

Writing Essays

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What we look for

- Critically informed argument
- Organized response, planned
- Clarity of writing
- Engagement with the question asked
- Closeness to text; textual analysis
- Not description/Not re-telling
- Don't give us back lecture notes
- Scholarly presentation

Do what the question asks

- Discuss
- Compare
- Write an essay/ Write an introduction/ What do you understand by?/Write about/Describe
- Do you agree?

Primary texts

- Use authoritative critical texts
- Do not trust texts found on the internet

Secondary/Critical material

- Use bibliographies provided by lecturers/tutors
- Library shelves
- Library catalogues
- Use proper critical material

Note-taking

- Read interactively
- Accuracy of quotations
- Reflect on the question asked
- Plan carefully
- Plan carefully
- Most of time in planning not writing
- Draft your essay

Reference books/Dictionaries

- All-purpose for words unsure about
OED, Collins, Chambers, Shorter Oxford,
Concise
- Specialist dictionaries for literary terms

Style

- Handbook
- 1.5 or double-spaced
- Number the pages
- Adequate margins
- Clear breaks between paragraphs
- 12 point font
- Indent longer quotes
- Footnotes for all quotes
- Single quotation marks for poems, short stories
- Bibliography
- Write in English

What to avoid

- Immersion in secondary material
- Careless writing/spelling/clichés
- Slack words, language
- Use of problematic internet sources/overuse of internet material
- Use of headings, subsections: write in continuous prose

Common problems with essays

- Insufficiently informed critically
- Overdependence on secondary material
- Use of problematic sources
- Poor presentation (margins, spacing, font/size, referencing)
- Poor paragraphing, poor sentences
- Lack of clear argument/structure
- Poor grammar, spelling, punctuation (it's instead of its)
- Unclear expression
- Retelling of plot/description instead of analysis
- Lack of or unclear Introduction/conclusion

Learn from your essay

- Experience of researching/writing
- No substitute for practice
- Expectation of improvement each essay
- Read comments carefully
- Meet with marker