Institute of Communications Studies - Study Skills

ESSAY-WRITING THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

In a subject like Communications Studies, much of your university work will be assessed by essay – whether that's an essay you prepare in your own time over a period of days or weeks, or one you concoct in an examination hall in the space of an hour. It therefore follows that if you learn how to prepare, organise and present essays, you will do much better in your degree overall. So this document might also be called:

HOWTOGET BETTER MARKS WITHOUT (NECESSARILY) DOING MOREWORK

We'll assume that you've read widely about the particular subject of your essay, and have a good understanding of the broader area within which that topic is located. Broad and deep research is the essential basis of an essay. You will have lots of notes on the subject — see the ICS Study Skills Guide to Note-Making for tips on how to do this.

So now it's time to write the essay. You sit down in front of the keyboard and start typing: you put the title, you try to group some similar bits of information or argument together, and then you put a conclusion on the end saying that there are many interesting points of view on this subject, right?

No, of course you don't. You've got to start off with an essay plan. By designing this you'll come up with the structure. A well thought-out structure is at the heart of every good essay.

What is a good structure?

It isn't enough to make sure that you have an introduction at the start, a conclusion at the end, and the other stuff in between. So what do you need?

1. You do need a solid introduction. It will probably contain something about how you have interpreted the question, and it is often a good idea to state a thesis (an argument) which you are going to illustrate or explore in the body of the essay – although you may prefer to save the 'findings' of your exploration to the end, in which case you have to introduce the question carefully at the start.

2. And you need a tight, powerful conclusion which is the logical consequence of everything that has gone before. The good essay has developed a number of related strands which the conclusion ties together. It may also contain an extra, surprising thing which you saved to throw in at the end with a flourish.

So what happens in between? Well...

Six really awful ways to begin the essay 'Why have baked beans become so popular in twentieth century Britain'?':

"The question of why baked beans have become so popular in twentieth century Britain is an interesting..."

"The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'baked beans' as..."

"in this essay I will explore the question of why baked beans have become so popular in twentieth..."

"The Penguin English Dictionary defines 'popular' as..."

"The twentieth century has been going for guite a while now and..."

"The Collins English Dictionary defines 'twentieth century' as...."

Why are these awtu? Because they are so predictable, uninspiring and limp. What should you do instead? Something else.

Ics Study Skills Guide To Note Making

RJ Shavelson

Ics Study Skills Guide To Note Making:

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