Video Essays

Introduction

To simplify this mode of assessment, **the video essay is the audio-visual equivalent of the written essay**.[1] It follows the same principles as the written essay as it requires students to research, plan, develop their argument and convey their ideas clearly. It allows students to communicate in different ways and develops their digital proficiencies all whilst focusing on the academic skills they are building within their university careers. This guide is a collection of practises from other institutions that have employed video essays as alternative assignments.

Video essays and how to use them

Video essays can be constructed from audio, visual and textual material to build an argument and address an issue. Students might use film clips, video their own material, use voice-overs, still images, written work and music to create their work.[2] A video essay is never just a collage of material. It is always the presentation of an organised and coherent argument. As such, it can be used as a replacement for a traditional research essay. Indeed, several guides to video essays from other universities suggest equivalent video length for essay word counts.[3] For example:

- a 5 minute video for a 750-1,000 word essay
- a 10 to 12 minute video for a 1,500 to 2000 word essay
- a 15 to 17 minute video for a 2,000 to 2,500 word essay
- a 20 to 25 minute video for a 4,000 to 5,000 word essay

Alongside the actual video, students could also submit evidence of their work. This might include the storyboard, script and bibliography to demonstrate the research undertaken with the work.[4] A portfolio of work can include the video and the supporting material used to create the video. For example, a video essay submission could consist of:

- A video response to the question
- A storyboard
- A script
- A bibliography

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[1] See http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/ and https://www.wellesley.edu/lts/bli/projects/viano for further details about this format.

[2] See https://ecu.au.libguides.com/c.php?g=670376&p=6249752 for further information and background.

[3] See https://catoolkit.herts.ac.uk/toolkit/8-the-video-essay/ and https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/en361fantastika/videoessayrubric/ for further details and explanation of video essays.

[4] See https://owl.excelsior.edu/online-writing-and-presentations/multi-modal-writing/multi-modal-writing-video-essays/, http://libguides.augie.edu/c.php?g=526064&p=3596905 and https://libguides.royalroads.ca/videoessayhowto.

Indeed, as a formative assignment, students could be required to submit a storyboard or script to explain their approach and argument for the final video essay.

Video essays could be set with questions that are used with academic written essays. Just as within these traditional assessments, students should be asked to create and compose their responses, to explore and extend their examination of the issues, they should allow for different or original responses and the finished piece should be judged by a specialist in the subject area.

Video essay questions should ask students to analyse, interpret, defend, explain, develop, justify, propose, or, compose their responses. Wherever the knowledge and understanding of a student needs to be assessed, a video essay can be employed to test their comprehension and skills.

Video essays and how to support students

The video essay will have the same components as an essay; an introduction, argument, discussion and conclusion. Students should be encouraged to approach the development of the video essay in the same manner as their academic essays; plan, prepare, research, write, edit and submit.

Just as word counts restrict essays and allow them to be focused, specifying the length of videos allows students to make decisions in the creation of their videos. The instruction to limit a video to 5 or 7 minutes can result in a work that concentrates on the issues rather than allowing a video that spans 30 minutes and which goes off at various tangents.[5] In that sense, video essays can again be regarded as comparable to their written counterparts.

As with understanding the structure of written essays, for video essays students can be guided through a structure.[6] Students could consider the following issues as they prepare for their video essays:

1. Comprehension – read the question carefully and consider how to respond
2. Research – by reading through relevant books and articles, students can develop their own perspective of the issue. Through a broad reading of the topic and around the topic then students can decide on the approach of the essay.
3. Bibliography – build a reading list for the video. This can be added to throughout the process as students change approach or alter their position.
4. Argument – as with a written essay, the presentation of the argument is vital. Through a reading of the relevant literature, students can define how the video essay will present their ideas and way in which the video will be framed.
5. Presentation – students can be encouraged to be clear and concise with their work, to focus on the issues and to avoid getting side-tracked.
6. Style – students can decide upon how to communicate their ideas. For example, perhaps a voice-over with a range of images could be used to document the development of an issue. Or, stock footage from an archive could be used if the

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[5] See https://ecu.au.libguides.com/video-essay/how-to-do-a-video-essay.
[6] See https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/audiovisualessay/resources/how-to-guides/how-to-video-essays-by-greer-fyfe-and-miriam-ross/ and https://libguides.royalroads.ca/videoessayhowto.

discussion required a historical context. Students can begin to make decisions about the best way in which to relate their argument. An appropriate style for the content and argument is vital.

7. Plan – once the argument and presentation are detailed then students can draft a rough plan of the video. Student can map out each part of the video for how it will introduce the argument, discuss the relevant materials and reiterate the ideas at the conclusion. To do this, a storyboard can be used to help organise the work as well as ensuring that the finished piece is coherent. Just as planning a written essay benefits from draft plans, a video essay benefits from a storyboard as it allows the student to envision the project, adapt, edit and refine before producing the materials. A storyboard can take a number of formats, but it most frequently resembles a comic strip. In this format, the action is sketched out in a basic drawing whilst a description of the visuals, text and production notes can be made alongside it. Storyboard templates can easily be made by students to suit the types of video they are creating.

8. Script – once the storyboard is complete then a script for the entire video can be produced. This details out the process of the film and it allows the student to make decisions on style, content and argument. A script is necessary for any spoken word elements or any text that is displayed. Students can be encouraged to create a detailed script to submit as a draft plan to a tutor or to ensure the video maintains a coherent and clear line of argument.

9. Development – there are a range of sources for images, sounds and video that students can use and a significant part of planning the video should be spent on development. As with all uses of material, students should be reminded to reference sources either in the video credits or with an accompanying bibliography.

10. Edit – here the essay can be structured and shaped according to storyboard and script. As with all editing processes, decisions can be made here to change, adapt and alter as is required.

Video essays and how to make them

Whilst some students may be familiar with taking videos on their phones, filming for an essay and then editing and produce videos properly may not be a skillset they have developed. A range of services are provided within the university to assist with this work. Cameras, iPads and access to editing software are provided by the Digital Transformations Hub (DTH). Students can borrow equipment to complete their assignments and draw upon the expertise and resources provided by this team, too.

For filming video and recording audio as well as editing the finished piece the DTH has a range of services to support students:

https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/artsdigitalhub/resources/video.aspx

Some universities and colleges have also highlighted the significant resources available freely online.[7] Technical advice on production and editing can also be found online through

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[7] After https://researchguides.library.tufts.edu/dds/DDSMediaProductionGuide and https://libguides.royalroads.ca/videoessayhowto/videoediting.

[Vimeo's Video School](). Students can be advised to look at the tutorials that introduce the basics to filming and editing:

- Filming - https://vimeo.com/blog/post/video-101-shooting-basics/
- Editing - https://vimeo.com/blog/post/video-101-editing-basics/

Editing programmes can be found for both Windows and Mac users:

- [Windows Photos]()
- [iMovie]()

There are further resources for the production of videos that students can use to develop their work:

- [Audacity]() – A open-source audio editing programme that allows a user to record, edit and import audio onto a video
- [Wikimedia Commons]() – a database of audio, video and image files that can be used for free without copyright restrictions
- [Creative Commons]() – a source of audio, video and image files that can be used for free under the [Creative Commons License]()
- [flickr]() – the creative commons area of the site provides images files that are free to use
- [Vimeo]() – the creative commons area of the site provides video files that are free to use

Students should be asked to use title slides and credit slides where any introductions can be made, and any references can be given at the conclusion.

Video Essays and examples that can inspire

Using video essays for the first time can present some challenges for students. So, to familiarise them with the format, the following examples could be given to lead students into developing their ideas, their confidence in the format and to guide them into building something original in response to the question.

- Student Video Essays on Tumblr – https://videoessays.tumblr.com/
- [Student Video Essays – Notre Dame University]()
- [Video Essays – Vimeo]()

Video Essays and how to upload them

Turnitin will not support multimedia submissions so Moodle Assignments will have to be used. Usually, the file size will be restricted so longer videos will have to be submitted via the MediaSpace Button. Complete information on setting up Moodle Assignments and instructions for students are available on the workspace:

https://workspace.nottingham.ac.uk/display/Moodlehelp/How+to+add+a+Video+Assignment

Using Moodle Assignments also provides students with an option to submit multiple files. So, a video submission could be accompanied by a bibliography and a storyboard as part of a portfolio of work.

Video Essays and how to mark them

As a video essay is structured in the same way as an academic essay with an introduction, argument and conclusion and it requires research and development appropriate to academic standards then it can be assessed in a broadly similar manner as an essay. The key criteria set out by the Faculty of Arts can be used to grade video essay:

- Structure and argument
- Knowledge and understanding
- Presentation

The existing grading criteria allows for students who have used innovative approaches to be rewarded appropriately. Just as an essay might provide an original structure or argument, then a video which incorporates an inventive style can be acknowledged for this work within the criteria. Videos which lack structure or do not communicate an argument can be penalised in the same manner that an essay would be critiqued for not stating the position clearly.

Video Essay Marking Scheme

	Structure and Argument	Knowledge and Understanding	Presentation
Exceptional Class I quality ("Starred First") **100** **98** **95** **92** **90** **88** **85**	• Superb structure, maintained throughout, that helps to highlight salient points • Precise, focused argument • Innovative and original thought	• Exemplary answer to the question • Outstanding knowledge and understanding of the relevant material • Well-formed in response to existing debates, with outstanding criticism of others' arguments • Exemplary integration of wide reading, as appropriate • Sure handling of analytical terms and critical concepts • Exemplary analysis of evidence / examples	• Lucid style and accurate presentation at an outstanding professional standard • Outstanding professional presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate.
	At higher levels of study, an answer in the 85-100 range might contain elements of publishable quality (depending on the discipline, topic, and task).		

	Structure and Argument	**Knowledge and Understanding**	**Presentation**
Class I quality 82 80 78 75 72 70	• Excellent structure • Clear, coherent argument • Independence of thought and/or evidence of originality, especially at the upper range	• Comprehensive and effective answer to the question • Excellent, wide-ranging knowledge and understanding • Well-digested and extensive reading (as appropriate for the task) • Sure handling of analytical terms and critical concepts • Accurate analysis and effective criticism of others' arguments • Excellent discussion of evidence / examples	• Clear communication and accurate English used • Professional presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate.
Class II.i quality 68 65 62 60	• Good to very good structure • Sound argument, generally well-directed to the question • Some independence in thought and approach	• Thorough answer to the question, covering most or all aspects • Good to very good knowledge and understanding • Wide reading (as appropriate), generally well-digested • Appropriate handling of analytical terms and critical concepts • Critical awareness and satisfactory analysis of different points of view • Good to very good discussion of evidence / examples	• Generally clear communication and acceptable English style • Good to very good presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate

	Structure and Argument	**Knowledge and Understanding**	**Presentation**
Class II.ii quality **58** **55** **52** **50**	• Generally coherent structure • Adequate and generally relevant argument • Some signs of independence in thought and approach, but often derivative of existing scholarship	• Adequate to good answer to the question, covering the main aspects • Adequate to good knowledge and understanding • Fair amount of reading • Some awareness of different points of view, maybe with some deficiencies in analysis and characterisation • Serious attempt to make appropriate use of analytical terms and critical concepts, maybe with some deficiencies • Some discussion of evidence / examples	• Generally coherent structure • Some deficiencies in clarity and English style, but generally adequate to good • Moderate presentation, including referencing and bibliography as appropriate.
	Typical weaknesses in this class include over-reliance on one or two authorities; some irrelevance; some incoherence in argument and/or structure.		
Class III quality **48** **45** **42** **40**	• Adequate to weak structure; there may be some irrelevance • Some ability to interpret questions and to convey information adequately, but weak argument • Little evidence of independence in thought and approach	• Some aspects of the question addressed adequately, but failure to address important aspects of it • Limited knowledge, with serious errors and/or omissions • Limited to adequate reading • Limited discussion of evidence / examples	• Moderate level of fluency and technical competence, with errors in communication • Poor presentation, with poor or perhaps incomplete referencing and bibliography.

	Structure and Argument	**Knowledge and Understanding**	**Presentation**
Soft Fail quality **38** **35** **32** **30**	• Little or no discernible structure • Little or no discernible argument • Could scarcely be considered a serious attempt at the task • Failure to address the question adequately • Typically brief and/or incomplete	• Failure to address the question adequately • Little evidence of knowledge and/or understanding • Little or no evidence of relevant reading • Some demonstrable ability to communicate information about relevant material	• Widespread incoherence and/or irrelevance • Minimal acceptable level of communication and technical competence • Poor or very poor presentation, with poor, incomplete or no referencing and bibliography.
Hard Fail quality **28** **25** **22** **20** -------- **18** **15** **12** **10** -------- **8** **5** **2** **0**	• Extensive incoherence and/or irrelevance • Could not be considered a serious attempt at the task whatsoever • Typically very brief and/or incomplete	• Failure to show understanding of the question • Failure to show evidence of any knowledge and/or understanding • Failure to show evidence of relevant reading • Little ability to communicate information about relevant material	• An unacceptable level of communication and technical competence, characterized by serious errors • Very poor presentation, with poor, incomplete or no appropriate referencing and bibliography.