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Essay Guidelines

Ensure that you plan your essay before you begin writing. You may end up deviating from the plan, but it is good to go in with a sense of direction.

Determine what the essay question is asking you. What are the key terms and concepts being used? What is the tension you are being asked to explore? What are the different sides of the debate? What material from the course should be used to answer the question?

What is your answer to the question? Your answer is the key to a successful essay. You have to take a stand and make an argument! Identify what your position is before you start writing. Once you begin writing, make sure that each of your paragraphs contributes to helping you clarify and defend your position.

Construct a good introductory paragraph. You can wait until you have finished the rest of the paper to write the introduction. It must include a clear thesis statement that sets out your position. The reader should be able to quickly and easily identify what your essay is trying to prove. Following your thesis statement, provide a brief description of how your essay will argue for the position you are taking.

After the introduction, you need a section where you define the key terms and concepts that you will be employing in your essay. Are there different ways of defining the terms or understanding the concepts that you reject? If so, specify how your understanding diverges from other prominent views.

Following the introduction and the section where you define your terms, describe what is at stake in the debate and briefly lay out the arguments you will be examining. This descriptive portion of your essay (everything up until this point) should make up no more than one third of the entire length of the paper.

The remaining two thirds of the paper should develop and defend your argument (or thesis). Make sure that each paragraph is crucial to advancing your point and that it links to the paragraphs before and after it. You should also signpost along the way to remind the reader of what your argument is.

You will need to support your arguments by drawing on the relevant thinkers and theories from the course. You should also use examples to illustrate your points. You can use examples from the text, from real life, and from your own mind (e.g. thought experiments).

Make sure that you also consider the other side(s) of the debate and the positions put forward by scholars you disagree with. Raising and then arguing against counter-examples is an excellent way to demonstrate a breadth of knowledge, and strengthen your own position.

Finish with a strong conclusion that reiterates your thesis and outlines how you have gone about arguing for it.

Please talk to me if you have any questions about your essay. I'm always happy to meet with students.

Try to have fun!



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