

A SEQUENCED ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: A STUDENT HANDOUT

Adapted 2011 from August 2005 version prepared by Linda Briskin

There are three steps to this essay assignment.

*Step One asks you to analyse your essay question, present a tentative thesis, develop a time management plan and complete the on-line tutorial on *The Research Roadmap*.
<http://www.library.yorku.ca/roadmap/>

*Step Two requires a bibliography, annotations and evaluation of sources, an updated thesis, and an outline. You will hand in your time management plan from Step One and comment on its accuracy. You will also re-do the on-line tutorial on *Academic Integrity*
http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/ and hand in your quiz results.

*Step Three includes the final research essay, a self-evaluation and an assessment of your time management plan.

Working through these steps will help you learn the complex process of producing a university-level essay with an informed point of view. Be sure to follow all instructions carefully. Each step is due in your tutorial on the dates indicated on the course outline. You must hand in prior steps with each subsequent step so when you hand in Step 2, include Step 1. With Step 3 you will hand in Step 1 and 2. Staging the work in this way will help you to plan your time effectively, and provide you with some feedback during the process.

It is imperative that you read carefully the handout on "Essay Trouble Shooting".

STEP ONE: PROPOSAL

For Step One, you will choose and analyse an essay question, present a tentative thesis, develop a time management plan, and complete the on-line tutorial on *The Research Roadmap*.

1. Explain the essay question in your own words. (1/2-1 page)

In your explanation, demonstrate that you understand what the question is asking, and the concepts used in the question. Do not go beyond the information in the question.

2. Do an initial organizational outline based on the question. (approx 1 page) See example in #3 in "Essay Troubleshooting".

3. Summarize your opinion on the **debate**. (approx 1 page)

What is your position on this debate? For the example in "Essay Trouble Shooting", you would outline whether or not you support censorship to deal with pornography, and explain why. **No research is permitted** for this statement of your initial opinion.

This statement represents a **tentative** thesis which will evolve as you research your topic and move toward the development of an 'informed point of view', what is also called an 'argument'. An informed point of view moves beyond opinion and is built on thoughtful and thorough investigation that takes account of the research and analysis done by scholars and experts. This exercise will prepare you to read your library sources more effectively. Analysis of scholarly texts depends upon a full awareness of prior opinions which often shape how we read research.

4. A Time Management Plan (1 page)

Too often, students leave their assignments until the last minute and then do a poor job on them. The most effective way to do a big assignment like this one is to space it over several months. Spacing the work gives you time to formulate your ideas and refine them.

A key time management strategy involves breaking down a large project into its component parts, estimating how much time each will take and then allocating that time over the weeks you have available. Use the sheet below to develop a Time Management Plan.

Be sure to keep track of how long you actually spent on each step over the year. This record will allow you to assess your time management skills. Effective time management requires an ability to accurately assess how long a task will take. You will also be asked to hand in and comment on your time management plan as part of Step 2 and Step 3.

For more information, see [Learning Skills: University Time Management](#).

Also see "[Essay Writing Tips](#)"- the following link under Teaching Essay Writing.

5. On Line Library Tutorial on *The Research Roadmap*

Complete the on-line tutorial on *The Research Roadmap* which will take you through the basic steps of the research process in preparation for writing an essay in the social sciences. It takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. This tutorial can be found at <http://www.library.yorku.ca/roadmap/>. It is recommended that you keep re-doing the tutorial until you score 100%. On completion, print out your quiz results and hand them in with your assignment.

STEP ONE LENGTH: approximately 3-4 pages typed double spaced

HAND IN THE ORIGINAL AND KEEP A COPY FOR YOURSELF. THIS IS FOR YOUR PROTECTION. Remember the penalties for late assignments.

GRADE:

*You will lose 2% if you do not include the completion sheet for the Research Roadmap.

*You will lose 2% if you do not include your Time Management Plan.

Note that you are required to hand in Step One with Step Two. Be sure to keep the copy on which your tutorial leader has written her comments.

STEP TWO: RESEARCH

In Step Two, you will develop a bibliography; read, annotate and evaluate four of your sources; re-examine and update your thesis; and prepare an essay outline. You will hand in and comment on your Time Management plan from Step One. You will also re-do the on-line tutorial on *Academic Integrity* and hand in your quiz results.

HAND IN:

1. BIBLIOGRAPHY

A bibliography of seven sources that you will use to write your essay. Your materials should be from academic or scholarly journals (some of which are available only 'on-line' as e-journals) or from scholarly anthologies or books. Material from newspapers, magazines or the Internet is not usually permitted unless specifically assigned by your course instructor.

Although you can use course materials for your essay and should include them in your bibliography with a proper reference, you will need seven additional sources. For the Bibliography, a book counts as one source.

Use proper referencing. **If you are using articles out of anthologies, reference each article separately.** If your work is filled with citation errors, your grade will be lowered.

In preparation for finding and selecting sources, it is imperative that you read #4 and #5 of "Essay Trouble Shooting".

2. ANNOTATIONS

i) Annotations on four of the sources. Where possible, choose sources that explore different sides of the question.

A book counts as two sources if you have read the whole book or a large portion of it. If you have read one or two chapters, count this as one source.

Although you can use course material for your essay, do not annotate it.

A book annotation should be about 2 pages; an article annotation 2-3 paragraphs. If your annotations are longer, it is an indication that they are too descriptive. An excellent annotation depends upon selecting the key points, and choosing what to leave out. Include a **complete** bibliographic reference with each annotation, and citations where necessary.

An annotation summarizes the author's arguments ('a set of claims') and conclusions. In an annotation, you are representing the author's arguments rather than interpreting or evaluating them. It also identifies and explains key concepts which are central to that arguments. Since you want to emphasize your own understanding and ability to explain the text, do not quote directly from the author. Prepare your annotations as soon as you have read the material. They will help you to clarify the main points and to remember the material.

ii) For **each** source that you annotate, answer the following question:

What material (evidence, data, arguments etc) in this text is relevant to the debate you are researching? Explain which side of the debate the material supports. It is not sufficient to indicate that the sources address your debate. **You need to be quite specific about what is relevant to the development of your thesis.**

In answering this question, do not repeat the material in the annotation. You are now shifting into your own voice, assessing the material for its relevance to your essay and to your argument. In contrast, the annotation represents the author's voice and highlights her arguments and conclusions. Do not quote from the article. Explain the relevance in your own words.

It is really important to draw from a range of sources. Do not rely too heavily on a single source. You are trying to represent a range of points of view.

3. ASSESSMENT OF TENTATIVE THESIS/FORMULATION OF NEW WORKING THESIS

i) Re-read the statement of your opinion/tentative thesis from Step One. Has your research changed or shifted your views?

If yes, why **and** in what ways? Be very specific and concrete. If no, why not? What research supports your initial opinion? For material (evidence, data, arguments etc) that challenges your tentative thesis, explain why it has not changed your mind.

Remember that a strong essay depends on taking account of arguments on both sides of the debate.

ii) In one paragraph, explain the informed point of view/thesis that will now organize your essay. See #6 in "Essay Troubleshooting".

4. RESEARCH OUTLINE

For Step One, you did an outline based on the essay question which provided an initial organizational tool. You now need to move beyond this outline and develop a **research outline** based on the themes, concepts and arguments that have emerged from your research. This outline will be completely different than the outline you did for Step One.

A **detailed research outline** utilizes your research and demonstrates how you will explain and defend your thesis. It identifies the major themes and sections of your essay; it includes notes indicating the arguments and the sources you will use in each section. This outline can be in point form. This outline will provide the foundation to write a first draft. Although an outline takes time, it can also save a lot of time. Once you have an effective research outline, you will find it considerably easier to write your essay. For more information on outlining, see #3 in "Essay Troubleshooting" .

5. TIME MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Hand in your time management plan that you prepared for Step One. Include how long it took you to do the various parts of Step 2. Comment on what you have learned about your own time management skills.

6. ON LINE LIBRARY TUTORIAL ON *ACADEMIC INTEGRITY*

Re-do the on-line tutorial on *Academic Integrity* which is designed to help you learn about plagiarism, what you can do to avoid it, and how to generally improve your academic efforts. This tutorial takes about 30-40 minutes to complete. This tutorial can be found at:

http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/

It is recommended that you keep re-doing the tutorial until you score 100%. On completion, print out your quiz results and hand them in with your assignment.

STEP TWO LENGTH: 11-12 pages TYPED DOUBLE SPACED

HAND IN THE ORIGINAL OF STEP TWO AND KEEP TWO COPIES FOR YOURSELF. ONE COPY WILL BE USED IN A TUTORIAL EXERCISE AND ONE IS A BACKUP FOR YOUR PROTECTION. Also hand in Step One with Step Two -- the version with the comments of your tutorial leader on it. Do not reprint it. In part, your grade will reflect the degree to which you responded to the suggestions\criticisms. Step Two cannot be graded without Step One.

GRADE:

Note that this step of the assignment is worth more than your final essay. This reflects the importance of this preparatory work. If you have done it properly, writing the essay should be quite straightforward.

*Remember the penalties for late assignments.

*You will lose 3% if you do not include the completion sheet for the on-line tutorial on *Academic Integrity*.

*You will lose 3% if you do not include your Time Management plan and commentary.

STEP THREE: RESEARCH ESSAY

In the final essay, you will bring together the work that you have done in Step One and Two. Your essay should include an introduction, main body and conclusion. **Although it should take account of all sides of the question, it should be organized around your informed point of view on it, and the key arguments you have developed to explain and defend your view.**

You need to support your point of view/thesis with the research you have done. **Be sure to incorporate relevant material from the sources you have read.** You should include reference to at least the seven sources you have read (in addition to relevant course material).

Be scrupulous about referencing and footnoting all material used. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are serious offences.

For information on writing and rewriting, see #8 in "Essay Trouble Shooting".

REMINDERS:

i) In your introduction, present your informed point of view/thesis around which the essay will be organized, and the organizational structure of your essay. Outline the major themes you will address and indicate the order in which you will present them. This helps to make your essay reader-friendly. Do the final draft of your introduction when the paper is complete. For more information on introductions, see #7 in "Essay Troubleshooting".

ii) Remember that this is an analytical paper, not a descriptive one. It is not just a restatement of the material you found in your research. Use description, empirical information (such as statistics or survey data) and your sources **in the service of developing and defending your informed point of view.** Include only the research material which is relevant to the debate. Sometimes students try to include everything they have learned even if it is not relevant to the debate outlined in the essay question. This only weakens your essay. For more information on what makes an essay 'original', see #1 in "Essay Troubleshooting".

iii) Remember that an informed point of view is not just an opinion but is built on thoughtful and thorough investigation that takes account of research and analysis done by scholars and experts. You cannot simply assert your views; you must support them with evidence and argumentation.

iv) Although the major goal of the essay is to elaborate, explain and support your informed point of view, you must demonstrate that you have understood all sides of the question. In order to make a strong argument for your informed point of view, directly take up the arguments of those who disagree with your point of view and explain the weaknesses in them. You must show why these arguments are not persuasive. You cannot ignore them. An informed point of view must take account of (not agree with) all relevant view points.

v) In your essay, be sure the voice is always clear. For every statement, the reader should know who is 'speaking', that is, whether the point of view is your own or from a specific source.

vi) Use the checklist below to assess your essay before you hand it in.

STEP THREE LENGTH: Your final essay should be 8-10 pages TYPED double spaced.

In addition, include

*a complete bibliography (all sources used, whether or not you quoted directly from them) and

*your time management plan that now includes a record of how long you spent on all parts of the essay. Comment on any discrepancy between how long you anticipated it would take to do this assignment and the actual time spent. How effective was your time management plan? Did it help you organize your time? Why or why not? What would you do differently in the future? (1 page commentary)

*the self evaluation (1-2 pages typed double spaced). See Guidelines below.

Hand in Step One and Step Two with your final essay -- those copies with the comments of your tutorial leader on it. Do not retype them. In part, your grade will reflect the degree to which you responded to the suggestions/criticisms raised. If the previous steps are missing, you will lose 5%.

MAKE THREE COPIES OF YOUR FINAL ESSAY: ONE TO HAND IN, ONE TO KEEP FOR YOUR OWN PROTECTION, AND ONE TO CIRCULATE. The circulating copy does not need to include the self evaluation.

GRADE:

*Remember the penalties for late assignments.

*You will lose 5% if the self-evaluation is missing.

*You will lose 5% if you do not include your Time Management plan and commentary.

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-EVALUATION OF THE ESSAY

It is best to write the self evaluation a few days after your essay is finished. It gives you a chance to read it 'as a stranger' and see its strengths and weaknesses. Most of you have not yet developed the skills necessary to evaluate your own work; yet such skills are essential to editing and revising your essays successfully. Take this exercise seriously and do not use it for self promotion.

*Identify the successful aspects of the essay and the ways it could be improved.
What prevented you from addressing the weaknesses?

*What aspect of this essay assignment did you find most difficult? Why? Most enjoyable? Why?

*Describe your writing process. For example, at what points did you face the most difficulties? How many drafts did you do?

*What did you learn about your skills? In what areas do you have strong skills? What areas need improvement?

*What did you learn about writing essays? For future essay assignments, what would you do differently?

*What did you learn about doing research and finding sources? For future essay assignments, what would you do differently?

CHECKLIST

Before you hand in your essay, use this checklist to ensure that your essay is complete. If you find problem areas, revise before you hand the essay in. For your information, this checklist is also used by your tutorial leader as a reference point for grading your assignment.

i) Do you have a clear introduction? Does it identify the thematic and organizational structure of the essay? Does it indicate the point of view you will argue?

ii) Have you organized the material effectively, that is, is the sequence of presentation appropriate?

Is the presentation reader-friendly, that is, do you indicate clearly the transitions from one section/argument/theme to the next? Do you use headings and sub-headings appropriately?

Have you eliminated any repetition of arguments?

iii) Have you made a persuasive argument to support your informed point of view? Have you addressed both sides of the debate?

iv) Have you used relevant source material?

v) Have you carefully referenced all your sources, both direct quotations and paraphrasing? And used correct and consistent citation style?

vi) Do you have a clear conclusion?

vii) Have you answered ALL parts of the question?

viii) Have you included a bibliography?

ix) Have you corrected all typing, spelling, punctuation and grammar errors? Do not rely on spell check programs on the computer. For example, if you use 'there' instead of 'they're' or 'their', the spell check program is of no help.

x) Is your assignment the required length?

xi) Have you included a self evaluation? Does it go beyond self-promotion?

xii) Have you included Step One and Step Two? And your time management plan and commentary?

Time Management Plan for Essay Assignment

	How long will it take?	When to do?	How Long did it take?
Step 1: DUE:			
Restate Topic			
Outline based on Question			
State Opinion/Tentative thesis			
Step 2: DUE:			
Find Sources			
Produce Bibliography			
Read Sources			
Take Notes and Annotate			
Comment on relevance of sources			
Review and update tentative thesis			
Do Essay outline			
Proofread and make changes			
STEP 3: DUE:			
Second Draft: Focus on logic/ clarity			
Third Draft: Final Proofread			
Self Evaluation			

