Tutor comments on the essay

Your general purpose in marking an essay is to offer a response which is personal and direct, which offers critical comment and guidance in relation to the subject in question, and simultaneously points the way forward to the next stage of the student's potential development.

On an essay script which has been thoroughly and skilfully marked, the tutor's comments should act as a form of *teaching* rather than simply assessment and grading. That is, the commentary itself should form part of the tuition process by offering further stimulation and advice to the student.

Indeed, on distance learning courses where the amount of tutor comment on a script might be more extensive than usual, this commentary acts as a replacement or a substitute for what might normally take place as debate and critical enquiry in the classroom, the seminar, or the tutorial.

Some tutors find it helpful to read quickly through an essay before they start marking it, so as to get some grasp of the overall argument. They will then read through it more slowly a second time, adding their written comments. If you have the patience to adopt this procedure you may find that it simplifies the matter of gaining a general impression of the work and its structure. Be warned however that it will take up more of your time.

Other tutors argue that such preliminary reading should not really be necessary. They claim that the essay should reveal the structure of its own argument in a coherent manner as it progresses, and that if something is unclear or misplaced then this itself is reason for comment.

Your task as a tutor is to help the student by correcting any factual mistakes and pointing out weaknesses, but you should also try to comment favourably and offer encouraging comments on any good points in the essay as well. You may also wish to respond by recording any ideas which are prompted by your reading.

Although it is sometimes difficult to resist the temptation to make ticks in the margin, you should keep in mind that they are only a very vague sign