



Department of Drama

## Writing an Essay

### Section One: The Essential Quick Style Guide

Below is a basic reference guide for good essay style. This is Exeter Drama's chosen style, which is broadly based on a Harvard style of referencing. If you are studying modules outside Drama you should check the referencing style that is required, as not all disciplines use Harvard. If you are a Combined Honours student, you may use the referencing style of your other discipline, provided you do so accurately and consistently.

This guide is far from exhaustive and there are many more guides out there if you want more detailed information.

If in doubt, use the style summarised below.

#### **General Formatting**

Essays must:

- be double spaced
- be justified
- be paginated
- include your candidate number and module code on the top of every page
- use 12pt font size
- titles should be italicised
- use of italics for emphasis should be kept to a minimum

#### **Referencing**

- Quotes over 40 words should be separated from the body of the text and be indented. If a quote is over 40 words it does not need quotation marks. Please see the example below:

Critics of spectatorship suggest, as Jacques Rancière notes, that looking is a dubious activity on two counts:

First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act. (Rancière 2009: 2)

It is, therefore, worth noting that Thompson.....

- Quotes should not be italicised, underlined, or in bold unless they are in the original source. If this is the case please indicate that the emphasis is the author's own.

- Quotes must be properly integrated into your essay and should not just be sentences in and of themselves. Introduce quotes with a colon where appropriate otherwise integrate the quote in to the grammar of your sentence.
- Quotes should be placed in single quotation marks. If there is a quote within a quote use speech marks for this. For example:

Taylor asserts that 'to be "a wayward horse" is precisely to be alone in the modern world' (Taylor 2012: 66)

- When using the Harvard Style do not use footnotes for references.
- Footnotes should thus only be used for a development of a point too long or tangential to be easily incorporated in the flow of the discussion. Footnotes, then, though located at the bottom of the page, are still in some way part of your essay.
- References, in general, come at the end of the sentence and always inside the punctuation. Please see example:

Indeed, Caruth continues to argue that a traumatic crisis is 'marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness' (Caruth 1996: 5).

- References should be organised as follows (Surname Year: Page Number). If there is no page number (i.e. for online newspaper articles for example use np).
- If you paraphrase, you still have to reference your source. For example:

One of the key aspects of time-management is the orientation towards certain goals and objectives (Adair 1988: 51).

## **Bibliography**

The bibliography is an alphabetical list (by authors' surnames) of all the sources you have used. Works in the main bibliography should be works that you have cited. If you wish to show other relevant reading that is not directly referenced please offer a subsection in your bibliography entitled 'Works Consulted'. Only include cited materials or particularly important works that you have just consulted. A bloated and unfocused bibliography will not secure a higher mark. Please note that different *types* of sources require slightly different formats. Here are the most common:

<b>Book with one author</b>
Adair, J. (1988) <i>Effective time management: How to save time and spend it wisely</i> , London: Pan Books.
<b>Book with two authors</b>
McCarthy, P. and Hatcher, C. (1996) <i>Speaking persuasively: Making the most of your presentations</i> , Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
<b>Book – second or later edition</b>
Barnes, R. (1995) <i>Successful study for degrees</i> , 2nd edition, London: Routledge.
<b>Book by same author in the same year</b>
Napier, A. (1993a) <i>Fatal storm</i> , Sydney: Allen and Unwin. Napier, A. (1993b) <i>Survival at sea</i> , Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

<b>Book with an editor</b>
Danaher, P. (ed.) (1998) <i>Beyond the ferris wheel</i> , Rockhampton: CQU Press.
<b>Chapter in a book written by someone other than the editor</b>
Byrne, J. (1995) 'Disabilities in tertiary education', in Rowan, L. and McNamee, J. (ed.) <i>Voices of a Margin</i> , Rockhampton: CQU Press, pp. 25-37.
<b>Books with an anonymous or unknown author</b>
<i>The University Encyclopedia</i> (1985) London: Roydon.
<b>Translated Books</b>
Freud, S. (2002) <i>The Wolfman and Other Cases</i> , translated from German by L. A. Huish, London: Penguin Books.
<b>Plays</b>
Shakespeare, W. (1967 [1600]) <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> , edited by S. Wells, London: Penguin Books.
<b>Translated Plays</b>
Euripides (1914 [415 A.C.]) <i>Trojan Women</i> , translated from Greek by G. Murray, London: George Allen. (N.B. It is always a good idea to provide date of original publication in squared brackets, but for plays or any other primary sources it is particularly important!)
<b>Journal article</b>
Muller, V. (1994) 'Trapped in the body: Transsexualism, the law, sexual identity', <i>The Australian Feminist Law Journal</i> , vol. 3, August, pp. 103-107.
<b>Newspaper articles</b>
Cumming, F. (1999) 'Tax-free savings push', <i>Sunday Mail</i> , 4 April, p. 1.
<b>For a particular edition of a primary source</b>
Beaumont, F. (1967) <i>The Knight of the Burning Pestle</i> , ed. John Doeblen. London: Edward Arnold.
<b>Theatre performance (devised production)</b>
Odin Teatret (1990) <i>The Castle of Hostelbro</i> , dir. Eugenio Barba. Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, Holstebro, Denmark. First performance 23. April 1990 [London: Barbican, 19. May 1990]. [state the date and place where and when you have seen the production, unless it is the same as the First Performance]
<b>Theatre performance (production of an authored play)</b>
Shakespeare, W. (1989) <i>Pericles, Prince of Tyre</i> , dir. David Thaker, The Swan in Stratford-upon-Avon, Royal Shakespeare Company. First performance: 6 September 1989 [3. December 1989]. [state the date and place where and when you have seen the production, unless it is the same as the First Performance]

<b>CD - Music</b>
Maroon 5 (2007) <i>It Won't Be Soon Before Long</i> , CD: Polydor
<b>DVD</b>
Barker, C. (2003) <i>Theatre Jazz. Workshop held at Warwick University, Spring 2003</i> , DVD, Exeter Digital Archives, Drama Department, University of Exeter.  <i>Dial M For Murder</i> . DVD. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. 1954; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2004
<b>Lectures</b>
Thomson, P. (2006) <i>The Clown in Shakespeare's Plays</i> , lecture given at the University of Exeter, Queen's, LT1, 12 May, 10-12am.
<b>Online Sources</b>
<b>Article from an online journal</b>
Heddon, D. (2002) 'Performing the Self', <i>M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture</i> , vol. 5, no. 5 [Online], <a href="http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0210/Heddon.php">http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0210/Heddon.php</a> [20 July 2006].  NB: You include the date on which you accessed the website in squared brackets, and you provide the <b>full</b> website address. In your essay, you would still reference this as (Heddon, 2002). There would be no page numbers, however, so you would write: (Heddon, 2002, n.p.) – n.p. stands for “no page”. <b>Any</b> information taken from the web must be referenced. If you are simply consulting a webpage, give the web details, plus your date of access.
<b>Website</b>
AUT [Online] <a href="http://www.aut.org.uk/">http://www.aut.org.uk/</a> [20 July 2003].  We would urge students to be very careful in their use of the web for source material. Credible online web journals are useful, but there are also many materials that are simply inaccurate. Unlike the peer-reviewed journals, where someone has “approved” the content, most web published materials is not subject to “quality control”. As a result, much of it is inaccurate, spurious, unhelpfully subjective, and lacking in critical rigour. Many of the “essays” on the web are student samples – and often not very good ones. Finally, the increased use of web materials has led to an increase in plagiarism. The university has responded to this swiftly, and we now routinely check essay text with web text and are currently testing software that will detect plagiarism from online sources. <i>Wikipedia</i> , possibly the most popular choice for information, may be useful for a quick orientation, but is unacceptable in an academic context as its contents can vary daily and is often enough plainly wrong.

**For more detailed information on how to reference particular sources, please see the online guides on the Library referencing website:**

<https://libguides.exeter.ac.uk/referencing>

## Section Two: General Notes on Writing Skills

Most people have mastered the art of writing an essay by the time they reach university. So, these notes are designed as reminders rather than prescriptions. Of course, however beautifully presented it is, the worth of an essay lies in the quality of the ideas it contains.

### Having Ideas

#### 1. Note-making

At university level your written work should reveal a breadth of reading and research. Usually your best ideas will be prompted by your reading, and by your reflection on workshop practice or performances you have seen. You should get into the habit of making notes while you read, and keeping full bibliographic information, including page numbers, for any quotations from primary and secondary sources. Always attribute quotations, not to do so is plagiarism. Referencing software such as EndNote, ReferenceManager, or ProCite can be an excellent tool for building your own bibliographic catalogue – one that can help organise your own notes into an electronically searchable database. Before reading anything, know why you want to read it. You might want to read to obtain a clear definition or to clarify a concept. If you don't really know why you are reading something, you may end up with notes that you will never use because you have not focused on what you really need to know. You might be reading to collect facts and information, or to understand a theoretical approach, or to grasp an author's argument, or to build up your own argument by gathering others' opinions. You will read in different ways, depending on why you are reading. You might use a variety of methods:

- Jot down the three or four questions you would like the text to answer. For example, one question might be "What are some good examples of feminist theatre?"
- Read the last paragraph of the chapter or article or skim through for any paragraph that seems to summarise the information. This way, you will find out if the text contains the answers to your questions.
- Read the first line of each paragraph. This should tell you where the information you want is located.
- Read sections that are relevant in more depth.
- With your questions in mind, read the chapter or the article, making notes on the answers to your questions.

Skimming, selective reading or close scrutiny of the text are useful methods depending on why you are reading. Using a variety of methods will help you to read actively rather than passively as you are actively looking for information while you read. Each time you finish reading, take a moment to summarise what you have gleaned from the text. You might also wish to check that your notes make sense.

#### 2. Critical Thinking and Your Own Ideas

Try not to be seduced by the arguments made by the writers you read, and regurgitate them. Begin with your own point of view and then see whether the writers agree with your view or not. Ask questions while you read such as:

- What are my reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with this writer's argument?
- Has the writer manipulated the material to put across their point of view?
- Can the evidence the writer uses be questioned? Why?
- Is the writer writing from a particular perspective? How does this influence what they say and the way they present their argument?

### 3. Structure

All essays need a clear structure. Your argument needs to develop as the paragraphs progress and the reader should be able to see how the material you have selected is relevant to the question you are answering. Connections between ideas and supporting evidence may seem obvious to you at three in the morning but may not seem quite so obvious to your reader at four o'clock the following afternoon. By following a simple formula you will aid your reader and support your argument:

- Begin with an introduction outlining what you are going to argue
- Follow this with paragraphs that make and illustrate separate points
- Provide a conclusion that summarises your argument but doesn't just say the same things in fewer sentences.

It is a good idea to look back at your argument and point out a key finding, or a remaining open question.

### 4. Planning

Planning the overall shape of the essay before you write it is an easy way to ensure readability. It is not necessary to know everything about a topic before you do a plan. In fact, doing a plan is an excellent way to find out what you need to know. The following planning method will help you to include your own ideas based on evidence and to build a structured argument:

- Answer the question in one sentence. Even if you don't know much about the topic, you have probably had some thoughts on it during lectures or seminars. If you feel you can't do this, you might do some brief background reading to inspire you. This is your tentative conclusion.
- Produce a list of bullet points under headings that support your conclusion. If you feel you need to find out more about a certain heading, write down exactly what you need to find out.
- Use the headings to locate the material you need in texts.
- Make notes on the material you need.
- Write a first draft, a rough outline of your ideas so far.
- You will need to write a second draft, where you ensure that each paragraph expresses an idea and moves your argument forward.
- Write the introduction last. It is very difficult to begin an essay with an introduction before you know what you really want to say.

This method helps you to avoid producing copious notes that you will never use and you will probably find that you read more selectively to inform or back up your argument.

### 5. Drafting and Editing

You will need to read back over your work at the end. You may need to refine the logic of your argument over several drafts. Beginning your writing early in the process allows you time to do this. Allow time to produce two or more drafts, until you are happy that you have articulated your argument clearly and effectively. Read your work once for "flow" and once again for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

**Pre-Submission Checklist**

- does the essay/portfolio answer the question?
- does it provide an argument (rather than just a bunch of ideas)?
- are the points it makes interesting, complex, original?
- is the evidence given convincing?
- does it make appropriate use of *academic* sources?
- is it clearly written?
- is it clearly and sensibly structured?
- is it well referenced?
- is it proof-read well?
- does it adhere to the style guidelines outlined above?