

A good essay

Answers the question

No matter how interesting or well-written an essay, you will not be given any credit for your efforts unless it answers the question which was set. This is the most important feature of what makes a good essay: it *must* deal with the subject or the topic(s) posed in the question or title. This requires that you both understand what the question is asking for and that you follow all its instructions. (See **Relevance** page 78)

Clear structure

An essay should be like a good piece of architecture – built on firm foundations to carefully made plans. The points of your argument should be arranged in some form which is logical and persuasive. If you are dealing with a number of issues, the relation between them should be made quite clear. The connections between each part and the original question should be evident at every stage of the argument.

(See **Planning essays** page 55)

Appropriate style

For an academic essay the third person ('he', 'she', or 'it') rather than the first person ('I') is preferable although occasional use of 'I' may be accepted if a personal opinion has been specifically requested. You should keep your audience in mind: try to imagine that you are addressing someone who is intelligent and reasonably, but not necessarily well-informed in the subject upon which you are writing. Remember too that your written style should be grammatically accurate. Poor punctuation and sentence construction, mixed tenses and metaphors, and even spelling mistakes will create a bad impression. (See **Style** page 86)

Arguments supported by evidence

Essays should not be just a series of unsupported assertions. You need to provide some evidence to support them – either in the form of factual details, your own reasoning, or the arguments of others. In this latter case, you should always reveal the fact that you are using someone else's ideas honestly and accurately by using a system of footnotes or endnotes. Never try to pass off other people's written words as your own. This is a form of intellectual dishonesty which is severely frowned upon in academic circles.

(See **Plagiarism** page 54)