ESSAY WRITING GUIDE

ART AND DESIGN THEORY

2017

TASMANIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS,
HUNTER ST,
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA
HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY

The Purpose of the Essay
The aim of an essay is to develop an argument about a particular issue. In order to develop an argument, you must have knowledge of what has already been written on the subject. At the same time, it is not sufficient simply to ‘regurgitate’ what has already been written. Rather, you should engage critically with what you have read, indicating whether you find the arguments of the relevant authors convincing or not and the reasons for your judgement. This will involve a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the various arguments or interpretations in question, showing where they are inadequate and where your own interpretation or argument is more adequate. It is not sufficient simply to assert that you find a particular interpretation persuasive or not.

Analysis of the Question
Prior to your research, you should break down the question into its components, and begin to think about your approach. What is the main emphasis of the question? Do you need to give equal weight to each part of it? Throughout the drafting process, you will need to keep referring to the question to stay on track.

In many cases, an essay question will fall into two or more parts. Some questions give a great deal of direction, but others can be non-specific. You will need to tailor your answer accordingly.

Quite often, the first part of the question will be an assertion of some kind. The views of a particular author might be put forward for discussion, for example. The second part of the question may call for a particular form of discussion or analysis from you. You might, for example, be directed to discuss some specific art works, or else called upon to provide examples of your own to furnish your argument.

A broad essay question which does not specify a particular line of inquiry demands that you set the stage for your discussion. You will need to declare to your reader your intentions, and set yourself a task that can be resolved within the word limit.
Collection of Material
Having selected the essay topic, and formed your broad approach to the question, you need to assemble the relevant material. You should start by reading the references related to your chosen topic listed in the unit outline. As you read it is useful to mark those passages which are most relevant to answering the essay question. Then you need to re-read the article or section of a book, this time taking notes. In making notes, do not simply copy out long passages as this defeats the purpose of notes which is to narrow down your attention to what the question is about. Try rather to get the gist of the argument being presented. It can also be useful to make comments on the author’s arguments as you go along but be careful not to confuse these with the arguments you are summarising.

You will also need to amass some visual evidence for your argument. In choosing some illustrations for your essay you will need to search for references beyond those listed in the unit outline related to works of art and/or design that are relevant to your essay. To do this you will need to use databases such as Art and Architecture Source which can be accessed through the library website. Do not rely on google and non-academic websites.

In collecting your material, it is important that you keep a record of where it comes from (including the page numbers) since in your final essay you have to acknowledge your sources, particularly when you are using direct quotes. A lot of time is often wasted trying to track down the source of a particular quote.

Essay Plan
After collecting all the relevant material, you are then ready to start writing your essay. It is often useful to begin the essay writing process by writing a plan in point form first. While this will only be a guide and is likely to change as you write the essay, it will help you to clarify what it is you want to argue and also to organise your thoughts in a coherent and logical manner.

The Drafting and Editing Process
A finished piece of writing needs to undergo several drafts, so allow yourself sufficient time to draft, redraft and edit. This needs to occur over several sittings. It might help to distinguish the difference between first draft and final draft by thinking of the rough draft as a letter to yourself – or to someone you know well - and the final draft as an article you are submitting for publication. To gain some distance from your writing and to be able to edit your own work it is often helpful to have someone else read it aloud to you, or at the very least read it aloud to yourself. This will reveal awkward passages. Use a spell checker.
Style
Imagine that the audience for whom you are writing is an informed, interested but non-specialised reader. The final draft of an essay should be written in a formal, academic style, but that is not to say you should erase your own “voice” or adopt a forced or artificial style. As your writing develops, so too will your style, and the lectures, tutorials, readings and debates you will encounter from week to week will provide stylistic models. There are a number of texts on style. One very helpful book is Style: Toward Clarity And Grace, by Joseph M Williams, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Format of Essays

• Typed on single side of A4 page, font size 12, double spaced with 3cm margin, numbered pages, standard cover page stapled in top left corner.

• Short quotes (less than 3 lines long) follow on in the text itself. Use single quotation marks. e.g. Mary Rogers comments a propos the placing of classical mythologies containing nude or semi-nude women: ‘These would perhaps be kept in private quarters rather than on public display’.

• Long quotes (more than 3 lines long)- start on a new line, Indent every line by 1 cm (approx.). Quotation marks here are not necessary.

• e.g. In his review, Feneon also proposes another crucial difference between the work of the tachistes and the new tendencies:

  In as much as M. Seurat, M. Signac, M. Pissarro, M. Dubois-Pillet realised their conception of this art in pictures where episodes were abolished in a general orchestration subject to the codes of optical physics and where the personality of the author remains hidden like that of Flaubert in his novels, so M. Gauguin works towards an analogous end but by different means. For him, reality is but a pretext for distanced creations.

• Do not overdo quotes. They should not be used to substitute for your own summary and analysis. Quotations should be used only when something is particularly well said or is necessary to your argument.

• Any foreign words should be written in italics.

• Quotes within quotes should be indicated by double quotation marks, i.e. “ ”.
Acknowledgement of sources:
It is important to acknowledge your sources when writing an essay. This is done through the inclusion of citations for sources of quotes, and a bibliography. The bibliography indicating full details of references consulted for your essay should be included at the end of your essay.

Citations for quotes
There are many different styles of citations for quotes. At the Tasmanian College of the Arts, Hunter St we use the Harvard style, which is outlined on the library website: http://utas.libguides.com/referencing. Sources for quotes are acknowledged in the main body of your essay in brackets immediately after the quote rather than in endnotes or footnotes, e.g. (Smith 2009, p. 54)

Endnotes
Endnotes are used to refer the reader to further references on a particular point and to acknowledge the source of particular approaches or interpretations or facts which are not generally agreed upon. Finally, they can be used to make points which are relevant but not essential to the main argument being developed in the essay. I.e. they can be used for asides so as not to interrupt the flow of the main argument. Endnotes of this type should be used only sparingly since it is annoying for the reader to have to wade through pages of endnotes and if such endnotes are too long, they distract the reader’s attention from the main argument.

Endnotes should be numbered consecutively throughout the essay and placed at the end of the essay immediately before the bibliography.

Bibliography
The bibliography should list all the sources referred to in your essay. Do not include references consulted which were not referred to in your essay. It occurs at the end of the essay and normally the references are listed in alphabetical order according to the author’s surname. If there are several works by the same author, these should be listed chronologically.

Format for articles in journals:
- Author’s surname, then initial of first name
- Year of publication
- Title of article in single quotation marks
- Name of journal in which article appears in italics
- Volume number of journal
- Issue number
- Page numbers of article
  e.g. Attfield, J 2006, ‘Redefining kitsch: the politics of design’, Home Cultures, Vol. 3, No.3, pp. 201-12

Format for articles in books:
- Author of article’s surname, then initial of first name
- Year of publication
- Title of article in single quotation marks
- Editor of book in which article appears-initial of first name, then surname. Where there are more than two editors, put the name of the first editor followed by et.al.
- Title of book in italics
- Place of publication
- Name of publisher

Format for books:
- Author's surname, then initial of first name
- Year of publication
- Title of book in italics
- Name of publisher
- Place of publication
e.g. Marks, LU 2000, The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment and the senses, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

Reference to works of art:
- Artist's surname, then initial of first name
- Date of work
- Title of work in italics
- Medium
- Measurements-height then width
- Date viewed if electronic
- URL if electronic

You should include photocopies of works of art discussed in your essays so that the reader can refer directly to them when marking your essay.

Websites:
Websites should be used with care as to the reliability of the information they provide. Acknowledgement of information from websites should indicate the following
- Author's surname, then initial of first name or organization responsible for the site
- Site date-date the site was created or last revised
- Title of document or page in italics
- Date of viewing the source
- URL
FEATURES OF GOOD ESSAY WRITING

1) Clear organisation:
   - Your essay should begin with a clear statement of the central issue to be discussed and an indication of what your argument is going to be.
   - In the main body of the essay, your argument should develop in a clear and logical sequence. It is useful to include subheadings to signpost the direction of your argument during the course of the essay. Each paragraph is a building block of your argument. A good rule of thumb is to develop one main idea per paragraph. Paragraphs should be neither too long nor too short.
   - You should finish the essay with a concluding paragraph summing up your main arguments briefly. Your introduction and conclusion should not be too long. One or two paragraphs are usually sufficient.

2) Be relevant:
   Avoid discussions that are not directly relevant to the question. In this regard, it is important that you have understood the set topic and address its main points. You need to demonstrate how the material that you have included relates to the question asked. The question you are answering should appear on the cover page of your essay. It is a good idea to keep referring back to it to ensure that you are answering the question.

3) Scope and Depth of Treatment of the Topic:
   It is important that the topic is covered in sufficient breadth and the issues and ideas analysed in sufficient depth. Where the topic is a double-barrelled one, make sure that you answer both parts of the question. While essays often suffer because they fail to cover all aspects required by the question, there is also the danger of trying to do too much. Make sure that your essay is focussed and integrated around the key issues addressed by the question. It is important to take note of the word limit. If you are under the word limit it is likely you have not done sufficient research on the topic. If you are over the word limit, check for repetition or lack of conciseness.

4) Evidence of good comprehension, interpretation and analysis of the required reading:
   Avoid the temptation of writing your essays 'off the top of your head'. Evidence that you have read and comprehended the relevant literature on the topic is essential. Your first priority should be to focus on the prescribed texts but you are also encouraged to find further references relevant to the topic (particularly in the long essay assignments).

   At the same time that it is important that you show you have read and understood other authors, it is also important that you do not simply 're-hash' their arguments but that you analyse them critically by pointing to their strengths and weaknesses, developing your own viewpoint.
5) Adequate Description and Analysis of visual examples:
To make a strong case in an essay about visual art demands that you pay close attention to the works of art in question. The most powerful form of persuasion or “evidence” is lively description and analysis, and this is where you have the greatest opportunity to bring something new and interesting to the discussion. When reading the works of critics and commentators, do not simply take their interpretations or reactions to the work as definitive. Compare their reactions to your own, and offer your own responses to your reader.

6) Coherent and well supported argument:
It is important that you develop your argument in a logical and convincing manner. In order to do this you need to be careful not to contradict yourself. It is a good idea to read over your essay when it is completed to check for this. Also, when discussing other people’s views, you need to be clear where they conflict with each other or with your own.

As well as avoiding contradictions, you need to take care to justify your opinion. While it is important to express your views on the topic, you must not just state them but should provide reasons for the position you adopt.

7) Clear expression:
It is important to try to express yourself clearly and succinctly. Long, cumbersome sentences are often a source of confusion. At the same time as you should avoid unnecessary jargon, it is also important not to be too colloquial in your expression. Careful attention should be paid to grammar, paragraphing and spelling. Ensure Australian English is used. Do not leave out discussion which clarifies your argument on the assumption that the reader already knows such information. The point of the essay is to demonstrate to the lecturer that you know what you’re talking about and this can only be done if you don’t assume too much knowledge on the part of your reader.

8) Definition of terms:
It is important that you define any technical terms you use. Often, students fail to adequately define their terms because they assume specialised knowledge on the part of the reader. In defining technical terms, it is best to refer to a dictionary specialised in the area rather than a general dictionary since often, terms used in particular disciplines have a different meaning from their everyday usage.

9) Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is the duplication of another person’s work, in part or in whole, as if it is your own work. You must provide appropriate and adequate citation advice for all material you have directly quoted, adopted or referred to. This applies to all original works even if not quoted verbatim (word for word): no matter what or who the source is (a textbook, a newspaper article, the internet, a lecturer or colleague, etc). Plagiarism arises not only when a
statement is quoted without recognition, but also when it is misquoted, or quoted out of context. The rules about plagiarism and the techniques for avoiding it are adopted in academic environments precisely to control this sort of misrepresentation. In the course of talking and writing about art and design in this School you will necessarily find yourself referring to others' opinions and commentaries: there are means for justifying quotation or “fair copy” of this material, and these will be addressed in tutorials. Plagiarism risks a major penalty: automatic and outright failure of a tutorial paper or essay and, in some circumstances, it may lead to further disciplinary action.

In all art and design theory units taught by the School of Art, guidance and advice will be provided with regard to the proper use of sources. On the Carington Smith Library website there are several excellent links to Internet sites that provide detailed information on these matters:

*Referencing and assignment writing guide, includes more citation examples:*

[http://utas.libguides.com/referencing](http://utas.libguides.com/referencing)

*How do I cite and manage my sources:*


These include notes on avoiding plagiarism and information on assignment writing, proper citation and the preparation of bibliographies.

Students are required to sign a form declaring that the material contained in his or her written assignment is, unless otherwise acknowledged, an original contribution to the topic in question.