

Some Advice On Essay Writing

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Before Beginning the First Draft of the Essay

- Review the notes made by your instructor and revise your thesis, arguments and conclusion accordingly.
- If you need clarification or have further questions/concerns about the assignment, make an appoint immediately with your instructor.
- Revisit the *Grading Guidelines for Humanities* and other grading information provided on our Moodle site for a reminder of general expectations of university papers.
- Visit the link on Moodle to “Some Common Problems” and keep these in mind as you prepare the essay.

Preparing the First Draft of the Essay

- Write/print the thesis in large type and put it close to the place that you will be working so that you can refer quickly to it as you write the essay. Reread it frequently so that you stay on track.
- Be prepared to revise the thesis a bit, however, if, as you develop the argumentation, you discover a compelling reason to do so (e.g., some component(s) of the argumentation cannot be adequately supported by evidence from the source materials and you need to omit or revise it; your analysis has uncovered a different or new line of argumentation that will add depth to the existing thesis). If the thesis needs revision, pause and take a few minutes to make notes so that you will remember what changes need to be done once the entire paper is finished and you begin work on the second draft. Don't go back to the beginning and start all over: you may discover yet more places for revisions as you prepare a subsequent section of the paper. *** Remember that adjustments/revisions are expected, but substantial/radical changes to the thesis need to be cleared, first, with your instructor. (An example of a substantial change would be when the paper proposed in Stage 1 draws on the themes heroes and failures of imagination, and the essay submitted provides an analysis of completely different themes and/or entirely different texts from those proposed and accepted in Stage 1.)
- Be sure that you save a back-up copy of the assignment to a source external to your computer so that if that computer becomes inaccessible you still have a copy elsewhere of your work. Your hard work deserves to be treated with care. Computer problems are not acceptable reasons for late papers.
- Once you have completed the first draft of the paper, take a break away from it. If only for a few minutes. After the break, proofread the essay and make adjustments.

Preparing the Second and Subsequent Drafts

- Revisit the comments that your instructor has made on Stage 1 so that they are fresh in your mind..

- Read the entire paper, making notes as you do. Keep the instructor's comment in mind as you make notes. It might be helpful to read it aloud so that you can hear any problems with difficult sentences and problematic argumentation. Work with notes and small obvious changes - don't try to rewrite the entire paper at this point so that you can avoid spending time making detailed changes to sections that you may well have to go back and revise all over again once you have read through to the end of this draft.
- Concentrate first on content and then on writing/structure/flow issues.

Content

- Go over the argumentation to be sure that it is sufficiently supported by evidence from the source texts and that it adequately develops your thesis. Be sure that the argumentation flows clearly from one point to another. Make notes about where adjustments need to be made.
- Check to be sure that the conclusion serves its purpose and does not include any new ideas/points that have not been explicitly discussed/supported in the essay. If it does contain something new, go back to the thesis and argumentation to see if this new point may well better serve you as a revised thesis for the paper. Remember, however, that the argumentation must develop the thesis – if this new point in the conclusion is not already developed/supported in the existing argumentation, or cannot be easily supported with a few adjustments in that argumentation, then it may well be simply a stray idea that should be omitted from the paper. (Don't throw it entirely away: make a note and revisit it when you prepare the Critical Portfolio. It may serve you in one of the entries there.) If it is a crucial component to the overarching position that you wish to establish in the paper, then the thesis and the rest of the assignment needs to be reworked to include it.
- Revisit the thesis. Pull together any notes that you made about potential revisions as you were proofreading the first draft as well as those that you have made during this initial reread of the paper. Make adjustments accordingly.
- Reread the argumentation and conclusion and your notes about where adjustments need to be made. Make changes accordingly, in light of the revised thesis.

Writing/structure/flow issues

- Now revisit comments about your writing that your instructor has made on previous formal writing assignments. Consider, especially, those that other instructors have also made about your writing,
- Go back over the paper again, concentrating on the mechanics of your writing.
 - Check to be sure that you are not making the same mistakes that you have made on previous assignments, and about which your instructor has commented. Note if/where you have.
 - In addition to checking for such things as problems with tense, spelling, punctuation, grammar and paragraph structure, pay additional attention to citations and the bibliography/works cited. Are there citations for all of the references to source materials (remember, it is not just direct quotes that require citations). Are citations formatted correctly? Are the texts to which you refer in your bibliography/works cited and are their entries formatted correctly? Make notes where adjustments are required.

Begin final revisions of the paper in its entirety, taking into account all of the above.

Before Printing the Final Draft

- Take a break away from the paper. When you return, give it one last reading – aloud if that is helpful to you – make final adjustments.
- Be sure that you save a back-up copy of the assignment to a source external to your computer so that if something happens during the printing, the final version of the assignment does not become lost.

After Printing the Final Draft

- Confirm that the pages are all there, that they are upright, and in the correct order.
- Collect and attach to the back any/all additional materials that are required according to the assignment instructions.
- Be sure that your name, your Tutorial Instructor's name (not the name of the Course Director) and the tutorial number is prominent on the top of the first page, or on the title/cover page, if you provide one. If you do provide a title page, out of respect for the trees, be sure to include an actual title rather than simply list the name of the assignment.
- Review the assignment requirements to be sure that you have met them all.
- Staple everything together.
- Put it immediately in a place where you will be sure to remember to take it when you go to class. It would be a shame to do all this work and then forget the assignment at home on the day that it is due, perhaps incurring a late penalty as a result.

Break into a happy dance and/or treat yourself to something for a job well done!