

Essay planning

Essays

The production of an academic essay is probably the most important skill you will need to develop for any type of serious study. Almost every course of conventional learning one can imagine—even those which have abandoned examinations as a form of testing—still use essay or project assignments to assess students.

Writing

Unfortunately, this skill is rarely taught in schools or colleges. You are normally expected to pick it up as you go along, with guidance from tutors. People coming to essay writing for the first time sometimes make the task more difficult than it needs to be. They sit down with a blank piece of paper and hope that the finished essay will emerge from the end of the pen. Of course it can't be done that way.

Planning

At the risk of over-simplifying this matter, I would go as far as saying that '*Writing essays is relatively easy: it is **planning** them which is difficult*'. The task of writing an essay should be the culmination of a long process of reading, thinking, sorting out ideas, and generally preparing the ground. You should have detailed plans to work from and all the detailed evidence to hand *before* you begin writing.

Conventions

Different subjects have their own conventions for what an essay should look like and the form it should take: (see **Writing essays**). However, the general principles of planning an essay are worth knowing no matter what subject you are studying. The outline suggestions which follow are not a guarantee of success or a formula which will work in all cases, but they offer a basic strategy which can be brought into play if you need it.

Rough notes

The planning stage is best carried out in rough note form, using lots of scrap paper. Don't imagine that your first efforts will be the best. You