

Essay Worksheet

A work of art needs to be carefully considered. You spend time thinking about your brief; you do the necessary critical and contextual background research, gather the necessary resources and create your work of art only when every aspect of it has been well thought out. The result is, hopefully, a piece of work that communicates your ideas in an imaginative way. An essay is no different - you still need the right balance of elements; you need to carefully consider how you are going to approach your brief, do the necessary background research and think about what textual analysis, quotes from theorists, and contextual information is necessary in order to effectively communicate and evidence your argument.

Essay Structure Diagram

Intro 10% word count	Introduce Context State Argument Define Structure (how you will be proving your argument)	Be Confident
Section One One Third of remaining word count	Theme One OR Artist/Artwork One MUST inform Section Two and Three	Start with your simplest or broadest theme/ idea
Section Two One Third of remaining word count	Theme Two OR Artist/Artwork Two MUST lead on from Section One and inform Section Three	Should be a more complex or more specific theme/ idea
Section Three One Third of remaining word count	Theme Three OR Artist/Artwork Three MUST lead on from BOTH Section One and Section Two	Finish with your most complex or specific theme/ idea
Conclusion 10% Word count	Draw together evidence Reiterate Argument	NO NEW INFO

Step by Step Guide

1. Decide on either a critical approach (gender, identity, postmodernism, psychoanalysis etc) OR an artist or genre you wish to study, then pick your approach (description, definition, rhetorical, compare and contrast)
2. Consider it in relation to the brief, and do not attempt merely to “answer” the question - rather use it as a springboard for an argument - which means finding something definite to say which you believe you can defend.
3. Read up on BOTH your chosen artist/genre AND your critical approach. You can speed read, you do not need to understand every single sentence, but rather the overall points of the essays. Type any quotes (into word or pages) you think might be useful for your essay, and fully reference them. This will give you a stock of theory to draw from.
4. Draw up your bibliography at this stage - it will seem even more of a chore once the rest of the essay is completed.
5. Referencing websites is a last resort, wherever possible try to find the information you need in a book as this will lend weight to your argument. A book isn't going to change - a website might.
6. Draw up the structure for your paper, (using the worksheet included here) and then (directly into your computer) arrange your “stock” theory onto these sections. Some will need to be deleted - but don't worry, gathering them wasn't a waste of time as they will help you even if you don't realise it.
7. Write your introduction, laying out your *argument* and your chosen approach (your critical approach and your structure). It should be clear to whoever is reading the work *exactly* what you are trying to say in the essay.
8. Write each section in order, making sure they lead logically into one another, and that you don't say anything (no matter how clever) that is unnecessary to your argument as this will be seen as a deviation from your point.
9. Make sure you use the quotes from your research, and that they are integrated into your own writing rather than just being stuck in as a block of text.
10. Make sure you critically examine any texts (images) you are focusing on, and avoid obvious or cliched statements. There is no justification for them in this day and age.
11. Your conclusion should mirror your introduction - it should reiterate your original argument and summarise the evidence you have presented to prove your argument - do *not* include any new information in your conclusion and *do not* save any brilliant ideas for the conclusion.
12. When you reach the end of your essay, re-write your introduction to make sure everything ties in completely.
13. Leave the essay (if possible for a few days) and then proof read a printed version. Any flaws in the grammar, structure or argument will become more apparent after a time away from the work.
14. Make corrections based upon that proof reading.
15. Attach your bibliography (VERY IMPORTANT!).

Essay Approaches - Pick One!

Description Paper:

Tells us what something looks like, the appearance of things.

Strengths: You can demonstrate acuity of perception and sensitivity to qualitative features of texts and theories.

Risks: If you talk about the obvious then the paper is redundant, and if you don't engage enough with critical theory the essay will not be suitable for degree level.

Definition Paper:

Tells us what something really is, not just how it appears.

Strengths: You can isolate essential features that characterize what something actually is (eg, a portrait might have political undertones)

Risks: You need to remember there is a difference between being able to describe and being able to define. This is more suitable for degree level.

Rhetorical Paper:

Any paper trying to prove a strong argument.

Strengths: you can use this type of paper to prove your own idea or someone else's.

Risks: Bear in mind that there could be alternative arguments, and that these papers are often combative (you are essentially picking a fight!).

Compare & Contrast Paper:

Any paper comparing two or more viewpoints on a given subject.

Strengths: you can expose the similarities and differences of different critical approaches and reveal the limitations of these approaches.

Risks: You need to ensure you are able to navigate your way through these approaches to come up with ideas of your own.

Essay Structure Worksheet

Introduction - 10% words appx

Introduction to general context of essay:

Main Argument:

Outline of sections of essay (how you will go about proving your argument - ie, list the topics of your three next sections):

Section One - 1/3 remaining words appx - Simplest/

Broadest Idea

Artists?

Artwork?

Theorists that can back up your argument or provide you with insight into your chosen artwork:

Section Two - 1/3 remaining words appx - More Complex

Idea

Artists?

Artwork?

Theorists that can back up your argument or provide you with insight into your chosen artwork:

How does this section logically follow from section one?

Section Three - 1/3 remaining words appx - Most Complex

Idea

Artists?

Artwork?

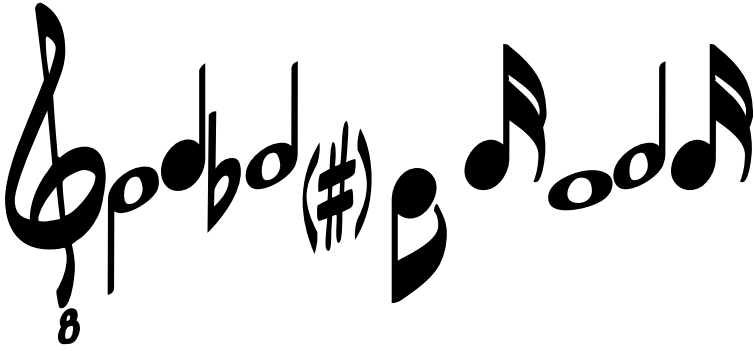
Theorists that can back up your argument or provide you with insight into your chosen artwork:

How does this section logically follow from and build on sections one and two?

Conclusion - 200 words appx

Summarise argument:

Notes



Peer Notes/Suggestions

Name:

Date:

Is there an argument?

Is it well structured (does each section inform the ones that follow in a logical order)?

Is the essay easy to read and grammatically correct?

Is there close critical analysis of texts (photographs/films)?

Is there sufficient theoretical underpinning (are there theorists quoted which help the argument of the essay)?

Suggestions for improvement:

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Date:

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Suggestions for improvement:

10 Most Common Essay Mistakes

Please avoid:

- Single spacing the essay
- Not completing your references and bibliography in the Harvard style
- Not quoting directly from theorists
- Not including all the images you discuss in the essay
- Repeating the same thing in different ways
- Writing a description of a photograph, without critical analysis
- Giving the life story of an artist, when it is not relevant to the argument
- Giving an overview of the history of a particular aspect/genre of art, when it is not relevant to the argument
- Trying to talk about too many examples/theorists and as a result not going into enough depth - or worse, getting confused
- Making general assumptions or statements which are then not evidenced

Essay Checklist

Go through this before handing your essay in.....

Requirements	Fulfilled
The essay is double spaced	
The essay includes a Bibliography in the Harvard style	
Any quotes (direct or paraphrased) have been referenced	
All facts/figures/statistics have been referenced	
All references are in the Harvard system (see library handout if unsure)	
Any numbers you mention are written in words and any book/film/ photograph titles are in italics	
Any figures should be numbered, captioned, floated and referenced in your essay and your pages should be numbered	
Your paragraphs are even in length, and approx two - three per page	
Your first sentence outlines the context that you are writing about	
You posit your argument within the first two paragraphs	
You outline your plan for the essay (themes, artists etc) in the first two paragraphs	
Your essay is structured in three parts, each of which leads on to the other logically - and you start with simpler/broader ideas and get more complex as you go through the essay	
Each sections covers one theme OR one artist/work or art	
You have considered a general critical idea in relation to your medium	
You have backed up your ideas and opinions with quotes from theorists	
You have spent time thinking about your essay and its argument	
You have re-written your introduction to fit with the rest of the essay	
You have a conclusion which reiterates/summarises your argument	
You have deleted anything that is not completely necessary to your argument (even if you think it is a good idea)	
You have spent time thinking about your essay and its argument	
You have proof read a printed copy of your essay (AND got someone else to do it for you) - preferably a day or two after you have written it	

