Oxford Essay FAQ

1. **Do I need to ask a live question in the essay?**
   Yes – you should set yourself a question that is interesting and controversial to answer in your essay. It may be in a question form, e.g. a research question, or it may be given in reported speech. It could also be in the form of a rheotrical question and an answer. You should start with the question, then your essay is the answer to the question. You shoudn't start with an answer then find the question. In other words, it should not be the case where the reader asks, at the end of 800 words, "so what is something meaningful I can ask about this essay?"

2. **Is this an expositiory or an argumentative essay?**
   The genre of the Oxford essay is an academic, argumentative essay because you have a particular point of view or an idea or a proposal to argue or convince your reader of. You are not just explaning how things are – in an expositiory essay, no stand needs to be taken.

3. **What is meant by delineating the scope of an argument?**
   It means scoping down your argument and this will help you decide or select the most relevant content AND analyse it within the word limit of 800 words. Do you think 800 words will be enough words to write on: "The use of predictive policing AI to reduce crime in America?" Use – how? Crime – White collar? Violent crime? Serious crime? Fraud? Sexual? America – North America, Canada/USA + South America – 12 countries and 2 colonies? A more cleanly delineated scope which might make for a more interesting and in-depth analysis might be: "What is the main benefit of using AI in predictive policing to prevent petty crimes such as shoplifting in small town America?" or "What is the main benefit of using AI in predictive policing to reduce crimes against street children in large South American cities such as Sao Paulo?".

4. **Why are definitions important?**
   Definitions of key words are important so that assumptions which might cause misunderstanding between reader and writer are not made. Definitions are also important because in some cases, a writer may be breaking new ground but using a different take on an existing word, e.g. "bit" when first used in computing, or "job" in the gig economy.

5. **Can I use a definition from a dictionary?**
   You could but that might restrict your freedom of expression or the development of your ideas, and in any case a standard dictionary definition may not be very helpful to you, e.g. "virtual companion" explained using an ordinary dictionary looking at "virtual" and "companion" will give a standard definition compared to a technical dictionary's definition of the same, and even a technical dictionary's definition may not be as interesting as your own defintion by the end of the essay.

6. **How many sources must I cite?**
   As many as you need! It can even be a single source, if you do a very close reading and detailed critical analysis. The important thing is to get the full picture of the available information and investigate its claims and evaluate information critically.

7. **Does the source of information matter?**

   Duh! Yes, but you need not just read journal articles; you could use popular science articles written by reputable science correspondents.

8. **In what ways is the Oxford essay different from a GP essay?**
   - No set question to respond to in the Oxford essay – design your own question
   - Quite a narrow topic in most well-written Oxford essays
   - Need for in-text and end-of-text references
   - Not a pro and con then say something 'balanced" such as "so in conclusion AI is a double edged sword" – yeah, so what? More interesting to say how to use the double edged sword, or indeed how to blunt the undesirable edge.
   - Oxford is argumentative, GP may be expository
   - Oxford shows originality – lots of your own critical views and not just recevied wisdom

9. **What counts as originality?**
   - Clear distinction between source and your CT value add
   - A good portion of the essay is your analysis of the source information; you are not just saying "X said xxxx, whereas Y thinks yyyy" - you are saying something like "Although X says xxx and Y says yyyy, they seem to have … so I say that zzzzzz is the most likely… because…"

10. **Do references count in the word count?**

    No, references don't conribute to the word count.