

**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.
- See [Student Services](#) for advice and tips on time management.

## 2. 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.
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 [Topic Analysis](#).

### **3. Understanding Criteria Sheets**

- In addition to the set question, you will also have a 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.
- Criteria sheets will differ between courses and pieces of assessment.
- Review the criteria for a high distinction or 7.

Example Criteria Sheet

Criteria	Mark/20	<50% (Grade - 3)	50 – 64% (Grade - 4)	65 – 74% (Grade - 5)	75 – 84% (Grade - 6)	85 – 100% (Grade - 7)
Understanding of the essay question and subject matter		Limited understanding of essay question and subject matter	Sound understanding of essay question and subject matter	Good understanding of essay question and subject matter	Very good understanding of essay question and subject matter	Excellent understanding of essay question and subject matter
Theoretical and conceptual understanding		Very little understanding and application of concepts and theories	basic grasp of concepts and theories, basic application of theories to argument.	Good understanding of relevant concept and theories. Used concepts well in argument.	Very good understanding of concepts and theories, used critically in argument.	Sophisticated use and critical appreciation of concepts and theories.
Quality of argument		Limited evidence of an argument – just listed points	Evidence of an argument	Sound argument	Very good argument with some originality	A sophisticated and original approach to the argument
Use of evidence and supporting literature		Limited research, and/or limited understanding of relevant literature	Understanding of relevant literature demonstrated at a sound level	Good understanding of basic and some more advanced literature	Very good understanding & application of basic and advanced literature	Sophisticated understanding & application of relevant, including advanced, literature
Structure and written presentation, including referencing		No evident structure, consistently poor spelling, grammar or syntax, or inadequate referencing	Basic structure evident, sound writing with few errors, adequate referencing	Clear structure, good English expression, very few textual errors, accurate referencing	Clear structure, concise and well written, accurate referencing	Very logical and concise, fluently/stylishly written and error free, accurate referencing
	Mark/100	Mark 15				

Engage with the key theories and ideas presented in the course.

Engage with the key theories and ideas presented in the course.

Craft a clear argument, drawing together a range of ideas, supported by evidence.

Draw on academic literature, beyond what has been set for the course, and be critical in your choice of literature.

Ensure your essay is well structures and clearly written. Allot time to proof-reading. Follow the referencing guide closely.

## 4. 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 ['search techniques' guides](#) to assist in finding quality information effectively. There is also [LIBRARY 101](#), a self-paced online tutorial that will guide you through all the things you should know about locating, using your Library and researching for your assignments.
  - **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.

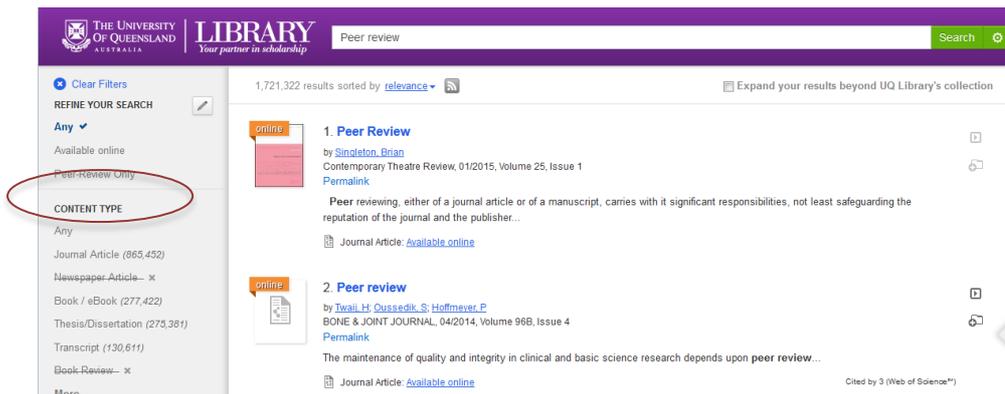
### ***Reading and Researching Critically***

- 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 [Beginning Research](#) and [Critical 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.
- Most journal articles have been peer-reviewed.
- 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.
- 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. Few of these think tanks do not have an explicit political agenda and funding base, and unless you recognise and acknowledge this, you should not use them.
- 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.

- 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.

## **5. 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. 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.

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

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

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

- Student Services have more tips on [Structuring your Writing](#).

### ***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. 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 out loud.
- 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

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before proofreading.

- It is also helpful to ask a classmate or peer to read your work, but make sure you have proof-read first, to develop skills as an independent scholar.
- Student Services have useful tips for [editing and proofreading](#).

#### **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?

## 6. 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 - [APA](#) 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 ([APA](#) and [Harvard](#)) in detail.
- 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.

### Referencing paraphrased ideas

- When you find important and relevant information in a source, you can paraphrase or re-phrase 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.
- Two styles of in-text referencing for paraphrasing are presented here.

#### Harvard Style In-text Paraphrasing

Paraphrase the authors arguments in your own words.

Regarding introductions, writers need to establish what needs to be done, and then state what they will do now (Thomson & Kalmer 2013).

Include the authors last names and the year of publication.

You can also refer to the authors directly when paraphrasing.

As Thomson and Kalmer (2103) write, authors need to include in introductions what needs to be done, and then state what they will do.

Include the authors last names and the year of publication in brackets.

#### APA Style In-text Paraphrasing

Regarding introductions, writers need to establish what needs to be done, and then state what they will do now (Thomson & Kalmer, 2013).

Include the authors last names and the year of publication, with a comma.

Include the authors last names and the year of publication in brackets.

As Thomson and Kalmer (2103) write, authors need to include in introductions what needs to be done, and then state what they will do.

### Referencing direct quotes

- Where appropriate, you can also include direct quotes from sources. Use direct quotes sparingly – it is preferable to use your own words, to demonstrate your research and comprehension.
- Ensure your quotes aren't 'floating' – this describes when quotes are incorporated as stand-alone sentences. You need to incorporate direct quotes into your own work.
- If the citation is a direct quote of an author's work, double quotation marks should be inserted around the words used.
- If the quotation is 3 lines or more in length, than the whole quotation is separated from the main text by a line, indented on both sides and single-line spaced. Quotation marks are left out.

**Harvard Style In-text Direct Quote**

Include the Page number.

As Thomson and Kalmer (2013, p. 95) state, "In the final section of the introduction, the writer must outline what they will do now that they have established that something needs to be done".

Incorporate the quote into a sentence.

Use quotation marks

**APA Style In-text Direct Quote**

Include the Page number.

As Thomson and Kalmer (2013, p. 95) state, "In the final section of the introduction, the writer must outline what they will do now that they have established that something needs to be done".

Use quotation marks.

**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.

**Harvard Style Reference List Example**

Title in italics

Location

Thomson, P & Kalmer, B 2013, *Writing for Peer Reviewed Journals*, Routledge, New York.

Author names and initials

Year

Publisher

**APA Style Reference List Example**

Title in italics

Punctuation

Location

Thomson, P., & Kalmer, B. (2013). *Writing for Peer Reviewed Journals*. Routledge: New York.

Author names and initials with full stops.

Year in brackets

Publisher

**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?

## **7. Formatting**

- Use a standard font, such as:
  - Ariel
  - Times New Roman
  - Cambria
  - Calibri
- Use 11 or 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 labeled, and referred to in text.
- Headings are usually not required for essays.
- Include the question at the top of the essay.
- Include your name, student number and course code in the header.

## **8. Submitting**

### ***In Hard Copy***

- Print out a copy of the School cover sheet, which you can access [here](#).
- Submit at the School of Social Science, Level 3 in the Michie Bld. There is a box beside reception for depositing essays and assignments. Your the cover sheet barcode will be scanned as a record of receipt
- Make sure you submit on time to avoid any penalties.

### ***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 form to apply for an extension [here](#).
- Work submitted late without an authorised extension of time may attract penalties (see each course outline 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](#)
  - [Disability Action Plan](#)
  - [Disability 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?

## **9. 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, 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 be 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 Tutorial](#) via siNet.
- Review the policy on [Student Integrity and Misconduct](#).

## **10. 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 are lecturers cannot read drafts of essays, they can give advice on structure and arguments.
- [Student Services](#) offer [regular workshops](#) in study, research and writing skills.
- Student Services also have 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
- [Student Help on Campus](#) (SHOC) provide support for students regarding misconduct.
- For further essay tips, exmple assignments, and contact with your Social Science HaSS Peer Mentors, visit the Faculty's 'Knowledge-Making in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences' Blackboard site, and click on Social Sciences (site to be released in Oweek). All students enrolled in HaSS first year courses will have access to the site via the Blackboard homepage <https://learn.uq.edu.au> (click on the site title under the 'My Communities' heading).