Introduction

This guide presents information about the skills and processes required for essay and dissertation writing. The advice is intended to be helpful to students on a wide range of courses at the University of Exeter Cornwall Campus and University College Falmouth.

How to use the Essay Guide

The original Essay Guide has been revised for 2011 and is available in pdf format via the ASK website.

You do *not* need to start reading this guide from the beginning, and progress through until the end. The table of contents is designed to lead you directly to the section of the guide that you need. **Throughout the guide, examples are shown with a shaded background.**

The examples are taken from different disciplines and in general the advice is meant to be useful for students' writing in different subject areas.

The example sentences / paragraphs are meant to illustrate points about the structure of writing – building arguments, clear writing, grammar. They are not necessarily valid, profound, or even true.

We would be very happy to hear any feedback from you. This is the 4th edition of *The Essay Guide* and your comments will be read carefully when making revisions for future editions. Please let us hear responses, good or bad, by emailing ask@falmouth.ac.uk

ASK: Academic Skills

See the ASK website for details of staff, roles, office hours and the service we provide. We also now have an online booking facility.

ask.fxplus.ac.uk

ASK operates throughout the year at both Penryn and Falmouth campuses (although there may be a reduced service during vacations, particularly at Falmouth).

IT Servicedesk

If you are experiencing problems with a computer on site, the best point of contact is servicedesk@falmouth.ac.uk . They will reply promptly. See the IT pages on the Learning Space for details of IT training.

Library User Support

Please see the Library pages:

Library.fxplus.ac.uk

The Info-perch provides a drop-in service for research advice every week during term time. See the library website (link above) for details of days, times and locations. Or you can look up your subject on the Library's Study Support pages to explore resources specific to your subject area and who your Academic Liaison Librarian is and how to contact him/her.

http://library.fxplus.ac.uk/subject-guides

Planning

Understanding the Essay Brief

You can save yourself a lot of effort if you spend some time reading and analysing the brief, rather than grasping the general subject area and then heading off to google to begin your research. If you do begin with unfocussed reading and note-taking, the risk is that you will write down information without having a clear idea of what to look for, and will end up with pages of unusable and irrelevant notes which make the essay even harder to write.

If you are in any doubt over a brief or question, you could ask

- Your tutor (this is the best person to ask)
- See an ASK advisor or visit the Info-Perch

They will not tell you how to answer the question, but will try to help you recognise what it is asking for.

What the assignment is asking for

This section gives general advice on how to read and interpret the brief, but if you really are unsure what it is asking for, the best person to ask is your tutor.

Assignments are sometimes presented as questions, other times as more detailed and extensive briefs (depending on the subject). Below are some examples of different briefs.

Example essay questions:

Does haute couture still have a place in the contemporary fashion industry?

Madness! Hysteria! Murder! Pathos! What part do sensationalism and melodrama play in the Victorian novel?

An essay brief:

You are asked to write an essay of 1,500 words on an idea/issue/line of enquiry emerging from your attendance at the Spring Term Lecture Series.

Your essay should do more than describing the work you are writing about. You should explore why you think things happened. Refer to the Learning Objectives above, the first three of which show, in general terms, what you should be aiming for.

Try to formulate a structured plan to develop your ideas and argument. This will help you develop your synopsis.

Please include references (Harvard system) for selected reading, and, where relevant, quotations. You may include illustrations, but only if they are discussed in the text. If you do so you should also include a list of illustrations before your bibliography. Ensure that all quotations and illustrations are analysed and form a coherent part of your argument.

The first thing to do with the question or brief is to read it carefully, then read it again. 2-3 page briefs may seem daunting but the only reason that they are written is to give you a clear idea of what is required. It can help to also look back at lecture notes to remind yourself of key course content, topics and ideas. Important instructions are often given by verbs: 'Demonstrate an awareness of…' 'Frame your discussion…' Consider the inter-relationship of…' If you don't read (and keep re-reading) the brief while working on the essay, the risk is that your work will not address the tasks laid out in the brief and you will lose marks.

Be aware of the different tasks that the question or instructions imply. These verbs are commonly used but all have slightly different meanings

analyse, assess, compare, consider, contrast, define, demonstrate, describe, discuss, evaluate, examine, explain, frame, justify, review, state, summarise

Terms used in the brief

You must identify any key concepts which the question is asking you to consider. In the question about haute couture (given as an example on the previous page), you may have to consider how haute couture can be defined. In the second example the terms 'sensationalism' and 'melodrama' may require close examination (not to mention 'madness', 'hysteria' etc.). The words often used in briefs that cause the most problems for students are:

Learning objectives and outcomes

A learning *objective* usually refers to the development of a particular academic skill. For example: 'Develop an understanding of how fundamental economic and social issues affect design'. A learning *outcome* is a more concrete task that you are expected to perform in producing the essay: 'To draw on relevant theoretical frameworks' or 'Develop independent self-management skills and meet deadlines'. The distinction is a subtle one, but the best way to think of it is that an outcome is a task you need to *perform*; an objective is a skill you need to *develop*.

Critical approach/understanding/perspective

These phrases are often used in briefs and by tutors to describe a particular academic skill. The skill is to be able to compare different positions on a particular subject. It means not judging a statement on its own terms but looking at different critics' and theorists' interpretations of a phenomenon or piece of work; in the same way, you should not present quotations as sacred statements but as specific perspectives on a particular subject. To have a critical perspective requires range and depth of reading.

Creating a proposal for a dissertation or research essay

Some subjects ask for a proposal or synopsis for the long essay / dissertation (and also for some of the longer research essays); it is also set on some postgraduate courses. Different tutors will specify how they want this to be presented (with or without bullet points for example or sometimes you will be provided with a framework or form to fill in), but the three qualities any proposal should possess are focus, succinctness and detail. It is unlikely

your synopsis will be accepted if it rambles and fails to offer a series of detailed points that you can expand on in your essay / dissertation.

You are generally expected to explain your overall research objective: what it is you want to find out. Also, it is normal to propose a number of more detailed research questions (also called 'guiding questions'). Your tutor will also expect to see a bibliography of sources that will help you answer these questions (sometimes called an annotated bibliography). So:

- general aim of the dissertation
- specific aims of the dissertation
- sources to support those aims

The proposal (or synopsis) is not, however, a binding contract of what your dissertation must be. There is plenty of latitude to change, add to or omit points from the proposal; but again, you should be in close contact with your tutor about significant changes that you are making from your proposal.

Section Summary

- Pay great attention to the requirements of the essay assignment.

- The key to the task often lies in the question word that is used.

- You are expected to adopt a 'critical perspective' towards your subject.

Researching

Planning Research

Planning for research is required whether you are doing short projects or major pieces of research such as final year dissertations. You will need to examine the nature of the project you have been set and see what is required. You will need to ask yourself various questions eg: How much depth do I need to go into a subject? What form is the information needed in? Do I need visuals? The requirements for a group presentation will be different to those for a short essay. Dissertations are more individualised pieces of work where you effectively set your own subject. Because of this there is a separate section below.

Planning Dissertation Research

It is crucial to find the right subject for final year dissertations/long essays. The dissertation gives you the scope to select a subject area that interests you to explore further (obviously

with advice from your tutors), as opposed to you being set a question or brief that you then respond to. It can take quite a while to decide on your subject, and you will have to explore various lines of enquiry before you make your decision. You have to allow for the fact that you might change direction. You also have to decide on what you don't want to do, what methodology or style you are going to use, and on what your essential argument is [see 3.3].

To research and complete a successful dissertation the subject area selected needs to be a feasible one with enough information available to base your research around, and with clearly defined parameters. You really want to pick a subject you are genuinely interested in and that you feel comfortable with. The research and the writing will then be a more satisfying and (hopefully!) enjoyable experience. It may also inform your practice or understanding of your subject area.

Because this can take some time, it is strongly recommended that you start to think about this at the end of your second year and over the summer vacation. At the very least you should have a clear summary or synopsis of what you are going to do by the time the new term starts. You should be able to identify the types of research you need to undertake. If you are going to do primary research such as interviewing people, making direct observations, surveys, or visits then you need to plan for this as well.

The library will usually be your starting point in terms of research, and the library does remain open over the summer period. If you plan to go away over the summer then it is a good idea to get together some material (books and articles) to take away with you, particularly if you won't have access to a specialist library. You can access our library catalogue and our specialist subject databases remotely if you have internet access. If you're going away to somewhere with a College or University then there is a scheme called UK Libraries Plus that enables you to have official reference access to another academic library; you can ask at the front desk for more information on this.

Good research involves using a range of sources and critically evaluating them. The clearer you are about your ideas *before* you start researching the better. Especially when using online sources there can be a danger that you overload yourself with information (this happens a lot when using general internet search engines such as *Google*). Too much information can be as problematic as too little! If you require visual information rather than textual, do ask library staff for help, as this could be in a variety of places.

Before you start researching in the library catalogue or academic databases, you will need to have a range of words describing your subject – just as if you were looking for something on *Google*. If you are looking at the work or writings of individual people, then their names are obvious starting points. If your subject is more thematic then you will need to combine the right sort of words to enable you to search effectively and you will also need to think of

alternative approaches and terminologies. The better the combinations of words you use the more refined will be the results. For example, *sustainability + architecture* is better than either of those words on their own. Similarly, *media + ownership* would be more useful than just *media*. You can break down your research into parts which relate to the various sections of your essay. This can be better than trying to research everything at once, which can often lead to a problem with managing all the information.

Stage 1 Research

When you have identified some search terms you can then start library research. Our main catalogue will find books, videos, radio and past student dissertations. If you don't find material on the catalogue don't give up! It could be you are using the wrong search terms, or that there are alternative ways of researching. One Stop Search will provide a more comprehensive search covering newspapers, magazines and many journal articles. Remember that you can use filters to refine your searches.

Do use the library enquiry service; our specialist reference section is a good place to find definitions of terms and to check facts. If you need more detailed information, or if you were unsuccessful in finding anything on the library catalogue (if your subject is very recent for example), you will need to go on to Stage 2 research.

Stage 2 Research

This research involves looking at specialist databases which provide you with references to journal articles. Journals are an excellent source of information on contemporary debate and on specialist subjects. Increasingly full-text articles are provided. The databases you use will depend on your subject. There are lists and descriptions of available databases on your subject page http://library.fxplus.ac.uk/subject-guides

These will guide you to academic journal and magazine/newspaper material, which is where contemporary critical debate takes place (although you can use them for historical purposes as well). You will also probably use general internet search engines such as *Google.* However, although you can find some excellent websites via this sort of search, you may find some of the information on the internet unreliable or partisan. It can also be quite time-consuming to trawl through the results. If you are doing dissertation research and have a problem finding resources, or you find references to things we haven't got, then the library can obtain material for you from the British Library (books and journal articles). We can also help identify specialist resources elsewhere for you.

Stage 3 Research

This could involve going beyond our resources (as mentioned above) and using other libraries, or it could mean more primary type research such as contacting and interviewing people or organisations, doing surveys, making visits and direct observations etc. The library is happy to help with this sort of research as well.

Organisation and Time Management

The most successful students are those who can manage their time and resources so that they give themselves the best chance of doing a good job. But for many students, being organised presents all kinds of problems. For some ideas about developing and improving your time management skils StudyHub.

Effective Reading

Reading Techniques

While at university you will be expected to undertake the reading of academic texts. However, you will not be expected to read all books from start to finish, so to make use of your time more efficiently, you will need to be selective about your reading.

Reading for Purpose

Firstly, you will need to identify your purpose for reading. Preparation will help you to focus and concentrate!

Are you reading to:

- Find if the source is useful?
- Look for a specific piece of information (names/dates/places?)
- Look for particular viewpoints from an author?
- Look for background information?
- Find out how to do something?

Once you have identified your purpose, then you will need to determine which reading technique to use.

Skimming

In order to decide which sources are going to be most useful, it is important to get the 'gist' of the it, without having to read the whole thing from beginning to end. Skimming through a book allows you to gain a general sense of the text. Look at the index, contents page, headings of chapters and sub-headings to give you an idea if the information you are looking for could be contained within the text. Reading the first and last paragraphs and looking at any diagrams or pictures will offer more clues. This should give you an idea which chapters/sections to read and which are not so appropriate.

Scanning

This technique can be used to look for specific information, such as names, dates or to answer a question. Whereas skimming can give you the general drift of the text, scanning is useful to locate certain phrases or topics to see if that particular area addresses your requirements.

Rapid Reading

Rapid Reading is a technique which can be used to confirm knowledge. It is similar to skim reading as you can progress quickly, but usually because the material is more familiar. You will not have to read every single word or paragraph as you half read and half fill in using your memory to fill the gaps.

In Depth Reading

Once you have located an article or a section within a book, you may then decide to read the chapter/section in full. You may need to work your way carefully through the author's to gain a full understanding. This process may take time and if the text is very detailed, then it may need to be re-read for clarity.

Critical Reading

Critical reading requires gaining a complete understanding of a text (like in-depth reading) but it means weighing up the arguments and evidence both for and against. Critical reading takes time and involves identifying and evaluating the ideas put forward by the author and considering how these ideas fit with other authors in the same field.

A brief overview of Reading Techniques and their uses

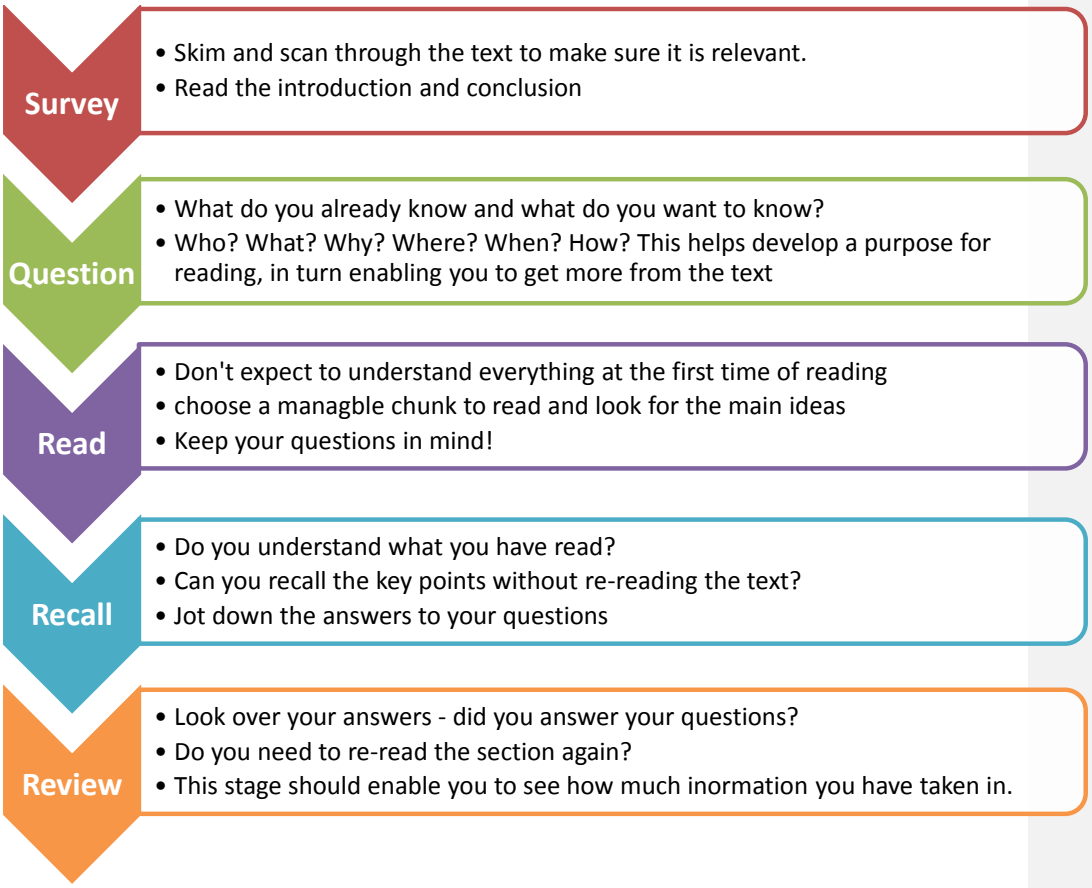
What do you need to do?	Reading Technique	What's involved?

Gain a general overview of the text	**Skimming**	Use to find main ideas and sequences and relationships between chapters/sections
Locate specific information	**Scanning**	Search through the text for specifics details such as key words, phrases, names, dates.
Recall information	**Rapid Reading**	Useful for revision – confirming knowledge
Increase knowledge and understanding	**In-Depth**	High level of concentration required, slow, steady and repetitive reading
Evaluate ideas	**Critical**	Question and analyse author's perspective

Your reading style will vary depending on the material you have to read. These techniques can be useful to quickly switch to and from and to enable you to search for the specific information. The decision can then be made whether you will need to read the text in full.

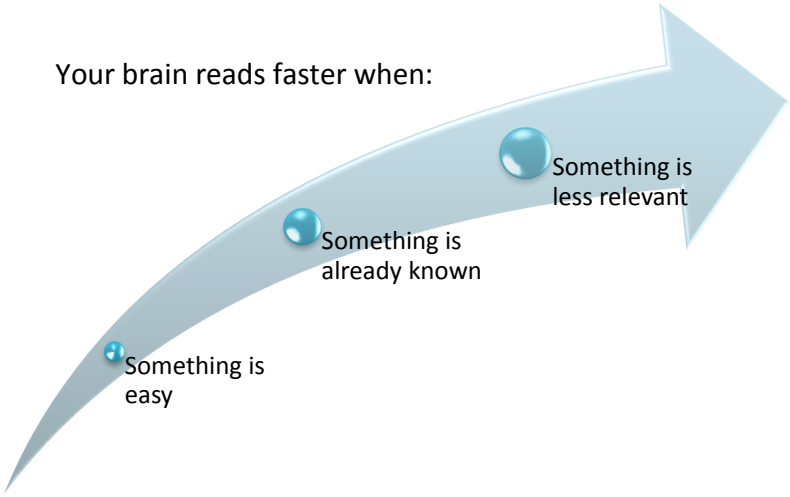
SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review)

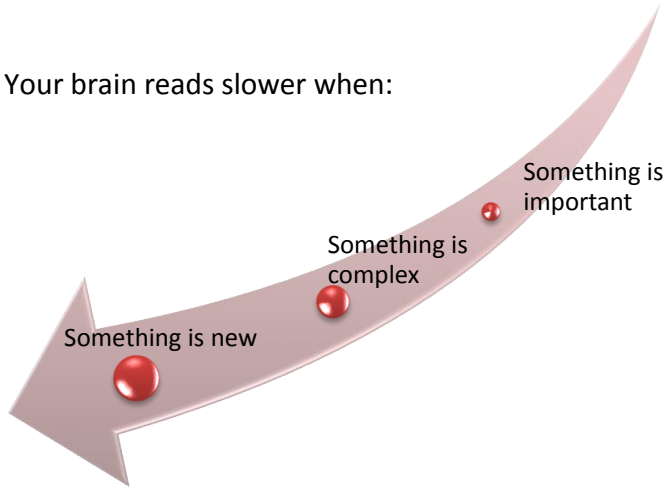
SQ3R is a set of techniques for extracting key information from a text. Posing questions will give you a purpose and will allow you to monitor your understanding of what you have just read.



Reading speed

The speed in which you read can very much depend on the text that you are reading. It will naturally vary but it is worth cultivating different reading techniques, rather like having a set of gears to control your speed. Rather than getting stuck in low gear, grinding slowly through a text, practice reading a bit faster than usual. This will help to train your brain – a bit like undertaking an exercise programme to get fit.





Reading academic texts will offer new challenges. The style of writing is not necessarily straight to the point and will raise questions, tease out ideas and present you with new vocabulary. New vocabulary can slow you down which might mean losing the thread of the text. Making your own vocabulary book (using a small address book will do the trick) and add in new words as you go along with a definition of each. This will be a useful resource you can build up over the time of your course.

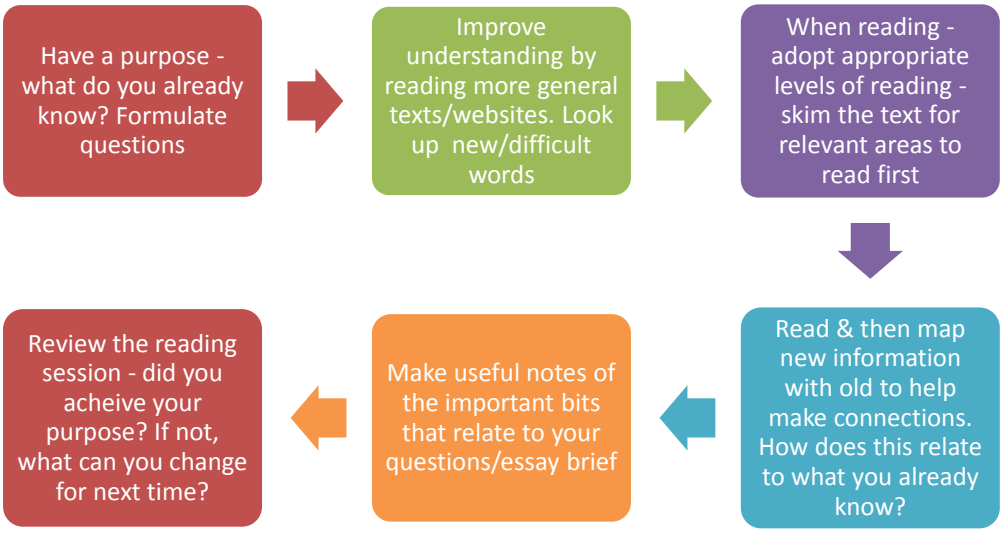
If you do read a text which is too complicated, then try reading a simplified version before you proceed or look up the meanings of the words which might be troubling you. Be prepared to re-read some sections if you do not get the 'gist' the first time round.

The best way to improve your reading speed is to read more often. Practice makes perfect!

Active Reading

When you are reading a document in detail which requires a high level of concentration, it can help to highlight, annotate and underline sections (if it is a photocopy or print out). Reading passively without questioning or marking the text, can be a time wasting activity. Making your reading more active can help you to interact with the text, emphasise information and review important points later.

Active Reading Strategies



Colour coding

Using colours for highlighting text can help you to return to important information and using colours can emphasise the specific information without having to re-read chunks of text. . For example – argument in blue, evidence in green, author's position in pink.

Reading alongside note making

Note making is an important aspect of study and is very closely linked to reading. Whether you read and take notes alongside as you go or read and write later, will depend on what works for you.

See the note making section of the Essay Guide.

Reading Comprehension

It is quite easy to read a text and then think to yourself 'what did I just read?' You may have felt like you were reading, but you have to be aware of whether you are actually taking in that information.

Monitoring comprehension

Monitor your comprehension by stopping from time to time to ask yourself what you have just learnt. Could you write down in your own words what you have just read? If you can, then your understanding of the text is very high. If you feel you can't, then re-read the passage to improve your understanding of the text. Don't be tempted to copy down big chunks of the text (unless you will be using it as a quote) as this will not aid your understanding! Write as much of it as you can in your own words.

Reading length

If you are reading texts which require great amount of concentration then you may find it more productive to read it in chunks and in smaller bursts. Reading solidly for 20 minutes at a time can be more productive and lead to a better understanding rather than feeling the need to read for a lengthier time. This will allow you to stop and reflect on what you have read and give you the opportunity to write notes if need be. Everyone has their own reading habits, so see what works best for you.

Finding your argument

To write a good essay or dissertation, you must have a clear idea of what you want to achieve. 'To look at how X influenced Y' isn't clear enough, likewise 'To investigate Riefenstahl's stylistic representations of power.' These only describe a subject area and are not solid enough foundations for a purposeful essay. Other examples of *weak* essay outlines could be:

- What the real reasons for X were.
- A look at the rivalry between Y and Z.
- Some differences between the work of A and B.

What does central argument mean?

A central argument is the backbone of your essay, what you want to persuade your reader is true. It gives your writing a sense of purpose. It does not have to be 'argumentative' (see below), but it is normally reducible to a single statement (not a question). If you can't express it in a single statement, then you may not have a clear enough idea of where your essay is going. It represents the difference between *descriptive* and *analytical* writing.

Reducing your central argument to a single statement is 1 method of cracking the essay; it may be frustratingly difficult, but it is an invaluable way to check if you are ready to begin. Here are some examples of what a statement of the central argument might look like:

X's photographs of disabled and insane subjects can be seen as self-portraits.
The most important differences between the Art Deco and Bauhaus styles are X, Y and Z.
The 19th Century Gothic novel allowed women new literary freedoms, in particular X and Y.
X is caused by Y.
This artist's work successfully overcomes the limitations of Z.
The reason rocks A and B are found in formation X is Z.
Fukuyama's notion of 'the end of history' is flawed because it fails to consider X and Y.
The notion of matrixial space raises questions A and B.

Notice that all of these statements explicitly answer questions about the true nature of the subject they address: What are X's photographs about? What were the most important differences between Bauhaus and Art Deco? In what way did the Gothic novel impact on gender roles? What explanation is there for X? and so on. A central argument should say something important about the topic, and say it clearly. *Please note, however, that a central argument can raise questions at the same time as being explicit and clear – as is the case with the last example.*

Testing relevance

The examples above each represent a particular argument, or position on the subject material. For this reason, they allow you to judge the relevance of everything in your essay: 'Does this material support my central argument?' should be the question that you keep asking yourself. If it doesn't then you must either find a way of making it relevant (and explicitly showing the reader that it is), or leaving it out. In this way, your central argument is the *organising principle* of your essay or dissertation. You might want to write down your central argument and stick it above your desk to refer to.

Avoiding questions that are too broad

If you are writing about 'the way architecture reflects political ideology,' and you want your first chapter to provide historical background to your essay, you will be faced with an unmanageably vast amount of possible material. This is because you do not have a central argument, only a description of the subject area. But, if you can formulate a central argument on the subject, such as 'Religious and secular architecture represent ideology in radically different ways' or 'Democracies are happy to borrow from the architecture of dictatorships', then you immediately have an organising principle which will allow you to choose the material for your historical chapter in a much more directed way.

Finding the Central Argument

Even though it should be possible to express the central argument in a single sentence, it is extremely difficult to find the right argument for your essay or dissertation. The process usually involves pacing around a room, coffee-drinking, etc. It may help if you can find a patient listener and talk through the thoughts you have on a subject and how you want to link them. Questions you might ask yourself to help arrive at a possible thesis statement could be:

What areas have I been researching and what is the connection between them?
What subjects have been the most interesting to read about?
With what subject material do I feel confident (or uncertain)?
What is at the heart of this subject area?
Why does it matter?

Equally, you have to be careful when committing to a central argument, and make sure that it is not fatally restrictive. *In other words, you need to make sure that your essay (and especially a dissertation) is 'do-able'*. Some points to consider might be:

Does this central argument allow me to cover the subject areas I am most interested in?
Am I able to satisfy the requirements of the assignment brief by pursuing this argument?
Is this really a good way of explaining the subject material?
Can I cover this amount of material in sufficient depth or should I narrow my focus?

The moment when you realise what it is your essay is about could come anytime and anywhere – make sure you write it down! Few feelings are more frustrating than knowing that you *had* a good idea. At the same time, having that breakthrough is very exciting: Archimedes, according to the story, jumped out of the bath and ran down the street shouting 'I've got it!'.

However, this is only the *starting point* for writing your essay. A day or two before the deadline is too late to be having your eureka moment. You will have to try to find a central

argument relatively early to leave time for writing a good essay; this is even more true of the dissertation.

Finally, a qualification: some essays may not seem to need a central argument. If the question asks you to 'compare and contrast', the body of your essay may just break down into 3 sections, each one comparing or contrasting in a different way. In this case it is easy to think that you don't have a central argument, but it is still there: '3 ways these works can be compared or contrasted are A, B and C.'

Section Summary

Come up with a central argument which is clear and directed.

Make sure that it allows you to fulfil the requirements of the question / brief.

Use it as your organising principle and means for testing relevance.

Structuring your Material

Weak essays are a series of loosely connected observations and insights on a particular (not very well-defined) subject. This is usually due to the lack of a clear structure imposed on the essay by you; as a result, your reader will find it hard to follow. It would be a good idea to read about argument before reading this section.

Many guides have tried to teach good essay structure through systems and diagrams; none that I have read really manages to embrace the endless possibilities of essay writing. This section tries to identify some of the elements that may belong to a well-structured essay.

Compare and Contrast

Here is a part of a question from a Design course:

> Compare and contrast two developing cities…consider the impact of sustainability, climate change, regeneration and new technologies on their development.

I have over-simplified the question for the purposes of demonstration. One way to structure the essay could be:

> Structure 1:
>
> Intro
> City 1
> sustainability, climate change, regeneration, new technologies

City 2
sustainability, climate change, regeneration, new technologies
Comparative Assessment
Conclusion

And here is another:

Structure 2:

Intro
Sustainability
- compare and contrast
Climate change
- compare and contrast
Regeneration
- compare and contrast
New Technologies
-compare and contrast
Conclusion
-

Both of these structures look fine, but by looking at the two cities separately, you would probably find yourself repeating material; in the second, by looking at aspects of the development side by side, you are in a better position to focus on the important similarities and differences. In all subject areas, you should try to build your essay around a structure that allows you to answer the question rather than just describe the topic.

Descriptive vs Thematic Structure

Here is another example of a compare and contrast and a possible (not very good) plan:

Structure 1: Compare and contrast the treatment of gender in 3 of the novels from this unit.

Intro
Frankenstein – Gender
The Monk – Gender
Jane Eyre – Gender
Conclusion

Although it may seem natural and organised to deal with each work separately, this doesn't allow for comparison between the novels. *The above plan contains no ideas on the subject*; it simply breaks down the question in terms of the works it will refer to. It is generally true

that essays which are structured according to the subject material tend to be more descriptive than analytical – not good.

The plan below is much more appropriate; it contains ideas on the subject, which are built into the structure. By structuring the essay around specific issues, each of which seems to support the conclusion, the essay is likely to be analytical rather than descriptive. *You could call this a thematic approach*.

Structure 2 : compare and contrast using a thematic approach

Intro
Theme 1 - Relationships between male and female characters
- Family and marriage relationships in Jane Eyre and Frankenstein
- Jane and Rochester
Theme 2 - Different presentations of gender in 'high' and 'low' Gothic novels
- A distinction can be made between types of gothic novels
- Jane Eyre not driven as much by Gothic genre
- Role of women as sexualised victims in *Frankenstein* and *The Monk*
Theme 3 - Jane Eyre as new type of female character
- Female character at centre of plot and controlling rather than reacting to events
- She becomes stronger and Rochester is physically reduced
Conclusion

Discuss / Analyse / Evaluate / Define

These instructions all require slightly different approaches, but I think that they can be grouped together as 'discursive' questions with a more open scope than 'compare and contrast'. Here are some different ways of approaching discursive essays in arts and humanities subjects. The best structure, however, will be the one that best supports your central argument.

Note that with this structure, it should be clear what does not belong in the essay; for example, a general history of the Bauhaus movement.

Question: *Discuss the extent of women's participation in the Bauhaus movement.*

Answer / Central Argument (not the only possible answer of course!):

There were several women who made important contributions to the Bauhaus movement, but their involvement has been largely ignored by historians of the period.

Part 1: Description of the contributions of particular women;
Part 2: Analysis of the importance of those contributions;
Part 3: Examination of the way these contributions were ignored by historians.

In the essay below, the structure follows the question but is held together by the central argument. If you tackle each task that the brief asks for separately, without a central argument, the essay will be structured but that structure will not be a coherent one – the different sections will not connect with each other.

Question: *Take any past or present advertisement, series of ads, or campaign and analyse it from the following perspectives: visual analysis; the inter and intra relationships of the ad(s). Frame your discussion with one or more relevant theoretical considerations.*

Central Argument (focussing on communist logos in Chile in the early 1970s): Abstract symbols can resonate with political meaning in revolutionary times.

Part 1: Context of the campaign (historical, where and how the logos were presented);
Part 2: Visual analysis of the ads, including inter and intra relationships of different propaganda art of the time (emphasising the formal simplicity of the images);
Part 3: Theoretical considerations: history shapes culture; meaning constructed between work and audience.

Dissertations and research essays – choosing your own question

Often the brief defines the subject area of an essay but does not actually ask a specific question; you are directed to perform a number of tasks in writing about the particular subject and to formulate the essay question yourself. In this case, you should concentrate on finding your central argument first (the answer), and then phrasing the question to which your essay is the answer. There is nothing wrong with making alterations (so long as you are free to do so) to better fit the essay you have written – even shortly before the deadline.

Key elements of a well-structured essay/dissertation

- It has a central argument. [see section 3.3]
- The argument is broken down into different sections, each one of which supports it in a different way (these can be mini-arguments of their own).
- The new sections are clearly announced with a topic sentence (see below).
- All evidence and analysis should clearly support the section of the essay it belongs to; the relevance of each section to the central argument should be explicitly shown.
- Important terms and concepts are defined.
- The introduction and conclusion perform appropriate introductory and concluding functions

Topic Sentences

Topic sentences are like signposts: clear emphatic statements which identify the topic or theme which will be expanded on in the following section. You do not need to begin every paragraph with a topic sentence; to do so would give your writing a ponderous and mechanical feel. Having said that, there will be moments in your essay when you want to clearly signal to your reader a new topic or a change of direction.

Examples of topic sentences:

• The project also has an ethical dimension.

• Given the collapse of left and right wing politics in Britain mentioned above, individual political identity is increasingly being expressed through patterns of consumption.

• The artistic development of Grayson Perry can be broken down into three distinct stages.

These topic sentences contain no brilliant analysis, nor spectacular insights. Their purpose is to clarify the direction of your essay to your reader (and also to you).

Section Summary
- Thematic structures are better than structures built around the subject material.
- Structure and the central argument are inseparable.
- Essay structure belongs to your answer, not the question.
- Topic sentences remind you and the reader where you are going.

Using Sources (and citing them correctly)

For more information see the ASK Referencing Guides on the ASK website

You are expected to refer to the work of other writers, theorists, artists, critics in your academic essays.

Quotation counts towards the word limit of your essay / dissertation. This may make extensive quotation attractive as a way of approaching the required word count but, obviously, this approach will *not* be well received by your tutor. Rather, if you imagine your own essay from your tutor's perspective, you can see that he or she will expect you to quote

economically, and to get good value out of the words you use. For this reason, it is better to be quotation-light than quotation-heavy (but with plenty of source citation – see below).

Having said that, the weight of academic tradition (and the requirements of the assignment brief) make it hard to imagine an academic essay without direct quotation (strictly speaking, the noun is 'quotation' not 'quote'). The use of quotation should always be judged against relevance: Does this quotation really support my point? Can I just cite the argument / idea rather than using quotation? Are the words themselves particularly important or illuminating?

Citation without Quotation

Citation is where you refer the reader to the particular work (book, film, article, webpage, etc) where an idea in your essay comes from. This *may* be accompanied by a quotation, but if you want to give examples of critics / theorists who represent a certain position or have used a particular argument which you can put into your own words, then it is enough to cite their work. This is especially true if that writer's position is very well known. If you are referring to a specific part of a work, then it is best to include a page number, even though it is not a quotation.

Some educationalists have argued that the rise of a therapeutic ethos in schools and colleges has led to a culture of dependency among students (Furedi 2004, Ecclestone 2004). [2 books are cited here.]

An important distinction is that made by Raymond Williams between residual and emergent culture (Durham and Kellner 2001). [Here, the writer referred to has been cited via an anthology – Durham and Kellner are the editors.]

Linguists have demonstrated the range of words for women in Mandarin Chinese which have no equivalent words for describing men (Burridge & Chin 1999: 124-5).

Short Quotation (phrase or sentence)

It is a common mistake to quote an entire paragraph when the key point you want to illustrate is in only a very short part of that paragraph. In this case, it is best to quote only the operative part, and embed it into a sentence of your own.

One formulation of postmodernity is that it is not so much a body of ideas as a period when former beliefs are rejected and abandoned, "an inverted millenarianism" (Jameson 1991).

Humanist intellectuals have traditionally tried to qualify the achievements of science; Borges, for example, wrote that "scientific knowledge is a finite sphere within an infinite space" (1999).

Clearly, you could have paraphrased either of these quotations (put into your own words), but in both of these cases, the original phrase or sentence is particularly resonant and succinct. In effect, you are signalling your appreciation of the original expression of the idea.

Longer Quotation (Block Quotation)

There will be times when you need to quote at greater length. This may be because

- You want to analyse an argument put forward by a writer;
- The writer makes several points on a particular subject, all of which you want to address;
- The quotation represents an original piece of analysis which is of central importance to your essay / dissertation;
- The material quoted is particularly complicated, and you feel that by quoting it at length it will clarify your own writing (for yourself and for your reader).

> The great advances in biology of the twentieth century […] derive from the realisation that at the heart of life as we know it lies a system of information coding and chemical processing mediated by an alphabet of nucleotides joined into strings of DNA and RNA. We may never unravel the exact origins of life, but we do know that once metabolism becomes entwined with replication, natural selection, as the Darwins [sic] showed us, will do the rest. (Dyson 2003: 2).

Dyson makes two points here which are very important to my own practice. First of all, he points out that all biological life can be represented in the form of code; secondly, he distinguishes between replication and reproduction…

One implication of this is that your quotation should have a high 'density' of usefulness. Remember that you can use the *ellipsis* in square brackets […] to cut out unnecessary parts of the quotation.

Floating Quotation

If you find that in parts of your essay there is more quotation than your own writing, this will be a problem. If you don't accompany long quotations with your own analysis, there is the risk that the most important points in your essay are being made by other people, not by you. This is NOT an invitation to plagiarise (pass off others' work as your own). If you put

someone else's ideas into your own words and don't give the source through citation, you are guilty of plagiarism.

The problem of detached or "floating quotation" can apply to any quotation, but happens most frequently with block quotation. When there is no explicit connection between the quotation and your essay, the quotation is 'floating' in space. It is not your tutor's job to interpret the significance of a quotation.

In this example,

Some of Goldsworthy's ideas on form are relevant to my own work: "I think my idea of simplicity is related closer to Brancusi: that kind of sensual simplicity that's very difficult to achieve" (Goldsworthy 2003: 84). Other artists who have been influential on me are…

The author of the essay has failed to explain how Goldsworthy's ideas are relevant to his/her own work. A full explanation would develop this idea of simplicity and how the author understands it, and also explain how she/he has tried to incorporate it into her/his own work.

Section Summary
Don't quote for the sake of it (use citation where appropriate).
Use short quotation where possible.
Longer quotation should be supported with extensive comment from you.
Quotation should illustrate your point; it cannot make points for you.

Adopting a Critical Perspective

Your Opinion

Some students feel confused about whether or not they are supposed to put their own ideas and opinions into an academic piece of writing. The key distinction is between an unsubstantiated (not supported by evidence) opinion and a position supported by argument and analysis. Register (or academic 'tone') is also important. In other words *you are* expected to present your own argument, but this is an altogether different thing from the sort of value-judgements and the pre-received, unreflected opinions that make up a large part of our everyday conversation: 'A vegetarian diet is terribly bad for you.' 'The Brazilian team of 1970 were the architects of the modern game.'

Compare this weakly written example

This advertising campaign is a complete failure because it is too boring to appeal to young people, who are the target market. I think that it was a terrible idea to hire agency X for this campaign.

with this much better, substantiated one:

The fact that this campaign was withdrawn three months earlier than originally planned, and its rapid replacement by a completely different series of advertisements, supports the view that the campaign itself was ineffective and inappropriate. Agency X are well-known for their political party broadcasts, but in retrospect, the decision to hire them seems to have been a poor one as the campaign failed to appeal to the target market. I would argue that the key failures to engage a younger audience can be summarised in the following way…

Is 'I' acceptable?

Some students are unsure if it is acceptable to use 'I'. The above point about substantiating your opinion is the best answer, but writing style may also affect your reader's impression: 'I feel that that this interpretation is wrong because…' reads less well than 'Rather, I would argue that…'. Some academic programmes insist that you do NOT use 'I'. If unsure, ask your tutor.

A 'Critical Perspective'

To have a critical perspective on a subject means to be able to compare and discuss different attitudes towards and interpretations of that subject. Also, to understand the *background* of those attitudes and interpretations: the attitudes behind this attitude; the ideas behind this idea. To have a critical perspective requires a fair amount of reading on the subject.

If you are going to express an opinion 'critically', then you should show awareness of the different points of view that could be taken on the subject you are writing about, and explain why yours is the most compelling.

Look at the example below (not to be taken too seriously). The writer is aware that there are different ways of approaching the subject – in this case the fall of Thatcher.

Thatcher's fall can, of course, be explained in the positivist terms of Marr (1991) and Blake (1992); they argue that this was nothing more than the fallout from her disastrous Poll-tax policy, to which her political reputation had been tied, as well as a succession of stormy relationships with her chancellors. Other analysts have emphasised the matricidal nature of her sudden overthrow by the cabinet (Hawkins 1994, Jones 1994), arguing that as Thatcher

aged and her ministers became (relatively) younger, she became less and less acceptable as the 'mother' of the Tory party.

The most penetrating interpretation, however, that all political careers are ultimately counterproductive, is Gray's position (2004). He points out the contradiction between economic liberalism and social conservatism: eventually, Thatcher gave birth to a society in which both she and her party were irrelevant.

Writing analytically (good), not descriptively (bad)

This is a question of perspective and content rather than style. To write descriptively is to tell the 'story' of what happened; instead, your material should be held together by analysis. Descriptive writing is:

- Trying to give an overview of the subject (eg a chronology of the industrial revolution);
- Describing the positions of different critics / writers on a subject *without* explaining the relationships between those positions;
- Simply writing about the subject (often due to not having a good essay structure

Here is an example of descriptive writing, followed by a better, more analytical version:

The Bauhaus school and movement was established in Weimar 1919 by the influential young architect Walter Gropius. Walter Gropius was not more than 36 years old but he already had a reputation as one of Germany's leading young architects. Gropius was born in Berlin on the 18th of May 1883; his family had a strong educational background within academia and architecture. [Weak, descriptive writing]

In the vacuum of the post-war years in Germany, when there were obvious reasons to break culturally from the past, it is not surprising that authority was handed over to young and intellectual architects. Walter Gropius had both of these qualities, having been…[much better]

Formality

The example of good writing above is written in quite a formal style. It is true that writing from a critical perspective requires careful control of your language, and this control might result in a dry, analytical, academic 'voice'. It is certainly not acceptable to use imprecise expressions, conversational style, or slang – at least not in a traditional academic essay or dissertation. If you want to submit an alternative piece of work, you will have to have this approved by your tutor. Also, you will have to find a way of satisfying the assessment criteria, which will probably include this critical perspective.

Section Summary

Your opinion is usually expected, but it must be substantiated (backed up)
It is important to evaluate the ideas you refer to.
Make points, don't tell stories.
Formal style is not required, but is often the most natural in which to write critically.

Developing Points/Depth of Analysis

Point Evidence Explanation

The *Point Evidence Explanation* rule is one that is still useful at FE and undergraduate level. The *Point* is the analytical insight; the *Evidence* is the material that you have found, through research, to support your point; *Explanation* is the heart of essay-writing: it is a linguistic-intellectual exercise where you demonstrate the relevance of your point and evidence to the question and your central argument.

Imagine answering the question 'Why are film sequels always worse than the originals?' A *point* would be: 'The Godfather II' was better than 'The Godfather'. Note that you have not substantiated this point, nor have you explicitly shown its relevance to the question. As *evidence*, you would have to refer to dialogue, acting, cinematography, film reviews or audience survey results. This would make your point much stronger. The *explanation* would come when you said that this showed that the original statement is not true in every case. This example would not constitute an essay of course, only a section of an essay.

The film sequel example may be a trivial one, but most of essay-writing is included in this process of Point Evidence Explanation. One of the most common faults of essays is to include extensive description in the place of analysis and evidence; to put it another way, to present information as if it were evidence for a point which is not made. Giving the reader (your tutor) a potted history of the subject area (the modern crafts movement, for example) is unlikely to achieve any of the assessment criteria.

Use of language is important in all three parts of the process.

Points

These are often expressed as topic sentences [see 3.4]: clear statements which will be substantiated later:

Examples of sentences making a point:

1. Popper's definition of science offers no room for geography.
2. The 'dumbing down' of BBC news output precedes the Hutton enquiry.

3. Digital photography allows for the infinite reproduction of images.
4. The Citroen DS was one of many examples of France's importance as a design nation in the 1950s.

This kind of sentence clearly signals that you have something to say, and prevents your reader from wondering what your point is. Of course it also obliges you to have one.

Evidence

What qualifies as evidence? If we look at the 4 statements above, they would have to be supported by different types of evidence:

Example 1: Popper's definition of science offers no room for geography.

Popper's definition could be quoted or paraphrased – in either case it needs to be cited [see chapter 3.5]. Even if you think the point is self-evident, you still need to show the reader that it is true; here, you would have to argue why Popper's definition offers no room for geography: the implications of his definition, an explanation of what you mean by geography, why the two are incompatible. In this case, providing evidence also requires some explanation.

Example 2: The 'dumbing down' of BBC news output precedes the Hutton enquiry.

This would be a difficult point to show evidence for. A good idea would be to cite authors who have argued this position [see using sources section]. You could provide some concrete evidence of changes to the format: less time spent on each news item, a breakdown of time devoted to different types of stories. You could also make some more subjective comments on tone, presentation style, and content. Some statements, especially in arts and humanities subjects, cannot always be supported by 'hard facts'.

Example 3: Digital photography allows for the infinite reproduction of images.

This point is so self-evident that it hardly requires evidence; it would be enough to say something like: 'The replacement of the negative by digital memory space means that the source material for photographic images cannot degrade or decay.'

Example 4: The Citroen DS was one of many examples of France's importance as a design nation in the 1950s.

This statement is full of assumptions. To fully support it with evidence, you would have to show:
other examples of successful French design from the 50s;
that the DS was a successful design (reviews sales volume, etc.).

Explanation

Some explaining has already been required at the evidence stage. The explanation stage however is the most demanding in terms of linguistic skill and mental dexterity. This is where you have to explain why this point (now supported with evidence) is important and

relevant to your essay / the question that has been set. To do this, we need to look at the essay questions that these points were intended to address:

The Questions:
Example 1: Is Geography a science?
Example 2: Is the presentation of news more affected from above by political interests, or from below by popular demand?
Example 3: Did the arrival of digital images represent a revolution in photography?
Example 4: What were the key features of European design after the Second World War?

The explanation is the most difficult part of the essay-writing process, but is made easier if you have a central argument [see 3.3], as this is often an easier hook to hang your points on than the question itself. It would be very hard, for example, to start writing an essay in response to the 4th question before you had identified a number of 'key features' that you would concentrate on.

Here are ways you might link the points made to a central argument, while answering the questions:

Example 1. Popper demanded that science be able to deductively demonstrate the proof of its findings, thus excluding what were previously known as the 'natural sciences', which were chiefly occupied with the activities of discovery, documentation and classification. [Central Argument: Contemporary Geography has developed in response to a series of exclusions by the scientific community.]

Example 2. The fact that BBC's ten o'clock news made editorial changes to its format (reduction in political interviewing, more time devoted to non-political stories) before the Hutton enquiry suggests that the enquiry was not central to the 'dumbing down' of BBC news output. [Central Argument: The BBC's main concern is to maximise audience numbers, therefore its editorial decisions are most affected by popular demand.]

3. Just as photography attacked the originality of painting by allowing multiple copies to be made from an original negative, digital photography with its multiple and identical copies attacks the originality of the negative in print photography. [Central argument: Digital photography is a continuation of the loss of originality in reproduced images.]

4. The spectacular appeal of the DS was apparent when 743 orders were placed within 15 minutes of the car being presented at the 1955 Paris motor show (Wikipedia). The design features which ensured the car's success and which defined design in the post-war period were the combination of classical elegance and new technology: the car's lines were sinuous and the name itself was a play on the French word 'goddess'; the new hydraulic suspension

system was an exciting technical innovation – valued more for its own sake than any improvement to performance (source date). (Central argument: The key features of post-war design were A,B and C, especially in combination.)

Order of Point/Evidence/Explanation

There is no reason why the point need come first, followed by evidence and then explanation. If you wrote like this all the time, your essays would be rather clunky. It is perfectly fine to start with your evidence, then reveal your point; or even to start with an explanatory comment – whatever feels most appropriate.

Quotation

This is very relevant to developing points, and is covered in chapter 3.5. The most important thing to remember about quotation (and images, and tables and figures) is that if they are left to speak for themselves, *you* will receive little or no credit for them. If a quotation is worth using in your essay, then it is worth commenting on.

Ways you can develop quotations

- Comment on the writer's choice of language;
- Connect the point made to that made by another writer – do they support or contradict each other?
- Apply the point made in the quotation to another subject than the one it originally was written about (tell the reader you are doing this);
- Agree with the quotation, explaining why (not just repeating the point made);
- Disagree with the quotation, explaining why.

Drawing conclusions from the points you have made

This sort of development might take place once you have finished the first draft of the essay. You may find that the different positions you reach in the different sections of your essay are worth trying to assimilate later. Take the example at the start of this section: 'Why are film sequels always worse than the originals?' If a section of your essay looked at sequels that were *worse* than the originals, and another section of your essay looked at sequels that were *as good as* or *better* than the originals, it would be worth taking this forward by trying to find out if there was a pattern to the sort of sequels that were as good as or worse than their predecessors; what if you found that sequels made by young Italian-American directors almost always surpassed the originals? That would be worth pointing out, and then hazarding an explanation for.

It's not a serious example, but the point is that being able to stand back from your essay once you have written a first draft may allow you to see new and interesting points of connection between different areas of your own analysis which are worth developing. This type of development may lead to a new section of the essay, or may be ideal material for the conclusion.

Section Summary:
Point
Evidence
Explanation

The Introduction and Conclusion

People have different ideas regarding the role or introductions and conclusions. This is a list of some of the functions your introduction and conclusion *can* perform, though not all in the same essay of course.

Introductions

Examine key terms. Consider a question such as 'To what extent was the industrial revolution responsible for…?'. It would be useful for the introduction to explain exactly what you understand the industrial revolution to mean: what start and end dates; if you are concentrating on the technological or demographic aspects of it; if you think that it is best described as a 'revolution' at all.

Explain how you understand the title. 'Reality television is the acceptable face of voyeurism. Discuss.' You could begin by saying that you think voyeurism always contains an element of titillation and that you will be examining how important titillation is to reality TV. (This is similar to examining key terms.)

Give a brief outline of the task / argument. If you have set yourself a particular challenge (to prove something, test the relevance of an idea or its application to a particular context), then outlining this task and why you decided it would be worth taking on would be valid content for an introduction.

Describe / justify your approach to the question. There are always several ways of writing about a topic. You may feel that a semiotic reading is the best way to get to the meaning of a particular photograph; that Marxist theory allows you to explain how museums work; or that looking at linguistic patterns is the best way to approach a play. The introduction can serve to explain which methods you will use and why.

Acknowledge the limits of your essay. No essay can say everything about a subject; you may wish to limit your scope to one or a few writers / artists / scientists. If you are an artist writing about physics (or a physical geographer writing about cultural theory), there will be holes in your knowledge of your subject area which you may want to acknowledge in the introduction.

In all these cases, the introduction does not intrude into the body of the essay, which is where the analysis, evidence, and explanation should be found, but nor is it simply summarising what will come later. Introductions are boring (and completely redundant in a short essay) if they simply preview the essay: '…and I will conclude by…'.

Another way of opening an essays that some tutors strongly dislike is to begin with a definition: 'The OED defines the word hysteria as…'.

Conclusions

It is an obvious point, but the conclusion really depends on the preceding essay. If you are concluding a report or a piece of research, then it is common to use the conclusion to suggest directions for further investigation. If your essay has considered the arguments for and against an idea, then the conclusion would be expected to make a balanced judgement.

A common misunderstanding about essay writing is that your analysis happens only in the conclusion. This is wrong. Your essay should contain analysis throughout; you should reach conclusions as you progress through the body of the essay. The purpose of the conclusion itself is to draw these conclusions together. Another doubtful piece of advice is not to introduce any new material in the conclusion; also, that your conclusion should summarise and restate the key points of your essay. If you followed this advice to the letter, your conclusion would probably be very dull and repetitious.

You may want to hold something back for the conclusion so that it is more than a restatement of the points made. For example, if you have a quotation/experiment/artwork in mind that unites the main ideas of your essay and is strong supporting material for your central argument, then it might be saved for a real killer point in your conclusion.

Possible functions of the conclusion:

Introduce a final example, so long as it serves to unite some of the key concerns of your essay.

Refer back to the question: explain how your analysis is relevant and gives an appropriate answer.

Deepen your analysis; try to take it one step further. For example: if you have argued in your essay that secondary school education encourages pupils to be more aware of rights than responsibilities, try to explain why that has happened, or in whose interests.

Extend your analysis; apply the findings of your essay more broadly. For example, see if your findings on the work of one artist can be applied to others of the same period. If your analysis has shown that BBC Southwest reports news in a particular way, use the conclusion to consider if this is particular to the South West, or if it applies to regional news in general (for example).

End with suggestions for further investigation. This is common in some types of writing (especially a research project or a scientific report).

Reviewing

Revising and Redrafting

Your tutor will try to identify both strengths and weaknesses when reading your essay. Be aware that:

- The positive features of your essay are probably not as clear to your reader as they are to you.
- Mistakes and faults are bound to be *more* obvious to your reader than they are to you.

It is at the revision / redrafting stage that you can clarify what you most want to say (what is most worth saying tends to be what is most difficult to say); also, this is the time when you can work on accuracy and make any final corrections and improvements. Leave time for this essential stage!

Correction

These are some areas to concentrate on when checking your essay:

1. Layout / referencing conventions [see chapter 4]
2. Written accuracy (spelling, grammar, sentence construction [see 5.1]
3. Vocabulary (right meaning, sufficiently precise, appropriate to task and subject area)

For most people, it is much easier to spot mistakes when reading from a paper copy than off the screen.

The before and after texts below show the level of improvement that can come with careful editing. It's good advice to leave the work for a day or two so you can come back to it with fresh eyes. Getting a colleague or friend whose opinion you trust to look at the writing and

point out where what you're saying isn't clear can also help. (Don't let anyone else tell you how you should have written the essay though.) This is an extract from an essay that needs editing:

I'm going to focus my attention on X Radios running order first, after listening to the three shows from X Radio. The main contributes to the running order was the advert breaks, the Music, the Weather, the Presenter, and Traffic and Travel. Analysing the advert break each, advert break lasted from six to seven minutes not only that, in each advert break there were up to ten to fifteen ads running. I also found that the quality of production that went into making the adverts was poor. They were very hard to understand not well produced and heard to hear. The creative side of making the adverts were poor, dull and not exciting.

And this is the edited version:

Having listened to and recorded three shows from X Radio, I noticed how important advertisements are to the running order. The main content was provided by the presenter, music, weather forecasts, traffic and travel information and advert breaks; ad breaks were 6 to 7 minutes long and contained 10 to 15 ads. The production level of the advertisements themselves was rather poor: the sound quality was so bad that it was not always possible to understand them. Also, perhaps because of the short time of each, they were loud, formulaic and unimaginative. In this way, the ads made the station much less enjoyable to listen to.

The edited version is so much clearer: it uses language much more carefully and avoids misleading statements and unsupported statements of opinion.

Clarifying your argument

Sometimes, it is far better to rewrite a section from scratch rather than tinkering with individual words and phrases. This may be the case if you have written a paragraph quickly in order to get the ideas down, but find later that it needs polishing – to flow better and to be in a more appropriate academic style.

The idea of having people phoning and texting in their votes each week was put together off the back of a rise in mobile phone ownership and they then set about getting the disposable income youngsters would normally spend on cd's each week and get them to spend the money on phone credit to vote for their favourite acts for which the programme got a percentage and made profit off of playing on the fact that the fans had to vote each week if they wanted to see their idol next week.

A good technique for re-writing is to take a paragraph like the one above, extract the main points

- Mobile phone ownership allowed audience interaction via text messages.
- Young audience transferred spending from CDs to text messages.
- Profit was generated through texting / phone messages.
- Programme structure encouraged repeat voting throughout series.

then rewrite from scratch, possibly reordering the main points:

Reality TV had acquired a new source of revenue: telephone voting. This was especially profitable as almost all teenagers (a core audience group) had mobile phones and could be persuaded to divert their funds from CD purchases to text messages to support their idol. The structure of the competition (with evictions each week) ensured that income from voting would be maintained.

Referring back to the question / brief

If, on rereading your essay, you see that your line of argument has wandered from the question or central thesis, you should edit, rephrase, or reject these parts [see 3.3, 3.4 for further explanation]. Most often, the point made is valid and sufficient evidence is provided, but the writer hasn't managed to explain its relevance to the argument.

During editing you will find places in your essay where you have not explained the relevance of your material – often because the *general* connection to the question is obvious. It is when you force yourself to explain the importance of a point that the best analysis occurs; new ideas can occur to you at this stage.

Moving sections of your essay

It is possible that once you have finished writing the first draft, you decide it would make more sense if a section was moved elsewhere. Also, within sections you might want to reorder the points you make, put a quotation somewhere else and move an argument to where it would be more effective. This is a useful and constructive editing process; word-processing makes it easy to cut and paste.

However, you should be aware that doing this will then require careful re-reading and some rewriting to smooth out the new shape of the essay. If you are not careful, quotations can be separated from their explanation, paragraphs can seem not to follow the previous ones and arguments can be cut in half so they finish before they begin; you can end up with a weaker essay than before the changes. Always give your final draft a careful read, in a single sitting if possible.

Section Summary

Your essay may not say everything you think it does

Typos are more easily spotted when reading off a page than off a screen

Rewriting weak sections may be the best option
Make sure that you are consistently relevant

Layout for essays and dissertations

This section will describe a commonly used and effective set of layout rules. As usual, there are different practices and preferences; some of the advice below may contradict what you are told in-programme by your tutors. If so, please follow what they say.

One tutor has estimated that good presentation is worth 2-3%. This has nothing to do with assessment criteria, but with how easy it is to read and the positive or negative effect that layout has.

Page Layout

Use a nice clear font (Arial and Garamond are good, this guide is written in Calibri). Use 12 pt font size and use double or 1.5 line spacing; some tutors insist on double, others prefer 1.5. Use single spacing for block quotations [see below]. Using a header or footer can be a good idea for document page number and/or essay information (course name, student number, essay title, module name etc), but it can also clutter the page and be distracting. Justified text looks good, but some people dislike it.

Paragraphs

There are 2 kinds of paragraph breaks: a single line break with an indent (use the tab key to get the indent not the space bar) and a double line break with no indent.

[…] and consequently, curriculum has shifted to accommodate this new pedagogy.

There has also been a diversification of courses on offer at post-compulsory level to suit different aptitudes: NVQs, GNVQs, HNDs, and A-levels, although all struggle to reach the same recognition as the latter. Perhaps more important is the emergence of lifelong learning as a main plank of the government's educational policy. The whitepaper Learning to Succeed: a new Framework for post-16 Learning (DfEE 1999) outlines the principles of this initiative; the chapter 'Supporting Adult Learners' begins:

All adults need the opportunity to continue to learn throughout their working life, to bring their qualifications up to date and, where necessary, to train for a different job. Now and in the future, employability is and will be the best guarantee of employment. (DfEE 1999: 7.1)

This is not the time to debate the validity of this argument for responsiveness between post-compulsory education and the skills requirements of the labour market and economy (a

Comment [e1]: No line break between paragraphs – indent first line of new paragraph

Comment [e2]: Title of whitepaper is in italics

Comment [e3]: Citation of the source – refers to full listing in List of References/Bibliography

Comment [e4]: The title of a chapter or article goes in inverted commas

Comment [e5]: Block quotation in smaller font size, single spaced, and indented. No quotation marks

responsiveness presided over by the LSC). Instead, this emphasises another expansion of education: it is no longer a process which ends, but one which one may keep returning to in order to boost one's skills, one's 'employability'. All of these examples of expansion (education for all for longer, deployment of new technologies and pedagogies to deliver education more widely, etc) can be termed temporal expansions of the education sector.

Comment [e6]: Use of inverted commas here suggests that the writer is not completely happy with the word as used by policy-makers

Comment [e7]: Italics are used here for emphasis

Citation

[For an explanation of what citation is see Referencing: The Basics] For Harvard, use parentheses () and follow the author-date system unless told otherwise. If the citation goes with a quotation or refers to material on a specific page of the work you are citing, then give a page number (author date: page).

Several analysts have argued that the rise of 'self esteem' as an educational issue has led to increased dependency by students on praise and reassurance from academic and non-academic staff (Ecclestone 2003; Furedi 2004).

Notice that punctuation (commas, full-stops, etc.) comes after the citation if it is in the text.

Or:

The 19th century has been described as preoccupied with history, "with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past" (Foucault 1998: 237).

Citation with block quotation is slightly different – see below.

Short Quotation

Short quotation (less than 3 lines) is embedded into the body of your text. As you can see in the example above, the quotation is put in quotation marks ("…"). Some writers prefer to use single quotation marks ('…') but either system is acceptable so long as it is consistent. If you need to put a quote-within-a-quote then see this example below:

Taylor suggests a distinction between Camp and Whimsy: "If […] 'the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural,' the essence of whimsy is its flirtation with the insignificant and random" (2005: 116).

Block Quotation

This is when you have a longer quotation (3 lines or more) and you present it separately.

Danto points out that furniture design is full of social information.

> The cabriole legs of Queen Anne furniture emblemize the elegantly curved foreleg of the prancing horse, a horse trained and bred to aristocratic ends – not the plug, not the plowhorse,

> not the spavined and heavy-legged horse of the parson, but the exact and delicate foreleg of the thoroughbred animal. (1988: 13)

Interestingly, this also shows that…

The standard layout is:

- Use a smaller font size than for the body of your essay (10 pt instead of 12 pt is standard).
- Instead of double or 1.5 line spacing, use single spacing – under Paragraph on your toolbar in Word.
- Indent the quotation on either side (1 cm right and left will be fine) – under Paragraph (Indentation) on your toolbar bar in Word.
- Use punctuation at the end of the quotation, not after the citation.
- Do not use quotation marks.
- Do not italicise the quotation.
- For more advice on how to use quotation, see Using Sources

Titles of Books, Essays, Reports, Poems, Films etc
Italicise the titles of 'whole works' such as Books, Films, Magazine titles and Reports.

Use inverted commas for the titles of poems, essays, conference papers and newspaper articles.

If you are handwriting a piece of work (very unusual, not usually acceptable), use inverted commas as above, but underline book titles etc. instead of italicising them. This applies in the body of your essay and to the bibliography.

See the bibliographies on the ASK website for examples of which titles are italicised, and which are in inverted commas.

Referencing Illustrations, Figures and Tables
see Section 4 of the Falmouth Harvard Referencing Guides on ASK Referencing or the printed guide.

Bibliography / List of References
See the ASK Falmouth Harvard referencing pages. Printed copies of a sample bibliographies are available from the ASK office.

Front Cover Page
which should clearly show:

[your name]

[the title essay]

MA *[plus your course]*

Falmouth University

[the date]

Confirmation page
which should clearly show the following wording:

"This essay is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of MA *plus your course].* I confirm that, except where other sources are acknowledged, this project is my own unaided work and that its length is *[insert word count*] words"

Signed.....*[sign your name here]* Date.....*[put the date here]*

Contents page
Only use a contents page if you need to - usually only for dissertations and reports but check the course guidelines and/or assignment brief.

Microsoft Word will generate a table of contents for you – use the References toolbar (you will need to use heading styles to format your Chapter headings). If you are using a lot of images, your course may ask for a separate Table of images or figures. Your table of contents could be laid out like this:

Appendices
Not many essays or dissertations need an appendix / appendices. Here are some types of material that you might consider including as an appendix (they would require an appendix each):

- Personal correspondence
- Tables or figures from which you have taken data
- Images that you think need to be presented in a larger format
- Material from your own research: surveys, photographs, transcripts etc.