

THE COMMAND AND STAFF SCHOOL
08 JCSC DEFENCE & STRATEGIC STUDIES MODULE
ESSAY ASSESSMENT

1. **Introduction.** As part of the course requirements for the Defence & Strategic Studies (DSS) module course members will complete an individual 5,000 word essay.
2. The DSS essay provides the course member with an opportunity to conduct personal research in a subject area related to defence and strategic studies. Course members will be expected to apply the concepts, theories and insights gained in lectures and associated reading in their essays.
3. Course members are free to choose their own essay topic from those listed in Annex A.
4. **Essay Style:**
 - a. Word Count: The essay will be **maximum** 5,000 words **excluding** footnotes and bibliography.
 - b. Format: Your attention is specifically drawn to Section Two of the Research Component Student Handbook 2025-2026. The completed essay will be a single typed document, margins of 20mm left and 20mm top, bottom and right, with Times New Roman text of font 12, justified and 1.5 spacing. Use headings and sub-headings as appropriate.
5. Guides to writing a critical essay are provided in the Maynooth University Tile on the DSS Block that may be of help. The lectures delivered on the particular subjects during the DSS block will also be of assistance.
6. Course members are reminded of academic conventions and the need for thorough and complete referencing. Course members are minded to review MU's Policy on Academic Integrity and unit Standing Orders Chapter 5 Section 6. Where an assessor has reasonable grounds to believe that a case of academic misconduct has been identified (which includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) to complete all or part of this assessment without acknowledgement), the assessor may refer the matter to the Head of the Department.
7. Essays are to be submitted electronically via the Turnitin link on the Assessment Tile **NLT 2359hrs on 10 Nov 2025**. Format for submission file name is 'YYYYMMDD_DSS_Essay_Exam_No.' Contact the POC below if there is any technical issue ahead of this submission deadline.
8. Grading. All essays will be assessed by a Maynooth University academic. 300 marks are allocated to the essay. Please note the marking rubric for written submissions contained in Annex B.
9. Feedback. Written feedback will be provided to each student.
10. POC. Comdt Simon Keenan.

08 JOINT COMMAND AND STAFF COURSE
DSS ESSAY TOPICS

1. Critically evaluate the continuing relevance of classical military strategic thought – from Sun Tzu to Mahan – in understanding contemporary defence and security challenges.
 - a. *Author should explore the ideas of one or more classical strategic thinkers and assess their relevance to current security contexts. Link the theoretical insights to concrete examples (e.g., conventional warfare, hybrid conflict, insurgency, peace enforcement). Avoid merely summarising the theorist — focus on critical evaluation and application.*
2. Compare and contrast realist and liberal perspectives on the causes of war and the prospects for peace in the 21st century.
 - a. *Author should set out the core assumptions of realist and liberal schools of thought in international relations, then analyse their explanations for war and pathways to peace. Apply perspectives to contemporary or recent cases to test their explanatory power.*
3. Evaluate the extent to which small states can influence international security outcomes through military and non-military means.
 - a. *Author should assess the tools available to small states, both military and non-military, in shaping security outcomes. Discuss their limitations as well as potential leverage points. Students may use Ireland as a case study but should also refer to comparative examples.*
4. Examine the effectiveness of regional security architectures in addressing contemporary security threats.
 - a. *Author should identify and assess contemporary security threats affecting particular regional security architectures. Draw on case studies to illustrate both successful and problematic applications. Determine the effectiveness of particular regional groupings and draw general conclusions applicable to all.*
5. Analyse the relationship between the military and other instruments of national power, using historical or contemporary examples to illustrate the challenges of whole-of-government strategy.
 - a. *Author should explore how military power interacts with diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments in the pursuit of national objectives. Use real-world examples to show the opportunities and frictions in integrated strategy-making.*

PERCENTAGE BAND	CONTENT (use of sources, breadth/depth of research, knowledge)	ANALYSIS (evaluation, logic and reasoning, argument)	STYLE (expression, tone, flow)
80% +	Extremely comprehensive solution. Exceptional research conducted. Highly innovative and imaginative. Questions orthodoxy effectively.	Flawless logic. Exceptionally insightful. Extremely convincing, compelling and authoritative argument. Highly effective critical analysis of underlying concepts and theories. Demonstrates high levels of originality and independent thought. Possibly of publishable quality.	<u>Written</u> : Tone completely appropriate. Precise and unequivocal expression. Excellent structure. Flows eloquently. Highest standards of presentation ¹ achieved. <u>Oral</u> : ² Very little (if any) dependence on notes / notes used very effectively without undermining engagement with the audience. Exceptional IPD. ³ Excellent level of engagement maintained with the audience throughout. Highly effective use of briefing aids.
70% to 79%	Highly comprehensive solution with high levels of accuracy. Extremely effective research that engages with debates within the relevant literature. Range of sources used selectively and imaginatively to support argument. Good attempt to challenge orthodoxy.	Highly logical. Excellent understanding of underlying concepts. Extremely well-constructed argument displaying critical analysis, originality and independent thought. Most persuasive.	<u>Written</u> : Tone appropriate. Highly competent expression. Very well structured. Flows fluently. Very good standards of presentation throughout. <u>Oral</u> : Little dependence on notes / notes used effectively without undermining engagement with the audience. Very good IPD and engagement with the audience. Very good use of briefing aids.
60% to 69%	Considered most of the essential issues. Relevant literature/key texts used effectively to engage with current debates. Good degree of accuracy demonstrated. Reasonable attempt to challenge orthodoxy.	Sound logic and understanding of underlying theories and concepts. Convincing and concise argument. Critical evaluation of perspectives with some evidence of originality.	<u>Written</u> : Tone generally suitable. Coherent expression. Well structured. Flows well. Standards of presentation generally adhered to. <u>Oral</u> : Not overly dependent on notes. Good IPD demonstrated. Audience well engaged throughout. Good use of briefing aids.
50 to 59%	Some omission of key/relevant issues, with some minor inaccuracies. Satisfactory research demonstrating reasonable familiarity with relevant literature.	Satisfactory logic. Reasonably coherent and convincing solution. Demonstrate some capacity to reflect critically on underlying theories and concepts, but little evidence of originality.	<u>Written</u> : Adequate tone and expression but may need some amending. Standards of presentation generally adhered to with some amendments necessary. Structure and flow could be improved. <u>Oral</u> : Some reliance on notes but did maintain a satisfactory level of audience awareness. Elements of IPD could be improved. Briefing aids could be used more effectively.
45-49%	Question addressed but several relevant issues not covered. Evidence of a basic familiarity with relevant literature. Contains inaccuracies.	Logic open to some doubt. Underdeveloped and unconvincing argument. Limited evidence of critical analysis. Has a basic grasp of underlying concepts, but a lack of understanding is demonstrated in places.	<u>Written</u> : Tone in need of some amendment. Expression often less than satisfactory. Standards of presentation not adequately addressed. Structure in need of significant revision. <u>Oral</u> : Very dependent on notes. IPD requires significant improvement. Briefing aids unsuitable.
40% to 44%	Limited consideration of relevant issues. Limited research. Incomplete knowledge of subject evident. Contains significant inaccuracies.	Logic poor. Limited understanding of underlying concepts. Not very convincing. Critical analysis limited.	<u>Written</u> : Tone and/or expression in need of significant amendment. A significant number of errors in presentation. Structure requires major reworking. <u>Oral</u> : Almost complete dependence on notes. IPD very poor. Inappropriate use of briefing aids.
Under 40%	Little relevant information. Poorly researched. Contains fundamental errors.	Logically unsound. Completely unconvincing argument. Question not addressed. Little or no understanding of key issues and underlying concepts. Little or no evidence of ability to critically analyse.	<u>Written</u> : Tone completely unsuitable/inappropriate. Expression weak and ineffective. Muddled arrangement. Careless writing style with errors in presentation consistent throughout. Flow disjointed and difficult to follow. Structured very poorly. <u>Oral</u> : Complete dependence on notes; the brief is read. IPD completely unsatisfactory. Briefing aids entirely unsuitable/inappropriate.

¹ Standards of presentation refer to spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax and referencing.

² Additional aspects to be considered for oral assessment under the criterion of style.

³ Interpersonal Dynamics (IPD): eye contact, mannerisms, body language, confidence, etc.