

ART HISTORY: GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING

The aim of formal essay writing is to engage your critical reading and writing skills to craft an articulate and polished essay. It provides an opportunity to consider a topic in depth, combining the synthesis of source materials with your own conclusions based on those materials. Students are expected to show independent thinking and not simply re-hash the opinions of scholars. However, an essay should not be based on your opinions alone. Back up your ideas with analysis of course materials, texts and articles. An essay is your dialogue with the scholarly community.

The style of your writing is as important for communicating your meaning as the style of a painting is for communicating an artist's intentions. Originality can lie in the way you write about your topic, as well as in the ideas you develop. Use quotations sparingly: do not simply string together quotations or paraphrase other writers. When you are closely following the ideas of others, it is essential that you acknowledge them, even if you are not quoting them exactly. If it is factual information that you find in several sources you do not need to reference the source, however some assignments may require you to do so, check with your tutor. In terms of ideas, if an idea seems to be specific to one writer (rather than a general stylistic analysis) be sure to reference the writer that you are drawing upon, whether verbatim or in précised form (see details on how to do so below). **Plagiarism is tantamount to theft in an academic context and will be severely penalised.**

Write complete sentences in good, clear English, using standard grammar. Organise material into paragraphs that group related points together and indicate to your reader when you are moving on to a new idea. Be sure to check your grammar and spelling, and proof read your final essay at least once. Use the computer's Spell Check function but remember that it picks up letter groups that do not match real words, but will not find errors in sense that result from typographical mistakes (e.g. it would not pick up "but well not fund errors on cents than result form topographical miss steaks"). Consult a dictionary if you are unsure of spelling or meaning of a word. Look out for common errors like misuse of the apostrophe. Its main function is to indicate possession, differentiating singular and plural, as in "one boy's toys" or "two boys' toys". The apostrophe also indicates elision as in "can't" in place of "cannot", though such informality should not be used in academic writing. An exception to the rule is "it's" which means "it is". In this case the possessive has no apostrophe and is written "its". (e.g. It's common for a tree to lose its leaves in winter.)

Remember - essays take time. It will take at least two weeks for you to do the following steps to write your final draft:

There are several excellent books available which can help you with writing essays including: Anne D'Alleva, *How to Write Art History*, London, Laurence King, 2010.

STEP 1: CHOOSING AND ANALYSING A QUESTION:

Start thinking about your essay well in advance and choose an essay question that interests you. When you analyse the question look for key words, such as explain, describe, discuss, compare. These will show you what is expected. Allow plenty of time for both preparatory research and for writing. Be sure to write a first draft for careful reading and editing and leave time for more than one draft before final submission.

STEP 2: READING:

The main libraries you will be using are:
Elam School of Fine Arts Library
The University General Library
The Auckland Public Library and/or your local library
You should also use the library databases eg. JSTOR

Some books may be in the Short Loan collection. Remember that you will not be the only person researching that question and so the book(s) you require may be out, in which case you should place a reserve on the book, recall it or check other libraries. This is why it is important to start early.

STEP 3: NOTE-TAKING:

When you start reading take a note of the title of the article, the author, date and place of publication and publisher. It is also useful to write down the relevant page numbers in case you need to come back and re-read it. This is also essential when you are quoting from the source so the reference can be placed in the footnotes. Place quote marks around anything which is taken down word-for-word. When you read each article or book keep asking yourself how it is relevant to the question.

Try to paraphrase and condense the ideas that you find in the source (you must not plagiarise by presenting ideas as your own).

STEP 4: PLANNING:

Organise your notes into a clear structure. You will have to prepare an essay plan - do not try to write an essay without one. To start with try to summarise each section of ideas into one or two paragraphs.

If you are dealing with a group of works, it may be productive to identify each work and analyse them in terms of themes, composition, colour, iconography, materials and other formal elements. Do not describe works without analysing them i.e. explain the significance of features you are writing about.

Plan your essay to present a coherent discussion that sticks to the point of the question, and works towards a compelling conclusion.

Be sure to take note of the word limit. There is a plus or minus 10% and footnotes and bibliography are included. The word count is 'cover to cover' ie every word is counted.

In structuring your essay:

1. Begin with an introduction that draws the reader into the arguments of the essay. Include a clear statement of the approach you are taking. This does not have to be long - 250 words or thereabouts should suffice.
2. Your body paragraphs should analyse your specific ideas and be supported with analysis of artworks. The opening sentence of each paragraph should link with the previous paragraph so there is cohesion, for example, 'on the other hand', 'furthermore'.
3. End with a conclusion that pulls the threads together, not just with a bland summary. No new information should be introduced but rather conclusions made from the points should be presented. It should link back to the idea you have signalled in your opening paragraph.

Allow plenty of time for both preparatory research and for writing. Be sure to write a first draft for careful reading and editing and leave time for more than one draft before final submission.

STEP 5: PRESENTATION

Essays should be presented in the following format. If you have difficulties with printing or word processing programmes, please discuss this with your tutor so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

- Choose a font and size that is easy to read (Times New Roman 12 point is a standard example).
- 1.5 space your work and leave a generous margin so that markers can write comments and corrections.
- Footnotes should be single spaces and in a smaller font than the main text.
- Bibliography and Image Plates should be on separate pages at the end of your essay.
- Paginate your essay (not including title page)
- Staple your essay together with a cover sheet (generated on Canvas) before handing in a print copy at the Arts Student Centre. You must also submit your essay electronically via Canvas.

*** Keep a copy for yourself. This is a good practice for all your university essays to safeguard them against loss or damage.

STEP 6: REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Your coursework and research must show you have found appropriate resources, evaluated them critically and used them to develop your arguments. **When you quote a phrase, copy all or part of something you have read, or even paraphrase or summarise, you must acknowledge your source.** You do not need to reference lecture material or 'common knowledge' eg. the dates of World War I or the birth of Picasso.

The most common style of referencing for Art History at the University of Auckland is Chicago 16th style with footnotes. The MLA system is also acceptable. You can find more information about these at www.cite.auckland.ac.nz

Referencing works of art:

It is standard practice to cite the title of a work of art in *italics* (or underlined if you don't have a facility for italics). You should do this throughout your essay and in the Image Plates at the end, always try to give the location of the work in a city, building or museum. You should also give a date, (the medium and the size of the work are optional, but check with your tutor).

Raphael, *Madonna Foligno* (oil on panel, 320 x 194 cm) c. 1511-12, Vatican Pinacoteca.

If you are referring to works that are not well known, it is useful to include images of works. The information above (Artist, *Title of the Work* (medium, size) date, location) forms the caption for each Image Plate. It is good practice to include the source of your image – from a book, a gallery, or website eg.

Figure 1.

Millais, Sir John Everett, *Christ in the House of his Parents* (oil on canvas, 864 x 1397 mm) 1849-50, Tate Gallery, London. Image Credit: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-christ-in-the-house-of-his-parents-the-carpenters-shop-n03584>

It is customary for illustrations to follow the order in which they are discussed in your essay but, if they are discussed in various places, you might prefer a different order, such as a chronological arrangement, as long as you are sure always to give the figure number when you discuss the work.

Quotations: If you quote from another publication, you should indicate this by enclosing short quotations in double quotation marks “like this.” Any addition to a quotation is indicated with square brackets [thus], and an omission is indicated with three stops...If there is an obvious error such as misspelling in a quotation, it is customary to insert (*sic*) so that the reader knows that it is not your error. Quotes already inside quotation marks are indicated with single quotation marks. “They would then look ‘like this’ in your text.”

A longer quotation (of three lines or more) is presented as an indented paragraph (indented at both ends) *without* quotation marks, and a space before and after it in the text like this. You should still reference this quotation (see below).

References and Citations: The Chicago referencing style uses footnotes. You will find a footnotes option in the references section of your word processing programme. The references should be numbered consecutively throughout the essay, and indicated by a number in the text and in the notes. The footnote numbers **follow** punctuation, like this,¹ or ‘this’² but **not this**³. (Correct way is after the full stop). The reference number comes at the end of a quotation or idea paraphrased from another author.

For Books: Leonard Bell, *Colonial Constructs: Images of Maori 1840-1914*, Auckland, 1992, p. 136. [Use ‘p.’ for a single page; ‘pp.’ for multiple pages.]

For Journal Articles: Jonathan Alexander, ‘Labeur and Paresse: Ideological Representations of Medieval Peasant Labor’, *The Art Bulletin*, 72, 3, 1990, p. 437

[The Article appears in volume 72, issue 3, of *the journal*.]

For chapters in an edited collection: Deidre Brown, “Pushing the Boat Out,” in Rhana Devenport, ed. *Lisa Reihana: In Pursuit of Venus*, Auckland, p. 56

[Use ‘ed.’ For a single editor; ‘eds’ for multiple; ‘trans.’ for translator/s.]

For electronic resources. Cite the web address (url) and the date you accessed the item. It is not necessary to provide the url for journal articles or book chapters that you gave accessed through course materials or databases (such as JSTOR) on the library website. Such items should be treated as print publications – follow the formats outlined above.

1

2

3

Your first footnote should give a complete reference, such as:

Leonard Bell, *Colonial Constructs: Images of Maori 1840-1914*, Auckland, 1992, p. 136

In subsequent notes use a shortened reference:

Bell, *Colonial Constructs*, p. 136

OR Bell, 1992, p. 136

If two references to the same work follow each other, use *ibid.* Only add the page reference if it is different from the first:

ibid., p. 48

If you encounter other types of citations (such as unpublished primary sources) you may require further information. Ask your course instructors or your tutors for guidance.

Bibliography: Provide a bibliography at the end of your essay. You should have consulted at least 5-8 sources – the bibliography enables the marker to assess the range and depth of your reading. Place all the works you have consulted (even if they are not cited in footnotes) in alphabetical order according to the author's last name. Do not number or use bullet points for your bibliography. The format differs in two ways from footnotes:

The author's surname should precede the first name or initial since a bibliography is an alphabetical list. For example: Bell, Leonard, *Colonial Constructs: Images of Maori 1840-1914*, Auckland, 1992.

If a work has more than one author or editor, only the first author's surname needs to be inverted in a bibliography. For example: Hagen, Rose-Marie, and Rainer Hagen, 'A Deceptive Idyll', in Iain Galbraith, tran., *What Great Paintings Say: Old Masters in Detail*, vol. 1, Germany, 1995.

The full range of pages must be referenced for chapters in edited collections and articles. For example: Nochlin, Linda, 'Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman', *The Art Bulletin*, 60, 1, 1978, pp. 139–153.

For extensive bibliographies at graduate level you might divide the list into two sections: Print and Electronic Sources

STEP 7: HAND IT IN!

Essays must be handed in at the Arts Student Centre. Late essays without extensions will be penalised 1 mark per day and 5 marks per week.

GRADE/MARKING SCHEDULE

Passing Grades	Failing Grades
A+ 90-100 B+ 75-79 C+ 60-64	D+ 45-49
A 85-89 B 70-74 C 55-59	D 40-44
A- 80-84 B- 65-69 C- 50-54	D- 0-39

A: Excellent (80–100).

Work based on wide reading (properly acknowledged through footnotes and bibliography, if required for the task) that shows excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Work offers a well-constructed argument and clear grasp of the major issues. It observes the conventions of writing style appropriate to the writing of academic papers. Outstanding pieces of work also exhibit independent and creative thinking and individual flair in expressing complex ideas.

B: Good/Competent (65–79). Work which is clearly structured and where a well-supported argument leads to a logical conclusion. The work is based on adequate reading (properly acknowledged through footnotes and bibliography) and a good grasp of the major issues raised in the readings. Meaning is generally expressed through clear prose.

C: Satisfactory (50–64). Work which shows a reasonable knowledge of the subject matter and attempts to answer the question but displays one or more of the following faults: inadequate reading, misunderstanding of the sources, confused argument and/or structure, weakness of expression, inadequate attention to footnotes and bibliography, communication not always clear

D: Fail (0–49). Work displays significant failings in one or more of the following: inadequate reading, misunderstanding of the sources, confused argument and/or structure, weakness of expression, inadequate attention to footnotes and bibliography.