

English Faculty Advice

Essays: Presentation, Content and Style

Presentation

Presentation is important, especially for your extended essays and your optional thesis if you choose to do one. You will find it much easier to meet the standards required for these if you have practised good essay presentation throughout your course. The scholarly procedures we will be looking for are really very straightforward.

1. **Quotations.** When you quote from a text, make sure you do it accurately: always check! Giving page numbers, or line references, will help you to locate the quotation when you come to revision, and is a requirement of the extended essays.

2. **References.** When you refer to a book, or a play, or a long poem, underline the title in hand-writing (this is printers' code for italicisation in print), (Bleak House, Hamlet, Paradise Lost). In word-processing *italicise* titles of books and long poems. Titles of short stories, essays, or shorter poems, i.e. items found within books, should go in quotation marks ("Amos Barton", "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time", "The Kraken"). It is often useful, particularly for revision purposes, to note the date too ("...Browning's Men and Women (1855)..."). In order for you and others to find the quotation, you should provide at the end of your essay a short list of the works (both literary and critical) that you have consulted and/or cited in your essay. Include sufficient brief publication information for it to be clear which edition of a work you have used (e.g., Penguin, 1994; or, more fully, ed., Isobel Armstrong, Penguin, 1994). This may seem like a lot of work for a weekly essay, but you will be required to provide this information in your extended essays, it is good scholarly practice and it will be useful for you to get into the habit now of including these details.

3. **Critics.** When you refer to the work of a critic, you should acknowledge that you have done so, name the critical work in question (e.g. not "...recent critics have claimed that..." but "...in Browning's Hatreds (1993), Daniel Karlin claims that..."), and of course include the page number. These works should be included in your list of works cited at the end of the essay. To do this you will of course need to take accurate notes of your critical reading in the first place. Not to acknowledge that you have used another's ideas – even if you are merely paraphrasing what they have said – is **plagiarism**, a serious form of intellectual theft. Every time you use another's ideas, you must give them credit – even in your weekly essays. Certainly, should you be found guilty of plagiarism in any piece of work you submitted towards completion of the requirements for a degree of the University, you would be subject to disciplinary action.

Content

1. Don't try to include everything in your essay. If, for instance, you're writing on Shakespeare's imagery, you are not going to be able to say all that there is to be said about Shakespeare's stagecraft as well, though it might be relevant to say something brief about it. One of the things you have to learn as you

practise the skill of writing a literary essay is to be selective – again, it is crucial both for extended essays and for examination essays.

2. Always try to construct a coherent argument. Write with the aim of persuading your tutor or tutorial partner of your point of view. First, you need to be sure that you do in fact have a point of view, and that it is defensible – and, preferably, interesting. There’s no rule against being controversial. You might have changed your mind by the end of term (or indeed by the end of the tutorial), but that doesn’t matter.
3. Be specific. Vague generalizations about an author or a topic never get you very far. This is true whether you’re engaged on a piece of focused textual analysis, or discussing a large cultural issue. Always try to pin your argument down to specific texts, and specific evidence.

Style

1. Critical language is formal, and chatty colloquialisms are best avoided. But don’t go to the other extreme and become pompous. A simple and direct style is usually most convincing.
2. Avoid clichés, always a sign of a brain off-duty (“harsh reality”, “deep yearning”, “dark despair”...). Make sure that every word you use earns its keep.
3. Avoid critical terms, either of commendation or condemnation, that have no real content. “Effective language” is a good example – effective in what way? Adjectives such as “powerful”, “rich”, “striking” also fall into this category (still more, phrases like “incredibly rich”, “extremely striking”, “very powerful”...), not to mention “passionate” or “beautiful”.

Faculty of English Stylesheet

This stylesheet is used for third year extended essays. By following these conventions from day one you will get into good habits of essay presentation.

1. *Presentation*

Your essay should be printed on one side only of good quality, opaque paper. The body of your essay should be double-spaced. Short quotations of a sentence or less should not be set in a paragraph by themselves. Longer quotations should be set in a separate paragraph, indented and single-spaced. Ensure that you allow yourself sufficient time to attend properly to the presentation of our work.

2. *References*

All quotations from, and allusions to, any work require a precise reference. References are best put in footnotes, and footnotes are best at the foot of the page (most word-processing applications create and position footnotes automatically). Failing that, they may be collected and printed together at the end of the essay. Take particular care over the proof-reading of our quotations and the verification of your references.

3. *Forms of reference*

Examples of how to construct a reference to (a) a book by a single author, (b) a poem in an edition of a single author (cited by first line), (c) a poem in an anthology (cited by title), (d) an article, (e) an essay in a collection of essays, and (f) a volume in a multi-volume work.

(a) book by single author – first reference:

O.Wol, *Orthographic Conventions and Individual Choice* (Oxford, 1969), p.523.

further references:

Wol, *Orthographic Conventions*, pp.306-9.

entry in main bibliography:

Wol, O., *Orthographic Conventions and Individual Choice* (Oxford, 1969)

(b) edition of single author / modern reprint of old edition – first reference:

“How sweet to be a cloud”, *The Collected Hums of Ouinné Lepoux* ed. C. Robin (1931; repr. Tunbridge Wells, 1992), no.23.

further references:

Lepoux, *Collected Hums*, no.15, lines 3-4.

entry in main bibliography:

Lepoux, Ouinné, *The Collected Hums of Ouinné Lepoux* ed. C. Robin (1931; repr. Tunbridge Wells, 1992).

(c) poem in anthology – first reference:

“The Knight whose Armour didn’t Squeak”, *The Penguin Book of Technological Verse*, ed. Helen Gardner (Harmondsworth, 1995), p. 166, line 19.

further references:

Technological Verse ed. Gardner, p.223.

entry in main bibliography:

Gardner, Helen, ed., *The Penguin Book of Technological Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1995).

(d) article – first reference:

W.T. Pooh, “Eleveses customs in the Sussex Weald”, *Journal of Cultural and Folklore Studies* 83 (1954), 24-87 (p71).

(Note that 24-87 indicates the page numbers of the whole article, p.71 the page referred to.)

further references:

Pooh, "Eleveses customs", p. 78.

entry in main bibliography:

Pooh, W.T., "Eleveses customs in the Sussex Weald", *Journal of Cultural and Folklore Studies* 83 (1954), 24 –87.

(e) essay in collection – first reference:

K. Roo, "The stripey Other: Tigger and domestic upheaval", *Essays in Imperialism and Immigration* ed. Stephen Brownblott (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 143-85.

further references:

Roo, "The stripey Other", p.150.

entries in main bibliography:

Roo, K., "The stripey Other: Tigger and domestic upheaval", in Brownblott, ed., *Essays in Imperialism and Immigration*, pp. 143-85.

AND

Brownblott, Stephen, ed., *Essays in Imperialism and Immigration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992)

(f) multi-volume work – first reference:

M.Rabbit, *Management and the Media*, 6 vols (Basingstoke, 1989-93), V.422-6.

further reference:

Rabbit, *Management*, III.29.

entry in main bibliography:

Rabbit, M., *Management and the Media*, 6 vols (Basingstoke, 1989-93).

The final bibliography should be divided into **Primary material** (i.e. editions of literary texts) and **Secondary material** (critical and scholarly works), each section arranged in alphabetical order. To use the examples given above, "Primary material" would list the entries for Gardner and Lepoux (in that order), "Secondary material" would list the entries for Brownblott, Pooh, Rabbit, Roo and Wol.