

Essay Writing Checklist



A good essay is one that will address the research question clearly, is presented in a complete and consistent manner, and stands out to the marker.

Here are three rules to help you on your way to writing a winning piece of work.

1. Understand the question...

Make sure you know what it is you are being asked. Here are a few key terms that are used commonly in essay questions, and their typical meanings. Be mindful of exactly what process is required:

Analyse Examine each part in detail and examine how the parts fit together.

Argue Present each case with evidence for or against the position.

Compare Provide comment or judgement (not necessarily negative) on two or more topics in a detailed way.

Critically Provide comment or judgement (not necessarily negative) on a single topic in a detailed way.

Critically evaluate Weigh the case for and against by assessing all important evidence.

Define Give full meanings and explaining the meaning(s).

Describe Provide a detailed account of features of an item WITHOUT interpreting or evaluating the information.

Distinguish Explain the difference between two or more items.

Evaluate Judge, examine the impact/significance, investigate the implications.

Illustrate Use examples to show meaning, significance, impact, etc.

Outline Describe the main features.

Prove Demonstrate by logical reasoning.

[Adapted from the table by The Communications Learning Centre, Central Queensland University:
http://dtls.cqu.edu.au/clc/2_1_1.htm]

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2. Know what your markers are looking for...

As a general principle, when reading your essay, markers consider the following criteria and grade papers accordingly:

Relevance

The content of your essay should be relevant to the question or problem you've selected. Don't include material not directly related to it.

Well-informed

Your essay should be well-informed. Different tasks and different disciplines require different amounts of reading. Make sure you know how much and what type is required, and that the reading you do is thorough and careful.

Your own thinking and your own words

Familiarity with the literature is essential but not sufficient. Your essay must be based on your own thinking. Markers do not expect you to come up with original insights at this stage of your studies, but they do expect a serious effort to evaluate how the reading bears on the problem/topic. Think for yourself and say what you think. By this, we don't mean rash, unconsidered statements.

Organisation

Your essay should be constructed in a way that shows the logical steps in your argument, with data from various sources being brought in as appropriate.

Expression

Take special care to express your ideas as clearly and concisely as possible. Write complete sentences and keep them as short and succinct as possible.

Plagiarism

Tutors/Lecturers pay particular attention to identifying plagiarists and penalising them.

3. Cover all your bases...

When you have completed what you believe is approaching your final essay draft, check off the following:

- Have I covered all the required aspects of the essay topic?
- Have I answered all specific questions asked?
- Have I clearly stated my central thesis/idea?
- Is my writing clear and concise?
- Have I properly understood all the terms (jargon) used?
- Does my essay have a programmatic introduction?
- Have I taken a clear position and argued my points convincingly?
- Have I provided enough detail, and have I demonstrated that I understand the topic?
- Does my essay have a conclusion that summarises the arguments I have developed?
- Have I only quoted where appropriate? (i.e. used quotations to support my argument, not to replace it)
- Have I referenced clear, consistently and correctly?
- Have I included a full bibliography?
- Have I re-read my essay?