Essay

What is an Essay?

An Essay is an assessment question that requires an answer in a sentence, paragraph, or short composition. Essay assessments are usually classified as subjective assessments as there are normally a variety of responses.

Structure of Essay (Trigwell, K. (1992). Information for UTS Staff on Assessment)

According to Trigwell, there are 3 Standard forms of essays:

1. **Role Play Essays**

   Students respond to the essay as if he/she is performing the role assessing in the essay. *For example:* Write a letter to the local county council, explaining the environmental issues in the area, and requesting them to produce some measures; giving evidences and social arguments from government reports. This type of essays allows the students become involved and see the relevance of the task.

2. **Structured Essays**

   Structured Essays are essays which have specific questions or topics that require answers. *For example:* In Shakespeare's play – Hamlet, discuss and compare some of the soliloquies in terms of its style, syntax and imagery.

   This type of essays is useful if the assessors wish to test a specific knowledge and techniques, it is also easier to mark as the assessors know what type of answers to expect.

3. **Interpretation of Data Evidence Essays**

   Students are asked to write an essay based on data from a report/experiment they produced or from an external source. *For example:* Using the measurements found in the laboratory, explain and discuss the chemical reactions between the two main elements found.

   This type of essays is greatly pragmatic, using data the students collected, allow the students to reflect and analyze.

An essay (depending on the types of essays) is usually expected to consist of an

1. Introduction/Aims/Objectives
2. Major points and ideas explained and summarized
3. Results/Related points/Issues/or others depending on the topic
4. Conclusion – future work

	Declarative	
Y	Functioning	
	Take Time to Set	
Y	Take Time to Answer	
Y	Take Time to Correct	CHARACTERISTICS
Y	Take Time to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
	Can substitute with Computers	
Y	Passive	
	Active	
	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly   Y = Yes

Advantages of Essay Assessment

- Essays have the ability to assess all levels of learning objectives.
- It encourages original and creative thinking.

Disadvantages of Essay Assessment

- Due to the subjective nature of essay assessments, grading is very unreliable even for the same assessor at different periods.
- Grading may be influenced by other factors such as handwriting and length of response.
- As essays are very time-consuming to answer and to correct, they are not recommended if only low-level of learning outcomes are assessed which can be assessed by multiple choices or short answer questions.
- Although guessing is not possible in essay assessments, but "bluffing" is.
- It is also not advisable to give the topic of the essay to the students at an early date. This may give rises to surface learning where students concentrate all their efforts in completing the essay only.

How to design a good Essay Assessment?

1. Let students know the assessment criteria and marking scheme, including grammar, spellings and other issues.
2. Try to reduce ambiguity in the essay questions, clearly define the expected response such as compare, evaluate, summarize, critique etc.
3. Do not use essays to measure knowledge or understanding that can be assessed using less time consuming assessment methods.

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Marking Rubrics

There are two general grading approaches – holistic and analytic grading. Holistic is grading the essay as a whole. Analytic grading approach grades the important components of the essay and assigns marks to each component. Below is a sample of essay rubric from Pearson Education:

http://www.phschool.com/professional_development/rubrics/writing_assignment.pdf

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
CONTENT				
Introduction:	Attitude is defined; thesis is clearly focused; subject is significant	Thesis is clear; provides direction for essay	Unclear; formulaic; not creative	Introduction is incomplete, ineffective, or missing
Idea Development:	Interesting; sophisticated; insightful	Clear and Thoughtful	Simplistic; uneven in quality; lacking in relevance	Absent or ineffective
Support or Evidence:	Detailed; accurate; convincing	Sufficient and accurate	Uneven	Vague, missing, or inaccurate
Word Choice:	Engaging and powerful choice of words	Appropriate to task	Uneven	Limited, monotonous, inappropriate
ORGANIZATION				
Topic Sentences:	Clearly related to thesis; comprehensive; incorporates effective transitions	Comprehensive and logical	Provides bland restatement of thesis; narrow or inaccurate	Absent
Paragraph Order:	Contributes to an effective argument; reinforces the content	Demonstrates a clear plan	Ineffective or inconsistent	Random
Transitions:	Effective and varied	Clear and functional	Mechanical	Absent
MECHANICS				
Sentence Structure:	Complete; varied; interesting	Complete and correct	Variety is present; some errors are evident	Repetitious; fragments and run-ons are frequent
Punctuation/Spelling:	Error-free	Present but do not interfere with meaning	Careless or distracting	Block meaning

Web Reference and Resources

Presentation Assessment

- Using Assessed Presentations, Learning and Teaching Hub, University of Bath
  https://teachinghub.bath.ac.uk/the-bath-blend/essentials/assessed-presentations/

Tips for Students Presenting

- Presentation for Assessment – A Guide, Learning and Teaching Centre, Macquarie University
  https://ishare.mq.edu.au/prod/file/e754584d-7fef-4b11-aaec-cca4468e0843/1/A415_019StudentPresentations.pdf

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