

*Handbook for Essay Writing*

*ENGL110061*

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## *Preface*

This handbook is for students of English Essay Composition at Fudan University. The goal of this handbook is to provide a brief and accessible reference to accompany the course. Many textbooks are extremely long that makes it hard to refer to or to get the main points from. This handbook is intended to cover the main points briefly and succinctly as well as being easy to refer back to later.

The goal of this course is to teach students to write both short and long essays. The course emphasises ideas in argument as much as style. Original critical thinking is an essential skill in this course and as such it is intended for advanced English language speakers.

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## **1. Essay as a Form of Writing.**

It is said that Michel de Montaigne invented the essay in his 1580 book *Essais*. This French word literally means “tests”. The idea of an essay is to explore, or test, ideas. Unlike academic papers which seek to prove a hypothesis an essay seeks to address values or policies or what we can expect in the future. All these things should be based on the facts that we have, but the goal is not to establish facts through science, but rather to argue what to do about facts now that we have them.

A classic example is climate change. Thanks to decades of science we know that emissions cause climate change. Now that we have these facts, what should be done about it? In society there are many things to consider as well as the environment. The economy, people’s freedom, people’s welfare and more all matter in relation to policies we might consider in this issue. A good essay might propose the extent to which we should go in order to reduce emissions, but it would not seek to prove that emissions are responsible for the very problem we face.

Students will often worry that when they make their arguments in an essay that they will be “wrong”. However, the goal of an essay is not to be right. Of course, it is good if you do turn out to be right but the best thing you can hope for is to be persuasive. None of us can accurately predict the future and a policy that worked in one country may fail completely in another. The goal of an essay is not to set policy but to contribute to the debate. An essay is not the final word on a subject. Essays are read by others and critiqued. Essays have counter-essays written against them and those essays have counter-essays written against them and so on and so forth. As Jonathan Rauch wrote “expose all to withering public criticism” and what survives at the end of the day is the base of our knowledge.

In terms of style, in literature and poetry, the goal of writing may be beauty and ambiguity as well as meaning. Essays that are beautiful are nice, but when that beauty gets in the way of understanding, it is a problem. Essays should convey information as clearly as possible. Abstract and awkward wording is a barrier to this, so are long sentences and unnecessary words. This class does not seek to teach students to write wordy or linguistically impressive works but clear, concise, and highly understandable essays. I have tried to follow these principles of writing in this guide.

## **2. Basic Essay Design**

The first essay that you write will be a standard, **5-paragraph essay**. Essays like this are common in standardized tests. This essay will be written out of class and so the burden for research and evidence is higher than it would be in a test. Essays that we read for class do not follow this format and in the real world this format is restrictive and not common. However, the 5-paragraph essay is extremely useful for practicing core essay writing skills in a brief format. It is a bridge to writing the second, longer essay that incorporates these skills but also takes them further with new writing devices. The final exam will also use this format, but in a time-limited setting. Students are encouraged to write on a policy topic for this essay.

### **2.1 Stages of Writing**

Now that we have covered essay styles and structures, we will go over the writing process. Writing an essay is a multi-step process. You simply cannot dive right into writing and expect to get an A. For the procrastinators: No, you cannot get everything done the night before your essay is due. There is a reason why you are given weeks to complete an essay assignment. It takes time to think, plan, and write your essay.

There are 7 stages of writing. If you follow these stages carefully, you will more likely do well on your essay.

#### *1. Brainstorm*

Brainstorming is when you are thinking about your topic, thesis statement (main argument), and audience. While brainstorming, you will want to ask yourself “What do I want to write about? Is it argumentative? Is it overdone? What points do I have that will support my thesis statement? Will my reader be interested in reading it?” More information on brainstorming topics can be found in **3.2**.

#### *2. Research*

Once you have decided what your thesis statement is, you will need to research evidence to support your points. Researching also allows you to see how viable your main argument will be. If you do not see enough materials, you may need to reconsider your thesis statement.

#### *3. Make an Outline*

An outline is a type of list that shows, in order, what you will write in your essay. An outline normally consists the thesis statement, list of supporting points, evidence that backs up the supporting points, concession & rebuttal, and conclusion (restatement of thesis statement). When you write the actual essay, you will fill in the rest of the details. An outline is a great way to get your essay structure in order and you will end up spending less time on figuring out what to write when you actually get to writing your essay. More information on outlines can be found in **2.9**.

#### *4. Write the Essay*

With your outline done, you can begin writing your essay. As you write your essay, remember to follow your outline as it will guide you.

#### *5. Review the Essay*

When you are done writing your essay, you will need to review it. There are a few things you need to do as you review your essay:

- Check that your essay follows the instructions given by your instructor
- Check for plagiarism and citations
- Check that the supporting points truly support your thesis statement
- Check that your evidence is legitimate
- Check that your concession is a true concession against your thesis statement
- Check that your conclusion summarizes all the main points made in the essay
- Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation

If you are doubting your own ability to review your own essay, you can always ask someone to look over it for you. This is known as *peer editing*. Peer editing is when someone else, usually a classmate or a friend, reviews your essay. Peer editing is a great way to get a different person to review your essay. Oftentimes, another person will be able to pick up mistakes that you may have missed.

#### *6. Make Revisions*

Once mistakes are noted, you can then correct them.

#### *7. Review the Essay Again*

In the last stage, you will need to check your essay one more time. There may be something that could be revised again. If you are indeed happy with your work after checking it for the second time, then you are done!

Writing is a long process that consists of many steps before you can have a fully written essay. If you are given 2 weeks to complete your essay, use those 2 weeks! Writing your essay at the last minute will cause you to not get the score you want!

## **2.2 Topic Selection**

Choosing a topic can be daunting. Many students will simply pick ‘hot topics’ from the internet and argue on one side or another of these. However, essays that stand out will usually get higher marks, assuming that they are also well-written and well-argued. To stand out means being original. This does not simply make the essay engaging to read it also demonstrates research and thinking.

There are a huge number of topics that it is possible to write on. One of the first ways to narrow down topics is to consider significance, that is to say, a topic should matter. Significance does not only mean how severely a topic affects us (it does not always have to be a matter of life and death) but also the amount of people it affects. Therefore, it is helpful to think ahead to the conclusion before you even start writing. What could you say in your conclusion that would make the reader think that this issue is urgent? If you are planning to argue that we should not give negative reviews to food delivery workers then what grand appeal to a better future can you really make in your conclusion?

Your main idea can be broadly defined in three categories – policy, value, or fact. Policy means you are arguing for what should be done. Economic policy, like taxes and subsidies; laws, like self-defence or classroom regulations on mobile phones in the classroom are all examples of policy topics. Usually, a policy main idea will use the word “should”, but this is not always the case. “People should not get married in their teens” is value, rather than policy.

A values main idea means that you are arguing over how we should react to something. Values often precede policy, if we can agree that something is bad then we may seek to change it. However, values can also address topics that are not affected by policy and are purely personal. One of the most famous historical essays, by Benjamin Franklin, was on what kind of mistress

to choose. So you may try to influence your readers personal opinions. Examples of values topics are, giving money to beggars; choosing a job; how we should think about historical figures and so on.

A fact main idea means that you are arguing about what is true. As previously mentioned, essays do not seek to establish scientific facts. When writing about fact as an essay it will usually be a prediction for the future or linking cause and effect. For example, if we know that obesity has increased in recent years, it may be sensible to predict that it will be more serious in the future. If obesity is rising then we could try to establish what is causing that rise, for example, are video games to blame?

It is recommended that for shorter essays students choose policy topics. These are normally much easier to deal with and argue concisely in just five paragraphs.

To get started it may be helpful to think of problems that exist, at any level, in the world. You may go local and think about what issues we need to address at school or in Shanghai, or wherever you come from. You may also think on a national level or an international level. Examples might include things like air pollution, traffic congestion, stress levels, rates of certain diseases and so on. You should, however, consider the perspective of your readers. Would your readers be interested to read about the monetary policy of the Brazilian central bank?

Remember the mnemonic “clear SODA”. A main idea must be clear before anything else. Once you have written your main idea check it several times. Ask people around you if they can understand your policy. It should be obvious without much explanation what it is that you are trying to argue. SODA stands for Significant, Original, Debatable and Attractive. A policy should be significant to the extent that it would have a meaningful effect on at least some people’s lives. Original means that it is not a cliché topic, this will be addressed in the next paragraph. The measure for debatable is – could reasonable people disagree? If nobody would disagree with your main idea then it fails this test. Likewise, if no reasonable person could be persuaded to agree with you then it is too extreme. Attractive means that people would want to read about your topic. Assume that your readers are smart but ignorant. If you have to do a lot of explaining into what the topic is even about then you will probably lose a lot of your readers from the beginning.

The economist Robin Hanson gives the metaphor of a policy tug-o-war, a contest where two teams try to pull a rope over the line in their own direction. If you imagine a common topic like tax policy there are already a lot of people on either side pulling (arguing) for increased or reduced taxes. By joining one of these sides you are contributing little of value and probably nothing new. His advice is to try to pull the rope sideways. That means thinking of new areas in the existing debate that have not been explored much. For example, instead of raising or lowering income taxes are there new things we could tax? Could we tax data that companies own? Could we tax height or beauty? You are not expected to be the first person ever to think of a policy idea, but you should absolutely not simply join one team in a well-established policy tug-o-war. Doing so will be considered a cliché main idea.

One thing to note here is that students will often argue for things which most people would agree with but which we do not do because of lack of will. For example, students will frequently argue that we should spend more on primary education. Of course, in an ideal world we would do this in every country. There really is no upper limit to how much we would like to spend on educating children. However, this is not why we do not spend enough on educating them. Governments have limited budgets and must allocate resources economically. Until we have solved the economic problem we will have to spend less than we would like on social programs. Another example, from a values perspective, is that people should do more exercise. Again, most people would readily agree. The reason some people do not exercise enough, however, is because they are lazy, or busy, or simply that they do not enjoy it, not because they disagree over the benefits of exercise. Avoid this kind of topic where people do not need to be persuaded but rather the problem is rooted in economics or human nature.

Lastly, remember that in this class we are not actually attempting to influence policy. Your essays will have no consequence beyond the classroom and your grade. For this reason, students are encouraged to be more contrarian. This is not because extremism is encouraged but there are several benefits to choosing a more controversial stance. For one thing it makes your essay more likely to be original and stand out. It also allows better analysis in the body. If the reason for your argument is not obvious then you have more chance to interpret and explain your reasons. Finally, it makes your essays more attractive. When people see a stronger argument, it arouses their curiosity to find out why that is a good idea. Be careful not to be *too*

extreme, however. If you think people would not just disagree but be offended by your essay then it is probably a good idea to moderate it.

### **2.3 The Introduction**

Once you have chosen your topic and are ready to begin writing you must tackle the introduction. The introduction should do three main things – attract the reader, explain the topic, and give your main idea.

To attract the reader, you need a hook. The hook should be the first sentence of the essay. It should be a fact or an example. A hook will point out something surprising, amusing, or shocking. Do not confuse the hook with the context. For example, many students will write things like “nowadays more and more people are using social media”, or “as we all know every June Chinese high school students will sit the Gao Kao”. This does nothing to capture the reader’s attention. A good tip is to have a comparison as your hook. For example, “today there are more English speakers in China than in England”. When you stop and think about it most people already know this fact, but pointing it out is thought provoking. Another example would be “last year more Americans died from prescription drug overdoses than from gun violence and car accidents combined”. This may in fact be surprising to many readers. In longer essays it is possible to tell a story as your hook but in the first short essay it should be just one or two sentences.

You must give some context to make the topic relevant or explain what the topic is. Perhaps there has been a recent event that drew attention to this topic. You may also point out the conventional wisdom on a topic before stating that you are opposed to this idea, this is a common strategy.

Finally, give your main idea. Make sure that the policy is exact, do not use vague words like “something” or “society”. Do not write, “we must do more to help the elderly”. The reader wants to know what we should do exactly to help the elderly. Do not say “we should change the policy”, say *how* we should change the policy. Do not include the reasons for the policy in the main idea, these will come later in the body of the essay. For example, many students will write something like, “we should legalize euthanasia as it will help reduce suffering and it will give people more freedom”. The main idea here is simply “we should legalize euthanasia”, and probably the student is trying to cover the fact that it is a cliché topic. Do not use passive words

like “blame” or “reflect on”. It is not clear by what is meant by “tobacco companies should be blamed for causing lung cancer rates to rise”. A policy must clearly show us what action should be taken. Do not forget to check the main idea several times, ask other people if they understand it too. Ask yourself if it is significant, original, debatable, and attractive.

### *Example Introductions*

In American colleges in the 1960s A grades were given to 15% of students, today an A is the most common grade for all students. To combat this, many colleges have policies to limit the number of A grades that students can receive. At Fudan this is set at 30% of students in a class. Many will agree that this is necessary to prevent grade inflation from devaluing true high achievement and sorting out the very best students from the rest. However, I believe that it is now time to abolish the 30% A rule.

In 2015 Donald Trump said, “I don’t believe in climate change”. Today while a majority of Americans believe the government should take action against climate change, Trump is the president. The views expressed by powerful people are often taken seriously and are given considerable publicity. Meanwhile ordinary people on social media can express their views freely, however wrong they are. For these reasons I believe it is time that we made climate change denial a crime.

## **2.4 Claims**

The body paragraphs in a short essay include both supporting points and concessions. In each case the paragraph should support the main idea in the introduction. A supporting point includes the following parts: a claim, a piece of evidence and analysis.

The claim will be either fact or value. Fact claims will support the benefits of enacting a policy. Value claims will say why the policy is justified. Usually we divide these two types of claims into “practical”, (or “impact”) arguments and “principle” arguments. For example, if your main idea is that we should abolish the 30% A rule then a positive impact may be that it would reduce stress among students. The principle may be that it is unfair to grade students in relation to their peers rather than on individual merit. A good essay should have both a practical and principle argument.

Practical arguments are usually measurable things. For example, life expectancy, GDP, social mobility, air pollution, divorce rates, home ownership rates and so on. These are often the most

obvious arguments and are relatively easy to find evidence to support. A good tip is to phrase these claims as predictions if you can. Use words like would or will in your impact claim. Phrasing them as “this policy would increase/reduce...” makes them debatable and easy to identify. For example, if the main idea was “we should legalize euthanasia” then the claim could be that many people suffer when they die. But it sounds more compelling to phrase it as, legalizing euthanasia would reduce suffering in the terminally ill.

An important metaphor for writing impact claims is “take a full step”. This means going straight to the impact directly and skipping the different stages. For example, if the main idea is to tax junk food then students often make impact claims like – “this would make unhealthy food more expensive” or “this would mean people buy less junk food”. These may seem accurate, but in a short essay you want to get straight to the point, Taking a full step would be to claim that taxing junk food would reduce rates of obesity related disease, for example.

Principle arguments are more abstract and rely on the way we feel about things. Issues like fairness, freedom, morality, justice and so on are common for principle arguments. You would often see these arguments written as “it is unfair to...” or “people should have the freedom to...”. These types of arguments are important for two reasons. First, it helps the points to be more distinctive. Students who just have two impact arguments may find that they are similar and overlap. More importantly a policy may have extremely good impacts but be seriously immoral. In the 1850s the Southern United States was the richest part of the world due to slavery, but nobody today would agree that slavery was justified, despite this impact. Torturing criminals would certainly have a positive impact on the crime rate, but how many would say this was justified in the criminal justice system? Having principle arguments helps to make your essay diverse, balanced, and deep. If you cannot think of a principle argument for your main idea it may be a sign that your main idea is too limited.

Your claims must always be clear, logical, balanced, and strong. Clarity comes from good writing and checking after you have written. Logic will be discussed below. Balancing can easily be achieved by having a mixture of practical and principle claims. In order to be strong, make sure that your claims are predicting a beneficial outcome or are based on things that most people would agree on. For example, if your policy would save the government \$10 million this might not be very strong. Ten million dollars may sound like a lot of money to you but in the perspective of government budgets it is very small. Another example is to say that we

should stop children using the internet because it is a waste of time. Well, many things children do are a waste of time and our reaction to those things is usually not to ban them.

An outline of your claims may look like this:

- I      We should abolish the 30% A rule
- II     Abolishing the rule would reduce stress in students
- III    It is unfair to grade students in relation to their peers

A good strategy is to read these backwards. Read the supporting point first and then read the main idea. Ask yourself, does it make sense backwards? Does the claim imply the main idea? If the answer to either of these is no, then you may have problems with logic and clarity. For example, it is unfair to grade students in relation to their peers, therefore we should abolish the 30% A rule. This, hopefully, makes sense. Of course, in the essay you will have a chance to explain your claims so it does not have to be perfectly obvious, but it should seem logical.

## **2.5 Evidence**

To support your claims, you must find evidence. Learn to distinguish evidence from common knowledge and from examples. Common knowledge and examples can be used in essays, but they should not replace evidence. Evidence must come from a source that is credible. Do not use unreliable websites like blogs or Wikipedia. These can be written by anybody and so are not considered credible. The most credible types of source are written by experts and include published books (as long as they are published by experts), academic journals, think tanks, credible news organisations, governments and so on. Remember that sometimes these things can also not be credible, some news organisations exist to make money and so publish rumours and gossip, or do not fact check information before they publish. You can usually identify such websites by the type of news they focus on (if most of their news is about celebrities, for example). Some books and even academic journals are self-published by someone with an agenda. In one terrible example a British medical doctor named Andrew Wakefield had his research questioning the safety of vaccines published in the Lancet medical journal. It was found that he had planned to sell his own “safe” vaccine and the article was later deleted after being found to be untrue.

When putting evidence into your paragraph you should name the source and give one other piece of information. For example, the author or the date it was published or where the institution is based and so on. So, “according to Nick Bostrom, a professor at Oxford University...”; “according to research published in the British Medical Journal in 2011...”; “in an article in Bloomberg News, Harvard Historian Niall Ferguson wrote that...”. The information that you give about the sources should do as much as possible to stress their credibility. For this class if you do not name a source then you will not receive credit for evidence. This is perhaps the most common reason for a low score.

Evidence for practical claims is usually quite straight forward and direct. For example, if you claim that your policy would save lives by reducing air pollution you can give evidence of the link between air pollution and cancer. The evidence for principle claims usually tends to be more indirect, for instance a general principle (like people should be treated equally, or the balance between freedom and responsibility). Sources for these are often thinkers like philosophers or jurists, great leaders, authors, and other luminaries. They can also include documents like constitutions and penal codes. A principle from a school of thought is fine, but make sure that you do not simply say something like “according to Confucianism”. You should still give an authoritative source that clearly shows this is a principle of Confucianism.

## **2.6 Analysis**

The analysis is your chance to explain what you have claimed, how the evidence relates to the claim or how the claim relates to the main idea. For example, if you have statistical evidence you might explain these statistics like by putting them in context or saying why they are like this.

Example:

Claim – A public smoking ban would reduce the number of cancer deaths.

Evidence – A 2010 report by the WHO found that passive smoking kills around 600,000 people worldwide every year.

Analysis – If people were not smoking in public then others would not be exposed to their second-hand smoke. Cancer rates would obviously be much lower.

Remember that statistics are neutral, they do not explain themselves. The CDC found that in 2016 over 30,000 Americans died due to guns. This could be analysed in two ways – in one case you could argue that 30,000 people is a lot and we should ban guns. However, you could equally argue that, in context, 30,000 people is not very many compared to how many people die from some other causes and therefore there is no great need to ban guns in America. Analysis puts the statistics on your side of the argument.

Analysis can use common knowledge that you do not need to give a source for. For example:

Claim – The death penalty does not reduce the murder rate.

Evidence – According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime the US has a murder rate 3 times higher than Canada.

Analysis – The US and Canada are neighbours and culturally similar countries, but Canada does not have the death penalty. From this comparison we can see that the death penalty is not making America safer.

With analysis you should fill in the thinking that is needed by the reader to understand your argument. You can do this however you feel is to best explain your point, but make sure that you always have analysis.

It is recommended that students try to write a syllogism to accompany their essay. A syllogism consists of two points which taken together produce a clear conclusion. A good example of this is the class essay “Kill the Language Requirement” by Gavin Schiffres. The essay can be summed up in a syllogism as:

1. Students should only learn what is the best use of their time
2. A foreign language is not the best use of students’ time
- C. Students should not be forced to learn a foreign language

## **2.7 The Concession and Rebuttal**

In your body you should have an argument against the main idea, this is called the concession. Immediately after you give the concession you should rebut it, in the same paragraph. The concession should be the strongest argument that you can think of against your main idea. The concession should not be an argument against one of your supporting points. It should also not

be on the same topic as a supporting point. Concessions can be practical or principle arguments, whichever you think is best for your topic.

For instance, if the main idea was to abolish the death penalty then the strongest argument against the main idea may be that it would cause crime to rise. However, you may have already addressed this with your impact argument, so perhaps another strong counter-argument would be that it denies justice to victims and their families.

The concession should be obvious by its wording. You must phrase it as being the argument of others, not yourself. Wording like, “my opponents would say...” or “some would argue that...” is common. You should transition to the rebuttal by using “however”.

The rebuttal does not have to prove the concession is “wrong”. In fact, if the concession can be shown to be wrong then perhaps it is not a very good concession. Be careful not to deliberately choose a weak concession that is easy to rebut just to make it easy for yourself. This strategy is known as a strawman and is considered to be a logical fallacy. If you cannot think of a strong concession then it is a sign that your main idea is probably too agreeable and you should think of a different main idea. If there are very many strong concessions that you cannot rebut then it is a sign that your main idea may be too extreme.

Also make sure that the rebuttal addresses the concession. Do not simply offer an alternative argument that is beside the point. Read them backwards to check that your rebuttal logically addresses your concession.

Example:

Main idea – We should abolish the death penalty.

My opponents may argue that by removing the death penalty the families of murder victims will feel deprived of justice. Losing a family member to murder is extremely traumatising and many, if not most, families want the killer to pay the ultimate price. However, our standard for justice should not, and cannot simply be the wishes of the victims, however much that may leave them feeling that justice was not served. For many, no amount of punishment will ever be enough and they will be left with a sense of injustice no matter the

punishment. If the victim's family wanted the killer tortured to death should we honour their wishes too? We must draw a line at barbaric punishment.

Evidence is not strictly required for the concession and rebuttal. However, if your concession seems to be extraordinary then you should consider giving evidence to prove it. If the concession is not in fact true then it will harm your score.

Concessions give balance to the essay. They address the doubt in the readers mind. They also show that you have thought about this topic and have considered both sides before coming down on the side you have chosen. Perhaps most importantly, they force you to think of the downsides to your own argument and moderate your main idea before you even begin writing. They are very useful for discovering poor main ideas before you have wasted time writing them.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The conclusion is extremely important and should serve two functions. Firstly, it should summarize the reasons that support the main idea. Basically, remind the reader of what you have argued in the body, usually in just one or two sentences. Secondly, it must explain the significance of your main idea. You must finish on a high note by saying why your proposed policy is important and how it might change things for the better. If you cannot do this then it is a sign that you have a poor main idea.

If you think of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, the most important lines that everyone remembers were in the conclusion. His dream was outlining a better world that racial justice would bring, this was the significance of his policy. Please note that you should never write "I have a dream" in your essay as this would be extremely cliché.

A conclusion may look like this:

Abolishing the death penalty would end the barbaric treatment of criminals, who themselves were often society's victims. It would also stop the injustice of killing innocent people wrongly convicted. Once we have abolished the death penalty we can look forward to a more humane society that is safer and with less fear. America can also join the ranks of other developed democracies who have long since abolished such barbaric, medieval practices.

## **2.9 Outline**

Before writing any essay it is recommended that you write an outline. This will help you to plan and spot problems before you begin writing. It will help you answer questions like, can I have both a practical and a principle argument? Can I have a strong concession that I can rebut? Does the conclusion have significance? Can I find the right evidence for this argument? In longer essays it will also help you to rearrange points and add new ones if you need to without becoming confused.

An outline is for you, so you can use whatever format you are most comfortable with. It is advised that you make it as simple and brief as you can. You should not write sentences out in full, make them very short and in note form. Add the evidence in very simple note form next to the claim. Do not add analysis to your outline. Most people will label the points A, B, C or 1, 2, 3 or I, II, III.

Example:

- I Universities should abolish limits on A grades.
- II Would reduce stress for students. (research on student stress levels)
- III Unfair to grade students relative to peers. (quote from China Daily on education)
- IV Students who do not deserve A may get them.
- V More enjoyable, productive university experience.

### **3. Further Essay Devices**

The second essay (Assignment 3) for this class is longer and aims to be more similar to the weekly class readings. By the time you write this essay you should be familiar with most of the class readings and so have a good idea of what is expected. You will have total creative control over this essay, the format is entirely up to you. Another important difference is that you are not required to be so original in your topic selection. You may choose topics that would have been considered cliché for the first essay. However, if you do choose a common topic for this essay then that does not mean that you should just give a standard cliché argument. Good grades will depend on original structure and using the new essay devices. Conversely, main ideas can also be more complex as you will have space to explain them in the body.

For this essay students are encouraged to choose policy, value, or fact as they like. Each of these requires using different kinds of essay devices. Students should carefully analyse their own main idea before planning and decide which devices are best suited to that topic. Not using devices that seem necessary to the reader will badly affect your grade. The devices used here are framing, examples, comparison and further analysis. Do not forget that these devices are there to enhance the main idea and arguments. You must still base the essay around a clear main idea that you support with claims and concessions.

The hook in your second essay can be much longer, often taking its own paragraph. In the class essays you will frequently see this. The author will tell a story that is engaging, shocking or surprising to the reader, it is very similar to an example.

#### **3.1 Framing the Essay**

You will see framing a lot in the class readings. It will come after you give the main idea in the introduction and it can do several things. See framing as anchoring the topic, setting the parameters of the essay.

In the case of policy essays, it may explain the policy more clearly. If you were arguing for a wealth tax on the rich then you might give the details of the policy and how it would be implemented. You might also address your critics in the framing, so as to avoid a concession in the body. Telling the reader what you are not arguing for can be important. Another thing

framing can do is to give extended background on the topic. Perhaps readers know little about your topic and you can use framing to explain it. You might also just want to engage your readers in this topic and let them see why it is important by giving an emotional example. In values essays you may want to use framing to explain how we judge something. For example, if you are arguing that something is morally wrong then what standards are you going to use for judging morality? If you were to argue that the United Nations has failed, for example, then how can we judge failure? If you were appealing to your readers to change their behaviour in some way, such as arguing that people should be more compassionate, then you could use the framing to explain in what ways they should do this.

In fact-based topics there may be important but little known facts that need to be explained to the readers. Think of the class essay *Teaching Kids to Kill* where the author is arguing that video games and violent media are making kids into killers. In his framing, he points out that most ordinary people cannot bring themselves to kill another person without special training. This makes it more believable later in the essay when he links violent media to violent behaviour now that we understand this fact.

Framing can be done in many ways and it will be different for every topic. Carefully analyse your main idea and decide exactly what type of framing it needs. It may be that your main idea does not need any framing, this is fine if that is really the case.

### **3.2 Using Examples**

Unlike framing, which is optional, you should always use examples in a longer essay. As previously mentioned you can put examples in the introduction and the framing. You should also consider putting an example in the body. There are two types of example, brief and extended, and they can be real world examples or hypothetical examples. You must have at least one extended example in your second essay.

While examples can be used as evidence you should still try to have as much basic evidence as you can. Examples can prove things, such as an example of a person or a country's behaviour can prove their character. But very often examples can do the opposite and lead to stereotypes. The principle here is that reasoning should go from the big to the small and not the opposite. For example, if I know that most men like sport then I can reason that this man probably likes sport. However, if I know that this man likes horse racing then it is poor

reasoning to infer that all men like horse racing. An example of one immigrant committing a crime does not prove that immigrants are mostly criminals. Sadly, this type of reasoning is often used in public discourse.

The goal of examples can be to prove something, in certain types of argument. More commonly they are used to demonstrate something or simply engage the reader, sometimes with emotion. For example, if you have spent time arguing that the number of innocent people wrongly executed means we should abolish the death penalty then you may give the example of a man who was wrongly executed. In an extended example you could tell his story and tell it in such a way that the reader feels pity and sadness and becomes emotionally engaged with your argument. In the essay *Teaching Kids to Kill*, after making his point about the link between media and childhood violence, the author tells a story. In this story the mother of a murdered girl sits in the hospital waiting for the body of her dead daughter. Anyone who reads this will feel moved. However, the author puts this example after all of his logical arguments, he does not rely on it to prove his main idea. Rather he uses it for emotional engagement. Likewise, you should not use emotional examples to prove something, but they can be extremely effective at enhancing your case.

Examples can also come from popular culture to both engage the reader and demonstrate something. Normally examples from books or movies would be terrible evidence, but when used as a demonstration they can be very effective. In his essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren* the great economist John Maynard Keynes introduces the concept of the “Purposive Man”. This is someone who loves money as an object rather than for what else it might bring them. To demonstrate this abstract concept, he gives the example of the professor and the tailor from the children’s story *Sylvie and Bruno*. In this story the tailor knocks on the door and asks for the money he is owed; the professor sends him away with the promise that he will pay him double next year. After he is gone he tells the children that he will do this every year, the tailor only loves the idea of money, not actually having the money. This effectively demonstrates Keynes’ concept.

Brief examples are just a few sentences and can be inserted into body paragraphs along with evidence and analysis. Again, do not substitute the evidence for an example. They will usually begin with “for example”. Extended examples usually take up most of a paragraph or

have their own paragraph. They may start with something like, “take the case of...” or “in one example...”.

Hypothetical examples would begin with “imagine” and are especially useful in the framing, conclusion, or further analysis of your essay. For example, if you were proposing a policy you might imagine what it would look like if your policy were implemented. “Imagine walking into a hospital with a broken arm, the doctor takes you straight into the emergency room. Nurses follow and soon your arm is X-rayed and a cast is put on. Nobody asks to see your ID at any stage of this process. After the doctors finish they bid you farewell and you walk out of the hospital with a card to come back for a follow up appointment. Nobody asks you to pay any money and nobody will. This is what universal healthcare would look like”. Alternatively, you could go online and read about the experiences of people who live in countries that have universal healthcare and quote their stories in your essay. Do not forget to put the source for this, as you would with evidence. You can also give personal examples in your essay, as long as your experience is relevant.

Examples are often descriptive or narrative. This is different to the style of the rest of the essay. Do not worry too much about using colourful language, as this is not the goal of the course.

### **3.3 Comparison and Contrast**

Comparison and contrast are extremely common in essay writing and as with examples and framing you should have seen many examples of these devices in the class readings.

Sometimes the whole body of the essay is a comparison with some contrasts thrown in. In *Teaching Kids to Kill* the author spends most of the essay comparing military training with media violence. At the end he makes one important contrast between them.

These are very common in fact essays. When predicting the future, we often look to the past. How does what we are experiencing today compare with similar times in the past? When discussing policy, you may compare your country with other countries that do have this policy. When talking about values you may compare people, behaviours, or institutions with one another. A very common example of this is with e-sports. Students frequently argue that e-sports should be in the Olympics and then compare and contrast e-sports with other sports. You can use comparison and contrast to make a case for or against e-sports being in the

Olympics. If there is competition between two things you could compare them to argue that one is better or worse. For example, students should choose to study STEM subjects and not humanities. Or we should move funding from higher education to secondary education.

When you are planning a comparison, it is helpful to draw a Venn diagram. On the sides you can write the contrasts and in the middle you can put the similarities. Then you can analyse your Venn diagram to decide how to make your argument in the essay. When you write the comparison do not forget that when making a claim you still need evidence. For example, if you claim that e-sports are more popular than most Olympic events you should find a source that shows how popular different events are compared to e-sports.

The extent to which you use comparison and contrast is up to you. You can use comparison or contrast (you can do one without the other) simply as one or two body paragraphs. You can also make the whole essay a comparison. This is especially common for values essays, such as the Olympics is better than the World Cup. This method is especially good for making creative, original essays.

### **3.4 Further Analysis**

The last essay device to look at is further analysis. Further analysis comes after the main body of the essay and, like framing, can do several things. Again, you should analyse your main idea before planning the essay to decide what kind of further analysis, if any, is necessary. Further analysis is more common with values and fact topics. Policy topics usually rely more on the framing to explain things.

If you have argued in your essay that something is bad then your further analysis might discuss what policies we could consider or what individual people should do themselves about it. Further analysis does not have to be argument, you can discuss various options, but you can also make an argument. If you have made a prediction as your main idea then your further analysis should discuss what the consequences of this prediction coming true would mean.

For example, if your essay has argued that the United Nations has failed then your further analysis could propose an alternative. You do not have to write another essay on this topic, simply positing and briefly discussing the options is enough. If you have predicted that in the

coming decades humans will no longer need to learn foreign languages then you could discuss the consequences of this, both good and bad, in the further analysis. For instance, we might see a more united world where people are less divided by culture. Conversely, some countries might lose the advantages they have that come from speaking the world's dominant language.

In the essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, Keynes spends a lot of the essay discussing whether it would be good or bad if we no longer had to work for a living in the future. He also puts many examples into this part of the essay showing that you can use two essay devices together at the same time.

Most of these are simply discussing the consequences of your main idea being right at greater length than in a normal conclusion.

### **3.5 Logical Progression**

While not an explicit essay device, logical progression is often used in longer essays. Shorter essays may rely on a single syllogism with two coinciding points. A longer essay may establish several points in order to reach its final conclusion.

An example of this is the class reading – “Where Are They?” by Nick Bostrom. Early on he establishes that there must be a great filter in the universe. He then establishes a number of possible causes for this while finally arguing the meaning of this in the end to support his main idea.

The outline might look something like this:

1. It would be a bad thing if we found life on Mars
2. There exists a great filter in the universe
3. It could be evolution
4. It could not be technology, space or time
5. It could not be the choice of extra-terrestrial civilizations
6. If we found life on Mars it would also rule out evolution
7. This means the great filter is some terrible future technology that will destroy us

## **4. Exam Writing**

A few days after the final class you will take the final exam for this course. In the exam you must write an essay of about 400 words in one hour. The topic that you write on is based on a simple prompt. It is recommended that students try to follow the 5-paragraph format.

However, if you wish to add an extra paragraph, for example by having more than one concession, an extra supporting point, a paragraph of framing or further analysis or an extended example then that is fine. Be aware of time and make sure that doing so is feasible.

Since you are restricted by time and the exam conditions you do not have much time to think and you cannot gather evidence from sources. Therefore the burden for topic selection and evidence is lower than in the first essay. However, students should still remember the principles of topic selection and evidence from the first essay and try to comply with these as well as they can.

### **4.1 Prompts and Topic Selection**

The prompt will be no more than a few sentences and is often just a single sentence. The prompt can be on any topic and sometimes it is open and does not focus on just one topic. Here are some examples of prompts from previous exams:

- Do the benefits of scientific and technological developments come at the cost of undesirable changes to people's lives?
- As long as our actions do no harm to others people should be free to act however they want, is this a practical guide to policy?
- Today there exists a very strange phenomenon in China: both rich families and poor families would go to great lengths to indulge children in the delights of leisure and material comforts. Write a comparison to make your critical analysis of this social phenomenon.
- Does reality TV promote dangerous stereotypes?

The advice to students is to identify and focus on the nouns in the prompt and then use these topics to create a main idea.

If the prompt is a question then your main idea should address that question, however it does not need to answer the prompt in a direct and simple way. For example, in the example above about reality TV you could argue that reality TV should be banned from promoting stereotypes. You could argue that stereotypes are harmful, or not harmful, to society. You could argue that despite containing stereotypes this is not harmful to society. You may predict that in the future reality TV will die out (and therefore we don't need to worry).

One final exam prompt was “TikTok, a Chinese video clip app now has 150 million users covering 150 countries around the world. What do you think of its popularity?”. As a teacher I received roughly 40 essays arguing that TikTok was harmful to young people and another 40 arguing that we should not worry about its effect on young people. Only a handful of essays argued anything more original than this. Remember that you can, and should, consider policy and fact as well as value. So for this prompt students could have argued that TikTok has reached market saturation and will not be more popular in the future; or they could argue the opposite, that TikTok will continue to see growth. A policy idea for this prompt could be that young people should be time-restricted in how much they watch TikTok. Another interesting idea would be to argue that TikTok will help Chinese soft-power generally. By the time you take the final exam you will have written 3 full essays, read a dozen essays and practiced writing many more thesis statements. It is expected that you can do more than simply write a generic main idea.

As a strategy, underline the most important nouns in the prompt. For example “technology”, “science”, “people’s lives”. Try to think of specific examples of these things. Here these may be artificial intelligence, social media, big data, cloning, facial recognition, and so on. Choose one of these and apply the filter of policy, value or fact. This should let you come to a reasonably original main idea. For example; Facebook should be broken up into several companies; social media does more good than harm; you should delete your social media accounts; facial recognition will eliminate crime in the future.

## 4.2 Outlining an Exam

As with all of your essays the goal is to support your main idea. Write a very brief outline which includes the main idea and each supporting point. Try to balance your points, if you cannot think of a principle argument then try to have an original impact argument. You

should always try to have a concession. State the significance for the conclusion. For example:

1. Facebook should be broken up
  2. Would improve innovation
  3. Monopoly goes against freedom
  4. But would worsen user experience
  5. Better information environment for all
- 
1. Facial recognition will eliminate crime
  2. Extremely powerful tool for police
  3. Criminals will be deterred
  4. But cannot stop crime in real-time
  5. Safer society for all

You can fill in the evidence and analysis as you write the essay, although you might want to make a note of the evidence you are going to use too.

### **4.3 Supporting Claims in an Exam**

As mentioned, you will not be able to do research for this exam. You will not know the prompt or even the general topic until you read the exam paper. Therefore evidence here can be loose facts, common knowledge or good examples.

Loose facts means that you give data but not so specifically. For instance you may say, studies at Harvard showed around a quarter of Americans get their news from Facebook. Or, the BBC reported over 50% of British people voted for Brexit. Of course, this type of evidence comes from your personal knowledge and requires you to have researched or read about the topic previously. It may be that you use evidence from readings you have done in this class, this is fine. The point is that you do not need to give much detail about the source and you do not need to give precise statistics. When it comes to quoting you could paraphrase people rather than quote them exactly. For instance you could say, “in his inaugural address president Kennedy asked Americans to put their country before themselves” rather than

saying, “in his inaugural address Kennedy said ‘ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country’”.

Common knowledge does not need a source and relies on the principle, “would reasonable, educated people know this off-hand?”. So for instance, “in the 1860s America fought a civil war” would be common knowledge. However, “there were 25,000 casualties at the battle of Gettysburg” would not be and would require some kind of source. Unless you have a source it would be better to simply say, thousands died at the battle of Gettysburg. This reduces the risk that you will make an error.

Good examples means examples that really demonstrate something. As mentioned in section 4, you should not reason from the small to the big. What one person says about themselves may tell you about that person, but it does not prove anything about all people. Likewise, a country’s policies may tell you a lot about that country but it does not inform you about all countries. Keep this in mind when using examples. For instance, if you are arguing that Facebook is a ruthless, monopolistic company then an example of their behaviour or policies really could prove this. However, if you are arguing that social media is harmful to children then one example of a child committing suicide after being bullied online does not prove this. Of course, you could still put the bullying example in your essay, but you should also add a fact. For instance, “this is not a single instance, more and more young people reported being bullied online and the number of suicides in teens has risen in recent years”. This is probably common knowledge for people who have read into the subject.

Examples of a body paragraph in an exam could be like the following:

Breaking up Facebook would improve innovation. Facebook frequently buys smaller companies that might threaten it in the market to prevent competition. For example Facebook bought the start-up company WhatsApp when it was new. After this they did very little innovation. Who knows what sort of rival to Facebook WhatsApp might have become had it been allowed to remain independent. It may even have become the western WeChat.

Monopolies go against our freedom and morals in business. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century president Theodore Roosevelt, who was known as the “trust buster” argued that monopolies were not just bad for consumers but that they were morally wrong too. This wisdom was true over one hundred years ago. Surely we have progressed since then and can see that our current monopolies are also wrong.

Finally, do not worry excessively about evidence. It is appreciated that you do not have much time and graders will probably give you leeway. As long as you are not making up your evidence or stating things that are counter-factual you are probably going to be fine.