

UOK Library

A Quick Guide To Writing An Essay

Essay writing is a valuable exercise which supports the development of your writing technique and helps you to develop your powers of argument and analysis.

The general principles underlying all essay writing are:

- Collecting and collating relevant information
- Organizing ideas and presenting your argument in an appropriate structure.
- Presenting your work with correctly formatted referencing

1. Features of a Good Essay

Below is a list of criteria relating to writing an Essay. A good essay should demonstrate and include all of the following:

- Knowledge of the subject
- Evidence of wide reading
- Critical thinking
- Expression of your own opinion
- Evidence of analysis
- Clear organization of ideas
- Logical thinking
- Evaluation of information and ideas
- Persuasive writing
- Avoidance of unsubstantiated assertions
- Arguments supported by examples from the material, including quotations from the secondary authors you have read
- Clear and correct English

- Professional format (see Standard formatting and Style guidelines below)

2. Understanding Instructions

Assignment titles contain instructions about how you are expected to deal with the topic. Sometimes key instructions will appear explicitly, but at times they may well be implicit. Whatever the case you need to identify the approach required. Below is a list of some 'key instructions' which typically appear in essay questions:

- ACCOUNT FOR - Give reasons for, Explain.
- ANALYSE - Examine and Explain why
- ASSESS - Decide the importance and give reasons.
- COMPARE - Write about (usually) two things which have certain similarities but with some crucial differences. There may be an element of evaluation here too.
- EXAMINE - Look at carefully; and Analyze
- IN WHAT - WAY Explain how and say why
- TO WHAT EXTENT- How far do you agree with, How true is it ...
- JUSTIFY - Give good reasons for; explain satisfactorily
- STATE - Express carefully, fully and clearly
- OUTLINE - Give a short description of the main points
- DISCUSS - Express your own view on an issue supporting it with evidence from other sources. This is a very general term used in essay assignments and you need to be careful.

3. Standard Formatting

- The essay should be word-processed.
- It should be presented on A4 paper.
- It should be double-spaced with margins (at least 1" / 2.5 cm).

- Use a reader-friendly font such as Times New Roman or Arial (12 pt).
- Cited works and quotations should all be referenced in footnotes or endnotes, or using your school's system.
- A bibliography of primary and secondary sources consulted and cited must be included
- For assessed coursework only: the essay should be stapled with a coursework submission coversheet attached

4. Essay checklist

- Have you answered the question?
- Have you done what you said you would do in your introductory paragraph?
- As the essay develops have you made sure that each main point is related to the main issues of the question?
- Is there any irrelevant material or repetition in your essay?
- Is there enough analytical discussion?
- Is there a balance between facts and discussion, with the analysis being supported by empirical evidence?
- Is the argument fully developed and sustained throughout the essay? Do your conclusions summarize the argument?
- Have you eliminated all grammatical and spelling errors and made sure that the English is clear?
- Is your essay clearly presented?
- For summative assessed coursework only: Have you printed a copy ready for submission and attached the correct coversheet to one copy? Have you saved another copy?