

**English Language and Literature
Guide to Writing Essays 2014-2015**

Contents

1. [What is it all about?](#)
2. [Lecturers, Academics, Professors, Writers](#)
3. [Reading English](#)
4. [Avoid pain: take charge!](#)
5. [The Essay \(at last!\)](#)
6. [Essay-writing activities](#)
7. ['Guiding' essay-writing: from A-level to university](#)
8. [Useful terms: 'primary' and 'secondary' texts](#)
9. [Different ways of getting started](#)
10. [Getting started with your own ideas](#)
11. [Getting started with other peoples' ideas](#)
12. [Libraries](#)
13. [Online reading lists, catalogues and databases](#)
14. [Finding books](#)
15. [Finding articles in journals](#)
16. [Open access online resources](#)
17. [Research reading](#)
18. [Critical reading](#)
19. [Drafting and re-drafting](#)
20. [Reading out loud](#)
21. [Cooking](#)
22. [Some handy hints](#)
23. [Comparing two primary texts](#)
24. [Word limits](#)
25. [When Things Go Wrong](#)
26. [Essay-writing and other forms of assessment](#)
27. [Feedback](#)
28. [Office Hours](#)

[APPENDIX 1: Style Guide Summary](#)

[APPENDIX 2: Final Draft Checklist](#)

1. What is it all about?



In the course of your time at King's you will be asked to undertake many different forms of assessment. These include sitting examinations, creating portfolios, making oral presentations, participating in class, and writing essays. This guide focuses on writing essays because developing your skills as an essay writer also enhances your ability to succeed in other forms of assessment.

But the essay is much more than a means of assessing your progress at College. It is the centrepiece of all academic work in the Arts and Humanities. And it is also a medium through which to develop a vast range of transferable vocational skills.

This may not be obvious at first. The kinds of questions you will be asked to answer by means of an essay may seem esoteric, even wholly removed from everyday life. But the first thing to remember is that an essay is not about getting it right or wrong. Rather, it is about persuading readers of your authority as a writer and of the value of what you are advocating. These skills are indispensable at every stage of your future career, from the job interview to implementing major initiatives in business, in administration, and other aspects of public life. So the skills you develop when writing essays will not only help you get a job, they will allow you to excel in your chosen career.

Your time at King's College London is a rare and precious opportunity to acquire and hone these skills. The opportunity is 'rare' because, thanks to the hard work you have already put into your education, you have earned privileged access to leading figures in Arts and Humanities research—your lecturers, tutors, and seminar leaders—all of whom are practised and successful writers. The opportunity is precious because of the length of time you now have to work intensively on your critical thinking and writing skills. In doing so you will set in train processes of learning which will continue to develop throughout your working life.

2. 'Lecturers', 'Academics', 'Professors', 'Writers'



Who *are* these people who will be teaching you how to write? In one sense, they are like the teachers you know from school in that they are committed to your education—and to the 'idea' of education *per se*—and that they are trained and experienced in helping you succeed at a specific stage of learning.

In another sense they are not like the teachers you have encountered before because, given what you have already achieved at school, *you* are now required to take greater responsibility for your own intellectual development. This is not least because no one can learn 'for' you anymore; the only way to develop intellectually is to devise your own trajectory through those vast collections of human knowledge stored in libraries, on databases, on the web, in print culture and archives, and in new information technologies, as well as in the minds and skills of expert individuals.

Academics are not the only people who can legitimately own this knowledge or 'be intellectual'. But academics are distinguished by their practising 'disciplined' approaches to human knowledge: in other words they subscribe to certain rules of engagement with it. You, too, are an 'academic' while studying at university

The rules of engagement include systems for acknowledging other people's work appropriately in your own writing (systems you will encounter first in the form of advice on 'avoiding plagiarism'). They also include means of ensuring that an academic writer's ideas are regularly reviewed anonymously and openly debated by others in formal settings.

This can sound somewhat strict and intimidating, and it is true that in enrolling at University you become subject to [academic regulations](#) which ultimately have the force of law. But in practice the rules are enabling guidelines rather than constrictions: 'disciplined' approaches to knowledge principally involve tried and true methods of communicating and developing ideas.

Academics, for instance, recognise the effectiveness of dividing knowledge in particular ways—into disciplines like 'English', 'Geography', and 'Biology' and so on—at the same time as they often draw attention to the limitations this can impose, and regularly test out 'interdisciplinary' approaches to particular subjects. And all along academics recognise that coming up with new ideas often involves innovating or even breaking the rules underlying 'tried and true' methods. Academic rules, then, are always themselves subject to academic thought; hence discussion of 'methodology'—*how* you approach a topic; *how* you came up with what you are claiming—often makes up a significant part of academic writing. That's why, in an essay, you often state what you will do in the body of the essay and why and how you will do it that way.

In the course of your studies at the College you will come into contact with academics with expertise in a considerable range of fields and who have different levels of experience working at university. But all of them will have engaged in high-level research and had their work subjected to many forms of 'peer review' (where it is scrutinised by other academics).

'Lecturers' are usually appointed after they have successfully completed a Doctorate of Philosophy (a PhD or a DPhil), at which point they are then given the title 'Dr So-and-So'. As Lecturers publish more of their work, and gain more experience in teaching and administration, they progress to more senior positions in the College, such as 'Senior Lecturer', 'Reader', and 'Professor'. At some point during your time at the College you may also be taught by 'Postdoctoral Fellows' ('Postdocs'), academics who have fixed-term appointments to research a particular topic, usually with a view to publishing a book. You may also be taught by 'Graduate Teaching Assistants' (GTAs), seminar leaders who are in their second or third year of doing research towards a doctorate. (Given the stage they're at in their academic careers, GTAs are

often in touch with the newest research in their fields, making them particularly enthusiastic and exciting teachers.)

All these academics continuously hone their ideas and their writing skills, and develop new ways of disseminating research through teaching and publication. That means that at the same time as they are teaching you, they are themselves 'research active', writing essays in the form of articles published in academic journals, one of the principal media in which academic debates about literature and culture unfold. The other, of course, is the book, called a 'monograph' if it is an academic book by a single author. The academics who teach you are writing these, too. All up, academics are continuously developing their own research, writing, and teaching skills *alongside* you as you study.

The high reputation of King's College London rests on the research output of its staff and the ways in which this research feeds directly into teaching. As part of their research staff also regularly attend international conferences where experts debate their ideas. (Many are also involved in organising and administrating such conferences and publishing the research which arises from them.) That means in lectures, tutorials, and seminars you will come into contact with people who are very much informed about the latest debates in literary and language studies, and deeply involved in developing rigorously researched, theoretically informed, and innovative approaches to historic and contemporary literature in English (and, indeed, in other languages).

What *else* do 'academics' do? As well as conducting their own research and teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students, academics are heavily involved in the wider administration of degree programmes, and in the governance of the College as a whole. They are also often involved in the work of other universities, helping to standardise higher education across the university sector. They are regularly called upon to speak in public fora, disseminating the latest research to publics ranging from local interest groups to the international media. As consultants they contribute to the development and implementation of government and private sector policies, they engage with businesses, and involve themselves with a range of cultural institutions like art galleries, museums, and theatre companies.

Apart from administering their own research and the teaching modules they convene, academics in the Department of English Language and Literature also have special positions (like Chair of the Teaching Committee, Senior Tutor, Chair of the Postgraduate Research Committee and so on) within the Department, Faculty, and College which enable them to contribute in focused ways to the ongoing work of the university.

3. 'Reading English'



The two most striking differences between your experience learning at school and at College go some way towards explaining each other: the sheer number

of texts you are expected to read every week; and the comparatively low number of hours you have 'in class'.

The first feature of university life—how much you read each week—results from the self-directed nature of study from this point on. Although you have three (full-time) years in which to complete your BA—or one full-time year for MA students—the breadth of knowledge that you will need to master in that time is still very considerable, demanding a high level of commitment in every single week that you are enrolled. The intensity of this experience is one of the 'tried and true' methods for learning which is professed by academics.

While you are given several months in summer to get a start on reading for the coming semester (and to pursue your own research interests), you still need to be given a reasonable amount of time each week during semester both to complete the set reading and pursue your wider interests in your chosen field. The number of texts, and the time you will take reading them, is not least why undertaking a degree in English Language and Literature is also referred to as 'reading English'.

It is *not* referred to as 'being lectured at in English'. However as an undergraduate (i.e. a BA student) or as a 'postgraduate taught' student (i.e. an MA student) you are offered guidance in your 'reading English': a specific 'programme' of modules designed as a progression through (i) for BA students, three levels of study (Levels 4, 5 and 6), and (ii) for MA students, one further, more intensive level (Level 7), which culminates in your writing a substantial research dissertation (15,000 words).

The principal means of providing that guidance comes in the form of expertly devised reading lists, carefully planned lectures, and a timetable of seminars, tutorials, individual consultations, set forms of assessment, and prearranged opportunities for receiving formal feedback. At College, then, your work 'reading English' is facilitated by people who have published studies on the subject, are recognised as experts by other academics, and have created programmes for those who are coming next along the line of interesting and interested readers and writers: you.

By means of class discussion, oral presentations, examinations and essay writing, your own ideas formed while 'reading English' will be scrutinised and discussed by many of these same people. And in giving you oral and written feedback on your work, they will help hone your skills as a reader, as a researcher, and as a writer. The whole process is at once exhilarating, terrifying, confronting, and exciting, but most of all it is deeply rewarding.

For although everyone has moments when intellectual work gets him or her down, even at dark moments (as any academic and indeed any writer will tell you) you learn a lot, not least about your own determination. It doesn't mean it won't hurt sometimes, but it does mean it can sometimes be worth the (transient) pain.

4. Avoid pain: take charge!



So believe-it-or-not by enrolling in the Bachelor of Arts at King's College London you have elected to become a writer. As such you should get in the habit of writing. Consider keeping a journal: it will be very enjoyable (and even excruciating) to look back on it one day. Write everything from daily activities to songs, poems, and stories. And you can also add mini-essays in your journal about anything from Kylie to the kitchen sink. You'll be amazed at how these things stand up to analysis. Get on with it then: put finger to keyboard.

Meanwhile, always take charge of every aspect of an assessment task you have been set at College. Remember you are in the driver's seat throughout your time here. For example, organise all library work in terms of the time you have, rather than the magnitude of the perceived task. Don't say to yourself, *I'm stuck in this hovel until I finish*. Say, *I have two hours today to work in this beautiful library, free from all interruption. When the two hours is up I will stop*. You will achieve a lot in that two hours as a result, and even enjoy yourself.

Taking charge also involves making your own decision about when an assessment task will be completed. By necessity this must be before the official deadline: so what? In most cases you will have more than one piece of coursework due on the same day. Rather than enslave yourself to this official deadline, set out in your diary a series of rolling personal deadlines when you will stop working on each piece, with the last on the day before the official deadline.

Apart from anything else, taking charge in this way will help make apparent that College assessment tasks are not unsolicited impositions but things you have elected to put to the service of your own intellectual and career development.

5. The Essay (at last!)



The essay is both a distinct and a capacious genre. The word derives from Latin meaning 'weighing out' and Old French meaning 'to test', 'try' or 'make an attempt'. You'll note it does *not* mean 'answering correctly' or 'always getting it right'.

Now by reason of your acceptance into a BA or an MA English programme at King's College London, your excellent skills as a writer have already been recognised: thanks to your hard work at school (and, for MA students, in your BA) you are already an accomplished writer. But there is still a vast amount to learn about how to write in a clear, authoritative, and persuasive manner. (No one ever stops learning how to write: ask any author.) At College you will learn more about how to find evidence to support your argument, how to marshal that evidence so as best to make your case, and how to reference it in such a way as to give assurance of your knowledge, demarcate your originality, and 'drive home' the importance of your ideas.

You may have written many essays, but as an undergraduate student you have probably not read many. It's useful to realise that opinion pieces and book/play/film reviews in newspapers and magazines are rarely essays in the academic sense; they conform to different conventions, quite appropriately, as they are directed to different readerships. The difference between journalistic opinion pieces and academic essays is easy to see once you have read more academic essays. In fact one of the best ways to learn about academic essay-writing is simply to read academic essays.

There are thousands of such essays published every year as articles in academic journals, that is, in journals where the essays have been reviewed anonymously by other experts in the field before they are accepted for publication. Academic journals have (not wholly exciting) titles like *Studies in English Literature*, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, *Literature and Medicine*, *Performance Research*, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, *Irish Historical Studies*, *International Theatre Research*, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, and so on (to name only a few in which staff in the Department have recently published work).

Often, as part of your preparatory reading for a seminar, you will be asked to seek out articles in journals like these (see below for how to find them). Many of these articles will be provided for you via [online reading lists](#) and/or on the [KEATS](#) site for individual modules, but it is rewarding (and good research training) to find the hard copy yourself. (When you do find an article, browse through the other articles in the same issue, and/or in other issues housed next to them in the library stacks, or which come up in searches of particular subjects in electronic databases. The more you get in the habit of reading around your set tasks, the better your essay-writing will be.)

By the way, you'll also find excellent essays in two outstanding 'local' papers: the *London Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. You can find copies in the library, at a newsagent, and you can even subscribe. Reading them is an excellent means of getting a feel for academic writing, quite apart from the ideas their reviews contain.

All this might make essay-writing sound a little dry but nothing could be further from the truth. One of the extraordinary things about writing essays is that drafting them is a form of thinking. As a result you never know what you are going to end up thinking by writing essays. If you are open to this process (don't force it, just let it happen) you will be amazed at the thoughts your brain thinks *for* you while you are writing. They'll seem to pop out of nowhere (and they won't only be about the topic in hand).

So by practising essay-writing you develop (vocational) skills essential for the work of an author, an advocate, a campaigner, a professional in any number of careers, and a writer of any number of other genres. But even more

importantly, better ideas than you could ever have hoped to come up with *before* you started writing will appear in the process of drafting essays.

And from this process you will gain unexpected insights into *yourself*. How, after all, did you come up with that idea almost despite yourself? Where did that particular idea come from? What does it say about you? One of history's greatest exponents of the essay form, [Michel de Montaigne](#) (1533-1592), discovered and wrote about this effect. You have an extraordinary opportunity over the next three years to test it out.

6. Essay-writing activities [^](#)

Essay-writing involves several interrelated activities:

- Planning
 - Researching
 - First-Drafting
 - Re-drafting
 - Re-re-drafting (*ad infinitum*)
 - 'Cooking'
 - Finishing
 - Celebrating
-
- Receiving feedback
 - Responding to feedback
 - Celebrating

Some essay-writers undertake the first eight activities above as stages, proceeding from top to bottom in methodical order. Others change the order around; others do several or all stages at once. Everyone writes essays in her/his own way: that's why it's so interesting to learn how *you* do it...

7. 'Guiding' essay-writing: from A-level to College [^](#)

That 'everyone writes essays in her/his own way' makes advising on College-level essay-writing difficult. The 'suggestive' nature of the advice that follows may also seem somewhat new after your experience being taught to write essays at school. You may be more used to receiving 'prescriptive' advice, even 'templates' for the composition of an essay. This kind of teaching is very effective at your former level of experience as a writer. It has provided you with a kind of scaffolding, enabling you to create essays that meet basic 'building regulations', giving you the confidence to know you can 'build' an essay that won't fall down. From now on, though, it will be up to you to create your own scaffolding and your own ways of ensuring more daring designs will stand up (to scrutiny that is).

You will not, then, find below a fool proof template for writing College-level essays: none exists. What you will find are some suggestions about ways of stimulating your thinking about essay-writing. These are designed to *start* a process you will continue to develop throughout your time at College and beyond.

Hence this guidance may not work for you: don't worry if you find yourself disagreeing with the advice, particularly if you are already receiving positive feedback on your writing. But it is still worth reading through this document anyway, if only to help you see that *you* write essays using quite a different method.

8. Useful terms: 'primary' and 'secondary' texts [^](#)

Your 'primary' text is the creative writing (novel/play/poem), or occasionally a particular example of theory/criticism, which is the subject of your essay. Often in essays you need to address two primary texts (see point 23 on Comparing Primary Texts). Your reading of the primary text(s) will nearly always be the core of your essay.

'Secondary' texts are all the criticism that is relevant to the primary text(s).

Demonstrating your knowledge of both types of material is an important part of academic essay-writing.

9. Different ways of getting started [^](#)

Many people tell you to begin essay writing with a plan, but there are a number of different ways to plan an essay. What they all share is *beginning in good time*.

Deciding which order to take points 10 and 11 in this Guide is an example of the strategic decision-making essay-writing involves. Point 10 suggests beginning with your own ideas about a primary text. But particularly when there is a vast amount of critical material on a particular writer or topic, it may be more effective to get a handle on other peoples' published ideas first (see point 11). This is not least because it might save you time, i.e. prevent you re-inventing the wheel. You may even prefer to deploy methods described in points 10 and 11 at the same time; the choice is yours.

10. Getting started with your own ideas: planning [^](#)

Neat planning

For some writers planning is a methodical affair with ordered points that will eventually become paragraphs. Such a plan sets out as fully as possible the stages in which you will answer the question, focusing on your own ideas and identifying the research of other people's ideas you will need to do in the

library. You then follow the plan. It's neat, efficient, and (for some) almost impossible; but do try it first.

Un-neat planning I: writing cold + planning afterwards

Another type of essay plan starts as the complete opposite: an entirely messy and free-form brainstorm on paper. This can involve simply beginning to write, as if you were in an examination for which you had done no preparation (other than to read the primary texts). You can then plan afterwards (see below).

By the way, if you only start your essay 24 hours before the deadline, you will in effect be writing cold but only complete this very early stage of essay-writing in time. You'll have a first draft not an essay and will receive feedback accordingly.

But if you start this stage in good time, plan afterwards, organise a research programme, and then re-draft and finalise your essay, you will reach the celebration stage.

Un-neat planning II: mind map + planning afterwards

Instead of 'writing cold', you might consider creating a mind map. The mind map is also a useful technique if you can and want to develop your own question/topic for an essay, or if you are uncertain which question to answer from a list provided in class.

The mind map entails taking a large sheet of paper, writing the name of the focus text in the centre (and the essay question if you have one), and scribbling down in note form around this centre everything that comes into your head on that subject. These scribbles tend to gather into constellations which may eventually form the substance of certain paragraphs. Use large arrows freely to draw connections between parts. The messier your final map appears, the better.

You might like to add a few quotations from the primary text to your constellations in appropriate places, or page references to the primary text.

Now look at the mess and see where your *topic* emerges from the range of ideas you have had about the text. This should be directed towards *answering the chosen essay question*.

So after your brainstorm some kind of shaping should be possible, maybe even just numbering areas on the mind map in a possible order of discussion. Remember: thinking is four dimensional, and you need to make it look as such (i.e. as messy as your brain) before pounding it into what is, on the face of it a neat two-dimensional essay. It's the reader who will make it four dimensional again.

Now you might like to attempt not-quite-so-cold writing. The idea is to translate your mind map into an early essay draft. Simply start writing *in an essay-like way*, that is, with full, grammatical sentences, with each paragraph aspiring to follow on logically, even if that doesn't quite work yet.

The Unexpected Great Idea

It is an absolute given that if you write for a morning, wandering down the page and coming up with everything you can on a text, this process of sustained thought will produce an Unexpected Great Idea (UGI). This will probably pop up right at the end of the complete wreckage of a first draft. Your final essay won't leave the draft in this state: it will read like you always knew the UGI was coming (see point 19).

Planning afterwards

Once you have a messy cold draft and/or mind map, try 'planning afterwards'. This means condensing each paragraph or constellation into the kind of single idea that infernal neat planner had in the first place. Make certain each one follows logically and pushes your argument forwards. You'll have to start moving material around.

Simply neatening up the un-neat plan in this way will also probably allow you to discard some initial ideas, and enable some other better ones to emerge. Granted that might mean going back to the planning board: but you've started in plenty of time, so that's fine.

Some writers will now go on to the re-drafting stage before doing research. Others do the research now; or both the research and drafting at once. In either case at the very least you now have bulk words: material to mould.

11. Getting started with other peoples' ideas



The messy stage will certainly involve starting a close critical engagement with the primary texts you have chosen, which is one significant aspect of your overall task. It should also enable you to focus the kind of secondary material that will be appropriate for you to consult. Desirable as it would be, for example, to read everything ever written on *As You Like It*, you probably don't have time to do so for a single essay, and with your cold draft and your UGI you can limit your inquiry to relevant criticism on this text (say a particular character, scene, performance; issues of race, gender, class and so on, depending on your topic, your cold draft, and your UGI).

Even so, remember that appropriate secondary material may not be *directly* related to the primary text: think laterally about what secondary material might enhance your argument.

So, the other significant aspect of your overall essay-writing task has now emerged: to demonstrate how your ideas about a primary text (or texts) interact with other people's published work on the same texts/topic. In other words, you need to show what other ideas are out there which speak to your topic and show how your ideas relate to them. (In some cases, notably when and if you write a dissertation, you might also need to demonstrate that you know what kinds of *debates* are out there on your topic and/or in literary studies more broadly even if these are not directly relevant to your essay. Demonstrating such knowledge lends you authority as a writer, but don't get carried away, for a normal undergraduate essay you only have very limited words to play with.)

If you find that a critic has already published an idea relevant to your own, you can use her/his work to support your argument; or if s/he has argued the opposite, this might spur you on to consolidate your case. Engaging with this other writing will add complexity and nuance to your own argument. *In all cases you must reference other work appropriately (see Appendix 1, Style Guide Summary).* Indeed another key skill you will develop in essay-writing is the ability to avoid plagiarism.

You are strongly advised to familiarise yourself with the College's statement on [Academic Honesty and Integrity](#) (click on 'View/Download pdf file'), which also contains a statement about plagiarism. You can also read information on [plagiarism](#) on the Department of English Language and Literature's website, and check out the Department's Skills Training site on KEATS, which has videos, screencasts, and quizzes to help you footnote correctly and avoid plagiarism.

Remember you can always consult your Personal Tutor—or any staff member in her/his office hours (see point 28 below)—if you are unsure about whether you might have plagiarised in a particular instance. By starting your essay early and planning research time you should *easily* avoid accidental plagiarism.

12. Libraries



For humanities students (you!), spending time in libraries reading is the equivalent to what spending time in the lab or doing fieldwork is for scientists: core activity.

During your time at King's College London you have several wonderful libraries at your disposal: the Maughan Library in Chancery Lane, the University of London's Senate House Library at Russell Square, and even the British Library in Euston Road. You also have the right to use other College libraries within the University of London federation. The COPAC catalogue merges online catalogues from all of these, and many other major specialist libraries. See <http://copac.ac.uk/>

The Maughan Library, King's College London

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/iss/>

The Maughan library is part of King's College London's Library Services and is a lending library. The library is in the Grade II listed building in Chancery Lane that formerly housed the Public Records Office. The library has been beautifully refurbished and offers a very pleasant work space 8 minutes' walk from the Strand campus. For more information see <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/iss/>.

Access: your King's College London student card is also your Maughan library card. Any problems see the KCL's [Libraries Help and Guidance](#).

Senate House Library, University of London

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/>

The Senate House Library is a wonderful research library. The rooms on the main (fourth) floor are beautiful and on all floors you will discover desks tucked away with superb views over London. The Senate House Library is a lending library.

Access: take your King's College London student card to the fourth floor of the Senate House tower and apply for a card at the front desk.

The British Library

<http://www.bl.uk/>

The British Library on Euston Road is an incomparable resource and, particularly in your final BA year, or for postgraduate research, you should make use of its amazing collections and superb work environment while enrolled at King's.

Access: Although the BL is increasingly accessible, it is wise to be able to state the exact nature of your research (traditionally one was required to have exhausted the resources of College and University libraries before using it). For this reason it is more likely you will seek out the British Library in your final year of a BA (particularly if you elect to write a dissertation) or at MA level.

So if you have good reason to be at the British Library and not elsewhere, apply for a BL reader's pass. The most accurate information on how to do so is found on the BL's [website](#). But be aware you will need your KCL student card and probably two other proofs of identity which have your current address on them.

Remember that the British Library is a space in which many professional researchers work. Mute the volume on your laptop before you enter the reading room and respect the silence of other readers.

PLEASE NOTE: The British Library is a reference library only. Once you have a reader's pass (which will be granted for a limited time like one year but is renewable), you can enter one of the reading rooms (probably Humanities 1 or Humanities 2), find a seat, remember your seat number, and go to the 'main catalogue' on one of the library computers to order books. Log in using your registered user name and password. Once you have searched and found the particular item, click on 'I want this' and then on the GO icon beside the 'Reading Rooms' option for delivery. This takes you through various stages of checking for availability and ordering, and tells how long it will take for each book to be delivered (the minimum is 70 minutes). Click on the 'request' link for each required volume, selecting the reading room where you want it delivered. After the allotted time, your book(s) will be available for collection at the Collection desk in the reading room you have nominated (when you are logged on you can see if your books have arrived by clicking on 'my reading room requests'). When you have finished with the book you take it back to the same desk; staff will also reserve up to six books for you (for three days) if you ask them to at the end of your session.

Once you have a reader's card, to avoid waiting for deliveries, you can order books from home to be waiting for you when you arrive at the library. Note also the British Library has free Wi-Fi for registered readers.

13. Online Reading Lists, Catalogues and databases

[^](#)

Many modules taught in the Department of English now have [online reading lists](#), a compendium of links to the full text or the physical location of all the required and further reading relevant to the topic at hand. But you should also get into the habit of looking for relevant material yourself, not least because life after university does not come with a reading list! Hence information in this and the following sections shows you how to become something more than a clicker on prescribed links: you'll be a reading-list creator for (and of) yourself.

Often when visiting the library you know what book or journal title you are looking for, in which case you can go straight to the catalogue and put the title into the appropriate search field. But other times you may be unsure where to start looking for material addressing a particular subject. In that case you should make use of 'subject' searches in catalogues, and bibliographic databases.

KCL Library Services Catalogue

Your first port of call should still be the catalogue.

<http://library.kcl.ac.uk/ALEPH/-/start/kings>

Under 'Basic Search', choose 'subject words' from the drop-down options and then enter appropriate topics in the search field, e.g. Shakespeare women. A number of titles held at the Maughan will then be listed. Don't forget to try other subject combinations if it doesn't work at first.

Databases

But more detailed bibliographic information and, increasingly, full texts of journal articles, are available via the Library Services databases. 'Bibliographic' databases allow you to search for various subjects (e.g. *Bleak House*) and provide information on where you will find articles and books that address it. You will then need to find the hard copy of the book or the journal in which the article appears. Full text databases contain the whole journal article in electronic form.

Many of the ISS databases are accessible at home via the ISS website. You may need your King's user name and password, supplied when you received email information on arrival at the College.

- ✓ Go to [Library Services](#)
- ✓ Click on the 'databases' field
- ✓ The subsequent page reverts to the 'Title' field: if you know the title of the required database, enter it here
- ✓ If you do not know the title of an appropriate database, click on the 'Subject' tag
- ✓ In the left column click on 'Arts + Humanities'. Click on the appropriate subject in the right column (e.g. 'English') and click on 'Go'.
- ✓ A list of databases will appear with descriptions of their contents and information about what passwords are required for remote access. (If you are working in a PAWS room you shouldn't need a further password.)
- ✓ It is VERY useful to familiarise yourself with these various databases, and you can only really do so by simply having a shot at making them work. Start with JSTOR, entering various relevant subjects in the search field or simply browsing through the site. (Why not timetable a few one-hour sessions for yourself to try this from home or at the library?)
- ✓ Note that there are also extraordinary primary resources available here: for example, you can browse, search, and read many historic newspapers and magazines. If you are taking a module involving pre-1900 texts you will learn much simply by browsing newspapers from the period: it's interesting apart from anything else.

Senate House catalogue and databases

The Senate House Library catalogue can be found at <http://www.ull.ac.uk/>

The link to Senate House databases is in the left-hand column of the same page. Note you may need your Senate House Library card number to access some of its electronic resources externally.

14. Finding books



This is a simple and familiar matter of finding the call number for a particular title from the online catalogue and finding where the book is shelved.

To find books or journals at the Maughan you will need the call number AND the room in which those call numbers are stored. Maughan Library floor plans are freely available and indicate the call numbers in each particular room.

If you can get the book yourself, as you can for the most part at the Maughan and Senate House, *browse* along the shelves. The book has been catalogued according to subject and will probably be sitting beside other relevant works.

15. Finding articles in journals



Once you have identified a useful article in a database, if the database does not include links to the full text you will need to find the hard copy of the journal in the library.

The article reference probably includes one or two numbers after the journal title, referring to the relevant volume and issue. You should note these, as well as the author, title of article, journal title and year of publication.

Search the title of the journal (not the article title or the author's name) in the library catalogue: you will probably need to indicate you are looking for a 'journal' or 'series' in a drop-down field.

If that journal is not held by the Maughan Library, you should also look it up in the University of London Union List of Serials, which gives the location of all journals held in any of the libraries in the UL federation. The list can be found in the KCL Library Services databases (see *Databases* above); put 'University of London Union List of Serials' in the title field, then search for the journal title once the list is up.

When you locate the journal go to the shelf mark and look along it for the relevant volume and issue number.

16. Open access online resources



A number of respected academic journals are now available in open access online (i.e. not only via a database) as are a large number of historic literary texts. Do remember to treat all material found online (other than in full text academic databases) with an appropriate degree of critical distance. Is it an authoritative source? Is it an appropriate source to use? What makes you think so? Does it engage with the debates related to this subject as they unfold in printed references, such as books and scholarly articles? Can it be referred to in isolation from these other sources?

17. Research reading



Once you have a text which might be relevant, you need to find the appropriate passages (if any). Research reading is all about being active and flexible, that is, saving time and effort by using the different parts of the book appropriately. Read the contents page very carefully, deciding what is more or less relevant. If you have a specific idea/subject in mind, use the index. Also, you can scan the index looking for long entries, which might have added details effectively summarising the whole text under certain subject headings. To get a good idea of general relevance read the first page of the book carefully, and keep in mind that at the end of the introduction, writers often summarise each chapter. SCAN pages to get a 'feel' of the book and the writer. More goes in than you think: just *turning* the pages and glancing helps. Let your subconscious work for you: relevant parts will soon jump out at you. Research is often more serendipitous than people realise.

So give yourself time to scan, browse, and let relevant things appear. When they do, you will probably need to sit down for (say) twenty minutes and read the section more carefully. *Always note the full reference (including the authors and the full page ranges of chapters/articles)*. Take other notes below the reference if you think it will help you understand/remember points, or if you think parts of the text might go into your essay directly as quotes. Don't worry too much about 'remembering' as you read: concentrate on understanding what is being said, and the remembering will be easy.

18. Critical reading



A critical reading is one which forms an opinion of the writer's agenda and methodology (see point 2) as well as understanding her or his subject: work out *what* the writer is saying, then think about *how* it is being said, and *why* it is being said in that way; then decide what *you* think about the 'what', the 'how', and the 'why'. Critical reading is a major skill developed during your university/intellectual life, no matter what your field of study. Consider asking yourself these questions when you take notes from secondary material.

19. Drafting and re-drafting



The difference between drafting essays and the final product is like the difference between wandering through a forest in search of the way out, and drawing a map of that forest to assist those who come after you. The first entails many dead ends, false starts, tangents, unnecessary twirling; the last is a straightforward this-then-this-then-this guide with a spectacular conclusion delivered by an expert. In between you can expect many in-between versions of the essay, wherein the ideas are still growing but the draft is becoming more 'finished' in appearance.

So into your preparatory work—your neat plan and/or your mind map and/or your 'cold' writing with the UGI—you have fed new material—your raw notes

from research—and let it do its developmental work within the draft. (Or *vice versa* if you have started with point 11 above and proceeded to point 10: into your research you have fed your own ideas and let them do their developmental work within the draft.) You make another point-form plan of what you have written. Does each point follow logically from the other? In the same process you have kept polishing your prose, clarifying messy sentences, spelling out knots in the argument. Nuanced by your research and this continuous process of reading, adding, re-reading, thinking, that early UGI suddenly metamorphoses into a New Improved Great Idea (NIGI). Now you feel like you have something solid. You are approaching the end of your task.

The objective now is that the final draft reads like you always knew you were heading towards that NIGI. You didn't know where it was at first, but now you can lead your reader directly to it.

So it's often at this point you discard altogether the provisional introduction you wrote to get yourself going on the early draft. Your new introduction will demand some kind of tantalising indication of the NIGI, to show that you know where you are heading, without giving too much away and depriving yourself of the chance to make a bigger impact at the end.

Sign-posting vs. The Nike Rule

Often it is very effective to 'signpost' your essay: to inform the reader how your argument will proceed (e.g. 'I will begin by doing x; then I will go on to do y'); and to remind her/him where you are in the argument at various stages. Sign-posting is also an effective means of spelling out your methodology, *how* you are approaching your chosen topic (see point 2).

But occasionally it may be more effective to apply the Nike Rule.

The Nike Rule states: 'Don't tell the reader what you *will* do, *just do it*'. In other words applying the Nike Rule involves replacing sentences like the following—'In order to address the representation of violence in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* I will explore the final scene in which Himmelfarb is attacked in the factory'—with a statement encapsulating what you have discovered in the course of your drafting and research: "'Petty" harassment in the everyday life of Patrick White's fictional suburb of Sarsaparilla is linked to genocide committed by the Nazis in the Second World War: violence is always shown to spring from the persecution of difference in *Riders in the Chariot* and to be marked out as evil no matter the scale of its effects'. The message is plain, the tone is authoritative. If the examiner disagrees s/he will argue against you but not slash marks.

Like other strategic decisions in essay-writing, it is up to you to decide whether the Nike Rule is more effective than signposting at any particular moment in the particular draft before you. Where you are considering this option, you

probably need to try out both full signposting and applying the Nike rule before making your final decision.

20. Reading out loud



Now the macro-structure of this essay is in place, you need to tidy up the details. *Read the draft out loud.* There is no other way to determine if the draft reads well. Better still, ask a friend to read it aloud to you. This might be agonising (and you may need to bribe him/her), but you will develop a very acute sense of the vagaries of your punctuation and syntax from each time your (soon-to-be-former-) friend stumbles or becomes puzzled.

At this stage, bear in mind that your focus is *your own text*. It is the essay itself that matters now, and only the essay. Put away all other books. Focus on making what you have written as effective and persuasive as possible.

21. Cooking



The essay will now take at least 24 hours to cook. This means you must lay the draft aside for at least a day, try and forget about it, and then read it out loud again. The longer you cook the draft the better. When you look back at it, read it like someone picking it up from a large pile of essays on similar subjects. Don't mess with this person.

In other words, ask yourself: is my essay boring? If I am bored by it, what effect will it have on my examiner(s)? Now if you have engaged with the primary texts and your secondary research, developed your initial ideas, and allowed the post-draft planning and further redrafting time necessary to delivering a precision piece, your analysis will electrify the readers: that's you first, and then the examiners. Electrified examiners award high marks.

Of course after the draft has been cooked you will probably find a few things to change. You may suddenly see how your ideas fit into debates in the secondary texts you have been reading, making it worth enhancing the context of your argument. Mostly it will be a matter of improving the shape of existing material so that the argument runs more smoothly (and persuasively). More often than not you will discover (with remarkable ease) an excellent point you needed to add to cap off your essay ('So *that* is what I was trying to say!'). Look for overall logical progression in your argument and the clarity of individual sentences. Smoothing out an ungainly sentence can have an astonishing effect on your overall argument. Read the draft aloud AGAIN. Don't let anything past that isn't gorgeous.

Once you have completed the final draft checklist (see Appendix 2) you are ready to hand in your essay.

22. Some handy hints



General

Using the first person in essays ('I think...', 'I am going to consider', 'In this essay I focus...') is perfectly acceptable and usually desirable.

Wikipedia is *not* an acceptable reference source, no matter how handy it is for looking up facts.

When quoting films transcribe the scenes yourself, unless you have access to the actual screenplay. Pay attention to what is on the screen (including camera angles etc.) as well as the dialogue.

An essay which does not include indented quotes from the primary texts analysed in detail will often lack originality and complexity. Scan your draft: do you have indented quotes from the primary texts?

In general, do not waste time and words on anything that is not directed to your argument. You probably need to provide less details of the plots of your primary texts than you think.

Discussing *more* than two primary texts can thin essays out and make them repetitive. If you are keen to demonstrate your engagement with other primary texts you have studied for a particular module, you can always refer to them in a footnote.

If you are relying on reasonably old secondary material it is likely that scholarship has since moved on. Anything before c.1980 is 'old', though, of course, this doesn't mean that it is unimportant and/or uninteresting. If you find valuable material in pre-1980 criticism, then make sure you both demonstrate your awareness of the ways in which debates have unfolded since that time and how the 'old' criticism you're using still has genuine value for a new reading.

Usually the question you are answering, and the text(s) you are working with, are part of a module. Try to show how you have been able to engage with the broader themes, discourses, concepts and theoretical issues of the module, as well as the specifics of a particular text.

When revising your introduction

Avoid beginning with a dictionary definition. Such definitions can be helpful in early drafts but they are often formulaic and ungainly in a final draft. Cut!

Avoid beginning a final draft with a platitudinous statement about cultures or peoples ('The Age of Shakespeare was the age of...'; 'The spirit of the nineteenth century was...'; 'Aboriginal peoples have always...'; 'For thousands

of years man has struggled with the written word'). Such sweeping statements are clichéd and unnecessarily contentious: they might help you start writing an early draft but they need to be cut from the final product. (If you really do want to refer to history in the opening of your final draft, refer to what a particular historian says about a particular issue.) Ideally begin the final draft with a pithily expressed opinion about the primary texts that also answers the question.

Where you have been asked to compare two primary texts, both should appear in the introduction.

Abstractions should rise from your concrete observations about a text; they should never determine those observations: 'Before looking at the representation of madness in *Jane Eyre*, we need to define madness'.... Yeuch! For the purposes of a literary studies essay we principally need to know how madness is constructed *within* the texts. Put: 'Madness in *Jane Eyre* is...'

Answer precisely the question you have been asked. The questions are composed by module convenors with some care to address the module they have designed and taught. If you are in doubt as to how to approach a question, make an appointment to discuss it with a member of staff (e.g. the convenor/your seminar leader/your Personal Tutor).

Common presentational and grammatical errors

Always number the pages of your essay. Always double space, and use 12 font, 'normal' margins in Word, and usually Times New Roman. (See Appendix 2, Final Draft Checklist.)

It's = It is

Its is a possessive pronoun ('the cat removed its hat')

This is the opposite of the rule for possessive nouns: 'the cat's hat'.

If you are unsure, say 'it is' aloud each time you encounter it's in your draft. Does your sentence still make sense?

Practice = noun ('his standard deteriorated despite the practice')

Practise = verb ('she was practising a unique form of dentistry at the time')

That 'ice' is a noun and 'is' is a verb helps you remember this rule.

The infinitive version of a verb places it in the 'to do' format ('to eat', 'to run', 'to frolic'). It is disputed whether split infinitives ('to further investigate...'; 'to more clearly see...'; 'to more easily understand...' etc.) are truly incorrect, but as they often sound inelegant, it is safest to avoid them. Put: 'To see this effect more clearly...' etc.

If you have a single figure as the subject of your sentence (e.g. 'The reader is encouraged...', 'The viewer can tell...'), maintain singular pronouns in the rest of the sentence.

- ✓ 'The reader is encouraged to consider his/her position', NOT 'The reader is encouraged to consider their position'
- ✓ Alternatively pluralise the governing noun: 'Readers are encouraged to consider their positions.'

Use *italics* for all titles of books or series titles (= the title of the journal, not the title of the article within it; for the article you use quotation marks; see Appendix 1, Style Guide Summary). Do not underline. Underlining is the old-fashioned way a typist indicated to the compositor (at the printer's) to change over to italics. As we now have italics instantly on our computers, use italics.

Finally

If you are tired, no matter how long you forge ahead with essay-writing you will achieve less than going to sleep, waking up in the morning and starting again, even if you only have a few hours. Sleeping on a specific problem is an incredibly effective method of solving it (kind of like mini-cooking, as per above). So is giving yourself a night off.

23. Comparing two primary texts



Often an essay question will ask you to compare two primary texts in your answer. Comparisons between primary texts enable you to set up and discuss *relative* terms (e.g. 'femininity', 'race') without reference to a perceived external social and historical 'reality', i.e. you are comparing such terms as they work *within* the systems of meaning set up by your reading of two texts. This is advantageous intellectually, not least because it limits the field of your essay's inquiry.

There are two principal ways of structuring comparisons of two primary texts in the main body of your essay. For each method there are advantages and disadvantages to be aware of in finessing your final draft:

Structure 1. A sustained analysis of primary text A (first half of main body of essay) followed by a sustained analysis of primary text B as it compares with your analysis of primary text A (second half of main body of essay).

Advantages of Structure 1

- ✓ Builds a momentum that ultimately enables a deeper penetration of each primary text in turn

- ✓ Analysis for each primary text develops a structure peculiar to the text in question, enabling comparisons at a deeper, structural level

Disadvantages of Structure 1

- ✓ Two halves of main body of essay may not cohere, leaving sense of two separate essays (to avoid this you need to let the draft cook before redrafting with fresh eyes)
- ✓ Might neglect certain points of comparison
- ✓ Possibly places greater pressure on the introduction as a site to synthesise ideas about the texts and answer the question: this pressure might be advantageous to the end product.

Structure 2. Paragraphs (or half-paragraphs) focused in turn on primary text A, primary text B, primary text A, primary text B, and so on. This may be the more familiar structure you have used at school where it guarantees both texts are considered in the early part of an examination.

Advantages of Structure 2

- ✓ Tends to order the essay automatically
- ✓ Ensures micro-comparisons do occur

Disadvantages of Structure 2

- ✓ Can lead to you setting up abstract themes and 'applying' them to each text, limiting or forcing analysis
- ✓ Can obstruct development of complex and idiosyncratic points for comparison which would have emerged from a more sustained analysis of a particular text

In both cases...

Your introduction and conclusion should be composed last. This is not to say you haven't begun the *draft* with a draft introduction, one that is as superficial and/or platitudinous as you like, as long as it gets you writing. However, for the final product you will in all likelihood slash and burn this initial introduction and write a new one that brings your main points together in a set of conceptual statements.

Changing from structure 2 to structure 1

If you usually use structure 2 AND...

- ✓ You are consistently not gaining the marks you would like
- ✓ Examiners regularly make comments on a lack of complexity in your analysis ('skates over surface', 'comparison forced', 'too much of an overview', 'superficial'...)

...it may be worth experimenting with structure 1. Do a trial run: re-read/scan one primary text and sit down one morning to write as much as you can about that text in a manner broadly appropriate to a particular question, seeing what ideas you come up with as you work your way down the page. You can still decide later whether you want your final draft to conform to structure 1 or 2.

Changing from structure 1 to structure 2

If you usually use structure 1 and are consistently not gaining the marks you would like and/or receive comments from examiners about a lack of coherence in your argument, consider trying structure 2; however you are recommended to consult with your personal tutor first.

24. Word limits



Learning to write to word limits is an important skill which you will continue to use throughout your working life. The Department of English Literature and Language has strict rules about word limits:

- ✓ You may only exceed the limit by 5% (that is 200 words in a 4000-word essay, 250 words in a 5000-word essay). So while no penalty is exacted for work up to 5% above the word limit, thereafter two marks will be deducted for every 5% above the word limit until 50% is reached. After 50%, three marks will be deducted for each additional 5% above the word limit.
- ✓ ALL quotes *and* ALL footnotes (including bibliographic information in the footnotes) count towards the word limit: only your bibliography is excluded from the word count.
- ✓ Under length work is not penalised directly but often exposes wasted opportunities. If your essay is under length, this is a warning sign that you may not have provided adequate in-depth analysis. Best consult your lecturer or Personal Tutor as soon as possible.

25. If Things Go Wrong



Department staff do understand that unforeseen circumstances can affect your ability to meet deadlines. As a rule of thumb, if, ahead of the deadline, you

suspect your situation (e.g. illness) will prevent you submitting work on time, fill in the Extension Request Form (ERF), available via the Department's [assessment](#) information page. If you have already missed a deadline for a specific reason, fill in the Notification of Examination Absence (NEA) form, also available via the Department's [assessment](#) information page. If your NEA claim is upheld, you may be able to submit work at a later date without incurring a penalty. In most cases ERFs and NEA forms should be submitted along with documentation to back your request/claim.

The form and original or scanned documentation need to be submitted either in hard copy to the Department Office or by email to the relevant programme board chair, i.e. either to the Chair of the Undergraduate (BA) Exam Board or to the Chair of the Postgraduate Taught (MA) Exam Board. Contact details for the holders of these positions can be found [here](#) (click on 'programme board chairs'). Do also email your Personal Tutor to fill him/her in on your situation, but note that Personal Tutors are not empowered to award extensions or take mitigating circumstances into account in your assessment.

Please note that College regulations mean we are unable to accept pressures rising from paid work commitments as grounds for extensions.

Note also that computer or internet failure cannot be considered adequate grounds for an extension. You should be sure to make adequate backups of your draft essays, planning also to complete and submit your work before the deadline (see point 4, above).

Nowadays nearly all coursework is uploaded onto KEATS and it is your responsibility to ensure (i) your work is uploaded before the exact cut-off (which is usually a precise hour of the deadline day), and (ii) it is the correct, i.e. latest, draft of your work. Note that if you upload work onto KEATS early, and then want to re-upload a corrected/improved version before the deadline, the later upload will over-write any former submission.

26. Essay-writing and other forms of assessment



This guide is concerned principally with essay-writing, but there are ways in which its suggestions can be adapted for other assessment modes. All assessment modes will, in some way, ask you to show your knowledge of a body of texts and on the critical field of discussion of them; that is, to exercise skills of close reading and contextual analysis. However, other assessment modes do stretch and test skills and approaches which the traditional essay cannot.

Examinations

Exams test your ability to work under time pressure and may also ask you to assess previously unseen material. Exams typically also test the *extent* of your knowledge of the material covered in a particular module: you need to

demonstrate you have read and thought about several texts in the context of the course.

Before the exam

Make sure you know exactly where and when the exam is being held and how long it will take you to get there, allowing extra time for transport delays. Get plenty of sleep the night before. And check the exam regulations so you know what to do if something goes wrong on the day (like you are unexpectedly ill).

Preparation

A 'prior disclosure' exam (where you know what the questions will be ahead of time) enables you to choose the questions, plan the answers and look up the quotations in advance. It is *never* a good idea to write full answers and try to memorise them: if you are focussed on memorising, you won't be having new thoughts. Instead, concentrate on thinking through the plan and its implications. You should go into the exam excited about realising the *potential* of the answer you have *planned*, not trying to remember an answer word-for-word.

For an 'unseen' exam (where you don't know what the questions will be before the exam), you need to prepare in advance to ensure that your knowledge and understanding of the material are sufficient to meet the exam's requirements. It's always a good idea to look at past papers and ask your tutor for guidance on the structure of the exam, i.e. how many questions you need to answer and of what type. When revising, make sure you are familiar with a wide enough range of texts to give you some flexibility in choosing which questions to answer. All up flexibility and preparedness are keys to success in an exam, allowing you to feel secure in the thinking you will do *in* the exam. This will enable your answer to come across as fresh and interesting to your examiners. It will also ensure you answer the specific question you have chosen in the exam.

Once in the exam

Despite the time pressures, the first thing to remember in any exam is not to panic. Think to yourself, 'I *can* answer this question [you can!], and I can do so in a logical and informed manner'. So try not to rush the planning of your individual answers and your examination paper overall: it's a good way of calming yourself down and reminding yourself you know more about the topic than you care to admit.

Secondly, make sure you have understood the exam's 'rubric' (the instructions) correctly: how many texts should you refer to in each question, and in total? Can you refer to the same texts in two different sections of the exam?

Thirdly, and most importantly, make sure you do *answer the question* you have selected. A beautifully organised, well-written exam essay that does not answer the question *cannot* be rewarded with good marks.

As regards presentation, write on every other line so that you can make revisions without turning your script into a mass of crossings out and miniscule insertions. Remember if your examiners can't read your answer, they can't give you credit for it. (But also make sure you *do* cross out anything which you do not want to be marked!)

Writing 'standard'

Your examiners' expectations are moderated when reading an exam answer compared to coursework: they understand that an exam answer is more like an early draft than a polished essay. Even so you should still aim for clear writing, a logical structure, a coherent argument and an accurate account of the texts. Planning helps!

Secondary references

In most examinations you will not be able to reproduce quotes from secondary sources as accurately as you would need to in an essay. Note that while minor inaccuracies in quotations are acceptable, ideas taken from critical texts still need to be credited: it *is* possible to plagiarise in an exam. As long as you can identify the critical source clearly (say by the author's name and the title of the book), precise publication details and page references are not required.

Dissertations

Some BA students will elect to do a dissertation in their final year (in place of two optional modules). This will involve developing a research topic and a plan in consultation with a supervisor, meeting with the supervisor on some occasions to discuss progress, and completing a 10,000 word dissertation successfully and on time. All MA students write dissertations (mostly 15,000 words) which are due at the end of summer, and are likewise developed under one-to-one supervision.

More information on the BA dissertation will be provided if you elect to do one, and MA students receive guidance on their dissertations throughout their enrolment. In the meantime, it's best to think of a dissertation as an amalgamation of smaller essays but with an overarching argument. The latter means the argument of a 10,000 word dissertation should be more complex than the argument of two 5000 word essays put together, and you need to allow even more time for researching, revising and rethinking your work than you would for a 'normal' essay.

You will also undoubtedly develop new ideas in the course of writing the dissertation and need to check whether these can be logically integrated with

the ideas you started with; you may even find that you need a fundamental rethink of the content or structure. All this takes time, so plotting a realistic schedule for working on your dissertation is crucial, bearing in mind that you will have other essays due at the same deadline.

(By the way, all this usually means that there are better plans than setting out to do all the reading before beginning to write a dissertation: the longer you leave starting to write, the more daunting it seems, and more tempting it is to procrastinate by reading just one more critical essay. Reading in the intervals of writing is usually a better option.)

Remember you will have had much experience in essay-writing before taking on the dissertation!

Commentary

Typically, a commentary is a close reading exercise asking you to focus on a short text. It may not be necessary to refer to critical reading. Examiners will be looking for the richness and subtlety of your reading of the primary text. An argument of the polemical kind may not be necessary, but you should aim for coherence.

Portfolios

Some modules ask you to develop a series of short critical responses to various readings over the course of the semester. Each entry may be short and focused on a particular text, but some of the skills outlined in this guide—such as critical reading, planning, and re-drafting—should also assist you with preparing your portfolio.

27. Feedback



You receive feedback for your contribution to English Language and Literature modules in the following ways:

- ✓ verbally in seminars
- ✓ by email in response to inquiries or comments during teaching weeks
- ✓ for some modules, as comments or replies in KEATS blogs
- ✓ verbally in pre-submission individual essay consultations
- ✓ verbally in discussion with any staff member consulted during her/his Office Hours
- ✓ as a formal written response to coursework by your examiner
- ✓ as a mark and award which is calibrated according to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Undergraduate or Postgraduate Marking Criteria (see links below)
- ✓ in discussion of your overall progress with your Personal Tutor.

Electronic feedback on KEATS

Formal written comments on coursework are an important component of the many types of feedback you will receive while at King's. Nearly all students now receive this formal feedback via KEATS in the guise of general comments at the end of the electronic version of coursework.

Some examiners also 'annotate' the coursework itself electronically: the annotated essay may have sections highlighted, and/or comments that 'pop up' when you hover the cursor over an icon placed by the examiner. Note that examiners are *not* required to annotate coursework in this way, and those that do usually only mark up the first page or so, to give a sense of how your expression might be improved (for example). It is up to you to look again at the entire essay in the light of this extra guidance.

Accessing the examiner's feedback via KEATS

You will be notified when this feedback becomes available and given instructions on how to access it online. The [dates](#) when you can expect this feedback are also published on the Department's website.

General comments can be found by clicking the speech bubble icon which appears beside (not on) the coursework itself. Annotations appear on the coursework itself or pop up when you hover the cursor over icons the examiner has set on the page.

You can read the general comments, and any extra annotations, online; or you can print out the whole essay and the comments/annotations. To print, click on the print icon at the bottom left of the coursework screen, and the programme will generate a pdf version of your essay in which all the examiner's annotations appear as endnotes linked by number to the appropriate part of the essay. The general comments field will also appear at the end of your essay.

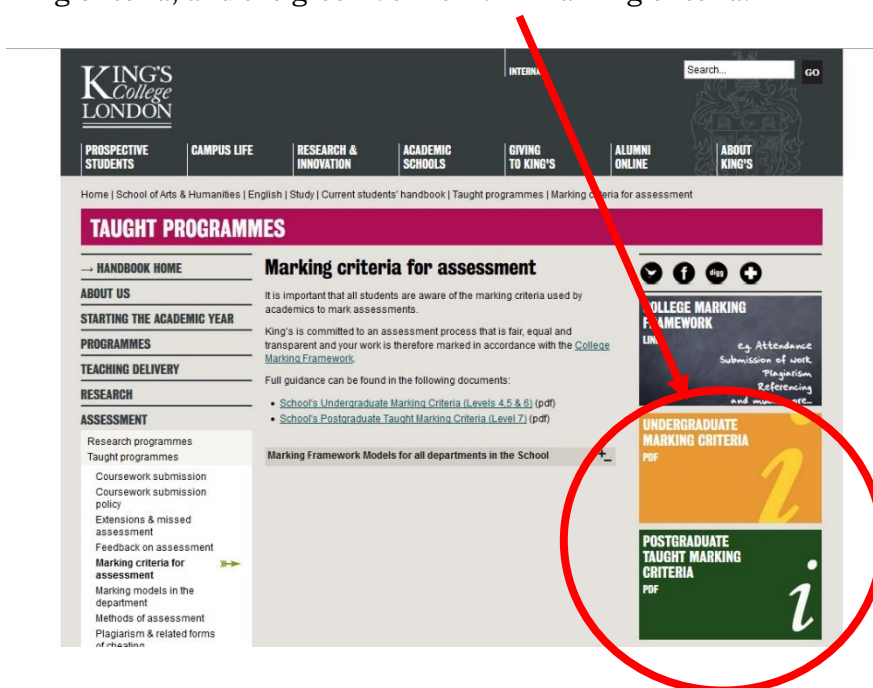
Anonymity and online examination

- ✓ Any online-marked essay is visible only to you, not to others in the same module.
- ✓ All essays have also been anonymised during examination; your examiners see a candidate number and not your name.
- ✓ Once the feedback is released, the coursework is de-anonymised and examiners can no longer access it on KEATS.
- ✓ Consequently, if you want to discuss the essay and feedback further with a staff member, e.g. your Personal Tutor, you will need to print the coursework and bring it with you to the meeting.

The Provisional Award

Your general comments on KEATS will *not* include a percentage mark for the coursework. This is because the process of examination continues after you receive the written feedback and the precise mark may vary slightly. It is therefore more effective to give you an indication of the likely range of the mark.

For this reason the written feedback *does* inform you of your provisional award (e.g. First, Upper Second...), usually with an additional letter (A+, A, B+, B...) indicating where your provisional mark falls within the award range. These indications of your provisional mark can be interpreted by referring to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities [Marking Criteria](#). Click on the yellow box for BA marking criteria, and the green box for MA marking criteria.



Making the most of your formal feedback

On receiving written feedback you should:

- ✓ Read any annotations made by the examiner and the general comments carefully
- ✓ For undergraduate work, read the criteria for boxes ticked (or otherwise) in the tick-box section
- ✓ Read the comments that tally with your provisional award/letter indicator in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities [Marking Criteria](#). These comments are quite detailed and tend to underscore the positive aspects of your achievement.
- ✓ RE-READ your essay in the light of the comments. This is by far the most effective means of improving your mark in your next assessment task.
- ✓ Ideally take notes identifying how the essay might have been improved.

- ✓ Discuss the re-read essay, the feedback, and your plans for developing your writing skills with your Personal Tutor. You may also discuss your essay and feedback with other members of staff during her/his office hours.

Your Personal Tutor is the most appropriate member of staff with whom to discuss your feedback. But please note that Personal Tutors are unable to make any changes to feedback comments, alter the provisional award, or request others to revise it. To do so would be to interfere with a robust and ongoing examination process in which coursework is still anonymised. Several stages in the examination of your coursework are still to occur when you receive your feedback, but it is made available to you early so you can benefit from feedback as soon as possible.

Remember that Personal Tutors cannot access your coursework online after it has been examined; please print your essay and bring it with you to the meeting.

Tick-boxes (undergraduates only)

Undergraduates will find general comments as well as a 'tick-box' section at the end of their assessed essays on KEATS. The tick-box section looks like this:

Understanding and Argumentation

(mark with 'X' as appropriate)

- Thorough: insightful; evidence of independent critical judgement
- Thorough understanding of relevant material; insightful discussion and analysis
- Good understanding of important facts and concepts; substantive analysis of issues
- Sound: relevant material, but limited range or depth; more descriptive than analytical
- Basic: some knowledge but little detail; minimal analysis
- Poor: inaccuracy; key issues not identified, inadequate analysis or none

Selection and Coverage

(mark with 'X' as appropriate)

- Extensive range applied insightfully; very effective use of evidence to support argument
- Comprehensive: a range of relevant material used, demonstrating independent study
- Good use of relevant sources, employment of a range of evidence
- Adequate: appropriate but limited material; ineffective use of evidence
- Skeletal: sparse coverage of basic material; unsuccessful use of evidence
- Poor: inappropriate or inaccurate material

Structure and Style

(mark with 'X' as appropriate)

- Excellent structure and focus; clear and fluent style; compelling argument
- Well structured and focussed; clear and fluent style; persuasive argument
- Good: coherent and logical
- Sound: generally clear but awkward structure and/or limited development
- Adequate but unclear or disorganised in places

- ♦ Poor: disorganized and unclear; incoherent argument; too short

Presentation (scale of 1-5 where 5 is excellent)

- ♦ Is the text grammatical and easy to understand? (*number*)
- ♦ Is the text correctly punctuated? (*number*)
- ♦ Is spelling correct? (*number*)
- ♦ Is the text adequately referenced? (*number*)
- ♦ Is there an adequate bibliography? (*number*)
- ♦ Is the overlength penalty applicable? Y/N

This template is reproduced in the general comments field of your coursework on KEATS, the appropriate sections marked with an X and numbers placed after each element of the presentation section.

The four categories enable examiners to provide feedback on how well you have met the generic demands of your assessment task (e.g. that your argument is well structured, your expression clear, the range of your reading adequate, and the standard of presentation acceptable). If the quality of these aspects of your essay is uneven, your examiner may tick more than one box within each category, suggesting the range within which you have met these generic demands.

These tick-boxes are designed to enhance the specific written comments you have received from your examiner. They do *not* represent the only things your examiner considers in making a provisional award, nor do the numbers in the 'presentation' section add up to a particular component of your final mark.

What happens after I receive my feedback and provisional award?

Coursework worth more than 15% of your overall grade for a module is examined by more than one member of staff. Each item of postgraduate coursework, and of undergraduate coursework failed by the first examiner, is double marked, with examiners conferring on a final provisional mark to be put to the relevant examination board. Undergraduate coursework provisionally awarded more than 40% by the first examiner is 'double marked by retrospective sampling', a process that ensures the first examiner's marks are consistent with others in the Department.

Double marking is completed about a month after you receive your RAC/EFF. It is not the practice of the Department of English Language and Literature to release comments from second examiners to students, as these usually relate to the first examiner's marking rather than to the coursework itself, and would be of minimal use as feedback.

All awards and marks are provisional until meetings have been held by the Programme, Faculty, and College Examination Boards. The Department of English Language and Literature's Undergraduate Programme Board meetings are held in June; Postgraduate Programme Board meetings are held in November. Highly qualified and experienced academics from comparable

universities sit on these boards as External Examiners to ensure parity and quality of assessment.

Decisions by the Programme Board are ratified by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Examination Board which is composed of representatives from all the different programme boards within the Faculty. Final responsibility for decisions about your assessment therefore rests with the entire Department and Faculty as determined and supported by the College's [academic regulations](#).

What happens if the provisional award is a fail?

Informed critique of one's intellectual work is nearly always a challenge to accept. Receiving a lower award than you had hoped and, in particular, unexpectedly receiving a fail, can be very upsetting. It is perfectly normal to feel this way, though do try and keep things in perspective: it is only a single piece of subject-specific coursework that has been judged, not your intelligence (which, needless to say, manifests in ways more important than written coursework), nor you as a person. *It's just an essay*. So let yourself be upset; leave things a few days; and then look back at your feedback for guidance as to how to improve your coursework on resubmission. And go and see your Personal Tutor for further guidance.

Work that has been provisionally failed by your first examiner is *always* scrutinised by a second examiner. If the second examiner agrees the coursework has failed, it is put to the relevant Examination Board in June (undergraduate) or November (postgraduate). If the fail is still upheld and confirmed as a fail by an External Examiner, you will then be informed that you may revise and resubmit the same piece of coursework and have it reassessed. In revising your coursework for resubmission you are normally allowed to answer the same question, use the same texts, and respond to advice given by your examiner and your Personal Tutor.

For undergraduate students, failed coursework from Semesters 1 *and* 2 is resubmitted in August of the same academic year. For postgraduate students, failed coursework is resubmitted one year after the original due date, i.e. in the next academic year. In all cases the mark for the resubmitted coursework is capped at a pass (40% for undergraduates; 50% for postgraduates).

If you have exhausted your re-submission opportunities and still failed the module, in some cases your result can be considered a 'condoned' fail, meaning the failure of this particular component of your programme will not in itself make you ineligible for the award of your degree. A fail can only be condoned when: (i) the module in question was an 'option', not a 'core' module for your particular programme; and (ii) your final mark for the module was in the range of 33-39% for undergraduates, and 40-49% for postgraduates. Up to 45 credits of condoned fails are permitted in BA programmes, and up to 30 credits of condoned fails are permitted in MA programmes.

28. Office Hours



Staff members in the Department of English Language and Literature each have two one-hour sessions per week which are designated as 'Office Hours'. These are indicated on the door to the relevant staff member's office and online [here](#).

During these times you are welcome to drop in on the member of staff to discuss any aspect of your work at the College, including any issues relative to writing essays. You do not need to be experiencing a 'crisis' to make use of this one-to-one contact time with your lecturers or tutors. In fact staff will usually be delighted simply to discuss your ideas about the modules you are taking, and to address any issues relative to your research and writing. Just do it!

In addition to reading this guide, students are asked to consult the [Department of English Language and Literature's website](#).

In particular you should familiarise yourself with the pages linked from the [Current Students' Handbook](#)

This Guide was written by Dr Ian Henderson, with input from all staff in the Department of English Language and Literature, King's College London.

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APPENDIX 1 STYLE GUIDE (SUMMARY)

The Department of English Language and Literature recommends the use of the MHRA style guide, freely available online.

<http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/index.html>

It is worthwhile downloading the full guide as a pdf for free (click on 'Style Guide pdf' link in right column of webpage above). Chapter Ten is the most useful but you will benefit greatly by reading the whole thing.

The following is a *summary* of the information you will need.

Formatting quotes

Quotes of fewer than 30 words or so are included in the body of the essay and surrounded by single quotation marks. For quotes within quotes use double quotation marks.

Veronica Smith claims the author 'always liked cats', but also notes 'she would inevitably scream "Get out!" when the local hamster put in an appearance'.¹

Note the comma/full-stop comes *after* the closing quotation mark.

Longer quotes are indented, after a colon [:] and *without* quotation marks.

Munro is well known for her ability to set a scene:

Then my father and I walk gradually down a long, shabby sort of street, with Silverwoods Ice Cream signs standing on the sidewalk, outside tiny, lighted stores. This is Tuppertown, an old town on Lake Huron, an old grain port.¹

The sounds of the lake at night are ever-present in the story.

Note that even if the quote is extracted from a character's speech (i.e. the whole thing is in a single set of quotation marks in the original) you still don't need quotation marks around the indented quote. Only use quotation marks *within* an indented quote (i.e. for quotes within the main quote).

Footnote reference number

Any quoting or paraphrasing of another writer's work must be footnoted. In Microsoft Word, this is a matter of clicking 'Insert Footnote' under the 'References' tag. Click so that the number appears *after* punctuation and ideally at the end of the sentence (if necessary, the footnote itself can contain references to more than one text). Remember this order: end-quotation, punctuation, footnote.

Please use footnotes, *not* endnotes, for your essays, as these are easier for examiners to consult when marking work online. And via the footnote and endnote options function please ensure footnote numbers are Arabic rather than Roman numerals (i.e. 7 not vii).

First and subsequent references to the same text

The first time you footnote a text you should provide full details as per the information provided below, but the second and subsequent times you footnote the same text, you can abbreviate the information. The author's surname will do; but if you have cited two works by the same author, also include an abbreviated version of the book/chapter/article title (e.g. Palmer, p. 93 OR Palmer, 'Victorians', p. 93).

Please do *not* use terms such as *ibid* and *op cit*.

The first time you refer to a *primary* text (see section 8 of the Essay Writing Guide), you should provide a footnote reference giving full publication details, followed by the statement: 'All further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text'. You may then add page numbers or Act and Scene numbers in parentheses as they are required in your essay.

Remember that all footnotes are counted towards your word-count, so abbreviating footnotes reduces their incursion on your word limit.

Format of footnote references

The way you present information about your sources in footnotes varies according to the form of the publication you are referring to (e.g. a single-authored volume, a chapter from a multi-authored volume, an article in a scholarly journal, a website etc.). See below for the footnote templates of the main forms of publication you will refer to.

Hard-copy book by a single author

Author's full name as given on title page, *Title* (Place: Publisher, year), p. 1/pp. 5-6

David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 11.

Note: capitalise all main words in the title and subtitle; separate the title and subtitle with a colon; put a space between p. and the page number; and end with a full-stop. When referencing a passage that continues over more than one page, use pp. (e.g. pp. 18-19).

If the publisher is a university press, spell out the name in full, e.g. Oxford University Press (*not* OUP; Oxford UP).

E-book by a single author

Author's full name as given on title page, *Title* (Place: Publisher, year), e-book format, location information

Andrew O'Hagan, *The Life and Opinions of Maf the Dog, and of His Friend Marilyn Monroe* (London: Faber, 2010), Kindle DX Version, p. 5.

If there is no publisher information available, include the Digital Object Identifier and/or the source of your download.

Andrew O'Hagan, *The Life and Opinions of Maf the Dog, and of His Friend Marilyn Monroe* [Kindle DX version], p. 5; <www.amazon.co.uk> [accessed 30 March 2012].

If at all possible, include page numbers. This is crucial in guarding against plagiarism. If you press 'menu' on your Kindle you can access a page number/and or location number. Please include one of these in your footnotes. If no page or location numbers are available, you should identify the major sections: Chapter, Section, Paragraph (eg Chapter 5, Section 2, para. 5).

Chapter in a book by multiple authors

Author's full name as given on contents page, 'Title of Chapter', in *Book Title*, ed. by Editor's full name as given on title page (Place: Publisher, year), full page range of chapter (page where quote appears).

Maria Absolut, 'Gin, Tonic, and the Raj', in *Elephant Walk: New Essays in Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Gordon Juniper (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 6-18 (p. 7).

Note the need for both the full page range of the chapter and the page number of the quote (worth remembering when you are taking notes in the library). If there are up to three editors, give the name of each in full; if more than three, give the full name of the first before adding 'and others'.

If you subsequently refer to a different chapter in the same book, give the author's name and title of the chapter in full, but abbreviate information on the book:

Bruce Oz, 'Beer in the Sun', in *Elephant Walk*, ed. by Juniper, pp. 19-25 (p. 21).

Articles in scholarly journal (or 'series')

Author's full name as it appears in the article, 'Title of Article', *Journal Title*, Volume Number.Issue Number (date), page range of whole article (page where quote appears)

John Jackson Finlandia, 'Vodka: An Illustrated History', *Drinking Studies*, 5.7 (1999), 1-10 (p. 3).

Note: placement of commas; use of Arabic numbers for volume and issue (even where the journal itself uses Roman numerals for these features); do *not* use 'p.' or 'pp.' for the page range of the whole article; *do* use p. or pp. for the actual page(s) from which your quote is drawn.

If there is no issue number, but a month or season is noted on the journal title page, add this to the year information.

Millicent Maid, "'Make Mine Milk": Drinking in British Schools, 1960-1980', *Journal of Liquid Consumption Studies*, 8 (winter 1998), 82-91 (p. 88).

Online versions of articles in scholarly journal (or 'series')

If the e-text is formatted the same as the hard-copy version (with page numbers etc.) you *may* reference it as if you were citing the hard copy. But ideally you should also add the URL (including the protocol—e.g. http—and the date of access) OR the Digital Object Identifier (which is less likely to change, and therefore does not require a date).

The DOI, which is usually in a numerical format, is available on the title page of journal articles sourced via online databases (e.g. JSTOR) along with other metadata.

Beth Palmer, 'Are the Victorians Still with Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century', *Victorian Studies*, 52.1 (2011), 86-94 (p. 92) <doi: 10.2979/VIC.2009.52.1.86>.

Beth Palmer, 'Are the Victorians Still with Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century', *Victorian Studies*, 52.1 (2011), 86-94 (p. 92) <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/vic/summary/v052/52.1.palmer.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

Website

Author's name [or Anon. where there is no obvious author], 'Website Title', <onlineaddress> [accessed day month year].

Anon., 'King's College London', <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/index.aspx>> [accessed 10 July 2014].

Hardcopy newspaper articles

Author's name, 'Title of Article', *Newspaper*, date, p. 10

Michael Billington, 'Richard III: Review', *Guardian*, 26 July 2012, p. 6.

Note: punctuation; omit 'The' in front of newspaper titles (e.g. put *Guardian*, *Age*, *New York Times*; the one exception is *The Times*); form of the date (26 July 2012 *not* July 26th, 2012).

Online newspaper articles

Author's name, 'Title of Article', *Newspaper*, date <webaddress> [accessed day month year].

Michael Billington, 'Richard III: Review', *Guardian*, 26 July 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/jul/26/richard-iii-review-shakespeare-globe>> [accessed 26 July 2012]

Note: punctuation; omit 'The' in front of newspaper titles (e.g. put *Guardian*, *Age*, *New York Times*; the one exception is *The Times*); form of the date (26 July 2012 *not* July 26th, 2012).

Films

Title, dir. by Director's name (Production company, date)

The Blue Lagoon, dir. by Randal Kleiser (Columbia Pictures, 1980).

When quoting from a film it is perfectly acceptable to supply your own transcription of a scene or scenes. Put a footnote the first time quote from a film, referencing it as above, followed by 'Transcriptions mine'.

Bibliography

The bibliography lists all the texts cited—and *only those you have cited*—in alphabetical order of the author's/editor's director's surname. It should be composed in a similar manner to the footnotes EXCEPT:

- ✓ Surname and first-name are reversed for author/editor, with a comma in between surname and first name. For co-authored or co-edited volumes, only the first name is inverted in this way, e.g. Donovan, Jason, and Kylie Minogue, eds, [etc.]
- ✓ Individual pages are not referenced, but page ranges are given for the entire length of articles in scholarly journals and chapters in multi-authored volumes.
- ✓ If you have referred to several chapters from the same multi-authored book, you can consider simply giving the reference to the book itself under the editor's name, followed by , ed., (or , eds, if there is more than one editor).
- ✓ There is no full-stop at the end of the citation.

Dickens, Charles, <i>Bleak House</i> (London: Chapman and Hall, 1868) < http://archive.org/stream/bleakhouse02dickgoog#page/n16/mode/2up > [accessed 26 July 2012] Finlandia, John Jackson, 'Vodka: An Illustrated History', <i>Drinking Studies</i> , 5.7 (1999), 1-10 Juniper, Gordon, ed., <i>Elephant Walk: New Essays in Postcolonial Studies</i> (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 6-18 Kleiser, Randal, dir., <i>The Blue Lagoon</i> (Columbia Pictures, 1980) Maid, Millicent, "'Make Mine Milk": Drinking in British Schools, 1960-1980', <i>Journal of Liquid Consumption Studies</i> , 8 (winter 1998), 82-91 Newsome, David, <i>The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change</i> (London: John Murray, 1997) Palmer, Beth, 'Are the Victorians Still with Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century', <i>Victorian Studies</i> , 52.1 (2011), 86-94 <doi: 10.2979/VIC.2009.52.1.86> Todie, Imensa, <i>Royal Animals</i> (Oxford: Sloan University Press, 2011)

APPENDIX 2

Checklist for your final essay draft

Please note, none of these hints is prescriptive or foolproof; and they may not all be appropriate for all modules. However, running down the checklist *may* help you identify points in your draft which would benefit from some extra attention.

This isn't all style over substance: an essay which is immaculately presented and correctly formatted imbues the reader with a sense of your authority and can boost the persuasiveness of your argument.

IS MY ESSAY DRAFT...

- **Headed by the fully-written-out question?**
 - ✓ Including the question at the top of page 1 increases the chance that you have answered it in the draft
 - ✓ Having only part of the question written out increases the chance that you only have only answered part of it
 - ✓ You should consult your module convenor before substituting a self-devised essay 'title' for a fully-written out question. You may need the convenor's permission to do this.
- **Numbered?**
 - ✓ Useful for examiners when they want to refer to something specific in your draft. Use your word processing programme's 'insert page numbers' function.
- **Within the word limit**
 - ✓ Penalties apply to work which exceeds the word limit; under length work often exposes wasted opportunities in the analysis. SEE point 24 of the Guide to Writing Essays.
- **Spelled correctly?**
 - ✓ RUN spellcheck
 - ✓ Re-read the draft for correctly spelled but incorrectly used words or you might end up with silly mistakes (e.g. 'If he had achieved the victory, his fame would have reached the stairs')
- **Formatted correctly?**
 - ✓ Double spaced throughout, including quotes

- ✓ 12 font Times New Roman or equivalent size in another font
 - ✓ Adequate margins ('normal' margins in Word are fine)
 - ✓ Longer quotes indented on both sides *without* quotation marks. (Quotes within the indented quote have single quotation marks.)
 - ✓ Shorter quotes in body of essay and surrounded by single quotation marks. (Quotes within quotes surrounded by double quotation marks.)
 - ✓ Footnote reference numbers in Arabic (not Roman) numerals placed (for the most part) after a full stop, or other punctuation.
- Justified straight on both sides, e.g.

NB: straight sides
on left and right

Undoubtedly the most profound lyrics in Ms Minogue's oeuvre relate to 'the devil [she] know[s]'. That said, the epistemological implications of 'step[ping] back in time' should not be overlooked, particularly as they relate to knowing what you 'have to do' to 'get it through to' someone that the speaker does 'love you, love you'.

Or justified to left, e.g.

NB: straight sides on left,
'uneven' ends on right.

Undoubtedly the most profound lyrics in Ms Minogue's oeuvre relate to 'the devil [she] know[s]'. That said, the epistemological implications of 'step[ping] back in time' should not be overlooked, particularly as they relate to knowing what you 'have to do' to 'get it through to' someone that the speaker does 'love you, love you'.

Do *not* 'centre' text (even for indented quotes)

~~Undoubtedly the most profound lyrics in Ms Minogue's oeuvre relate to 'the devil [she] know[s]'. That said, the epistemological implications of 'step[ping] back in time' should not be overlooked, particularly as they relate to knowing what you 'have to do' to 'get it through to' someone that the speaker does 'love you, love you'.~~

- Divided by clearly marked paragraphs?
 - ✓ Indent the first line of a new paragraph (hit tab) and/or leave a line between paragraphs
 - ✓ Avoid submitting a 'wall of words' (a whole page without paragraph divisions). Paragraphs help your reader situate him/herself in the logical progression of your argument; one main point per paragraph. Paragraphs also help you in the re-

drafting process: you can see the 'bones' of your argument and consider whether each bone is placed in the correct part of the skeleton.

- **Displaying several indented quotes from the primary texts?**
 - ✓ It is very hard to be original in essays if you have not engaged closely with particular sections of the primary texts. A lack of indented (i.e. longer) quotes from the primary texts suggests you may not have engaged with them closely enough.
- **Properly referenced?**
 - ✓ See Appendix 1, Style Guide (Summary) and the [MHRA Style Guide](#) (detailed) for footnote referencing format. Use footnotes, *not* endnotes.
- **Rounded off with a correctly formatted bibliography?**
 - ✓ Only texts directly referred to in the essay should appear in the bibliography
 - ✓ See Appendix 1, Style Guide (Summary) and the [MHRA Style Guide](#) (detailed) for bibliographic referencing format which is slightly different to that for footnotes.
- **Grammatically correct (e.g. correctly used apostrophes)?**
 - ✓ See point 22 in the Guide to Writing Essays ('Some handy hints').
- **Devoid of wikipedia definitions? Containing dictionary definitions only sparingly?**
 - ✓ Wikipedia is not an appropriate source for your essays, handy as it is for looking up facts.
 - ✓ Dictionary definitions are stylistically hackneyed, and using them in the opening of an essay risks imposing terms on your primary text.
 - ✓ In some cases, however, the historical record of a word's meaning (which may be different to contemporary usage) *might* enhance your interpretation of a particular passage. In that case, refer to the Oxford English Dictionary, or another authoritative dictionary which includes examples of word use from historical texts.
- **Purged of platitudes (particularly in the opening paragraph)?**
 - ✓ Cut anything like the following: 'Shakespeare has been thrilling audiences since time immemorial'; 'Australia is the oldest yet the youngest nation'; 'Ireland is a country rich in song'; 'Stories have always captivated mankind' etc. etc.

- ✓ Such platitudes may be useful in an early draft (they often help you start writing) but they need to be cut from the final product: begin with a statement on the primary texts.
- **Copy-edited?**
 - ✓ Read the draft ALOUD sentence by sentence checking each is grammatically correct, adjusting for beauty.
- **Edited for organisation?**
 - ✓ Often after an early draft whole paragraphs or strings of paragraphs might be better placed differently in the essay. This will be easier to see if you have a series of copyedited paragraphs. Write down the main point you have made in each paragraph and write it in the margin of your draft. Do these follow in the best possible order?
- **Headed by a conceptual answer to the essay question?**
 - ✓ In many (but not all) cases, the ideal first sentence is also directed explicitly to the primary texts.

If the answer is 'yes' to all the above you have completed your essay!

NOW CELEBRATE!