

Guidelines for Essay Writing

Introduction

These guidelines have been produced for all students at SMBC, and it is expected that students will read them, benefit from the helpful hints, and conform their essay writing to the regulations set out, as the matters raised apply to each student.

When you write an essay, think of yourself as a barrister who has to convince a jury that his perspective best accords with reality. You are required to write essays primarily to extend your research and reasoning skills, and to develop the capacity to express yourself. Do this work diligently and the rewards will be great.

1. General Hints on Essay Writing

1.1 Before starting work

First, underline key words in your essay topic. Be sure you understand the meaning and significance of each word. Pay particular attention if the topic is complex. Outline the points you think you should cover. Retain the key words and major themes in your mind so that when you are reading and listening to lectures, you will be constantly mindful of them.

Words commonly used in essay topics (and exam questions) are 'analyse', 'discuss', 'evaluate', and the like, and examiners use such words with clear intention. You have to know what the word means and respond accordingly. Don't assume that your understanding of the word is its common meaning. See towards the end these guidelines for explanations of such terms.

1.2 Selecting material to use

Once you have thought about the topic you will need to supplement the information that you have retained in your memory.

- Scan your lecture notes, handouts and book summaries. Develop a set of codes to mark in the margins.
- Check bibliographies. Go to the library and skim read the relevant books. Note the sections which specifically deal with your essay topic. Do not mark library books (even in pencil).
- If the essay is on a biblical passage, study the passage. It is tempting to study all sorts of secondary material without actually studying the biblical text. Your priority should be to know the text of the Bible, and to think about its meaning (both originally and for the world today).
- Even in other subjects your aim should be to sort out the issues, and work out your response on the basis of the main evidence (primary sources), before you interact too much with what other people say (secondary sources).
- You may use the subject search facility in the library catalogue.
- Ask other students about information they have found.

When researching, resist the temptation to take a run down side roads.

1.3 Writing your essay

Remind yourself that you can't keep on reading indefinitely. Set a time limit, and then start writing when you reach the time limit. Most people find it helpful to construct an outline on the essay before actually writing it out in full. You can note the main points, and then list sub-points, and even some of the main evidence for each of these, as well as references. Only when you are satisfied with your essay in this skeleton form should you then begin actually writing. By doing this you can make sure that what you plan to write actually answers the question, before you get too far into writing the essay.

Plan your essay with the word limit in mind. The essay should keep to the set length, within 10% variation. For example a 1,000 word essay should be between 900 and 1,100 words. The count includes all words, but does not include abstract, footnotes or bibliography. MDiv Projects do include footnotes in the word count, but BTh & Grad Dip Projects do not.

If you are relying on the word count in your computer, make sure it excludes from the count abstract, footnotes and bibliography.

What really matters is how well you organise your material, and how you apply it to address the set topic. You must answer the question! It does not matter what quality material you have in your essay, if it does not answer the question. In that case, it will earn you nothing. Further, make sure that you know what kinds of things (such as interaction with the views of others) are being looked for in the essay, and conform to this as much as possible.

1.4 The Shape of the Essay

As a rule of thumb, the breakdown of an essay should be as follows:

Introduction:	one (shorter) paragraph
Body of Essay:	the bulk of the essay
Conclusion:	one (longer) paragraph

Your essay should be of uninterrupted prose, i.e. without points, bullets or headings. However, a reasonable number of headings which guide the reader and enhance the meaning of the essay may be used, but not complex systems of sub-headings.

1.4.1 Introduction

The introduction must outline to the reader what you are going to investigate, i.e. how you interpret the question and how you plan to approach your answer (response). It is simply an outline of the main points you will examine. In the body of the essay you report your investigation and conclusions. You may well find it easier to write the body first, and then when you have all your points laid out, write the introduction. The introduction is not a summary of your results, but an indication of what you will examine in the essay.

If you have a very broad essay topic, you may have to limit its scope in the introduction. You may state that because of the vastness of the topic, you are going to focus on the five particular instances that are representative of

the whole. Or just select key issues. Whatever you decide, spell out your basic strategy in your introduction.

Should you use the first person singular ('I will...'), the first person plural ('We will...'), or some impersonal term ('This essay will...', or 'It seems reasonable to suggest...')? It is advisable to avoid using first person pronouns. Apart from this, choose the style you feel most comfortable with, and then be consistent. Certainly avoid excessive use of the style you choose.

1.4.2 **Body of the Essay**

In the body of the essay you lay out your argument. Above all, you must order your points effectively. Make sure that your essay is organised, so that there is a logical flow in your argument, instead of jumping around. It is important to signal to your reader that you are moving on to a new point. Remember that while you have spent scores of hours reading, reflecting on the material, and writing your essay, your reader hits your essay 'cold'. What may be abundantly clear to you may not be as clear to someone else.

- *Paragraphs*

Use a new paragraph for each point, and use the first sentence in the paragraph to identify the new point. A brief final sentence may summarise this point. All of this helps to make your structure clear. Paragraphs could be around 10 lines long, but not too much longer or shorter.

- *Pointers*

These are expressions that people use in essays to indicate that they are embarking on a new point. If you are going through a number of points, use 'Initially', 'Secondly', 'Similarly', 'Lastly', 'Having discussed X, we will now examine Y', or the like.

- *Scripture references*

If it is a biblical topic, support each point of your argument with references to Scripture, usually cited in brackets unless an integral part of the sentence. The usual system of verse referencing is to be seen in the following examples – Romans; Genesis 5; Deut 3:6; Matt 1:9-11; Rev 2:1-3:6; Luke 2:1-3; 4:6-8. References are listed like this, separated by semi-colons.

1.4.3 **Conclusion**

The conclusion of the essay draws the threads of the essay together. It has three aims:

1. to summarise the discussion and the main points
2. to convince the reader that you have answered the question
3. to round off your answer without introducing new points.

The conclusion demonstrates that in answering the question you have done what you said you would do in your introduction. 'So we have discussed A, B & C, and our conclusion is clearly D.' Remember the image of the

barrister. The introduction and the conclusion are similar. The introduction says what the line of investigation will be, and the conclusion states what it was and what the conclusions were.

Use pointers like: 'We are now in a position to sum up,' or 'Having discussed the issues, it is now clear that...', or 'In the light of the preceding argument...' or simply 'Clearly then,...'. If you need to put application in (and this is generally not so in ACT essays), do so in the conclusion.

1.5 Other Points

Here are some final points:

1.5.1 Margins

Make sure your essay has a good sized margin of at least 3 cm on the left side of every page. This leaves room for the examiner to write comments and put ticks. Do everything that will make the marker happy!

1.5.2 Spacing

In ACT essays double-spacing is obligatory, but otherwise single, one-and-a-half, and double spacing are all acceptable, provided one is used consistently.

1.5.3 Spelling, grammar and punctuation

These should be as accurate as you can make them, simply for the sake of showing care in writing. Make sure that each sentence is complete, begins with a capital letter, and ends with a full stop. Sentences should say something when taken by themselves. Try not to use long, complicated sentences that would be better broken up into several sentences. As well, remember that the less displeasure you give to an essay marker, the more he/she will follow your argument and be inclined to mark you well. If you choose to use capitals for each reference to God (He, Him, His), then you must do so consistently.

1.5.4 Drafts

If you want to improve your essay writing, you should plan the essay before you start writing, and you may also do at least one draft before your final copy. This gives you a great opportunity to reorganise your material if necessary, and to make sure that the flow is clear and logical.

1.5.5 Computers or hand-written?

When it comes to essay writing, there are great advantages in using a computer. However, if a student so wishes, he or she may submit a hand-written essay, provided it is neat and legible.

2. Setting an Essay Out

Generally, essays at SMBC should use the 'note system' of referencing as set out below. However, individual lecturers may adopt the 'author-date' system for particular courses. Check with the lecturer of your course in order to be clear whether this is so in

a particular case. The 'note system' is explained below and it is expected that it will be used, unless otherwise indicated by the lecturer.

2.1 Footnotes and endnotes

Your essay should include footnotes (or endnotes), which are used to:

1. give the source of a direct quotation;
- or 2. indicate the source of ideas being used;
- or 3. add brief material that is slightly peripheral to the main line of the argument, but is nonetheless relevant.

Footnotes (or endnotes) should not exceed 25% of the prescribed essay length. They are indicated in the text of the essay by a numeral above the line, usually at the end of the appropriate sentence. Footnotes are placed at the foot of the page, and endnotes are placed at the end of the essay (beginning on a new page) before the bibliography. If you want to be sure they are read, footnotes are better than endnotes (and usually easy to insert with standard word-processing programs).

For example, immediately after quoting Graham Goldsworthy's definition of the kingdom of God in the text of the essay, place a small number above the line (superscript) immediately after the quotation, and then in the footnote put Graham Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) 83. Footnotes should be set out as follow, noting the difference between a monograph (book by one author about one subject), multi-author work (book which includes a number of articles by different authors), and journal article. Examples only are given below, but this should give you a pattern to follow.

After the first reference, any information that is not relevant to the reference you are making can just be left out. You should give the page references of whatever material you are referring to rather than the whole book or article. However, you may want to list the pages of the whole articles and then add e.g. 'esp. 11-13' (where 'esp' = 'especially'). Instead of italics you may give the book or journal title underlined. Standard abbreviations for journals may be used, and are usually given in good Bible dictionaries or the like. Or you may see the style guides by K.L. Turabian or the Society of Biblical Literature. Study the following examples, although not all books, etc. will have all the features mentioned below:

1. **First reference to a book** (full details)

J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. T. McNeill; trans. F.L. Battles; 2 vols; LCC21; London: SCM, 1961) vol. 1, 39-40.

D. Ehrman, *The New Testament, A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 200.

2. **First reference to a multi-author book** (full details)

J. Nolland, 'Salvation-History and Eschatology,' in I.H. Marshall, D.G. Peterson (eds.), *Witness to the Gospel. The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 63-81.

J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992)

3. First reference to an article (full details)

D.J.A. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968) 53-103.

M.C. de Boer, 'Jesus the Baptizer: 1 John 5:5-8 and the Gospel of John.' *JBL* 107 (1988) 99.

G.R. Osborne, 'Redaction Criticism,' in J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall (eds.). *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992) 662-668.

(NB: The journal may use Roman numerals for volume numbers, or some other system. Use its system in your citation.)

4. First reference to a CD Rom or internet site (full details)

Publications found on the internet should be referenced in the normal way with the internet address provided instead of the publisher's name. The date the material was cited should also be included. Internet addresses should not be hyphenated at the end of a line. They can be divided before a 'dot' at the end of a line.

B.N. Kay, 'Head, Heart and Spirit: Shaping the New Millennium,' 1999, no pages. Available: <http://www.anglican.org.au/BNKtalks>. Cited 8 May 2000.

T.J. Pritzker, 'An Early Fragment from Central Nepal,' no date. Available: <http://www.ingress.com/~astanart/pritzker/pritzker.html>. Cited 8 June, 2000.

Oxford English Dictionary computer file: On compact disk (2nd ed.; CD-ROM, 1992). Available: Oxford University Press (27 May 1995).

5. Succeeding references (abbreviated) to a book or an article

Calvin, *Institutes*, 2. 18-34

Clines, 'Image of God', 69

When citing an article or book for an opinion, the reference should precede the view cited thus:

G.R. Osborne, 'Redaction Criticism', in J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992) 665 maintains that...

2.2 Bibliography

The bibliography should contain all texts consulted and referred to in the writing of the essay. The bibliography should be set out as in the first (full) footnote reference, but with changes as exemplified below. Note the differences!

Indentations of each reference is a good rule to follow, and the author's names should be in alphabetical order. You may choose to separate primary and secondary sources.

Calvin, J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. T. McNeill; trans. F.L. Battles;

2 vols; LCC21; London: SCM, 1961)

Ehrman, B.D., *The New Testament, A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Nolland, J., 'Salvation—History and Eschatology', in I.H. Marshall, D.G. Peterson (eds), *Witness to the Gospel. The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)

Kay, B.N., 'Head, Heart and Spirit: Shaping the New Millennium', 1999. Available: <http://www.anglican.org.au/BNKtalks>. Cited 8 May 2000

Clines, D.J.A., 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968) 53-103

The above system of writing footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliography is called 'Note (-Bibliography) System of Referencing', and is in common use in the humanities in a few different forms. Although the ACT does allow the use of the alternative system (the 'Author Date System'), in the interests of uniformity students should normally, unless otherwise indicated by the lecturer, conform to the above system. If you are not used to it, it will not take long to work out the details. More details are available in:

K.L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses & Dissertations*, 6th ed.; University of Chicago).

See also *Undergraduate Manual* the ACT (Guidelines for Essays, #4).

2.3 Quotations

The essay should be in your own words. You may include a direct quotation, if it will strengthen your argument, but you must do so in the author's exact words and in inverted commas. When an author's argument is expressed in your words, acknowledgement should still be made. Remember, plagiarising is a form of misrepresentation and deceit, and is treated with severity by examiners. However, obvious (or commonly accepted) facts or interpretations need not be referenced in a footnote. When referring to the Bible, Bible books may only be abbreviated when followed by both chapter and verse (for example, 'Gen 5:2', but not 'Gen.' or 'Gen 5').

2.4 Cover Sheet

The first page the examiner sees should be your SMBC cover sheet, which you should fill in as completely as possible. While all these details may appear like minutiae, remember that examiners are quite unimpressed by students who don't follow simple instructions.

Part-time students are asked to furnish their address, so that marked essays can be mailed to them if necessary. All students are asked to make sure to include their correct student numbers, since failure to do so can result in administrative confusion (and frustration) and your mark not being awarded to someone else.

3. Guidelines for Essays (ACT)

As well as observing the guidelines above, the following material has been abstracted from the *Undergraduate Manual* of the ACT, as containing the relevant material for students at SMBC writing essays for ACT subjects. For more details see the ACT *Undergraduate Manual*.

1. **Date**

Essays are to be completed and submitted to the candidate's College by the due dates. Failure to complete essays by the due dates will exclude students from sitting for examinations.

2. **Presentation**

An essay should reveal clear thinking and careful organisation, for while the essay will be marked on content, the format is important. The use of a standard format assists both the examiner and the student. Careful attention should be given to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Preferably the essay should be word-processed (double-spaced), but neat, readable handwriting is acceptable. The left-hand margin should be at least 3cm wide. All pages should be numbered consecutively. Students should submit two copies of their essay, and keep a copy for themselves.

3. **General format**

An essay should consist of five parts, each to begin on a fresh page:

3.1 **Title page** (= SMBC Essay Cover Sheet)

This should contain the student's ACT and SMBC number, course name and subject (name and code), the full title of the essay, the date and the number of words in the body of the essay. The SMBC Cover Sheet will suffice for this purpose, if filled out as fully as possible. The essay should keep to the set length, within 10% variation. For example, a 3,000 word essay should be between 2,700 and 3,300 words. This count does not include abstract, footnotes or bibliography, but does count quotations (Biblical or otherwise).

The title page must also contain the following disclaimer signed (initialled) and dated by the student – 'The following essay, of which I have kept a copy, is entirely the work of the undersigned and that all sources of ideas and expressions are duly acknowledged in footnotes or endnotes'. An essay to be examined externally should not contain the student's name. The signed (initialled) disclaimer should be lodged with the student's sponsoring institution, as on the SMBC Cover Sheet.

3.2 **Abstract**

This should occupy the second page of the essay/paper/thesis and should be a piece of continuous prose, not numbered points, about 150 words long, giving a summary of the argument of the essay.

3.3 *The essay proper*

This should include:

- a clear introduction to the subject, setting out the matter to be discussed, and what steps you will follow. This is *not* a summary of your conclusions but of the steps you will follow in your discussion.
- the body of the essay, setting out in a clear and concise way your discussion of the issue and including the evidence.
- the conclusion of the essay, summarising what has been said and drawing necessary conclusion.

The essay should be in the student's own words. Where a quotation contributes to the argument, the author's words should be quoted exactly and placed in inverted commas (single, and then double inside these). Where an author's argument is expressed in the student's own words, acknowledgement should be made. Abbreviations should conform to those set out in a standard work such as that by K.L. Turabian.

3.4 *Footnotes*

Footnotes should be given to all references used in writing the essay. These should be used consistently, and:

- to document direct quotations;
- to indicate the source of ideas being used;
- to add brief material not appropriate for inclusion in the main text.

Notes should not exceed 25% of the prescribed essay length. A note should be introduced by a numeral above the line, usually placed at the end of the sentence. Notes may be included at the end of the essay as endnotes (beginning on a new page), or at the bottom of each page as footnotes.

3.5 *Abbreviations*

Abbreviations for journals or biblical books, for example, should conform to those set out in a recognised style reference work such as that by Turabian or *The SBL Handbook of Style*. Biblical books may only be abbreviated when followed by both chapter and verse (e.g. Gen 5:2; *not* Gen. or Gen.5).

3.6 *Bibliography*

A bibliography should be included, containing all references cited and important references consulted in the writing of the essay. The items in the bibliography should be listed alphabetically by author's surname.

3.7 *Greek and Hebrew*

Where these are used, they should *not* be transliterated. Pointing of Hebrew is not necessary unless it is exegetically significant.

4. **Title page/cover sheet**

On page 5.36 there is a copy of the SMBC Cover Sheet, which you may photocopy and complete, and then attach to essays which are for internal SMBC subjects as well as for ACT essays. There is also a supply of these available from the library or the College office.

(Composed by Ron Sims, revised by Alan Mugridge, December 2005)

HELPFUL ESSAY QUESTION DEFINITIONS


'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less'. Lewis Carroll

Analyse	Show the essence of something by breaking it down into its component parts and examining each part in detail.
Argue	Present the case for and/or against a particular proposition.
Compare	Look for similarities and differences between propositions.
Criticise	Give your judgement about the merit of theories or opinions about the truth of facts, and back your judgement by a discussion of the evidence.
Define	Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase. Show that the distinctions implied in the definition are necessary.
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic account.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument, sift and debate, giving reasons for and against.
Enumerate	List or specify and describe.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something in the light of its apparent truth or utility; including your personal opinion.
Examine	Present in depth and investigate the implications.
Explain	Make plain, interpret and account for in detail.
Illustrate	Explain and make clear by the use of concrete examples, or by the use of a figure or diagram.
Interpret	Bring out the meaning of, and make clear and explicit, usually also giving your own judgement.
Justify	Show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions.
Outline	Give the main features or general principles of a subject, omitting minor details, and emphasising structure and relationship.
Prove	Demonstrate truth or falsity by presenting evidence.
Relate	Narrate/show how things are connected to each other, and to what extent they are alike or affect each other.
Review	Make a survey of, examining the subject critically.
State	Specify fully and clearly.
Summarise	Give a concise account of the chief points or substance of a matter, omitting details and examples.
Trace	Identify and describe the development or history of a topic from some point or origin.

– adapted from Harry Maddox *How to Study*, 2nd Edition,
Pan Books, London, 1967, pp.119-120

Essay and Assignment Cover Sheet

SMBC Student No. _____ ACT Student No. _____

- Course:
- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dip 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Dip 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> PGD (ACT enrolled) | <input type="checkbox"/> PGD (non-ACT enrolled) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B.Th 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> B.Th 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> B.Th 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grad Dip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AssDegTh 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> AssDegTh 2 | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MDiv 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> MDiv 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> MDiv 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time student |  | | |

address to post this back to you

P/code

Subject: _____ Subject Code (ACT) _____

Lecturer: _____ Subject Code (non-ACT) _____

Essay/Assignment Title

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Word count: _____

Date due: _____

Date submitted: _____

Extension granted until _____

Assessment: Mark _____ / _____

Grade _____

The following essay of which I have kept a copy, is entirely the work of the undersigned and that all sources of ideas and expressions are duly acknowledge in footnotes or endnotes.

Initials Date

Marker's Comments

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