

Guide to Writing Political Science Essays

The following guidelines are intended to assist you in your attempt to fulfil our expectations. Please read them carefully.

I - Planning and Research

Planning

An essay or paper must be more than a series of random thoughts. It should be written with a purpose in mind. This purpose (or theme) will, to some extent, be formed by the assignment. Choose a topic that interests you. Or, you may wish to write on a topic that you are already familiar with. Examine your topic closely and look at the keywords. What are you being asked to write about? For example, some assignments might require you to consider an issue and draw a conclusion, while others might require you to compare and contrast the views of different theorists. Some assignments may require you to assess all sides of an issue. Other assignments require you to set out a clear hypothesis, or central argument, and then attempt to demonstrate that argument. Whatever your purpose, you should try to state it clearly in your introductory paragraph. This will help you as well as the reader. Brainstorm your ideas and do a rough outline. Try to put together a list of issues, questions that will help you understand the assignment.

Research

Begin by reading your relevant lecture notes, items on your reading list and any other material recommended by your lecturer or tutor. Locate books, journal articles, newspapers, statistical sources in the library. Also search for academic journal articles through the recommended library databases. You may also wish to check the internet and consult credible web sites such as newspapers, government sites etc.

It may be useful to start initially with general sources. Determine what other specific information you need to explore your topic. The staff at the library information services desk will gladly help you. Keep in mind that the proper use of sources is assessed, and that one of the goals of the assignment is to develop your research skills.

Take notes making sure that you cite the author's names, title of the book/journal article and other bibliographic information. Skim read the material at first, always asking yourself "Is this relevant to my topic?". If it is not, it is unnecessary to re-read it or take additional notes on it. Do not swamp yourself with time-consuming note-taking that you can never use.

Read critically. Much of what experts write on a topic is open to debate. Try to find out other sides to an argument.

II - Organisation and Writing

Once you think you have completed your research and organized your material, start thinking about an outline. Your outline should be clearly structured with a main argument, and relevant evidence for developing your argument. You may wish to show your outline to your tutor or lecturer to make sure that you are moving in the right direction. Even if your tutor is not able to read your outline, it is always useful to have one because a clear framework helps you clarify your thoughts and ideas.

Introduction

Provide a context and any relevant information for your discussion.

Clearly state your central argument or your hypothesis in your introduction. State whether A causes B: whether A contributes to B; whether A leads to B; or whether A is a precondition of B, etc. For example, development leads to democracy; higher levels of education contribute to greater gender equity, etc. You may take a side and promote your considered argument. However, it would be worthwhile to also acknowledge and address contrary opinions.

Define all important terms and then use those terms consistently. Discuss relevant literature.

Explain what evidence you will use to support your argument. Do not simply state your argument -- a Political Science essay or paper should consist of logically reasoned arguments for your conclusions.

Try to understand all sides of the question, even as you present your own argument. Anticipate and answer any obvious objections to what you are saying.

Body

The body of your essay provides supporting evidence for your main argument or hypothesis. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence, that is, the main point for that particular paragraph. Develop your argument in the paragraph by showing evidence. Begin another paragraph and discuss another aspect of your main argument/hypothesis. Link your paragraphs together. Try to develop your ideas logically and coherently.

Conclusion

Remind the reader your argument and main points of evidence. What conclusions can you draw from your discussion? What is the significance/implication of your argument? Do not introduce new material in your conclusion.

III - Presentation, Style and Format

Style

Use an academic style rather than a chatty, informal style. Do not use obscure, pretentious words where simple words would be more precise. The most profound thoughts can be expressed simply and clearly.

Avoid long quotations. The reader wants to see your perspective and not that of someone else.

Repetition is tedious and should be avoided. Avoid clichés and slogans; they will not strengthen your arguments.

Obvious errors of spelling and grammar (not to mention fact) do not impress markers. If this is one of your weak points, get someone else to check your essay before you hand it in.

Editing

Editing your essay usually improves the quality of your essay. The easiest way to edit is to work on a computer. Once you get your first draft onto a computer, it is very easy to edit it (the computer will even do a spell check). Give yourself enough time for the editing process. As you edit, your goal should be to improve the spelling, grammar, organization and logic.

If your essay is over the word limit you will need to condense it. This can be done by removing unnecessary words and eliminating repetition. You may find it necessary to remove portions of your essay that do not directly address your topic. Try to organize your essay more efficiently.

Format

Your full name and your tutor's name should appear on the first page of the essay. Leave a right hand and left hand margin of about 4 cm for comments by your marker. Number your pages, and type on one side only. Staple your essay together. Try to keep to the word limit

You should try to type your essay using double spacing. If you must write by hand, make sure it is neatly written and legible.

Make sure you have acknowledged all your sources and remember to include a reference list at the end of your essay. Keep an electronic copy of your essay.

IV - Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use, without proper acknowledgement, of someone else's material. As it is a form of cheating it is considered dishonest and carries the highest penalties in the University. However, while some of the most obvious forms of plagiarism are easily recognised, there are more subtle forms which one can fall into often without even realizing it.

It is important to recognize that all scholarship involves using other people's material in a variety of ways. Since academic essays, articles and books all rely heavily on previous scholarship, it is important for a writer to distinguish between the contributions of previous scholarship and his or her own contribution. In most cases, a writer's original contribution to scholarship consists mainly of selecting, ordering, summarizing and interpreting what other scholars have said. It is therefore important to learn how to reference properly, that is, how to specify clearly what your debts are and how to acknowledge them. Then your own contribution can be more clearly identified and appreciated.

IF YOU ARE IN ANY DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER SOMETHING CONSTITUTES PLAGIARISM, PLEASE CHECK WITH YOUR TUTOR BEFORE HANDING IN YOUR ESSAY.

PLAGIARISM IS CHEATING AND MAY RESULT IN A ZERO GRADE FOR YOUR ESSAY AND FURTHER PENALTIES IMPOSED BY THE UNIVERSITY.

The University's interpretation of what constitutes dishonest practice includes the following:

- **Plagiarism**, being the presentation of any material (text, data or figures, on any medium including computer files) from any other source without clear and proper acknowledgement of the source of that material.
- **Collusion**, being work performed in whole, or in part, in conjunction with another person or persons, but submitted as if it had been completed by the named author alone (or joint authors if a group item of work). This is not intended to discourage students from having discussions with each other about how to approach a particular assigned task, and incorporating general ideas coming out of such discussions into their own individual submissions.
- **Copying**, being the use of material (in any medium, including computer files) produced by another person or persons, with or without their knowledge and approval.
- **Ghost writing**, being the use of another party (with or without any form of payment) to prepare all or part of an item of work submitted for assessment.

Under the University Regulations, evidence of any of these or other forms of dishonest practice by any student(s) represents grounds for disciplinary action and may result in penalties ranging from denial of credit for the item of work in question to exclusion from the University.

IV - Referencing

When you write your essay, you need to indicate whose ideas and information you use to support or shape your argument. A referencing system allows you to acknowledge your sources using a standardized method. You are strongly encouraged to use the author-date system or the Harvard referencing system. For this system, you need to provide the name of the author, year of publication and page number in the text within parentheses and also include a list of references you cited at the end of your essay.

In-Text Referencing

The following are some examples of the way you use this system of referencing.

a.If you are referring to an author in your text, cite as follows;

“Fred Von Der Mehden (1986: 13-19) argues that not only are these scholars alienated from religion...”

b.If you use ideas directly from your source, cite as follows;

“Many of the candidates were forced to abandon traditional methods of electioneering, and to confront their constituents with issues rather than banknotes (Young 1998: 72).”

c.If you use a source with more than one author, cite as follows;

“It is a struggle for both cultural authenticity and self-determination (Keppel and Taylor 1999: 56).”

If there are more than three authors, cite as“(Keppel et al 1999: 56)”.

d.If you cite two publications from the same author in one year, cite as follows;
(Brown 2005a) or (Brown 2005b).

e.If you use a chapter from an edited volume, cite the author of the article and not the editor of the book.

f.If you use a quotation from the original source that has been reproduced in the source you have read, cite as follows;

“As Fernea argues, “..education has been, and continues to be, the spur...” (cited in Brown 2005: 189).” [Note that you list Brown in your reference but not Fernea because you have not read Fernea].

g.If you use a website, the information should include the author’s name(s), the person, organization responsible for the site and the date created or revised.
For example, (United Nations 1996); (The Brookings Institution 2006).

h.If you decide to use a direct quote, make sure that the quotation is in inverted commas and cited correctly. If a direct quote is more than three lines, the quote should be placed as a block quote, that is, indented on both sides and without inverted commas. Remember to give the correct citation. Excessive use of quotations indicates a lack of originality and should be avoided.

Reference List

At the end of your essay or paper, you should provide a list of books and articles cited. Books and articles not cited in the essay or paper should not appear in this reference list. The list is organized alphabetically by surname; the author’s surname comes first, then her/his first name or initials. Write the author’s name, title of book or article (edition, if relevant), place (city) of publication, and the name of the press.

Book

Mulgan, Richard.1994. *Politics in New Zealand*. Auckland: University of Auckland Press.

Chapter in Collected Work/Edited Volume

Wood, G.A. 1992. “The National Party” . In *New Zealand Politics in Perspective*. Third Edition. Ed., Hyam Gold. Auckland: Longman Paul. Pp.289-309.

Article in Journal (same author, 2 publications)

Friedland, Jonathan. 1994. “The Regional Challenge” . *Far Eastern Economic Review*. 157(23): 40-41.

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Internet Sites and Databases

The internet is a wonderful source of information but you should use it with caution and care. All internet referencing must include the author of the article and/or name of web site. You are encouraged to use web sites from well-known institutional

sources such as newspapers, government web sites, international organizations, or research institutes.

Generally, references to the internet should include the following information:

- author/ name of web site
- title of the article
- web address (URL)
- date the article was published, if available
- date the article was accessed

Examples:

The Brookings Institution. 2006. "Iraq Index: Tracking of Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq". August 2006.
<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/indexarchive.htm> (accessed 15 June, 2006)

Amnesty International. 2006. "Beyond Abu Ghraib: Detention and Torture in Iraq".
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGMDE140012006> (accessed 21 March 2006).

Note that for journal or newspaper articles, the complete reference from the journal or newspaper should be given along with the web address.

For example, Fernea, Elizabeth. "The Challenges for Middle Eastern Women in the 21st Century". *Middle East Journal*. 54(2):185-193. Available at: name of database, URL of database (accessed 7 August 2007).

Note: There are many different acceptable forms of internal punctuation. Choose one form and use it consistently.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR SOURCES IN ORDER TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

V - Grading

Indication of usual characteristics;

D/E range	Poor research, poor organization of material, poorly written and argued. Content often irrelevant to the question.
C range	Adequate research and organization, expressed intelligibly. Tendency to rely on familiar beliefs and arguments and to adopt a safe, unmemorable approach. Summarizes without analysing.
B range	Well-researched, well-thought out, well-organized, and well-written. The argument and the analysis are convincing.
A range	Elegance of style, originality of ideas or use of ideas in original ways, strong argumentation, clear and intelligent organisation.

VI - Late Essays

Extensions will only be granted on medical grounds or for exceptional family or personal circumstances, which usually involve serious medical problems.

Late essays, which have not been granted extensions, will be penalized 2% per day up to a maximum of ten days. Your essay may not be marked if it is more than ten days late. Please remember, a barely passing essay handed in ten days late may still receive a D, which is vastly better than the zero you have to be given if you do not hand in an essay. It is extremely difficult to pass a course if you fail to hand in a paper or essay.

VII - Appeals

If you believe that you did not get the mark you deserved, this is what you should do:

- Read through your essay and consider whether the marker's comments are fair and reasonable.
- If you still have a problem with the mark, talk to the marker as soon as possible. If, after talking to the marker, you still think that a mistake has been made in marking your essay, you may wish to have us reconsider your grade.
- To do this, write down your reasons for believing your grade should be higher. Your reasons must relate to the content of the essay or paper and take into account the marker's comments ("I'm really smart so I should get an A+" is not an acceptable reason).
- As soon as you can, bring your list of reasons, along with your essay, to the department office, where your appeal will be recorded, and passed along to the lecturer.

Your essay will be re-read, in the first instance by another tutor under the supervision of the lecturer, and one of three things will happen:

- If we determine that the original mark was too low, the mark will be raised.
- If we determine that the original mark was too high, the mark will be lowered.
- If we determine that the original mark was accurate, the mark will not be changed.

If, after going through this process, you believe that you have not been treated fairly, a second appeal can be made, in which case the essay will be marked by the lecturer. Again, the mark may be raised, lowered, or left unchanged.

If you are still not satisfied, you need to consult University regulations.