

HOW TO WRITE & PRESENT YOUR ESSAY

The following criteria of assessment have been directly culled from Daniel Chandler's assessment feedback forms. Not only do these notes give you an idea of what it is we are looking for when marking your essays, it is also a reasonable guide on how to actually write your essays and present them.

Presentation: The text must be presented so that it is readable in its expression and legible in its format on the page. Word-processed presentations are expected, the main font being a 12-point serif font (such as Times Roman). The text should be printed clearly in black (except where colour is needed for illustrations). Express yourself as clearly as you can. 'Signpost' the structure of your text for the reader—for instance, by including section heads (in bold). The organization of the text can also be improved by paying attention to formatting conventions like page numbers, (double) line spacing, margins (top and bottom, left and right), bullet points, indentations for quotations of 4 lines or more, paragraphs (separated by a blank line) and font (size, italics, and bold). Do not use underlining. Illustrations can be used to enhance the presentation—figures and tables—they are indeed expected where your topic is visually-oriented (shot-by-shot analyses of TV programmes, films or ads, for instance, should include sample frames wherever possible). The careful selection and use of relevant images scanned from print or downloaded from electronic sources and strategically pasted into your document can improve both your presentation and your argument. Cropping may also be used to good effect, focusing the reader's attention on key details. Avoid purely decorative images. If you include an illustration, be sure to discuss it in the text. All illustrations must be properly labelled (e.g. Fig. 1: Close-up of Coca-Cola bottle). Note that the titles of books, films, television programmes, newspapers and magazines should always be in italics (without quotation-marks). Copy-edit your text (e.g. for spelling, grammar and style) as carefully as is expected for published work.

Coverage: All parts of the set assignment must be covered (note in particular where a question has more than one part). All of the content must be relevant to the set question and the relevance of each point must be clearly established. Get to the topic immediately: long introductions which are not closely related to the exact topic are a waste of space. Waffle, in particular, is guaranteed to lose marks. Make sure that you cover all of the key issues but on the other hand don't try to cover too much territory. If space limits your focus, explain what you are not trying to cover. Make up for this in the detail which you go into about the aspects that you are covering.

Sources: You must demonstrate consultation of relevant academic source materials, which can include books, journal articles, reports, databases and webpages. Both broad and intensive critical reading must be evident. Avoid referencing in footnotes; you should refer to your sources in the main body of your text thus: (Smith 1990: 25). Secondary references should be cited thus: (Smith 1990 cited in Jones 1999: 2). Unless otherwise instructed, reference films within the text thus: *Cruising* (Friedkin, 1980) and *TV: The Office* (BBC, 2001-3). Lectures notes should not be used in the references: these are merely a guide to study. You are welcome to read essays by other students but do not cite them. Where sources are specified for the assignment, focus on these but go beyond them. Use bibliographic searches to extend your reading. Avoid over using direct quotation of academic sources-- demonstrate your understanding by paraphrasing points and then referencing them. Where you do quote directly, indent quotes which take up more than 3 lines and drop the inverted commas. Do not use italics to indicate quotes. You are normally expected to include an alphabetical list of references at the end of your text. These are works actually cited in the main body of the text (unlike a bibliography). All of the in-text citations must appear in this list. Follow this format closely unless otherwise specified (noting in particular that the titles of books and journals should always be in italics):

Hodge, Bob & David Tripp (1986), *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Jaglom, Leona M. & Howard Gardner (1981), 'The Preschool Television Viewer as Anthropologist'. In Hope Kelly & Howard Gardner (Eds.): *Viewing Children Through Television* (New Directions for Child Development 13). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 9-30.

Brown, Mac H., Patsy Skeen & D. Keith Osborn (1979), 'Young Children's Perception of the Reality of Television', *Contemporary Education*, Vol. 50, No. 3: 129-33.

Chandler, Daniel (1995), 'Children's Understanding of What is "Real" on Television: A Review of the Research Literature' [WWW document] URL <http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/realrev.html> [visited 21/1/03]

Knowledge and Understanding: It is essential to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of relevant issues, concepts, theories and findings introduced in lectures and other sources. You need to be able to provide an accurate and balanced summary of these and to apply them appropriately to the topic. Do not rely on standard dictionary definitions of key technical terms: such definitions should be based on relevant academic reference sources. However, do not explain technical terms with which your reader should be familiar: demonstrate your understanding by applying such concepts to the current task. Map out key standpoints regarding the main issues. Synthesise where appropriate — that is, bring together similar approaches by different writers. Summarise the views of particular theorists and researchers in your own words. Relate these closely to the specific focus of the assignment. Provide appropriately detailed examples.

Critical Evaluation: The best work not only describes and summarises theories and findings but also critically interprets them. When an author's views are simply declared as part of evidence and argument, this is known as an 'appeal to an authority': you need to critically evaluate such views. The task is not to 'criticise' the work of experienced professionals on the basis of your own knowledge of the topic or of research methodology but to show that you are capable of thinking critically and with insight about the issues raised. Relate different studies to each other. Compare and contrast different approaches and identify their strengths and limitations. What questions do they leave unanswered? Try to be as balanced and impartial as possible.

Evidence and Coherent Argument: Organise your materials as effectively as you can to support the development of an orderly argument. Do not leap from point to point. Take nothing for granted. Simply quoting assertions does not count as evidence. All assertions must be supported with the best evidence you can find. Evidence is provided by drawing upon the analysis and interpretation of findings. Conclusions must follow coherently from the evidence; do not be tempted into speculation, prediction or moralising. Unless specifically called for, personal opinions should not feature. Where data collection and analysis is required (qualitative or quantitative), it should be undertaken by using an established methodology. Specify this methodology and refer to a published example of its application in the field. Discuss the appropriateness of that method for the task in hand. Show an awareness of the limitations of your own study. Have regard to any legal or ethical considerations.

Tip: Many students produce a better essay if they revise it some time after producing their first version. So start early and leave yourself plenty of time for revision!