

## Advanced Essay Writing

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Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching

### Advanced ?

- Higher (stage 3 or PG study)
  - Substantial argument
- Longer (4000-6000 words)
  - Planning
  - Time management
- Deeper
  - More research
  - Better use of sources
  - Critical analysis

### Basics of a good essay

This is the minimum!

1. Focuses on the question/ task
2. Has a clear structure - easy to follow
3. Is well researched - evidence based
4. Adheres to academic conventions
5. Is correctly referenced
6. Is well presented – word limit, page numbering, margins, line spacing, font type, spelling ...

### But still ...



### Time management

Thinking takes time.

- Time-manage the **whole** process
  - allocate a specific block of time for each stage  
<http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask/index.php>
  - stick to your timings!
- Allocated at least 4 weeks
- Avoid switching from stage to stage...
- Do not rush ...
  - stages 5 (referencing) & 6 (editing)  
> lose marks & **potential for unintentional plagiarism**

### Choosing from a list of questions

- long or short questions?
- 'early' or 'late' (in the course) questions?
- Interest over 'marker-friendliness'?
  - Don't be afraid of difficulty!
  - Motivation is important for a longer piece of writing
  - Your writing will be 'genuine'
  - Likely to get higher marks

## Deconstructing the question

Consider the Learning Outcomes

- Context and background?
- Key words?
- Key instruction words? (implicit or explicit)

analyse justify criticise discuss  
evaluate relate describe

So, what is the question asking you to do?

## Instruction verbs

descriptive/factual	analytical	discussing
define	analyse	criticise
describe	compare	discuss
illustrate	contrast	evaluate
outline	explain	justify
review	appraise	predict
state	relate	estimate
trace	test	argue
summarise	interpret	examine
indicate	question	judge
identify		assess

## Creating your own questions

- What am I interested in?
- What can I achieve in the given time?
- Is there enough material available?

### Formulating the question:

- Narrow/ specific/ related to theory or current debate
- In question format
- Keep wording open until settle on your arguments

## Choosing your own questions

- What am I interested in? Climate change
- What can I achieve in the given time? Library research
- Is there enough material available? should be

### Formulating the question:

- Topic/ area of interest End of Kyoto Protocol
- What about it? Has it been successful? In what way?
- Narrow/ specific/ related to theory or debate  
Emissions trading, impact on developing nations, sustainable development, economic growth
- Main title/ sub-question  
Emissions trading and its impact on developing countries: has inflow of capital stimulated economic growth?

## Your argument

- Hook it up to a reference point
  - A core concern in your discipline
  - A certain author, view point, school of thought

•Kyoto protocol  
• 2012 - new agreement?

- Identify 'cracks'
  - Tensions, contradictions, conflict

•Fair deal for 'selling nations'?  
•Economic growth without carbon emissions?  
•Impact of current economic crisis?

## Your argument

- Take a new angle
  - Bring in authors/ ideas/ aspects that have been overlooked
  - Bring in new data
  - Set a new context
  - Take an interdisciplinary approach
  - 'Mutate' existing approach
    - By inserting something new
    - By expanding or twisting something

•Impact on emerging industries in Africa  
•China's investments in Africa (exporting carbon emissions)

## Formulating your argument

- Take a position
- Back up your views with reference to empirical evidence
- Engage with debate/theory
  - also note down counter argument(s) & evidence)
- Be explicit
  - This essay will argue that ...
  - In this essay it will be argued that ...

### Not about :

- Mere detail
- Large amounts of facts
- Anything & everything
- You & your opinion
- The plain obvious
- List of problems

This essay will argue that capital flow generated by emissions trading is having little or no impact on the economic development of African nations.

## Planning your research

- What do I know?
- Which questions do I need to find answers to?
  - theoretical or conceptual context
- What is my answer (likely to be)?
- What kind of evidence do I need to support my argument?
- What will I need read? - definitely/ should/ maybe, if time
- When will I do these things?
- <http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask/index.php>

## Researching the Topic

- Reading list
- Library catalogue (incl. Online)
- Subject Librarians
- Bibliographies of sources
- Internet :
  - Dedicated database
  - Google scholar <http://scholar.google.co.uk>
- Good variety (types and angles)

Books, journal articles, unpublished work, conference papers, research papers, reports, government publications...

**Engage critically: bias, hidden agenda, flaws ?**

Do I really need this ?  
What for?

## Reading

- Think before you read
- Think while you are reading!
- Keep question(s) in mind while reading
- Take 'relevant' notes only
  - key quotations (exact wording/ page number)
  - data, stats & facts
  - ideas, insights, concepts, opinions ... (paraphrased or summarized in your own words)
- Record sources
  - full bibliographical details

More on avoiding plagiarism :  
[www.kent.ac.uk/ai](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai)

<http://www.criticalreading.com/>

## Critical Reading

- **discovering** information & ideas
  - careful, active, reflective, analytical reading
  - identify a **line of reasoning**
  - identify **evidence**
  - identify **assumptions**
  - Identify **conclusion**
  - Identify the author's 'intentions'
- **evaluating** information & ideas
  - interpret these & reflect on their validity
  - within the text and within the wider context (prior reading and understanding of the world )

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## Possible barriers to critical reading & thinking

- Emotional involvement
- Ignorance
- Prejudice
- Lack of focus or attention to detail
- Focus on facts only
- Understanding 'critical' as purely negative
- Awe of experts, reluctance to critique experts
- Lack of practice

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## Making an essay plan

Consider:

- Word limit
- Readership
- Your argument
- Possible line of reasoning
- Areas to be covered

## Generic Essay Plan

Introduction (5-10% of words)

Body decide on:

- possible line of reasoning
- number of paragraphs
- issues, ideas, examples, evidence

Conclusion (5-10% of words)

References - list of your sources

## Introduction

- Interpretation of the question/ title
- Explanation of key terms
- Presentation of background and context
- Link to module's themes/ topics/ theories
- Include a **Thesis statement or your argument**
- Outline of main ideas  
e.g. *This essay will ...*
- Indicate evidence used
- Indicate limitations

Include mini literature review as 'shop window' on your research

## Body

Order your information into paragraphs

- Constantly return to your argument
- Everything you say needs to serve a function
- Use evidence from a variety of sources
- Present an overview of the discussion so far
- Present critical analysis (of facts, conclusions, proposition, insights, causality, implications etc.)
- Identify trends, tendencies, developments etc.
- Engage with theory
  - Explain why you use theory
  - Relate to contemporary theories (not too many and only those you understand)

## Paragraphing ...

structures thoughts and helps the reader

One key idea per paragraph:

- **T**opic sentence
- **S**upporting sentences that explain and expand the topic sentence...
- **E**vidence that supports the supporting sentences
- **E**valuation of that evidence, and where possible a
- **L**ink to the next paragraph

Paragraphs must have **STEEL**

Never claim anything that you can't back up with evidence

## Paragraph structure:

Factors that influence teenagers to smoke are complex and numerous. They include socio-demographic characteristics, family background, school performance, and other social and environmental factors. Among these factors, some are predetermined, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Others can be affected through program implementation or policy initiatives such as prohibition of cigarette sales to minors or education about the effects of smoking. In 1990, the 'California Youth Tobacco Survey' looked into the relationship between school performance, smoking, and attempts to quit smoking among teenagers<sup>1</sup>. It accepted that a student's school performance is inversely related to smoking status. That is, the better students do academically, the less likely they are to become smokers. School performance can be viewed as a broad indicator that reflects traits such as general educational commitment, motivation, competence in learning and value judgment, and academic success. It is therefore important to investigate in detail the issue of school performance in relation to smoking status.

topic sentence

more details

evidence

evaluation of evidence

comment & link

## Conclusion

- Link to title and introduction
- Rephrase your argument
- Discuss your argument in light of the evidence and analysis
- Remind the reader of the limitations
- Present of overall evaluation
- State your position
- Address wider implications (suggestions)
- NO NEW INFORMATION

## Drafting/ writing

If stuck let it rest for a while.

- Start anywhere
- Write up individual paragraphs
- Light edit after each writing session
- Once your ideas have begun to 'flow', revert to writing in sequence,
- More substantial editing later
- Revise, reconsider and rewrite what you have done
- Fill in any gaps and make connection
  - Signposting/ signaling

## Referencing

- All academic writing needs to observe the rules of academic integrity (proper & transparent acknowledgement of sources)
- To avoid accusation of PLAGIARISM
- To demonstrate your understanding
- To provide authority/credibility

## Plagiarism ...

Record all source carefully or use RefWorks

- Intentional:
  - Other people's text or ideas copied but presented as own work
- Unintentional:
  - Other people's text or ideas have been paraphrased badly
  - Other people's text or ideas have been paraphrased but were not, or incorrectly, referenced

## Using sources

All need to be referenced ! (with page number)

- **Quote:** repeat exact words (written or spoken)
  - > as evidence, illustration, can't possibly say it any better

Included in word count?
- **Summarise:** give shortened version of original (written or spoken)
  - > to give background information
- **Paraphrase:** present original (written or spoken) in your own words
  - > when original idea is more important than original wording, to avoid direct quotes, to demonstrate your understanding of the issue

## Engaging with your sources

Don't just mention works or studies ...

- Discuss them
- Explain the (historical/ conceptual/ theoretical) context
- Group sources (school of thought/ focus)
- Be critical
  - identify the author's argument
  - evaluate their evidence
  - evaluate their methodology
  - identify any bias/ hidden agenda
  - evaluate applicability & validity

Critical thinking skills

## How to reference?

### in text

- form depends on the referencing style
- author date page number or footnotes<sup>1</sup> or number system

### 'after' text

- Reference list or Bibliography
  - each source on a new line
- Consult your school's handbook or <http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai>

## Editing

Ongoing process.

- A bit after each writing session
- Read through your document
  - Does it answer the question/ address the task?
  - Does it flow? Is there a logic?
  - Is all the information relevant?
  - Are all claims back up?
  - Are all sources acknowledged?
- Word limit? +/- 5%

## Proof reading

Consistent proof reading can increase your mark by 10%.

- Proof read your essay
  - read it out aloud
  - be systematic
- Check
  - Layout (the title/ margins/line spacing/ font types & size/page numbering/your details/cover sheet ...)
  - Spelling/grammar/punctuation/syntax
  - Academic style <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk>
  - In-text citation - List of references

## Academic style/ conventions

- Avoid contractions "can't or isn't"
- Avoid emotive language "a really good idea"
- Avoid 'chatty' language "loads of"
- Avoid clichés "at the end of the day"
- Avoid 'I', 'we' or 'you'
- Do not confuse evidence, assumption and opinion
- Watch personal pronouns and gendered pronouns (use plurals instead)
- Check discipline-specific conventions
- Use technical terms correctly

## Academics use 'hedging'

Academic and scientific writing is factual, but ...

- to distinguish between facts and claims  
*it seems likely that... or arguably...*
- "Our results seem to suggest that in less industrialised countries the extensive use of land to grow exportation products tends to impoverish these countries' populations even more".
- to tone down statements in order to reduce the risk of opposition
  - to let their readers to know that they do not claim to have the final word on the subject
  - to appear humble rather than arrogant or all-knowing

Also, it has become conventionalized...

## Changing tenses - longer document

Rough Guide

- **Intro** – mix
  - **past** ( background)
  - **present** (current issues, facts)
  - **simple future** (to indicate structure)
- **Literature review** – **present, present perfect ...**
  - **Past** - relating historical events (scholarly discussion of past events)
- **Methodology** – **past** (what was done)
- **Results** – **past** (what was found out)
- **Discussion** - **present** (significance, generalisations)
- **Conclusion** - mix
  - **past** ( background)
  - **present** (current issues, facts)
  - **simple future** (to indicate structure)

## Learning from Feedback

- Pick up your marked assignments
- Engage with the feedback
- Follow up with your markers
  - for clarification
  - for learning
  - NOT for change of mark
- Implement improvements with new essay
- Come and see a learning advisor in SLAS

## Any Questions?

Get in touch: [A.Koch@kent.ac.uk](mailto:A.Koch@kent.ac.uk)

Slides will be available at  
<http://www.kent.ac.uk/learning/programmes/index.html>

**Good luck !**