

Suggestions for Writing Research Essays

- 1) **Topic and Thesis:** The topic of an essay is the particular, focused issue or phenomenon being addressed. It is the material to be investigated. A thesis is an *assertion* about your topic - an idea you will support in the body of your essay. Start your research by searching for a topic.
- 2) **Your topic should stay on probation until you can answer the following questions:**
 - a. Is the topic narrow enough?
 - b. It is likely to sustain your interest?
 - c. It is appropriate to your intended audience?
 - d. Can it lead to a reasonable thesis?
 - e. Does it involve enough complexity - enough "parts" - for development at essay length?
 - f. Do you have enough supporting material to work with?
- 3) **A conventional essay structure** is as follows:
 - a. Introduce topic: What is being discussed?
 - b. State thesis: What is the writer's point?
 - c. Meet objections, if any: Why objections to that point are not decisive?
 - d. Support thesis: On what positive grounds the point should be believed?
- 4) **"Writing is rewriting."** Start writing early. That will allow you to make conceptual and organizational changes as well as editorial ones.
- 5) **Avoid plagiarism:**
 - a. Cite your bibliographical sources. In that way, the reader should be able to distinguish your ideas from other writers' ideas. What should be cited? Direct quotations, paraphrases, borrowed ideas, and facts that do not belong to the general knowledge. Do not bother to quote facts that could be found in any commonly used source.
 - b. Use quotation marks when you are quoting a passage word by word.
- 6) A very brief note on **style in economics essays.**
 - a. Use parenthetical citations including the author(s) and date of publication. E.g. (Dornbusch, 1990).
 - b. If you include the author's name in your prose, provide the publication date in parenthesis. E.g. "King and Levine (1993) support the idea that more developed financial sectors are associated with faster growth of total factor productivity."
 - c. If you are citing a direct quotation or want to point out to a specific idea within a given source, include the page(s) in your citation. E.g. (Williamson, 1990, p. 141).
 - d. If you are citing more than one work of a given author(s) for a given year, append letters in alphabetical order to the publication year. E.g. (Edwards, 1989a).
 - e. At the end of the essay include a reference list ordered alphabetically. Each reference should include full bibliographical information:
 1. Books: include author's name, book's title, place of publication, and publisher. E.g. Schultz, T. (1953), *The Economic Organization of Agriculture*, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
 2. Journal articles: include the author's name, article's title, journal's title, volume, number, and pages. E.g. Demsetz, H. (1967), "Towards a Theory of Property Rights," *American Economic Review*, vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 347-359.
 3. Articles in books: include author's name, article's title, book editor's name, book title, place of publication, publisher, and pages. E.g. "Bhagwati, J. (1990), "Trade and Wages: A Malign Relationship?," in S. M. Collins (ed.), *Imports, Exports, and the American Worker*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 49-99.
 - f. Avoid direct quotations unless the language of the reference you are citing is important. Prefer paraphrasing or summarizing main ideas.
 - g. Use footnotes rather than endnotes.
- 7) There are many good books on writing. One I like is Crews, F. (1992), *The Random House Handbook*, 6th Edition, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- 8) You are welcome to discuss your ideas for the topic, thesis, and structure of your essay with me or with the TA. You can also get help on English language use and grammar at the Writing Workshop.