

ACADEMIC ESSAY WRITING

1. KEY TERMS

Essay term	Definition
Analyse	Break an issue into its constituent parts. Look in depth at each part using supporting arguments and evidence for and against as well as how these interrelate to one another.
Assess	Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.
Clarify	Literally make something clearer and, where appropriate, simplify it. This could involve, for example, explaining in simpler terms a complex process or theory, or the relationship between two variables.
Comment upon	Pick out the main points on a subject and give your opinion, reinforcing your point of view using logic and reference to relevant evidence, including any wider reading you have done.
Compare	Identify the similarities and differences between two or more phenomena. Say if any of the shared similarities or differences are more important than others. 'Compare' and 'contrast' will often feature together in an essay question.
Consider	Say what you think and have observed about something. Back up your comments using appropriate evidence from external sources, or your own experience. Include any views which are contrary to your own and how they relate to what you originally thought.
Contrast	Similar to compare but concentrate on the dissimilarities between two or more phenomena, or what sets them apart. Point out any differences which are particularly significant.
Critically evaluate	Give your verdict as to what extent a statement or findings within a piece of research are true, or to what extent you agree with them. Provide evidence taken from a wide range of sources which both agree with and contradict an argument. Come to a final conclusion, basing your decision on what you judge

	to be the most important factors and justify how you have made your choice.
Define	To give in precise terms the meaning of something. Bring to attention any problems posed with the definition and different interpretations that may exist.
Demonstrate	Show how, with examples to illustrate.
Describe	Provide a detailed explanation as to how and why something happens.
Discuss	Essentially this is a written debate where you are using your skill at reasoning, backed up by carefully selected evidence to make a case for and against an argument, or point out the advantages and disadvantages of a given context. Remember to arrive at a conclusion.
Elaborate	To give in more detail, provide more information on.
Evaluate	See the explanation for ‘critically evaluate’.
Examine	Look in close detail and establish the key facts and important issues surrounding a topic. This should be a critical evaluation and you should try and offer reasons as to why the facts and issues you have identified are the most important, as well as explain the different ways they could be construed.
Explain	Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. Your writing should have clarity so that complex procedures or sequences of events can be understood; defining key terms where appropriate, and be substantiated with relevant research.
Explore	Adopt a questioning approach and consider a variety of different viewpoints. Where possible reconcile opposing views by presenting a final line of argument.
Give an account of	Means give a detailed description of something. Not to be confused with ‘account for’ which asks you not only what, but why something happened.
Identify	Determine what are the key points to be addressed and implications thereof.
Illustrate	A similar instruction to ‘explain’ whereby you are asked to show the workings of something, making use of definite examples and statistics if appropriate to

	add weight to your explanation.
Interpret	Demonstrate your understanding of an issue or topic. This can be the use of particular terminology by an author, or what the findings from a piece of research suggest to you. In the latter instance, comment on any significant patterns and causal relationships.
Justify	Make a case by providing a body of evidence to support your ideas and points of view. In order to present a balanced argument, consider opinions which may run contrary to your own before stating your conclusion.
Outline	Convey the main points placing emphasis on global structures and interrelationships rather than minute detail.
Review	Look thoroughly into a subject. This should be a critical assessment and not merely descriptive.
Show how	Present, in a logical order, and with reference to relevant evidence the stages and combination of factors that give rise to something.
State	To specify in clear terms the key aspects pertaining to a topic without being overly descriptive. Refer to evidence and examples where appropriate.
Summarise	Give a condensed version drawing out the main facts and omit superfluous information. Brief or general examples will normally suffice for this kind of answer.
To what extent	Evokes a similar response to questions containing 'How far...'. This type of question calls for a thorough assessment of the evidence in presenting your argument. Explore alternative explanations where they exist.

SSDS (2010:1)

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF AN ESSAY

A good essay takes the reader into account by clearly presenting material in a way that is logical, coherent and easy to follow. Before you begin to write your essay, you need to select and order your material in the form of an essay plan. When you have an effective essay plan you are free to concentrate on the expression of your ideas and information. You can learn to guide your reader by being aware of how to use the key elements of an essay. This guide shows you how to make the best use of:

- the introduction;
- paragraphs;
- evidence;
- the conclusion

a) The introduction

The introduction is a signpost for your reader, showing how you intend to answer the question. You will need to show your understanding of the key issues and indicate the main areas your essay will cover. One possible structure for an introduction is shown below;

- Begin with a general point about the central issue

“Foreign aid has played critical roles in the development of many societies worldwide.”

- Use the words of the title to show your understanding of the question

“When discussing the role of foreign aid development, both advantages and disadvantages can be found.”

- Show what your essay structure will be

“In the first section of this essay, the role of foreign aid in development will be considered ... The second section of this essay will examine the ... Finally, a conclusion will be made on the role that foreign aid plays in the development of human society...”

- Make a link to the first point

“In discussing the role of foreign aid in development, a useful starting point is the public interest theory....”

*What is key in the introduction is to provide the aim/objective as well as the outline of your essay

b) The use of paragraphs (Main body)

Your essay plan should show clearly what the main sections of your essay will be and which points will be including in each section. Ordering your points in each section should also take place at the planning stage. You now need to use paragraphs to take your reader step by step through each section. Each paragraph you write should express clearly one point or one aspect of a point. Your paragraphs should link together to provide the reader with a sense of logical progression.

The use of evidence and/or examples

You should use evidence to illustrate and support your points. Evidence may be the opinion of an expert or the results of a study or experiment. Use the evidence to:

- add authority to your point;
- add credibility to your argument;
- add interest to your discussion

Whenever you refer to someone else's ideas or opinion you must acknowledge your source through referencing

There are two main ways of referencing your evidence:

- the use of a number referring to a note at the end of the essay or bottom of the page (as in the first example);
- the inclusion of the author and date of publication in the body of the essay with the full details included in your bibliography (as in the second example).

At the end of your essay you must include a bibliography which lists all the books you have consulted in writing your essay, whether or not you have referred to them in your essay. A bibliography should include the details of author, title, date, place or publication, publisher and edition for each book

c) The conclusion

The conclusion is another signpost to your reader. It gives you the opportunity to:

- use the words of the title to show you have answered the question;
- remind the reader of what has been covered;
- show the overall significance of the material;
- provide an overall assessment of theories or arguments,
- Summarizing your own view point.

REFERENCING AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

This is aimed at helping you to understand why you should include references to the information sources that you use to underpin your writing. It explains the main principles of accurately referencing such sources in your work.

Why reference?

When you are writing an essay, report, dissertation or any other form of academic writing, your own thoughts and ideas inevitably build on those of other writers, researchers or teachers. It is essential that you acknowledge your debt to the sources of data, research and ideas on which you have drawn by including references to, and full details of, these sources in your work. Referencing your work allows the reader:

- to distinguish your own ideas and findings from those you have drawn from the work of others;
- to follow up in more detail the ideas or facts that you have referred to.

Before you write

Whenever you read or research material for your writing, make sure that you include in your notes, or on any photocopied material, the full publication details of each relevant text that you read. These details should include:

- surname(s) and initial(s) of the author(s);
- the date of publication;
- the title of the text;
- if it is a paper, the title of the journal and volume number;
- if it is a chapter of an edited book, the book's title and editor(s) the publisher and place of publication*;
- the first and last page numbers if it is a journal article or a chapter in an edited book.

For particularly important points, or for parts of texts that you might wish to quote word for word, also include in your notes the specific page reference (direct citation).

* Please note that the publisher of a book should not be confused with the printer. The publisher's name is normally on a book's main title page, and often on the book's spine too

When to use references

Your source should be acknowledged every time the point that you make, or the data or other information that you use, is substantially that of another writer and not your own. As a very rough guide, while the introduction and the conclusions to your writing might be largely based on your own ideas, within the main body of your report or essay, you would expect to be drawing on, and thus referencing your debt to, the work of others in each main section or paragraph. Look at the ways in which your sources use references in their own work and avoid PLAGIARISM.

Referencing styles

There are many different referencing conventions in common use. Each university will have its own preferred format. Focus here is on the '**author, date**' system (Harvard system of referencing style).

How to reference using the 'author, date' system (Harvard System)

In the 'author, date' system (often referred to as the 'Harvard' system) very brief details of the source from which a discussion point or piece of factual information is drawn are included in the text. Full details of the source are then given in a reference list or bibliography at the end of the text. This allows the writer to fully acknowledge her/his sources, without significantly interrupting the flow of the writing.

1. Citing your source within the text

As the name suggests, the citation in the text normally includes the name(s) (surname only) of the author(s) and the date of the publication. This information is usually included in brackets at the most appropriate point in the text.

The seminars that are often a part of humanities courses can provide opportunities for students to develop the communication and interpersonal skills that are valued by employers (Lyon, 1992).

The text reference above indicates to the reader that the point being made draws on a work by Lyon, published in 1992. An alternative format is shown in the example below.

Knapper and Cropley (1991:44) believe that “the willingness of adults to learn is affected by their attitudes, values and self-image and that their capacity to learn depends greatly on their study skills.”

Note that in this example reference has been made to a specific point within a very long text (in this instance a book) and so a page number has been added. This gives the reader the opportunity to find the particular place in the text where the point referred to is made. You should **always** include the page number when you include a passage of direct quotation from another writer's work.

When a publication has several authors, it is usual to give the surname of the first author followed by et al. (an abbreviation of the Latin for 'and the others') although for works with just two authors both names may be given, as in the example above.

You may need to cite an **unpublished** idea or discussion point from an oral presentation, such as a seminar/conference. The format for the text citation is normally exactly the same as for a published work and should give the speaker's name and the date of the presentation.

Recent research on the origins of early man has challenged the views expressed in many of the standard textbooks (Barker, 1996).

2. Reference lists/ bibliographies

When using the 'author, date' system, the brief references included in the text must be followed up with full publication details, usually as an **alphabetical** reference list or bibliography at the end of your piece of work. The examples given below are used to indicate the main principles.

Book references

Works quoted in the examples above.

Knapper, C.K. and Cropley, A. (1991) **Lifelong Learning and Higher Education**. London: Croom Helm.

The reference above includes:

- the surnames and forenames or initials of both the authors;
- the date of publication;
- the book title;
- the place of publication;
- the name of the publisher.

The title of the book should be formatted to distinguish it from the other details; in the example above it is bold, but it could be in italicized, underlined or in inverted commas. When multi-authored works have been quoted, it is important to include the names of all the authors, even when the text reference used was *et al.*

Papers or articles within an edited book

A reference to a paper or article within an edited book should in addition include:

- the editor and the title of the book;
- the first and last page numbers of the article or paper.

Lyon, E.S. (1992) Humanities graduates in the labour market. In H. Eggins (ed.), *Arts Graduates, their Skills and their Employment*. London: The Falmer Press, pp. 123-143.

Note that in the above reference, it is the book title and not the article title that is italicized

Journal articles

Journal articles must also include:

- the name and volume number of the journal;
- the first and last page numbers of the article.

The publisher and place of publication are not normally required for journals.

Pask, G. (1979) "Styles and strategies of learning." *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, (46) pp. 128-148.

Note that in the last reference above, it is the journal name that is italicized, **not** the title of the paper or article.

Referencing web pages

The internet is increasingly used as a source of information and it is just as important to reference internet sources as it is to reference printed sources. Information on the internet changes rapidly and web pages move or are sometimes inaccessible meaning it can often be difficult to validate or even find information cited from the internet. When referencing web pages it is helpful to include details that will help other people check or follow up the information. A suggested format is to include the author of the information (this may be an individual, group or organisation), the date the page was put on the internet (most web pages have a date at the bottom of the page), the title, the http:// address, and the date you accessed the web page (in case the information has been subsequently modified). A format for referencing web pages is given below.

University of Zambia Senate Committee (6/8/2017) Code of practice and guide to study. <https://www.unza.zm/> (Accessed 08/01/17)

Miti, P. (2011) Delay in funding youths in Zambia. <http://www.postzambia.com/post> (Last consulted: 18th August, 2017).