RESEARCHING AND WRITING ART HISTORY ESSAYS

Edouard Manet, Portrait of Emile Zola, 1868 (Paris: Musée d’Orsay)

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1 WHY WRITE ESSAYS?

1.1 Learning and assessment

Essay-writing skills are evidence of the gains you make in the course of your study at university. In the process of researching and writing about a specific topic, you will learn far more than by just reading about it. Robert Gagne claims that while we retain only about 10% of what we read, and 20% of what we hear, we retain over 70% of what we say or write ourselves.

The key reasons we require you to write essays are:

- to encourage you to read widely and learn more about the topic.
- to enable you to organise your research and analyse your subject in ways that are clearly and accurately expressed
- to help you acquire writing skills and to apply the conventions of writing appropriate to the discipline of art history
- to enable your progress in learning and writing skills to be assessed

Victoria University has identified three key attributes in its graduates: communication, creative and critical thinking, and leadership. We believe that writing essays is one key means to achieve these attributes.

1.2 Short- and long-term goals

Learning objectives at each level of study guide your and our expectations of your development (see 5.1). You should read the objectives stated in the course outline and take them into account when writing assignments.

More specific skills which you will develop when writing essays include:

- effective use of library resources
- the ability to analyse a question
- the ability to combine material from many sources into a coherent argument
- referencing and bibliographic skills
- familiarity with and effective use of the language of art history
- skills of visual analysis
- the ability to write so others can enjoy reading your work

All these skills are valuable in the longer term, not just for passing courses. The ability to communicate knowledge and ideas to others in written form will always be useful. And in the process you will also be learning about art and art history.
1.3 Audience

All writing is done for an audience, and the most successful writing is tailored to the needs and expectations of this intended audience. In the case of art history essays, your primary audience is your course coordinator – the person marking your work. While they may well know more about the topic than you do, you should not try to write what you think they will agree with. It is important to formulate and explain your own ideas.

It may also help to think of your audience as yourself – before you did the detailed study for the essay; that is, someone who has a broad knowledge of the subject area, but needs to have the specific question answered.

Alternatively, imagine your classmates as the audience – a relatively well-informed group, who needed to be persuaded by your argument. To ensure an even tone, keep this audience in mind throughout your drafting and revision of the essay.
2 ART HISTORY ESSAYS

2.1 What is an essay?

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines essay as a ‘literary composition’. The word comes from a French word meaning ‘attempt’, originally from the Latin ‘to weigh’. So the literary form ‘essay’ implies a weighing of evidence, or an attempt at persuasion to a certain argument. It is a formal exercise, requiring non-colloquial language and careful attention to sentence structure.

An art history essay is a literary composition devoted to the discussion of art, the contexts of art, and ideas about art.

2.1.1 Talking about art

When writing an art history essay you almost always need to write about art objects themselves. This means discussing paintings, drawings, prints or works in other media such as sculpture, photography or architecture. Remember to use the art itself as a starting point for your ideas. Look carefully at pictures and other art objects. Your analysis of these will help you to formulate your own opinions, which can then be supported using written research material.

You should refer to art objects to make your points and to support your statements. Illustrate your arguments with reference to specific works of art. Section 4.3 explains how to set this out.

2.2 Aims – what do we expect?

A good art history essay is well researched, well argued, and well written. It is also handed in on time. Lecturers have examples of good essays which you can look at.

A University of Otago English Department study differentiates between the process requirements of writing an A-grade essay, and the finished product.

2.2.1 Process

The process of writing an art history essay requires a student to:

- identify the requirements of, and possibilities inherent in, a topic
- formulate and develop a coherent argument
- accurately present an appropriate range of visual and written evidence
- show originality and independence of thought
- write with fluency of style and correctness of mechanics
2.2.2  Product

The finished product demonstrates how well you have completed the process of planning, researching and writing your essay. It is the means by which your skills, and your progress in developing those skills, are assessed.

2.2.3  Deadlines

Deadlines are set to help you plan and organise your work so that you do not fall behind. Extensions may be granted by your tutor on medical grounds, with a medical certificate. You must apply for an extension before the due date.

In general, the policy of the Art History Programme is to grant a short extension. To receive a short extension you should contact the course coordinator by email before the 5 pm deadline. For extensions longer than 3 days you will have to provide written justification (e.g., a medical certificate, death notice, or letter from a counsellor, etc.).

The short extension policy does not apply to take-home tests or other assessments where students have a set period of time to complete the task. In these cases an extension will only be granted in exceptional circumstances with written justification (e.g., a medical certificate, death notice, or letter from a counsellor, etc.).

Penalties will apply for late work. 5% will be deducted for work submitted more than 72 hours late; a further 2.5% will be deducted for each subsequent day. Work submitted more than 10 days late will not be marked; the work must still be submitted to meet mandatory course requirements. Late work may receive minimal comments from your marker.

Instructions for the submission of written work are given in the course guide. If you need to submit a hardcopy of the essay, the Art History assignment box is located to the right of the main doors leading into Art History by 5pm on the due date. Please note that in general we do not accept essays sent by email.

2.3  How essays are marked

Your tutor/course coordinator marks your work. For each assignment, tutors discuss the specific questions and their requirements. Sample cross-checking is done between tutors as well as the course co-ordinator(s), to ensure consistency for the whole class. Sections 1.2 and 2.2.1 outline the skills we are looking for in your essays, and Section 5.2 shows a sample marking sheet.

If you do not feel that your work has been fairly marked, you can ask the course co-ordinator to arrange for it to be re-marked by someone else. Read the marker’s comments carefully – see section 2.4.
2.4 Feedback

You can discuss your essay plan with your tutor/course coordinator at any stage (but do not expect them to read a draft). You do not have to wait to get back a completed essay to know whether or not you are on the right track.

2.4.1 Learning from marker’s comments

When you have an essay handed back, read the marker’s comments carefully. If any comment is unclear or inadequately explained ask for more feedback. And keep your tutor’s points in mind when writing your next essay.

This aspect of essay writing is often underrated, but can improve your grades dramatically. The comments your tutor makes are your cues to approaching your next essay.

2.5 Word count – why and how?

The word limit stated for your essay is a guide to what is expected from you. You should stay within 10% of the limit. The word limit includes quoted material, but not your footnotes or the bibliography.

If your essay is too short, you may not have put enough into it. Think about how you can develop your argument. Have you given enough evidence to support your claims? Is there a counter-claim which you should discuss?

If your essay is too long, you may have got carried away. Have you stuck to the essay question? Have you been repetitive? Do you have sentences which are too wordy? It probably needs to be tightened up, by cutting out material which is not strictly and logically tied to your argument. Editing always improves your work (see Section 3.3).

2.6 Presentation

Essays should be written on a computer unless you have a good reason for not being able to do so. The important point is that they are easy to read. Things to remember:

- use A4 paper
- use double spacing for your text
- ensure you leave a wide left-hand margin for the marker’s comments
- number the pages
- keep a copy for yourself

Always securely staple the top-left corner so no pages can become detached.

Fill out the standard coversheet, available from Blackboard or the Art History office, and attach securely to the front of your essay.
Things that will definitely annoy your tutor:

- smiley faces anywhere on the document
- decorative flourishes such as borders, or irritatingly decorative fonts (use 12-point Times Roman or another plain font such as Palatino Linotype)
- use of subheads to break up your essay
- illustrations embedded within your text (if you consider they are necessary, form a separate appendix of numbered illustrations which you can reference in your text; see section 4.3)
- incorrect spelling of artists’ names and titles of works of art
- titles of works of art in ‘quote marks’ instead of italics
- incorrect use of the apostrophe (see section 6)
- plastic covers on the essay (secure stapling is sufficient)

You should always keep a hard copy of your essays when you hand in the original. Do not rely on computer files, which can be lost or corrupted. Always print out an extra copy of the essay and also save your work to an alternative memory device (such as USB memory stick or a cloud storage service like Dropbox of Google Drive).

2.7 Where to go for help

You should never feel at a loss with essay writing. General and specific help is readily available from the following:

2.7.1 People

- Tutor

Your Tutor is your first contact for any questions or difficulties you may have. Tutors are there to help you learn and develop your skills. They want you to do well.

Ask them exactly what they expect from your work, if they haven’t already made it clear to you. Talk to them about your essay plan, your draft outline, or any particular part of an essay which is a problem.

- Lecturer

Like tutors, lecturers want you to do well in your studies. They set the essay questions, so if you are not clear about how to tackle a topic, ask for help.

- Student Learning Te Taiako

The Student Learning is off the Hunter Courtyard, level 0, New Kirk building. They run short courses (1-2 hours) on various aspects of study skills, language and writing skills. These are free, but you need to book in. See the Student Learning website (http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/slss) for information on available courses or ring them on 463 5999 or email student-learning@vuw.ac.nz. Student Learning also offer one-to-one sessions, ‘drop in’ sessions, and assistance in setting up study groups.
• WRIT 101 – Writing English

The School of Linguistics & Applied Language Studies (level 2, Von Zedlitz building) offers this 20-point course which can be part of your degree. WRIT 101 (or WRIT 151 for non-native speakers of English) teaches all aspects of writing at tertiary level. It uses practice and feedback to develop skills in self-criticism to help you recognise and improve on defective elements in your own writing.

• Group Study

Group study can work for some people. In its simplest form, it can just be talking to your classmates about the essay questions. You may start up a study group to share the initial research work, and discuss detailed approaches to a topic. (Student Learning can help you to set one up – see above.) Bouncing ideas around can be really useful, but be careful that the finished product is all your own work.

2.7.2 Resources

This handbook is a brief guide to what Art History expects. Greater detail on the specifics of essay writing can be found in the following books, which are available from the library:

3 HOW TO RESEARCH AND WRITE ESSAYS

The processes of planning, researching and writing an essay demand good time management and self-discipline. These are extremely valuable skills and the sooner you develop them the more you will achieve – both at university and throughout your life. Your mastery of these skills will be reflected in your essay grades.

One of the hardest parts of writing an essay is getting started. But the earlier you start planning your writing, the more likely you are to hand in a good essay.

3.1 Planning

The first things to do are to choose a topic and plan the time frame for its completion. We advise you to do this well in advance of the due date. Choosing an essay topic early will enable you to take note of relevant material you encounter in lectures and through your reading. It is advisable to analyse the question at an early stage so you understand what it is you are being asked, and so you can develop a strategy for answering it.

3.1.1 Selecting the question

Choose a question that interests you. It is always better to write about a topic that engages you, rather than to choose one because you think it looks easy.

3.1.2 Analysing the question

Having made a choice, carefully analyse the question:

- Identify the subject – this is the topic of the question. If it is not immediately obvious, consider the question and ask yourself, ‘What, in one or two words, is this question about?’ Or, if this were an exam question and someone asked you which question you had done, you would say, ‘I did the one on …’

- Identify the key structural words, or instruction – for example, compare, analyse, etc. The following is a summary of common key structural words (with similar or related words in brackets):

**KEY STRUCTURAL WORDS**

- **analyse** (explore, examine, consider): break the subject up into its main ideas, and describe the relationships between them
- **comment on** (discuss, explain, criticise): discuss, explain, and give your opinion on the ideas expressed
- **compare** (and contrast, distinguish between): look for similarities and differences between the things mentioned
- **criticise** (review, critically examine, comment on, assess, evaluate): make your own judgement about the views expressed and support your judgement with evidence
- **define**: set down the precise meaning; or state the terms of reference
discuss (argue, debate, examine): present the different aspects of a problem and come to some conclusion
explain (account for, describe why): give the meaning, interpret, give reasons
illustrate (demonstrate, give examples): explain or clarify a problem, using concrete examples
justify (support): provide the reasons for your conclusions or for the statement made in the question
outline (indicate, summarise, list): give the main features or general principles of a subject leaving out minor details
relate (integrate): prove the connection between one thing and another; tell, recount

Identify the aspect or focus – which aspect of the subject is the question directed at?

The following example shows how a question can be analysed:

Question: Compare European depictions of Māori and Aborigines in New Zealand and Australian art of the 19th century, noting specific similarities and differences in style and attitude to subject.
Subject: early European depictions of Māori and Aborigines
Key structural word: compare
Focus: style and attitude to subject

By the time you have broken down the question this way, you will probably have a good idea of where to start your research. It may help to discuss it with your tutor if you are not sure whether you are on the right track.

You may like the topic of a question, but find you cannot easily analyse it this way. The key structural words may not be explicit, for example:

Is El Greco a Mannerist or a Baroque artist?

Although it does not say so in so many words, this question asks you to compare and contrast the key characteristics of Mannerism and the Baroque, with particular reference to El Greco. Check anything you are not sure of with your tutor.

In some circumstances you may write on a topic of your own choice, but you will need to discuss it with your tutor first and have it approved. It must be of a standard comparable to those of the set topics. Also, it must cover the same part of the course as the set topics.

3.1.3 Beginning your research

Background reading is necessary for all essay topics, including exhibition reviews, and the best sources are books, journals and exhibition catalogues. How much reading you do will depend on the topic, the knowledge you already have, and the extent to which you feel your own understanding is clarified by becoming familiar with others’ views. The amount of reading will also be determined by how much time you have available. Plan your reading.
Remember to review your lecture notes to identify where your lecturer may have given you useful advice, and also look in your course handbook for relevant readings. Look through the reading list on your course outline, highlighting books that might be relevant. All the books on your reading lists are in the university library. Many are on closed reserve or three-day loan. At higher levels, you may be encouraged to make use of material in other repositories, such as Te Papa’s library, Te Aka Matua (open weekends).

There will be other sources you can use which are not on the reading list. Many useful sources can be identified using Te Waharoa, the VUW Library catalogue. Another useful resource is Grove Art Online, which can be accessed through Te Wahoroa or the Art History subject guide provided by the VUW Library (http://libguides.victoria.ac.nz/art-history).

Art History advises caution in the use of internet art history resources, but they can be useful for checking spellings and dates. Your course outline may include recommendations regarding appropriate web resources. Particularly useful are the sites maintained by major art galleries such as the National Gallery in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Louvre in Paris (which has an English-language version).

As you analyse your chosen essay topic, various questions and considerations will present themselves. These should guide your initial research. In relation to the question on Māori and Aboriginal depictions, for example, you need to canvas general books on New Zealand and Australian art as well as specific studies on the depiction of Māori and Aborigines. Use the search functions on the library catalogue – and remember there are staff who can help you to use the library efficiently.

To mount a convincing argument, you will need to make notes from a range of these sources. This does not necessarily mean reading the entirety of the books. Rather, use the contents page and index to focus your reading on the relevant sections.

### 3.1.4 Note-taking

Taking notes enables you to keep track of your research as well as to process the ideas you encounter. To avoid the possibility of plagiarism, it is best to paraphrase the ideas (that is, put them into your own words), while also noting the page numbers to enable later referencing.

When you come across a passage that you think may be quotable, be sure to transcribe this verbatim (word for word, including punctuation), along with its page number. If you use quote marks in your note-taking, it will be clear to you which are your words and which are the author’s.

In the finished essay, you need to reference the original sources fully and accurately – both for paraphrasing and for direct quotation. You must always reference your sources fully and accurately (see section 4.4 for details).

Remember that quoting from an author, and then commenting on the quotation, is one of the most effective means of engaging your sources.
3.1.5 **Thinking about the topic**

Now is the time to do some planning of the essay’s key points and argument.

Here are some strategies for tackling an essay. Try some out to find what works best for you. Remember that there is no one ‘correct’ way to plan and write an essay. Different methods or combinations of methods suit different people.

- **Mind-mapping**

This is a technique which can help organise scattered ideas, and especially suits people who are ‘visual’ learners. Start with a blank sheet of paper, turned horizontally. Write the main subject in the middle of the page. Make branches out from the centre for each key point, and build out from these. Use arrows, doodles, or different colours. The following is a mind map made for the essay topic on European depictions of Māori and Aborigines in Section 3.1.1:

![Mind Map Example](image)

- **Brain-storming**

Alone, or with others, you can use brain-storming as a concentrated ideas session. Any words, phrases or questions you think of about the topic are immediately written down. After ten minutes or so, stop and see if you can make sense of your notes. Select the important points to think about some more, and eliminate anything which is obviously irrelevant.

- **Key words**

A more linear thinker might progress directly from analysis of the question to planning an answer. Take the key structural words, and apply them directly to the key subject and focus words. For example:

**Compare** 19th-century depictions of Māori **with** 19th-century depictions of Aborigines **focussing on** style and attitude to subject
That is, describe the typical styles and attitudes to the subjects of 19th-century depictions of Māori and of Aborigines, and discuss their similarities and differences.

- Argument and counter-argument

If the essay question puts a proposition or states a viewpoint, you can treat it as a debate. Can you support the argument? Can you refute it? Can you reach and support a conclusion?

The debating technique can also be applied to questions which do not directly propose a thesis. For example:

**Question:** To what extent does landscape painting in modern New Zealand art reflect a local rather than a national interest? (You should stay mainly within the period 1940 to 1970.)

**Argument:** landscape painting in NZ (1940-70) reflected a local interest

**Counter-argument:** landscape painting in NZ (1940-70) reflected a national interest

In the process of researching both these claims, you would expect to find more convincing evidence on one side or the other. **Present all the evidence**, and explain why you support one side over the other.

- Free-writing

Sometimes you just need to start writing, with no clear idea of how you want it to turn out. Once you have analysed the question, write down the topic and start writing. Set a time limit of 10-15 minutes, and write quickly and freely without pausing. If you get stuck, don’t stop — repeat your last word or phrase until you get going again. Don’t stop to re-read until the time is up.

You might find you have written a draft introduction or conclusion. You might decide that the topic is utterly hopeless and you should throw it away and start again. But you are likely to come up with at least some ideas you can restructure into an essay plan. And you will have made a start on the actual writing process.

### 3.1.6 Thesis statement

You should write a concise statement about the topic, and your approach to it. This **thesis statement** may be a statement of opinion that you will defend or explain, or a statement of intent declaring what you will explain and illustrate in your essay. For example:

> I propose to look briefly at some of the ideas behind these movements and to concentrate on the art of social realists George Grosz and Otto Dix to show how the decadence and anarchy of Weimar Germany is reflected in the art of the period.

This thesis is the ‘kernel’ of your essay, and should be written early in the planning stage. However, as you develop your ideas and research, you may find you need to refine or revise it.
3.2 Essay Structure

Write out the essay question in full at the beginning of your essay – see Section 2.6 (presentation). Having it there at the start should help you to keep to the topic.

Every essay needs three main parts, each with a specific purpose:

- introduction
- body
- conclusion

You can look at an essay as a journey or a place around which you are taking your reader.

3.2.1 First draft

You don’t have to start writing your essay at the beginning and then work through to the end. Some people write the conclusion first, and write the rest of the essay with that end point firmly in mind. Or you could start with an introduction – but don’t worry if you end up having to rewrite it later on. You may find it easiest to start with the part with which you are most familiar. The important thing is that the thesis – or argument – proceeds effectively.

Your first draft should be completed several days, and preferably at least a week, before the deadline. That way you can leave it for a day or two before coming back to look at it with a ‘fresh’ eye. The draft can be deliberately longer than the word limit to allow for pruning.

3.2.2 Structuring your essay

Paragraphs break writing into manageable sections of related material to aid the reader’s comprehension. Each paragraph should deal with one idea only. The first, or topic sentence states the point to be made. Then develop the idea in a few support sentences. Your paragraphs should flow into each other, but keep the ideas separate. Anything unrelated to the topic sentence should be in a new paragraph.

Link your paragraphs so that each follows on from the last. Show how the ideas are related by using words such as furthermore, however, conversely, therefore, consequently (but avoid over-use of any one). If the structure of the essay does not make your points flow into each other, you will need to explicitly link them back to your original thesis. It should be clear how each point helps to answer the essay question.

3.2.3 Introduction

The introduction should do just that – introduce your reader to the main themes and ideas to be addressed, without going into detail. Address the implications of the question and the scope of your approach, and broadly discuss background, issues and context. It must include (usually as its last sentence) a thesis statement – see 3.1.4.

Remember that the introduction is the first part of your work encountered by the reader. It should grab their attention, drawing them into the essay, making them want to find out
more. Do not state your conclusions – if you give the game away, the reader may lose
interest.

3.2.4 Body
The body of an essay should present your ideas about the topic. Each new idea needs a
new paragraph, and will often benefit from being broken down into several paragraphs.
You will make more impact if you put the main idea first. If it is in a secondary position, it
will appear less important. Introduce each idea with a sentence or two detailing its
relation to the question or argument. Develop the idea by explaining it, giving evidence,
and illustrating the evidence. Refer to books and articles, and put them in your
bibliography (see 4.5). Make reference to specific works of art (see 2.1.1).

3.2.5 Conclusion
Summarise the ideas you have presented, and say why you have reached your
conclusion. State your conclusion clearly and relate it back to your thesis statement. Do
not introduce any new material. Your conclusion should leave the reader believing that
you have covered the topic thoroughly and convincingly.

3.3 Editing
Editing is how you make your work readable, and at this stage it is helpful to print out a
copy of the essay. Make sure the overall essay structure makes sense. Have you presented
your argument in a logical sequence? Do your introduction and conclusion fit with the
body of the essay and with each other? Are the main points sufficiently prominent?

Have you used paragraphs to help order and structure your ideas? Do they flow? Check
the grammar and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, referencing, etc). Take out or change
any word or sentence which is repetitive. Vary your sentence structure, so it doesn’t
become monotonous. If possible, have someone read your essay; someone unfamiliar
with the topic will be able to comment on general clarity.

Section 5.4 is a good writing checklist prepared by staff teaching English at VUW, which
you can apply to art history essays and other writing as well. Note also section 2.5 on
length.

3.3.1 Punctuation and spelling
Poor spelling and punctuation are major sources of ‘noise’ in an essay. They distract the
reader and interfere with their reception of your ideas and message. The same applies to
grammatical glitches.

Use a dictionary and pay attention to the red line that appear under words. This is the
spellcheck. Always check the names of artists and writers you are writing about or
quoting from. It is irritating to read an essay about ‘Gaugin’, when it should have been about Gauguin.

If you have trouble with grammar and punctuation, it will help to have someone else read your essay, or to read it aloud to yourself. Student Learning can help you, or you may enrol in the WRIT 101 course (see 2.7.1).

3.3.2 Common errors

The following are some common spelling and grammatical mistakes. See the Style book for a full explanation of these and other common errors.

Correct hyphenation: ‘twentieth-century art’, but ‘art of the twentieth century’
(no hyphen)
avant-garde

affect – (verb) move, touch, or produce an effect on, also pretend
(noun) feeling, emotion. Think of affection
effect – (verb) bring about, accomplish an effect
(noun) result. Think of effective

medium (singular)/media (plural)
canon NOT cannon

Apostrophes are never used for plurals. They either indicate possession or the omission of letters:
1940s – no apostrophe (or ‘the forties’, as long as it is clear which century!)
Sarah’s painting, Jones’ work, or Jones’s work
its – means belonging to it
it’s – is the abbreviation for it is     NB – never use IT’S unless it means IT IS!!

CAPITAL LETTERS should be employed for the names of styles or movements in art history, such as Byzantine, Renaissance, Baroque, Romanticism, Impressionism, Cubism, Pop Art, Postmodernism. Many of these words have lower-case usage (‘the renaissance of religious sculpture in the nineteenth century’) and remember also that, if you are quoting, you need to follow the original text exactly. Lower-case letters should be used for abbreviations: c. (circa, meaning around), fig. (figure), p. (page) or pp. (pages), vol. (volume), p.c. (private collection). Do not use pg. for page.

3.4 Unblocking

Most of us get ‘writer’s block’ at some stage in writing. Usually, this is a temporary condition, when we suddenly run dry and can’t think of where to go next. Simply re-reading what you have written, or leaving a gap and continuing with another idea, is usually enough to get started again. More serious blocks can be depressing. Perhaps you are worried about the deadline, or are trying too hard to produce a perfect essay at first-draft stage.
Here are some techniques for ‘unblocking’ suggested in the WRIT 101 course:

Free-write as hard and as fast as you can. See if language will lead you towards a meaning.

Break the paper down into attainable goals and concentrate on one part at a time. (You can eat an elephant if you eat one bite at a time.)

Dictate the draft. Talk into a tape recorder and then transcribe it from that.

Pretend you are writing a letter to a friend. Put Dear ... at the top of the page and start writing.

Write down the reasons why you can’t get started. Once you have defined the problem, you may be able to dispose of it.

Take a break for exercise – and then come back to it.

WRITING THAT CAN BE DELAYED, WILL BE. DO NO EDITING BEFORE IT IS TIME.
4 REFERENCING

Proper referencing is essential in essay writing. This refers to published material only. Please do not reference your lecture notes.

When you look up information in books and articles, you can use the references and bibliographies supplied by other writers to find further material. Properly referencing your own work makes it possible for others to look up your sources. It also allows you to introduce points of view with which you do not necessarily agree, and to set up reasoned debate within your essay.

4.1.1 Academic integrity and plagiarism

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means no cheating. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one’s own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other students or staff.

It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.

Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk.

Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning
- suspension from class or university
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course.

Find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, on the University’s website at: http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism.

4.2 Quotations

There are two main ways of incorporating quotations into your writing. Where you only use a phrase or a short sentence, it can be included in a sentence of your own but should be enclosed in double quotation marks:
The “myth” of Antipodean cultural isolation was addressed by Bernard Smith in 1961, when he wrote: “The historian is to myth what the ferret is to the rabbit. The historian burrows down after myth, hunts it out and destroys it if he can.”

If you wish to quote a passage of three lines or more, it should be indented from the main text and either dropped in point size (or distinguished by single spacing as opposed to the double spacing of your main text). **Do not use quotation marks on these indented quotes.**

The treatment of the Aborigines by Australia’s European colonists, who treated the indigenous inhabitants as virtually sub-human, has bequeathed a lasting legacy within Australian culture. As Bernard Smith asks in a 1980 lecture:

> How shall we redeem it [white Australian culture] from the guilty awareness that these acts of genocide and attempted genocide were being enacted most vigorously at that very time when our own white Australian culture was being conceived and born?

There are many different systems used for references and bibliographies. The bibliography in section 7 (p. 37) lists a number of authoritative sources. They can be complicated and somewhat confusing, but the examples used here are in the style preferred by Art History. **Whichever method you choose, you must be consistent.**

### 4.3 Referring to works of art

Paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints and photographs should always be referred to using the conventional format: Artist’s full name, *Title of work in italics*, date (location in brackets). Names of buildings and items of decorative arts are not underlined or italicised. For example:

Mary Frederica Marshall, *River Hutt Looking from the Fern Ground*, c. 1845 (p.c.)

Le Corbusier, *Chapel at Ronchamp*, 1950-54 (Ronchamp, France)

Thomas Germain, *Royal silver tureen, cover, liner and stand from the Penthièvre-Orléans Service*, 1733-34 (p.c.)

These examples use ‘c.’ to stand for *circa*, which is Latin for approximately or around (sometimes written ‘ca’) and ‘p.c.’ to stand for private collection. Works in public collections require the name of the city and the institution. For example:


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Kowhaiwhai patterns, Te Hau-ki-Turanga, 1842 (Wellington: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa)

It is important to give the accurate location of a work on first mention in the body of your text, as there are sometimes two or more works of the same title by the same artist. Not all books give the location of works, so you may need to find the location by looking at other sources (and remember that location can change over time). It is acceptable to use abbreviations for well-known collections. Some examples are:

- **NY: MoMA** for New York: Museum of Modern Art
- **London: NG** for London: National Gallery
- **NY: Met** for New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

If you are unsure of the appropriate abbreviation, you should give the location in full.

Your subsequent references to the same work do not need the location, but in the first instance and in cases where confusion might arise (perhaps more than one work of the same title) they should be stated in full. It is not necessary to give the dimensions and/or media of works of art unless this information is integral to the point you are making. If this is the case, weave the information into the text of your essay.

**Exhibition titles** should also be distinguished from the rest of your text with ‘inverted commas’ or with *italics*. If you are also giving titles of individual works (in *italics*), ‘inverted commas’ are preferable for exhibition titles.

**Illustrating your essay** with images of works of art will leave your tutor in no doubt as to which particular work you are talking about, especially if it is a lesser-known or obscure work, or you are placing emphasis on a certain detail of the work. Place these illustrations in an appendix and refer to them in the text by figure number (fig. 1, fig. 2, etc.). Record full details under the image, including artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, location and collection. Images of famous works do not need to be included, and you will not be penalised if you do not use illustrations.

**4.4 Footnotes and endnotes**

Footnotes and endnotes generally contain information on quotations or references in the text (see 4.2). They can also be used to mention related material or incidental information which would be too distracting if included in the main text. They should be kept as short as possible. Footnotes are indicated by a superscript number at the end of the sentence containing the name, phrase, or quotation to which they refer, and appear at the base of the page – under a horizontal line and in a smaller typeface (see below). The footnote function within Word will execute this automatically, and will change the numeration as you insert footnotes.

Endnotes serve the same purpose as footnotes, but appear at the end of the essay – as commonly seen in periodicals. Like footnotes, endnote numbers should be sequential.
throughout the essay. Use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3) rather than the Roman ones also on offer (i, ii, iii).

In general, it is best to avoid copious footnotes, as they tend to interrupt the flow of your essay. Try to restrict them to references or brief explanations only. It is not necessary to footnote ideas or assumptions that are or were generally held to be true. For example, it is not necessary to give a source for such statements: ‘By the end of the 18th century in Europe, it was generally accepted that the earth was round’.

There is often confusion about how to refer in footnotes to the same book several times or two or more books by the same author. We recommend the use of a short title for subsequent citations. The following is a guide to dealing with a series of references to writings by a single author:

According to Bernard Smith, European artists on Cook’s voyages applied a combination of the pictorial conventions of the topographical and picturesque traditions to their representation of Pacific landscape subjects, which resulted in a new type of landscape which Smith calls the ‘typical landscape’.1

Painters like William Hodges saw the New Zealand landscape through the lens of the Baroque landscape tradition as practised by painters like Salvator Rosa.2

In a later book on the same subject, Smith restated many of his original arguments.3

1 Bernard Smith, European Vision and the South Pacific, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1984), 1. [Make sure you give full publication details including page numbers.]
2 Smith, European Vision, 65-66. [Use the same format for any further references to this particular book by Smith.]
3 Bernard Smith, Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of Cook’s Voyages (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 1-5. [If you refer to this book again you must give the author and short title, i.e., Smith, Imagining the Pacific, to distinguish it from the other books by the same author.]

Use the short title format rather than the Latin abbreviation like ‘ibid.’ (in the same source) or ‘op. cit.’ (in the work cited).

4.5 Bibliography

Start your bibliography on a fresh page at the end of your essay, and place it before your illustrations (if you are using any). You should list only those books and articles which you have actually used. They should be listed alphabetically by surname of main or first author. The bibliography allows your reader to follow up ideas or issues that you raise in your essay. It should not include standard reference works such as language dictionaries or the Bible. Remember: Do not reference lecture notes in your bibliography, nor your course handbook. Any relevant item within the handbook should be referenced in the usual fashion.
Your bibliography lists the research literature used for your topic for the benefit of your reader. It should be as comprehensive but also as concise as possible. Unnecessarily long bibliographies annoy rather than impress your reader, especially if they contain obviously irrelevant material. On the other hand, you must include all relevant material you have used, even if you have not quoted from it directly.

4.6 Footnote and Bibliography conventions

There are several different ways of setting out the information in your bibliography. You can use either footnotes or endnotes (see 4.4). Footnoting is the style we prefer in Art History. In general, the more information you give, the better. Here are some examples of how to reference different types of publications.

Footnotes and the bibliography generally include information on the author, title, and facts of publication.

- **Author**: single or multiple authors; single or multiple editors; or gallery or museum for an exhibition catalogue (when there is no identifiable author/editor).
- **Title**: title of the book; title of the essay or chapter in an edited collection; title of an article and journal; or title of a webpage or site.
- **Facts of publication**: city of publication, publisher and date for books; volume, issue, date and page numbers for journal article; URL for website or online database.

The format to cite a publication in footnotes and the bibliography follow slightly different conventions.

The Art History Programme recommends a simplified form of the Chicago Manual of Style format, where both footnotes and bibliography are organized as a single sentence.1

- In a **footnote** the bibliographic details are organized as a single sentence, since the footnote is a continuation of the text. The author and title are separated by commas, and the facts of publication are enclosed in parenthesis (brackets). The author’s name is given in standard order, with the first-name before the surname. The title of books is set in italics, while the title of article, essays or chapters are enclosed in quotation marks.
- The **bibliography** is organized alphabetically by lead author’s surname, so each entry begins with the lead author’s surname (subsequent authors appear in standard order). Book titles are set in italics, while the titles of articles, essays or chapters are enclosed in quotation marks.

Many library catalogues and databases now provide citation tools to automatically produce a bibliographic citation for a publication. These tools can be useful; however, it is necessary to check the accuracy of the citation, and correct any errors. For instance, the

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1 In the full Chicago Manual of Style format, the bibliographic entries follow a different format: the author, title, and the facts of publication are separated by a period (full-stop). For more information see “Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide,” Chicago Manual of Style Online, 16th ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), accessed 4 May 2017, http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.
citation tool for Te Waharoa, the VUW library catalogue, does not distinguish between the different contributors to a publication (author, editor, translator, museum, etc.). You can find the citation tool under the “save/export” tab on the right-hand side of the catalogue entry.

Publication titles can be capitalized in one of two styles: i) headline style, where all major words are capitalized (as in the examples below); or ii) sentence style, where the first word and any proper nouns are capitalized. However, one style should be used consistently throughout the text and references in an essay, so do not alternate between headline and sentence style.

4.7 Examples of footnote and bibliographic entries

Below are examples of some of the most common publication types you will use in an art history essay. For more information see the “Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide” at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html, which includes more information and wider range of examples.

**Book with single or multiple authors:**


**Book edited by one or more people:**

**Footnote:** Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (eds), *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts* (London: Phaidon, 1992).

**Bibliography:** Frascina, Francis, and Jonathan Harris (eds), *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts* (London: Phaidon, 1992).

**Essay or chapter by an author who is not the author or editor of the book in which it is published:**


Exhibition catalogue:
Large exhibition catalogues frequently include a group of essays, but may lack a clear primary author. If an editor or curator is clearly identifiable, list the catalogue under his or her name:


In some instances there is no identifiable author or editor. In this case list the catalogue under the gallery or museum where the exhibition was held. Art gallery, *Title*, Place of publication, Publisher (often the gallery), date.


Periodical or journal article:


For articles accessed electronically, give full details of the published article, then the date accessed, and the stable URL or doi (digital object identifier). This information is usually listed when you access the article on the database, on the article coversheet (in JSTOR), or at the bottom of the first page of the article. Where no stable URL or doi is provided, list the database consulted. Do not include a lengthy search string.

Stable URL


DOI


Database


Dictionary or other reference book entry (for example, The Dictionary of Art):
Author(s) of the entry, “Title of the entry,” Title of dictionary in italics, Editor’s name, Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication, volume number, page numbers.


Many reference books are now available online. For instance, The Dictionary of Art is now available as Grove Art Online. If you are consulting the online version, you can use the following reference format:


Internet references:
Author/Organisation, “Title of item,” precise date when accessed, URL:


Conference papers:
Published papers follow the conventions for the relevant type of publication.
Unpublished conference papers can be referenced as follows:


Personal Communication:
Author’s name, type of communication, place, date.


Audio-Visual material (Television/Radio programme/DVD):
Include sufficient information to identify the source: Title in italics, Director or author, Television Network or Radio Station, date of transmission.

Broadcast programme

DVD
Footnote: Cave of Forgotten Dreams, dir. Werner Herzog (London: Revolver Entertainment, 2011), DVD.
Len Lye, Colour Box: 19 Films by Len Lye (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre, 2016), DVD.

Bibliography: Herzog, Werner (dir.), Cave of Forgotten Dreams (London: Revolver Entertainment, 2011), DVD.
Lye, Len, Colour Box: 19 Films by Len Lye (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre, 2016), DVD.

YouTube video
Footnote: Tusalava, dir. Len Lye (1929), YouTube video, 10:05, posted by “Andrew Pask,” 2 February 2008,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flJOXMln4C0.
TateShots, “Louise Bourgeois: ‘I Transform Hate into Love’,” YouTube video, 7:38, posted by “Tate,” 9 June 2016,
https://youtu.be/qy7xJhImnLw.

Bibliography: Lye, Len (dir.), Tusalava (1929), YouTube video, 10:05, posted by “Andrew Pask,” 2 February 2008,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flJOXMln4C0.
TateShots, “Louise Bourgeois: ‘I Transform Hate into Love’,” YouTube video, 7:38, posted by “Tate,” 9 June 2016,
https://youtu.be/qy7xJhImnLw.
5 APPENDICES

5.1 Learning Objectives

The following are the learning objectives of Art History:

100 level

1. To develop an understanding of the chronology of art history within a framework of ideas and themes
2. To introduce students to the skills of visual analysis; the language of art history, theory and practice; and the concepts needed to progress in the discipline
3. To develop skills of analysis and argument by encouraging students to evaluate the visual and to read selected texts of art history with care, using both to construct an argument
4. To develop skills in the written presentation of art historical material (writing and editing)
5. To ensure students have basic library skills appropriate to the discipline
6. To encourage participation in tutorial discussions
7. To make students aware of exhibitions and art collections in the Wellington region

200 level

1. To introduce students to the chronology and key artists in particular periods or areas of art history
2. To develop students’ skills in visual analysis and, where applicable, to the materials and techniques used in the art of a particular period
3. To develop students’ ability to analyse and interpret art within the relevant social, political and theoretical contexts
4. To introduce students to some major themes and currents in writing about art of a particular period or area
5. To develop students’ ability to gather and organise relevant information and evidence from published material (that is, secondary sources) and to further their ability to construct an argument using this material
6. To develop further students’ ability to present material which is coherent and well-written and which demonstrates an understanding and application of the conventions of academic writing (including appropriate citation, referencing and documentation);
7. To develop skills in reading art history and to make students aware of the range of available library resources;
8. To develop students’ ability to contribute to group discussions
9. To encourage students to view relevant art exhibitions and collections
300 level

1. To introduce students to more specialised studies of art and to specific areas of theory and debate within art history
2. To refine students’ skills of analysis and interpretation within the specific context of the course
3. To develop students’ ability to recognise and evaluate a range of different approaches to art historical material
4. To encourage students to produce substantial pieces of written work which demonstrate their ability to think and write critically
5. To ensure the consistent application of the conventions of academic art historical writing
6. To ensure that students are able to use the full range of reference systems in the University Library, including periodicals and on-line data bases
7. To develop student skills in the presentation, analysis and discussion of visual material in tutorials
8. To further encourage the viewing of artworks and the use of other primary resources

400 level

1. To familiarise students with historiographical and methodological debates in art history
2. To encourage students to apply their skills to the critical examination of visual and textual material
3. To develop student capacity for independent work, including the formulation, analysis and refinement of topics
4. To ensure that students make full use of library resources and unpublished material appropriate to their individual areas of study
5. To refine student skills in seminar presentation and oral debate
6. To prepare students for further post-graduate research in art history
7. To introduce students to the standards required of scholarly articles and papers and to the application of their research and writing skills in the work place
5.2 Sample assignment marking sheet:
(note that the format may vary slightly for different courses)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

ART HISTORY ESSAY MARKING SHEET

NAME:  

COURSE: ARTH

TUTOR:  

DUE DATE:
(2% deducted for each day late)

DATE OF SUBMISSION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>components of essay</th>
<th>outstanding</th>
<th>excellent</th>
<th>very good</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>satisfactory</th>
<th>adequate</th>
<th>fail</th>
<th>comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDERSTANDING &amp; DEFINITION OF TOPIC: Is the main point of the essay clear and relevant? Is all the discussion related to the topic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMULATION &amp; DEVELOPMENT OF ARGUMENT: Is the essay structured so that the ideas and argument is developed in an orderly way? Does the essay flow logically from the introduction to the conclusion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USE OF VISUAL AND WRITTEN RESOURCES: Have the major sources been consulted? Do the sources used in the essay adequately support its main point? Are pertinent visual resources used to support the argument?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORIGINALITY &amp; INDEPENDENCE OF THOUGHT: Has some element of independent thinking been demonstrated? Have you ensured your point of view is clear to the reader?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continues over
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENTS OF ESSAY</th>
<th>OUTSTANDING</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>VERY GOOD</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>ADEQUATE</th>
<th>FAIL</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCING:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are all ideas, facts, paraphrases and quotations taken from sources cited accurately and adequately? Are works of art properly documented within the text? Can the reader refer from the essay back to the sources used?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STYLE &amp; MECHANICS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the style allow the clear communication of ideas? Is the essay free of excessive grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GENERAL COMMENTS:

GRADE: GRADE AFTER PENALTIES (if applicable):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Excellent in most respects</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Good with some weaknesses</th>
<th>Satisfactory to good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>Fail Poor</th>
<th>Fail Well below standard required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>0-39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31
5.3 Interpreting grades:

Course grade ranges and indicative characterisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pass/fail</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Normal range</th>
<th>Midpoint</th>
<th>Indicative characterisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90%-100%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Outstanding performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>85%-89%</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Excellent performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80%-84%</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Excellent performance in most respects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>75%-79%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Very good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>70%-74%</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>65%-69%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Good performance overall, but some weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>60%-64%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Satisfactory to good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>55%-59%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Satisfactory performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%-54%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Adequate evidence of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>40%-49%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Poor performance overall, some evidence of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>0-39%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Well below the standard required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fail due to not satisfying mandatory course requirements, even though the student’s numerical course mark reached the level specified for a pass, usually 50%. A student whose course mark is below 50 should be given a D (40 – 49) or E (0 – 39), regardless of whether they met the mandatory course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall pass (for a course classified as Pass/Fail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fail (for a Pass/Fail course)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 Good Writing Checklist

WORDS: precise – the right choice?
appropriate – the right register? (not too colloquial)
concise – all needed?
idiomatic – used and combined in accepted ways?
organised into good sentences?

SENTENCES: correct – grammatical? make sense?
effective – easy to follow?
varied – differ in length and pattern?
organised into logical paragraphs?

PARAGRAPHS: one per topic?
topic sentence?
everything on the topic?
internal organisation logical?
links to other paragraphs logical?

STRUCTURE: thesis statement?
paragraphs all relate to thesis?
paragraphs in logical order?
paragraphs linked to one another?
paragraphs lead logically to conclusion?
conclusion confirms thesis?

EVIDENCE: relevant?
appropriate?
accurate?
sufficient?

CONVENTIONS: spelling, punctuation correct?
bibliography complete and accurate?
quotations properly acknowledged?
footnotes clear and accurate?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>formulate and present your own argument based on research</td>
<td>list facts and descriptions from books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>check word count</td>
<td>exceed word limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allow plenty of research time</td>
<td>ask for an extension after due date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask for help if you are stuck</td>
<td>panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>check with your tutor that you are on the right track</td>
<td>keep writing if you are unclear about the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edit your writing</td>
<td>leave no time for ‘tidying up’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep a copy of your essays and learn from past mistakes</td>
<td>throw essays away without reading the marker’s comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type or write neatly</td>
<td>forget to staple the pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answer the question</td>
<td>waffle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plan your structure carefully</td>
<td>leave out your conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference correctly and fully</td>
<td>forget the bibliography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learn from feedback on essays</td>
<td>ignore tutor’s advice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 THE USE OF THE APOSTROPHE

NEVER WRITE “IT’S” UNLESS IT IS SHORT FOR “IT IS”

DO NOT USE AN APOSTROPHE FOR DECADES (1790’s, 1850’s, 1900’s)

The apostrophe is used in English for two main purposes. One is to indicate possession (the man’s head); the other is to indicate a missing letter (it’s = it is).

POSSESSION

• The possessive apostrophe replaces (or can be replaced by) the word “of”
  The paintings of David = David’s paintings
  Winckelmann’s theories = the theories of Winckelmann

• The rule is to put the apostrophe after the possessor and add an “s” if the possessor is in the singular
  Gauguin’s trip to Tahiti

• When the possessor is in the plural simply put the apostrophe after the plural possessor
  The academicians’ theories = the theories of the academicians
  The museums’ initiative = the initiative of the museums

• The only exception to these rules relate to possessive personal pronouns, which do NOT take an apostrophe
  His hers theirs ours yours its

  NOTE: The commonest mistake is to place an apostrophe in the possessive its

• Proper nouns (names of people and places, usually capitalised) which end in “s” are sometimes given another “s” as if they were singular
  William Hodges’s paintings or William Hodges’ paintings (both are correct)

MISSING LETTERS AND ABBREVIATION

• One of the commonest uses of the apostrophe is to indicate the contraction of a pronoun and a verb, echoing spoken language but increasingly common in journalism. AVOID IN ACADEMIC WRITING.
  I’m (I am) she’s (she is) you’re (you are) we’re (we are)
  I’ve (I have) [she has] you’ve (you have) we’ve (we have)

  Contractions of negative verbs may bring alterations in the shortened form
  Don’t (do not) can’t (cannot) didn’t (did not) won’t (will not)
IT'S ITS USAGE THAT'S TORTURE

Murdering the apostrophe is a neon light to a who’s who whose grammatical sensibilities are strained, says KEITH AUSTIN. A group of more than 100 well-known literary figures in Britain – including Martin Amis, Andrew Motion and Fay Weldon – was recently asked to nominate which grammatical mistakes annoyed them most. At the top of the list, behind split infinitives and clichés, was the misuse of the apostrophe. My only objection to this is the misuse of the term “misuse”; the apostrophe isn’t so much misused these days as tortured, horribly disfigured or murdered (although The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage is more prosaic, calling them “gross disturbances”).

It is a pet hate of mine that, in my days as chief sub-editor of the Herald, was guaranteed to induce either utter despair or a towering rage that would have put King Lear to shame. So it is good to see someone making a stand against, perhaps, the written word’s most frequent mistake. Of course, not everyone agrees on the correct use of that most pertinent of pen flicks, that most crucial of key strokes.

The American columnist William Safire has waged a long battle of attrition against people such as myself who believe that the use of 1980’s/1970’s/1960’s to describe a decade is erroneous. As you would expect, Safire is eloquent in his defence of the apostrophe in this instance. But wax as lyrical as he might, he’s wrong. The 1980s is plural; it describes every year of that decade – all 10 of them. There is no apostrophe needed – and I’d put money on it.

In fact, once I nearly did. A few years ago, after many dark winter months driving past Sydney’s gaily lit Taylor Square and gritting my teeth at the sight of the huge neon radio station sign boasting that it was the sound of the 90’s (grrr), the sign was taken down. It seemed an opportune time to ring the station and beg to buy this largest of misplaced apostrophes from them. The sweet young thing who took my call was nice enough to pass on the old loony caller to the firm that made the sign. Sadly, the wording was broken up before I could make an offer they couldn’t refuse. It would have looked great on my desk at work, and I could have brained errant reporters with it.

The apostrophe was invented in the 16th century to indicate that a letter or letters had been omitted when two words were joined together (it is = it’s). That’s 400 years, and we still can’t get it right.

Look, it’s easy. Join two words together and you whack in an apostrophe to show something’s missing. OR you use it to indicate possession: as in, "the girl’s dress”, "the dog’s collar” or "the chief sub’s neon apostrophe is blue”.

Pronouns? It’s a no-go area. Plurals? Don’t use it (unless it is possessive and then the apostrophe goes after the final s). Music shop owners in particular should beware: one more sign offering hundreds of CD’s for sale will prompt pyromania. One of my favourites is the American television advert for, get this, Toy’s R Us. A single toy? If only . . .

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