WRITING FOR HISTORY

Tips on how to format and present your essay

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Formatting rules for essay submission

Every essay must have the following components:

1. Cover page with the following information:
   a. Name
   b. Student ID
   c. Course of study
   d. Module code: Module Title
   e. Lecturer
   f. Tutor
   g. Question title
   h. Date of submission
   i. Word count (excluding footnotes)

2. Page numbers centred at the bottom of each page.

3. Make sure to staple your essay before submitting a hard copy.

4. Margins must be justified. This can be done in the ‘Paragraph’ section of the Word Doc toolbar.

5. Lines should be double spaced. This can be changed in the ‘Paragraph’ section of the toolbar as well.

6. Indent second and subsequent paragraphs. Do not space out each paragraph, simply move onto the next line and indent the line (press tab button once).

7. Bibliography is on its own page at the end.

8. Do not use headings, except for the ‘Bibliography’ title on that page.

9. To insert footnote: press Ctrl + Alt + F


11. Do not use contractions. (Use ‘do not’ instead of don’t)

12. Use the written form of any numerical value under 100. Anything above that you can use the numerical value.

13. Dates should always be written in the following format: 22 July 2016.
Process of writing an essay

Picking your question/topic:

Pay close attention to the exact wording of the question. Identify what is being asked of you and consider whether you want to take on the challenges that lie ahead.

The types of questions you will be asked are:

- **Compare**: Look for similarities and differences.
- **Contrast**: Set in opposition in order to bring out differences.
- **Criticise**: Judge the merit of theories, opinions, or supposed facts.
- **Discuss**: Examine by argument; debate; reasons for and against.
- **Evaluate**: Make an appraisal of the worth of something.
- **Explain**: Make plain; interpret and account for; give reasons.
- **Interpret**: Make explicit a meaning, usually giving your judgement.

Allow yourself a lot of time to make your decision. Do not wait until the night before to choose your topic. This is a recipe for disaster. Pick your question early in the semester and start looking for sources to help you. Take notes as you go along.

Plan/Structure:

Now that you have chosen your question, you can move on to formulating your plan. This is a crucial stage of composing any written assignment. From your research on the topic you should have an idea of the argument that you wish to present to your examiner.

Draw up a plan of how you will present the argument. Below is a basic one that I used during my years as an undergraduate student in UL. It can be used regardless of the word count or topic being addressed.

a. **Introduction** (usually ten per cent of word count):

   i. Begin with a good topic sentence that clearly lays out the argument you are making in the assignment.

   ii. Talk about the relevance of your argument to the question being asked.
iii. Lay out how you will answer the question. Usually this comprises 3 or 4 main arguments. Lay out the main thrust of what your arguments will be in a general sense.

b. **Main argument** (usually eighty per cent of word count)

   i. Break each argument into different sections. For essays of 2,000 words or above, it is a good idea to break each section into two separate paragraphs.

   ii. To make clear that you are continuing on with the same point, it is a good idea to use a link sentence to reiterate the point of the section the examiner is about to read.

   iii. Compose a bullet point list of what you want to talk about in each section. That way you can avoid using a good talking point that would be better suited to a different section.

   iv. Try to have each argument/section a uniform length. Stylistically this will look better and give off the impression that the essay has been meticulously planned out.

   v. Do not write three or four sentences and then move onto a new paragraph.

   vi. Do not litter your essay with many different theories/arguments. You will be getting marked on your ability to rationalise an argument to its full logical conclusion.

   vii. Try not to be too general and introduce items that should be taken for granted.

   viii. If your essay is well planned out in advance, you will have no problems reaching the required word count. You should not be thinking about just scraping past the word count, this will set you up for ultimate failure.

c. **Conclusion** (usually ten per cent of word count):

   i. Do not simply restate your main points from the essay.

   ii. The conclusion is there for you to tie together the disparate elements of your main arguments into a neat and tidy conclusion that proves your original hypothesis.

   iii. It should be treated with care. It is the final chance for you to make an impression on the examiner.

   iv. Give it as much attention as your introduction.
v. Conclusions of less than half a page will often be looked upon negatively.

*The dangers of Narrative:*

When you choose a topic, make sure you can tackle it in a way that your argument forms the bulk of the essay. Too often students approach a topic with the intention of padding it out with general and vague assertions. These simply take up space and distract from your argument. Do not fall into the trap of providing too much narrative. Assume that your examiner is already up to speed on the general history surrounding your topic. You are getting marked on your ability to formulate a cohesive argument to prove your original hypothesis.
Referencing

What does it mean?

Put simply, referencing refers to the ways in which you credit somebody for aiding in your research. Every time you use a piece of information in the text of your assignment, you must show where you got this from. The examiner will need a full citation to be sure of where you got your information from.

Why is it important?

It is crucial that you highlight where you got your information. If you fail to do so, you run the risk of falling foul of the plagiarism guidelines. Whereas some forms of plagiarism are totally accidental, and are treated as such, repeated instances of unattributed work will be considered a serious breach of UL’s academic integrity principles.

Which referencing system do I need to use for History?

The Department of History uses the Irish Historical Studies (IHS) guidelines. This the only referencing system that you are allowed to use for history assignments. Although you may well be using different referencing systems for other subjects, they will not be tolerated in your history assignments. The IHS guidelines are available on the History LibGuide. Make sure to print out a copy and have it beside you when you are writing your essay. It will make life much easier in the long run.

   1. Footnotes
   2. Bibliographic citations.

I will not be going into heavy detail on how to reference every different type of source, as that would take too long. This information is available in the IHS attachment on the LibGuide page.

Footnotes:

They are used by students to correctly attribute the source of the information they have just presented, without cluttering up the main text. After you have finished making your point based off one of your sources, you conclude your sentence in the normal fashion.¹

A good rule of thumb for students is that for every 100 words of text that you write, you should have at least 1 footnote to back it up.

¹ By pressing Ctrl + Alt + F on the keyboard, I have created a footnote. Here you make sure to give the full reference. If it is a book by one author, then it will look something like this: John Smith, Book title (City of publication, year), p. xx.
As you can see below, I have placed the formula for footnoting a book. It takes the form of:


If you are referencing a journal article, it will look like:


*Bibliography:*

This is always listed on the final page, under the centred heading ‘Bibliography’. This book ends the essay and allows you to provide a full list of all the sources you referenced in the course of writing your essay.

If needs be, you should separate the Primary sources from the Secondary sources.

The formula for a bibliographic citation of a book is as follows:

Surname, Forename, *Boot title* (Place, Year).

**Differences between Footnote and Bibliographic citations:**

There are a few differences between the footnote citation and bibliographic citations.

1. Surname comes first in a bibliographic citation (Forename comes first in a footnote).

2. While footnotes provide the exact page(s) referenced, bibliographic citations do not. In the case of an article in a journal, you must list the overall page range in the bibliography.

3. Bibliographic citations are arranged alphabetically by the authors surname. You only have to list a particular source once in the bibliography.