



ESSAY WRITING (4): TEN WAYS TO **LIVEN** YOUR ESSAYS



Effective Learning Service

Ten Ways to Liven Your Essays

Essays do not have to be boring. You can combine analysis, detail, clear structure, good referencing – **and** elements that make them interesting to read.

This booklet will present ten ways of doing this.

But first it is important to understand the different **types** of essay and **writing styles** expected of you.

Essay types

All essays explore the validity of theories ideas, practices, and models. They test your knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of ideas and theories.

However, essays can be **discursive** or **problem-based** in type and approach; or may combine the two:

Discursive	Problem based
<p>'Discursive' means proceeding to a conclusion by use of reason or argument, rather than from intuition.</p> <p>Discursive essays involve a close scrutiny and discussion of a particular hypothetical proposition, question, or statement.</p> <p>Students are expected to weigh up arguments and reach conclusions based on their reading on the broad issues raised.</p> <p>This type of question can be found across all subject areas at the School of Management, but particularly in Human Resource Management and Marketing.</p>	<p>These involve addressing a specific potential or actual problematic situation, and addressing questions posed in relation to these.</p> <p>Students are expected to apply their knowledge of theory, modelling, or specific practice to a stated case or situation.</p> <p>This type of problem based question is often associated with law, finance, statistics, or IT related disciplines at the School of Management, although discursive style essays are also set by these subject areas.</p>

Essay writing style

At the School of Management, essay writing **style** is formed by two broad approaches to writing:

- Traditional essay writing style
- Non-traditional essay writing style

Traditional essay	Non-traditional
<p>A traditional essay is written in what is called a 'continuous narrative', which means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas are broken up into paragraphs: a single idea is presented and developed in each paragraph; • no sub-headings; • no bullet points; • limited use of diagrams & tables; • sources are included, which are properly cited and referenced. 	<p>These are similar, if not identical, to a report format and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can include sub-headings to unite a cluster of related paragraphs; • might include some bullet points; • can include diagrams & tables; • are likely to include sources, which are properly cited and referenced.

Tutors will usually advise you which style of writing is expected for any particular assignment. But if in doubt, ask.

So, here are the ten ways you can liven your essays, both traditional and non-traditional.

1: Start well

For both styles of essay writing a good introduction is essential to set the scene and to capture the reader's interest.

An introduction can:

- Make a statement or use a quotation that grabs the attention of the reader and is relevant to the topic (more likely for a discursive style essay)
- Clarify the aim and specific objectives that the essay intends to achieve
- Introduce the structure of the essay

Don't forget, the introduction is the first thing the tutor will read.

However, there are differences of approach for both discursive and problem-solving essays.

Discursive essays

Discursive essays build and develop an argument, stage by stage, so introductions to this type of essay can start this process. Here is an example from an introduction to an essay on organisational change.

The essay title was:

'The most effective organisation will be those that build innovation, change and learning into their natural operations. Discuss'.

"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams we would be reorganised. We tend to meet any new situation by reorganising, and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization." (quoted in Hellriegel, Jackson and Slocum 1999, p.455)

The above quotation might have been recorded yesterday in any staff canteen in any large organisation. However, the Roman author, Petronius, is believed to have written it in 210 BC. Petronius refers to the 'illusion of progress', meaning the images

presented to the world outside the organisation, whilst hiding the reality within. This essay will discuss the reasons why organisations try to maintain their competitive advantage by innovating, changing and learning. But it will also emphasise the need for planned organisational change to avoid the situation Petronius describes – and is still valid today.

The student uses an ironic quotation to gain the interest of the reader and to make a valid point about the need to manage change effectively. The student does not question the proposition in the essay title, but makes it clear that planned organisation change is necessary to avoid the 'illusion of progress'.

This essay could have been taken in any one of a number of directions; there is no 'right' direction, although tutors are looking for knowledge of issues surrounding organisational change.

The student has, however, decided to focus on the management of change as a way forward. In an essay constrained by a tight word limit, it is often necessary to do this.

Problem based essay

An introduction to a problem-based essay is more likely to immediately summarise the task and how you intend to address it in the essay. Here are three examples:

From a law essay

Armchair Books Ltd (ABL) is based in the north of England, retailing books and incorporated in June 2000. They recently discovered that two companies of similar names, Armchair Novels Limited (ANL) and Armchair Sales Ltd (ASL) have been incorporated. The former (ANL), incorporated in January 2004, are publishers of books based in the Midlands. The latter, incorporated in January 2003, are furniture retailers in the north of England.

Part A of this assignment concerns advising ABL on their legal position to stop both ANL and ASL using their current names based on case law and statutory provisions. Part B will advise ABL's directors of their personal liability if they sign a document on which the company's name is misspelt.

From an economics essay

Market research firm iSupply forecasts growth in the industry at a credible 30% per annum from 2006 – 2008 when the market will be worth some \$82 billion. However, is this sustainable and will the CRT die out without a fight? The essay will focus on this question along with the long run commercial potential of TFTLCD technology and impact of supply, demand, costs and prices. Using microeconomic theory and competitive strategy theories, industry analysis will be undertaken to see what the future holds for the TFT-LCD industry and CRTs.

From an operations management essay

Effective supply chain management is crucial for the commercial development and profit of any organisation.

In order to be globally competitive, companies must continually strive to lower the cost from sourcing and faster deliver the product to their customers. Supply Chain involves various parties, such as customer, retailer, distributor, manufacturer, and supplier, and is one of the key factors to decide success or failure of a company.

The objective of this assignment is aim to:

1. Critical evaluate the supply chain management at Dell and Compal.
2. Indicate the problems existed.
3. Propose the suggestions in the changing environment.

As stated earlier, one role of the introduction is to **outline** or **indicate** the structure of the essay to the reader.

A good structure is essential to an essay.

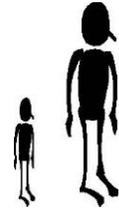
This booklet is more about writing style, rather than structure, but you can learn more about effective essay structure in the Effective Learning Service booklet : 'Essay Writing 2: Planning and Structuring Your Essay'.

2: Strive for variety in writing

For both types of essay you should strive for variety in your writing.

Sentences can be a mixture of lengths to maintain reader interest.

However, lengthy sentences of 30 words or more are always risky, as you may lose a grip of the sentence if you include too many clauses and sub-clauses. But if done well, and followed occasionally with short, punchy sentences, this can add variety to writing.



Look at the way the writer, Anthony Giddens, uses variety of sentence length to build and maintain interest, and in particular how he ends an essay on globalisation.

“It is not settled or secure, but fraught with anxieties, as well as scarred by deep divisions. Many of us feel in the grip of forces over which we have no power. Can we re-impose our will upon them? I believe we can. The powerlessness we experience is not a sign of personal failings, but reflects the incapacities of our institutions. We need to reconstruct those we have, or create new ones. For globalization is not incidental to our lives today. It is a shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we live now”.

Use rhetorical questions (sparingly)

You must be careful with the use of these, as your role as an essay writer is to answer essay questions, not to pose them!

However, if you both pose the question **and** attempt to answer it in your essay, then this can make for interesting reading; notice how Giddens does this:

“Can we re-impose our will upon them? I believe we can.”

3: Connect with the sense

You can select words that connect with the senses of your reader.

Read the following final two paragraphs in the Anthony Giddens essay on globalization:



“As the changes I have described in this chapter gather weight, they are creating something that has never existed before, a global cosmopolitan society. We are the first generation to live in this society, whose contours we can only dimly see. It is shaking up our existing ways of life, no matter where we happen to be. This is not – at least at the moment – a global order driven by collective human will. Instead, it is emerging in an anarchic, haphazard fashion, carried along by a mixture of influences.

It is not settled or secure, but fraught with anxieties, as well as scarred by deep divisions. Many of us feel in the grip of forces over which we have no power. Can we re-impose our will upon them? I believe we can. The powerlessness we experience is not a sign of personal failings, but reflects the incapacities of our institutions. We need to reconstruct those we have, or create new ones. For globalization is not incidental to our lives today. It is a shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we live now”.

Note in the Giddens extract above how he uses terms like ‘dimly see’, and words that connect with physical sensation, such as ‘shaking’, ‘driven’ and ‘carried’.

These are words that connect with the senses and have an immediate impact on the reader.

4: Connect with the human concerns of the reader

Good writing in all types of essay will engage the reader directly, or address their concerns. Notice how, in the extract on page 7, Giddens uses words such as: 'we'; 'us'; 'life'; 'lives'; 'human will', to help him do that.



Giddens also recognizes the vulnerability and fragility of individuals who may feel swept along by global events.

However, he also appeals to our more optimistic side, and presents the case for globalization as one of opportunity:

“Can we reimpose our will upon them? I believe we can. The powerlessness we experience is not a sign of personal failings, but reflects the incapacities of our institutions. We need to reconstruct those we have, or create new ones”.

5: Use contrast

You can also use **contrast** to create a tension (and interest) in your writing. A contrast in writing is often signalled by the words 'but', 'however', 'alternatively', or simply saying 'by contrast...'

See how Giddens does this:

“It is not settled or secure, but fraught with anxieties, as well as scarred by deep divisions”.

Note the term 'scarred by deep divisions'. Giddens uses the word 'scarred' in a symbolic way to describe cultural divisions (and blemishes) among peoples of the world.

However, the word also resonates with our senses (see item 3), in this case our sight. We can **visualize** a scar, so the impact of the word is likely to be more profound and meaningful to us.

See also 7 below.

6: Cut redundant words

Be ruthless with your writing. Cut redundant words.

Shortening sentences is often possible without losing their meaning. Look at the following introduction to an essay:

Before embarking on an approach to analyse the business model there is a need to explore the meaning of the business model. Paul Timmers (2000) has defined the business model as ‘an architecture for product, service and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles’. Although there are different kinds of business model they have got one thing in common and that is they are designed to make money for their owners in the long run.

There are 81 words in this introduction. But this can be reduced by a quarter without loss of meaning. Alternative words can be substituted for those cut.

Before	After
<p>Before embarking on an approach to analyse the business model there is a need to explore the meaning of the business model. Paul Timmers (2001) has defined the business model as ‘an architecture for product, service and information flows, including a description of the business actors and their roles’. Although there are different kinds of business model they have got one thing in common and that is they are designed to make money for their owners in the long run.</p> <p>(81 words)</p>	<p>Before analysing the business model, there is a need to explore its meaning. Timmers (2001) defined the business model as ‘an architecture for product, service and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles’.</p> <p>Although there are different business models, they have one thing in common: they are designed to make money for their owners.</p> <p>(60 words)</p>

The word-count in assignments can be managed by pruning your paragraphs; like shrubs, it does them good!

7: Use quotations

Quotations can have an impact on the reader, particularly if the language of the person quoted is significantly different from the essay writer.

Look at the following example taken from the introduction to an essay on flexible working:

"Flexible working! That's just another excuse to squeeze more work out of us for less money!" (Striking BA worker, quoted in *The Guardian* 30 Aug. 2003, p.4)

"These dynamic employers recognize the importance of creating a mutually beneficial work environment," said AARP CEO Bill Novelli in announcing the 2006 list of 50 Best Employers. *"Flexible arrangements can be a big part of that positive environment, enabling workers to balance both work and family obligations."* (AARP 2006).

These two quotations highlight the tension at the heart of this issue. On one hand, the notion of 'flexible workforce' is often presented in positive terms to both employers and employees by sympathetic commentators. But on the other, it may not be perceived as "...*creating a mutually beneficial work environment*" by workers those who view their personal lives and security of work tenure disrupted by it.

The student starts with two quotations, which provokes an immediate interest and contrast (see also item 5). The first of the two presents an example of direct and colloquial speech. This forms an interesting contrast to the second, which is peppered with jargon.

The writer also uses a metaphor to create interest: '*heart of this issue*'. The word 'centre' or 'core' could have been used, but 'heart' is a word both literal and associated with the emotions, so has human appeal.

A quotation by a well-known commentator can also add gravitas and interest to the writing.

Charles Handy has argued that "Compromise is a prerequisite of progress" (Handy 1994, p.81).

However, **don't overdo the inclusion of quotations in your essays; they should be included very selectively**, and always ensure the quotation adds to, or complements, the main point you are making.

8: Use examples to illustrate ideas

In both types of essay use real-life examples to illustrate the theories and ideas you present.

These help to connect concepts and abstract ideas to people's everyday experiences. Here is another example from the essay on flexible working introduced earlier (see 7 above):

A recent example of when an employer attempted to create a more flexible workforce was the case of British Airways (BA), when it announced plans in July 2003 to introduce split shifts and annualised hours. Flexible working arrangements were already in place prior to the announcement of this new scheme by BA but Management instigated changes to better service customer's needs and meet business objectives.

These proposals resulted in a mass walkout by check-in staff, of which 90 per cent were woman with children. Fears were expressed that the new arrangements may possibly alter their ability to work. Key employee concerns appear to have been overlooked when implementing this scheme, which affected BA's ability to obtain initial buy-in from its employees.

Using illustrative examples also demonstrates to the tutor that you understand the relationship of theory to practice.

9: Keep it simple

Look at the following extract:

Garfinkel (1967) argues that the relationship between the act of representation and represented object is dialectical not unidirectional. The character of the representation changes in the attempt to explain the perceived nature of underlying reality while the object 'changes', in turn, to accommodate the language employed to represent it. Representation, in other words, is a dynamic, interactive process in which the 'actor', and the form of representation, that is language, 'constructs' some at least of the reality under investigation.

This pretentious style of writing over-complicates the subject.

The writer is trying to say that it can be difficult to explain the nature of 'reality', as it depends who is talking about it, how they perceive it, and the words they use to explain its meaning. One wonders why the writer did not simply say that.

One reason might be that when students arrive in higher education, a change often comes over them.

They feel they need to change from writing in plain English, to a writing style they feel is more 'appropriate' for university. They may think they should try and imitate the 'academic' style of writing they read in books and journals.

But not all 'academic' writing is good. In fact, some of it is pretty awful!

However, the best academic writers always strive to make their ideas accessible to a wide and intelligent readership. This invariably results in a direct and readable style of writing that connects with the experiences, senses and emotions of the reader.

10: Understand the subject

This one is probably the most boring, but also the most important point of the ten.

An experienced tutor can usually tell when a student does not fully understand the essay topic.



The student's writing often becomes more convoluted and difficult to follow in proportion to his or her lack of understanding of the subject.

So, if you really want your writing to lift off and connect with the tutor, you must first get to grips with the subject. You cannot skip the research and preparation side of essay writing. You cannot wing it, blag it, or lag it with superfluous waffle, and expect to get a good mark.

Once you have a good grasp of a subject, your writing will usually improve. If you can explain it easily to yourself, this is the first step in explaining it clearly to others.

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