



Guidelines for Writing an Essay

For some, the directive given by the lecturer 'to critically evaluate or analyse...' might call for a visit to the chemist to restock the medication shelf. For others, maybe a lesser effect. Writing essays can certainly be a daunting task if you are unsure of how to proceed.

The following information is provided in an endeavour to help with this process. Please take the time to become familiar with its contents and search out guidance where needed. (You will find a list of additional resources at the end of this guide).

This booklet is prepared to give you guidance in the following areas:

- i. The gathering of information for assignments and essay preparation;
- ii. The structure and setting out of assignments and essay presentations;
- iii. The inclusive language to be used throughout your essay;
- iv. The use and display of quotations in your text;
- iii. Abbreviations and other related matters.

Information Gathering and Planning

- ▶ Make sure you thoroughly understand what the essay question means. Become familiar with expressions such as 'critically evaluate...; analyse...; compare and contrast...'. You will be surprised how many students lose marks because they haven't answered the question that has been asked.
- ▶ Use dictionaries, encyclopaedias and textbooks to check the definition of key words used in the question (eg. Bible Dictionary, Encyclopaedia of Church History). Do not rely on them however - they can be very helpful in analysing the essay question, and giving a broad over view of the issues, but you must go further than this for the set assignment to be fully answered.
- ▶ When reading for an essay, start with the references which give a more general coverage of the topic and then go on to more specific aspects.

Hints:

- i. Use the INDEX and CONTENTS of a book. This enables you to find what you want in a minimum of time.
FOR EXAMPLE: If you are using John Drane's book *"Introducing the Old Testament"* and you want to know about the Apocrypha, the index at the back of the book (pp. 351-352) will tell you to look at pages 98 and 190-191 specifically for this topic.
- ii. Use the PREFACE for an introduction to the book. Skim through the preface and introduction because in these the author often summarises the thesis (his/her point of view) of the work and explains what he/she means when using certain terms.
- iii. Look at the back of sources to the list of materials which may give you more books to look into regarding your topic.

A good essay is one in which you assess current knowledge and points of view concerning the topic and demonstrates that you understand what the authors are saying. If specified in the question, also give your own thoughts and conclusions. Therefore, when you are reading, think about how it is relevant to the essay topic.

It is important at an undergraduate level that you understand the importance of being able to show that you understand what you are reading.

In the process of writing an essay you need to ensure that you acknowledge the source of all ideas and quotations that you use or refer to, either directly or indirectly.

(More information can be found in the *Footnotes, Bibliographies & Referencing Guidelines* available from the School of Theology).

- ▶ Keep a record of your reading.
 - i. Mark your notes with the full reference to your source - author, title, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, and any other relevant information;
 - ii. Give the page number/s from which the information is taken;
 - iii. Use quotation marks where you are copying directly from a reference (this will avoid confusion later); and
 - iv. Sometimes it is beneficial to photocopy a page of a textbook and highlight relevant information. (Remember to write full reference of the text at the top of the page or photocopy the appropriate information from the front of the book.)

Structure and Layout

A good essay plan should look something like this...

▶ **Title Page**

A title page should precede the essay.

This should contain the student's name and/or student number, course, subject name and number, the full title of the essay, the lecturer's name, the due date, and the number of words in the body of the essay. (Available on p. 45 of Handbook).

▶ **Synopsis or Abstract**

This is the first page of the essay and should follow the title page.

The synopsis is a general survey or summary of your essay. It should generally be about 150-200 words and is required for every essay, although not necessarily for other other types of written work. It states the argument of the essay clearly and indicates the **concepts** presented in your essay and a summary of conclusions. The marker should only need to read the synopsis to find out whether you are supporting, rejecting or modifying the position. As you are researching for the essay, the synopsis outline will be forming in your mind. When you have worked it through, you can begin to write your essay. However, do not write the final copy of your synopsis until your essay is complete. The synopsis is not a repeat of the introduction but a statement involving (in broad terms) the issue at hand.

▶ **Introduction**

This introduces the subject in question and shows how you will go about answering it.

▶ **Body**

i. Content:

- covers the main issue/s raised by the essay question;
- includes only material relevant to the essay question;
- provides an appropriate coverage of information and arguments on the topic;
- definitions given when required;
- reflects broad reading on the topic.

ii. Structure:

- the argument proceeds in a logical progression of steps;
- each sentence and paragraph should be linked to the next;
- link words may be used to ensure a smooth flow, for example; 'in addition' , 'consequently', 'in illustration', 'nevertheless';
- generally, each paragraph develops one major aspect of your argument.

iii. Evidence for arguments:

- specific examples or references from your reading to support your arguments;
- all sources acknowledged accurately with a clear distinction between references and your own statements or interpretations;
- if relevant, evidence demonstrating the weakness of a point of view is presented as well as evidence which supports it (you then reach your own conclusion).

► **Conclusion**

It must reflect and summarise the main points in the body of your essay. The conclusion does NOT introduce any new information and closes with a sentence which rounds off your essay.

► **Presentation Protocol**

- i. Title page (fully completed);
- ii. Double line-spaced and typed on one side of the paper only;
- iii. 4cm margin on left hand side of page;
- iv. Proof read with punctuation, spelling and grammar corrected;
- v. Eliminate slang, ambiguous language and subjective bias;
- vi. No abbreviations (use 'for example' rather than 'eg.'; 'do not' rather than 'don't');
- vii. Correct acknowledgment of all sources of information and ideas;
- viii. Bibliography or References (list of all book used in preparation; must include all books or works acknowledged in essay). Refer to *Footnotes, Bibliography & References Guideline*.
- ix. Correct word length (only a 10% variation above or below is accepted).
- x. Please avoid any tautological use of first person pronouns.
- xi. Please disguise all personal details of officers and/or corps in your assignments.

Inclusive Language (Gender Sensitive)

There has been much debate in recent years about the social implications of the use of language. Language can be defined in terms of inclusive and exclusive language. Inclusive language tries to eliminate language which excludes, isolates or stereotypes people with regards to race, colour, class, religion, age, abilities or sex. This has most clearly been displayed in the correction of sexist language.

Male oriented language dominates scriptural, liturgical and religious texts. Some feel that this exclusive language should be retained while others believe that it should be replaced by more inclusive language.

The following aims to offer some suggestions regarding inclusive language and writing styles.

► **Style Matters**

The general aim is to develop strategies which are non-discriminatory while still keeping the conventions of English grammar.

Below are some examples of how inclusive language can be used.

LANGUAGE ABOUT GOD

Christian scholars are divided as to the use of traditional names and metaphors when speaking of God. Some refuse to depart from traditional practice, believing that the integrity of the biblical text must be preserved. Others seek to remove all masculine references to God. Thus such terms as King, Master, Lord, Father are avoided. In their place terms such as Ruler, Creator, Parent, and the like, are employed.

For others the correct procedure lies between these two positions. The language of the NRSV serves as a useful guide in this regard. COFE seeks to honour the convictions of all of its students whilst at the same time recognising the appropriateness of inclusive language. It thus sets forth the following as a guide:

Masculine pronouns when referring to God

Traditional: By 'revelation' is meant His disclosure to men.

Inclusive: By 'revelation' is meant God's disclosure to (his) people

(Do NOT capitalise pronouns which refer to God.)

LANGUAGE ABOUT PEOPLE

❖ **Man**

Avoid using 'man' as a generic term, for example:

Traditional

man, men
mankind
sons of God
every man
common man, man in the street
forefathers
church fathers
brethren/brothers

Inclusive

we, person, people, human beings
humanity, humankind
children of God, people of God
everyone
average person, ordinary people
ancestors, forebears
leaders of the early church
brothers and sisters, friends

❖ **Prefixes and Suffixes**

Avoid using 'man' in compounds either as a prefix or suffix, for example: manhood, chairman, layman, spokesman, and the like.

Avoid the uses of feminine suffixes such as authoress, priestess, deaconess, and the like.

(Some practices are maintained, for example: abbot/abbess, gods/goddesses)

❖ **Pronouns and possessive adjectives**

It is no longer acceptable to use just 'he' and 'him' when you are speaking generally. It is more acceptable to use he/she, him/her, or he and she, him and her.

❖ **Stereotyping**

Do not use specifiers when talking about roles. For example use cleaner instead of cleaning lady.

❖ **Native peoples**

References to any race are always proper nouns and are not italicised. Always spell (Australian) 'Aboriginal' using title case.

Avoid any reference to a person's race, ethnicity, age, disability or sex, unless it is relevant.

Note: Quotations should be accurately reproduced, and any changes must be noted. Should you wish to make some disclaimer about any exclusive/discriminatory language, this can be done by means of a comment in the text or footnote. The use of the word sic in square brackets can be helpful here ([sic] - see abbreviations).

Quotations

When you decide to use someone's exact words within your essay or text, it is extremely important that you indicate you have quoted them, by placing the words in double quotation marks ("....."). It is then necessary to state where the information was resourced from, following either the Footnoting/Bibliography or the Referencing (Harvard System) format you have been using throughout your essay/text:

- *Footnoting/Bibliography*: State the authors name and book details as you would in any other footnote, including page number the quote has been taken from.
- *Referencing (Harvard System)*: State the author and the year of the published book in which the quote can be found, eg. (Smith, 2004).

Other important points to follow include:

- If you omit any words from a quotation, the omissions need to be indicated by 3 spaced periods (i.e., ...), plus any punctuation marks within the quote (i.e., words left off the end of a sentence should have four spaced periods, i.e.,).
- Quotations that exceed 3 typed lines in your text should follow these rules:
 - indent margins on the left and right for the entire quotation by at least 5 spaces.
 - quotations should be single spaced, as opposed to the rest of the double-spaced text.
 - generally, quotations should not exceed 5-6 lines in length, as you are simply indicating another's work to define or support your own.
- Quotations should be used sparingly, and lengthy quotations should be avoided unless they make an obvious, and irreplaceable contribution to the essay. Direct quotations should not exceed 10% of the prescribed essay length.
- If you are *quoting a quote* (i.e., within the section you have quoted, the author has quoted someone else), then you use single quotation marks ('...') to indicate the quote within your quote. Eg. "This essay is a 'multi-faceted' approach to the topic."
- If you add a word, or more explanation, clarification, or correction to the quotation you should enclose your own comments within square brackets, i.e., [...] - do not use parentheses/round brackets (...).
- When you quote a bible verse, put the verse in inverted commas and give the reference in brackets after the verse. Eg. "Happy are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8). Do not put this reference as a separate footnote.

Acknowledgement of Sources

In scholarly writing, the ideas or words of other authors are always acknowledged. The rationale is that such words or ideas are someone's intellectual property. In addition your reader (or marker) has the right to be able to check easily the accuracy of what you cite in your essay. For these reasons, the correct acknowledgment of ideas and facts is an essential part of essay and assignment writing.

The only time you do not reference your source is when it would be clearly too difficult to name any one source, as in facts well-known to the general public or what is part of a shared body of common knowledge.

Information gained from your lectures need not be acknowledged although lecturers will often give the sources for their statements, which you should acknowledge.

Please refer to the Footnotes, Bibliographies and Referencing Guide, available from the School of Theology, for further information regarding referencing details and requirements.

Miscellaneous Points

1. Do not give the initials of the publisher, or write Co.; Ltd.; Sons; or the like.
2. The abbreviation for page is: 'p.'.
The abbreviation for more than one page is: 'pp.'.
3. The contemporary practice is to use BCE (Before the common [or Christian] era) and CE (Common [or Christian] era). These both follow the numerals: For example 323 BCE or 66 CE.
4. When counting words it is the TOTAL number of words (that is, your computer word count. If you do not have a word count, calculate by multiplying the average number of words per line by the number of lines per page by the number of pages).
Your essay must not differ from the required length by more than 10%, otherwise a penalty will result (therefore, for example, a 2,000 word essay may be between 1,800 and 2,200 words). For this purpose, **the word count does not include** title page, synopsis, bibliography/references or footnotes; however, it does include quotations.
5. **ALL** written work (excluding examinations), requires complete referencing/footnoting, bibliography, title page, synopsis (unless specifically directed by lecturer).

6. Presentation of direct quotes:

Short quotations of twenty to thirty words or less are enclosed in quotation marks and incorporated into the text, followed by the footnote number or reference (author and year in brackets). (They can also be typed in italics for clearer identification if desired).

Longer quotations of more than thirty words are presented as separate paragraphs.

- double indented
- single spaced
- no quotation marks are needed
- footnote number at the end of the quote OR the reference clearly stated either before the quote (author and year mentioned in quote introduction/lead up), or after the quote (author and the year in brackets).
- typed in italics (optional)
- double space before and after paragraph.

Abbreviations

Anon.	Anonymous
Ante	before
BCE	Before the Common (or Christian) Era
c. or ca.	(circa) about - usually used when the date is uncertain eg. c. 1880 or ca. 1880
©	copyright
CE	Common (or Christian) Era
cf.	compare
ch., chs.	chapter(s)
col., cols.	column(s)
d.	died
eg.	for example
E(e)d.	editor or edited by
enl.	enlarged
et al.	(et alii) and others
etc.	(et cetera) and so forth, and the like
et seq.	(et sequens) and the following
f. ff.	and the following
fig.,figs.	figure(s)
fn.	footnote

ibid.	(ibidem) in the same place
id.	(idem) the same (referring to the same person)
i.e.	(id est) that is
illus.	Illustration(s), illustrator, illustrated by
Infra.	below
loc.cit.	(loco citato) in the place cited
ms., mss.	manuscript(s)
n. b.	(nota bene) take notice, mark well
n.d.	no date (meaning that a book has no date of publication listed).
n.p.	no name of publisher given.
n.pl.	no place of publication given
n.s.	new series
No.	number
op.cit.	(opera citato) in the work cited
o.s.	old series
p. pp.	page(s)
passim	throughout the work, here and there
post	after
pseud.	pseudonym
q.v.	which see
rev.	revised, revised by
rpt.	reprint
ser.	series
[sic]	thus, so. It is also used to indicate that an odd spelling or reading is in fact accurate, as per the quotation. (square brackets indicate a parenthetical comment or correction)
sup.	(supra) above
suppl.	supplement
trans. or tr.	translator, translated by
ver.	version
viz.	(videlicet) namely
vol., vols.	volume(s)
vs.	versus (against)

The following references have been used in the compilation of this booklet:

- Australian College of Ministries. *Style Manual for Writing Essays and Assignments*. Australian College of Ministries, 2003.
- Aust. Govt. Publishing Service. *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*. Canberra: AGPS, 1988.
- Godden, J. *Guide for Essays and Written Assignments*. Sydney: Sydney University Department of Nursing, 1994.
- Gawith, G. *Power Learning*. Lower Hutt: Mills, 1993.

The following three books are recommended by the University of Sydney and will give further help in this area:

- Bate, Douglas & Peter Sharpe. *Student Writer's Handbook*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990.
- Burdess, Neil. *The Handbook of Student Skills*. Sydney: Prentice Hall, 1991.
- McIntosh, Lawrence D. *A Style Manual for the Presentation of Papers and Theses in Religion and Theology*. Wagga Wagga: Centre for Information Studies, 1998.