Academic Preparation for Commerce

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Who are we?

Lecturers in academic language and learning whose research and practice examines the various modes and conventions of thinking and writing across the disciplines.

Come and see us in Building 11, take the lift opposite the uni bookshop to the third floor.

What do we offer?

• Workshops
• Learning Resources
• Individual and group appointments
• The Learning Carnivale

Embedded in first year:

COMM110 – Report assignment
MGMT110 – Essay assignment
MARK101 – Poster presentation
COMM101 – Commerce Academic Integrity Online (CAIO)

Today’s session

• The essay as process
  – Analysing the question
  – Doing the research

• The essay as product
  – Writing
  – Referencing
  – Logic and evidence

The difference between an essay and report

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<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Report</th>
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<td>An essay contains a well-developed and supported argument. Its purpose is to demonstrate your ability to critically evaluate the evidence and answer a specific question.</td>
<td>A report usually contains an analytical description of events/results of primary research around a particular problem/issue. Its purpose is to convey specific information in logically arranged sections to the reader. A report may also contain recommendations.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Report</th>
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<td>The audience of the essay is the subject lecturer who is assessing, not just your knowledge of the topic, but your ability to develop a well-researched argument that answers a specific question in a logical manner.</td>
<td>The report usually has an imaginary audience, such as a company CEO. It is written for people who need specific information that is easily accessible.</td>
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<th>Structure</th>
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<th>Report</th>
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<td>The essay is simply formatted according to Introduction, Body, and Conclusion.</td>
<td>The report is more specific: Executive Summary, Contents Page, Introduction, Body Sections, and Appendices.</td>
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What is a good essay?

• It answers the question directly
• It develops an argument logically and coherently
• It is based on sound evidence
• It illustrates wide reading and a good understanding of the topic
• It is concise and clear
• It is at least the third draft!

Analysing the essay question

Consider first the disciplinary demand being made on you.

• Why this question?
• In this subject?
• At this time?
• What are they trying to find out about what you know and can do?
• What are you being asked to demonstrate as a student in this subject and in this discipline?
At a more technical level,

Identify the
– topic words
– instructional words

• Consider deeply the purpose of the essay, what you are being asked to do.

To what extent can people be regarded as the most important resource in an organisation?

Does the “Design School Model” provide a practical solution to the problem of how to formulate management strategy?

What major changes in the Australian business environment are likely to impact on managers over the next decade?

“Accounting, as an information system, has its strengths and weaknesses.” Discuss.


Write a 750 word critique of one of the additional readings (Ashenfelter, Tietenberg or Hawke and Lewis). Your critique should consist of four parts:

a. Summary of the article (250 words maximum),

b. Strengths of the article (200 word maximum),

c. Limitations of the article (200 word maximum) and

d. Overall Assessment of the article (100 word maximum).

• Read broadly - lecture notes/ text book

• Read narrowly - journal articles/ some texts

• Read critically - don’t take anything for granted

• Avoid over-relying on textbooks and books located in the library.

• Learn to use the library databases.

• Read as widely as possible.
The quality of your research will depend on the quality of your sources and your ability to critically evaluate them.

Are they appropriate, current and relevant?

There are three main categories of research used in academic writing:

1. primary
2. secondary
3. theoretical

What are some examples of each type? Can you think of why you might use each?

Primary:
- Material produced by the organisation itself (statistics, advertisements, annual reports, products, webpage etc)
- Interviews/qualitative/quantitative data from direct research

Secondary:
- More objective discussion of primary sources
- Non-academic (newspaper, magazine or online news articles)
- Academic (scholarly books or journal articles - which may be available via the library databases)

Theoretical:
- Theory about the relevant issues that can be applied to the analysis (other people tend to quote them)

Check publication date
Consider the status/perspective of the author
Understand the range of debates in the field

Question assumptions
Actively seek divergent views
Don’t bias your enquiry in favour of a particular outcome
Make judgements and evaluations -- both positive and negative
Organise your writing according to your evaluation and stay focused on the question
What does it mean to be analytical and critical?

- Broadly speaking, writing can be descriptive, analytical or critical
- In practice, these types of writing overlap with each other, forming a continuum, i.e. descriptive ‾ analytical ‾ critical
- Writing at university level should aim for the analytical/critical end of the spectrum

Example 1: Descriptive

Strategy formulation can be defined as ‘...the development of long-range plans for the effective management of environmental opportunities and threats, in light of corporate strengths and weaknesses’ (Wheelan & Hunger 1995, p9). It involves both long term and short term planning that must be flexible for changing circumstances (Browne 2000, p7). Competitive advantage will be gained by those who are more flexible than others (Browne 2000, p14).

Notice that this paragraph just describes what other people have said. It is not clear what the student is thinking. It appears the student has taken this information at face value without thinking critically about it.

Example 2: Descriptive/analytical

Strategy formulation can be defined as "the development of long-range plans for the effective management of environmental opportunities and threats, in light of corporate strengths and weaknesses" (Wheelan & Hunger 1995, p9). Henry Mintzberg, a well-regarded critic of DSM, argues that the Design School Model, while providing a useful foundation, does not provide a practical solution to strategy formulation. This is for a number of reasons, one being the fact that Mintzberg believes in shorter term strategies which are more adaptive to changing circumstances, compared to the design school and Andrews which focus on long term strategy that tends to be inflexible.

Example 3: Analytical/ critical

One of the main reasons the Design School Model should not be used exclusively in formulating strategy relates to the fact that it is a rather conservative tool designed for long term planning. Despite the fact that strategy formulation is considered ‘the development of long-range plans’ (Wheelan & Hunger 1995, p9), more recently attention has been drawn to the need for shorter term strategies that are more adaptive to changing circumstances (Mintzberg 2000, p25). Indeed, the notion of flexibility in strategy formulation has become increasingly important over the past decade (Smith 2001, p34; James 2005, p134).

From research to writing

- Use the writing process to clarify your thinking.
- Never hand in the first draft.

Developing an argument

- Provide a focused answer to the question
- Ensure your argument is logical and supported with evidence
- Use essay format
- Reference everything - remember, the more evidence you provide, the stronger the argument
This essay analyses a case study that highlights important issues in managing groups and conflict resolution. The case study involves a conflict in the office that escalated at a weekly meeting when some of the staff complained to the manager that they were unhappy about a lack of delegation, the type of work they were being given and a lack of recognition and reward of individual talents. The manager felt threatened by these complaints so rather than seeing this as a chance to learn about the needs of his staff, he dismissed the complaints as irrelevant and ended the meeting. Surprisingly, the manager thought he had handled the situation well, but he was unaware of the resentment and dissatisfaction felt by the staff at having their concerns dismissed so abruptly. It will be shown that in order to resolve the situation the manager needs to consider five major issues these include the dynamics of the group, the physical layout of the office space, the level of recognition and reward of individuals, delegation of tasks and responsibilities, and dealing with different personalities and prejudices. Failing to address these issues will only lead to more dissatisfaction within the group and morale and productivity will be jeopardised.

The opening sentence not only introduces the essay as a case study analysis, but also clearly states which two concepts are fundamental to this student’s analysis of ‘what happened’.

This essay analyses a case study that highlights important issues in managing groups and conflict resolution. The case study involves a conflict in the office that escalated at a weekly meeting when some of the staff complained to the manager that they were unhappy about a lack of delegation, the type of work they were being given and a lack of recognition and reward of individual talents.
Another characteristic of groups that needs to be addressed is the existence of norms. Norms are the standards of behaviour expected by the group, and as Eunson (1990, p.37) points out, they can be "negative and punitive, or positive and rewarding". Either way they affect the productivity of a group, and their existence needs to be acknowledged. The behaviour of the woman after the meeting is an example of adhering to a group norm. Although nothing was said, there was a united display of disrespect towards the manager and rebellion against his authority by pulling faces, drawing ridiculing cartoons and generally wasting time. This sort of behaviour is not indicative of a satisfied, productive work group. By understanding the dynamics of the group, the manager would be better able to lead the group in a way most beneficial to the needs of the group. This would be rewarded with a highly motivated, productive work team working together to achieve their goals.
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In conclusion, the critical incident that occurred highlighted a number of problems existing in the workplace, most of which were related to the manager's poor interpersonal skills. It has been shown that there need not have been a conflict at all if the manager had handled the situation in a more professional manner. By looking closely at his managerial skills and taking into consideration the solutions offered regarding the issues of effective communication, personalities, delegation and the office layout, the manager could easily improve the situation and restore harmony to the work group. If the solutions offered in the essay were acted upon, the Monday meeting could become the focal point of the group, and used constructively and openly, would ensure that a situation like this is prevented in the future.

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Using evidence

The argument you develop will result from your analysis of the research material.

The argument and the evidence you select will be a direct indicator of your research effort.

Integrating evidence

• When introducing evidence into the argument, you can use
  – indirect quotation
  – direct quotation.

• Indirect quotation should be used more often than direct quotation, as it indicates that you have fully understood the information.

• Use the Harvard reference style (author/date)

Library homepage

Direct quotation

Example:

McNurlin & Sprague (2004, p65) state that “if CIOs are to play an important role in shaping a business’s use of IT, they must understand the business”. Their point is of utmost importance because….

• You MUST give page numbers for a direct quote.

Indirect quotation

An indirect quote is where you present an author’s ideas in your own words.

This can be done either through paraphrasing or summarising.

You MUST always reference the material.

Even though it has been written in your own words, it is still someone else’s idea.

Paraphrasing

Original

“If CIOs are to play an important role in shaping a business’s use of IT, they must understand the business. With that understanding, they can then create a vision of their firm’s use of IT” (McNurlin & Sprague 2004).

Paraphrase

A deep understanding of the business is crucial to a CIOs ability to successfully configure its use of IT (McNurlin & Sprague 2004).
McNurlin & Sprague (2004) argue that a CIOs leadership in an organisation is dependent on his/her ability to understand the business, create a vision of the future and persuade others of the intrinsic value of that vision.

Note how this information is a summary of ideas expressed in the original document over several pages.

Orientation

• Author orientation
  McNurlin & Sprague (2004) argue that a CIOs leadership in an organisation is dependent on his/her ability to understand the business, create a vision of the future and persuade others of the intrinsic value of that vision.

• Theme orientation
  Having a deep understanding of the business is crucial to a CIOs ability to successfully configure its use of IT (McNurlin & Sprague 2004).