THE UNIVERSITY of York

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

WRITING ESSAYS

Some Guidance

By Adrian Leftwich

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Preface

This is the fourth edition of *Writing Essays*. Earlier editions were written specifically for students in the Departments of Politics and Economics and in the School of Politics, Economics and Philosophy in the University of York. Expressions of interest in using this booklet at other universities in the country led to the third edition being revised in such a way that it was no longer York-specific, but relevant for all universities in the United Kingdom. That approach has been retained for the present edition. The main information, themes and advice remain as before but have been brought up to date where appropriate. I have stressed far more in this edition the importance of being able to use the new information technology, that is the computer-based and internet sources of information now available to students.

In preparing the various editions of this booklet over the years, I have benefited from ideas and advice from a number of my colleagues and former colleagues to whom I am grateful. In particular, I should like to record my appreciation to Dr R. K. Alderman, Professor A.]. Culyer, Professor Andrew Dunsire and especially Mr Peter Nicholson. Kirstyn Radford of the University of York J. B. Morrell Library has made a special contribution to this present edition. The responsibility for this booklet remains, however, my own.

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Introduction

It has frequently been stressed that one of the many aims and purposes of higher education is to develop the habits of mind and intellectual skills which enable you to be analytical, critical and independent in judgement. A university is an institution in which you can learn and apply these skills through developing the capacity to undertake research on your own, using libraries and other sources of information and ideas for this purpose.

It is even sometimes argued that these and other related skills are just as important, if not more so, than the actual content of your studies, and that they will remain with you for longer. For instance, after graduating it is unlikely that you will remember much of the detail of your courses for very long, unless you are actually engaged in using it, perhaps in teaching or further research. That may sound odd. But memory studies teach us that much of what we learn very quickly disappears down the memory curve.

However, if you can master the skills of independent thinking, research, evaluation, critical analysis, coherence of argument and clarity of presentation, they will always be of service to you, whatever your subsequent career, whether it be in law, the civil service, politics, social work, business, teaching, journalism, accountancy, administration or management - and much else besides. After all, most of you will spend a large amount of time in your future careers preparing written documents, presenting them in committees and boards of various kinds and evaluating similar papers by others. So essay writing skills are, in the jargon of the day, ‘transferable skills’ which transcend the particular disciplinary skills you will learn in your main subject, whatever it may be.

Such skills as these are most effectively developed in the course of your encounters with questions, problems, ideas and evidence that will occur when you prepare and write essays. This will be a major part of your work at university. This booklet has therefore been written to provide you with some general principles and specific guidance which will be of help to you when preparing and writing essays.

The principles apply to almost all your written work: seminar papers, tutorial essays, term essays or assessment essays, as well as research projects and dissertations. So please read this booklet carefully and keep it by you for frequent reference.

The first section suggests some of the reasons why writing essays is important, not only for your present studies but for later life as well. The second section outlines some of the central principles which you need to bear in mind about essays in general. The third section goes on to advise how you might sensibly approach the preparation of your essays, and it suggests ways of organising your planning, research and reading, including note-taking. The fourth section offers some guidance on the actual writing of an essay, plus some practical hints about form, style and presentation, as well as a warning about the offences of plagiarism and collusion. You must note this warning very carefully. The conclusion condenses and emphasises the main themes of this general advice.

Why Write Essays?

1 Types of Essay

The essay - its preparation and writing - provides the central focus through which you can develop the intellectual skills mentioned above. These can be learned and improved, from essay to essay, term by term or semester by semester. Practice is essential, so use each essay to experiment with approaches, styles and structures. Of course, there are different types of essay, and it is important to be able to recognise these.

i Some, for instance, will require you to respond in one way or another to a proposition or question (for example: '"European imperialism in Africa was historically and objectively progressive". Do you agree?'). Others may require you to analyse and evaluate a particular argument or thesis (for example: How simple is Mill's "one simple principle" in his book *On Liberty*?'). You may be asked to argue in favour of something which you may not believe in or support (for example: 'Can a strong case be made for charging university students the full cost, or even half the cost, of their tuition?'). Or you may be asked to highlight the central differences and similarities between, say, the structure of government in the USA and in Britain, with particular reference to the separation of powers. And so on.

ii You may, on occasions, be posing your own question - this is commonly what happens when students do research projects or when they identify an issue they want to explore in a long assessment essay. Indeed, the skill of formulating a question is a very important one, for in doing so you might ask about a particular relationship between a number of variables that others may not have explored before; or you might be inviting yourself to look at a theorist or theory in an unusual way. A question in this sense - indeed in almost every sense - is an invitation to look at something in a particular way. So, for example, after studying the writings of Mill and others on liberty you might wonder whether there were circumstances under which 'liberty' (in a Millian sense) could and should be suspended. A question might emerge along those lines. For example: 'Can it be argued that in poor, under-developed countries, the struggle to grow out of poverty requires the suspension of many forms of individual liberty, both economic and political?'.

Or, having done some work and written some essays on 'neoclassical' approaches to the analysis of markets, you might begin to wonder whether such an analytical framework can be usefully applied in societies such as Nigeria or Bangladesh, where differences between cultures, property rights and concepts of welfare may suggest the inappropriateness, or at least some need for modification, of the neoclassical approach. A question may emerge: 'What sorts of similarities between societies permit the application of a common economic framework of evaluation - and what ought it to be?' And so on. One thing leads to another, and this is both academically healthy and intellectually exciting.

2 Types of Skill

i Whatever the kind of essay, whether it is in response to a question posed for you or by you, it will always provide the occasion

for combining and developing a series of analytical skills. One might summarise these as comprehending, evaluating, defining, arguing and expressing.

ii Comprehending means understanding or grasping an argument, theory or explanation: this is clearly essential if you are to evaluate it, either positively or negatively. Evaluating it involves dissecting it: teasing out the premises and assumptions, and assessing the tightness of the fit between argument and evidence, between 'theory' and 'facts'; and deciding whether it is consistent in its own terms or not. Defining means clarifying precisely terms ('democracy', 'legitimacy', 'freedom', 'alienation', 'cross-elasticity', 'welfare', etc) which an author uses or which you propose to use in your essay; that is, it involves establishing the definitional basis upon which you will proceed to argue or evaluate.

Arguing in this context does not mean simply stating forcefully your own opinion or preference. It means building a case; developing it from premises and definitions, and substantiating it with appropriate supporting evidence and illustration; showing its strengths and weaknesses, limitations and advantages, implications and conclusions. Mere assertion of opinion is no substitute for argument of this sort. Expressing refers to the manner in which all this is done, and involves clarity of presentation and sharpness of style. In short, it involves the use of good English. Indeed, if your argument has been clearly thought out, the chances are that you will be able to express it concisely and coherently.

iii These, then, are some of the academic reasons why essays are important: they enable and require you to concentrate on a bounded theory, problem or issue - but also to identify new questions and issues which may arise from it; they enable you to clarify and focus your thinking by exploring such a topic; they provide the opportunity to develop the crucial intellectual skills of assimilating, using and evaluating ideas and information; and they require you to become concise and coherent in expression.

3 Wider Value of Such Skills

i Now these are not only academic skills. They are skills which will be of great value in your life after and outside your studies. Whatever you do after graduating, you will find them useful. You may need to write a letter of application for a job, or a report, or a proposal for a project or for funding, or a letter of complaint or praise, or a reference for someone. Whatever it may be, the ability to prepare the ground through research and hence to identify the central points you want or need to make, and then to express these clearly in writing, will stand you in good stead. Even at a less active level, the ability to read a newspaper article, watch a television documentary or listen to a speech or lecture, and see its strengths and weaknesses as reporting, arguing, persuasion or propaganda is not a bad thing to be able to do.

ii All the skills that go into preparing and writing good essays that are suggested in this document will help you to do these things, and make you feel confident that you have a clear and good head to make sense of what you see, read and hear about you in a complex world.

iii So, regard the preparation and writing of essays as being at the heart of your studies. This work stands at the intersection, so

to speak, of consumption (of information and ideas, in books, journals, lectures and seminars) and production (where you are engaged in using what you have read or learned for the purposes of developing an explanation, exposition or argument).

It is an intersection at which, and from which, the qualities of critical, independent thought and clear expression grow. But also see your essays as having a much longer-term value in enabling you not only to learn how to read, observe, listen and understand, but also to make points, argue a case, demonstrate a line of thought, show something to be spurious or inconsistent, put forward a carefully worked out proposal - and do so with style.

iv If you can develop these skills from your very first week you will find it much easier when it comes to writing assessment essays, projects and even short essay answers in unseen examinations.

General Principles

There are a number of general points about essays in the social sciences and humanities which need to be made before going on to some practical advice about preparing to write an essay.

1 Right Answers, Wrong Answers?

i It is important to recognise that there are seldom ‘right’ answers. There are only more or less interesting ones. The questions which you will be asked will generally seek to discover not only what you know but will also seek to find out how you can use what you know for purposes of exposition, explanation, argument, assessment or interpretation. This is not to say that there are no ‘wrong’ answers: there are - usually of an empirical kind, but sometimes, too, of a conceptual kind, in the form of theoretical confusion. And when these are incorporated in explanation or interpretation, things can go badly wrong. For example, it would be wrong to argue that Argentina is in Asia and that its agricultural productivity is affected by the South-east monsoon; or that Russia is a major exporter of bananas and that its dominance of the banana market threatens small producers in the Caribbean; or that the Phillips curve is a fault in the earth’s crust in California and influences the economic life of that state; or that the constitution of the USA established a unitary system of government.

It would also be wrong to suggest that Rousseau endorsed the divine right of kings, or that Marx argued for private property, or that Robert Michels held that democracy would always overcome oligarchy. Any essay in which you tried to build an argument around such clearly ‘wrong’ propositions would not get you very far.

ii There is another kind of unambiguous wrongness which occurs when you are illogical. For example, you may write correctly that Argentina lies to the south of the USA, but incorrectly go on to say that therefore its trade will be mainly with the USA. It may or may not be but, whether it is or not, the reason is not Argentina’s relatively southern position. Or you may assert, probably correctly too, that the demand for student places at the University of X will decline (*ceteris paribus*) if X raises its tuition fees relative to other universities. But you would be wrong to infer from this

information alone that the University of X ought to reduce its fees, or not raise them: the desirability of doing that will depend on what X is trying to achieve, how other universities might respond, a view about efficiency and equity in access to higher education and lots of other considerations. Alternatively, you may be right to say that leisure is a normal good. However you would be wrong to infer from this and the usual economic assumptions that an overtime premium commencing at fewer hours per week than an individual was previously working will increase the number of hours she will be willing to work – she might or might not.

The point here is that arguments must be logical. You therefore need always to check the logic of your arguments and take care to ensure that whenever you write 'therefore' or 'thus' the inference or implication is correct and the connecting logic clear.

iii Having said that, it remains true that there are seldom 'right' answers. Essays provide you with the opportunity and challenge to develop your analytical and interpretative skills. Thus you need to be able to use 'facts' (more about them later) to support an argument, and not merely re-cycle them.

2 Argument and Structure

i An essay is essentially an argument: you should be making a case, developing a line of thought which carries forward one or two main points or themes. These form the pegs on which the essay hangs and around which you organise it. The more these pegs are your own - a way of looking at the matter you have thought of for yourself - the better.

ii But in order to be able to do that, it is essential that you think out the broad argument of the essay in the course of your reading and research, before you start to write it. This is an essential condition of sound essay preparation. As your argument begins to come clear, you will also be able to work out how you are going to organise it, that is structure it. The vital principle to grasp here is that, for any good essay, ARGUMENT IS STRUCTURE and STRUCTURE IS ARGUMENT.

The main argument you will develop, and the order in which you will present it, is the structure, and vice-versa. For this reason it is important that you get your central argument clear before you commit pen to paper (or, preferably, sit down at the computer) in the final version. In the course of preparation, and even in the first draft, you will of course need to do a lot of juggling with the main points of the argument as you devise the best way of stating it, while assembling and presenting the relevant supporting evidence or illustration. The point here is essentially that argument is *reasoning plus evidence*. Examples of how you might structure the core of your argument will be given later, but for the moment there is a third general point to bear in mind, and this concerns 'the facts'.

3 Facts

i As already indicated, we are not especially interested in your capacity to re-cycle facts. We assume that in your reading and

research for each essay you will become familiar with the most relevant facts and information, and also that you will become adept at learning how to find data you need in the library, or on-line from the internet. More about that shortly. We are much more interested in how you can handle and assess facts for the purposes of your argument. But it is important at the outset to recognise two things: (a) the facts never speak for themselves; you have to organize them to do so; and (b) the facts themselves and their interpretation are often in contention. These points are worth developing here.

ii Obviously, some facts are both simple and uncontentious: for example, that there are two houses of the Congress of the USA; that a successful coup occurred in Uganda in 1985, not 1983; that Marx wrote about 'alienation', Durkheim about 'anomie', Weber about 'charisma' and Mill about 'liberty'. But on their own, they tell you little. What is important is what you can say about such facts: how you can use, explain, interpret or expound them. The really interesting issues in economic and political analysis which you will be exploring in your essays have little to do with the facts themselves, but with the relations between facts and theories, evidence and explanation.

iii In other words you need to be able to show why facts are relevant or significant from a particular point of view. For example, to know the current population of the United Kingdom (approximately 60 million people) is not in itself very interesting. But it may become so if you are concerned to know whether the population is increasing or decreasing, and at what speed and why. Then you will need not one figure but a series of figures, though you will also need a lot else besides to begin to grope towards an explanation for what the run of figures may mean.

But from another point of view, net population figures may be of considerably less importance than density of population per square kilometre. For instance, you may read that the population of Nigeria at the last estimate was about 127 million, and that this was about the same as the figure for Bangladesh (131 million). Interesting perhaps; important maybe. But these data take on a very different significance when you discover that the population densities of the two countries are not at all similar: for Nigeria it is about 125 persons per square kilometre, for Bangladesh it is 950 and for the United Kingdom it is 245. You may want to explore such 'facts' further. For instance, it may turn out that some parts of some countries are much more densely populated than others, the cities for example. The population density of greater London will be vastly in excess of that for Caithness. So, distributional issues are also involved.

iv The point, of course, can be made more and more complicated. But the key thing to remember is that facts become important only in a context, from a point of view, in order to make a particular kind of case, or to answer a particular kind of question. For the significance of the fact or facts depends largely on how you propose or need to use it, and how indeed you do use it. In short, few explanations, judgements or implications follow from a single fact or set of facts as such.

v Often 'facts' turn out to be judgements dressed up as data. This can be illustrated with references to debates about the condition of societies in the developing (or 'Third') World. You may encounter figures which show that economic growth in many societies there occurred steadily between 1950 and 1975. On the basis of this

someone may argue that it is therefore a fact that ‘development’ has been taking place. But is ‘development’ the same as ‘growth’? Are there not definitional and conceptual judgements being smuggled in here which need to be exposed? Moreover, further probing may reveal that the distribution of growth (say in terms of GNP per capita) has been very uneven, as between town and country or social classes or religious or ethnic groups.

The picture begins to look a little more complicated. Thus, while the initial ‘fact’ about growth rates may have been entirely correct (at least in terms of the assumptions and methods used for measuring growth in a particular way), little else followed from this by way of judgement. The interesting and contentious issues usually have to do with how those data are interpreted, what they can be argued to have shown or not shown - and so on. To repeat, the crucial issues from an analytical point of view occur in the relations between evidence and explanation, facts and interpretation.

vi It is also worth remembering that ‘facts’ are not as straightforward as we may sometimes be led to believe. At first sight they may seem to be persuasive and unambiguous, or even to come from a very reliable source. That is not always the case. The ‘official’ facts given out in war-time may subsequently turn out to have been quite false, as they served propaganda purposes rather than the truth. The way some facts are collected and presented may also be very dubious.

vii You are of course not going to be able to check and counter-check every fact; and some *are* quite uncontentious. But try to develop a sceptical frame of mind, so that you can ask revealing questions about ‘the facts’. Watch out for judgement as fact. Try, if you have the time, to find ‘counter-facts’ or alternative interpretations of the same set of facts and figures with which you may be working. It is also no bad habit always to ask yourself, as you begin to form your argument in essay preparation, what ‘facts’, what evidence or what alternative view you would accept that would make you change your mind.

4 Facts and Philosophical Argument

i Not all your essays will involve an engagement with facts of this kind. In political philosophy, for example, one is seldom required to assess or appeal to ‘facts’ in the way that one is in an empirically-based subject. Even when you are expounding a text, say Mill’s *On Liberty* (1974) you cannot turn to a particular sentence as a fact, as what Mill ‘really meant’. Consider his famous statement in that book:

> ‘I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded in the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.’ (Mill, 1974: 70)

The only usable fact here is that Mill published those words. What matters is what you think he meant, and that requires interpretation which by its very nature is not susceptible of empirical proof or disproof. But this is also not to say that any one interpretation is

as good as any other: you still have to argue for, to establish your interpretation. And there are good and poor interpretations, ones that are more or less plausible, more or less compelling, more or less insightful.

ii A good essay on that quotation from Mill would have to define and elaborate terms; specify what the issues are and analyse what turns on them; indicate what you, as the essay writer, think the statement means and, if asked by the question title, give your view as to its implications and whether you agree with them or not. A longer essay may require you to put the statement into a wider context - perhaps referring backwards and forwards to other writings by Mill, or others. This is part of the process of mapping and exploring a field of argument, of placing a particular debate in a 'tradition', or 'school' of thought, or comparing it with other schools. It occurs in all branches of the social sciences.

iii An essay in political philosophy can legitimately be about possible definitions of a term, and nothing else. Also while it is always necessary and important to develop an argument, it is not always necessary to reach a firm or decisive answer to the question. You might be driven to the conclusion that there is no fixed or substantive conclusion, for instance in answer to such questions as 'what is politics?' or 'what is freedom?'. You may find it appropriate to show that such terms are and can be used in diverse and conflicting ways and that there is no 'real' meaning; that different definitions have different implications. Such an 'inconclusive conclusion' is an entirely legitimate conclusion, but it would be useful if you can show why you think that; why, that is to say, you can see no good reason for preferring one definition or conception to another. That's argument: and it has a place sometimes in other areas of the discipline besides political philosophy.

5 Facts, Figures and Economic Argument

i Many of your essays will involve the presentation and use of statistical data and relationships. Sometimes the data you use may be culled from the work of others; sometimes you may have gathered them for yourself, often you will have processed the raw data or others' results for your own purposes. You will always confront the problem of how best to present your data. Long tables of basic numbers are seldom helpful in the text of an essay (though they may belong in an appendix if the text refers to them), whereas summary data, such as means and variances, or estimated relationships, such as a consumption function, may form an essential part (or even conclusion) of an essay.

ii The acid test is that of relevance. Are the data relevant to the topic of the essay? Are they being introduced at the best point in the essay? If you are drawing a diagram or presenting a mathematical argument, does it elucidate the neighbouring text and does the text adequately support it? Diagrams and maths that are merely "tacked on" should always be avoided, whereas if they are well chosen and well placed they add precision and rigour - and economise on the written word.

iii you will probably draw many diagrams in the course of your essay writing. Make sure that you give them plenty of space, especially if they are at all complicated. Tiny and unreadable diagrams help neither you nor your reader. Use a ruler to keep

straight lines straight. Do them in pencil before a more indelible form is used. Sometimes you will find it best to draw curves after you have drawn your straight lines. For example, if you want to illustrate the Giffen good, it will be easiest if you draw the (straight) budget lines first, then mark on them the points of tangency to bring out the case in point, then draw the indifference curves tangential to the marked points (being careful not to violate any of the usual assumptions underlying the construction of indifference curves).

In the light of these general principles, how then should you prepare to write essays?

Preparing to Write an Essay

1 Library

i It is something of an understatement to say that if you cannot use the library properly you will be lost. During the first few weeks at most universities, students are given an introductory tour of their library or, as it is sometimes now called, the Learning Resource Centre. But you will also have been discovering so many other things about the university that you may well have forgotten some of what you learned about the library. If that is the case, go back to the library - ideally in a group - and re-familiarise yourself with what it can offer and how you can use it efficiently. The librarians are there to help you, so ask them. For more specialized guidance to resources in your discipline you should find out who the appropriate specialist librarian for your subject is and ask her or him for detailed help. But first try to understand the system on your own. There will almost certainly be printed guides available for you, and/or a library website with additional information.

ii Libraries vary from university to university with regard to the way in which they are organized. Even if they were identical, it would not be possible in a booklet of this kind to give a detailed account of the organization of a library or how to find material in it. However the following are the minimum essential library usage skills which you must master for the purposes of essay writing. Make sure that you do so.

- Most universities now have very sophisticated web catalogues, often incorporating subject indexes, links to external websites and more. You must clearly know how to use these systems in your own library, and they can usually be accessed from any networked PC. From the library catalogue you can find out what books, reports and journals are in the library, and where they are housed (their shelf-mark or class-mark). The catalogue will also tell you whether a book is available to be borrowed in the library or whether someone has it out on loan (and when it is due back). It will tell you which books are in the Key Texts, Reserve or Short-loan collections and which are being ordered or being repaired. You can also look up a subject (say ‘nationalism’ or ‘inflation’) and trace all the books with that

word in their titles or subject headings. You can usually check your own library record. It therefore makes much sense to spend some time in front of a PC screen: getting to know how the computer catalogue can help you to make maximum use of the library.

- You must obviously know where the books in your subject are shelved – that is their shelf-mark. Make a point of finding those parts of the library. You will gain a lot just by browsing and seeing what is on the shelves, in relevant sections. But this is never a substitute for intelligent use of the computer catalogue.

- You should also know where the journals are kept (they may also be known as serials or periodicals). Sometimes, current journals are kept on open display shelves; while back issues are housed elsewhere. Get to know how you can find these, as well as current newspapers and magazines. Many historical issues of newspapers are now available in microform or CD-ROM. Find out where these are and how to use them. Your library may subscribe to "e-journals": websites incorporating the complete text of printed journals, magazines or newspapers. Look out for guides to using these, or ask library staff for help.

- You should also familiarise yourself thoroughly with the Reference collection in your library. Browse in the Reference section, and discover what is there. It can be very useful indeed. You can find almost any information you will need, or you will be able to find out how to get it. There are atlases, dictionaries and compendia of all kinds, as well as useful and detailed country studies, encyclopedias and global economic, social and political data.

  For instance, you can find out the current annual school fees at Eton or Roedean; the name of the present Head of State in Bhutan (and even where Bhutan is); the names of the major political parties in Switzerland, the outlines of their programmes and the level of support for them at the last election; the main items of agricultural and mineral production in Zambia; the educational qualifications, if any, of your local MP; the volume of external debt of India in 1990, or the number of television sets per 1000 people in Iceland in 1987.

  One particularly useful reference work to locate and flick through is the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, (1968) which is published in a number of volumes. It has short and very informative articles, plus suggestions for further reading, on major themes and theories in the social sciences, ranging from 'liberalism' to 'revolution'. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967) is a similar source of reference for Philosophy. And there are others. Your tutors and librarians will be able to advise you.

- The Reference collection may also include Bibliographies, or these may be shelved in their own section. Many printed bibliographies have electronic equivalents, which are likely to be linked to the library website. Ask one of the librarians to show you how to use these. You can find so much that will be useful to you, such as directions to specific journal articles

on subjects you would like to read about; short summaries of books and articles so that you can check whether they will be of use to you; and you can even find, sometimes, references to reviews of books that you are reading. And much more.

- As an example of the value of a bibliography, try to access the British Humanities Index – it may be available in your library as a web database, a CD-ROM or annual printed volumes. Look up a topic like 'famine' and you will find a long list of newspaper and journal articles on this topic, and where they have been published. The same is true for an enormous range of issues, topics and questions. Also useful is *The Philosopher's Index* which lists articles by subject and author, usually with an abstract (that is, a brief summary of the content).

- Most university libraries have a short-loan collection (also known as Reserve or Key Texts) where items which are in heavy demand are kept and can be consulted or borrowed for only short periods (commonly 2 or 4 hours, and sometimes overnight or over the week-end). Up-to-date information about what items are held here will normally be on the library computer catalogue, and it may be possible to book an item in advance by entering your library membership details as prompted on the screen.

iii Finally there is the Internet. This provides access to information and resources on an almost unimaginable scale. 'Surfing the net' may be fun, or even an obsession, but it is also something which can yield important information. Although it can consume a lot of time, it is very worthwhile knowing how to use it. Librarians will be able to direct you to searchable "subject gateways", which provide lists of links to the most authoritative and reliable external websites for your subject, often with brief descriptions of the content of each site. These may even be incorporated into the library catalogue.

For most purposes, using the library is simple, once you have got the hang of it. But some things are a bit more tricky. Practice will soon enable you to master the necessary principles and skills for finding out. Once you have done so, you will never be lost in your university library or any other library. In later life you will be able to find information efficiently in your local library or any other major library.

For most of your non-assessed essays, reading lists will be issued by your tutors. If the books are in heavy demand, or if they have not been put on the short-loan system and you therefore cannot get hold of them immediately, you may think that you are lost. Don't panic: you are not. There is always masses of material that you can find for your purposes by canny use of the library catalogue, the reference section, bibliographic databases and web subject gateways. A bit of straightforward browsing can do wonders for you, too. If you are really stuck, ask a librarian. Try to make sure that you ask him or her to explain the principles, and not merely to find a book or article for you, although that might be necessary in particularly difficult circumstances. And look out for library workshops or seminars, where you will get the chance to learn more about the range of printed and electronic information sources available to you while you're at university, often with an opportunity for hands-on practice.

Assuming that you have got the principles and procedures right for finding information you may need, what are the steps you should follow as you prepare to write the essay?

2 Interpreting the Question

i However obvious this may be, it has to be said: *read the question carefully*, several times, stressing different words each time, until you have made quite sure that you know what it is getting at. If it is a question you have set yourself, be clear about what it is that you really want to explore. There may be a number of ways to do this, but be sure that you do so within the target area established by the question. Once that is clear, think a bit about *how* you might go about it. Do you want to criticise the terms of reference of the question? Is there an assumption in it which you wish to challenge? Do you need to define some central concepts? Is there choice between theorists, problems or countries for the comparison or illustrations? Can the broad structure be divided up even before you start reading?

For instance, in Politics, consider a question like: 'Does the principle of collective Cabinet responsibility make for good government?' Clearly you are going to have to say something about (a) what the principle is; and (b) what you think about its implications for good government - but the balance between those two parts can vary enormously. You may want or need to define what you consider 'good government' to be.

Whatever the question, there is much to be gained by just pausing to think about it, about the issues that may be involved, the kinds of approaches you might want to take and so on. You may want to make a preliminary list of issues you will need to read and think about, or information you will require. But, always, make sure you understand the question by 'unpacking' it a bit. Transform it into several distinct statements or assertions, implied by the individual words it contains. The process of doing so may be of great help when you come to the next stage.

3 Reading and Note-taking

i Conventionally, for seminar papers or term essays, there will be a reading list. For assessment essays and research projects there may not be one, but your tutor will always be able to advise. As you read, remember that you need to be *selective*. You are reading for a particular purpose and that purpose has been defined by the question posed, by your initial interpretation of it, by what is needed and how you have decided to tackle it. This will certainly affect *how* you read, because you are looking for information and arguments on topic X, not Y.

Learn how to *use* a book, which does not always or necessarily mean 'reading' it in the ordinary sense. Always peruse the Contents page carefully. Don't forget to look at the Index. If it's a good one (and not all are) it can get you straight to material and topics in the book you need to focus on. Consult the Preface and the Introduction.

Familiarise yourself briskly and intelligently with the book's structure and content. It is harder to do this with articles but you can with some of them. An article will often start with a short Abstract or introductory paragraph which tells the reader what it is about, and gives its central argument. Read that carefully, and skip through the article to see what the main headings and parts are. Have a look at the conclusion. 'Getting to know' a book or article in this way might save you a lot of time and may give you a good sense of whether it is going to be of much use to you or not.

ii As you read, looking for information and arguments on the topic defined by the question, you will be taking notes. People do this in different ways. Some take notes on sheets of paper, others on cards. Today, many people write notes directly on to their computers, or on disk. Do what suits you: develop your own system. But it is not a bad idea at all to start your own card index system of books and articles you have consulted or build up your bibliography on your computer (remembering always to make a back-up copy, on disk). Whatever technique you adopt, make absolutely sure that whether it is a book, article or review, you take down in full the information about author, title, and date.

At the top of your page, or on your card, you should have the following types of entry:

If it is a book, state author, (date), *title*, place of publication, publisher, thus:

> Carr-Hill, Roy A. (1990) *Social Conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London, Macmillan).

OR

> Nelson, Joan M. (ed.) (1989) *Fragile Coalitions: The Politics of Economic Adjustment* (New Brunswick, Transaction Books).

If it is an article, state author, (date), title, *journal*, volume and part, and pages, thus:

> Goodin, Robert E. (1988) 'What is So Special About Our Fellow Countrymen?, *Ethics* 98 (4), pp 663-86.

If it is a chapter from a book, state author (date), title of chapter, editor/s of book, *title of book*, place of publication, publisher, thus:

> Plant, R. (1985) 'The Very Idea of a Welfare State' in Philip Bean, John Ferris and David Whynes (eds), *In Defence of Welfare* (London, Tavistock)pp 34-47.

If it is a report from an official agency or institution, the same general prin- ciples apply: name of organisation, date, *title of report*, place of publication, publisher, thus:

> World Bank (1984) *Toward Sustained Development in Sub-Saharan Africa. A Joint Program of Action* (Washington, DC., The World Bank).

As will become clear later, these are part of the tools and apparatus of scholarship. Get into the habit of using them. It will save you much time and frustration later if all your notes can clearly be identified in this way.

iii Just as important is that you simply *must* distinguish in your notes between *summaries* you are making of what an author says and *quotations* from his or her work. In both cases it is useful to put in brackets after the point(s) being made the page number or numbers from which the argument or quotation comes. But if it is a quotation you must use quotation marks and record the page number or numbers, and do so religiously. When you later come to write the essay and you want to use a quotation, you will be able to do so properly. As will also become clear later, to use a quotation *without* acknowledging its source is an extremely serious fault, known as plagiarism. Usually, when this happens, it is because in their note-taking, students have failed to distinguish between quotations and summaries. It is vital to do so.

4 Mapping the Essay

i As you read through the books and articles for the essay, ideas and arguments will begin to form. Start jotting them down. As you go along, try to begin to shape the *broad* structure of argument. Do it initially in large chunks. Then, as you proceed, juggle with them and begin to break them down into smaller and more manageable parts. But all the time try to establish and refine the central thesis or few points that will be the backbone of the argument, noting evidence and illustration that will be of use and the sources you are using for it.

ii Writing an essay is essentially a creative act. It is seldom possible to plan it down to the last detail from the start. Even later, as you come to write the final version, you may find that ideas pop up which you will want to incorporate. There should always be scope for that, but not too much: you have to stop somewhere. You have deadlines to meet and it is important that you school yourself rigorously to meet them. There are costs for not doing so. What is meant here by suggesting that you sketch out the main chunks of the essay can best be illustrated by the following example which will help to summarise and combine many of the points already made.

iii Assume that you have chosen to write an essay on the following question:

‘In what sense, if any, are Britain and the USA liberal societies?’

Some preparatory thought about the question may lead you to recognise that it raises important *conceptual* issues which you will have to resolve. For instance, what is meant by ‘liberal’ in this context? Does it refer to economic or political or social issues? It also raises empirical questions, that is issues about the actual policies and practices of the USA and Britain which will have to be measured against the definition of ‘liberal’. It is also comparative in that you have to answer the question with respect to *two* societies. And it is *evaluative* in that you are required to assess whether either or both the societies are ‘liberal’, according to the definition you choose or evolve for yourself. Elements of structure will emerge from such initial thinking about the topic.

You may have done some work on the issue already: you may have notes from your lectures and reading; there may have been a seminar or

tutorial on aspects of the question. If you are quick off the mark, and thinking creatively, you will see that you may be able to use material and ideas from different courses you have taken, for example in political theory, macro-economics, comparative government or economic history. Check through this material. Know what it is and where it is in your notes.

That done, you will be ready to advance on the library, where you might well start by doing some reading on and around the definition of 'liberal'. There is a vast scholarly literature on this question. Be selective: interrogate the computer for sources. Use the reference section and the subject index. You may want to concentrate on *political* liberalism, that is on issues concerned with rights, duties and freedoms of the individual in the narrowly political or constitutional sense; or you may want to explore the question further in the field of 'economic' liberalism, so-called, about the organization and character of the two economies; or both. Whatever you propose to do, do it thoroughly and stick to your approach. You will also need to read comparatively on the USA and Britain, trying to find illustrations and examples of what would or would not count as 'liberal', according to your approach and definition. Note-taking is important; examples and data need to be culled and their sources carefully recorded.

As you proceed you should be able to map out the broad structure of the essay which might go something like this: first, definition of 'liberal', differing approaches and implications; second, a statement of what you will mean by this for the purposes of the essay and your argument; third, outline of the relevant features of British and US politics/economics that you consider appropriate to answer the question; fourth, a comparative assessment of the extent to which either or both do or do not conform to the definition; fifth, conclusions.

As structure emerges, so too should argument, and *vice-versa*. You should already have worked out what the central thesis of your essay is to be. For instance, you may want to argue that the US, according to your definition of 'liberal', is more liberal than Britain because more rights are constitutionally enshrined for the citizens, whereas in the British case such rights are fewer and have been more shakily and reluctantly granted to subjects through precedents, and are hence more vulnerable. Moreover, you may argue further that the US economy, at least since the Second World War, has been less regulated than that of the UK and the role of the state in it has been far slimmer. But that is only one possible line of argument: there are many others.

Nonetheless, you now have the broad structure of the essay, a logical sequence in which you will develop it, and an emerging thesis. It may be that your planning and thinking has refined the structure and argument even more fully than this. In either case, you are almost ready to begin writing. If you are a very careful planner, you may now want to spend a further hour or two mapping out the detailed structure, argument and content. That being done, you will be ready to write.

iv Before turning to some specific points about writing the essay itself, it is worth noting here that the more tightly structured and 'directive' the question is (as in the above example), the less room you will have for interpreting it, though there is always some. Conversely, the less tightly structured and 'directive' the question,

the more room there will be for interpreting it and the more you will have to shoulder the responsibility for generating a framework in which to answer it, for imposing structure and selecting examples and illustrations. This would be the case with questions such as: ‘To what extent is rapid economic growth compatible with democratic politics?’ Or, ‘Is revolution any sort of solution to the problems of underdevelopment in Third World societies?’ Or, ‘Are equality and liberty incompatible policy objectives?’

These questions specify very broad target areas, and you have to aim within them; but there is more room for you to choose the kind of approach you will adopt and the kind of illustrative examples you will use than in the earlier example. It is a useful skill to be able to recognise quickly the differences between tightly and loosely structured questions. You may prefer one sort to another, at least sometimes.

But in all cases, you will always need to block out the main components of your essay, define or clarify terms and forge an argument. The preparatory stage of essay writing is largely about this. Spend time on it, but allow yourself enough time to attend properly to the writing. With the preparation done, how best to proceed with the writing?

Writing the Essay

The line between preparing and writing an essay is not a hard and fast one. The two processes merge. But a point will be reached at which you have to start writing; always remember that you have deadlines to meet and that there are penalties for late submission. By this stage you should have a broad structure in mind and the central thesis and supporting points of your argument should be clear. You should also know what kind of evidence, examples and illustrations you will be using to sustain your case, and more or less where and how you will use them. With this done, the following advice is worth bearing in mind as you commence to write.

1 Form and Style

i An essay has a beginning, a middle and an end. We often refer students to the old preacher’s advice about how to construct a good sermon:

‘Tell ‘em what you are going to tell ‘em; then tell ‘em what you’ve got to tell ‘em; then tell ‘em what you told ‘em.’

It’s very good advice, and should be followed when writing an essay. The very first part of the essay, the Introduction, should explain and explore the problem for analysis and spell out the context and wider issues. For instance, say why you think the question or issue is important, or why it interests you, or what its relevance is for the general field of study. If your preparation has been careful, you will already know this: your notes on structure, argument and content will be your guide. This Introduction is not the same as the Abstract, which precedes it, and is an even more succinct (one paragraph, at most) account of the argument. I return to this shortly.

But never write the beginning first, except only in a very preliminary form for your own immediate writing purposes. Write it last, when everything else is complete. That way, you know precisely what you have to introduce the reader to, and what assertions you can safely make about what you will argue, show or prove.

The middle should be the bulk of the essay where the substantive content is presented. It takes the reader through the stages of the argument in logical order, building up the case and deploying the evidence.

The end should develop the conclusion, bringing together threads, hammering home the main thesis, and perhaps taking the reader out again into a broader context, or indicating other issues which have arisen and that would need to be explored elsewhere.

ii Students seldom use a proper Abstract. This should come at the very beginning, on a page of its own, immediately after the cover page which will display the title and your name or examination number. It should not be longer than a paragraph and should be clearly marked ABSTRACT. Some people out it at the start of the essay, before the Introduction. Wherever you put it, it is very important to get into the habit of writing an Abstract. It is enormously helpful to the reader, because it tells him or her what is to come. But it is also very useful for you, the writer, because it compels you, as you prepare for the essay and then come to write it, to be quite clear about the core structure and essence of your argument. Here are some examples of the sort of thing you need to be able to write in an introductory paragraph or an Abstract.

a) In response to the question: "'The permanent value of Hegel's *The Philosophy of Right* lies not in its substantive claims but in the method constructed for reaching them". Explain and discuss.'

Abstract

'The quotation assumes that it is possible not only to distinguish but also to divorce the substantive claims made in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* from its method. I shall argue that, on the contrary, the content and the form of the book are interdependent. First, I shall outline the content of The Philosophy of Right, to see what its main substantive claims are and to extract the chief elements of Hegel's method. Second, I examine in detail one part of the book, Hegel's discussion of Civil Society, to demonstrate that his conclusions and his methods are inseparable. Finally, I turn to the view proposed in the quotation and consider what the permanent value is of Hegel's claims and methods, taken together.'

b) In response to the question: "'Unfair competition from imports provides justification for tariff and non-tariff protection for domestic producers." Critically examine this assertion'.

Abstract

'Such a claim is common in daily newspapers. In this essay it is argued that the assertion is, in general, false and that romantic assertions are no substitute for careful analysis and empirical evidence. I shall begin by reviewing some possible meanings of the word 'unfair' and shall argue that the appropriate concept relates

to the international and singular domestic distribution of the gains from trade or welfare losses from protection. I shall then proceed to show that protection tends to discourage specialisation according to comparative advantage and to impose net welfare losses on both trading partners/ especially in the long run. I shall also argue that tariffs, along with other non-tariff barriers to trade, tend to harm consumers and producers in both trading partners and do so, moreover, in such a fashion that cannot readily be seen to be 'fair'. The theoretical argument will be illustrated by reference to empirical evidence on trade between developing and developed economies.'

c) In response to the question: 'What are the lessons for anarchism of the Spanish Civil War?'

Abstract

'Anarchists were very active in the Spanish Civil War, especially at the start. Their contingents fought hard and well at the front; their workers' organizations ran industries and whole cities; and in the countryside communes sprang up. Yet the anarchists not only found themselves on the losing side, they contributed to that defeat by allowing themselves to be under-mined and in the end overwhelmed by those with whom they had allied themselves. Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War suffered self-inflicted disaster. This essay aims to establish this thesis, which is admittedly a controversial one, first by describing the part played by the Anarchists in the Civil War and by showing what happened to them, and second by analysing their mistakes which led to their failure. Some of the failures were beyond their control, and probably inevitable; but others could have been avoided. To understand how they could have been avoided is to learn the lessons of the Spanish Civil War, and to learn how anarchism could be more successful.'

The point about these examples - and they are not 'right' answers, merely illustrations of what could be argued in answer to each of the questions - is that they offer a concentrated summary of the essay, of what is to come. Written well, they should leave your reader clasped to the chair, keen to go on and see how the argument is developed and presented.

iii As the examples show, it is perfectly legitimate to use the first singular person ('I propose to argue...'). Many students shy away from this. There is no need to; indeed there is some psychological advantage in doing it because it helps to make you say what you think, and then write it. But if you feel happier with the more neutral tone ('It will be argued...') then by all means use that.

iv A further point about form - which merges with stylistic issues - is that it is a very good idea to break up your essay into SECTIONS and sub-sections, with cross-headings and sub-headings, or by leaving blank lines, or by using numerals or alphabetical markers. Again, students seem very shy about doing this. It will help you to structure your essay, to separate points from each other and to indicate where parts of the argument end and new ones begin. It also makes it much easier on the reader. If you glance through this document, you will see that it is broken up into sections and sub-sections for those purposes.

v Likewise, it is helpful to conclude a section either by summarising briefly its main point, or raising a question that flows from it and which introduces the next section or chapter. It shows that you are fully in command and know where your argument is leading, and why; and it is of great value to the reader who can then follow clearly the steps in the argument, especially when you are changing direction or level, or introducing new material. Something like this is the sort of thing I mean:

> "I have shown in this section/chapter how limited land reform has been in much of India. But the question is why has this been the case? I take up that issue in the next section/chapter'.

vi There is another stylistic ploy - which also contributes to form - that is worth using. It can help you to avoid the difficulty of deciding whether a point comes in this section or the next, because it relates in part to both. The trick is to insert little 'flags' in an appropriate place in one section which refer forward to fuller treatment in a later section. The purpose of these is to tell your reader that you are aware of a particular problem (or want to make him or her aware of it), but that you will be dealing with it later. You are suspending a particular line of argument or an intrusive point, but will come back to it.

The trick can be used informatively, such as: 'This point will be elaborated more fully in the next section'. Or it can be used as a come-on, such as: 'Just when it seemed that inflation was coming down, an event occurred which was to change the picture. What it was will be discussed shortly.' Finally, it can be used to dramatise an issue, thus: 'It might seem as if the arrest of Nkrumah and the CPP leadership was the end of the nationalist movement, but it was not, as we shall see'. And so on.

vii There is not much that can be added about style in the general sense of the 'colour' and quality of your prose. Some people write easily and fluently; others find it more difficult to do so. The best advice is to go for clarity, rather than 'fine writing'. Remember that your purpose is to communicate argument and ideas, and to do so as succinctly and persuasively as possible. It is probably true to say that good writing comes when the writer is confident about what he or she wants to say. This is why thorough essay preparation is so important and why I have stressed that 'argument is structure and structure is argument'.

viii If you bear in mind some of the suggestions made in this booklet you will be able to improve your essay preparation skills, and that in turn will improve your writing. But there are, in addition, obvious things you can do to increase the impact of your argument: vary the length of your sentences and avoid unduly long ones; steer clear of over-written, long paragraphs. Break up the text. Eliminate jargon unless it is necessary from a technical point of view: if you *mean* 'epistemology', then say it. If you are unsure about the meaning of a term, look it up. Any serious student should have a good dictionary and a Thesaurus close at hand. Check your spelling. Most students now use word-processors to write their essays. Most word-processing packages have a spell-check facility. Use it.

Finally, you should *always* read your essay draft through from beginning to end before preparing the final version. It is actually a very good idea to read it *aloud* to yourself, for that will help you to decide whether it flows and makes sense. Does your Abstract or introduction make you want to read on? Have you answered the question? Is the core of your argument or its final outcome clear enough to leave you in no doubt that you have accomplished what you intended to do? If the answer to these questions is 'yes', then there is a very good chance that the reader will think the same. Remember, too, that you should always read through the final version of the essay before you hand it in.

2 The Apparatus of Scholarship

i Whether they are for assessment purposes or not, all your essays are expected to display the marks of professionalism and the conventions of scholarship. You should learn from the start what these are and then use this 'apparatus of scholarship'. For present purposes there are two major features: references and methods of citation.

ii A reference is an acknowledgement. When you use a quotation from a printed or electronic source in your writing, it is not only a courtesy but a duty to acknowledge who originally wrote it and where you found it. When you employ an idea that is not your own, or advance an argument that you have summarised, you must say whose it is and where the reader can find it more fully discussed. (It is usual, however, to omit detailed references for extremely well-known and general ideas or phrases that can be held to be the common coin of learned discourses, such as Plato's Theory of Forms, Marx's concept of alienation or Keynes' concerns with demand management). However, the central point is that when you fail to attribute work that is not your own it becomes plagiarism, and this is a matter to be discussed in greater detail shortly.

What is the best way to cite your sources?

iii It is absolutely essential that you get into the habit from the start of citing sources for any piece of written work; and you must cite them properly. There are a number of systems for referencing and citation which you will encounter in books and journal articles. Some are complicated and others are not, but all may be used. Whatever you do, follow an accepted system and be consistent.

The essential requirement for any system or referencing and citation is that it supplies information about the source in a way that a reader may check it or follow it up if she wants to. Thus you must always cite the author's name, the date of the item, its title, the name of the publisher and the place of publication (if a book), or the journal and its number (if an article) and the page number/s where relevant (e.g. where you are quoting). If you have been following the suggestions made earlier for your note-taking, you should have this information at hand. Over the years, if you use a card index system or an electronic equivalent such as Reference Manager, you will build up your own set of references.

The system which we recommend, however, is the simplest one. It is known as the Harvard or author-date system and it is used as follows.

In the text of the essay itself

a) References are included in the body of your writing, in brackets, after the relevant point or quotation, like this (Andrews, 1991).

b) If it is a general reference to a book on inflation in Brazil, you need do no more than cite the author and date (Burman, 1980).

c) However, if you are *quoting* from a book or article, or citing a specific piece of information from the book - perhaps some data - then you have to give not only the author and the date, but the page reference as well, as the following example shows. 'According to one author, "Laws against monopoly in very small or poor states may mean that domestic production might never begin" (Colclough, 1991: 2).' Or: 'According to Huntington, some 45% of states in the world in 1990 were formally democratic, compared to only 24% in 1973 (Huntington, 1991: 26).' Whether it is a book, article or official report, you use the same method (author, date and, where appropriate, page numbers). Thus, in the case of a report, 'According to the World Bank, development will be most effective in a "market-friendly context" (World Bank, 1991: 6-7)'.

d) If you are citing a newspaper report, there may be an author, in which case you use the same system (Deakin, 1989). But if there is no author cited in the paper, you have to name the paper and the date on which the article appeared, thus: (*The Independent* July 6, 1992).

e) Sometimes you may wish to quote something which is being quoted in another book, not from the original source. As a general rule, try to track down the original source but, if you cannot, it is perfectly acceptable to cite as your source the place from which you got the quotation as the following example shows. 'In the early phases of economic development, it may be important for there to be a strong government which can pursue the national interest and common good, unlike an elected legislature which, in Adam Smith's words, is more likely to be moved by "the clamorous importunity of partial interests" (Smith, cited in Wade, 1990: 373)'. In this case, Smith does not appear on your list of references, because your source was Wade, who does appear (see below).

f) If, as sometimes happens, you are using two items by the same author, then you cite them in the text with their respective dates (Smiley, 1967; Smiley, 1975) and this will distinguish them from each other in the reference list at the end (see below).

g) And if, as also now and again happens, two items have been published by the same author in the same year, then in your text you cite them thus (Jones, 1991a) and (Jones, 1991b) and list them in that order in your references at the end (see below).

In the notes

In this author-date system you can also use Notes, at the end of the essay and *before* the references. Notes are usually reserved for some additional information which is not central to the structure and flow of argument in the essay and which, if included in the text, would disrupt it. All you need to do is put a number in brackets in the text where you want to flag a point of this kind.

Some notes (see below)may be of the courteous kind, acknowledging some help or advice (1). This kind of note is just the sort of note you should use if you have been assisted in coming to a particular idea by a friend or colleague, perhaps in the course of a long discussion (2). By acknowledging that assistance (you will see it commonly in books and articles) you are not only being courteous to a friend or colleague, but are also avoiding any charge of collusion (see below under Plagiarism). Some Notes may be substantive but not central to the argument (3). You then write the Notes at the end of the essay, like this:

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Mr. Mungo Sidewinder, in the University Library, for his help in tracking down this information.
2. This is a conclusion which I came to in the course of a long and intensive discussion with my friend, Joan Smithers.
3. The understanding of democracy which I use here is based on Held's account (Held, 1991). Of course this is contentious, but for the purposes of the argument here it will suffice.

(Thus even though the reference to Held is only in your Notes, it will still also be included in the list of references which follows, as in the list below).

At the end of the essay

Now, at the end of the essay, all you need to do is list in alphabetical order all the sources you have used in the brackets in your text. So, given the ones I have used above, my reference list looks like this:

Andrews, J. (1991) *The New Political Economy* (Boston, Pioneer Press).
Burman, P. (1975) *Brazil at Bursting Point* (London, New Era Press).
Colclough, C. (1991) 'Structuralism Versus Neo-liberalism: an Introduction', in Christopher Colclough and James Manor (eds.) *States or Markets* (Oxford,Clarendon Press) pp 1-25
Deakin, J. (1989) 'Who Speaks for the Gypsies?' (London, *The Independent*, 6 April, 1989).
Held, D. (1991) 'Democracy, the Nation-State and the Global System', in David Held (ed.) *Political Theory Today* (Cambridge, Polity) pp 197-235.
Huntington, S.P. (1991) *The Third Wave, Democratization In The Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press).
Jones, J.J. (1991a)'Two Cheers for Democracy', *Journal of Political Phenomena* 16(2), pp 34-45.
Jones, J.J. (1991b)'The Case Against Democracy', *Modern Political Studies,* 15 (4), pp 2-10.
Smiley, T. (1967) 'Market Imperfection or State Imperfection? The Case of Peru', *Journal of Latin American Economic Perspectives* 12(1), pp 45-66.

Smiley, T. (1975) 'The Coup in Chile in Retrospect: An Economic Interpretation', *Journal of Socialist Economic Exploration* 44(4), pp 12-40.
The Independent, London, July 6, 1991
Wade, R. (1990), *Managing the Market Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialisation* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
World Bank (1991) *World Development Report 1991* (New York, Oxford University Press).

Two final points on this technical detail need to be made. Please note from the above that you only *italicise* or underline the title of a book or report or journal name (see, for example, Wade, World Bank and Huntington, above);and you write the name of an article or chapter in 'inverted commas' (see, for example, Held and Smiley above). Also, always list all the sources you have consulted, even if you do not quote or cite them.

Citing electronic publications

Articles from electronic journals, newspaper websites or CD-ROMs, and any other electronic publication with a printed equivalent, can be cited in exactly the same way as the print version; the format in which you viewed the publication is not important. But an increasing number of electronic texts have never appeared in print, and may never be systematically archived by any library. How can you give the reader of your essay the best chance of tracing these items?

As yet, there is no international standard for the citation of electronic resources (information from CD-ROMs and other databases, websites, e-journals, mailing lists, discussion groups etc). But the same principles apply as those for citing print resources: provide the author's name (unless the text has been published anonymously), and enough additional information to allow your reader to identify precisely the source you have used; and provide this information in a consistent format.

For example:

ICISS (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty) (2001), *The Responsibility to Protect*. Available at: http://www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca, accessed on 10 September, 2004.

Pelizzo, R. and R. Staplehurst (2004) 'Tools for Legislative Oversight: An empirical investigation', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3388, September 2004. Available at: http://econ.worldbank.org/staff/38159/ accessed on 11 September 2004.

Office of National Statistics (2001) 'Social Capital. A review of the literature', Social Analysis and Reporting Division. Available at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/downloads/soccaplitreview.pdf, accessed on 11 September 2004.

The format [online] is important because it indicates to your reader that the item you consulted does not have a printed equivalent and hence may no longer be accessible in the form in which you consulted it (websites are continually redesigned or erased). The date on

which you accessed the item gives your reader some idea of the likelihood that the text will still remain accessible and unmodified by the author or other contributors.

All this might seem like a lot to remember at first. But if you start to use this system now it will become second nature to you because it is actually very logical and tidy. The key lies in writing your references clearly and properly when you read and take notes.

3 Some Practical Hints

i Always aim to keep your essay or dissertation within the prescribed word limit, whatever it is. There are no prizes for going on and on. In fact, the contrary is true: in many universities it is within the discretion of examiners to *stop reading* when an essay goes beyond its prescribed word-length, and they sometimes do. Even if they do not, essays which go way over the word limit may be penalised. It is important to recognise that a *longer* essay is not necessarily a *better* essay. It can lose its way, its shape and its punch. A compact structure and concise argument can be much more effective. Moreover, any fool can write a long essay, simply slapping down all that he or she knows: short essays, on the other hand, require judgement and discrimination between what is important and unimportant. Imposing a word limit is thus not simply 'bureaucratic' - it is an intellectual test too. The word count normally consists of all the text, notes and any appendices there may be, but usually excludes references. Check the rules in your own department.

ii Many universities expect students to submit their essays on A4 paper. It makes sense, also, to leave a reasonable left-hand margin free for comments, especially for non-assessed work. It is also preferred that you write on one side of the paper only. Some students have, on occasions, objected to this, using the ecological argument that it is a waste of paper. Such conscientious objection is respected, but it may be taking a principle just a bit far. For those who can live with their consciences on this point, please write on one side of the paper only. Also, make sure to number the pages and fasten them securely.

iii Most students today use computers for word-processing purposes. A few may still use type-writers. Please make sure that your essays are submitted in a printed form. Word-processing courses are now widely available in most universities and an increasing number of students have their own personal computers. It may be of interest to know that it is almost unthinkable in most universities and colleges in the USA for students to submit handwritten essays. Most, though not all, universities in the United Kingdom now have a rule that essays must be typed or word-processed. But, even if your institution does not have that rule, it will be to your advantage if you submit work that is. The reader will be able to give undivided attention to evaluating what you say, rather than spending time and energy trying to decipher your writing. Academics can get very irritated by badly written essays which are almost indecipherable. Not only is it frustrating trying to get clear what has been written but the effort of trying to make sense of the scribbles actually gets in the way of understanding and assessing the flow of your argument. The best advice is to learn how to type or word-process. But if for some good reason you cannot type your essay, or write on a word-processor, please avoid 'idiosyncratic' handwriting. There is no virtue in being

illegible. In any event, the ability to use a word-processing programme on a computer will be invaluable in your future life and career, so all the arguments stack up in favour of your using the opportunity to learn how to do so now.

iv For all essays *always* put your *name* (and appropriate address) on the essay, and also the name of your tutor - unless otherwise instructed. In some institutions, assessed work has to be handed in anonymously, using only a number. Make sure you know what your examination number is and use it.

v You should *always* keep a copy of any essay you submit. If you are using a computer, it is a simple matter to make a copy on disk; otherwise take a photocopy or make sure to keep your rough draft.

vi It is sensible to retain all your essays done over the years. They are obviously useful for revision purposes. But there may be circumstances when the examiners may want to look at past work.

4 Plagiarism and Collusion

Finally, it is necessary to say a few words about plagiarism. Most universities now have very strict rules and regulations about plagiarism. For instance, at the University of York, under the heading of 'Academic misconduct', the University Regulations governing the conduct of examinations state that students must not '*plagiarise*', that is 'incorporate within their work without appropriate acknowledgement material derived from the work (published or unpublished) of another', or '*collude*', that is 'assist another candidate to gain an advantage by unfair means, or receive such assistance' (University of York, 2001: 80).

As indicated above, 'plagiarism' is using someone else's work and passing it off as your own. 'Collusion' means representing work which you have done in collaboration with another or others, as work which you have done alone. There are four points to make here.

First, by following the earlier advice about good scholarship, by using common sense and working in good faith you will be able to avoid the charges of plagiarism or collusion.

Second, good scholarly practice requires that you always cite all references and sources used for any piece of written work and that any quotations or data taken from such sources are accurately referenced to particular pages or tables. That is why the apparatus of scholarship, discussed in the previous section, is so important. So long as you indicate in the proper manner where ideas, information and arguments come from, you cannot be accused of plagiarism. It is better to over-reference than under-reference. Moreover, your tutors will be encouraged to know that you have surveyed the literature and can deploy it intelligently and creatively to develop an argument or to show why you agree with one interpretation of a problem rather than another.

Third, plagiarism has been committed and will be penalised (see below) whether it was deliberate and with intent to deceive or the result of sheer sloppiness or poor note-taking, as mentioned in an earlier section.

Fourth, as far as collusion is concerned, the obvious and clear case occurs when a student submits an essay as if it were his/her own, with the consent of the real writer. Now of course we want students to collaborate and co-operate, to bounce ideas off each other and to pursue arguments together, in and out of seminars. Much very good learning goes on in that process. Moreover, some of your work may involve formal joint projects in which a group works on a particular problem or research topic and then writes it up together. This is all to the good. Written work based on such formal co-operation must obviously be acknowledged. And provided you also acknowledge, in good faith and with common sense, any informal and specific assistance you have had on general arguments or particular points, you cannot be accused of collusion (see the earlier section on 'The Apparatus of Scholarship').

All this, it should be added, refers not only to assessment essays but ALL essays. If you practice good scholarship and comprehensive referencing you will avoid charges of plagiarism and collusion.

Both plagiarism and collusion are surprisingly easy to spot. Tutors seldom find difficulty in being certain that a particular essay or passage is not the student's own work, though it may sometimes be more difficult to find out whose work it is. But that is frequently possible, too. Plagiarism and collusion can result in serious disciplinary action, and the only possible advice is not to do it.

When plagiarism is suspected, the matter is carefully and exhaustively investigated. You may be sure that it is a *very* uncomfortable experience for a student to be called in by such an investigating committee. If plagiarism in an assessed essay or examination paper is proved, it can lead to severe consequences. The mark for the paper will be lower, and may be zero, which will lower the degree result and may even cause failure. If the case is considered particularly grave, the University Regulations at York state that disciplinary action may also be taken; the candidate may be suspended or excluded from the University; the class of degree may be lowered; and the degree may be withheld, with or without the right to re-sit (University of York, 2001: 81). Most universities have regulations of this kind. Make sure you check what they are in your own institution.

For all these reasons, make sure that your note-taking is clear and accurate; that you distinguish between quotations and paraphrases; and that you do not pass off either any quotations or the contents of any summaries as your own. We have no wish to discourage students from using other people's concepts, ideas, arguments and evidence in your own thinking and writing; quite the contrary. What I wish to stress in this section and the earlier section on scholarship is that you must make clear what your sources are. However, merely to provide a bibliography of the sources you have consulted is not enough. The material used in the body of the essay must be properly cited and referenced. To repeat, it is better to err on the side of over-attribution than under-attribution.

If you are in any way uncertain about what plagiarism and collusion are, or about how to avoid them, or about how to give references carefully and fully, speak to your tutor.

Finally, plagiarism is detested by all scholars and teachers as it represents the worst form of intellectual and academic cheating. Even

the mildest academic, who has never been known to get seriously ruffled about anything in many years, can be transformed by the discovery of undoubted plagiarism into an agent of controlled but deadly rage. And it is worth remembering the irritated response of the professor of Marine Biology who was regularly pestered by people who asked whether it was true that one could get away from the killer shark by blowing bubbles in its face under water. To the umpteenth questioner, he replied: 'Listen, pal; the shark lives there. If it wants to get you, it will'. Just so. Faced with the stench of plagiarism, the academic is a bit like the killer shark.

Conclusion

There are no magic keys which unlock the door to essay-writing. Some people seem to find it easy to write quickly and well; others do not. But you can always improve the quality of your essays by following the guidance offered here.

There is little doubt that a good essay is a clear essay; a clear essay has a concise and coherent argument; such an argument is carried forward on a balanced structure; a balanced structure reflects intelligent research about the subject; intelligent research is the product of careful thought about the question posed; and the question represents an invitation to deal with a particular problem in a particular way.

In these pages I have tried to suggest ways in which you can sharpen all these skills, and why they are the essence of an intellectual training. By developing such skills throughout your years of study you will improve your capacity to understand, interpret and analyse. Insofar as you can do that with confidence, you will both enhance the enjoyment of your studies and also expand your capacity to think clearly and independently, to think creatively and to think critically.

The more people in a society who can do that, the richer it will be. Or so it could be argued.

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