For this week’s task I would like you to:

1) focus on the organization of the essay. What is the thesis? What are the main ideas of the body? What are the supporting ideas/evidence in the body? How is the essay ordered? I want you to work backwards in analyzing this essay and make an ESSAY OUTLINE based on the sample essay “The Efficacy of Assignment Essays in Education”. You can use point-form just to sketch the basic organization of the essay,

2) use this essay to review the skills we have studied thus far in the course to prepare for the coming midterm.

Organization/Essay Outlines:

After brainstorming/ researching a topic and gathering as much good information as possible, a good writer will then think more clearly about how to organize an essay. That, of course, starts with a thesis (preferably a strong one, but theses can change throughout the writing process), and is followed by evidence that is arranged so the thesis is well supported. A careful writer will think about what his/her best evidence is and consider it, first, in categories that logically connect information/ideas, and second, in generalizations that best express those categories, in a sense creating a hierarchy. Sometimes it may make sense to order an essay chronologically (in time order). But sometimes there is no real chronology, if this is the case it may be best to consider the strength of your evidence when ordering the body. For example, if you have three main points, consider the strength of each relative to the others: 1, 2, 3. One common way to order essays when the connections are more abstract is to put the second strongest point as your first body section, the third and weakest point (it should not be ‘weak’ because no points in your essay should be weak, but weaker than the other two) as the second body section, and then finish with your strongest point. So, the body points arranged by strength are 2, 3, 1. This is common because most people are impressed by beginnings and remember endings. All essays are different entities though, and the key thing is to remember that **the body must be organized in a way that best supports your thesis.**

Then, it is important to create an essay outline. An essay outline is a graphic organizer that should fit on one page and sketch out the basic structure and logic of an essay. It allows the writer to clearly see:

1) The logic of the thesis and main supporting points: Do the ideas connect clearly? Does the language clearly express your ideas? Is it appropriate language?

2) The depth of the evidence: Do you have enough information? Is it the best/ most relevant information?

3) Any gaps or overlaps in information: Are there gaps in your ideas that need to be filled so that the reader can fully understand your argument? Are there overlaps? Overlaps are when you are using basically the same point or points that are too similar. Sometimes a writer may have fooled him/herself just by changing the language somewhat to express the same point twice.

By creating an essay outline, a writer can better and more easily understand the essay; it creates a kind of road map that the writer can use first to judge the brainstorming he/ she has done, and then to follow through the drafting stage.

The following is an example of a simple relatively informal essay outline. Read the sample essay below and make an outline based on it. Use point form.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis: |  |
| Main Point 1 | Main Idea: |
| Supporting ideas:  a)  b)  c) |
| Main Point 2 | Main Idea: |
| Supporting ideas:  a)  b)  c) |
| Main Point 3 | Main Idea: |
| Supporting ideas:  a)  b)  c) |

*The following is an example of a short five-paragraph academic essay based on the question: “Discuss why assignment essays are common assessment tasks in undergraduate tertiary coursework, and evaluate the effectiveness of assignments as an avenue for learning.” (Word limit 500 words – 10% leeway) Please note that the APA referencing style is used in this sample essay.*

The Efficacy of Assignment Essays in Education

Assignment essays are developed from set questions that give students a period of time to research a topic and produce their answer with references to their sources of information. While there are some disadvantages with using assignment essays as an assessment tool, there are sound educational purposes underpinning this practice. This essay examines the reasons why assignment essays are beneficial for student learning and considers some of the problems with this method of assessment.

Assignment essay tasks are set to assist students to develop mastery of their study subject. Firstly, assignment tasks enhance understandings about subject matter. Yang and Baker (2005) reason that “to master your learning materials and extend your understandings, you need to write about the meanings you gain from your research” (p. 1). Secondly, research (Jinx, 2004; Zapper, 2006) clearly demonstrates that students learn the writing conventions of a subject area while they are researching, reading and writing in their discipline. This activity helps them to “crack the code” of the discipline (Bloggs, 2003, p. 44). Thus, students are learning subject matter and how to write in that disciplinary area by researching and writing assignment essays.

Using assignment essays for assessment supports student learning better than the traditional examination system. It is considered that course-work assignment essays can lessen the extreme stress experienced by some students over ‘sudden-death’ end of semester examinations:

If we insist that all students write about everything they have learned in their study courses at the same time and in the same place (e.g. in examinations), we are not giving all of our students equal opportunities. Some students are not daunted by the exam experience while others suffer ‘exam nerves’ and perform at the lowest level of their capabilities. (Wonderland University, 2006, p. 4)

Additionally, Jones et al. (2004, pp. 36-37) propose that assignment essays can be used to assess student learning mid-course and so provide them with helpful feedback before they are subjected to the exam experience. Exams only provide students with a mark rather than specific feedback on their progress. Therefore, setting assignment essays for a substantial part of student assessment is a much fairer approach than one-off examination testing.

As an assessment tool, assignment essays have some disadvantages for lecturers and students. It has been found that assignment essays consume a great deal of staff time and money to mark and student time to prepare (Sankey & Liger, 2005, p. 192). A consequence of these problems is that feedback to students is frequently delayed, and this is much less useful to students than rapid feedback (p. 294). It is partly because of these disadvantages of time and expense that other assessments such as multiple-choice tests and short answer questions have an enduring place in the tertiary learning environment.

To conclude, it seems that assignment essays continue to have a prominent role in tertiary education as an assessment tool. This is mainly because they are very effective in developing knowledge and writing skills for subject areas. Also, assignment essays can be less stressful than examinations as they allow students to show their understanding of content in less pressured circumstances. On the other hand, the time consuming nature of writing and marking essays points to some disadvantages that also need to be considered. The weight of evidence, however, supports the writing of assignment essays for student assessment because this approach has such positive and proven effects for improved student learning.

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