

# EC1800 Essay Writing Guidelines

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The whole point of an academic essay is for the student to **SYNTHESISE** some of the material of the course into a **COHERENT** argument answering the question. Some essay writing notes:

- In your introductory paragraph, define what you are going to mean by 'wealth' throughout the rest of your essay. **MAKE SURE** it has at least one supporting academic reference (and preferably more!) from a **peer reviewed source**<sup>1</sup> – failure to do this will guarantee a maximum mark of 70% as the approach definition is the single most important academic reference in ANY essay.

For example:

Taking inspiration from Adam Smith whose seminal work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) described wealth as "the annual produce of the land and labour of the society", this essay defines wealth as the aggregated output of the economy as defined by Gross Domestic Product or GDP. This definition was chosen as studies have repeatedly shown a strong correlation between economic activity and social utility (Smith, 1776; Jevons, 1865; Marshall 1890; Keynes, 1936; Friedman, 1980; Varian, 1992; Mas-Colell et al., 1995; Frank, 2000; European Quality of Life Survey, 2003).

- Stick consistently to your definition of wealth throughout the essay. Failure to do this indicates poor organisation and presentation and therefore a lower mark.
- Remember that in academic writing, you can never state any fact without an academic reference to support it. In particular, **you cannot state your own opinion about the state of the world without using academic references to do so** (except in the conclusion), though you *can* state your own opinion about academically supported objective facts. For example, you **cannot** say "Around one sixth of the Irish population suffered abuse as children" without an academic reference but you **can** say "Abuse has significant positive and negative effects upon wealth" if and only if you then discuss separately both the positive and negative effects with academic reference support (at least one reference giving evidence for each position).
- Academic writing rarely uses the first person singular (i.e. 'I shall define wealth as ...'), it prefers to use the passive voice (i.e. 'Throughout this paper wealth shall be defined as ...') or the third person (i.e. 'This paper shall define wealth as ...').
- Break up your essay into sections using headings. Remember to tie everything together in your conclusion. Your conclusion is **the sole & only place you can state your own opinion** without a supporting academic reference.
- Government Statistics Offices and peer-reviewed academic sources are considered the best quality of reference, followed by books based purely on peer-reviewed academic sources such as most of the books we have reviewed for this course. If you want 85%+, **more than half** your references will need to be from either of these two sources. You can search peer reviewed journals using the UCC library (ask the library staff). It's easiest to look up references from the bibliographies of other papers or books.
- You can reference broadsheet newspapers, professional periodicals and the internet, but remember that none of these are peer reviewed. Business journals such as *The Economist*, *Harvard Business Review* or *The Financial Times* are considered much higher quality than ordinary newspapers (business needs the truth not rhetoric, hence the accuracy tends to be much higher). Equally, try to avoid referencing Wikipedia if at all possible as its quality is considered highly unreliable and you may be penalised.
- Remember that graphs don't add to the word count and therefore are 'free'. I don't mind you copying & pasting graphs from the internet or peer reviewed journal papers so long as you properly reference your source.

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<sup>1</sup> Anything published by the well known intellectual giants before peer review was introduced (i.e. before the 20<sup>th</sup> century) is fine. For a list of well known pre-20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual giants, try *The History of Western Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell or *A Dream of Reason* by Anthony Gottlieb.

- The top scoring essays tend to describe a journey. In Economics, this is usually through a sequence of logical argument (see my own Economics essays on Blackboard).
- Most of the theory covered by this course has been general theory not specific to Ireland. Applying some of this theory to Ireland would be an excellent essay. I gave my own application of this theory to Irish Economic History during the last two lectures – if you can't think of how to approach the essay, you could take one part of my treatment of Irish Economic History, research all the peer reviewed academic papers supporting my approach and submit that as your essay (this is why I left out academic referencing).

Useful references:

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish\\_diaspora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_diaspora)
- *Wherever Green is Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora* by Tim Pat Coogan (2002)
- Cullen, L. M., 1972, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660*, Batsford, London
- *The Economy of Ireland* by J.W. O'Hagan
- Finfacts.ie
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish\\_economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_economy)
- <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2008/0808/1218142761221.html>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtic\\_tiger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtic_tiger)

## Isn't all this too high a standard for a Diploma?

Last lecture, some felt that my outline of how I would mark the essays was too tough for a diploma level course.

Firstly, feel free to compare my marking schedule outlined in the lecture slides with that from the course handbook p. 19-21. As you'll see, I am more forgiving. Remember that the NUI and therefore UCC treat a Diploma as equal to an Ordinary Degree (NFQ Level 7).

Secondly, here are the main marking differences from an honours undergraduate course:

1. At Honours level, the true top percentage awarded is 75% for most non-numerical subjects. For this course, the true top percentage awarded is the full 100%. This makes the essay significantly easier.
2. At Honours level, I would try my hardest to NOT award marks except when I have to. For this course, I will award marks when given any excuse to do so. If you can give me any reason to give you a mark, you'll get it. Similarly, you will get the benefit of the doubt if I can give it.
3. At Honours level, most universities will fail a significant proportion of students in order to ensure that students choose the subjects that they are best at (e.g. at Trinity College Dublin, some first year modules deliberately fail half of all students no matter what). For this course, the only way you will fail is failure to submit, failure to answer the question or plagiarism.

**BEST OF LUCK, AND THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME AS YOUR LECTURER!**

## **Introductory paragraph for 6000 word essay I handed in before Christmas**

### **Topic: Cost Accounting of Efficiency & Productivity**

Blanchard (2004) has shown that a large majority – up to seventy percent – of the total life cycle cost for a given system can be attributed to maintenance and operation. In order to maximise the efficiency of this cost expenditure, a systematic feedback of reliability information from usage and internal testing is essential (Berman and Klefsjö, 2003). **It therefore becomes clear that the efficiency & productivity of a system is more dependent on effective maintenance than any other single factor** (Ahlmann, 1984; Al-Najjar, 1997; Riis et al., 1997; Ahlmann, 1998; Mckone and Wiess, 1998; Bevilacqua and Braglia, 2000 and Al-Najjar and Alsyouf, 2003). Indeed, Alsyouf (2006) argues that maintenance should be viewed as a profit generating function rather than as a cost.

Note the steps:

1. Lead into your definition of topic
2. Define your topic
3. Refine your topic