

Essay Writing – Points to Note

4 *Basic Principles*

1. Arguments in the social sciences must be supported by **evidence or examples**. Making a statement without evidence is assertion. Passionate as it may be, it fails to convince.
2. One should also **avoid one-sided arguments**. An important aspect of critical thinking is the ability to see multiple sides of an issue. It is always more convincing to the readers if you have considered alternative explanations or interpretations before coming to a conclusion.
3. **Reading/research** provides the necessary stimulus to good writing. The more/wider you read, the more ideas you will have upon which to reflect, the more you will be inspired to write.
4. Good quality writing requires discerning preparation. Fact collection is only one of the steps. Persuasive writing displays logic and analysis, coherence and effective communication. [That is why even when two students present the same facts in their essays, they could end up getting different grades.]

10 *Practical Hints*

1. Introduction -your essay should always begin with an introductory section which spells out the subject matter, the scope, the time frame, and the key concepts to be addressed. Within this section, your thesis is the pivotal statement which clearly defines the specific position on the subject that you are attempting to defend.
2. Present your arguments in a logical sequence, using sub-headings when necessary.
3. Present supporting evidence – could be drawn from press clippings, speeches, material from the web, news magazines, journal articles, scholarly books, etc.
4. **AVOID PLAGIARISM** – when you are quoting verbatim or paraphrasing someone else's work, always acknowledge the source. This applies whenever you are using other people's ideas, expressions, opinions, statistics, etc. For further information, please go to www.hku.hk/plagiarism
5. Endnotes or footnotes could be used to offer additional information on the point that you are making, without affecting the flow of the essay proper. Endnotes or footnotes could also be used to cite the source of your information.

6. **If necessary**, appendices could be attached to your essay.
7. Conclusion – it should summarize your major findings or main arguments. Be careful not to contradict yourself, especially if you have already taken a position in the introduction. Do not smuggle in a new argument or a new perspective at this stage.
8. Balance – the introduction and the conclusion should not take up a disproportionate length. Let common sense prevail.
9. Keep to the word limit. Quality is not measured by length.
10. Submit on time. To ensure you meet the deadline, start early. Computers and printers tend not to co-operate with you if you leave things to the last minute. Sadly, experience also tells us that grandmothers and aunts (in that order) have the highest probability of passing away around the *deadline*.

2 *major styles of referencing* (Choose one only, and be consistent throughout)

1. Footnote/Endnote referencing.

In the essay, whenever you refer to someone else's work, you insert a number at the end of the phrase/sentence. Full citation is not needed for repeated reference.

(For books) Author, *Title of Book*, (Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication), page number(s).

e.g. David Farrell, *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001) p. 97

[If this book appears the second time in your reference, you could simplify it to David Farrell, *Electoral Systems*, p.156]

(For journal articles) Author, "Title of article", *Name of Journal*, Volume number, Issue number, Year, pages.

e.g. Julie Dolan, "Women in the Executive Branch: A Review Essay", *Women and Politics*, Vol.22, No.4, 2001, pp.89-104

2. Author-date format.

In the essay, whenever you refer to someone else's work, you simply put the author's surname and the year of publication in brackets, plus the page number if applicable. For example:

A survey of Executive Officers in 1999 found that over 75 per cent of the respondents thought that performance pledges had been effective (Scott, 2000:122).

If you use this style of referencing, you will need a **full bibliography** (arranged alphabetically by the author's **surname**) at the end of the essay. For example,

Scott, I. (2000). Public sector reform and middle managers in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol.22, No.2, pp.107-134

Internet citations

While the standards on how to best cite research obtained “on line” are still being developed, when citing sources from the internet you should at least, when available, include the following information (this format and the example is taken from James D. Lester, *Citing Cyberspace*, NY: Addison, Wesley, Longman, 1997. June 18, 2003 <<http://www.apsu.edu/~lesterj/CYBER3.HTM>>):

- Author/editor name
- Title of the article within quotation marks
- Name of the book, journal, or complete work, italicized
- Publication information
 - * Place, publisher, and date for books
 - * Volume and year of a journal
 - * Exact date of a magazine
 - * Date and description for government documents
- Date of your access, not followed by a period
- URL (Uniform Resource Locator), within angle brackets, followed by a period

Example of an online magazine:

Fahey, Todd Brendan. “Beach House.” *Kudzu* Autumn 1995. 10 Mar. 1997
<<http://www.etext.org/Zines/k954/fahey-Beach.html>>

We recommend three websites for guidance on how to write a persuasive essay:

- The University of Victoria’s Hypertext Writer’s Guide <http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/>
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. www.bartleby.com/141/
- Jack Lynch’s Guide to Grammar and Style
<http://andromedia.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/writing/index.html>