These instructions will assist students in preparing and writing essays at University level. Essays are an important part of the skills you develop at University. They provide the framework within which you can develop your ideas; they are an index of your performance for your tutors, and, for almost all students, they are the means by which your work in the course is assessed. Inadequate preparation means that students begin to write their essays without sufficient material to do the task justice. Essays can also be marred by bad organisation and a clumsy handling of the subject that ruins even the most carefully prepared material.

FORMAT

Number all pages except the first. Write the essay question at the start of the essay.

Essays should be word processed with line spacing of at least 1½ and 12 point font. There should be a wide margin (about 4cm.) on the left hand side of the page for comments.

See your course outline for any additional advice on essay format.

LENGTH

The length of the paper should not be your chief consideration. While you should aim to write within the prescribed length, you should aim at a concise, lucid argument that avoids verbosity and yet provides an adequate coverage of all the relevant aspects of the topic. Rather than write to the exact nominated number of words, use the suggested length of the paper to guide you as to the appropriate depth of argument that you develop. Most tutors will accept a paper that is within 10-15% of the specified length. If your essay is more or less than this, you should probably check with your tutor. In addition, if you are provided with a word length range please remain within this range. An essay of 5,000 words will obviously be expected to contain more detailed discussion of evidence and to develop a more sophisticated argument than can be done in a short paper of say 2,000 words.
TREATMENT

1. General
An essay is primarily an exercise in writing, within a prescribed length, a rounded argument, with enough evidence to support it. It should not be primarily a report on the research you have carried out or a merely descriptive account of elements in the essay topic. It should be an exercise in the presentation and critical assessment of factors bearing on a particular issue. The best essays will often take the form of a debate in which competing positions in respect to a central issue are presented and then assessed and evaluated. Above all your essay should take a side in the debate and take the reader to a clear and concise conclusion after weighing the evidence and considering the alternative positions.

Long pages of description might be highly informative, but contribute nothing to the value of the essay. Description should be complementary to analysis, and aimed at illustrating your line of argument rather than merely detailing facts. State factual material briefly and do no more than allude to matters that are general knowledge for anyone reasonably familiar with the field.

Nevertheless every essay should contain those facts required to support its central argument or theme: the value of careful empirical research cannot be overstated.

2. The Essay Topic
Make sure before gathering material for your essay that you understand the precise meaning of the set topic. Direct your efforts towards that topic. One of the most common weaknesses in essays is that they fail to answer the question set. Relevance is a cardinal virtue. One page of writing that really seeks to deal with the topic set is better than five pages that hesitantly skirt around its fringes. A question about the performance of the Howard Government does not call for a discussion of Howard’s description of himself as a “cricket tragic”. An understanding of the full scope of the topic is also vital: turn it over in your mind and consider deeper meanings. Try to find out all the most significant dimensions and ramifications of the subject. In this way you can avoid narrow and limited interpretations that will limit the scope of your essay.

3. A Point of View
There are two main dangers in the presentation of opinion in an essay. On the one hand it is wrong to present only one point of view, to display the arguments for only one side of the issue. You can then justifiably be accused of being ignorant of arguments that possibly refute your case. On the other hand you should not merely present the arguments for and against an issue, side by side, without coming to a conclusion. You should strive for a balance between these two extremes. Certainly you should have a point of view, but in the development of your own argument you need to show an intelligent awareness of conflicting arguments by critically evaluating them.

4. Sources
Reading lists, where they are provided with essay questions, are not intended to be exhaustive. They are a starting point only, and the works listed will be of unequal value.
Many other works, some of them of great importance, can be found in the library and online and you are expected to look for them. The library staff includes a dedicated Politics Research Librarian, but all staff will gladly show you how to use the catalogues and databases.

Familiarity with the library is an essential prerequisite for good essay writing.

Where possible you should make use of primary sources, that is, documents contemporary with the time of which you write, or reports of people with first hand experience of events which you are discussing.

Secondary sources, that is, commentaries written by people either without first hand experience or as later critical reflections of first hand experience, are also important. They form, in fact, the bulk of material available to students. But they should not be regarded as the only important source of information.

Articles in periodical journals are also a valuable source for the latest developments in many fields, particularly on controversial topics. You should use these wherever possible. Do not neglect the valuable electronic databases that can take you to indexes of journal articles. In particular is it often worth consulting ‘Expanded Academic Index’ (a link to this can be found in the Barr Smith Library catalogue – search for Expanded Academic Index under title), although a link to all databases is available on the library’s home page. Similarly, websites will often have the most up to date information or transcripts of recent speeches. However, you should always exercise great care in using materials from the internet. Make sure that you can make an informed evaluation of the worth and integrity of the site. Internet sources will generally form a lesser element of essay research by comparison with other sources. When in doubt about the value of internet sources, seek the advice of your tutor.

It is possible to go too far and get bogged down in attempting a too exhaustive piece of research. But essays based on too few sources can hardly be improved by including a padded bibliography. This is rarely successful and always dishonest. However, it must be emphasized that source material should be approached with a critical spirit rather than being approached as truth. Always be prepared to exercise discrimination and critical judgment in assessing the validity and importance of what you read.
PLANNING AND ORGANISATION

1. An Overall Plan
   The most elementary and important step in any writing task is for the writer to formulate an overall plan of what to say before beginning to write. What prompts such an obvious remark is the tendency of many students to defer the writing of their essays until time is too short and panic too overwhelming to enable them to plan before writing.

2. Preparing the Plan
   You may be able to make a tentative plan at the beginning of your work, but if the subject is new to you, you may not be able to begin planning until you are gathering material. A plan will serve as a very useful guide to you in identifying relevant material. That is why it is a mistake to defer planning until you are working on your essay. The important point is that throughout the process you should have an idea of where you are going.

3. A Central Theme
   As was emphasised above, you should try to develop a definite point of view or argument. This point of view should provide the focal point for the organisation of your essay. Rather than simply list points in a seemingly random way, engage with the ideas, positions and interpretations of specific authors, and present your ideas and material so as to give the most effective support for your main theme or argument. In the best essays there is a logical progression of ideas to a definite conclusion.

4. Structure
   Give some thought to the overall structure of the paper. An essay that is well planned has a clear and coherent structure that will be much easier to read and to understand than one that moves randomly through the material. The structure should allow the reader to follow the gradual progression or development of the argument and should take the reader to a conclusion that has naturally emerged from the body of the paper. Your essay will normally include:
   - an introduction that sets out the scope of the essay, establishes the key argument that you will be advancing and ‘sets the scene’ for the discussion that follows. A good introduction will engage the reader’s attention and show why the topic warrants close investigation. It will contain some necessary background information, a preliminary survey of relevant literature and an explanation of how you plan to deal with the topic. This is where you take a position and outline the central theme that will be argued through the paper. At the same time, note that the introduction should not summarise your findings as these will appear in the conclusion.
   - the body of the essay will normally contain a presentation and discussion of the evidence together with an account of the outcomes of your research, and the analysis of it. This is where the main development of the argument takes place and where your own interpretation is offered to the reader. Above all, the body of the essay should present a critical analysis of the topic that is based on evidence, statistics, quotations etc. (that are all supported by
appropriate referencing – see below), not just a listing of relevant matters or a narrative account of ‘what has happened’. The body of the paper should be devoted to an explanation, not a description.

- a conclusion in which you assess the findings that have emerged from the discussion of the evidence in the preceding sections.

**STYLE**

1. **Simplicity and Clarity**
   Style is a personal matter, but in general a direct, simple style free from mannerisms is best. Above all aim at clarity. Avoid unnecessary jargon and bear in mind that few markers will be greatly impressed when you use a four syllable word where a much simpler word will do. In general:
   - Use the active voice.
   - Make positive clear statements.
   - Be specific. Do not ‘waffle’ or use convoluted language.
   - Avoid colloquial expressions and non-standard forms.
   - Avoid abbreviations.
   Above all, be as clear as you can in all your writing

2. **Paragraphs**
   Paragraphs must be used to indicate a change of subject. Paragraphs that carry on for several pages (or essays that contain only one paragraph) can turn an otherwise good essay into a chaotic jumble and will certainly destroy the reader’s interest and patience. Try to develop one point in each paragraph. A good way to plan your essay is in terms of its paragraphs. Think of each paragraph as developing one aspect of your theme and consider how these paragraphs might be connected to each other. Pay particular attention to the first sentence in each paragraph which should provide a link to earlier discussion.

3. **Grammar and Spelling**
   Marks will not be deducted specifically for errors in grammar and spelling but spelling mistakes and sloppy grammar may obscure your meaning. They will probably create an impression of careless writing and, if numerous, indicate that the essay was not proof-read after it was written. It is a good idea to proof-read your essay and make sure that it is understandable. If you find writing difficult, for your first draft use only simple sentences without subordinate clauses and with active verbs. Always allow time to redraft and to improve any piece of written work. Take the time to learn some of the simpler rules of grammar (especially those relating to the use and misuse of apostrophes).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SOURCES

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of the work of another writer. It is ‘literary theft’. Plagiarism is specifically prohibited by the Statutes of the University which state that:

No student will submit for assessment any piece of work that is not entirely the student’s own, except where either:
• the use of the words, designs, computer code, creative works or ideas of others is appropriate and duly acknowledged, or
• the assessor has given prior permission for joint or collaborative work to be submitted.¹

Essays plagiarised in whole or in part will not be acceptable and will be given a failing mark or returned without a grade. With modern internet search engines, it is often quite easy to find the source of many examples of plagiarism. Note that you are expected to acknowledge that you have read and understood the rules relating to plagiarism on the essay cover sheet.

Of course you must take facts and ideas from other writers, but you should then rethink those ideas and restate those facts in your own words, or you should quote your source directly. Slight rearrangements of an author’s words or sentences are not acceptable. Rearrangements cannot be cited as direct quotations and must therefore be regarded as plagiarism if they occur persistently. Certain limited deletions and additions are permitted in quotations in the interest of brevity and grammar; but words omitted should be indicated by a series of three spaced dots (or four spaced dots if a sentence or more is omitted), and words inserted or altered in form should be marked by placing them in square brackets. Insertions and alterations should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Quote passages if you wish as long as you adhere to the rules, and as long as you do not make the quotations too numerous. The bulk of the essay must be in your own words. It must not consist of innumerable quotations strung together by your brief comments. Occasionally students hand in essays without footnotes or bibliography. Such essays are not acceptable and will be returned unmarked.

In order to minimise the time spent on preparing bibliographies and references, students should make sure that, when making notes during their preparatory reading, they include in their notes all the bibliographic details and the page(s) of any work used. This will eliminate the need to refer to the book a second time in order to check one’s source for footnotes and bibliographies.

MINIMUM RULES FOR THE CORRECT CITATION OF REFERENCES

These instructions are intended to draw to your attention the necessity of adhering to the ordinary rules of scholarship in your essay. For more information see references listed at end. In general, you should:

- Acknowledge all passages that are not of your own composition. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. There are standard ways of acknowledging sources. Examples in these instructions explain and illustrate these rules. For instance, ‘short direct prose quotations should be incorporated in the text of the essay and enclosed in quotation marks’,

  and longer quotations should be separated from the rest of the text and indented by one or two centimetres from the left hand margin, like this paragraph. In this case quotation marks are omitted but you still need to include a citation to the original source [here].

Simply giving a reference with no quotation marks or without indenting the text for a direct quotation is an example of plagiarism and is unacceptable.

- Give a reference for all factual material that cannot be assumed to be part of the normal knowledge of a well-informed reader. If much of one section or paragraph of your essay is based on one source you can indicate this in a single footnote rather than giving a separate reference for each fact.

- Give references for important ideas that are not your own, and for borrowed opinions that need the support of authority, since they are not fully supported by the evidence you offer (or ideas which you do not feel warranted in advancing, or do not wish to acknowledge, as your own).

- Give a reference where it is desirable to give the reader any other kind of information that does not properly belong in the text, e.g. to indicate cross-references within the essay, or to add secondary or explanatory matter that is not sufficiently important to be incorporated into the body of the essay. Among other things, such references can be used to indicate to the reader (and examiner!) that you have read widely on the topic and that your understanding is broader and more nuanced than may be indicated by the bare text of the essay. However, keep the use of such explanatory footnotes to a minimum and only use them when they are necessary.
FORMS OF CITATION

The purpose of a reference citation is to acknowledge the source of your material in such a way that the reader could check your quotation or citation. You must give enough information to enable the reader to locate the exact source of your material without too much trouble. There are two main forms of citing referencing that are generally acceptable. Note that you should check individual Course Guides and your tutors to see if one of the methods is preferred.

Harvard
The Harvard system requires the author’s name together with year of publication and page reference to appear in brackets in the text. For example:

This point had been made earlier by another commentator (Stretton, 1980, 23) in a wide ranging discussion of the role…

If the author’s name appears in the text then it should not be included in the note itself. For example

In his account of the welfare state in Australia, Stretton (1980, 23) makes a distinction between ‘universalists’ and ‘selectivists’

Note that this form of citation refers the reader to the Bibliography where full bibliographic details of the work cited are available (for details of Bibliographies, see below). Some other considerations for use with the Harvard system:

- When you have cited more than one publication in the same year by the same author, the year of publication is followed by a letter. For example, ‘Stretton 1980c’ would direct the reader to the third work listed under Stretton from 1980 in the Bibliography.
- When there are more than two authors to be listed for a single publication it is possible to give just the first surname and then use ‘and others’ or the Latin expression et al. to indicate that there are other authors. For example ‘Stretton et al. 1980’ would indicate that there are several authors – or editors – of the particular work being referred to. Note that et al. is italicised as it is a non-English expression and al. has a full stop as it is an abbreviation.
- Try to avoid any discursive comments with this system of referencing. Beyond adding something as brief as ‘see also Stretton 1980, 23’ there should be no comments included as part of the reference.

Footnotes and Endnotes
This system of referencing consists of a sequence of numbers that take the reader to detailed references either as footnotes at the bottom of the page on which the number appears or as endnotes gathered together as a single list at the end of the paper. Footnotes are usually preferable.

A footnote for the example cited above would thus look like this:
In his account of the welfare state in Australia, Stretton makes a distinction between ‘universalists’ and ‘selectivists’²...

In the first reference to a journal article you need to show:
- The author’s (or authors’) name(s)
- The name of the article in inverted commas
- The title of the journal (italicised)
- The volume and number details
- The date
- The page(s) to which the reference refers

To cite a book, you will need:
- The author’s name as on the title page.
- The title of the book without subtitles shown always in italics.
- The place, publisher and date of publication.
- The volume or edition number (where appropriate).
- The page number(s)

Subsequent references to the same work must be shorter: either “ibid.” or a short title (main title only – no subtitle – plus the page number):

- If the next reference is also to Stretton³ you can use the abbreviation ibid. (a Latin term meaning ‘in the same book, chapter, passage etc.’). Note that ibid. is italicised as it is a non-English expression and has a full stop as it is an abbreviation. In the note below it has a capital I as it comes at the beginning of a sentence.
- If the next reference to the article by Stretton comes after a different citation⁴ the note would read thus.⁵ Note that a ‘short title’ has replaced the more detailed bibliographic information in the first reference. Some referencing systems use the Latin term op. cit. meaning ‘in the work already cited’ after the author’s name rather than a short title.

Other considerations for use with this system:

- Should you be using two more works by the same author, or if the second reference follows much later in your essay, you should give the name of the author followed by a short title, sufficient to identify the exact source, and then give the relevant page number.
- This form of citation allows you to use the footnote or endnote to make some additional points or comments that would distract from the argument if

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³ Ibid.
⁵ For a defence of the importance of a publicly funded welfare system see H. Stretton, ‘Social Policy’, pp. 35-37.
Other points about citation to remember:

**Using works cited in other sources (citing at second-hand).**
You must always indicate if you are citing a source obtained from somewhere else (e.g. if you have not read the original work yourself but are using a quotation or reference that someone else has cited). For example, if you use a quote or argument from Anne Marie Smith’s work that is cited in another book, your footnote should show this. Simply reproducing the footnote or reference to Smith’s writings that Bell and Binnie provide would be a serious misrepresentation, since it would imply that you had read the original work by Smith when you haven’t. In other words, your references should always give an accurate account of your actual source.

**Listing chapters in edited collections.**
It is important that you cite the author and chapter title (in inverted commas) when using works from edited collections of writings. Note that the footnote reference refers just to the page(s) cited. In the bibliography you should show the pages from start to finish of the chapter.

More generally, remember that the abbreviation of page (singular) is p. (never pg.) and the abbreviation of pages (plural) is pp. The titles of all published work should be italicised. For journal articles it is the title of the journal that is italicised and for books it is the published title of the book. The name of the journal article or chapter in an edited collection appear in inverted commas. The same rule holds for the names of newspapers. The title is italicised (and is not enclosed in inverted commas) while the word ‘The’ is dropped from the citation. Dates should always appear as day month year (in that order), without any punctuation. A note to an article from a newspaper might appear thus:

> On 12 March 1997 John Howard was quoted in the *Age* as saying “Australians were entitled to ask the young unemployed to perform some work … [for] their benefit”.

In this quotation the series of three dots indicates that words have been omitted from the original source (use four dots if a whole sentence has been omitted) while the square brackets indicate that you have added a word to assist in the clarity of the quotation or to make the grammar consistent with the rest of the sentence.

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8 *Age*, 12 March 1997.
Citation of electronic sources

The forms of correct citation of electronic sources are still evolving. The minimum requires are that you show enough information to enable your readers to find exactly the document or web page that you are referring to. Given the transitory nature of web materials, it is often a good idea to keep either a hard or electronic copy of documents that you cite from in your essays. You can find some useful suggestions about citation of electronic sources at the following web sites:

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos2006/basic.html
http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html
http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~africa/citation.html
http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/index.html

In general, when you cite a web page or document you must include (wherever possible) the name of the author of the web page or document, the date of publication or most recent update, the title of the web page or document, the title of the home website from which it was obtained (in italics), the URL (web address) at which you found the document and the date on which you viewed it. If a URL is longer than a line it should only be broken at a forward slash: ‘/’. A standard bibliographic entry might look like this:


If the URL of an actual web page or document is unreasonably long (longer than a line or two) the home or root URL of the website can be used as long as it has a search engine which can easily find the related document using the title or author.

To cite from an online journal, you need to show as much of the information about the reference as you would for a hard copy as well as the URL of the article. As with all web documents, you should show the date on which you viewed the page. A standard bibliographic entry might look like this:


If you use a library database to search for the electronic version of an otherwise hard copy journal (e.g. using Informaworld or Academic Search Premier to access Third World Quarterly) you are only required to show the information that you normally would for the hardcopy such as:

E-Books come in a variety of formats. Not all include page numbers. If your e-book has location numbers instead of page numbers, bear in mind that these numbers can vary from reader to reader so you should aim to give as much information as possible (chapter, paragraph and line numbers, for example.)

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

You must include a full Bibliography at the end of every essay. Most tutors prefer a bibliography that consists *only of works actually cited in the essay*. Others want to see a listing of all the materials that you have found useful in the production of your essay (not just those that are directly cited). If you include any references that are not directly cited in the essay you should split the bibliography into two sections (one listing works cited, the second showing other works consulted). This will ensure that you provide a bibliography that is acceptable to all tutors. Regardless of the format you choose, you must give full bibliographic / publication details for everything that appears in the bibliography. All works should be correctly cited.

The exact layout (and section headings) of the Bibliography will vary according to the nature of the materials that you have dealt with and the form of citation you have chosen. If you have used the Harvard system, the Bibliography should be a single consolidated list sorted alphabetically by author (or where no author, by commissioning institution) and then by the order of publication if a single author (or group of authors) has more than one text cited in the Bibliography.


SPECIAL FORMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Some abbreviations, commonly found in footnotes and bibliographies, often puzzle students meeting them for the first time. The following notes are intended to be explanatory, not to encourage the use of the forms listed, since similar English alternatives exist.

**ff.** - following (pages):
Normally used in a footnote to indicate that a particular matter is referred to on several successive pages, e.g. Hutton, W., (1995) *The State We’re In*, Jonathon Cape, London, p.63 ff.

**passim.** - in various parts of a book etc.:
Normally used to indicate that a particular matter is dealt with in several places in a work, e.g. Hutton, W., (1995) *The State We’re In*, Jonathon Cape, London, passim.

**qv.** – *[quod vide]* which see:
Used to refer one to another item for additional information, and most commonly found in encyclopaedias and other works of reference e.g. ‘Gulf Oil erected its main installations at the port of Menal-Ahmadi *(q.v.*)’

**sic.** - thus or so:
Used within brackets, in order to show that a quoted passage, often containing some error, is precisely reproduced, e.g. ‘The outcome of the 2001 Australian election was greatly influenced by the reporting of events associated with the ship *MV Tampered* [sic].’

**supra.** - above:
Normally used in a footnote to indicate that further reference to a particular matter will be found at an earlier point).

**vide.** - see, or refer to:
Used to direct attention to a particular page, book, etc. e.g. vide, Hutton, W., (1995) *The State We’re In*, Jonathon Cape, London, p. 125).
HELPFUL REFERENCES

There are many style guides and related books dedicated to giving advice on essay writing and guidance on presentation. See, for example:


NOTE: Despite the foregoing, essay writing can be fun! (Or so we are reliably informed)

Updated February 2104