**Bachelor of Communication and Media**

**Writing the essay**

**Slide 1: Introduction**

This presentation focuses on the elements of writing a good essay. Particular aspects such as what an academic essay is and its structure will be discussed. You will also be introduced to two important aspects that you need to pay attention to before you begin writing, they are ‘instruction words’ and ‘reporting verbs’. In addition, some examples of the introduction, body and conclusion sections of an essay are provided. The example essays you see in this presentation demonstrate two different writing styles. Example 1 is a reflective essay and so the writer has used first person pronoun. Even though first person pronoun is generally allowed in a reflective essay, it is still an academic essay and where appropriate you need to adhere to academic writing conventions.

**Slide 2: What is an academic essay?**

An academic essay is written in the academic style which is quite different from language used for everyday communication. \*The topic is well-researched and the arguments are evidenced based on the research. When you write an academic essay, it is categorised into three sections, namely the \*introduction, \*body and \*conclusion. \*You are expected to use objective language. This means you cannot communicate your bias through the words you use. For example, you cannot say ‘This is interestingly obvious only in the research context’. You are advised to use reported speech and only third person pronoun in your arguments unless your instructor has advised you otherwise. You are not allowed to use contractions in your essay and your arguments need to be evidenced through the research that you have undertaken about the topic. You must also put forward a coherent, cohesive and critical argument. This means that your discussion must be meaningful, insightful and flow smoothly. You are also expected to produce grammatically correct sentences. It is important to submit work that is proofread and edited so that it is free of errors.

**Slide 3: The essay structure**

As was indicated earlier, most essays that you would be required to write will be structured with an introduction, body and conclusion. This may not always be the case as some instructors would require that you structure your work in a different manner. That is why it is really important for you to always check with your instructor before you begin writing. \*The introduction is approximately 10% of the total word count. So, if you are writing a 2000 word essay, the introduction will be approximately 200 words. In the introduction, you generally have to introduce the reader to the topic and highlight one or two key issues related to it. Next you have to specify what the aim of the essay is. It would not be wise to just repeat the essay question as essay questions are rather broad and you cannot possibly answer everything associated with it and produce a substantial argument. Rather you should indicate the aspects on which you will be focussing in your discussion. Next you would provide the scope of your essay. This typically tells the reader how the discussion will be organised in your essay. The scope can be used as an outline for your essay.

\*The body section of the essay is made up of approximately 1600 words or 80% of your total word count in a 2000 word essay. This is where a significant proportion of your marks are awarded, therefore you need to present a logical and coherent argument. The body section of the essay should be divided into different paragraphs. Each paragraph should typically have a topic sentence which would be expanded with supporting statements. You then have to demonstrate your critical thinking and provide examples wherever possible to show that you can relate the concepts to actual contexts.

\*Finally, you have to write the conclusion for your essay which is approximately 200 words or 10% of the total word count of a 2000 word count. The conclusion brings together and wraps up the whole discussion. In the conclusion, you have to restate the thesis statement which is the main message of the essay. This is because you would be writing a substantial discussion about the topic and the reader may forget what the thesis statement is and you have to remind them. You would also have to recap the key points raised in the body section of your essay. Try not to just repeat what you had said earlier but interpret what this means to your discussion. Then conclude your discussion with a concluding statement that is related to the topic. This could be suggestions for future research, implications for your discipline or simply just a thought provoking statement. It must be emphasised here that if you just describe the key ideas associated with the topic, you will not be awarded good grades. In order for you to obtain high marks, you need to discuss the topic critically and in detail.

**Slide 4: Instruction words**

Often your tutors expect you to be able to demonstrate your ability by addressing the requirements of the task. They will instruct you to present something through the use of instruction words. Instruction words tell you how you are suppose to address the task and each one of them mean a particular thing. On this slide and the following one, you can see the different instruction words that are usually used in your essay questions and what they mean. Do ensure that you demonstrate what is required in order to obtain good marks.

**Slide 5: Instruction words (cont’d)**

Here are some more examples of instruction words and what they mean.

**Slide 6: Reporting verbs**

On this slide you will see some examples of ‘Reporting verbs’. You can make your arguments strong or weak by using the appropriate reporting verb. There is no rule as to when you should use any one of these. You would have to be the judge of that. Be clear about what type of argument you want to communicate to your reader and use the appropriate verb. The examples on this slide are just a few of the reporting verbs that you could use in your essay. There are many more that you will find in any texts on academic writing.

**Slide 7: Organisation of the body**

The body section of the essay is organised into different paragraphs. It is advisable to discuss one key point in each paragraph. Raising too many points in one paragraph will make the discussion rather superficial and confusing. You can use as many paragraphs as you want to discuss one key point. Try not to write very long or very short paragraphs. \*\*\*Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence which is a mini introduction to each key point or the main idea that will be discussed in the paragraph. Expand this with supporting statements from you readings, research, etc. You should provide a minimum of two or three references for each key point. Try not to repeat the same references throughout the essay. Next, demonstrate critical thinking, which simply means interpreting what this means to your discipline, context, the strengths and limitations of the debates or findings in this area or a critique. This will demonstrate to your tutors that you understand what you read and are able to critically engage in the discussion. Many students fail to do this and that is why they do not obtain high grades for their essay. Finally, where possible try to incorporate an example to contextualise the discussion. Everything you discuss in your essay should be linked within and between paragraphs so that your essay is coherent and cohesive. If you do not create links in your discussion, it will come across as disjointed. The organisation of the paragraph structure is not stagnant. You can demonstrate critical thinking and show examples wherever appropriate and applicable.

**Slide 8: Introduction: Example**

On this slide you will see two examples of the introduction. Observe how the writers have organised their paragraph. \*Example 1 is an essay that was written for LANG1054 which is Intercultural Communication. You will notice that the writer has used first person pronoun as this is allowed in the course. \*In Example 2, which is an essay written for COMM1057, the writer does not use first person pronoun and it is written in reported speech. These examples draw your attention to different writing styles that are practised in different courses. It is important to be clear of the requirements for your assessment tasks before you begin writing so that you don’t spend a lot of time writing only to be told later that you have not met the criteria.

You do not have to produce a replica of these examples. You can come up with your own version of the introduction but demonstrating the different components highlighted in the text boxes on the right will ensure that you will get good marks. The introduction is usually written in one paragraph.

**Slide 9: Body: Example**

\*On this slide you will see two examples of a body paragraph. Once again, the examples are from two different courses. \*Observe how the writers have organised their discussion. It is often suggested that you use current references; anything that is more than ten years is often perceived as dated in academic writing. This is because the world constantly changes and something that was found or recommended 20 or 30 years ago may no longer be relevant today. However, if these sources are applicable to your discussion and if you cannot find anything more recent on the topic, it is okay to use them. Some theories and concepts that were introduced in the early 1900s are still used today. However, always begin by looking for recent sources and then go backwards. Also ensure that you do not use the same references over and over again. Try to look for different sources on the key idea that you are trying communicate. The organisation of the discussion exemplified on this slide is an example only. You do not have to follow the exact structure and only demonstrate critical thinking at one point in a paragraph. Critical thinking can be demonstrated anywhere in the discussion. You also do not need to provide an example at every instance. However, examples do help make a point clearer. Do also ensure that you cite your references in-text and include a reference list at the end using the referencing conventions that is recommended in your program. It would also be a good idea to listen to the referencing presentation. In the examples, you will also notice that one writer has used UniSA Harvard referencing conventions and the other writer has used the APA.

**Slide 10: Conclusion: Example**

On this slide you will see an example of the conclusion section of the essay that was written for LANG1054. Try to incorporate the elements that were highlighted in Slide 3 of the presentation in the conclusion. The conclusion is usually written in one paragraph and does not have citations.

**Slide 11: Resources for writing the essay**

Here are links to additional resources that you may find useful for writing your essay. These resources are on the study support webpage: http://w3.unisa.edu.au/study-skills/developskills.html