

# Writing and Essay: a primer

This handout presents an overview of what is expected from a written essay. All bolded items on this first page refer to 'pitfalls'. These you should pay particular attention to.

## The thesis

We use the word thesis to signify the core argument of your essay, the 'so what'. Importantly: **a thesis must not be pulled out of your hat**, with no evidence of development. **Your essay must support the thesis** to the point where everything else must go: trim the fat no matter how interesting it may seem.

The thesis should be clear and unapologetic. If you require a visual analogy for a thesis, imagine a man standing on top of a tall building shouting your thesis to an excited crowd.

## The form of the essay

All essays should be **clearly structured**. Supporting this will be the **formatting** (e.g. Microsoft header styles and bullet points), which should be used in an explicit manner.

### *Title*

The title should **describe briefly your thesis**. It should also be clear and simple. The easiest way to achieve this is to leave the title till last. It is quite customary to not know what your thesis will be when you are starting your essay.

### *Introduction*

Here is introduced your argument in a **summarized form**. It serves broadly the same function as an abstract, being longer and also detailing the importance and history of the key issues of your essay.

### *Body*

The body is where you will argue your thesis. It will be composed of supporting points. A typical supporting point will start with some evidence that can be a quote, some data, an example or suchlike.

**Your argument should not consist entirely of evidence**. On its own, evidence is neutral. It will need to be developed through elaboration in such a manner as some sort of position is made.

The body should contain around three such supporting points.

If relevant, you might also introduce an opposing view. You can then counter this to support your own position.

### *Conclusion*

In the conclusion you round up and summarize your thesis. We are not mind readers: **state exactly what your thesis is**. Also, **it should come as no last minute surprise**, having been preceded by a clear and convincing argument.

## Different types of essays

There are many different types of essays, and you are free to use whichever best serves your needs. Google 'types of essays' and you will see a vast array to choose from.

These essay types need not be entirely exclusive: an essay type might employ strategies characteristic of another essay type.

Here are briefly described two classic essay types: 'compare and contrast' and 'analyse'. We have chosen these for their suitability to the practice-centric nature of this particular program but you are free to employ whatever approach best serves your needs, so long as it is clear.

### **Compare and contrast**

In order to examine and understand something it is sometimes productive to compare it to something else. At a simple level this will consist of a comparison of attributes, e.g.:

*'This artist is Korean whereas this other artist is Irish.'*

However, there must also be some manner of thesis. Having a thesis will help you select appropriate comparative attributes and to structure the whole essay in a coherent manner. Hence,

*'The art of Korea and Ireland is very different yet both are informed by a history of colonial oppression. This history is addressed in the work of both these artists, yet manifest in different ways.'*

Compare and contrast might be used as a device to place both subjects under equal scrutiny, or to scrutinize only one of them.

The thesis must be evident through the compare and contrast. What novel point are you trying to make? In the preceding example, the thesis might be in the commonality of historical influence between Korean and Irish art. Korean and Irish art are different enough for this point to be a novel one.

### **Examination**

An examination requires that the thing being examined is broken down. An examination takes a single thing, such as animation, and returns many things, such as the influence of technology upon animation, the role that politics plays in animation, etc. A simple example might be:

*'Korean animation has, like much of Korean culture, been subject to a large degree of state support. Additionally, it has found ready consumers in the home market, though its overseas market has not been as vigorous as other aspects of Korean culture.'*

The preceding is composed of many points, all of which should be evidenced. In this case the thesis might be the need for government investment in popularising Korean animation abroad.

## **General advice**

The following is some general advice on the craft of essay writing. Some of it reiterates points already made.

### ***Keep it simple***

The core thesis of your essay should be understandable to anyone who has the time to read it.

### ***Keep it on point***

Your essay is not 'life the universe and everything'. It is strongly advised that in your essay you only address what is core to your thesis and get rid of anything that does not support it. Be cruel to your essay: trim the fat ruthlessly.

### ***Seek consultation***

If there is one core difference between undergrad and postgrad, it is the of consultation to the development of the student. At this stage students who avoid consultation have misunderstood what a post grad education is.

The role of the prof in consultation will be to:

- Evaluate your argument for its clarity.
- Identify your thesis.
- Provide relevant reading / viewing material.
- Refer you to other faculty for their specialized areas.

In consultation, do not be shy about asking for clarification if you not understand what has been said. Also do not worry about arguing against what the prof says, it is through argument that novel positions are arrived at.

It is not unknown that two profs might disagree with each other in their idea of how your work might proceed. This is evidence of the discursive nature of university life. Your essay is your own: you own your position and should you make your position clear it is likely that both profs will support it.

### ***Get feedback***

You will not know what you have done until you have seen it through other peoples eyes. In addition to seeking consultation, you would be well advised to share your ideas with your peers. Talk them through your ideas. Sometimes just by doing so you will better understand them and any weakness that they possess.

The role of your partner(s) should be to try to identify any weak points in your argument. Any position that they express need not be respected, but might very well reflect a weakness of your own position.

### ***Don't last-minute***

Give yourself plenty of time to do the essay. You need not be working on it continuously, but it is good to have things brewing.

### ***Revise, revise, revise***

It is assumed that you will not know exactly what you are writing about when you start it. This will evolve. As well as revising the content of the essay, you should also revise individual sentences. Something that made sense last night might not make sense the following day.

### ***Hippity-hop***

It is a rare essay that is written successfully from beginning to end. Should you try to do so, you are likely to get lost in needless details. A more productive strategy is to address only those parts that need attention at the time. This will take you around your essay in hippity-hop fashion. When you are nearing the end, read it through to ensure linear clarity.

### ***Don't panic***

Go for a nice long walk. It can clear the head wonderfully. Always ask yourself what motivated you to take this subject to begin with.