



Guide to Essay Writing

for Distance Education Units

The following guide is for all distance students undertaking study at Swinburne. Please read carefully prior to writing and submitting essays.

Aim

The aim of an essay is to establish that a student has studied an area of relevance concerning a particular subject. Furthermore, it requires that a student has conducted some research of his/her own that expands on the course notes provided and integrates findings, data, and previous knowledge, with fresh ideas of the student.

There are many ways a question may be asked. For example, an essay question may ask the student to *discuss* a topic, perhaps from a particular stance, or *compare*, or *contrast*, two or more viewpoints of existing research. It may ask the student to identify aspects or situations and provide *comment*, or provide *critical analysis* of an aspect. The student needs to be aware of what exactly the question requires, before answering.

Structure

An essay is generally broken down into three major parts - an introduction, a discussion, and a conclusion. A reference list is attached after the conclusion.

The essay should commence with an ***Introduction***, which can be fairly brief (i.e. two or three paragraphs), and it should not include any references. This introduction should *set the scene* for the topic about which you are going to write. It may include a few sentences about aspects of the topic, but it **must** indicate to the reader:

- the purpose of the essay
- what the essay expects to demonstrate
- why the issue is relevant or important; and
- the methods of research being used

It is customary to call this part by its name; Introduction.

The ***Discussion*** area provides the key argument(s) relating to the essay topic(s). Although, strictly speaking an essay does not have headings, we encourage the

use of *limited* headings/sub-headings to help break the issues into parts. However, you should not use any numbering system in an essay.

Critical: Your research and writing must demonstrate an ***analytical*** approach to a topic rather than a descriptive approach. Essays that regurgitate course notes, cite large passages of text (even if correctly referenced), or provide copious description, may receive limited marks or may not be considered satisfactory to pass. Higher marks arise from an essay that is well structured, develops a logical and rational argument which has clearly been well thought-out and counter-balanced with many viewpoints. The way this is done is by researching a topic well. This means finding numerous, credible sources of information that help to answer the question. From this material judgement of the most useful and relevant information is important, as is the need to discard material that is not relevant. It also means acknowledging sources of research used throughout the essay, and in a suitably formatted reference list.

In this way an interesting, comprehensive argument can be developed, which demonstrates the student's capacity to study and undertake pertinent research. A higher quality essay also seeks to challenge information found, look at further implications of an issue, or consider changes and trends that could occur, or are occurring. For example, given a particular stance on a topic and supported by sound research, an argument might expand to consider the impact on industry, other stakeholders, and may even consider political issues such as trade, community response, social responsibility, and so forth.

It is very important to integrate material references into the argument. There are two very good websites provided by the Swinburne library, which provide the necessary information to do this (see Referencing for this unit). Note that marks are allocated not only for referencing systems, but for demonstrating how the reference material assists the argument.

The discussion section should be about 80% - 85% of the essay length.

The ***Conclusion*** of an essay should not repeat previous points, but should synthesise or draw together the issues argued previously, ensuring the argument satisfies the requirement of the essay topic(s). The conclusion should also offer some implications and/or recommendations. It should leave the reader satisfied that the topic has been researched and required issues have been discussed

adequately. A reader should be able to read the introduction and immediately read the conclusion to test whether the intent was matched by the outcome of the essay. Like the introduction, the conclusion should be limited to a few paragraphs. No new material should be introduced here, hence references are not needed.

Note: There is no executive summary or contents page in an essay. A title page should indicate to the marker the nature of the topic.

Style

Always write in the third person. In other words, **Never** use "I, me, myself" (1st person) or "you, your, yourself" (2nd person).

Proof reading work is critical to ensure the essay flows logically. Further, proof reading is important to ensure sentences and paragraphs are complete and grammar and spelling are correct.

Format

Assignments completed on-line may be marked on-line by the tutor or printed for ease of marking. Therefore, they need to comply with the following:

- Swinburne Cover sheet with name printed to acknowledge plagiarism and collusion disclaimers and signifies that the work is the student's own and undue assistance has not been obtained.
- Font size: Arial 11
- Spacing between lines: 1.5
- Header/footer: Should include Semester/year, student name, subject code, assignment number, and page number.
- Margins: 3cm on left and right, 2cm top and bottom
- No numbering system
- Limited use of bolding/italics

References and Reference List

Any material that is not the student's own **must** be referenced. In academic work, it is vital to integrate references used in your research appropriately throughout the essay. That is, if a particular source is referenced several times, it needs to be cited each time.

It is also vital to list references used in a **carefully formatted** reference list after the conclusion of the essay. See 'Referencing for this unit'.

Referencing system

The Swinburne preferred method for referencing is called the Harvard (American) system which requires 'in-text' references.

- References appear in one list only, (i.e. books, journals, internet addresses and personal communications all appear in one list).
- All references are displayed in alphabetical order of the authors (- in the case of multiple authors, the lead author's surname is important to the alphabetical list). If in doubt, consult any text book that contains references.

- **Internet references**

The internet is fast becoming a most valuable resource. All major companies host websites and much information can be gleaned from them. From the Swinburne aviation website, links page, students are referred to a list of links. See <http://www.swin.edu.au/aviation/links.htm> for a start. *Be careful with internet sources, however – they must be credible sites. Be aware that you also need to reference website specifically both in-text and in the reference list.*

Essay Marking Criteria

Marks are awarded for the following criteria although the allocation of marks for any section shown (or others) may vary with individual subjects.

Structure	The essay should contain information and be structured as indicated above – i.e. Cover sheet, Declaration, Introduction, Discussion, Conclusion, References
Content	The essay needs to demonstrate a sound understanding of the issues and any applications to industry in the area of the chosen topic. Terms used should be clearly defined, and relationships explained. Question (s) asked need to be answered soundly.
Analysis	Essay needs to demonstrate the formulation of a logical argument which draws together various ideas, theories, viewpoints etc., from numerous sources which are correctly integrated into the argument and supported by examples and other information. Argument needs to be written in critical style, not descriptive.
References	Material from a number of sources including any prescribed textbook, journals, personal interviews, appropriate magazines, newspapers and credible web sites must be correctly integrated into the argument. An acceptable method of referencing must be shown. here's a good place to start.
Presentation	Readability of an essay is largely dependant on overall presentation and layout, sentence construction, grammar, and spelling.