

## Essay Writing Workshop – 2014/2015 Cohort

The following few pages are the notes gathered during the Essay workshop in 2015. The names have been changed, and some of the notes are at times schematic, but it should give a general overview of what has been discussed, and what contributions people made. Please note that all information is without guarantee for success and is based exclusively on the discussions we had among us. Nevertheless they might provide valuable strategies and tips for your specific problem or provide inspiration.

### 1. Starting off (choosing an essay question and start planning):

- Emma: just reflect on the essay questions for a long time.
- Ava: ask yourself “*why do I want to answer this particular question?*”
- Sophia: has doubts about taking the most ‘interesting’ (perhaps more difficult) or the ‘easiest’ question.
  - *It comes down to getting a good grade*
  - Group: Remember, there is no need to read a whole book or whole article. Don’t lose yourself in reading.
    - Use electronic resources: search them for key words
    - For ‘picture’ or scanned resources: there are programmes available (often for pay) that convert these to searchable pdfs
    - For books: go to index, or try to find an electronic version.
- Isabella: chooses the question according to the following criteria:
  - Which week of the course did I feel most comfortable with?
  - Then she looks first at the key readings, and then the key-words in the reading list.
  - Maybe talk to someone who is interested in the essay topic. This can be really productive. Take some notes during your conversation. You are creating your argument during the discussion or argument.
- One strategy of how to deal with a question: Brake down the question! Key words, phrasing of the question. Divide the question into sub-questions.
  - Don’t forget! You can also take issue with the question itself. Basically: “this question is stupid and irrelevant because X. The more important element is Y.”
  - Narrow the question down to what you think the issue is.
- Problem: they choose the question that is narrow so as not to deviate too much.
  - Make sure you don’t lose yourself in setting the terrain or answering many sub-questions in too much detail, → you might find you forget to answer the actual question!
    - In general, always ask yourself after every 2 hours: “AM I ANSWERING THE QUESTION?”
- If you chose a broad question, then really narrow it down.

- Pay attention to the phrasing of the question: like “critically discuss”, or “evaluate”. At the GI there is a document that explains those kinds of phrases.

## 2. Note taking:

- Often note-taking documents are too big. How do we start writing with such a big document??
  - Mia: she structures her notes and quotes according to arguments. She uses colour-coding. E.g.: Argument 1: red. Argument 2: blue
  - Amelia: suggests that those things we remember easily are generally the most important parts. Don’t complicate things too early.
- NEVER DON’T TAKE NOTES! I.E. ALWAYS TAKE NOTES!
- Write down your thoughts after some of your notes:
  - Use a code-word, like your own name, when you write down thoughts when taking notes. That way you can easily identify what thoughts and comments you had when writing your notes.
    - Example: “*Oliver*: use this for argument number two”
    - Example 2: *Ray*: Link to transfeminist writings here. Connect this to Butler’s argument.

## 3. Structuring and plan-making:

- General distribution of essay:
  - 10% intro, 10% conclusion, 80% main body. Then calculate the number of words necessary, also for each paragraph/argument, i.e. “I need 500 words per argument or point I want to make”.
    - Problem perhaps: calculating the number of words might be limiting during the writing process. You do not necessarily know in advance how many words a specific part of your argument is going to take up. So don’t be too rigid.
    - Also, essays can have slightly different structure, so don’t limit yourself too much at the expense of creativity.
- Always **go back to plans and look where you are**.
  - If need be: change the plan, but not too often.
- Keep in mind!!
  - Every single step in your plan **must** be a **logical and necessary contribution** to the argument you want to make. Every part of your plan has a “reason” for being there!

## 4. Writing process:

- Abigail’s suggestion: she writes the whole of her essay by hand. She finds this helpful when she is typing it up on screen, because it makes her more aware of the anatomy of the essay, and whether it is coherent or not.

- Structure of an argumentative paragraph: very roughly: first sentence: your opinion or argument. Second: review existing literature. Third: body.
- Always think about the reader! Guide them/ her / him.
- Make subtitles. It helps making your ideas clear so they guide the reader.
- Write your introduction at the end. If necessary, write your introduction twice
  - The introduction needs to fit your main-body and the main-body's structure.
- Ask yourself:
  - "Am I answering the question?" "Does this paragraph contribute to the answer of the question?"

## 5. Review:

- Think of the "Blind Lady": Remember that when you write and then read your essay, it must be clear where you are going. Imagine that you are guiding a slightly confused blind lady to a place she doesn't know. Explain to her before departure where you that place is and how you are going to get there. Explain to her why it is important you get there. Once you departed (i.e. your 'main body' started), make sure to always assure the lady at what point of the journey you are now, what you have just 'gone through' and where you are guiding her now. Don't be afraid of pointing out the too obvious; after all you have to make sure that she always knows where you are now, how you got there, why you are there and why this place is useful to be now in order to get to the destination.
  - *This was an image a teacher once provided a class with that turned out to be quite useful.*
- PS: Don't forget that you don't necessarily have to agree personally with the argument you make.

## 6. Time management and procrastination:

- One student's tip: Draw on your past experience and suffering: imagine how bad you will feel if you leave everything to the last minute. Imagine how tired and desperate you will feel. How stressed and disappointed with yourself. Don't let this happen to you!
- Remember you don't have to read always the whole article!! Read strategically and with a purpose!
- Sometimes, have some fun!! Sometimes this actually makes up time, because you feel energised for new work.
- SHUT OFF WIFI!!!
  - There are also apps that block your Internet, or only specific websites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for a preset time!
- One student's technique: Have a shower when you feel stressed.

## 7. Bibliography and citation:

- When is it relevant to use your own voice and opinions?

- The “I” is permitted.
- Plagiarism! Because of the fear of plagiarism, Alba feels that they need to support every single statement.
  - General: You can put your opinion and conclusions, but if you know that someone else has argued the same, then you need to cite.

#### **8. Technological tips:**

- Learn about and use different shortcuts like control-V/control-C.
- Mendely: referencing programme
  - There are many other referencing programmes.

#### **9. What to do when you are stuck**

- Free writing with pen and paper!!!
  - Just take pen and paper and write down **everything** that you think the part you are stuck with for 10 minutes. It will always help!

#### **10. Resources**

- LN996 on Moodle: you can enrol into this course for useful resources