

School of Social Science Essay Guide

Planning, Research and Writing

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1. Planning Your Time

- Ensure you have a clear plan at the beginning of semester regarding when each piece of assessment is due, for each course, written in a calendar or diary. For each piece of assessment, work backwards to allocate time for:
 - Reviewing and understanding the question
 - Research
 - Writing
 - Referencing
 - Proof-reading
 - Seeking feedback from your tutor, lecturer or peers.
- While some parts of the process will overlap, ensure you have left sufficient time for each phase, and do not leave your research and writing until the last minute.
- You will need to work on multiple pieces of assessment at once to manage your workload successfully.
- See [Student Services](#) for advice and tips on time management.

3. Understanding the Question

- When you are set an assignment or essay, carefully review the question or topic to be addressed. An initial review of the question will help you to understand when you need to do, what research is needed, and how to approach writing.
- Break the question into parts if necessary. If there are multiple parts be sure to answer all of them in your essay.
- Examine the question to identify:
 - **Key words and concepts:** Identify key words or concepts which must be considered and defined and incorporated into your essay. Often these key words and concepts need to be defined in the context of the essay topic.
 - **Problem or issue set by the question/topic:** Essay topics and questions in the social sciences often have an issue (or conflict) which you need to address, explore and adopt a position on. Exploring a topic or question allows you to be more analytical and successful in your writing.
 - **Determining instructional words:** Look for words which direct what you need to do in the essay. They will determine how you will research and structure your essay and argument.

Analyse	Break the topic matter down into its component parts and examine each part in detail to get to the essence of topic matter.
Argue	Systematically accept or reject a position by presenting reasons and evidence for acceptance or rejection. Always indicate your awareness of opposing viewpoints.
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic description of the characteristics of the topic, emphasising the most important points.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument, presenting a point of view (whether yours or others). May entail description and interpretation, and your opinion should be supported by arguments and evidence both for and against.

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Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something, in the light of its apparent truth or utility. Include your personal opinion, supported by evidence, and consider both strengths and weaknesses.
Review	Critically examine, analyse and discuss the major points of a topic, in an organised and orderly manner.

- See Student Services' guide on [Analysing the Topic](#).

4. Understanding Criteria Sheets

- In addition to the set question, you will also have a marking criteria sheet, by which your essay will be marked by your lecturer or tutor. The criteria include important information on what is expected of your work. They will tell you what you are being marked on, and what the various standards are for each of those criteria.
- Criteria sheets will differ between courses and pieces of assessment.
- Review the criteria for a high distinction or 7.

Example Criteria Sheet

		High Distinction (7)	Distinction (6)	Credit (5)	Pass (4)	Marginal Fail (3)	Fail (2)	Low Fail (1)
Generic Descriptor (stem word)		Demonstrated evidence of exceptional achievement of course learning outcomes.	Demonstrated evidence of advanced achievement of course learning outcomes.	Demonstrated evidence of proficient achievement of course learning outcomes.	Demonstrated evidence of functional achievement of course learning outcomes.	Demonstrated evidence of developing achievement of course learning outcomes.	Minimal evidence of achievement of course learning outcomes.	Absence of evidence of achievement of course learning outcomes.
SAMPLE CRITERIA	Depth and breadth of knowledge/content	Mastery of content	Substantial knowledge of fundamental concepts of the field of study	Good knowledge of fundamental concepts of the field of study	Adequate knowledge of fundamental concepts of the field of study	Superficial understanding of the fundamental concepts of the field of study	Deficiencies in understanding the fundamental concepts of the field of study	Some engagement with the assessment tasks; however no demonstrated evidence of understanding of the concepts in the field of study
	Critical analysis and problem solving	Expert and critical evaluation of data, cases, problems and their solutions, and implications	Critical evaluation of data, cases, problems and their solutions, and implications	Considered evaluation of data, cases, problems and their solutions, and implications	Identifies data, cases, problems and their solutions, and implications	Attempts to identify data, cases, problems and their solutions, and implications	Inability to identify data, cases, problems and their solutions, and implications	

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	Quality of argument	Significant and sophisticated insights in identifying, generating and synthesising competing arguments or perspectives	Perceptive insights in identifying, generating and synthesising competing arguments or perspectives	Develops or adapts convincing arguments and provides coherent justification	Develops routine arguments or decisions	Presents undeveloped arguments	Presents inappropriate or unsupported arguments	
	Application of knowledge and skills	Original, novel and/or creative application of knowledge and skills	Extensive application of knowledge and skills	Effective application of knowledge and skills	Acceptable application of knowledge and skills	Emerging ability to apply knowledge and skills	Inability to apply knowledge and skills	
	Communication	Exploits the conventions of the discipline to communicate at an expert level	Uses the conventions of the discipline to communicate at a professional level	Uses the conventions of the discipline to communicate at an effective level	Uses some of the conventions of the discipline to communicate appropriately	Communicates information or ideas with limited clarity and inconsistent adherence to the conventions of the discipline	Communicates information or ideas in ways that are frequently incomplete, confusing and not appropriate to the conventions of the discipline	

5. Research

- Once you have identified the goal for the essay, begin research with resources that have been set for the course. This will usually include key concepts, theories and topics relevant to your essay. Do not reference lectures – you have to seek the original sources.
- Then, you must also go beyond material set for the course, in order to conduct comprehensive research. Most essays will have a distinct criterion related to research – ensure you read the criteria (see section on Understanding Criteria Sheets), and consult with your tutor or lecturer, to see what is expected, such as:
 - A minimum number of sources required.
 - Sources and references of a particular kind, such as first-hand accounts or peer-reviewed work.
 - Based on the criteria and requirements, begin your literature search, using the key words you identified in the question analysis.
- **Following the ‘literature trail’:** Start with the textbook and readings set for your course, but go further. Textbooks will always have a list of references at the end, or *Further Reading* sections at the end of relevant chapters. Also look at the reference lists at the end of any books or articles you find useful.
- **Searching UQlibrary search for books and articles:** The library provides useful guides on [search techniques](#) to assist in finding quality information effectively. There are also the [Digital Essentials](#) modules, that will guide you through all the things that you should know about using your library, locating resources and researching for your assignments
- [Information essentials](#) - finding quality information, evaluating online information, identifying fake news
- [Types of assignments](#) - written, video, audio, presentations, posters, 3D models, coding
- [Write, cite and submit](#) - plagiarism, referencing and referencing styles, EndNote, submission requirements
- **Journal Databases:** The library subscribes to many journals electronically. The library provides a range of guides to identify key databases with [Subject Guides](#) and also assistance with your [search techniques](#). For the social sciences, start with Sociological Abstracts, JStor, Scopus, Proquest. [You can find these here.](#)

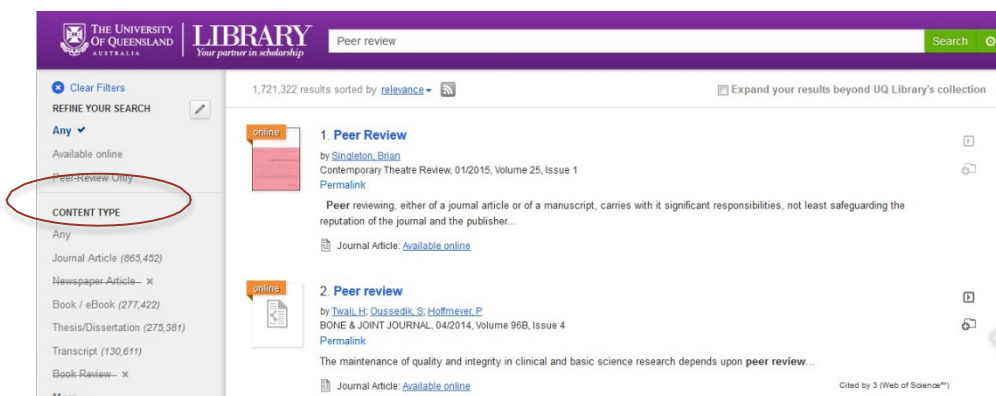
- **Google Scholar:** [Google Scholar](#) indexes a large range of scholarly literature, but please remember to still [evaluate](#) your sources.
- You can also contact library staff directly for assistance [here](#).

Reading and Researching Critically

- You need to ensure that the work you are reading, researching and referencing is valid, relevant and up-to-date. Read '[critically](#)' – assessing arguments, possible bias and the validity of an argument. To begin, ensure the work you read and reference is:
 - Relevant to the topic.
 - Relevant to the context (eg, if a question asks you to look at an issue from an Australian context, ensuring that the research you read is also from Australia).
 - Relevant to the discipline (sociology, criminology, anthropology, archaeology).
- Fairly up-to-date.
- For more information, see Student Services' section on [Researching and note-taking](#) and [Critical Reading and Analysis](#).

Understanding Peer Review

- Articles that are 'peer reviewed' or 'refereed', have been submitted to a journal, and evaluated for quality, value and credibility, by a panel of experts. This process helps to ensure the quality and accuracy of research.
- The library website allows you to focus your searches to only include peer-reviewed articles.



- Watch [this tutorial](#) by the UQ Library for a description of peer review.

Avoiding Internet Sources

- Sources from the internet – Wikipedia, blogs, forums, think tanks - are often dumbed down, badly researched, not peer-reviewed, or have particular ideological objectives. You cannot always properly gauge the quality or intention of what you read online.
- Information drawn from Wikipedia or similar sources cannot be referenced in academic work, as the accuracy of this information cannot be ensured. You can always find the kind of details you find on Wikipedia in academic sources.
- Think Tanks such as the Australia Institute (progressive, Green, welfarist) and the Institute of Public Affairs (libertarian, free market) and any number in the US and Europe, while often containing papers that seem tailor made for your essay, must be treated with caution. Many of these think tanks have an explicit political agenda and funding base, and unless you recognise and acknowledge this, you should not use them.
- If you decide to reference material found via a general web search, it will be clear to the marker that you have not conducted thorough research.

6. Writing

Planning and Structure

- Before you start writing, and as you research, draft an essay plan – which concepts or ideas will go where and in what order. Work out the main ideas or key points you wish to make before starting to write. It is often helpful to draw a diagram or flow chart so you can visualise what you are going to write. Check whether you can use sub-headings to help structure your work. Good essays will introduce each concept or argument in a logical order.
- The structure of your essay will depend upon the topic and question, however, essays usually follow the following structure:

Introduction –Introduces the topic, outlines the question, and how you will answer the question. Tell the reader what you are going to be discussing, and the key arguments that will follow.

Body – Include your key arguments as separate paragraphs. The number of paragraphs will vary based on the length of the essay, the number of arguments you have and the required depth of analysis. For each paragraph, include a clear topic sentence that outlines what the paragraph will say, and how this links to the question. Ensure you have evidence to back up your ideas. Depending on the nature of the assessment this might be evidence drawn from reliable secondary sources – or your own evidence that you have been asked to collect.

Conclusion – Draw together your key arguments. Demonstrate how you have sufficiently answered the essay question. Avoid introducing new information or ideas here.

- An essay map, such as this, might help with your planning:

Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce the topic.• Introduce the question.• Provide your thesis statement or main argument.• Demonstrate how you will answer the question .		
Argument 1 <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Topic Sentence.2. Supporting evidence.	Argument 2 <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Topic Sentence.2. Supporting evidence.	Argument 3 <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Topic Sentence.2. Supporting evidence .
Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draw together your argument.• Summarise and review your key points.		
References <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include references for all sources referred to in-text.• Include references in alphabetical order.		

- Student Services have more tips on [writing your assignment](#).

Defining Key Terms

- Ensure you define key terms and concepts that you identified in your question analysis, as well as key theories and concepts that are central to your argument.
- When you define your terms, don't use a dictionary definition, use articles and academic literature. The dictionary will have an accurate general description, but academic literature will describe how experts in your discipline use the term to represent a particular social phenomenon or idea.

Making Arguments

- If the assignment requires that you make an argument, you need to choose your position on a topic, which you can support with evidence (see the UQ Library digital essentials guides for help in evaluating and using evidence for assessments). Your research may reveal a range of positions on the topic - you will need to evaluate each position and decide why one is stronger in terms of validity and evidence.
- State your position in a thesis statement – one or two lines – in your introduction. Each paragraph will need to support, and expand on, your thesis statement.

- However, you need to acknowledge *both sides* of an argument. For example if you have decided globalisation is a positive phenomenon, you must also acknowledge that there are economic, cultural and environmental downsides to globalisation as well. You don't need to go into detail, but demonstrate that you understand the breadth of a topic and debate.
- Be careful about the word 'prove'. We are rarely able to 'prove' things in the social sciences, the best we can normally do is to present a persuasive case, based on evidence and reason for a particular explanation.

Writing

- Begin drafting your essay early so that you have plenty of time to review and revise, and do further research if required. As you write, pay attention to:
 - **Readability and expression:** Including grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence construction, and use of academic language as opposed to slang/jargon/general terms.
 - **Flow of ideas:** Ensure sentences link in a logical manner, and the essay overall has logical connections throughout.
 - **Relevance:** Ensure that each sentence helps to answer the question, and link back to the question and argument with clear topic sentences.
 - **Spelling:** Use Australian spelling (eg, globalisation, generalisation), and be consistent throughout.
 - **Use formal language:** Avoid clichés, questions, slang and conjunctions.
 - **Avoid hyperbole:** Communicate your argument through dispassionate argument and evidence.
 - **Avoid broad generalisations:** Social science writing is ‘scientific’: that is, the aim of sociology and criminology is to learn about and understand society based on research and data. Therefore, all statements that you make should be supportable. Don’t make unsupported generalisations or speculation.
 - **Discriminatory and judgmental language:** Be aware of the impact of particular phrases and expressions, particularly when talking about minority and marginalised groups.
 - **Acronyms:** At first use, write out acronyms in full, and then follow with acronyms. For example, “According to the United Nations (UN).....” followed by, “The UN argues that...”.

Proof Reading

- It is very important to proofread your work for grammatical and typing errors, as well as to check that your argument is concise, logical, and says what you intend it to say.
- If taken alone, does each topic sentence (first sentence of each paragraph) flow on logically from the last?
- The most effective way to proofread is from a hard copy rather than a computer screen. It can also be useful to read your work aloud.
- Since it will be hard for you to see errors in work in which you are still immersed, it is usually a good idea to leave your essay at least overnight before proofreading.
- It is also helpful to ask a classmate or peer to read your work, but make sure you have proofread first, to develop skills as an independent scholar.
- Student Services have useful tips for [Editing your assignment](#).

Checklist for Writing

- ☒ Does your essay have a clear, logical structure, with an introduction, body and conclusion?
- ☒ Does your essay clearly answer the essay question and align with the criteria?
- ☒ Does your essay use up-to-date and relevant literature and evidence?
- ☒ Is your essay within the word limit?
- ☒ Have you proof-read your essay?

7. Referencing

- ‘Referencing’ describes acknowledging other authors when you use their ideas in your essay, using their name and date of publication to identify a particular publication. Your essays **MUST** include in-text references, and a reference list at the end. You will see different referencing styles in the articles and books you read for your course.
- The purpose of using referencing is to acknowledge the work and ideas of other people as used within your own written work. Referencing conventions should be followed when you are:
 - quoting the exact words of another author;
 - closely summarising a passage from another author; or
 - using an idea or material which is directly based on the work of another author.
- Referencing conventions are used to:
 - assist a reader’s further research in the same area of study;
 - add an expert’s authority to your claims; and
 - give credit to the work of others.
- There are different styles that have different directions for formatting. In the School of Social Science we use the author-date style of referencing, as opposed to footnote and endnote referencing. There are two common styles - APA7 and Harvard – that differ according to order and punctuation. Your lecturer will tell you which style they want you to use. Review the library guides (APA7 and Harvard) in detail [here](#).
- All references cited within the body of your essay must be acknowledged in an accompanying reference list which should be alphabetically listed on a separate page, attached to the back of your assignment. It is not a convention in this School to do bibliographies. Only sources cited in your essay should be included in your reference list.
- There is no set number of references, however, for an essay up to 2000 words you would usually be expected to have consulted approximately eight to ten works. Be sure to keep a record of the works you consult as you are researching.
- Make sure you are using quotes to support your ideas – not *instead* of ideas.

Referencing Paraphrased Ideas

- When you find important and relevant information in a source, you can paraphrase or rephrase this work, re-writing using your own words, expression and sentence structure. You then need to acknowledge the original author/thinker/researcher using an in-text reference.

Reference List

- At the end of your essay you must include a list (in alphabetical order of authors) of all works you have referred to throughout your essay whether quoted directly or not. However, do not include any sources you have read but not cited.

Checklist for Referencing

- ☒ Have you included references for all ideas that you have drawn from your research?
- ☒ Have you included all in-text references in your reference list?
- ☒ For each reference, are all required details included?
- ☒ Is your reference list in alphabetical order?

8. Formatting

- Use a standard font, such as:
 - Ariel
 - Times New Roman
 - Cambria
 - Calibri
- Use 12-point font.
- Double or 1.5 space your work.
- Include page numbers.
- Use regular margins.
- If including tables, photos or graphs, ensure these are clearly labelled, and referred to in text. Please consult a [Style Guide](#) for information on correct labelling.
- Headings are usually not required for essays, but may be permitted or required for other forms of written assessment (e.g. reports).
- Include the question at the top of the essay.
- Include your name, student number and course code in the header.

9. Submitting

Via Turnitin

- Access Turnitin via your course blackboard.
- There is no need for a coversheet, as Turnitin will ask for your details.
- Turnitin will generate an 'originality report' which will highlight sections that match other texts. Review to ensure you have correctly referenced.
- Double check to ensure you received an email confirmation report.
- Make sure you submit on time to avoid any penalties.

- Email your tutor or lecturer if you have technical problems with Turnitin.
- If electronic submission is not required, Turnitin is a helpful tool to check that you have not used the work of others without appropriate referencing.
- The library have a tutorial and instructions on using Turnitin [here](#).

Due Dates and Extensions

- Due dates for submission of written work are designed to allow you to budget time and to prepare in advance. You must adhere to due dates.
- If you are unable to meet a due date you must seek an extension from the course coordinator or tutor well before the due date. Any extensions asked for on, or close to, the due date will require a medical certificate. Find the information on how to apply for an extension [here](#).
- Work submitted late without an authorised extension of time may attract penalties (see each Electronic Course Profile [also known as the E-Course Profile or ECP] for details).
- Any student with a disability who may require alternative academic arrangements, including assessment, in the course/program is encouraged to seek advice at the commencement of the semester from a Disability Adviser at Student Support Services. Please refer to:
 - [UQ Policy for Students with a Disability](#)
 - [Diversity, Disability and Inclusion Services](#)

Checklist for Submission

- ☒ Have you saved the most up-to-date version of your essay for printing/uploading?
- ☒ Have you proof-read your essay?
- ☒ Have you correctly formatted your essay?

10. Academic Misconduct

- Academic Misconduct can happen when students:
 - Plagiarise authors they have read
 - Work together with other students and submit the same work independently
 - Copy another student's work
 - Buy essays, assignments or answers, also known as contract cheating
 - If you are given, or steal essays
 - Take notes into exams, or have someone else sit the exam
 - Make up references or data
 - Hide library books, cut out pages or delete texts
 - Lie about medical conditions to get extensions
 - Have someone make major editing and proof reading corrections to assignments

What is Plagiarism?

- UQ has adopted the following definition on plagiarism ([UQ, 2012](#)):
 - Plagiarism is the act of misrepresenting as one's own original work, the ideas, interpretations, words or creative works of another. These include published and unpublished documents, designs, music, sounds, images, photographs, computer codes and ideas gained through working in a group. These ideas, interpretations, words or works may be found in print and/or electronic media.

- The following are examples of plagiarism if appropriate acknowledgement or referencing of the author or source does not occur:
 - Direct copying of paragraphs, sentences, a single sentence or significant parts of a sentence;
 - Direct copying of paragraphs, sentences, a single sentence or significant parts of a sentence with an end reference but without quotation marks around the copied text;
 - Copying ideas, concepts, research results, computer codes, statistical tables, designs, images, sounds or text or any combination of these;
 - Paraphrasing, summarising or simply rearranging another person's words or ideas without changing the basic structure and/or meaning of the text;
 - Offering an idea or interpretation that is not one's own without identifying whose idea or interpretation it is;
 - A 'cut and paste' of statements from multiple sources;
 - Presenting as independent, work done in collaboration with others;
 - Copying or adapting another student's original work into a submitted assessment item
- Plagiarism can include:
 - Unintentional plagiarism - Careless or inadequate referencing, or failure to reference and intentional plagiarism.
 - Intentional plagiarism, which will be treated as [academic misconduct](#).
- To ensure academic integrity, ensure you correctly and fully reference ideas and quotes in your essay, by following the reference guides and keeping track of your research.
- Complete the [Academic Integrity Modules](#).
- Review the policy on [Student Integrity and Misconduct](#).

11. Further Assistance

- Consult with your tutor or lecturer. They will have standard consultation hours, or in some cases you can make appointments, or discuss over email. While tutors and lecturers cannot read drafts of essays, they can give advice on structure and arguments.
- [Student Support](#) offer a range of online resources and tutorials for learning skills.
- The Library offers a range of research support, in person and online. Assistance and advice is also available via the [ASKUS](#) service in person or online via Chat
- [Supporting U](#) provide support for students regarding misconduct.