WRITING THE ESSAY

1 BEFORE YOU START: (A) MAKE SURE YOU HAVE DONE THE ANALYSIS AND (B) THINK ABOUT YOUR STORY

You can start writing the essay before you complete your analysis, but it makes sense to have most of your analysis done before you start writing. The essay has to tell a story, the story of your analysis and your findings, therefore, it will be hard to write the essay when you still have not completed your analysis.

Data analysis is being described as sense making. You want to tell a story. This essay is not a step by step description of what you did. It is instead an argument that you are developing based in your results. You need to start by emphasising why this matters and why you selected these variables, describe the data source so that we are persuaded the conclusions are grounded in solid data, present your results, and then put them in the context of the broader literature. It should all read as a coherent piece. Pay attention to the how you are telling the story (grammar, formatting of your tables and graphics, etc.) for this can make the difference between a good mark and an excellent mark. Stephen Few "Show Me the Numbers" is considered the "bible" of chart and table construction. It is worth every penny. Have a look at this document if you need further guidance.

2 PROVIDE A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

This does not have to be long. You can think of it as a mini-literature review in which you provide the basis for your analysis. This is where you briefly explain why the topic is important. More critically, here is where you justify the variables you are using. You need to consult the existing literature and make a case for the variables that you have selected. If everybody in the field thinks that the variables you have selected DO NOT explain variation in your dependent variable, you will have a harder job selling your selection. On the other hand, if there is strong consensus that the variables are associated with the dependent variable you have chosen and this is something that has been study to death, why bother to study them again? You need to persuade the reader that what you are doing is worth doing. What is the new angle? Why is it important to look at this? You are not expected to discover the Higgs boson, but you need to demonstrate some originality and critical thought in order to be recognised as a first class student. A careful selection of variables (which is helped by exploring the subject area literature) will help to achieve this. When thinking of your literature review quality matters more than quantity, at the very least you should to consult 8-10 studies or reviews of the topic. It may be a good idea to try to identify good up to date review articles on the particular topic you are exploring. It is fine to use USA literature. It will be hard not to, given its volume and quality. But don't forget either you are in the UK.

3 PROVIDE A VERY BASIC DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY (THE PARTICULAR SURVEY YOU HAVE SELECTED)

No more than 2/3 of a page. You need to make sure that you include the more important methodological properties of the survey (i.e., sampling design, response rate, sample size, sample exclusions) and discuss how they may affect your results (you may need to refresh some of the stuff you learnt in previous research methods course units).

4 DESCRIBE THE VARIABLES YOU ARE USING

You will need to think and discuss (to the degree that it may be appropriate) whether the questions that you are using are good measures of the underlying concepts that you are exploring. Academics agonise about the measurement of theoretical concept for a reason and each of the topic areas we allow you to choose there is significant debate about best

measurement. You need to demonstrate you are aware of this area of the literature and that you are taking it on board when choosing your measures. Avoid referring to your variables by their name in their dataset; instead describe what the question wording was (as much as it may be necessary). Avoid referring to them as X1 and X2 too! In this section you need to demonstrate that you took data munging seriously and that you know how to use appropriate descriptive summaries and visualisations for the variables at hand. If any variable presents any issues that raises complexities or limitations for the analysis you need to raise it here.

5 DESCRIBE THE BASIC BIVARIATE ANALYSIS AND THE RESULTS

This semester we discussed how to assess relationships between two variables visually and through statistical tests. In the document about how to do the analysis you are given hints as to what you need to do in this regard. In this section you need to describe your analysis and produce any visualisations you may think appropriate. Try to do this in a parsimonious way. There's not need to provide charts and table that gave you the exact same information. It is important that you discuss tests of significance and tests of strength of association. It is important that you use the right tests for the scenario at hand. It is important you not only print the tests but that you also interpret the results that you are reproducing here. Simply cutting and pasting the numerical results from the output you get in R is bad practice. Make sure you use your text editor to produce professional looking tables.

6 DESCRIBE THE MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS AND THE RESULTS

You need to do a regression model. Here you will present the results and produce effect plots when appropriate. You need to clearly identify the type of model you use and interpret your results. Make sure you discuss the general measures of fit relevant to the type of model you use. You may also want to mention the caveats we discussed about regression analysis. In this section, you will get brownie points if there is evidence that you have done the required and recommended reading on regression (and you clearly get it). Keep in mind that the rubric for a first class essay expect students to have read more than what it is part of the required (data analysis) reading and a firm conceptual foundation (which can be acquired by exploring some of the recommended materials we provide you with).

7 END UP WITH A DISCUSSION OF YOUR SET OF FINDINGS

By now the reader should know what your findings are. Here you provide a summary of what the key findings are and you discuss their theoretical/policy implications. Although the heart of this essay (and what we will be primarily evaluating) is the analysis, its description and interpretation; a first-class essay will also be able to justify and discuss the results on the basis of the broader criminological literature. Professional academics often recommend starting writing the discussion and then write the essay backwards. The discussion is the punch line. It matters and needs to address the "so what" question (why any of this matters?).

8 ADD YOUR REFERENCES

Make sure that you have used the Harvard referencing system and that you have used it in a consistent manner.