

Style Guide

School of Government Post-Experience Programmes

This Guide¹ provides a general overview of expectations and guidance in preparing items for assessment. For more detailed information and assistance, visit the Student Learning Services website or the Library website:

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/slss/studyhub.aspx

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/library/instruction/annotatedbibliography.html>

Style

Analysis, argument and evidence

Items of assessment in public policy and public management usually require an analytical, not a descriptive, approach. Written work (essays, case studies, reflection, commentaries and the like) must present an argument, usually based on a critical analysis of a topic or issue. An argument is a series of generalisations or propositions, supported by evidence or reasoning and connected in a logical manner, that leads to justified conclusions.

You must sustain your argument by giving evidence and reasons. Assertions do not constitute an argument. You must support your opinions with good evidence and valid reasoning. Being critical may mean determining whether or not the evidence available justifies the conclusions that are drawn from it; or it may mean uncovering and questioning the assumptions that underlie the issues or topics under consideration.

There is rarely a ‘correct answer’ to an analytical question. There is no ‘line’ for you to follow. You will be assessed on how well you seem to understand the issues and how well you make your case. Whether the examiner agrees or disagrees with your conclusion is not essential to your mark. Disagreement does not lead to bad marks; bad essays do.

If there are important arguments against your position, do not ignore them; deal with them honestly. Be fair to counter-arguments: try to meet them by providing better ones. Analysis and scholarship are not about political point-scoring: respect evidence and superior arguments.

Planning and writing

Start early

Start working on your written items well in advance of the due date (allow in particular for Murphy’s Law and the – predictable and unpredictable – peaks and troughs of work). Avoid the frantic, last minute rush. Always manage your time so that you can put aside your penultimate draft for two or three days so that when you return to finish it off, you can read it with new eyes.

Analysing

Many assessment topics will explicitly or implicitly ask you to ‘analyse’ a concept, topic or issue. This will involve one or more of the following:

- compare: examine the characteristics of the objects in question to demonstrate their similarities and differences;
- contrast: examine the characteristics of the objects in question to demonstrate their differences;
- analyse: consider the various components of the whole and explain the relationships among them;
- discuss: present the different aspects of a question and problem;

¹ This Guide has drawn heavily on Essay Writing and Style Guide for Politics and the Social Sciences, compiled by David W. Lovell and Rhonda D. Moore (1992) for the Publications Committee of the Australian Political Studies Association.

- evaluate: examine the various sides of a question to reach a normative judgment.

Creating an outline

As a general rule, never start writing without planning. Start by sketching an outline of your item – whether it is an essay, commentary, critical reflection, case study or whatever. This ensures that your work has a coherent, logical structure. It will also enable you to assign relative weighting to the different components of your piece by differentiating which points are central and which peripheral. Your outline will also facilitate the preparation of your essay by guiding your reading, note taking and writing.

Researching, reading and thinking

Wide reading and deep thinking are essential if you wish to submit a good essay. Without either you will not have the breadth or depth of understanding necessary to produce good analysis. Effective research depends on knowing what to look for, so always keep your essay outline in mind.

The reading requirements are, of course, related to the nature of the subject and topic. Some topics may require a detailed analysis of a small number of texts; yet it is rarely sufficient to read only one or two books on a particular topic. Reading guides are issued to help you choose material. These are starting points. Further references may be compiled by, for example, using bibliographies in textbooks.

Of course, the internet is becoming a wonderful resource for research – but use it critically. Websites and the material on them are not usually subject to peer review. Some sites have no value. On the other hand, institutional sites such as those of tertiary institutions, government agencies, research centres, news media and so on, usually provide useful if not authoritative material.

Writing and revising

A written item of assessment of whatever form should be a coherent and logical piece of analytical prose. It should deal with the set topic, and cogently and coherently argue your case.

Your essay should have three parts: an introduction, body and a conclusion. The introduction should introduce the topic to be discussed and prepare the reader for what is to follow; be concise. It may be useful to summarise briefly the overall theme or argument of the essay, indicating the main points to be made. The body of the essay is the place to present your argument. Attend to the logical sequence of your presentation, and to the presentation of evidence. The conclusion should restate briefly the key arguments and signal their implications.

Writing an essay is almost always a process of writing and revising. A good essay will almost always involve more than one draft. Use the first draft to map out your ideas and to get the basic structure right. Second and subsequent drafts should pay more attention to detail, argument and style. Always assess your own work by imagining that you are writing for the average professional: Have you included enough information and evidence, in the right order, to allow such a reader to follow your argument? Would such a reader be convinced by your argument?

Style

Grammar

Sloppy grammar distracts the reader's attention from your ideas.

Spelling, hyphenation

The standard spelling reference for New Zealand writing is the Oxford Dictionary. In general, English spelling is preferred to American. Use dictionaries as a guide to hyphenation of words. The tendency in recent years has been to use fewer hyphens, and many words which formerly consisted of two components have now become one.

Capitalisation

The rules of capitalisation are complicated and the decision whether or not to capitalise is still frequently left to the discretion of the writer (bear in mind that public service practice capitalises excessively and deferentially, so be on your guard against ingrained workplace habits). As a general rule, only proper names should be capitalised (including the name of an organisation). Title should not be – unless they are used, in effect, as a proper noun (e.g. Prime Minister Clark; President Bush). If in doubt, opt for lower case (e.g. the prime minister, Helen Clark; ‘the government policy is...’; ‘the department view is...’; ‘council’s decision...’)

Numbers

Spell out the numbers one to nine and spell out even hundreds, thousands and millions, except if they include a decimal point or fraction (e.g. 4.25, 41/4), or where they refer to page numbers, or where there are sets of numerals, some of which are higher than ten (e.g. 14, 9, and 6). Use Arabic numerals (11, 12, 13...) for other numbers. Percentages are expressed as figures followed by % even if the number is less than ten. Always write out a number or year if it begins a sentence.

Note the following:

- Large numbers should be written with a comma rather than a space (e.g. 50,000).
- Dates should be written thus: 9 January 1956.
- Periods of time should be written thus: 1970s (not 1970’s); 1984-85 (not 1984-1985, or 1984-5).
- Avoid Roman numerals wherever possible.

Underlining/italics

In most books and journal articles, emphasis is added to words by italicising them. Foreign language words that are often used in English, but are not yet fully naturalised, are italicised. This does not apply to terms such as vis-a-vis, or laissez faire. If in doubt, check the Oxford Dictionary.

Non-discriminatory language

Ensure you use forms of language that are not – intentionally or unintentionally – sexist, racist or discriminating against disability.

Documentation

The following points cover ‘referencing’. You must cite the work from which you draw any ideas, data or which you paraphrase, summarise or quote. Most people understand that the sources for quotes should be cited but many do not realise that citations should also be provided for any sources which are summarised or even those from which you have drawn ideas or facts. If you do not cite your sources you risk being accused of plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of ideas, organisation, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate reference or acknowledgment, so that it appears to be one’s own work. This includes published and unpublished work, the internet and the work of other students

and staff. Plagiarism is an example of misconduct in the Statute of Student Conduct. Students who have plagiarised are subject to a range of penalties under the statute.

See the website: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy/students.aspx>

The footnoting system (a.k.a. the ‘Chicago’ system)

Intellectual debts in essays may also be documented by way of the traditional footnote. By contrast with the Harvard system, full bibliographical details about a book or article are recorded at the foot of the page on which it is first mentioned, as well as the particular page or pages that are relevant. At subsequent references to the same book or article, various devices ('ibid', 'op cit') are used both that lengthy repetition of the bibliographic details is avoided and that the appropriate work is cited. Footnotes may also be used (sparingly) to expand on points in the texts, as with the Harvard system. Notes should be numbered consecutively and placed at the bottom of the page. The corresponding note number in the text should be written or typed as a superscript. Thus:

...all initiatives of this type tend to be *ad hoc* in character⁵

5. Boyle D. Local Government in New Zealand, Auckland, Oxford, 1998, p. 27

The first reference to a book, a chapter in an edited collection, or an article in a periodical, should contain all the bibliographic information necessary to identify it. These details should then be followed by the page number or numbers of the quotation or specific reference.

Confusion often arises over the way in which second and subsequent references to a book, chapter or articles may be abbreviated. It is suggested that the references given in footnotes take the following form:

Books when first cited:

Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1977, p. 53.
William J. Pomeroy, *Apartheid Axis*, New York, International Publishers, 1971, p. 23.

Articles when first cited:

Ralph Thaxton, "On Peasant Revolution and National Resistance", in *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Oct.
Andre Gunder Frank, "The Development of Under-development", in Robert I. Rhodes (ed.), *Imperialism and Underdevelopment*, New York, Modern Reader, 1970, p. 5.

Books or articles when previously cited:

Provided that the precise reference is unambiguous, generally use op. cit. (opera citato – in the work already cited), or loc. cit. (loco citato – in the place already cited).

Thus:

Albert Memmi, op. cit., pp. 34-42.
Ralph Thaxton, loc. cit.

Where the reference is to the same work as in the immediately previous footnote on the same page, use ibid. (ibidem – in the same place).

Richard J. Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution*, Paladin, 1972, p. 105.
Ibid., p. 32.

Where there are more than two authors of a given work, the abbreviation et al. (et alii – and others) may be used:

Robert L. Kahn et al., *Organizational Stress*, New York, Random House, 1964, p. 15.

Remember that footnotes and bibliography are not optional luxuries but help the reader gauge the extent of your investigations and are important scholarly conventions.

The ‘author/date’ system (a.k.a. the Harvard system or the APA system)

The ‘author/date’ (or ‘Harvard’) system is designed to give enough information within the body of the text – a citation – to enable the reader to locate the item in a reference list at the end of the day.

The basic citation in the author-date system consists of the last name of an author and the year of publication of the work, followed (where appropriate) by the page numbers. No comma separates the author and year. Pages, chapters and so forth follow the date, preceded by a comma. It is unnecessary to use ‘p’, ‘pp’ or ‘page’ to indicate the page numbers. Within the author-date system, terms such as ‘ibid’ and ‘op cit’ are not used. Most citations should indicate the relevant pages. To cite an entire book for a specific point is generally unacceptable.

Footnotes have a role in the Harvard system, but they are not used for the purposes of citations: they can be used to expand on points in the text, or to provide information on citations of newspaper articles, interviews and personal communications. But they should be used sparingly. The material in a lengthy, discursive footnote may be better placed in the body of the text, or left out altogether. Notes should be numbered consecutively and placed at the end of the essay (“endnotes”) or at the bottom of the page (“footnotes”). The correspondence note number in the text should be written or typed as a superscript. Thus:

Doyle (1966) initially advanced this idea¹⁴

14. The idea was developed in the United States (Clarke, 1968, 254).

When more than one study is cited, arrange the references in alphabetical order and use semicolons to separate them:

A number of researchers (Bennett 1967, 142; Dent 1969, 1970; Groom 1969) have advanced this argument; however, the opposite view has considerable support (Cummings 1985; Norquest 1984, 256-63).

Use commas to separate two works by the same author. If works by the same author are also published in the same year, add lower case letters to the dates of publication and repeat these in the reference list:

This theory was advanced in two articles by Dixon (1974, 1975).
This theory was advanced by Lindsey (1981a, 1981b, 1982).

If there are two or three authors, cite all names each time. If there are four or more authors, ‘et al’ (meaning ‘and others’) should follow the first author’s name. If two or more authors have the same last name, the first initial should be used to distinguish between them:

The idea was originally advanced by Arndt, Wee and Smart (1955). Independently, other authors (Drew et al 1967) advanced a similar idea, with what was strongly criticised by Irish researchers (R. Smith 1960; J. Smith 1962). Nonetheless, the idea has gained widespread acceptance in Ireland (Dent 1969, chap. 2) and overseas (Eckhart 1972, 131-50).

Reference List and Bibliography

Note that the author/date system requires a ‘reference list’ at the end (i.e. an alphabetical list of only the works cited in the text). Under the footnoting system, you are permitted to provide a ‘bibliography’; an alphabetical list that also includes other works consulted during preparation of the assessment item but not cited.

The bibliography or reference list should appear at the end of the essay, in alphabetical order. The information you provide should be as full as possible and include (a) the names of authors, including initials or given names, (b) an indication if the book is edited, (c) the book's title, underlined or in italics, (d) the city of publication, (e) the name of the publisher, (f) the date of publication and (g) an indication of relevant volume if there is more than one.

The reference list or bibliography should be formatted as a 'hanging' paragraph.

Here are some examples:

Drew, O. & Parsons, S. (eds.), *Socialism and American Life*, 2 Vols., London, Oxford University Press, 1952.

Mayo, H.B., *Democracy and Marxism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1955.

Nkrumah, K., *I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology*, New York, Praeger, 1961.

Note that, as a general rule, a bibliography puts the year of publication at the end of the reference (as above). The author/date system puts it in brackets, after the name of the author. Compare the following with the version above:

Drew, O. & Parsons, S. (1952) (eds.), *Socialism and American Life*, 2 Vols., London, Oxford University Press.

In the case of journals, article titles should appear in inverted commas and journal names underlined or in italics. The volume and issue number as well as the date should be provided for journal articles. Here are some examples:

Bretton, H.L., "Current Political Thought and Practice in Ghana", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. XII, No. 1, March 1968.

Mazrui, A., "Africa and the Egyptian's Four Circles", *African Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 251, April 1964.

Chapters in edited collections may be written in the fashion of journal articles.

Turner, A.H., "The Split in Australian Communism", in J.D.B. Miller and T.H. Rigby (eds.), *The Disintegrating Monolith*, Canberra, Australian National University, 1965.

On-line documents should include the URL.

Treasury (1996) Putting it all together: An Explanatory Guide for the New Zealand's Financial Management System, Wellington, accessed at <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publicsector/pit/> January 22, 2003.

Submission of your assessment item

Some courses may have specific requirements relating to assessment. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand and meet the requirements. Unless otherwise advised, follow these guidelines.

Front page

All items of assessment must have a front page with the following details (centred):

Course code and name
Assessment item descriptor (e.g. essay, case study)
The question or topic in full
Due date (and date submitted, if different)

Name of student
Student ID number
Name of course coordinator/lecturer

Layout

All items of assessment must:

- Be submitted in hard-copy format (email submission is permitted only by agreement)
- Be printed on A4 paper
- Use line spacing of x2 or x1.5
- Paragraphs should be separated by x2 lines OR have the first line indented
- Use a 'standard' font and font size (e.g. Times New Roman 12pt; Arial 10pt; Tahoma 10pt; Helvetica 10pt)
- Use default margins
- Use no more than three levels of headings (two is recommended for most items)

Printing and stapling

Print all items of assessment and staple in the top left-hand corner (there are special arrangements for research projects and theses – consult the relevant guide). Please do not bind items of assessment or place them in plastic folders.

Deadlines and extensions

The ability to plan for and meet deadlines is a core competency of both advanced study and successful officials. It is expected therefore that you will complete and hand in assignments by the due date. As a general rule, penalties will be imposed for lateness (five marks for every working day by which the assignment is late) with no assignments accepted after five working days beyond the due date. For out of town students, two calendar days' grace is given to allow for time in the post.

If ill-health, family bereavement or other personal emergencies prevent you from meeting the deadline for submitting a piece of written work or from attending class to make a presentation, you can apply for and may be granted an extension to the due date. You should let your course coordinator know as soon as possible in advance of the deadline if you are seeking an extension.

Length

As a general rule, items of assessment should be within 10% of the nominated word count. Submissions that are over or under this limit may be penalised.