



University of Sussex

Sussex Centre for Language Studies

Academic Writing Guide – Stage 1, Part 1

Chloé talking about analysing the essay title and creating a mind map

Sue: So Chloé you also worked with the John le Carré essay title. Um... how did you find it generally, working with that title? How easy or how difficult was it to produce a final discursive essay working with that?

Chloé: um at first when I saw the essay title I really stressed, and I thought it would be really, really hard as I came from a French system and I've never seen these kind of questions. However, all the stages really helped me to go through it and give a final draft and, final essay that was pretty good, I think.

Sue: So the staging – that sort of breaking it down into small parts – you found that helpful. Can you say how or why?

Chloé: um especially the first stage, because I didn't know anything about the Cold War, as I'd just heard of it but I never studied it in France, and so having to do the breakdown of the question, each part: to what extent; Cold War paranoia; 1960s – helped me to go in each part of the question and work on it.

Sue: So that was the sort of the context really, the background, the historical context. And then deciding what you wanted to argue. How easy or... What did you decide you wanted to argue in your essay?

Chloé: um I decided to argue about the characterization of the main characters, and also the population that is a bit represented in the book – so Leamas as the person that is manipulated by the society and by the Bureau and everything, and he doesn't have any more personality, he is just a character of what he needs to reflect, which is a spy. And Liz on the other side, she is the representation of the population and the paranoia, with Leamas because she always has doubts about him, and um yeah that was just to represent both parts.

Sue: So you worked on the background, the historical context, and then you worked on the idea of characterization to build your argument. So going back to that sort of early stage, when you were trying to work out what you were doing, did you put together a mind map?

Chloé: Yes I did.

Sue: OK, can you talk to me about that?

Chloé: It was really useful because um starting to work on finding out what was the Cold War, what happened during the Cold War, helped me to create the first part of the mind map. And I read the book really early because I had an interview to get into the Foundation year so I started to read the book, and being able to do the mind map and having read the book before helped me to create another branch of the mind map to talk about the book and all the main ideas that I could think of.

Sue: Can we have a look at the mind map and you can talk me through how it works and what you did?

Chloé: So in the middle, the core bit, was Cold War paranoia in Britain in the 1960s, because I thought that's what I'm focusing on. So then there is 'what is paranoia?' And then I developed what it was. So I took just a definition of paranoia and developed it to have different synonyms, and then I developed it to inside the book. Then I developed some Cold War – I put the dates and all the main events that happened that we can find in the book as well. And then the last one was Britain in the 1960s, which I knew nothing about, so I thought it would be important to do a branch on. And every time I would do a branch on Cold War Britain in 1960s, or paranoia, I would at the end link it to the book.

Sue: Nice! Nice so you've got your whole sort of context there, and you've got links to specific parts of the book. And then from there you went on to develop the idea about characterization of the main characters in the novel.

Chloé: It also helped me to find the sources for the annotated bibliography, which is in Stage two.

Sue: Tell me about that link. How did the mind map help you find sources?

Chloé: Well it helped me to – developing the mind map helped me to develop some questions and think about them, and then I just went on the Library Search and kind of built up my question in a way that I could have an answer with some books that would help me.

Sue: So it actually helped you come up with some of the key terms for your library search?