

**Macquarie University
Department of English**

THE PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION OF ESSAYS: Full Version
(AH; rev Oct 2011)

Welcome to the Department of English at Macquarie University. This is a guide to the preparation and presentation of essays within the broad academic discipline of English Studies. It outlines the Department's specific expectations for students enrolled in our units. The essay is one of the oldest forms of writing in English, and its contemporary flexibility as a form of training in critical analysis and persuasive argument means it is a major form of assessment used in the Faculty of Arts.

This guide is an introductory guide, which sets out ways to prepare your work, to organize your thinking, to work with your draft and to present your final essay. The English Department has high standards for final presentations, but remember that academic writing, especially essay writing, is a genre like any other, in that it has its own conventions. Using and working with those conventions will give your ideas their best chance to communicate authoritatively and convincingly.

PART A: PREPARATION

1. APPROACHING THE ESSAY TOPIC

- Think out carefully what the topic seems to be asking for. Even when it does not take the form of a **question** (for instance when it requires you to 'discuss', 'examine' or 'compare'), the essay topic still calls for a particular kind of response.
- If a specific text is involved, re-examine that text in the light of the essay topic. If further reading is needed, keep the topic in mind as you read. In this way you are beginning to work out what your response to the topic will be when you come to write your essay.
- Topics may include those that demand a focus on contextual and critical research, those that ask for comparison, or those that ask for analysis of a text or of a particular reading of a text. Each kind of question will require a different kind of approach. Your essay must answer the question, or provide a response that is appropriate to the topic.

2. ASSEMBLING THE RELEVANT MATERIAL

- Think through the relation of the topic to the text or texts you are going to discuss. If you are being asked to choose texts from your unit for an essay question, select texts that can best illustrate an argument in relation to that topic.
- Think through the main aspects of the topic in relation to the texts. Identify points from the lectures, tutorials and seminars, from your notes, and from your reading that address or relate to the topic.
- Are there aspects of the topic that will need further research? Identify the unit's expectations to clarify what role further research should have in your essay. Where necessary, identify what issues, texts, contexts, authors' details, theoretical points or frameworks you know will need grounding in further scholarship. Gather a selection of authoritative, relevant and up-to-date

scholarship that will substantiate your argument. Wikipedia is not a scholarly resource!

- The length recommended for your final essay will urge you to be selective in the points you include. It is unlikely that you will be able to say all that you know about *A Doll's House*, *Alien* or *Paradise Lost* in 1500 words. Be selective and **choose what to leave out**. Essays over or under the word limit by 10% will attract a penalty of 10% of the total mark.

3. PREPARING A DRAFT STRUCTURE

- Your essay must put forward a particular proposition. The proposition is both your view of the works or texts and your answer to the essay question.
- Organize your points conceptually in order to argue this proposition. Construct a logical sequence of ideas. Think about which ideas must come before other ideas, and which ideas depend on other ideas. Think through relations, conflicts and implications for all of your points until you begin to build an argument.
- Use your critical judgement to think about the importance and weight of your points. What is not relevant? What is repetitive? What are the strongest and weakest points?
- Bring forward relevant evidence to support your ideas or develop your argument at every point. This is usually where detailed engagement with the texts you are discussing is necessary. What is a good example for each point? Do you have enough evidence for each point? Can you explain examples clearly, as if to an unfamiliar reader?

4. WRITING YOUR ESSAY

- Work from an essay plan as detailed as possible (see point 3 above).
- Substantiate argument with evidence and balance analysis with detail.
- Use the present tense when providing information about the plot or internal workings of a text.
- Subordinate plot detail to the purposes of your essay. Never tell the story of a work for the sake of it. Mention only the particular aspects of a text that have a bearing on the point you are making, and integrate examples from the text as evidence for your argument. Make sure you comment on your examples; do not let them simply speak for themselves.
- Aim for a consistent tone – usually formal and authoritative, according to academic conventions.
- Aim for a consistent narrative point of view – usually impersonal and objective, according to academic conventions.
- Ensure your paragraphs flow and that you provide adequate transitional comments to link paragraphs. Avoid the episodic or disjointed discussion that resembles a series of loosely related or unorganised dot points.
- Draft and redraft. Many essay writers find they need to rewrite their introduction after finishing a first draft, when the argument has been clarified.
- Use a conclusion to synthesize points and to identify overall significance. Rather than just reiterate the central ideas of the essay, use the conclusion to indicate the implications of your findings and round off the discussion.

5. COMPARING TEXTS

- Essay topics that ask you to compare two or more texts require you to bring out any significant differences between them as well as the major similarities.
- Your essay should be presenting an argument about the comparability of the texts, not just a list of points of comparison. Think about what broader factors make them comparable as well as the features they may share or not share. If they are very different, explore their difference: set them in contrast.
- Choose an approach that best suits the comparison. You may choose to examine each text separately. This approach requires ordering the texts in your essay in the best way to build an argument, and drawing out points from previous texts when discussing later texts. Be wary of repetition or appearing to write separate mini-essays on each text. This approach may suit texts that exhibit significant differences.
- You may choose to synthesize the discussion of various texts around a sequence of ideas. This method may better suit texts that have many features in common. This requires good signposting of your argument and careful handling of the texts so that the essay does not appear to merely jump from one text to the other too many times.

6. USING SCHOLARSHIP AND CRITICISM

- Look for up-to-date critical work about the texts you are asked to discuss; guides to or work relating to literary and cultural theories that are relevant; or up-to-date discussions of the literary period, movement, genre or mode (modernism, for example). These discussions may be included in books, or in journals in the field, including internet-hosted journals, or through electronic gateways and databases. Keep your research skills up-to-date.
- Evaluate the criticism you read. Assess the worth of your discoveries using your critical judgement and also the judgement of other scholars. Is it published in a reputable scholarly source? Is it indexed in the important databases of English Studies? Has it been peer reviewed?
- Use internet-hosted information with care. A Google search is not research. Even if you find material that appears to be directly relevant, make sure you check its provenance (origin). Course notes from other universities are not scholarly criticism, nor are fan sites (although there are exceptions) or blogs. Use only material that has clear status as objective, disinterested and rigorous scholarship.
- Other scholars' work cannot do your work for you. Use scholarship to ground and advance **your own argument**. Make sure you comment on ideas expressed in any critical material cited, and integrate those ideas into your discussion. In your essay, you are taking part in a scholarly conversation, so you need to express your own views as well as situate your argument within scholarly debate.

7. REFERENCING AND CITATION

- Acknowledge **all** ideas, facts, quotations, and arguments from another scholar's work: **every** single one at **every** place you use it. This practice is what distinguishes rigorous argumentation as scholarship. True scholarship requires the ethical acknowledgement of others' work, in order to allow readers to verify your research. See part B, Presentation, on how to set out such acknowledgements.

- Failure to acknowledge such material, or **plagiarism**, is considered to constitute academic dishonesty. It is a serious breach of the University's rules and is very heavily penalised. **Plagiarism** entails any of the following:
 - use of published ideas or words without adequate acknowledgement;
 - *any* use of material produced by other students;
 - *any* re-use of an assessment item you have produced for another university unit (at this or another university, previously or currently);
 - use of essay material purchased from an essay-writing provider, either via the Web or otherwise.
- University penalties for plagiarism include failure in the unit or expulsion from the university and will be very strictly enforced. The link below has more details about the policy, procedure and schedule of penalties that will apply to breaches of the Academic Honesty policy: http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html
- If in any doubt about your referencing, consult your tutor or the unit convener. Referencing style is described in Part B of this document.

8. PROTECTING YOUR WORK

- Always **keep a copy** of any essay submitted, ideally a paper copy as well as an electronic one. It is your responsibility to ensure that your essay reaches its destination on time.
- If you are asked to do so, submit a disc copy, as well as a paper copy of your essay, or submit it via Turnitin if requested.

9. LATE ESSAYS

- The department penalises late essays without adequate documentation (e.g., medical or counsellor's certificate) at the rate of 2% (of the total mark for that essay) per day (including weekends).
- If you have a documented reason for the late submission of your essay, consult the special consideration policy at http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html
- Students applying for Special Consideration circumstances of three (3) consecutive days duration, within a study period, and/or prevent completion of a formal examination must submit an on-line application with the Faculty of Arts. For an application to be valid, it must include a completed Application for Special Consideration form and all supporting documentation. The on-line Special Consideration application is found at: http://www.arts.mq.edu.au/current_students/undergraduate/admin_central/special_consideration.

PART B: PRESENTATION

1. LAYOUT

- Written work must be submitted through the Arts Student Centre (via the appropriate assignment box) on Level 1, W6A (for internal students) or via COE (for external students). Internal students must print and attach a completed coversheet to all submitted work. A personalised assignment coversheet is generated from the student section of the Faculty of Arts website at: http://www.arts.mq.edu.au/current_students/undergraduate/admin_central/coversheet.
- Write out the essay topic in full.
- Leave a 2cm margin on every page for your marker's comments.
- Essays should be double-spaced throughout, except for indented quotations, notes and bibliography (unless you are writing an Honours or postgraduate thesis, when special conditions apply). Make use of the spell check and grammar check features of your word-processing program, but do your own checking too.

2. TITLES

- Titles of **books, plays, films, television series, journals, epic poems** and large multi-part **websites** should be in italics, in order to avoid ambiguity, for example, "Julius Caesar hardly appears in *Julius Caesar*," or "Some situations remind one of *Ruthless People*." Capitalise the initial letter of the principal words, but not of minor words like "and" or "the".
- In the case of a work such as a **short story, essay, article**, single item or **webpage** on a large website or **lyric poem**, which is not published in a volume of its own, but as part of a longer work or a collection of short works, give the title in quotation marks. For example, "The Fat Man in History", "Peeling" and "Crabs" are stories in the collection called *The Fat Man in History*.
- The critics you will be reading use this system of signalling what kind of work the title refers to, as will your tutors when they draw up reading lists. It enables you to tell the difference between references to Sylvia Plath's horse called Ariel, her poem called "Ariel" about riding the horse, and the volume called *Ariel* in which you will find the poem.

3. QUOTATIONS

- Prose quotations of more than three lines, or shorter ones which you want to highlight, should be placed on a new line, and the whole quotation should be set 2.5 cm from your margin. Indented quotations should **not** be enclosed in quotation marks, and should be single-spaced.
- Prose quotations of not more than three typed lines may be introduced into the body of your essay. These must always appear in quotation marks. If the quotation ends with a full stop but your own sentence enclosing it has not yet ended, replace the final full stop of the quotation with a comma. Otherwise, do not change the punctuation or spelling.
- Verse quotations of a line or less should appear in quotation marks in the body of your essay. Quotations of not more than three lines may appear in quotation marks in the body of your essay. Use a slash with a space on either side of it to indicate where the verse line ended in the original. If the lines begin with a capital letter in the text, the capital letter

should appear in your quotation. For example:

In the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*, Milton directly requests the muse to sing “Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree.”

- Verse quotations of more than three lines should be set out as in the original. They should begin on a new line, indented ten spaces (or 2.5 cm) and single-spaced, unless the spacing of the lines is unusual in the text: for example in quoting Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s poem “Don’t Let that Horse”, you would copy the unusual spacing as closely as possible from the original:

Don’t let that horse
eat that violin
cried Chagall’s mother

- Where you have left something out of a quotation because it is irrelevant to the point you are making **and you want to indicate that your reader should leave it out**, replace the omitted material with three dots like this . . . with spaces before, after and between them. Add a full stop if it is the end of your sentence.
- If you change or add a word in a quotation, put it in **square** brackets to show that it is not an accurate copy of the original, like this:
The poet uses puns seriously, as in the lines, “When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For I [Donne] have more.”
- When a quotation includes a quotation, use double inverted commas for the whole and enclose the inner quotation in single inverted commas.
- Your sentence introducing or containing your quotation must fit with it grammatically. Change your sentence to fit the quotation rather than vice versa, if possible. In this example the sentence and quotation **do not** fit together: “The magistrate scathingly comments that Volpone’s suitors ‘These possess wealth, as sick men possess fevers, / Which, trulier, may be said to possess them.’” In the next example, they do make sense: “The magistrate scathingly comments of Volpone’s suitors that ‘These possess wealth, as sick men possess fevers, / Which, trulier, may be said to possess them.’”

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Always indicate the source of information or of a quotation.
- The most widely used method in English and literary/language studies is the MLA Style. It allows for multiple citations of a single text without multiple footnotes, and is considered the least disruptive to the flow of an argument. It aims for as little punctuation and information as possible within the body of the text while remaining absolutely correct, and places the bulk of the bibliographical information in a list of Works Cited at the end.
- Please note that this is **not** the same parenthetical reference style used in fields such as education and the behavioural sciences, in which the parenthetical note lists the author’s name and the date of publication. Referencing in English Studies requires the **author’s name** and **page number**. Because you are directing your reader to the exact page from which you are citing ideas/words, the page number is a crucial piece of information.

- Parenthetical notes appear in parentheses (round brackets) in the body of your essay. References should be as brief as possible, usually the **author's name and a page number only**. No p. or pp. abbreviations or punctuation between name and number are included. Examples:
 - The part of Lear's fool was written for Robert Armin (Gurr 87).
 - Gurr claims that the part of the fool was written with Robert Armin in mind (87).
 - Gurr claims that "for Armin", Shakespeare "produced Feste and Lear's Fool" (87).
- **All works cited in this way must appear also in your Works Cited** where your reader will find the full reference to the work.
- Where you cite more than one work by the same author, your parenthetical reference will need to include a sensible abbreviation of the title of the work to which you are referring. For example, in an essay that includes references to Frank Kermode's *Renaissance Essays* and to his *English Renaissance Literature*, your parenthetical reference should look like this:
 - "Wit" did not mean to the writers of the Elizabethan period what it does to us (Kermode, *English Renaissance* 41).
- Use **footnotes** or **endnotes** only for important tangential information or for the provision of complex bibliographic information such as evaluative comments on sources or variant editions. Footnote or endnote numbers should appear **immediately** after the material referred to as a superscript number like this.¹ Most word processors have a facility that will enable you to compose your footnote and have it placed at the foot of the page or the end of the essay or chapter.

5. WORKS CITED/ BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **All works cited** must be listed at the end.
- Start a new page and head it Works Cited. Alternatively if you wish (as in an Honours thesis) to indicate that your research extends beyond works actually cited in the body of your essay, head it Bibliography. List the works in alphabetical order of authors' **surnames**.
- Where you list more than one work by one author, arrange them in order of publication. Where you have used a work with more than one author, list it under the first surname on the title page.
- **Titles must be given in full**, including any subtitle. Examples:

Major works published in their own right (books, films, epic poems)

White, Patrick. *The Twyborn Affair*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1979. Print.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Canterbury Tales*. Ed. A.C. Cawley. 1958. London: Dent, 1975. Print.
 [To list only the prologue, because you had not read the rest: Chaucer, Geoffrey. "General Prologue". *Canterbury Tales*. Ed. A.C. Cawley. 1958. London: Dent, 1975. Print.]

Heaney, Seamus, and Ted Hughes, eds. *The Rattle Bag*. London: Faber, 1982. Print.
 [Note that Hughes's name appears the right way round, while Heaney's is listed surname first.]

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. E.V. Rieu. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945. Print.
 [If your essay was about Rieu as a translator, not about Homer, you could list it this way: Rieu, E.V., trans. *The Odyssey*. By Homer. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945. Print.]

Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. Trans. Joseph Laredo. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983. Print. Trans. of *L'Etranger*. Paris: Gallimard, 1942.
 [The novel appeared in French in the 1940's not the 1980's so for clarity you may wish to add the information about the French publication after your basic information; Penguin has published two different translations of it so the name of the translator of this one is important.]

Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Print.

[The second edition was heavily revised. Name the edition.]

Gaiman, Neil. *Stardust: Being a Romance Within the Realms of Faerie*. Illus. Charles Vess. New York: Vertigo-DC Comics, 1998. Print. Rpt. of *Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess' Stardust 1-4*.

[This could also have been listed under the name of the illustrator with Gaiman as Writ. Neil Gaiman where it now says Illus. Charles Vess. The fact that it is reprinted from an earlier version may be added after your main entry or you may leave it out.]

A journal article

Haegert, John. "Memoirs of a Deconstructive Angel: The Heroine as Mantissa in the Fiction of John Fowles." *Contemporary Literature* 27.2 (1986): 160-81. Print.

[The page numbers are for the whole article.]

An article in an edited collection

King, Pamela M. "Morality Plays." Ed. Richard Beadle. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 240-264. Print.

A reprinted or anthologised item

Derrida, Jacques. "The Law of Genre". *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 62-70. Rpt. in *The Narrative Reader*. Ed. Martin McQuillan. London and New York, 2000. 220-243. Print.

Levertov, Denise. "Stepping Westward." 1966. *Postmodern American Poetry*. Ed. Paul Hoover. New York: Norton, 1994. 89-90. Print.

An encyclopedia or reference work

Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. Online ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Web.

"lexicographer, n." *OED Online*. June 2011. Oxford University Press. Web. 3 July 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/107774>>.

[for a single citation where the June 2011 date of the latest alteration or update is important]

An episode of a television series

"The Dalek Invasion of Earth". *Doctor Who*. Writ. Terry Nation. Dir. Richard Martin. Prod. Verity Lambert. BBC. Nov. 1 - Dec. 26 1964. BBC Enterprises, 1990. Videotape.

A film

The Duellists. Dir. Ridley Scott. Perf. Keith Carradine and Harvey Keitel. Paramount, 1978. Film.

[If you wished to refer only to the contribution of a particular individual, the entry would be: Keitel, Harvey, perf. *The Duellists*. Dir. Ridley Scott. Paramount, 1978. Film.]

Rashomon. Dir. Kurosawa, Akira. Perf. Toshiro Mifune. Daiei, 1950. Eastern Eye, 2006. DVD.

A web publication

Tu, Yvonne and Catherine Lavender. "Dorothy Rothschild Parker 1893-1967". *New York City's Women's Biography Hub*. Web. 26 July 2011 <<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/dparker.html>>.

[Make sure you know the exact details for any site you are using, including the author if possible, the name of the site and the name of the item and the date of its most recent update. If you cannot find such information, you should not be using that website in the preparation of your essay. Date accessed and URL should follow the basic information. If you need a line break in the URL, put it after a forward slash.]

English Department, Purdue University. *The Purdue Online Writing Lab*. 2011. Web. 27 June 2011 <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>>

McKay, Charles. *Lost Beauties of the English Language: An Appeal to Authors, Poets, Clergymen, and Public Speakers*. New York: Bouton, 1874. *Internet Archive*. Web. 2 July 2011 <<http://www.archive.org/texts/flipbook/flippy.php?id=lostbeautieseng00mackgoog>> [Like most material from retrieval, facsimile and archival services, such as JSTOR, this is a print item republished in web-accessible form.]

Cohn, Neil. "A different kind of cultural frame: An analysis of panels in American comics and Japanese manga." *Image & Narrative* 12.1 (2011) 120-134. Web. 22 July 2011 <<http://openhumanitiespress.org/image-and-narrative.html>> [This online journal gives page numbers for its items; if it had not you could use "n.p." to indicate that there were no page numbers. The notation "n.d." would indicate that no date of publication was given.]

6. PROOFREADING

- Re-read your essay carefully and correct any errors of spelling or punctuation before handing it in. Make sure you have transcribed quotations accurately and spelled proper names from the text correctly. Simple mistakes have a cumulative effect: the more there are, the harder it is to evaluate the real quality of your essay.
- Do not trust the spelling and grammar checker on your computer. Do your own checking.

7. FURTHER READING

- The conventions followed in this guide are explained in full in the following:

Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009.

Honours and postgraduate students should consult the longer version, particularly Chapter Five, on the presentation of theses and dissertations:

The Modern Language Association of America. *The MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. 3rd ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008.

For further information on citing films, radio programs, information services, and other non-book sources:

Stinson, Bill. *Citing Non-Book Materials: A Guide for Researchers and Students*. North Ryde: Macquarie University Library and Audiovisual Services Committee of the Library and Information Association, 1990.

- A general guide to essay writing for students may be of use. Some examples are:

Davis, Lloyd, and Susan McKay. *Structures and Strategies: An Introduction to Academic Writing*. Melbourne: MacMillan, 1996.

Greetham, Bryan. *How to Write Better Essays*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001.

Peters, Pam. *Strategies for Student Writers*. Brisbane: John Wiley and Sons, 1985.

Soles, Derek. *The Essentials of Academic Writing*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.