Centre for the Study of the Renaissance

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

A GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING

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A GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING

This guide is meant to provide suggestions in particular for the writing of undergraduate essays in Renaissance Studies, but many of the points will be relevant for other modules and even for writing at postgraduate level.

The writing of an essay provides an opportunity for you to communicate your ideas in an ordered and engaging way. There is no one way in which to write an essay. Writing, whether a story, poem or essay, is an intensely personal experience and there are probably as many ways of writing essays as there are people who write them. It is for you to decide how best to combine thinking, reading, note-taking, and writing in order to produce an essay which successfully communicates your understanding of a topic. The more you work on essay writing, the greater will be your understanding of your own mental processes, and such knowledge will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life.

1. Choosing the topic

Usually you will be given a list of questions from which to choose. Although there are opportunities for specialization through choosing topics that are interrelated (for instance, you may find topics concerning imagery on essay lists for more than one module) it is a good idea to show some spread of interest over your degree work. If none of the suggested topics appeals to you, it is usually possible to negotiate a title with your tutor; in some modules you will be actively encouraged to think out a title for yourself.

Some recommendations for choosing a topic:

- Choose a topic that you find personally interesting, one to which you feel willing to devote some time and energy.
- Choose the title of your essay early, giving yourself chance to think about it broadly before starting intensive research.
- Make sure you have understood what the question or topic requires before settling down to work on it. If you are in doubt, discuss the question with your tutor.
- Think hard about the terms of the question itself: what sort of information and what sort of approach does the question seek; and are the terms of the question straightforward, or are they themselves open to question?

2. Reading

Your reading will usually be divided into **primary** texts and **secondary** (or **contextual** or **critical**) texts.

i. The **primary** text is the work (or group of works) on which the question is based. In the following question on Dante there is no doubt what the primary text is: 'What part does suspense play in the narrative of the *Comedy*?' You need a good knowledge of the *Divina Commedia* to answer this. But in the following question you need to choose your own primary texts: 'Consider the presentation and function of landscape in Renaissance short stories'.

Much of the success of the essay will depend on the choice of stories (and the rubric to the essay title list will tell you how many you need to choose). It is often a good idea to choose texts from which you can create contrast in your essay: here, texts that allow you to show how different authors

(or the same author) use landscape in varying ways, and to discuss whether, despite their differences, there are some convergences.

It is advisable to gain a thorough and personal knowledge of the text(s) in question before exploring contextual reading. This is particularly the case when the question is asking for a detailed reading of, say, a poem, treatise, or work of art. Yet do not limit yourself to this step, but use critical studies to inform and correct your interpretation.

ii. Secondary (or **contextual** or **critical**) material can be divided into various kinds. If you are working on short fiction you may want to know more about the literature of the period you are working on, as well as narrative strategies and the writer. An essay on a text of the Italian Renaissance may require historical and political knowledge, further exploration of philosophical ideas popular at the time and current literary approaches. You may decide that you want to approach the topic within a particular conceptual framework (e.g. psychoanalytic, feminist, deconstructionist); all of these will require specific reading.

In work on literary texts you will also find in most cases a wealth of scholarly engagement with the text itself. Clearly you cannot read it all and you will have to be selective. Your essay is not meant to be the last word on, for instance, imagery in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* – indeed it is important to remember that there is no 'last word', for all criticism is part of a process, a dialogue. Seek out secondary material that concentrates on the topic which concerns you: if you need help identifying this, or feel overwhelmed by the amount of material available, discuss with your tutor the most appropriate texts to consult.

Avoid the tendency to think that because a view is in print it is 'right' or 'the final word'. Remember that what counts most is YOUR view on the particular essay question, informed of course by critical writings and argued clearly and coherently. Some of what you read will quite properly alter what you think, will give you new insights, and sharpen your perception. But all criticism needs to be read judiciously, with critical awareness. It is good to set your views within the context of critical writing on the subject (particularly in final year essays), but never let your perceptions be swamped by your critical reading. Aim to synthesize the various critical approaches to the topic or text in a way which leads you to a clear expression of your own interpretation of it.

Like anyone else, scholars are prone to use some arguments that are stronger than others, and the views or research of some scholars are more dependable than others. If you are dealing with a book and are unsure to what extent its arguments are accepted or eccentric, it will be useful to read a couple book reviews on it.

Some of the contextual reading you will find on reading lists that accompany the module, or will learn about from discussion with your tutor; you will also probably find other books and articles for yourself via or electronic resources (see section 3 below).

3. Resources

Obviously the texts you own and the **books and periodicals in the library** will be your major resources. Sometimes a book you want to consult may not be available in the library because someone else has checked the volume out. In this case, you may use the 'request' function at the top of the library record for that book. If, however, the library does not have the book or periodical in its collection, go and see your module tutor or personal tutor. It is sometimes possible to get the text for you on the **document supply system** (i.e. borrow it from another library) and sometimes your tutor has a copy which s/he is willing to lend. But these requests can take some time to fulfil, so don't wait until the last minute.

Individual bibliographies for specific sessions will give you details of articles in periodicals, but you may like to explore further for yourself. Take a look at the issues of periodicals on the ground floor (earlier issues are kept on the third floor across the bridge in the library extension, in the section Arts Periodicals). Some useful titles are: *Italian Studies*, *Forum Italicum*, *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*, *Renaissance Quarterly, Renaissance Studies, The Modern Language Review*, *Burlington Magazine.* Become familiar with the various journals particularly important for, say, history, art history, or languages and literature.

Use the library website to help you locate books in the library. You can also use various CD-ROMs to locate criticism available on your author or topic. Kate Courage is the librarian responsible for supporting the Renaissance Centre and is always very willing to help students make the most of the library's resources.

You should also be aware of electronic databases that are available through the library website. **JSTOR** gives you full-text access to various articles and book reviews, but remember that (i) it does not include chapters in books, (ii) there is a lag-time of several years between an article's publication and its appearance in JSTOR, (iii) JSTOR tends to focus on journals of general scholarly interest rather than on journals devoted to specific fields, and (iv) journals from some countries (e.g., Italy) often do not place their contents on JSTOR.

Other electronic resources: From the library's home page, click on 'Databases', then (under 'Arts and Humanities') on 'Medieval and Renaissance Studies'. Click on 'Databases'. Particularly useful resources for finding bibliography are:

- International Bibliography of Humanism and the Renaissance
- International Medieval Bibliography
- Iter: Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance

In addition, valuable information on Renaissance art, and art history in general, can be found in the *Grove Art Online* database (accessible from the Library on-line catalogue) and the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (https://www.metmuseum.org/toah).

4. Note-taking

You will need to take notes while you are reading both primary and secondary texts. These notes serve as i) a bank of information or opinion derived from the texts you have read; ii) a collection of raw materials from which to assemble your own interpretation of the texts or topic, i.e. an essay; iii) a set of references to be discussed or quoted in your essay. Here are some recommendations for making your note-taking as efficient as possible:

- Do not allow note-taking to be a substitute for genuine reading and interpretation of the text. Your notes should consist of your own coherent summaries of and comments on the material you are reading, rather than isolated passages copied from the text, which do not necessarily make sense to you on re-reading. Only copy quotations where you think they articulate an argument succinctly and therefore will provide a useful discussion point in your essay.
- It is very important to know where you have taken a quotation from, or where you have come across a certain idea, so you must reference your notes. Head your notes with the full bibliographical details (see below) of the book or article you are reading and put at least an abbreviated reference on every sheet of paper you use.
- When copying a quotation for use in your essay, always put the passage in quotation marks and note the page reference at the end of the passage, so that you have it to hand when you write the essay. In case you should later abbreviate the quotation, indicate in your notes if the quotation

spreads over two pages. This can be done with a double slash or some personal marker of your own:

> e.g. 'The second general achievement of the humanists was historical. Besides reviving a specific ethical tradition and enhancing knowledge of antiquity, they perceived that antiquity was a lost civilisation. This insight itself produced their attainments in moral philosophy and classical scholarship. Because they saw that a lost world had spawned ancient // literature, they grasped that antiquity possessed distinctive and finite forms' (pp. xiv-xv).
> [Your notes will have been headed: John Stephens, *The Italian Renaissance: The Origins of Intellectual and Artistic Change Before the Reformation* (London and New York: Longman, 1990).]

- Be absolutely clear in your notes about what is your own opinion and what is paraphrased or summarized from the text. Use some indication to differentiate your own comments from summaries and quotations, e.g. underline in a different colour, use square brackets plus the words 'my comment' or 'me'. If this distinction is not carefully maintained in your notes, you run the risk of the resulting essay being penalized for plagiarism (see section 7 below).

5. Organizing your essay

It is essential that your essay moves forward with a logical and coherent argument, rather than being a collection of random paragraphs. **What** you use in the essay – i.e. the core information – is clearly a crucial component of it, but a substantial proportion of your mark will also be determined by **how** you use and present that information.

In order to produce a well-organized essay, you will need to make a plan. There are various organizing principles. You can progress from the simple to the complex, beginning the essay by giving the overall picture and then going into greater detail. You can construct a debate within your essays by rehearsing the arguments on one side of the case in the first part of the essay and then on the other side in the second part; or by discussing the pros and cons of each argument in turn. The principle you use should be determined by your own interpretation of the topic: ask yourself, 'What am I aiming to convey to my reader?' This in turn may well be determined by the essay question: an essay that responds directly, but also sensitively and with flexibility, to the question asked is usually a successful one (provided, of course, the response is supported by sound understanding of the materials).

Some recommendations follow:

- DO answer the question. To discuss the terms of the question or to cast doubt on an opinion expressed is often a sophisticated and successful tactic, but DO NOT hi-jack the question and divert it towards a topic you would prefer to write on.
- DO make sure your essay has an introduction and conclusion. The introduction should lead the reader into the argument, but should not be so broad as to be banal. The introduction should be a fairly substantial paragraph, culminating in the statement of your thesis and how you will go about proving it. It should also help the reader understand what the organization and sequence of topics in the essay will be. The conclusion should sum up your argument but should not repeat it. DO NOT re-cycle your introduction as your conclusion. DO use the conclusion to drive home your own, individual opinion at the culmination of this research and writing exercise.
- DO make effective use of sign-posting to indicate to the reader your logical sequence. For instance, you might organize your essay (especially if it's a longer one) in recognizable sections and headings. Another complementary technique is to start a new section by referring to what has been already said and pointing forward to new material: 'Having analysed Dante's technique of allusion in Canto 3 of the *Inferno*, I will now turn to ...'

- In comparative essays, DO NOT write two discrete essays that you then stitch together in your conclusion. Also, DO NOT distort one text to make it fit in with an overall theory. Convey the individuality of each text, but draw out points of comparison and contrast and discuss them with regard to both or all texts together. It may well be useful to adopt a **thematic approach** in order to make for something more interesting to read (and write!).
- DO NOT re-tell at length the story of a novel or summarize a plot in your essay if this was a set text for the module. You can assume that your reader knows the text well. DO be clear about the place within the context of the whole work of any incident or character you are discussing, but make this ancillary to the opinion you are expressing of that incident or character.
- DO NOT include in your essay biographical detail about writers, or historical detail about the period, or critical detail about the literary or artistic genre, except where it contributes directly to the formulation of your argument. Your essay is a piece of critical analysis, NOT a narrative.
- DO engage your reader and express your own personality in your writing. Your essay should present convincingly some sound critical research – it is not an exercise in creative writing or an advertising spot. Avoid an excessively florid or flippant style, but DO try to invite your reader to share your individual perspective on the topic.
- DO express your own position with regard to the question or topic clearly, but DO NOT express personal opinions that are vague or ungrounded, such as 'I think Machiavelli was an important Renaissance writer.' The word 'important' here is meaningless, unless you have explained in exactly what ways you believe his activity to be important. On the other hand, feel free to use the first person: 'In this essay, I will argue that Machiavelli's writings had an immediate impact on his contemporaries.'
- DO NOT allow your essay to become a list of points; i.e. avoid beginning each paragraph with phrases such as, 'Another example of animal imagery in the *Orlando furioso* is...', or 'The next characteristic visible in Giorgione's painting is …' Some essay questions may lead you towards this sort of approach by asking, for example, how an author progressively builds a theme or character, so beware.

6. Use of secondary sources

There are various ways in which you can use your secondary and contextual reading in your essay. The following provides examples of some of these ways:

i) You can quote directly from another text either to support your argument or to provide a context for what you want to say:

e.g. As Paul Oskar Kristeller has indicated, 'Renaissance humanists were neither good nor bad philosophers; they were, rather, no philosophers at all' (Kristeller, p. 22). So it is best not to assume that humanists were writing philosophical works.

ii) You can convey the same idea through free paraphrase:

e.g. Some scholars have insisted on the need to see humanists not as philosophers, but as members of an educational movement (Kristeller, p. 22). This perspective has a bearing on this essay because …

iii) You can quote because you want to take issue with what the writer says.

e.g. Paul Oskar Kristeller puts the matter rather clearly: 'Renaissance humanists were neither good nor bad philosophers; they were, rather, no philosophers at all' (Kristeller, p. 22). One might, however, question the assumption that there was such a clear separation between the areas of humanism and philosophy. This essay will show why I think this perspective may be mistaken.

iv) You may wish to refer to a number of sources in order to recount the history of, for example, a particular perspective, or to establish your own position. In this case it is often a good idea to paraphrase the argument of each critic rather than quoting them individually; too much direct quotation can make for a rather disjointed essay. After having set one critic or interpreter against another you may choose to agree with one or none of them.

e.g. Eugenio Garin sees Renaissance humanists as champions of a new philosophy of man (p. 42); Paul Oskar Kristeller instead treats them as 'no philosophers at all' (p. 22). Baron's comments are the most revealing of all: he starts by describing them as 'educators' (p. 232), then...

Each critic you paraphrase will need to be acknowledged; see section 8 on Referencing below.

7. Plagiarism

In all the above instances, whether you are quoting directly, paraphrasing, alluding to a critic's view, or setting one critic against another, you must cite your source(s). You must also cite your source(s) if your general argument, organization, or choice of examples are influenced by what you have read but you are not quoting or paraphrasing. If you do not cite your sources you could be accused of plagiarism.

Derived from a Latin word *plagiarius* (originally meaning 'plunderer' or 'kidnapper'), **plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas and/or passages of text from another work or author without acknowledgement**. It is trying to pass off as yours what is not yours. In a culture in which authors own copyrights of their works and consider their writing as their property, plagiarism is a form of theft. It is therefore important to get into the habit early on in your writing of indicating the source of your material. Be aware that essays submitted on Tabula are run through a plagiarism-checking software (Turnitin) that picks up many instances of plagiarism, including from electronic sources, online encyclopaedias, etc.

Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence, and there are penalties for offenders. Procedures are set out in the University Calendar. There is a Moodle course on plagiarism called PlagiarWISe that you may want to take.

For further information, see the University's pages on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: https://warwick.ac.uk/services/aro/dar/quality/categories/examinations/assessmentstrat/plagiarism

8. Referencing

Acknowledging your sources means using a reference system. There are various ways of referring to sources, and different publishers use different 'house styles'. All referencing systems have the same objectives. They give credit where it is due by making it clear to the reader who is responsible for the ideas and information in the piece of writing; they allow a reader to check the evidence on which the argument is based; and they facilitate the circulation of knowledge in the scholarly community. (As you will find out for yourself, following up the source of an idea presented in a footnote or reference is one way of discovering further knowledge.)

Students of humanities are usually advised to use the style set out in the Modern Humanities Research Association guide known as ***MHRA Style Guide*** (this can be downloaded online:

http://www.mhra.org.uk/style). This guide, which includes a great deal of useful information on mechanics such as use of quotation marks, spelling, and punctuation, has two chapters (10 and 11) on the use of footnotes and references. The following is a simplified version of the MHRA guidelines, suitable for essay writing. Note that there are two main systems of referencing, the 'humanities' system and the 'author-date' system, which is especially used in the social sciences. Although both of these are acceptable, the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance strongly encourages the use of MHRA. Also note that there are possible variations of presentation within each system; you should choose the one that best suits you and stick with it. (The important point is to be consistent.)

Both systems make use of a **bibliography** at the end of the essay. This list is not meant to include all the material you may have consulted in preparing your essay, but only what you have actually quoted or referenced. The list should be ordered – **alphabetized** by author's surname and by title and ideally **separated** into Primary Sources and Secondary Sources.

a) 'Humanities' system of referencing: bibliography (see MHRA Guide, 11.6). Each list should observe the following guidelines (note that a bibliography is organized alphabetically by surname of the author or – in the case of edited volumes – the volume's title; some writers prefer for the bibliography to list an author's name before the name; again, the important thing is consistency):

i) books

Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Decameron*, introduction, comments and notes by Antonio Enzo Quaglio, 2nd ed, 2 vols (Milan [*not*: Milano]: Garzanti, 1980)

Carruthers, Mary, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Chadwick, H. Munro and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932–40; repr. 1986)

Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana, ed. by Vittore Branca with the collaboration of Armando Bladuino, Manlio Pastore Stocchi, and Marco Pecoraro, 2nd ed, 4 vols (Turin: UTET, 1999)

The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. by J. Herman Randall, Jr. and Paul Oskar Kristeller (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948)

Skinner, Quentin, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)

——, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

——, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) [note that Skinner's publications are ordered alphabetically by title]

[Name, title in italics or underlined, place(s) of publication (colon), publisher, date; use of full-stop optional at the end of the entry; dashes mean that the author is the same as the last-mentioned]

(ii) chapters in books

Branca, Vittore, 'Ermolao Barbaro e l'umanesimo veneziano', in *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Florence: L. Olschki, 1964), pp. 193–212

Brownlee, Kevin, 'Dante and the Classical Poets', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.100-119

Kraye, Jill, 'Moral Philosophy' in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, and Eckhard Kessler, with the assistance of Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 303–386

Richardson, Brian, 'Editing Dante's *Commedia*, 1472–1629', in *Dante Now*, ed. by Charles Cachey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 33–132

Scaglione, Aldo and Ugolino Betti, 'L'età di Aldo Manuzio', in *Dizionario storico della letteratura italiana*, edited by Luca Bianchi, Nino Pertile, Natalino Sapegno, 3rd ed, 4 vols (Turin: UTET, 1988) IV, 133–156

[Name of author, title of book chapter within single inverted commas, followed by 'in', title of book in italics or underlined, 'ed. by' + name(s) of editor(s), place(s) of publication (colon), publisher, date and page numbers preceded by 'pp.'. Variations possible as in [i] above.]

(iii) articles in journals (note: no 'pp.')

Garin, Eugenio, 'Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV', *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia fiorentina di scienze morali 'La Colombaria'*, n.s., 16.2 (1947–50), 55–104

Grafton, Anthony, 'Rethinking the Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53.1 (1987), 333–48

McNair, Philip, 'The Bed of Venus: Key to Poliziano's Stanze', *Italian Studies*, 25 (1970), 40-48

[Name of author, title of article in single inverted commas, title of journal in italics or underlined, volume number, year of publication in brackets, page numbers without 'pp.' Variations possible as in [i] above]

***Note**
You will have noticed that you use capital letters for the key words (everything except articles, conjunctions, and short prepositions) in the titles of books and articles in English. In Italian, however, you use a capital letter only for the first word of the title (and for any proper names within it). An example from above is: *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana.*
Some other conventions from France, Italy, or other countries contradict English ones – e.g., in Italian texts, titles of articles in books or journals are italicized. **You should use the English conventions when writing in English**.
Italian (or German, or French …) place-names for publishers should be given in the English form ('Milan', not 'Milano'; 'Padua', not 'Padova'; 'Florence', not 'Firenze'; 'Munich', not 'München', etc.), both in the text and in the references.

(iv) encyclopedia entries. Generally speaking, non-specialized encyclopedias such as *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Wikipedia*, etc. should not be used in academic essays. There are, however, some helpful specialized works that may well be relevant. These will usually have signed articles, so you would list entries according to the author:

Donnelly, John P., '*Ratio Studiorum*', in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, gen. ed. Paul F. Grendler, 6 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1999), VI, 224

Sbriziolo, Lia, 'Ballino, Giulio', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–), V, 101–02

(v) internet references. Increasingly, materials are published as eBooks, or students may find articles on online databases such as JSTOR. When an electronic publication exactly replicates the published paper version (as is the case with JSTOR), it is not necessary to indicate the online version. However, it is important to do so when an item is *only* published online (or in another non-print format). The MHRA Style Guide gives indications as to how non-print materials should be referenced (11.2.11 to 11.2.18). Do bear in mind that, **except for in very special circumstances, non-refereed websites should not be used in assessed essays, since they are not scholarly pieces of work**. Yet there can be very good and dependable online resources, such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ask your module tutor if you are in any doubt.

b) 'Humanities' system of referencing: in-text references. If your essay is analysing or quoting extensively from one or a few primary texts, you may choose to indicate the relevant sections or pages by in-text references after having first given the full reference to the text in question in a footnote; e.g., indicate your source in brackets, usually at the end of the relevant sentence or paragraph or quotation: (*Decameron*, III, 10, p. 208), (*As You Like It*, III.4).

Footnotes (at the bottom of the page) are by far preferable to **endnotes**.

Note that the format for footnotes and bibliography is not identical: in footnotes it is standard to indicate the specific page(s) on which the information referred to may be found, and to close with a full stop. Furthermore, once you have given a full reference in a footnote, later references may be abbreviated (see MHRA Guide, 11.3):

Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 72. [note that footnotes end with a full stop; bibliography items do not, in the British system]

[subsequent reference, with short title optional, but necessary if you are citing more than one work by the author in question:] Carruthers, p. 33.

[cf. Bibliography: Carruthers, Mary, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)]

Vittore Branca, 'Ermolao Barbaro e l'umanesimo veneziano', in *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Florence: L. Olschki, 1964), p. 194, note 3.

[subsequent reference] Branca, p. 201.

[cf. Bibliography: Branca, Vittore, 'Ermolao Barbaro e l'umanesimo veneziano', in *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano*, edited by Vittore Branca (Florence: L. Olschki, 1964), pp. 193–205]

Anthony Grafton, 'Rethinking the Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53.1 (1987), 335–36.

[subsequent reference] Grafton, p. 338.

[cf. Bibliography: Grafton, Anthony, 'Rethinking the Renaissance', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53.1 (1987), 330–349]

If one reference is **exactly the same** (including page number) to the one immediately above, you may also replace it with *Ibid.* (short for the Latin *ibidem*, meaning 'in the same place'). But this is a dangerous practice—if you later interpolate a footnote before the *Ibid*. one, your *Ibid*. footnote will now refer to a different work.

c) The second system of referencing is called citation by the **author-date system** (sometimes referred to as the Harvard system) and is used by science and social science students. Some humanities subjects also use it. For further details on this, see section 11.4 of the MHRA Style Guide.

9. Quotations (see MHRA Guide, ch. 9)

When including quotations in your essay, the conventions below should be observed.

i) Short quotations (i.e. up to forty words) should be enclosed in single quotation marks and incorporated in the text of the essay. Quotation or speech within the quotation should be put into double inverted commas to differentiate it from the quotation itself. The full stop of the sentence comes after the quotation. A quotation will usually be followed by the short reference. The full stop should come after the closing parenthesis:

e.g. Dante highlights the ironical pathos 'that lovers who failed to divide in life will never be parted in death' (Carruthers, p. 188).

ii) Long quotations (i.e. more than forty words) should be separated by a line of space from the body of the essay both at the beginning and the end of the quotation. You may indent, if you like and/or use single spacing. You do not use inverted commas when setting out long quotations in this way, and the full stop goes at the end of the quotation, before the parenthesized reference.

It is important to ensure that the quotation 'follows on', that is, that it fits the syntax of your sentence.

Whether you are quoting a text in the original or in translation, quote accurately! Quotation from medieval and Renaissance texts will require special attention as the language will contain forms that are not used today. Points may be deducted for lack of accuracy in quotations, especially when this happens repeatedly, so always **double-check your quotations**. Imprecise quotations give the impression that you care little for the work from which you are quoting and that your analysis may also be untrustworthy.

Do not just insert quotations without introducing them or commenting on them.

10. References to Works of Art

If your essay discusses works of art, as is usually the case with topics concerning art history, **images of those artworks, with captions, must be provided**; a good place to append them is at the end of your text, but you may also insert them elsewhere (e.g., at the beginning of the section or paragraph where those artworks are discussed). If you analyse minute details of those artworks, do include pictures of these, too.
References to artworks should follow **MHRA Guide 11.2.18** and must include (in this order): name of the artist (if known), title of the artwork in italics, its date, medium of composition, dimensions (optional), and its physical location.

Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, *c.* 1485, tempera on canvas, 172.5 x 278.5 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, 1545-1554, bronze, height 519 cm, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence.

Albrecht Dürer, *Knight, Death and the Devil*, 1513, engraving, 25 x 19.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Searchable databases and image banks particularly useful for Renaissance art history are:

- ArtStor: from the Library's home page, click on 'Databases', then (under 'Arts and Humanities) on 'History of Art'
- Web Gallery of Art: https://www.wga.hu/index.html.

Do remember that the biggest museums in the world are often rich in Renaissance artefacts and have their own searchable collection databases, often providing valuable information, available on their websites. If any of your chosen artefacts is kept in there, the museum website is a good place for you to start your research. Most notable for their online resources are the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Gallery, London; Louvre, Paris; Museo del Prado, Madrid; the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

11. Presentation

A well-presented essay conveys the impression that you take pride in your work, and suggests that the whole task of producing the essay has been taken seriously. Sometimes essays that get turned in would work well as drafts, but they are very obviously unfinished pieces of work: they have not been double-checked for spelling, grammar, logical flow, clear sign-posting, mechanics, etc. Make sure that you leave yourself enough time to prepare. Half the battle is to figure out what you want to say, which is where a draft is useful. Once you have done that, you can rewrite the piece keeping in mind where it should be going. An effective trick is to read the essay to yourself aloud – you will catch more mistakes than if you were to just re-read it silently.

Students submit their essays by the deadline on Tabula.

12. Style

Style – your style – is an expression of yourself. Just as choosing clothes is a personal choice, so the presentation of yourself in writing involves personal decisions. Your styles of writing will develop with you, as you work on them. In thinking about how to write your essay, however, you may find it helpful to bear the following in mind.

First of all, remember that there are various ways of writing. These tend to be influenced by the purpose of your text and in particular who is to read it. The reader may be a real person whom you know well (as, for instance, when you write a letter to a friend), or a body of real people whom you are generally familiar with (such as fellow students if you are writing a review for a student magazine), or a hypothetical group (say, children and 'born-again' children if you were writing the next Harry Potter story). When writing an academic essay, you are in practice writing for one person you know reasonably well – your tutor – and for the second marker for that module, and possibly the external examiner. You should assume that you are writing for an informed academic readership. And you are writing an analytical account. This means that

- the style will need to be quite formal;
- note that formality does not equate with being stilted or pompous; as much as possible, make sure that your English is idiomatic without being familiar or colloquial; brief Anglo-Saxon words are often preferable to long latinate equivalents;
- in school you may have been taught that you should never use the first-person pronoun; this is not necessarily the case, and in fact can significantly help the flow of sentences as well as to clarify what *you* are bringing to the table ('In this essay, I will argue that Machiavelli's political theory is not entirely new, as some scholars believe');
- you should avoid abbreviations and contractions (such as *isn't* or *won't*);
- you should aim to be lively and engaging without appearing casual;
- your syntax should be varied and interesting, but not convoluted or difficult;
- above all, be clear: work out your ideas and communicate them as clearly as you can.

As with many other of the skills involved in essay-writing and academic work in general, the skill of effective written presentation is one that will be invaluable to you in your life and work beyond university.

13. Vocabulary

Style can be enhanced by a wide vocabulary. One of the ways to increase your range is to read and listen attentively. Notice words and phrases that appeal to you, and note them down as you read. Where specific terminology is required, use it. As you write, try not to repeat words unnecessarily as this can give the impression of a limp, unadventurous style. Dictionaries and a thesaurus can help here but always try to think of something for yourself first and then use the thesaurus to check that you are right.

14. Grammar, punctuation and spelling

i) In the past few years, written English has become less formal than it used to be. Split infinitives (i.e. 'to boldly go', rather than 'to go boldly' or 'boldly to go') are now accepted in a number of instances, as are some colloquial phrases. Nevertheless, in a university essay it is probably best to be cautious and show that you can control formal English without being stilted or pompous. The following will help you to avoid some common mistakes:

- Make sure that your sentences make sense in isolation, and that they contain a finite verb (a verb limited by person or number), for example:

La figlia di Iorio was first performed in Milan at the Teatro Lirico in March of 1904. Directed by Virgilio Talli, Ruggero Ruggeri taking the major role of Aligi.
Corrected version:

La figlia di Iorio was first performed in Milan at the Teatro Lirico in March of 1904. It was directed by Virgilio Talli, and Ruggero Ruggeri took the major role of Aligi.

- Make sure also that the verb agrees in number with its subject:

The author's interest in contemporary politics, and particularly in the marginalization of women in the political arena, come increasingly to the fore in later novels.

The singular noun, 'interest', is the subject of the verb. Corrected version:
The author's interest in contemporary politics, and particularly in the marginalization of women in the political arena, comes increasingly to the fore in later novels.

Also:
None of the brothers seem to seek independence from the mother.

'None' is an abbreviation of 'Not one', so is singular. Correct version:
None of the brothers seems to seek independence from the mother.

- Remember that the apostrophe needs special attention, since its position can alter meaning dramatically. Mainly it is used to denote possession.

If you have difficulty determining where to place an apostrophe to indicate possession, turn the phrase around using 'of', and place the apostrophe at the end of the resulting phrase,

e.g. Morantes (?) novels: the novels of Morante > Morante's novels
the hermetic poets works (?): the works of the hermetic poets > the hermetic poets' works

In the above examples, misplacement of the apostrophe would change the meaning of the phrases:
'Morantes' novels' would be 'the novels of an author named Morantes'
'the hermetic poet's works' would be the works of one poet, not of a group

The apostrophe 's' is not used when 'it' is used possessively.

e.g. The dog was large and fierce; its name was Hercules.

When 'it's' is used, it is an abbreviation for 'it is' and the apostrophe indicates that a letter has been omitted (compare also 'don't' for 'do not' etc.).

- The other use of the apostrophe – to indicate omission – is used for abbreviated forms, and, since they are colloquial, they are generally not appropriate for use in a formal piece of writing. In your essays, use *do not* rather than *don't*, *is not* rather than *isn't*, etc.
- **Gender and inclusiveness**.[1] The English language has historically used 'man' and 'his' as universal referents, not only in connection with males ('God made man in His own image. Male and female created He them'). It is still fine to do so, in expressions including 'as a reader, one needs to have his own opinion on this matter'. However, feminist readers and writers have increasingly objected to this usage, which they feel excludes the female gender. Various solutions (none of them quite satisfactory) have been proposed, ranging from the most extreme one of having the female pronoun stand in place of both male and female ('The firefighter drove

[1] This is currently one of the most controversial topics in writing, and conventions may change rapidly. A great deal in this paragraph is subjective. Whatever you settle on, be consistent!

her lorry to the station') to the more moderate—but rather confusing—one of interchanging 'he' and 'she', 'him' and 'her', etc. ('The reader is faced with a challenge at this point: she must imagine for herself the sequence of events which has occurred during the lapse in the narrative. [Then later in the essay:] It is questionable whether the author of an 'open' text allows his [referring to the author] reader genuine freedom of interpretation, or whether her [referring to the reader] responses are to some extent determined.) A more cumbersome solution is to use both masculine and feminine pronouns each time the referent is not determined ('The reader is faced with a challenge at this point: s/he must imagine for her-/himself the sequence of events which has occurred during the lapse in the narrative. [Then later in the essay:] It is questionable whether the author of an 'open' text allows his/her reader genuine freedom of interpretation, or whether the latter's responses are to some extent determined. ['the latter' makes clear that the reader is the subject of this clause, since 'his/her' may be ambiguous in this instance, potentially referring to author or reader.]). One elegant way of resolving these sticky passages is to change everything to the plural if one really objects to using the masculine pronoun ('Readers are faced with a challenge at this point: they must imagine for themselves the sequence of events ... It is questionable whether authors of 'open' texts allow their readers genuine freedom of interpretation, or whether the readers' responses are to some extent determined.) Feminists may also object to the universal use of words such as 'man', 'men', 'mankind', preferring in their stead 'human beings', 'people', or 'humanity'. You should make your own decision on the matter. Highly journalistic, colloquial, and grammatically incorrect (but increasingly used) is the solution to use 'their' with reference to a singular: 'The reader has to make up their own mind.'

- **Religion**. Out of reverence to the deity, or because of their religious background, some authors or students feel uncomfortable writing out 'God' in their essays; they may write it as 'g-d', which is perfectly acceptable. Some like to capitalize pronouns referring to the deity ('God's creation shows His power') whereas others leave them in lower-case. Either usage is correct.

ii) Pay close attention to **punctuation**. Generally speaking, students tend to under-punctuate rather than the opposite, so when writing and re-reading your essay, look to add rather than to remove punctuation. As a rough guide, any point at which you would pause when reading a sentence aloud should be marked by a punctuation mark: a comma for a short break, a semi-colon to separate items in a list or to make a sharper break, a colon to elaborate or to introduce further related comment, a full stop to end one idea or example and introduce a further one. Paragraph breaks provide for starker separation of different points or components of your argument, but ensure that the connection between one paragraph and the next is clear to your reader.

Double quotation marks should only be used for speech or quotation within a quotation,
e.g. The story opens with a seasonal *vignette*: 'He slid down the chimney and said, "Merry Christmas!"'.
Use **single** quotation marks a) to quote from texts or b) to cite lesser-known or very specific theories, movements, genres, especially if their name is not in English - e.g. 'cinema d'auteur'. In the case of (b), use quotation marks sparingly, and an alternative is, as with 'vignette' in the example above, to italicize the word.
Never use quotation marks (single or double) simply to highlight a word or concept.
Never use quotation marks (single or double) when writing the title of a book, film, journal, etc. (use italics instead).

Minimize your use of exclamation marks. Since exclamations are a feature of spoken rather than of written language, they should, strictly speaking, appear in your essays only within quoted speech.

Do not use an exclamation mark to signal something amusing or ironic: careful use of syntax and/or vocabulary can express this quite adequately.

iii) There are some rules of thumb which can help in **spelling**. Here are some of them.

- When ‘full’ is added to a word, you change ‘full’ to ful’, e.g. helpful, cheerful.
- When a word ends in a consonant followed by ‘y’, you change the ‘y’ to an ‘i’ before adding ‘ed’, e.g. tidy, tidied.
- When a word ends in ‘-ce’ or ‘-ge’, you keep the ‘e’ when adding ‘-ous or ‘-able’, e.g. peace, peaceable; courage, courageous.
- When ‘ie’ or ‘ei’ sound like ‘ee’, as in keep, then ‘i’ comes before ‘e’ except after ‘c’, e.g. field, niece, but receive and ceiling.
- When a word ends in a vowel followed by the letter ‘l’, you double the ‘l’ before adding ‘-ed’ or ‘-er’ or ‘-ing’, e.g. travel, travelled, traveller, travelling
- Exception: parallel, paralleled.
- The final consonant of monosyllabic words where the final consonant is preceded by a vowel is also doubled before ‘-ed’, ‘-er’ ‘-ing’, e.g. stop, stopped, stopper, stopping;
- rob, robber, robbing; run, running; hot, hotter.
- But there is no doubling when there are two vowels or another consonant before the final consonant, e.g. feel, feeling; halt, halting.
- '-ise' and 'ize': You may use either, but MHRA guidelines prefer the '-ize' version. Whichever you choose, be consistent.

Note, if using '-ize', that there are some verbs which always end in '-ise'. The MHRA *Style Guide* gives a list of these, but commonly-used examples are:

advertise	compromise	improvise	surmise
advise	devise	revise	surprise
comprise	enterprise	supervise	also: analyse

When in doubt about a word, look it up in a reliable dictionary (the best one is the *Oxford English Dictionary*, available online via the Library) and then learn it. Note that misspelling can sometimes change the meaning of a word:
e.g. ‘discreet’ means judicious, circumspect; ‘discrete’ means separate, distinct.

Use the ‘spell check’ on your word processor, but remember that it will not highlight words that are correct in themselves but are not correct in context.
e.g. She bought a pear [pair] of socks and stuffed them in her bat [bag].
Also bear in mind that the ‘spell check’ offers some crazy solutions of its own (e.g. the 'Word' ‘spell check’ does not accept the word ‘Italianist’ and offers ‘Stalinist’ in its stead).

Remember that some words in foreign languages require accents, so make sure you put them in before handing in the essay. Find out how to use accents in your word-processing software.

Note: If you are dyslexic, or think you might be, make sure you tell your tutor. There are special considerations to keep in mind for dyslexic students.

15. Correcting and checking your essay

It is a good idea to read your essay through (aloud) a number of times before submitting it. The following are points to look out for:

- Check that references and quotations are accurate; check that quotations in foreign languages have the correct accents and other relevant signs. Check that all book titles are italicized.
- Check that the punctuation you have used is adequate: if you need to read a sentence twice in order to grasp its meaning, then add punctuation or re-phrase the sentence (possibly making it two or more sentences)
- Cut out unnecessary repetitions, excess adjectives, and empty phrases. A part of the process of clarifying your own thinking in writing is to phrase one concept in a number of different ways. On re-reading your essay, you may well find that one such phrase conveys the concept adequately, and the others merely burden the essay.
- Check that you have kept to the word limit for the essay. There is a little flexibility but on the whole the word length is advice that is meant to be followed. If your essay exceeds the limit, comb through it for sentences or examples that only bolster your argument, rather than genuinely building it.
- Make sure that you have been clear. It is very easy when you have been working on a topic for some time to assume that the reader is on your wave length, or that, because the tutor who will read your essay 'knows all of this', there is no point in writing out the argument in full. Ensure that all the steps in your argument are exposed.

It is, therefore, **very important to leave enough time to read through your work more than once, preferably in hard copy**. Ideally, leave the finished essay for a day or two and come back to it with fresh eyes. Bear in mind when planning your time that the last things – checking the quotations, references and spelling – always take longer than you expect.

16. Assessment Criteria

Undergraduate marking conventions for the CSR are outlined on the module website.

17. Return of essays

Essays will be returned to students via Tabula with comments from two markers, who will see only your ID number connected to the essay. You will then be offered the opportunity to discuss your essay in person with your tutor. Take this opportunity: as indicated in the introduction, expressing your ideas in writing is a skill that you will develop gradually over the years of your university study, and this development will be optimized by listening to and digesting an experienced reader's feedback. Also, take the time to re-read the essay in the light of the markers' comments, and note your strengths and weaknesses, any spelling or grammatical errors you frequently make, etc.

18. Suggested further reading

MHRA, *Style Guide* (available online)
William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (long-standing, brief guide especially used by American students)
Fowler's Modern English Usage (a classic on the effective use of the English language)
Style guide in the Department of Classics and Ancient History and for other departments.