Information Management Essay

What is an essay?
The purpose of an academic essay is to present your point of view, sometimes known as a position or argument, on a particular topic. This means that an academic essay:
- is a persuasive piece of writing that analyses a topic and persuades a reader that the point of view presented is correct, and
- is developed, explained and supported using evidence from experts based on reliable and academic sources which are all acknowledged using a referencing system.

What does your lecturer expect?
Lecturers and assessors of your essay will have particular expectations for each assignment so read the task requirements carefully. However, generally all essays require you to:
- develop a point of view in relation to a topic through research and thought;
- persuade your reader that the point of view you have developed is well supported by the ideas and information you present;
- construct your thoughts, as expressed in your writing, based on a number of reliable (academic or scholarly) sources of information, ideas and theories;
- always acknowledge the sources when you use them by using a referencing system;
- structure your essay appropriately according to the point of view you have taken, and
- write your paragraphs and sentences clearly in a formal and objective style. Lecturers are looking for cohesive writing where the ideas flow smoothly and logically together.

What type of thinking is needed?
You need to think broadly to help you to see the big picture, for example by:
- considering different points of view on the topic
- brainstorming and arranging possibilities

You need to think critically about what you read by:
- evaluating the reliability of the sources you use
- examining the arguments provided in detail
- asking critical questions
Some examples of critical questions could be: ‘Are there any gaps in the logic of the writer?’ ‘Are there other elements of the argument which may be more important?’

You need to **think analytically** to connect the evidence you have directly to the question or the task. Useful points to remember are:

- avoid just stating the evidence; explain how it is relevant or significant to the question;
- plan, read and take notes;
- avoid leaving it until you begin to write your first draft.

**Structure of an essay**

**Introduction**
- Introduce topic/context
- State main idea/thesis
- Outline main points

**Body Paragraphs**
- Topic sentence
- Explanation
- Evidence
- Example
- Concluding sentence

**Conclusion**
- Restate argument/main idea
- Sum up
Sample introduction 1

- The introduction moves from broad to specific details.
- The length of your introduction will depend on the word requirement of your essay (usually 10%).

The purpose of conducting oral history is not merely to record information but to make it available to researchers (Matters 1995). This is true for all types of materials collected by libraries and archives. While most librarians would consider it unacceptable to acquire published materials and not make them accessible, academic institutions often actively collect oral histories without making adequate provision for researchers to discover, access, and use them. Without policies and procedures guiding collection, management, and access, it will be extremely difficult—if not impossible—for researchers to find and use oral histories, especially over time, considering staff turnover, technological advances, and other changes. After a brief discussion of the important roles university libraries play in the transferring of information about the history and culture of society orally as an ancient tradition, several key barriers to creating access to oral histories are identified, most notably, insufficient funding, limited expertise or experience with oral histories and technological issues. Finally, guidelines are suggested that may assist university libraries to better manage access to oral histories.

(Adapted from Grimsley & Wynne 2009, pp. 278-279)

Developing your thesis statement

1. Consider what the task requires you to do (e.g. discuss, argue, explore, critique, etc.)
2. Read credible, academic sources
3. Assert a position in relation to this aspect

Example assignment task: Discuss the contributions university libraries make to providing access to oral histories, including potential barriers. Also suggest guidelines or strategies which university libraries might implement to manage access to oral histories.

Thesis statement = Without policies and procedures guiding collection, management, and access, it will be extremely difficult—if not impossible—for researchers to find and use oral histories, especially over time, considering staff turnover, technological advances, and other changes.
Body paragraphs

- **MUST** follow the outline of the essay presented in the introduction
- Paragraphs are very structured and typically include the following elements:
  - **Topic sentence**
    - Tells the reader the main idea of the paragraph
    - One main idea = one paragraph
  - **Explain & support**
    - Use your readings to explain & support your discussion
    - Use in-text references to acknowledge sources of information
  - **Concluding sentence**
    - Summarise the main idea: This is the ‘So what?’ or ‘What does this all mean?’ statement
    - May link to the next paragraph or idea

**Sample body paragraph 1**

Funding and staffing support for oral history collections is a significant barrier to improving researchers’ access to these materials. More than twenty years ago, Ekrish examined 129 oral history programs in academic institutions and found that most were understaffed and underfunded. Only five programs in his study had autonomous budgets allocated specifically for oral history activities (Ekrish 1987, p. 63). Sanner’s survey, completed several years later, included various types of institutions—academic libraries, public libraries, historical societies, special libraries, and government repositories. Only about half of respondents in all categories received annual funding designated for oral history collections. Commonly, repositories did receive one-time grant funding to begin an oral history program, but no provisions were made to continue processing materials over time. A common concern in MacKay’s survey of academic, historical, government, and special libraries was the need for ‘creative ways to meet expenses in an era of shrinking funds’ (2007, p. 11). Ten of the twenty-one academic library respondents to MacKay’s survey felt that curation of oral histories was not sufficiently funded in their institutions (2004, p. 11). Without the ongoing financial commitment of the institution, university libraries are unable to sustain the level of service required to manage access to oral history collections.

Related to funding and staffing support, staff experience with oral histories or collaboration with curators, oral historians and others …

(Adapted from Grimsley & Wynne 2009, pp. 284-285)
Sample conclusion

- Restate the focus of the essay.
- Summarise the main points or findings presented in the body of your essay.
- Finish with a concluding observation or comment.
- The length of your conclusion will depend on the word requirement of your essay (usually 10%).

Considering the uniqueness and research value of oral histories, academic libraries can and should pursue greater access by developing acquisitions and collecting policies and describing materials in discovery tools that are readily available to the public. Even if an institution holds relevant oral history material, if university libraries are not adequately funded or staffed with appropriately experienced personnel, if these resources are not catalogued, and if they are not equipped with state-of-the-art technology, with they might as well not exist. Despite these barriers, most university libraries do possess the capability to enhance access to such resources. In today’s information-seeking environment, for example, multiple access points can enhance the visibility and accessibility of oral histories. Libraries and archives should seek a variety of methods to expose oral history collections beyond the local repository. Further studies of different access methods may lead to greater standardization among institutions, offering solutions to institutions that are currently wrestling with (or ignoring) unprocessed collections due to competing priorities and lack of funding and staffing.

(Adapted from Grimsley & Wynne 2009, p. 295)

Read and use credible, scholarly sources of information

- Scholarly sources include journals, textbooks and government reports.
- These have been refereed, peer-reviewed or have gone through a rigorous editorial process.
- Reports from governing bodies or leading organisations in your field may also be considered appropriate.

Why reference?

- Avoids plagiarism & maintains academic integrity
- Shows exactly where the information comes from
- Strengthens your argument or provides evidence to support your position
When to reference?
- Paraphrasing the words and ideas of others
- Summarising the words and ideas of others
- Quoting the words of others
- Copying the data, graphs, images and tables of others
- Mentioning the ideas or work of others (unless it is considered general knowledge)

How to reference?
1) Include in-text references which provide:
   - Author’s surname or family name
   - Year of publication
   - Page number (when quoting, using data, graphs, tables and images from a specific page or pages)
2) Include a reference list which provides full bibliographic details of sources referenced in your report

Additional resources:
Visit the module Improving your academic skills for more information about:
- Understand Assignments and Instruction words (see Planning section)
- Assignment planning (see Planning section)
- Paragraph writing (see Writing section)
- Introductions (see Writing section)
- Conclusions (see Writing section)
- Proofreading your assignment (see Writing section)
- Linking words and phrases (see Writing section)
- Reading and note-taking (see Reading section)

For resources on referencing (including UniSA Harvard and APA referencing styles) and academic integrity, go to UniSA’s referencing website.

To understand more about finding and choosing scholarly sources, check out the UniSA library’s training videos on the library’s website.

Writing essays: writing centre learning guide (University of Adelaide)

References