Essay Writing

Insert your text here. Essay writing is an essential part of almost any degree programme. In order to write good essays, you have to write in an academic style.

Characteristics of good academic writing:

- **Honesty**: Only write that which can be supported
- **Clarity**: Be clear/No waffle
- **Reality**: Explain what needs to be explained
- **Relevance**: Stick to the point

The Essay Question:

The first thing to consider when you approach an essay is the question. Take your time, and make sure that you fully understand what you are being asked. Writing everything you know about a topic, and not answering the question will not give you a good mark.

An essay question can have up to four parts: *Topic, Focus, Precept and Limit.*

When you first approach a question, it is important to take the time to analyse what you are being asked to do:

Identify the **topic** (In general terms, what the question is about)

Identify the **focus** (Which part of the topic are you being asked to talk about?)

If the **topic** has a *limit* or *specific viewpoint*, identify it. Does this fit in with your position?

Locate the **precept** (the command word, which often comes at the beginning) and make sure you understand what it means and what it requires you to do.

Some Common Precepts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe</th>
<th>Analytical</th>
<th>Discursive</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Criticise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarise</td>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
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<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
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Sample Question:

Discuss (precept) the impact of the IMF (focus) on the economic policy (topic) of Argentina (Limitation).
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The parts of an essay:

Broadly speaking, essays have three parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. These roughly correspond to saying what you are going to say, saying that, and saying that you have said it. The three sections of an essay should normally contain the following information:

Introduction:

- Background information to the study
- Explain how you have interpreted the question
- State the thesis of what you are going to explore
- Brief outline of how you will deal with each issue
- Define any subject specific or problematic (eg: ambiguous) terms

Body:

- **Clearly stated arguments**: Make your point at the beginning of a paragraph and then support that point in the rest of the paragraph.
- **Unity**: In any paragraph, only write support that is relevant to the argument you made at the beginning of that paragraph.
- **Logical order**: Make sure that your arguments follow the structure that is appropriate to the question you are answering. Start with the most important argument first and work your way down.

Conclusion:

- Usually says nothing new, but may contain some comment on the future in terms of direction for further research
- Summarise your arguments and themes and bring them together
- Give general conclusions and make it clear to the reader why these are important.
- Finally relate all of this back to the title to illustrate how the question has been answered

Proofreading:

Always proofread your work. Read through it several times and leave enough time (preferably 24 hours) between finishing your writing and starting to proofread. There are three areas to consider when you proofread your essay.

**Grammar**: Have you made any spelling mistakes? Is your style appropriate? Is there any slang etc?

**Logic**: Do your conclusions follow logically from your arguments? Have you supported your arguments well enough? Have you answered the question? Is there any irrelevant material?

**Plagiarism**: Have you referenced all your material? Is there any chance you may have copied sentences or chunks of sentences into your essay? Have you used somebody else’s ideas without crediting them?

Produced by the Effective Learning Advice Service, Brunel University. To book an appointment with an adviser email elas@brunel.ac.uk or call 01895 266547