



Writing Helper user guide

This User Guide walks you through the Writing Helper process. You may wish to look also at the [FAQ](#) and our [video guides](#). There are versions of Writing Helper for Windows, Mac and 'anywhere' (built with web technology), and this document focuses on the new version. However, there are only slight functional differences and we would encourage users of the Windows and Mac versions to move over to using the new version soon. Projects are compatible, so if you start work on one version of Writing Helper you can move the file without any issues, but the new version will have new features and benefits.. You can see the [release notes and roadmap](#) for the new Writing Helper here, to find out more about what we're working on.

Writing is a tricky skill to get started with, let alone to master, and not many of us come into the process without needing to experience it first hand, and develop the skill ourselves. Whilst types of writing differ in content, structure, tone, audience and the themes they explore, their composition can follow consistent and well-established flows. Writing Helper breaks down this writing process, and presents it to you step by step, allowing you to focus on each stage separately, to build a strong piece of writing from the foundations upwards.



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The Writing Helper process

Writing has two broad stages: composition, then formatting. Writing Helper's interface is 100% about composition, whilst word processors such as Microsoft Word and Google Docs are designed to help you format your documents. It's normal to put your writing together in one place, then bring it all into a word processor to deal with the aesthetic elements like layout, spelling and referencing.

The seven Stages in the Writing Helper Process are:

1. Details
2. Question
3. Structure
4. Sources
5. Snippets
6. Review
7. Publish

Each of these Stages is covered by its own section, later in this guide.

Composition

Writing Helper stages the writing process, so that you can follow each step in turn, without distractions, and focus without overwhelm. The same amount of work needs to be done, but this bite-size and (mostly) linear approach enables you to manage overwhelm by only focusing on what matters at a given time.

Formatting

Writing Helper outputs a completely accessible Word document, to which you can apply edits and formatting changes (including referencing) very simply. This cuts down on lots of time traditionally spent perfecting reference styles and document formatting.



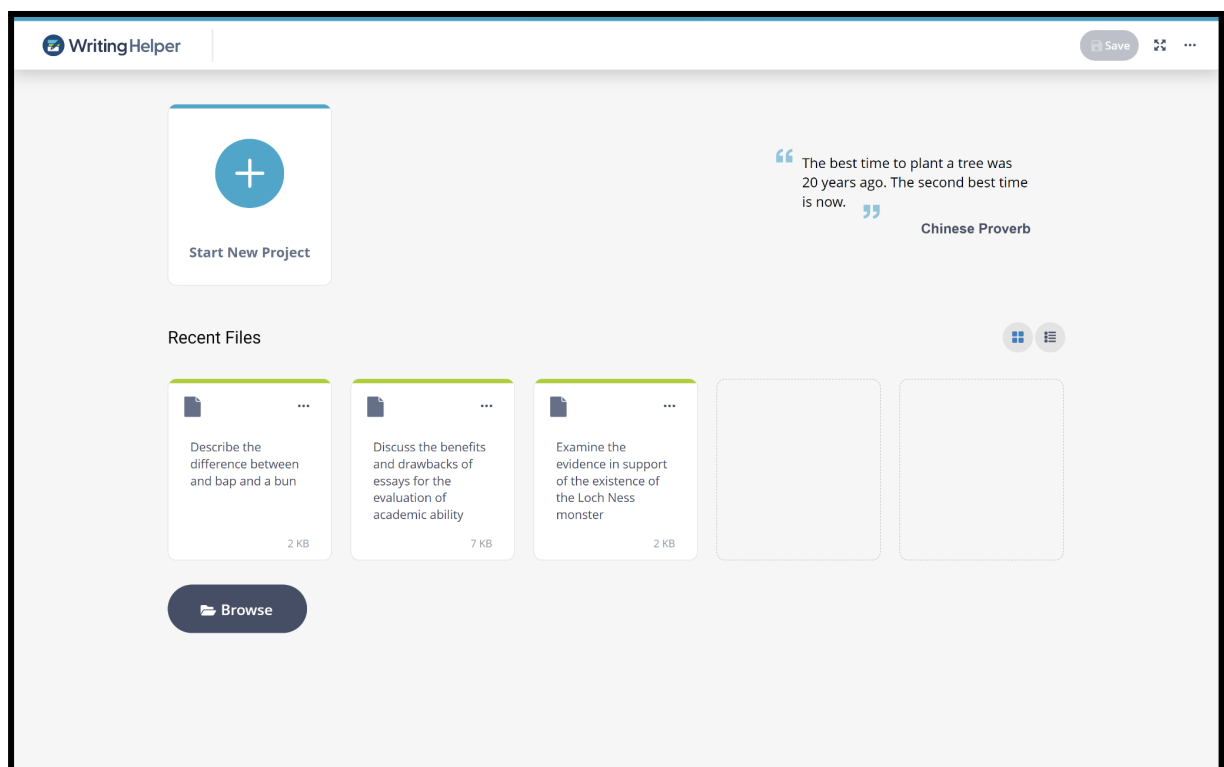
Writing Helper

Writing Helper homepage

When you run Writing Helper you will be taken to the homepage, which you can see below. Clicking “Start New Project” will of course create a new project for you and you can follow the workflow through the rest of this help guide to understand the Writing Helper process in more detail.

You can also launch existing projects by clicking on them, or browse to find projects you might already have saved elsewhere. For example, you might have sent a project to yourself, or you may have been working previously on a project with Writing Helper Windows or Writing Helper Mac.

Whichever approach you use, you will be taken into a project, so read on to learn how to follow the Writing Helper process to create excellent written content.





Welcome window in Writing Helper



Writing Helper

The interface and full screen mode

A key benefit of Writing Helper is in how it enables you to focus by breaking down a complex activity into manageable and structured tasks. It is highly recommended to operate Writing Helper in full screen mode as this removes the distractions of other tabs and maximises the space available to focus on your writing. Click , at the top right of the interface to run Writing Helper in full screen mode.

Click  to open a menu containing other useful tools, such as a link to our feedback form where you can let us know how you are getting on with Writing Helper.

Once you're in a project you will see the Writing Helper process down the left hand side on what we call the Navigation Pane. This enables you to move through Writing Helper's seven stages as you build your composition.



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Stage 1: Details

Once you've created a new project, or run an existing one, you'll be taken to the Details Stage. Here, you can enter basic information about the project, like your name, the title, a short title, and selecting the word count you are aiming for.

The Details Stage

Use the Navigation Pane on the left to move ahead to Question, or any other stage in the process.



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Stage 2: Question

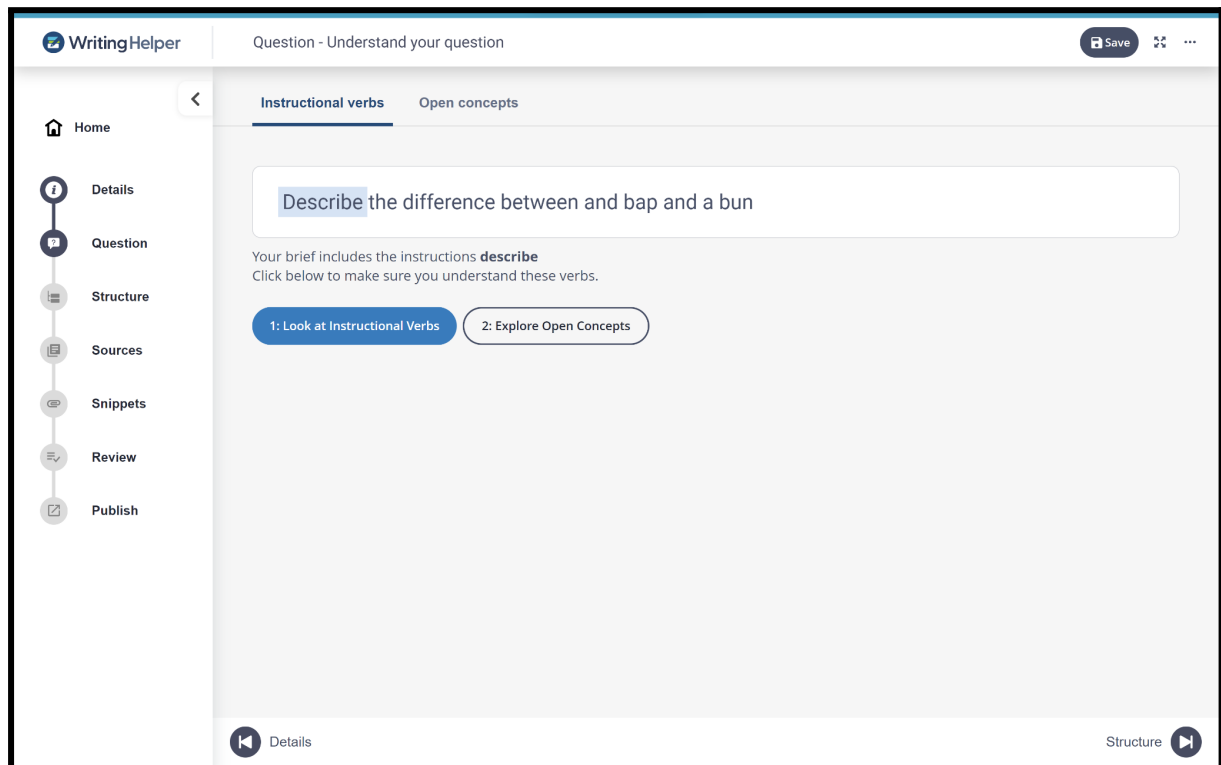
“It doesn’t matter how good your writing is if you don’t answer the question”

This is where the project really gets started. A common problem with new and experienced writers alike is that there is a tendency to rush into a new writing task without giving the task itself enough consideration. Students given writing tasks will usually be given a brief, which can include a title, but often also a rubric, mark scheme, reading list and guidance for completion, as well as a deadline and word count target. These things form a *definition of done* as well as provide vital information about what to do and - crucially - what not to do.

Taking time to focus on what the objectives of your writing are is significant, and spending time here to get the foundations of the project right will save you a lot of problems further down the road.



The Question Stage has two distinct parts: firstly, the **Instructional Verbs** part; and then the **Open Concepts** part. Each part has its own tab in the Question Stage, which you can see below.



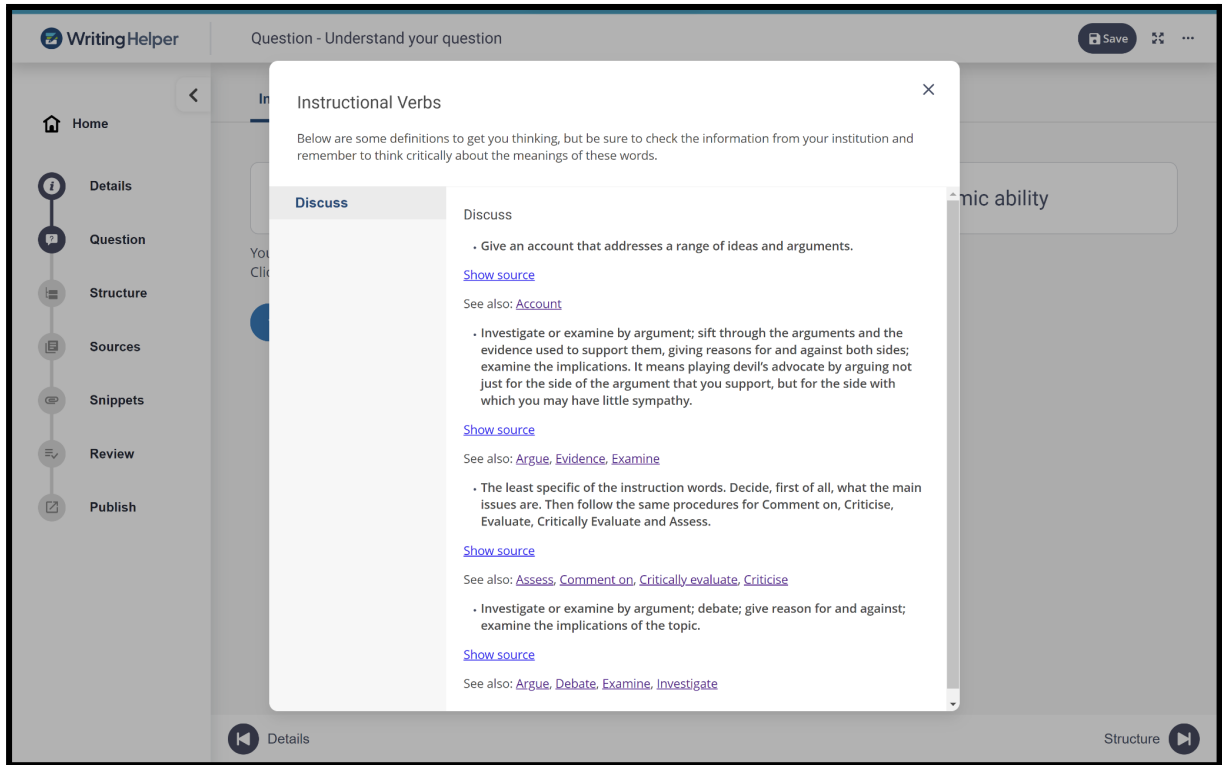
Question Stage layout including two tabs to look at Instructional verbs and Open concepts

Instructional verbs

What are you being asked to do?

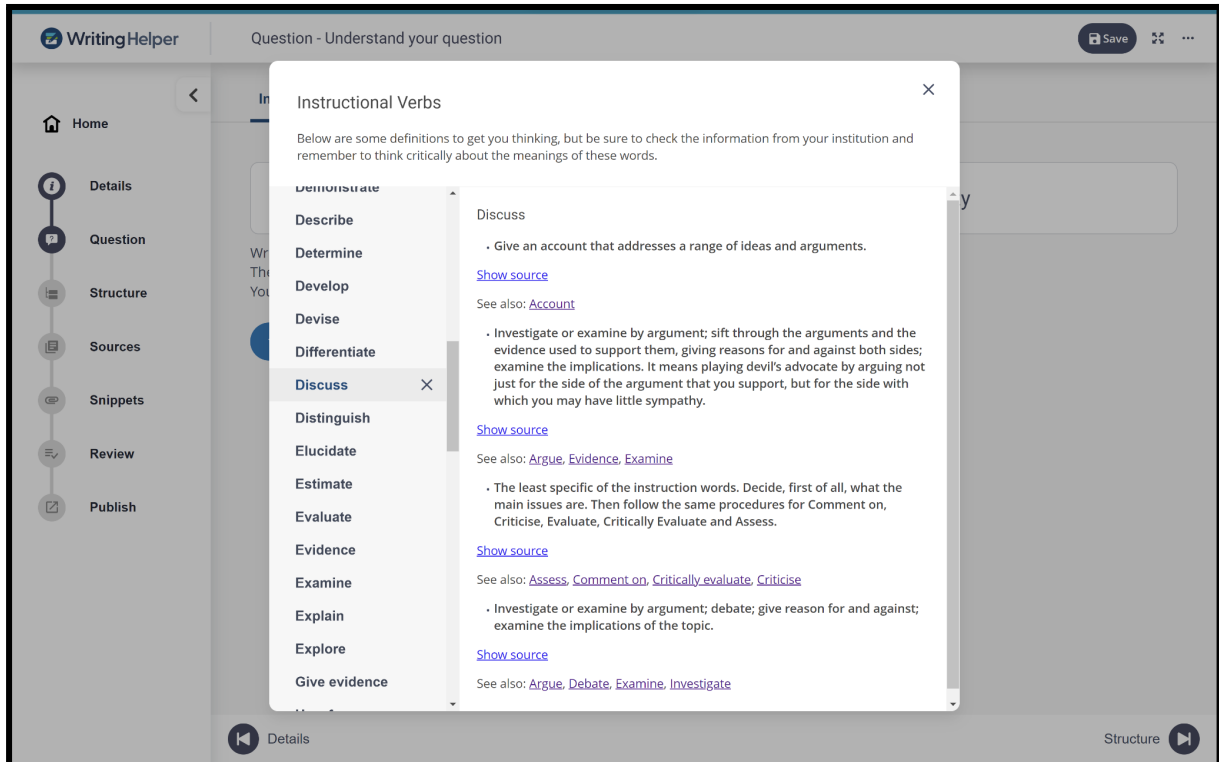
Usually, a writing project like a report or essay, dissertation or thesis will have a title, and often these titles will include an *instruction*. The most common instruction will take the form of an explicit verb such as 'describe' or 'argue' or 'explain'.

In the example image above you can see that the verb 'describe' was identified by Writing Helper. You can click the **Look at Instructional Verbs** button to learn more about these instructions.



Question Stage showing the Instructional Verbs dialog

As you develop your writing skills and encounter more complex projects, you might no longer have an *explicit* instruction, but rather the instructions could be *implicit*. Question words like how, or why, are good examples of implied instructions. You can still use the Instructional Verb dialog for inspiration though.



Example Instructional Verbs, with 'Discuss' selected

For some projects like technical reports and thesis chapters you may not even have an instruction. This is expected and totally normal. It may be up to you as a writer to judge what the objectives of your writing are to be. Keeping your intended audience in mind is always crucial.

Open Concepts

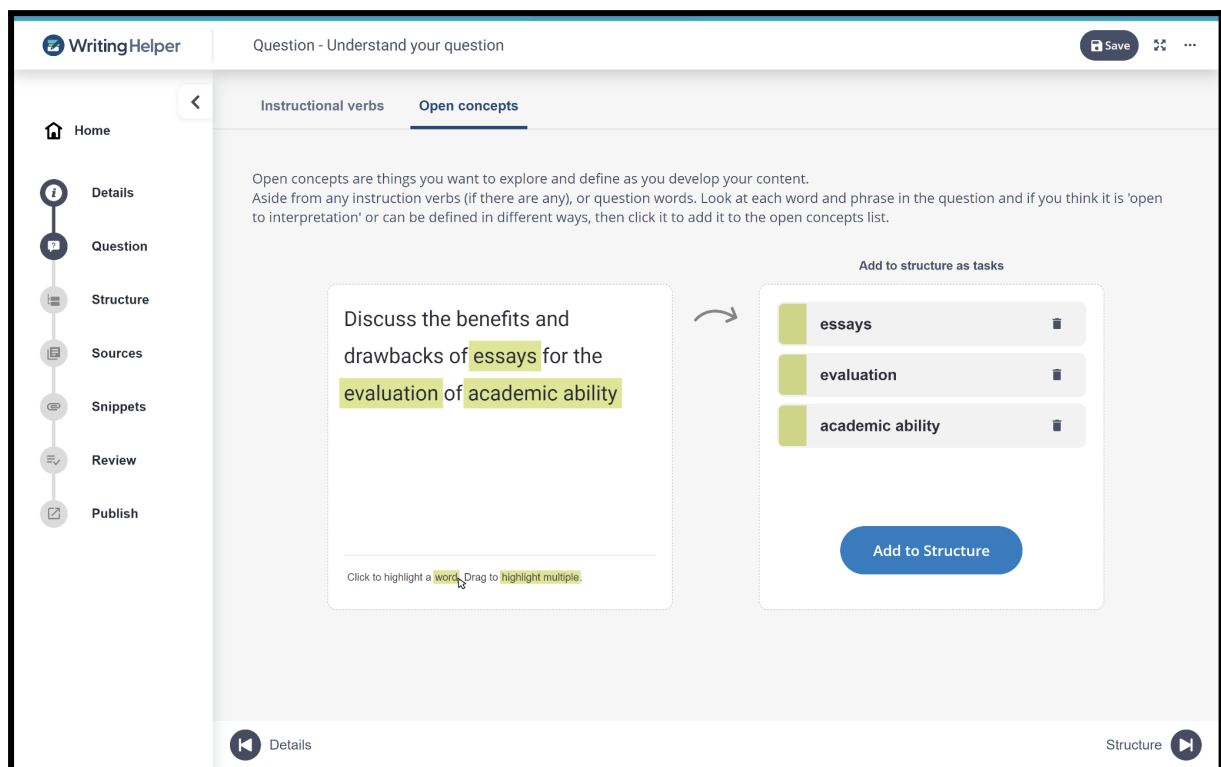
An open concept is a word or phrase that is open to interpretation, or may have different meanings. A good piece of writing will explore these different meanings either in stating how you, as the author, are going to interpret them in your answer, or in the body of the writing itself as you explore these meanings.

There can be a great degree of skill involved in identifying the open concepts in a question. For instance, it might be easy to assume a certain meaning of a given word, but on closer inspection there could be ambiguity. Think not only how you

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would define a word or phrase, but also anticipate your reader’s interpretation. The word ‘essay’ for example could mean a journal article to some, or an opinion piece in a newspaper to others, yet to others it might be specifically a piece of academic writing. Therefore ‘essay’ can be an open concept, and it’s up to you as a writer to decide on an interpretation and clarify this in your writing.

Once you’ve identified the open concepts, it is going to be important to define or explore them in some way. Your readers need to know your interpretation of them so it’s usually worthwhile to actually be clear in your writing what you mean by each of the open concepts. You can click the “Add to Structure” button to move all of your open concepts into your Structure as Tasks. (See the [Structure Stage](#).)



Question Stage showing the Open Concepts selection

Open concepts example

As a further example of open concepts, consider the question “Coffee is bad for you. Discuss.”



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Both “coffee” and “bad for you” may have different meanings: caffeine is bad for your health; farming coffee is bad for your environment; buying coffee is bad for your finances; drinking coffee is bad for your teeth!

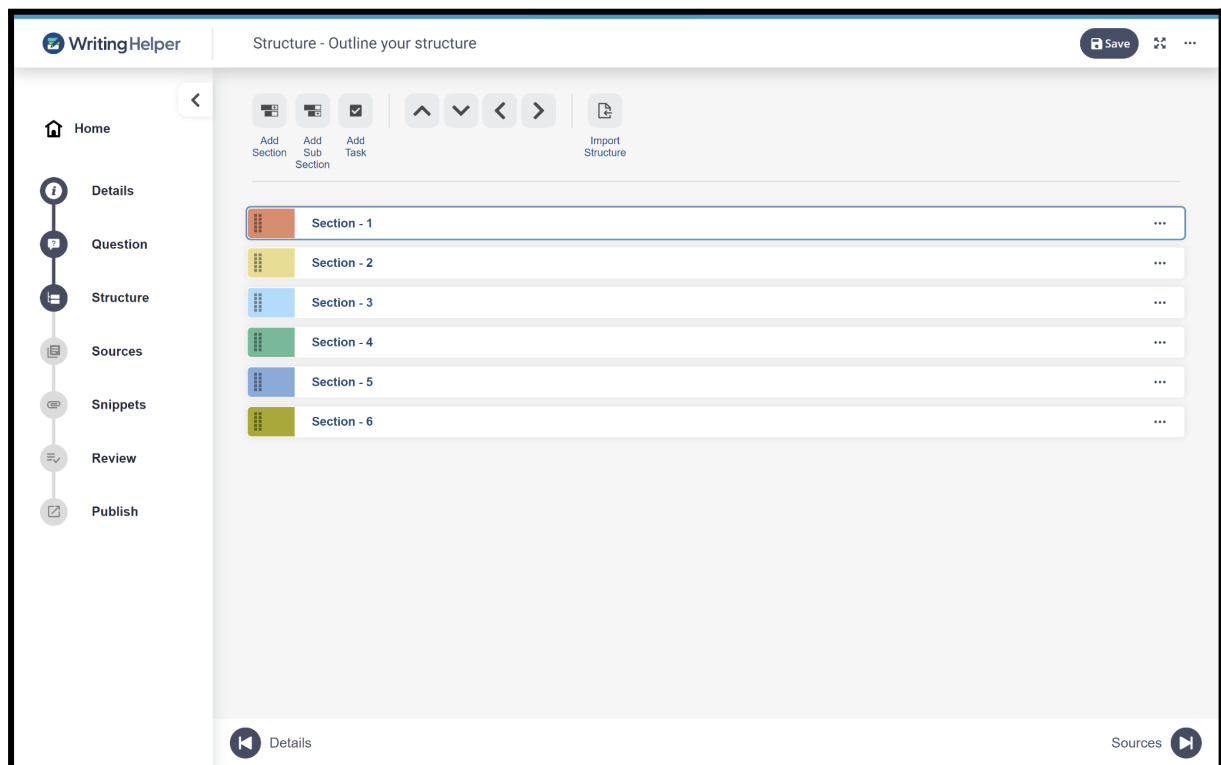
You don’t have to answer all of these, but you should be clear about which one(s) you are going to answer, and the reasons why. A good piece of writing will be really clear about how it is to approach the question and explore these open concepts in some depth.

You will have your own way to explore open concepts, and examples include brainstorming, note taking, seminars and workshops, peer discussions, research and reading, and visual mapping. No approach is ‘right’, so it’s important to figure out what works for you.

Stage 3: Structure

Create an outline structure, but don't worry about getting it perfect first time

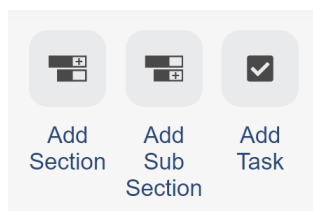
A core feature of Writing Helper is in how it allows you to open different sources of information and highlight sections using colours that match the structure of your work. The default for a new Writing Helper project's Structure is 6 sections, which you can see in the image below.



Structure Stage showing the default 6-colour Structure

Some users may prefer to skip this section for now and go ahead to [Sources](#) to pull in their research and capture information using the 6 default colours that are given. However, it's more natural to begin by defining at least a basic outline structure.

Creating a Structure manually



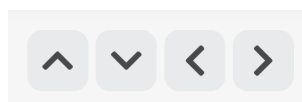
You can do this easily by renaming the existing elements. You have the option to add Sections, Subsections and Tasks. Sections are main headings like ‘Introduction’ or ‘Conclusions’ whilst subsections are one level lower than these so form parts of Sections, and they share their parent Section’s colour. Finally, Tasks can be used as reminders to, for example, refer to a specific paper, to state your aims, to define your [open concepts](#), etc.

The above image shows the default 6-section Structure for all new projects, but the image below expands on this and illustrates a realistic Structure that contains Sections, Subsections and Tasks and how they might relate to each other.

Creating new Structure components (Sections, Subsections and Tasks) is done by clicking the appropriate button on the toolbar, and the new element will appear beneath the currently selected item in the Structure (which is identified with a dark border). Upon creating an element, you can rename it.

You can see how the Structure’s colouring is organised also, in that children inherit the same colour as their parent Section.

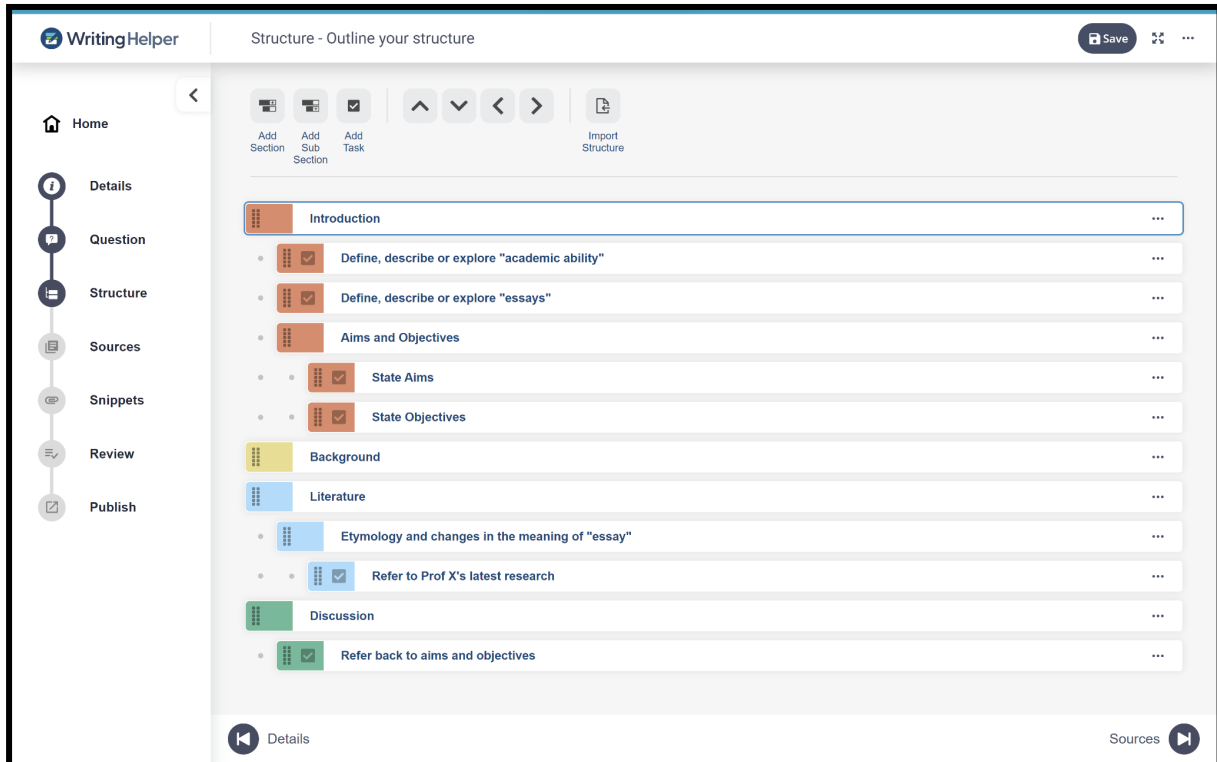
You can drag these elements around to reorganise them, as well as use the arrow buttons in the toolbar to move items up or down, and indent or outdent them.



Indenting turns a Section into a Subsection and a Subsection into a Task. Outdenting does the opposite, turning a Task into a Subsection and a Subsection into a Task.



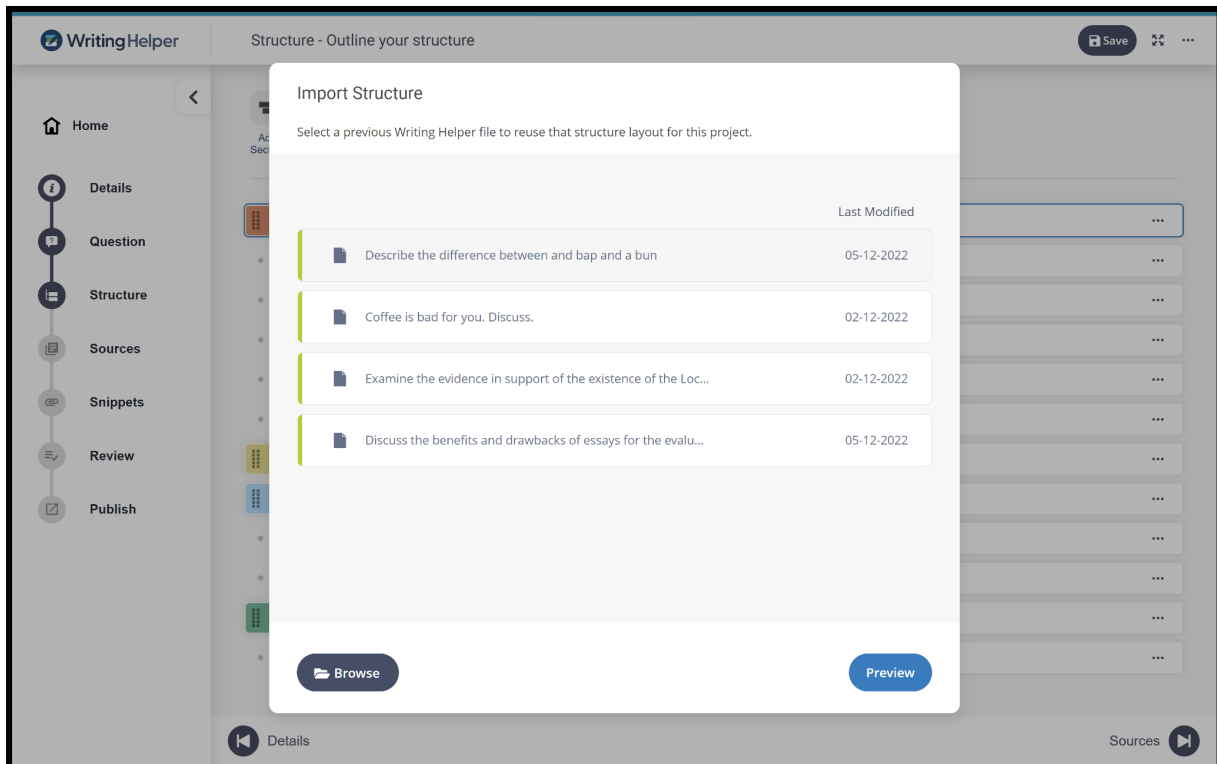
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Structure Stage showing a user-created structure meeting the needs of the project

Importing a Structure

As you start more projects you'll begin to see common structural elements emerge. You might want to completely reuse an old Structure from another project, or you might only want parts of it. You may manually recreate all elements of the Structure but using the **Import Structure** button you can save yourself some time.



Import Structure dialog

You can select a project from the list, which matches those already visible on your home screen, but moreover you can use the **Browse** button to find another Writing Helper project from elsewhere and import the Structure from there. The **Preview** button will let you see the Structure you'll be importing before you commit to it.

Revising your Structure

It's important to have an underlying Structure for your writing, but it's also important to allow flexibility and change as you get more into your writing project. The reading and research that you do will identify new sources of information that you will be opening and reading in the [Sources](#) Stage. As you find new information you'll have new ideas, and new ideas might lead to structural changes. This is not only acceptable, but expected.

Drafting and changing are key parts of writing, so whilst having a Structure at this stage is sensible, be prepared to revisit it and change things. Writing Helper isn't

completely linear: you can move forwards and backwards through the process, but all the work you do will ultimately be towards the end goal of having an excellent piece of writing that addresses the question, and which has been completed with less overwhelm and stress.

Stage 4: Sources

Research sources of information and capture information from them.

At this stage you'll have a good idea of the Question you're looking to answer, and you will have underpinned this Question with a Structure your response is going to take. When you compile writing, you will be sharing views, opinions, analyses and conclusions with your reader, and will most often want to back up your writing with evidence.

Evidence can take various forms like journal articles, books or websites, and judging the quality of these sources can be tricky. Common traps that beginner writers might fall into include 'cherry picking'; which relates to focusing on evidence that supports a particular point or opinion and neglecting conflicting views. This can even include using lower quality sources, which might include poor methodologies or significant bias. All of this is hard, and as you progress through your education, these are key study skills that you will need to develop. Being objective and critical, using quality sources of information and finding information that is relevant to your writing are some of the things you are being assessed on.

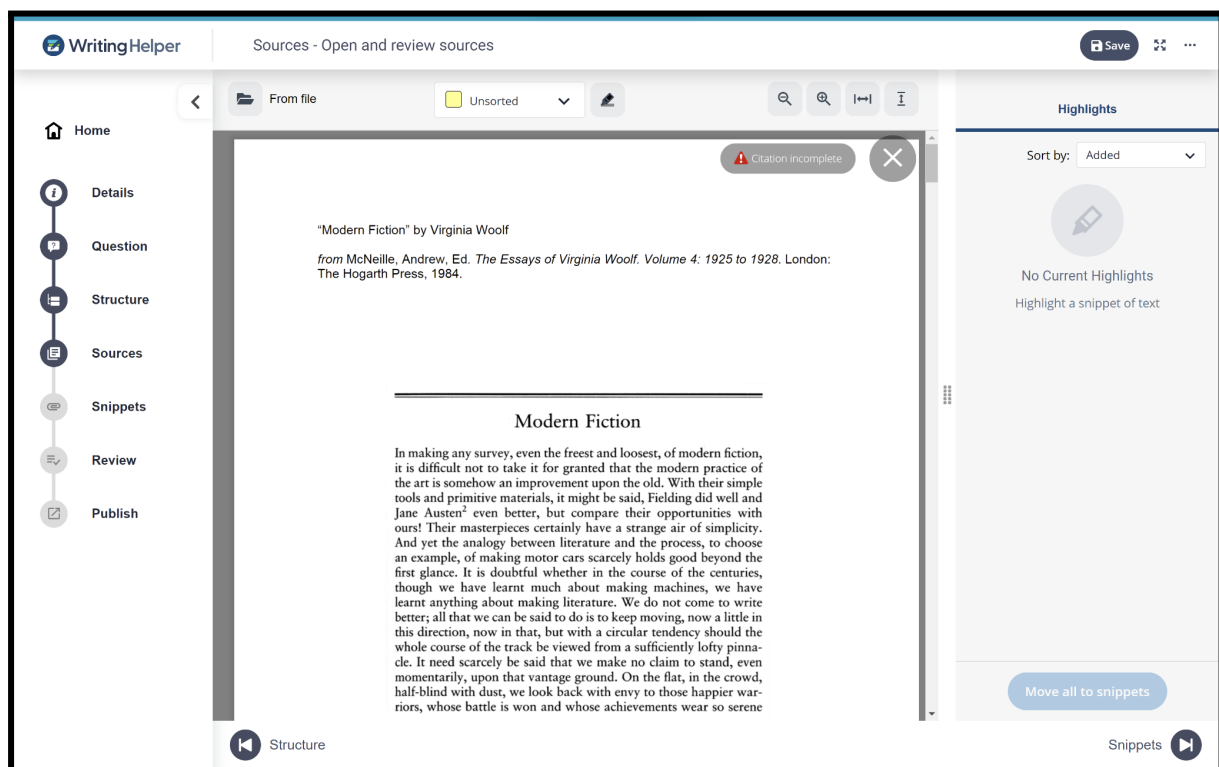
Writing Helper supports you in developing these skills and ensures that all of the work you do remains your own. The Sources Stage lets you bring in different sources of information, state where you found the information for referencing later, and capture relevant information from these sources.

Opening sources

You can open various file types with the **From file** button on the toolbar. This includes sources containing inaccessible text, which will be converted with OCR (optical character recognition) as the file is opened, or as you try to capture information from it.

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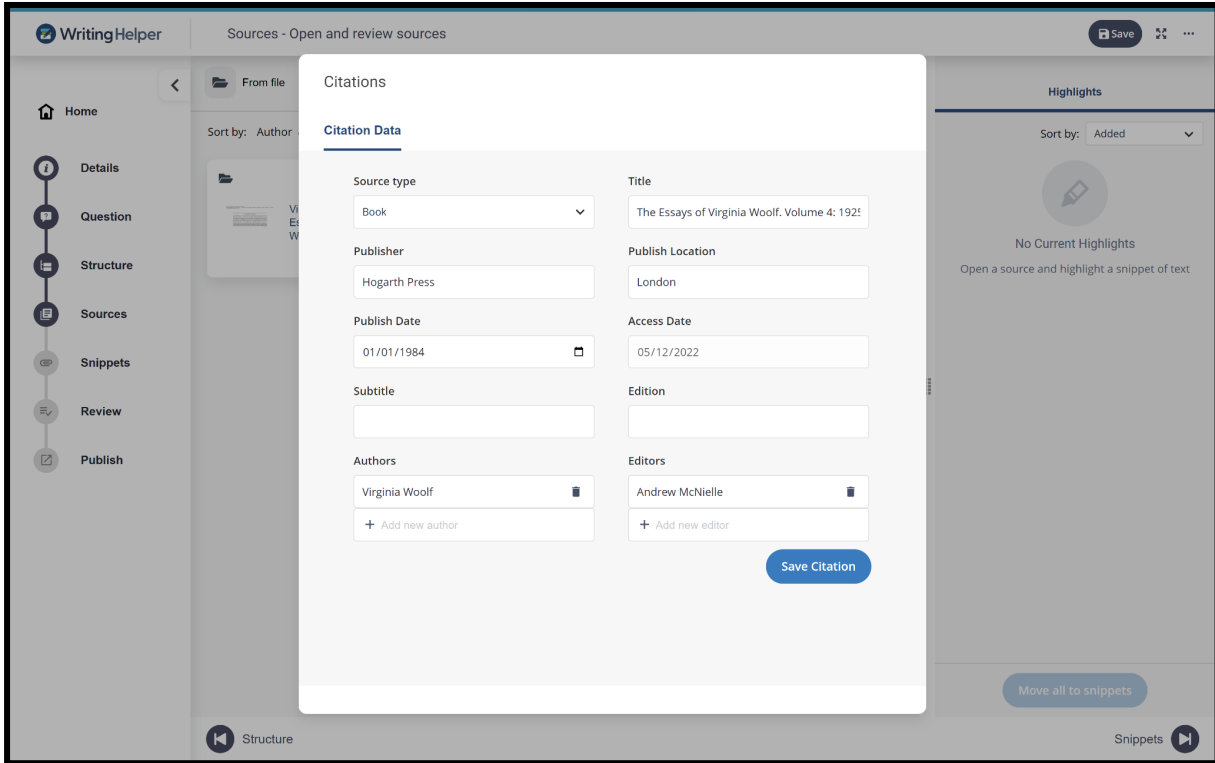
The image below shows a newly loaded source, which contains accessible text. If you're going to use this source in your project, you need to define it by giving it a 'citation'. This is the source's author, title, publisher, and so on, all in plain words. You don't have to worry about applying a referencing style, e.g. Harvard or APA, as Writing Helper will help you with that later.



Sources Stage showing an opened source document PDF

Defining sources

Once you have a source loaded that doesn't have a citation defined you can see towards the top of the page a red triangle icon with 'Citation incomplete' written next to it. You can click this to define the Source.



Defining a citation in the Sources Stage

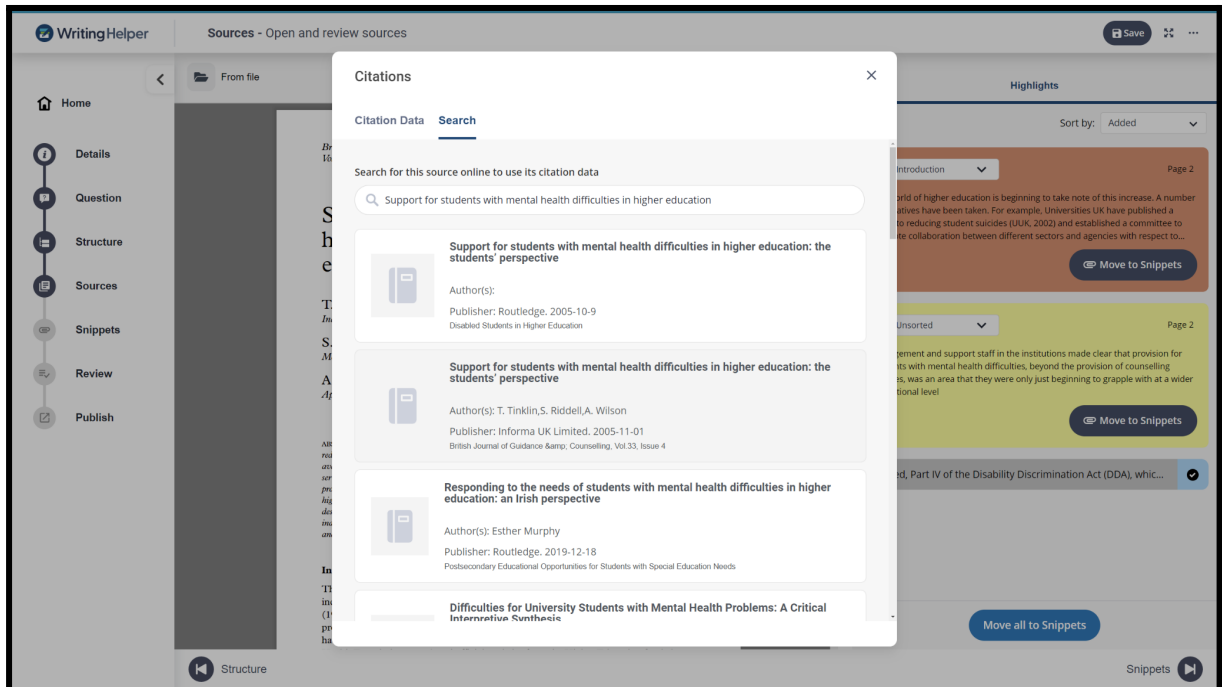
This provides a form that you can complete to define your source. This is used later when you Publish your project, and a full reference is built at that stage that you can format into any reference style you need to use.

Searching for books and journal articles

If your source is from a book or journal article, when you change the 'source type' dropdown menu to one of these, a Search tab will appear at the top of the dialog.



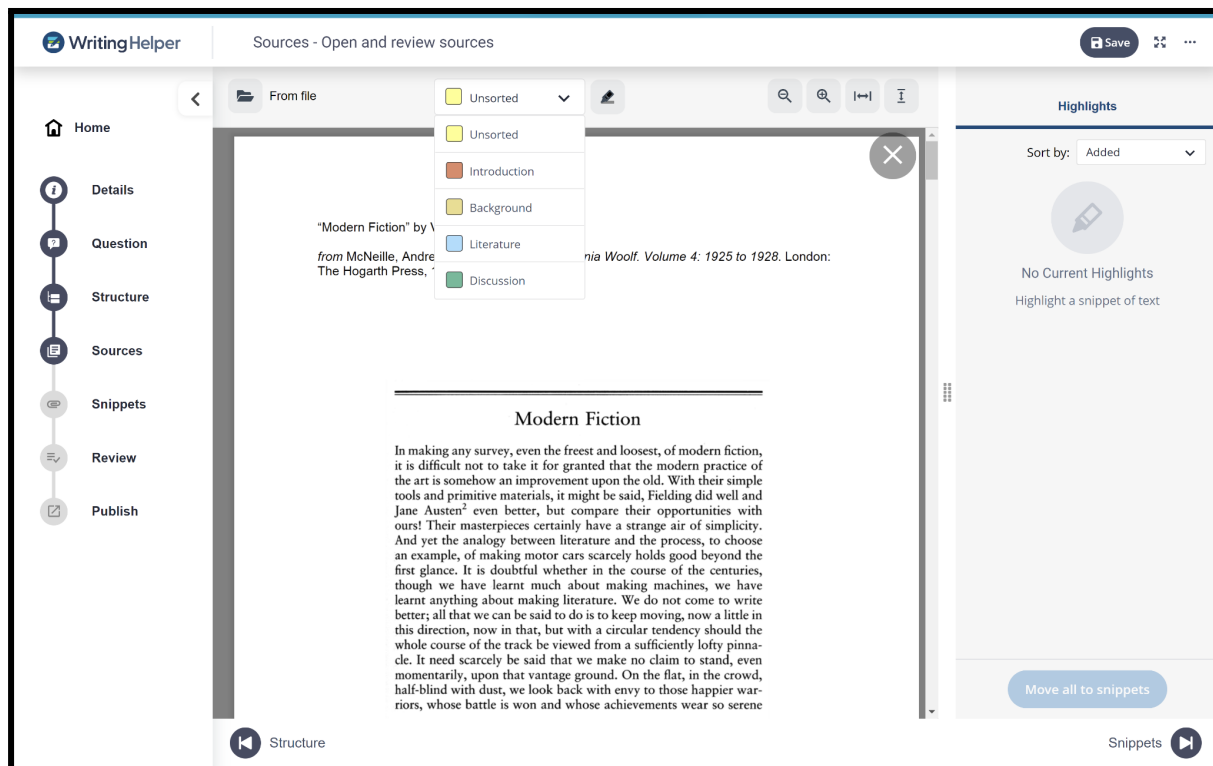
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Citation search results. Click the one you want to use and all the fields for your citation will be automatically populated.

Capturing information

One of the greatest features of Writing Helper is in how it allows you to highlight information from a Source using colours that match the Structure you've already created. If you look above at the [example Structure](#) you will see it has four Sections (Introduction, Background, Literature and Discussion) in orange, lime, blue and green colours. Now in Sources, you can highlight information that is relevant to each section of your project using these highlighter colours.



Sources Stage showing the dropdown with highlighters labelled and colour coded to match your project's Structure.

As well as the existing project Sections, you can also see a colour for 'unsorted'. This is for whenever you find a piece of information in a Source that you can use, but you aren't sure which Section to put it into (or maybe you haven't created the Section yet). Any changes to the Structure you make will lead to these highlights changing as expected, and any document highlights you've already created will update too.

Capturing highlights is simple, as in the image below: select the text you want to highlight, then with the appropriate highlighter selected, click the 'Highlight' button to the right of the dropdown. You'll then start to see your highlights in the right side panel.

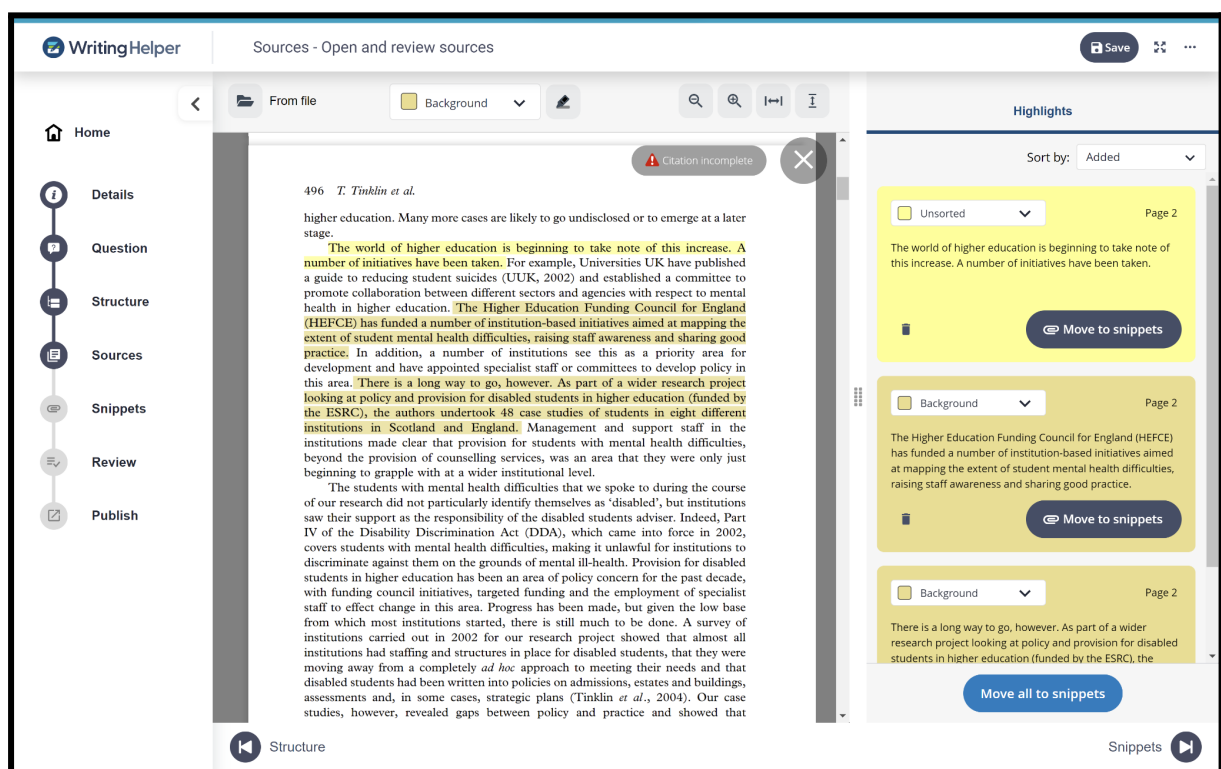
Reviewing information

At this stage you can do a number of things to confirm your highlights on the right hand side: you can delete them if you don't want to keep them; you can change

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which Section you want to assign them to (the highlight colour will change to match); or you can move these highlights into your project's Structure as [Snippets](#), which is the next stage in the Writing Helper process.

You can use the 'Move to Snippets' button to handle each one individually, but if you're happy with them all and want to move ahead to the next Stage, you can click the 'Move all to Snippets' button at the bottom right.



Sources Stage with highlights selected from a Source, showing in the right panel

Once you've moved these highlights over into your Snippets, you'll be able to see that they've been moved, although they'll still be visible as highlights in your source. Any new highlights can be treated in the same way as before.



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Writing Helper Sources - Open and review sources

Home Details Question Structure Sources Snippets Review Publish

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higher education. Many more cases are likely to go undisclosed or to emerge at a later stage.

The world of higher education is beginning to take note of this increase. A number of initiatives have been taken. For example, Universities UK have published a guide to reducing student suicides (UUK, 2002) and established a committee to promote collaboration between different sectors and agencies with respect to mental health in higher education. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has funded a number of institution-based initiatives aimed at mapping the extent of student mental health difficulties, raising staff awareness and sharing good practice. In addition, a number of institutions see this as a priority area for development and have appointed specialist staff or committees to develop policy in this area. There is a long way to go, however. As part of a wider research project looking at policy and provision for disabled students in higher education (funded by the ESRC), the authors undertook 48 case studies of students in eight different institutions in Scotland and England. Management and support staff in the institutions made clear that provision for students with mental health difficulties, beyond the provision of counselling services, was an area that they were only just beginning to grapple with at a wider institutional level.

The students with mental health difficulties that we spoke to during the course of our research did not particularly identify themselves as 'disabled', but institutions saw their support as the responsibility of the disabled students adviser. Indeed, Part IV of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which came into force in 2002, covers students with mental health difficulties, making it unlawful for institutions to discriminate against them on the grounds of mental ill-health. Provision for disabled students in higher education has been an area of policy concern for the past decade, with funding council initiatives, targeted funding and the employment of specialist staff to effect change in this area. Progress has been made, but given the low base from which most institutions started, there is still much to be done. A survey of institutions carried out in 2002 for our research project showed that almost all institutions had staffing and structures in place for disabled students, that they were moving away from a completely *ad hoc* approach to meeting their needs and that disabled students had been written into policies on admissions, estates and buildings, assessments and, in some cases, strategic plans (Tinklin et al., 2004). Our case studies, however, revealed gaps between policy and practice and showed that significant barriers remain to the participation of disabled students in higher education, in the areas of physical access, access to the curriculum, choice of

Highlights

Sort by: Added

The world of higher education is beginning... ✓

The Higher Education Funding Council for ... ✓

There is a long way to go, however. As part... ✓

Literature Page 2

The students with mental health difficulties that we spoke to during the course of our research did not particularly identify themselves as 'disabled', but institutions saw their support as the responsibility of the disabled students...

Move to snippets

Literature Page 2

Progress has been made, but given the low base from which most institutions started, there is still much to be done.

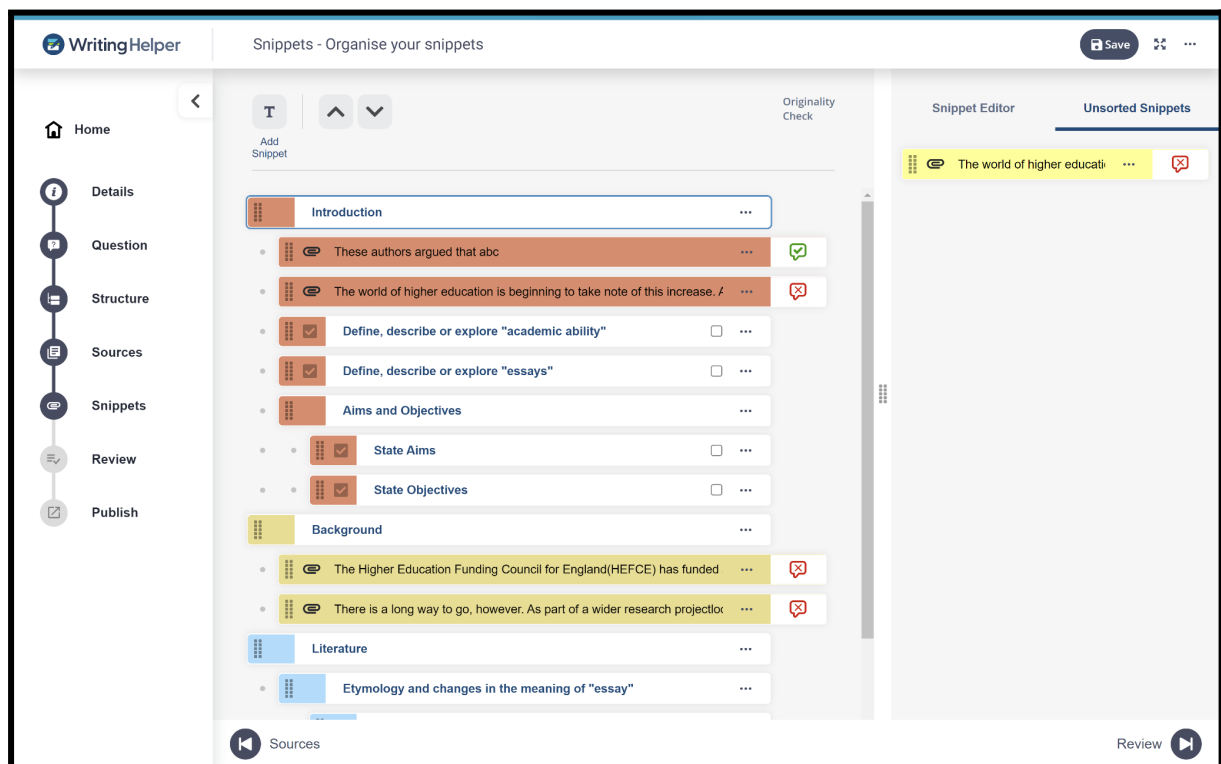
Move all to snippets

Structure Snippets

Sources tab showing a combination of old highlights that have already been moved to your Snippets, alongside new ones that need to be triaged.

Stage 5: Snippets

The Snippets stage expands on the Structure stage by showing all the highlights you have harvested from your Sources, slotted right into your project wherever you put them. Unsorted Snippets can be seen on the right, and you have various tools at your disposal to organise your evidence as well as create your own content.



The Snippets stage showing the Structure with Snippets slotted into place.

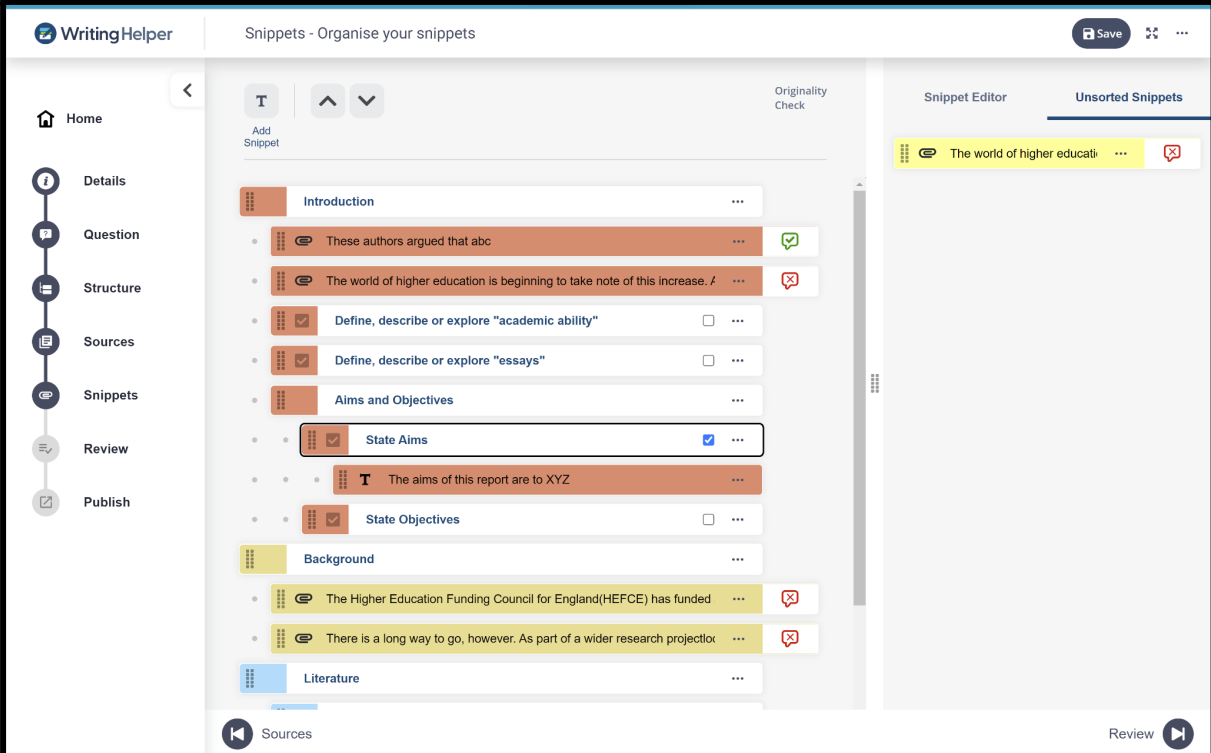
Creating your own snippets

So far you will have created a Structure and captured some information from Sources, which has been slotted into your Structure for you to manage in Snippets. Before you look deeper into the evidence you've captured, you might want to add some signposting, or remarks of your own. You can create a Snippet under the currently selected Structure item by clicking the 'Add Snippet' button.

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We will select the 'State Aims' task in our example, create a Snippet (which will appear beneath the task) by clicking the button, then rename that Snippet to say "The aims of this report are to XYZ" (see next image). Finally, we can check off the task above as 'done' using the checkbox in its row.

Custom Snippets are great to be used as signposting too: consider starting and ending each Section and Subsection with a Custom Snippet to tell your reader what you'll be discussing, or to summarise what you discussed. You can also interleave or group pieces of evidence together using Custom Snippets. There's no limit to how many you can use.



Snippets stage showing a newly-created custom Snippet beneath the 'State Aims' task, which has been checked as complete once the custom Snippet has been used to state the aims of the report



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Organising your evidence

All of the items in the Structure component that you can see in the Snippets stage can be dragged to reorganise them. You can also use the arrow keys in the toolbar to move them around.

Furthermore, you can drag the Unsorted Snippets from the tab on the right hand side into your Structure, as well as drag any Snippets from your Structure into the Unsorted Snippets panel. This panel on the right can be used as a handy buffer to help you organise your snippets.

Any Snippets that are moved to different Sections will change colour, and if you go back to their source, you'll also see the highlights will be changed to reflect which section the Snippets now live in.

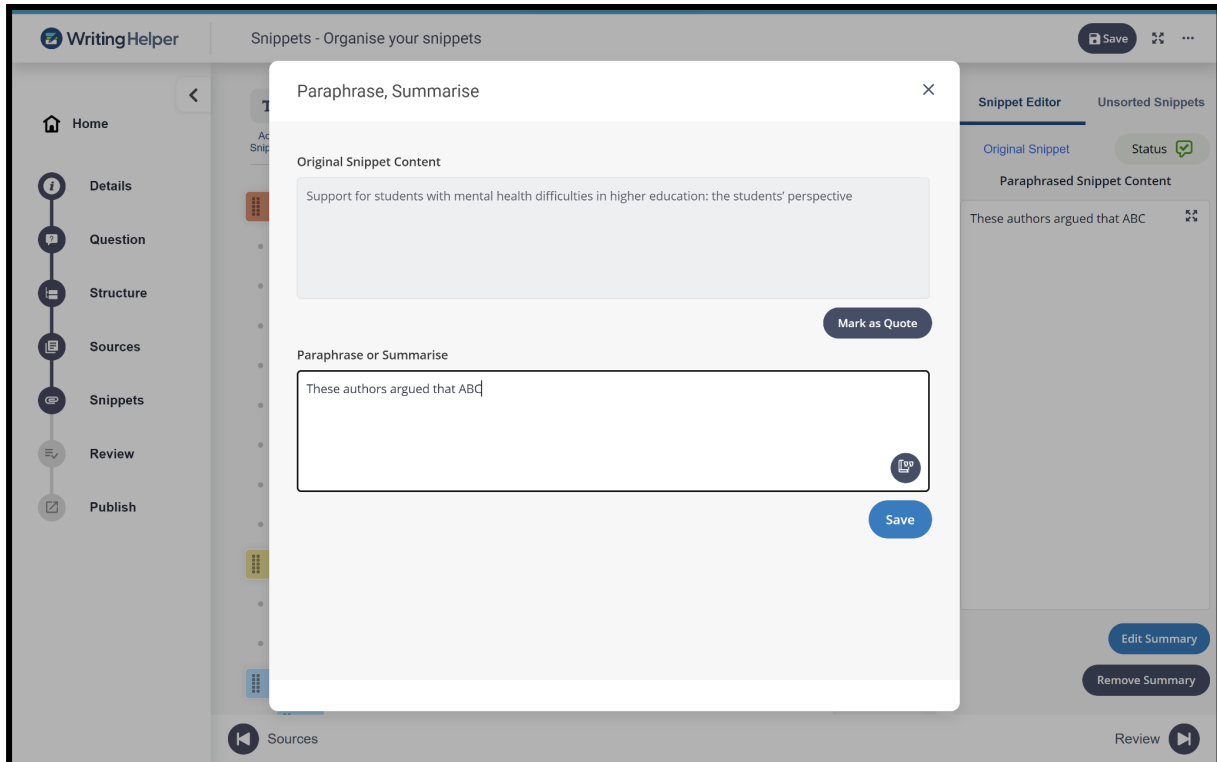
Managing originality

One of the most crucial study skills you'll develop is that of paraphrasing, or summarising evidence. Rather than copying and pasting what another author said, you need to take their work and put it into the right context for your own writing. You'll use phrases such as "Woolf argued that ..." or "This argument is supported by Woolf" and so on.

To the right of the unoriginal (i.e. non-custom) Snippets - the things you've captured from your sources - you will see an originality indication. Anything that has been captured will appear as a red cross indicating that you need to do something to deal with the originality issue.

By clicking on any of these so marked Snippets you'll be shown a panel on the right under "Snippet Editor" where you can paraphrase, or summarise, or even quote that evidence. A quote is used to fully include the author's words exactly as they used it, along with a citation to state where the evidence came from.

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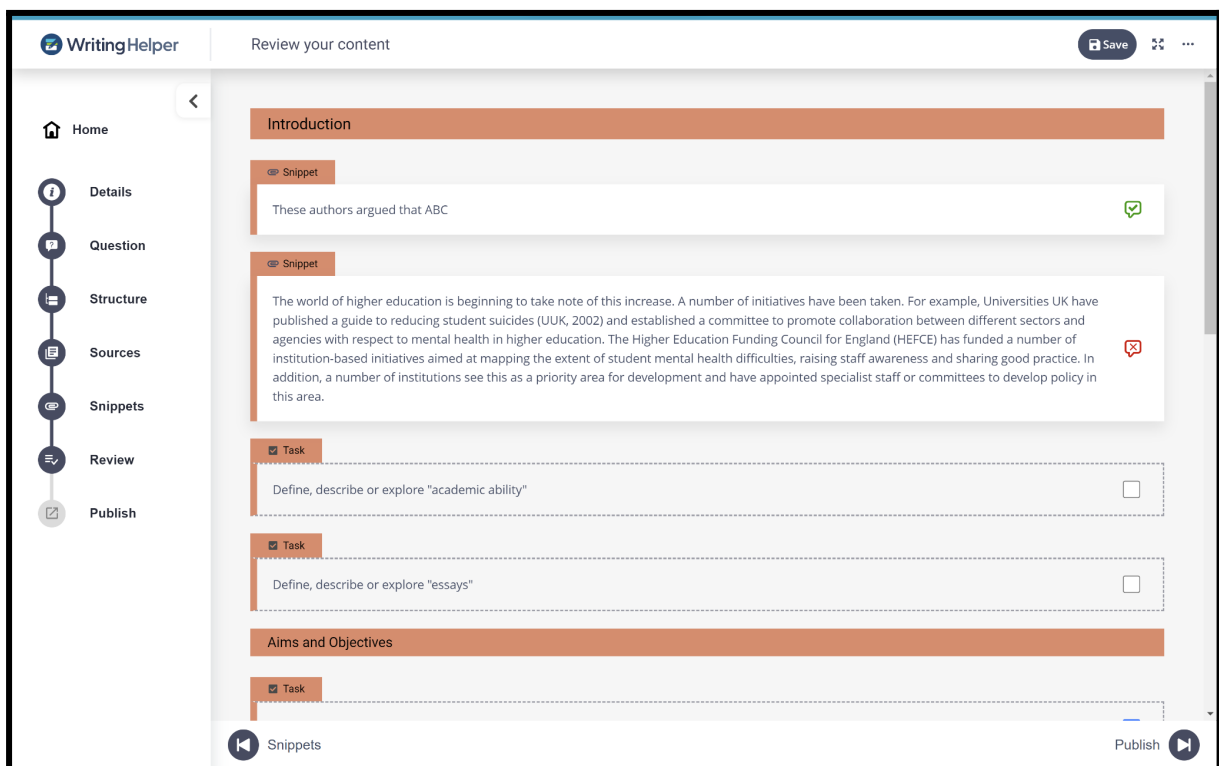
The Snippet Editor panel

By the end of the Snippets stage, you can have all of your evidence captured, organised and paraphrased, summarised or quoted. You can complete all tasks, and create all of your own signposting, analysis and remarks. However, you haven't had to work with a document, so therefore haven't had to worry about (or been distracted with) your document's formatting and appearance. Instead, you have succeeded in composing a piece of work that addresses all the questions that you were initially asked.

The next stage lets us see the work we've done all in one place before we move on to publishing it.

Stage 6: Review

The Review stage lets you see the whole document at once, but not formatted in the way that Word might do so. Rather, you can see the full flow of the writing you've done, and identify any issues you may wish to fix. This stage is intended to be used to help you revise your drafts as you go. By reading this, you'll pick up on any flow issues, inconsistencies, weaker arguments, or other various changes you wish to make.



The Review Stage, where you can see a summary of all of your work so far, including both your own content, anything that has been paraphrased or summarised, as well as quotes, and unoriginal elements that are still in the author's own words.



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Stage 7: Publish

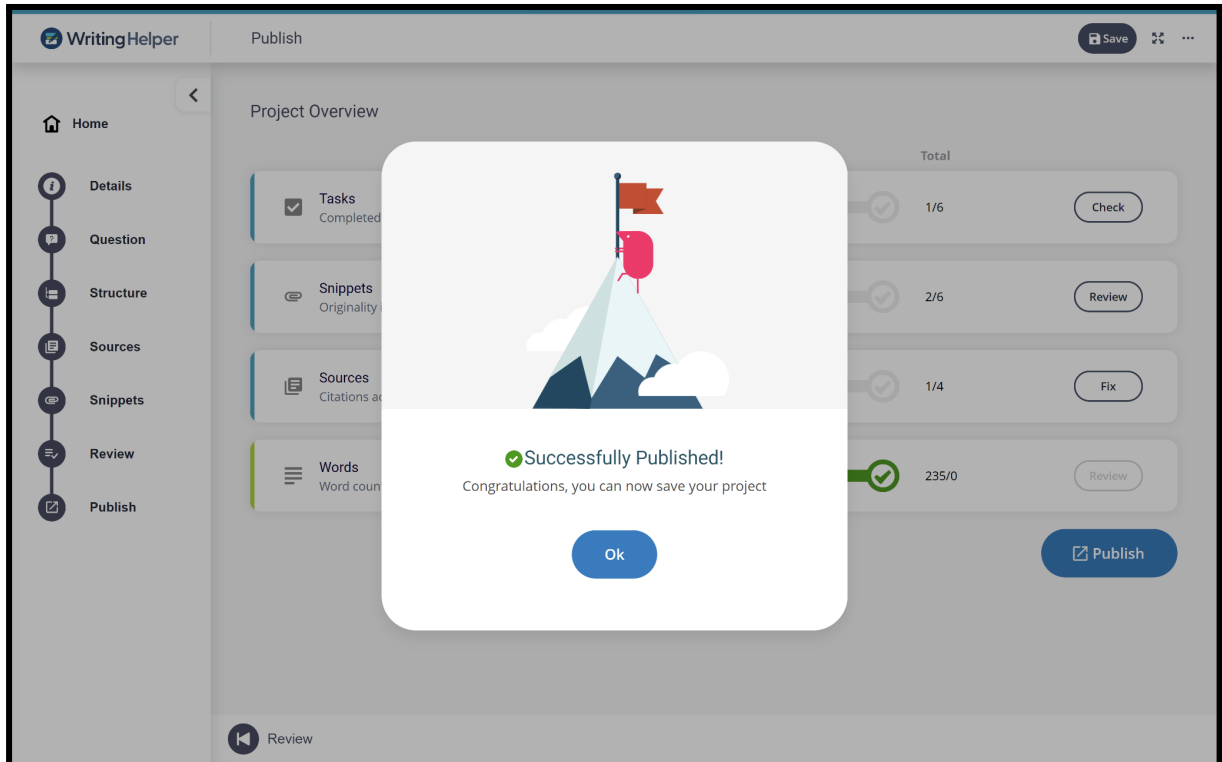
The final steps in completing your work will be the formatting of your document where you can fix spelling, grammar, formatting and referencing issues. All of these things can be dealt with using Word and various other tools, but so far with Writing Helper you've managed to complete your composition: you've understood and addressed the question, used good sources of information and structured your arguments.

This means you're ready to move onto the aesthetic elements. Writing Helper shows you some health checks on your writing so far, which you can address here.

Before you click Publish, you can visit the Settings panel so change how you would like your output document to look. When you click Publish, you'll be given a Word document. This document uses "styles" in Word, meaning that your title, headings, quotes, subsections, and all other components will be given fixed styles. It is then easy to modify each style, just once, to make your document look how you want it. You could even apply a Word template that automatically reformats your entire document how you want it, in one easy step.

Similarly, the bibliography that Writing Helper builds for you is not text that looks like Harvard, for example: it is actually a bibliography that Word recognises. You can change the reference style easily, as well as use other tools that offer comprehensive customisation and specification of your referencing styles.

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Success! You now have a completed piece of work (in terms of its content) to open in Word. You've got formatting left to do, but the hard part is behind you!

So that's it! This document walked you through the complete Writing Helper process from starting with a question, through to having a completed composition that only requires a little formatting. Rather than worry about formatting and referencing, reading and structuring and many other elements of writing all at once, you can now break these down into a simple, clear, and easy to follow process to maximise your focus and minimise your overwhelm. Good luck writing!