

ESSAY GUIDE



POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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SECTION 1: HOW TO CONSTRUCT AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

This Essay Guide is designed to help you plan, write and format a standard essay in the School of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS). Please note that this guide only applies to essays and that you may be asked to do other assessment pieces by your course coordinator that might require different types of preparation than the ones outlined here. **In all cases, follow the advice of your course coordinator as to the exact type of assessment that is being requested of you.**

Planning your Essay

Before you start writing, it is important that you first plan your essay.

There are seven major steps to planning good essays:

1. Choosing an Essay Topic
2. Understanding the Task
3. Developing an Argument
4. Doing Academic Research
5. Reading
6. Creating an Essay Outline
7. Taking Notes

1. Choosing an Essay Topic

Effective **time management is essential** to successful tertiary study. You must consider the workload that is required in all your courses and plan accordingly, especially when you have multiple assessment deadlines that fall around the same time. Therefore, you should **choose an essay question/topic early** in the semester and begin working on it with the intention of producing more than one draft. If you leave your essay until the last minute and prepare it in a frantic rush, the quality of your work will invariably suffer.

2. Understanding the task

The most common problem in undergraduate essays is that students do not follow the assignment instructions. Therefore, it is important that you check the Electronic Course Profile (ECP) before you begin planning your essay so that you know exactly what your assessment entails.

Once you understand what your task is, you need to break it down into its component parts. Start by highlighting some key words and then think carefully about what the essay question is asking you to do.

Suppose, for example, the following question was asked: 'Is a two-party system necessary for the existence of representative democracy?' A careful analysis of the question suggests that a suitable answer would incorporate discussions on:

- the nature of representative democracy
- the role of political parties in representative democracy
- features of representative democracy strengthened by the role of political parties
- the idea that representative democracy is neither dependent on, nor weakened by, a two-party

- system; and
- your evaluation of these points.

At this preliminary stage, some of these components may not be apparent yet. Therefore, students should start by building their foundational understanding of their chosen topic by revisiting lecture notes/recordings and reading relevant chapters from their course reading lists. However, please note that lecture notes/recordings should not be cited in your essay (unless authorised by the Course Coordinator).

3. Developing an Argument

Once you have a good sense of what the essay question is asking you to do, you can start thinking about what your argument will entail. One of the most common mistakes that students make is the **failure to advance a central argument**, also known as a central argument. This should be a direct response to the essay question that also provides the primary justification for your answer.

For your essay, you are expected to demonstrate your understanding of your chosen topic by drawing upon ideas, theories, research findings and related information that supports your argument. However, rather than simply reproducing relevant information or repeating other people's arguments, you need to critically assess their importance and relevance. This **requires an analytical, rather than a descriptive approach**.

In courses dealing with politics and international relations, you are expected to be critical in the sense of determining whether or not the available evidence justifies the conclusions that are drawn from it. In other words, you are expected to question the assumptions involved in the material, rather than simply taking them at face-value. Being critical also implies identifying gaps in others' arguments or the evidence they use, identifying assumptions they make and postulating alternative explanations or interpretations. Critical analysis of sources is often a criterion used in marking essays.

As you develop your argument, you will need to keep the following factors in mind. First, it is not appropriate to answer an essay question with broad generalisations. Using the above example, a response that claims that 'democracy is desirable' but provides no supporting evidence or reasoning is insufficient because it constitutes an assertion, rather than an argument. Therefore, every scholarly argument or claim that you make must be substantiated by **evidence** and supported by **authoritative sources**.

Second, your argument will be further strengthened if you acknowledge multiple viewpoints, rather than providing a narrowly framed yes/no response. One of the most common mistakes that students make is that they only include information that promotes one specific viewpoint. A well-rounded discussion will incorporate various perspectives and counterarguments before coming to an overall conclusion as to which position/s you find more persuasive (and why). You should also acknowledge the limitations of your own views and address them in your essay.

4. Conducting Academic Research

To explain why you are making your argument in a particular way, you need to demonstrate that you have researched the topic. To do this effectively, you need to use academic sources for your essay.

Most Course Coordinators provide students with further reading lists that are designed to help students choose relevant material for their assessments. These are the **best place to start** researching an essay topic. You can also compile further references by checking the bibliographies in books and journal articles.

A good quality essay makes effective use of a wide range of academic sources, such as books, chapters in edited volumes, and peer reviewed journal articles. Textbooks are useful as they generally examine the

issue/topic in a broader context. However, they typically provide an overview of the academic debates and relevant concepts and do not examine the various theories or competing perspectives in-depth. To give your essay greater analytical strength, you will need to go beyond the textbook and required readings and demonstrate that you have read other relevant academic sources and are able to engage with theoretical perspectives and scholarly debates. Essays that provide evidence of in-depth/critical engagement with the academic literature are more likely to result in sound, critical and engaging analysis.

Types of Sources

As you start collecting your sources, you will need to make sure that they are both reputable and credible. The most straight-forward way to determine whether your source should be included in your essay is by first ascertaining what category of information they fall into.

Primary Sources: These sources are documents that were created during the time in question and therefore constitute a 'first-hand' account of events by those who directly experienced them. Primary sources may include diaries/memoirs, speeches, interviews, government reports, United Nations treaties/resolutions, reports by non-government organisations (NGOs), statistical data, and newspapers (but see below). While they are generally considered to be authoritative, they also often contain biases (e.g. when a government justifies its policy position in the face of criticism). However, while they are not strictly academic sources, they can be useful if your essay requires you to look at the attitudes of people directly involved in a specific event or if you need to gauge the significance of your topic/issue (e.g. global proportion of women in senior leadership roles).

Secondary Sources: These are sources that provide second-hand information on specific issues and events and critically analyse their significance. For academic essays, students should mainly focus on including scholarly sources such as books and journal articles. These will be the main sources used, and depending on the course and essay topic may be the only sources consulted for your essay. One way to determine whether a secondary source is credible is to ascertain whether it has been subjected to peer-review (i.e. where the source has been examined by other academic professionals).

The UQ library provides you with numerous tools to streamline your academic research. First, you can refine your results to only include sources that have been peer-reviewed. Second, you can use the UQ database library to access various global repositories that host a large number of politics and international relations journals, including the *Social Science Database*, *Sage Journals*, *JSTOR*, *Project MUSE*, *Taylor and Francis*, and *Wiley Online*.

Newspapers and News Periodicals: Newspapers can constitute either primary or secondary sources. However, they must be used cautiously as they are not scholarly and often promote a specific viewpoint rather than a balanced critical analysis. While newspapers can be useful repositories for facts, commentaries and current affairs, they do not provide a coherent analytical framework. The UQ Database Library has subscriptions to many national and international daily and weekly newspapers, most of which can be accessed via *Factiva*.

Parliamentary and Government Records: Each Australian parliament records debates in *Hansard*. The federal parliament *Hansard*, as well as text of bills and other parliamentary information, can be found at [Home – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](http://aph.gov.au). The Queensland parliament *Hansard* can be found at [Record of Proceedings \(Hansard\) - Queensland Parliament](#).

Internet sources: You can access a wide range of scholarly journals and e-books online via the UQ library or by using [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com). However, you should be wary of relying on other internet sources as their reputability cannot be as easily established as peer-reviewed scholarly literature. One way to determine whether an internet source is credible is by checking whether it has been compiled by a reputable institutional source. Remember that the purpose of researching an essay is to gather evidence that is pertinent to your argument and to demonstrate to the marker that you understand the different schools of thought or

different contributions that are applicable to the topic.

In situations where you have to discuss a contemporary issue/topic, publications from think-tanks (such as the Lowy Institute or Australian Strategic Policy Institute) are a good way of obtaining critical analyses of current events and to 'bridge the gap' with books and journal articles which are often slightly out of date. However, reliance on these types of sources should ultimately be minimal.

Do not use these sources in an academic essay:

- Online user-updated encyclopedias such as *Wikipedia*
- Online dictionaries such as *Britannica*
- General information websites such as *History.com* and *E-International Relations*
- Blogs, newsgroups, email lists
- Partisan, personal or anonymous websites.
- Lecture slides and other course content that has not been approved for use by the Course Coordinator

It is always preferable to find the same information from a more reputable and authoritative source. If you can, then use the reputable source as your reference. If you cannot, then it is best not to rely upon the information at all.

For more information on how to conduct academic research using the UQ online Library, please go to: [Research tools & techniques - Library - University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/research-tools-techniques)

5. Reading

A good essay requires wide reading. This will help you develop the breadth of knowledge necessary to evaluate ideas and arguments put by others. However, mere quantity is not enough; you should choose your material wisely and be selective by using sources that are directly relevant to your discussion.

When you start your reading, you will want to get a general idea about what the book or article is about to determine whether you want to include it in your essay or not. Therefore, begin by reading the introduction and conclusion of a book/book chapter or the abstract of an article to get an overall sense of its content and approach. Another useful way of streamlining your reading is to check a book's index, or the sub-headings within chapters, to identify relevant information and sections. As you narrow down your topic, you can then focus more on the details and on the paragraphs, quotations, or ideas that are most relevant to your argument.

It is usually best to read from the general to the specific. Begin by reading the relevant sections of introductory texts, and then move on to more detailed publications or specialised journal articles. Please note that while individual courses and assignments may require different amounts of reading, you cannot write a convincing essay by only using a limited number of sources (see Section 2 for more details).

6. Creating an Essay Outline

Once you have analysed the question, researched the topic and done some reading, you need to organize your ideas into an outline. This is to ensure that the essay has a logical structure. It also facilitates the preparation of the essay by guiding your reading, note taking and writing.

There is more than one way to write an outline. One is to do a diagrammatic/brain map approach, putting

boxes on the page for each component (e.g. introduction, one paragraph per key point you want to make in the essay, conclusion), and adding dot points for each point you want to make in each component. Another is to do a linear, narrative plan in which you use headings for the introduction, each paragraph, and the conclusion and put dot points under each heading for what you plan to write in that component. Referring back to the above example, each body paragraph may be assigned a heading that addresses a specific component of the essay question (i.e. the nature of representative democracy, the role of political parties in representative democracy etc).

It is also important at this stage to keep in mind the **stipulated word limit** (see Section 3 for more details) and any other requirements set by the Course Coordinator. An effective way of keeping track of your word count is to assign an approximate number of words for each section of your outline. By identifying the points that are central and those that are peripheral to your argument and by allocating appropriate word-lengths, your outline will provide a useful guide for how much reading and writing is required.

7. Taking Notes

Once you have created a basic essay outline, you can start filling it out with relevant information. The most effective way to do this is to first take down some notes from the sources that you have read. You may use a different set of notes for each of the sections of your essay outline. The major advantage of this system is that when you write your essay, each section of the outline can be dealt with in turn, without having to leaf through pages of disorganised notes.

Always write down the exact reference (including page number) for the information you write down in your notes to keep track of where you sourced it from. This is especially important when you directly import an author's words in the form of a direct quote (see section 3 for more details on referencing). In order to avoid unintentional plagiarism, it is always better to paraphrase the material into your own words, although you will still need to acknowledge where you got it from (see Sections 2 and 3 for more details on referencing and academic misconduct).

Once you have finished your reading and taking notes, it is often useful to take a step back and think again about what you want to argue in the essay. Sometimes it helps to get some distance from the reading and your notes by taking a walk or waiting until the next day to revise the structure and argument of your essay or argument. This is why it is so important to start the essay planning process early since it takes time for your ideas to be consolidated into an effective discussion.

Building your Essay Structure

Writing your first Draft

As soon as you have incorporated your arguments and relevant information into your essay outline, you are ready to write the first draft of your essay. Your essay should be written in a **coherent and logical prose** that is cogently (convincingly and effectively) argued, carefully documented, and well written.

The structure of an essay typically comprises three parts: an introduction, the body of the essay, and a conclusion.

Introduction: The introduction should introduce the topic to be discussed, clearly delineate your central argument, and outline the structure of your essay- the points you will cover in the essay to make that argument in the same order in which they will appear in the essay. Referring back to the above example, your central argument may be worded in the following way: "In this essay, I will argue that the existence of

representative democracy is neither dependent on, nor weakened by, a two-party system.” The more robustly worded and multifaceted your central argument is, the more effective your response will be.

Your introduction should comprise a concisely worded and accessible summary of your entire essay. If you are uncertain as to how your introduction should be structured, have a look at some abstracts from journal articles and introductory paragraphs in books and book chapters.

Body paragraphs: The body of the essay is where you will make the key points that comprise your argument. Body paragraphs usually start with a topic sentence that summarises your point. Then, you need to expand on your reasoning and provide supporting evidence including data (facts and statistics), illustrative examples/case studies, and the work of key scholars (either individually or as part of an academic debate).

In your first body paragraph, you may want to provide some context for your main discussion to give the reader a good sense of what the issue/topic entails. This may consist of a brief historical background, definitions of key terms (but avoid being too descriptive here), an overview of relevant theoretical concepts, or the parameters of a particular IR debate/discussion. The type of context that you provide depends on what the essay question is asking you to do.

Conclusion: The conclusion should briefly restate your key arguments and demonstrate how your own analysis has enabled you to draw specific conclusions about the topic. The conclusion should be written in your own ‘voice’ and generally does not include quotations from other authors. Do not introduce new ideas at this stage of the essay.

There are two ways to get started when beginning the writing process. You can either begin by writing your introduction first, or you can start with the body of the essay. Writing the introduction first may help to clarify the central argument of the essay, but remember that, like an essay plan, it will often need to be revised as the essay progresses. Some writers prefer to commence with the body of the essay as it enables them to mould the points from their outline into a structured argument. Once you have established the structure of the essay, this can serve as a guide for the introduction. Whichever method you use, the body of the essay must be consistent with the introduction and conclusion.

As you write your first draft, remember that one of the key hallmarks of effective essay writing is to provide a balance of facts and analysis. If your essay is either too descriptive or too speculative, then you have only provided a partial response to the essay question. Also keep in mind that while directly engaging with the academic literature is highly encouraged, you need to make sure that your essay doesn’t become a collection of academic quotes and scholarly perspectives to the point that your own argument cannot be identified.

Formatting and Revising your Draft

One of the most common mistakes that students make is that they only write one draft. To get the best possible mark for a university essay, you should allow yourself sufficient time to write **more than one draft**.

The aim of a first draft is to get your ideas mapped out on paper. Therefore, you need to think of it as an ‘expansion’ of the essay outline, rather than a final product. The aim of writing second (and subsequent) drafts is to refine your argument and to achieve the best possible wording. The editing process will enable you to improve the cohesiveness of your essay by identifying awkward sentence structures and analytical weaknesses. One way to revise a draft of your essay is to read it as if you were the marker. What are the shortcomings in the argument, writing, sequence, and so on? Revise the draft to overcome these deficiencies and try to achieve an elegant writing style that you would enjoy reading.

Presentation

Another important aspect of the writing process is to ensure that your essay is presented as effectively as possible. Essays should be typed, use double or 1 ½ line spacing, have a margin of 2.5cm on all four sides of the page, use Times New Roman 12 point (or a similarly clear font and size), and include page numbers. Using justify to distribute the text evenly between the margins will give your document a more polished look.

Paragraphs: Your essay should be divided into roughly equally sized paragraphs that are between 150-250 words (although your introduction and conclusion can be a bit shorter). Avoid having either lengthy sections or short 1-2 sentence paragraphs as they detract from the flow of your discussion. You should aim to address one key point per paragraph in your essay body before moving on to the next one.

Sub-Headings: Unless directly discouraged from doing so by your course coordinator you should consider the use sub-headings in your essay to help orient your reader and provide clarity to your structure. Make sure that they are not generic but rather encapsulate what you are discussing in that particular section. You should also use headings sparingly (i.e. not after every paragraph).

Spelling/Grammar: Your essay will be less coherent if it contains a lot of spelling and grammar mistakes. Please make sure that you use the spell-check function in Microsoft Word **before** you submit your essay so that you don't lose marks unnecessarily for failing to proofread your essay.

Writing Conventions

As you write your essay, keep in mind the following writing conventions to ensure that your argument is conveyed as effectively as possible.

Avoiding Bias

Bias refers to prejudices, preconceptions or predispositions that distort your capacity to examine and assess material in a dispassionate manner. Bias occurs when you ignore and/or suppress contradictory data or alternative viewpoints, only include authors who agree with your own viewpoint, or presenting dogmatic views or opinions that are not supported by the available evidence.

The best way to avoid bias is to draw upon a broad range of sources and evaluate the arguments and assertions contained within them critically. One of the key elements that markers look for when assessing the depth of a student's knowledge on a particular topic is their ability to provide a balanced analysis that acknowledges the existence of alternative arguments and evidence. Avoiding emotive or casual language (see below) can also help avoid appearances of bias.

Good writing style

Your discussion can be based on a considerable amount of research and still fail to convey your meaning effectively if your writing style is unsophisticated. For markers, a lack of clarity in exposition may be interpreted as a symptom of confused thinking. Therefore, it is important that your response is articulated as clearly as possible. Here are some suggestions to improve your writing:

- **Role Models:** Pay attention to the style used in the articles and chapters that you read in researching your essay. Model your own writing style on the work of authors who you enjoy reading.
- **Dot points:** Do not submit an essay that is written in point form and always write in complete sentences. Even if the source that you use has dot-points or numbered sections (e.g. articles in international treaties), you need to amalgamate the information into your body paragraphs.
- **Use active voice:** Avoid using passive voice as it leads to long, complicated sentences. Compare the

following: 'The bill giving the right to vote to women was passed by Parliament'; and 'Parliament passed the bill giving women the right to vote'. The second example uses active voice and is clear and straightforward.

- **Use the first person:** For POLSIS essays, you are encouraged to write in the first person. Rather than writing: 'In this essay it will be argued that...', try the alternative: 'In this essay I argue that ...'. Your assertions will be more forceful if you take direct ownership of them.
- **Quotations:** You should only use a quotation when the author's own words are critical to make the point you want to make. Otherwise, paraphrase the idea in your own words, remembering to give proper credit to the author. Quotations of **more than 40 words** should be presented as a 'block quote'; that is, they must be indented on both sides with single spacing in the text and presented without quotation marks. Including the page number(s) for the quotation is essential.

Quotations must use the exact wording and punctuation of the original text. If you want to omit words from the middle of a quotation, indicate the omitted words with ellipses (...). If you want to add words or clarify comments, you must include them in square brackets []. For example, the quotation 'Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few' could be shortened or clarified respectively as: "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed ... to so few," or "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many [people] to so few."

Do not start a sentence with a quote, but rather amalgamate it into your broader sentence structure. For example, you could link the quote directly back to the author by stating: Smith (2008: 13) argues that "[n]ever in the field of human conflict has so much been owed...to so few."

- **Gender-neutral language:** Avoid inappropriate gender-specific language. Groups of people should not be characterised as either male or female, but rather be referred to as 'they/them.' The use of 'he', 'him', or 'his' as the default pronoun should not occur, while humanity in general should not be referred to as 'man/mankind.' Nor should you use female pronouns when referring to inanimate objects, for instance referring to a boat as she. If an individual uses gender-neutral pronouns, that person should also be referred to as 'they/them.'
- **Non-discriminatory language:** Terms that are discriminatory or prejudicial to ethnic or racial groups are unacceptable in academic writing. When referring to Australia's Indigenous peoples, the terms "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" should be used. ("Aboriginal people" or "Torres Strait Islander people" is appropriate if referring specifically to either group of people.) It is also acceptable to use the terms "Indigenous peoples" or "First Nations peoples" as alternatives to this formulation. 'Non-English speaking background' is used to denote someone whose cultural background is derived from a non-English-speaking tradition or whose first language is not English. Please use the full 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersex and Queer Community' when referring to this community. It is also suitable to use the acronym LGBTIQ.
- **Cliches and jargon:** Avoid words and phrases that suffer from overuse. Clichés impede clear perception, feeling and thought. Statements such as: 'the moment of truth', 'history tells us' and 'at the end of the day' should be avoided. It is also important to refrain from using language that is unnecessarily verbose, which often has the unintended effect of obscuring your argument. Rather, try to convey your meaning as clearly and concisely as possible.
- **Contractions, colloquialisms and slang:** Avoid contractions, slang and colloquial expressions. A contraction is a shortened form of a word or expression that is common in spoken English but should

be avoided in formal written expression like essays. For instance, use 'it is' rather than 'it's' and 'is not' rather than 'isn't.' A colloquialism is a word or expression that is appropriate to a conversational level of usage but is not suited to academic composition. Slang is a form of colloquialism where ordinary words have been given a special meaning (e.g. using the word 'cool' as an expression of approval).

- **Numbers:** Spell out the numbers wherever possible and use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) for other numbers (e.g. statistical information). Percentages are expressed as figures followed by 'per cent' even if the number is less than 10 ('%' should be used only in charts, tables, graphs and footnotes). Always write out a number or year if it begins a sentence. Do not use an apostrophe if referring to a decade – for example, 1990s (**not** 1990's).
- **Acronyms:** An acronym is a word formed from the first (or first few) letters of a series of words. For example, AJPS is an acronym for the *Australian Journal of Political Science*. When you refer to a relevant term for the first time, you need to write out the full title, followed by the acronym in parentheses: for example, the United Nations (UN). In subsequent references, it is sufficient just to use the acronym.

SECTION 2: REFERENCING

Which referencing system should you use?

For POLSIS assessments, you have the option of using either the **author-date in-text** referencing system (Harvard), or the **footnote** referencing system (Chicago)

Please note that:

- The Author-date in-text referencing system **will** count toward the word limit
- The Footnote referencing system **will not** count toward the word limit (unless you include substantive material, which will count)

The UQ Harvard referencing style guide can be accessed here:

<https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/uqharvard>

The Chicago footnote referencing style guide can be accessed here:

<https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/chicago17-footnotes-bibliography>

Once you have chosen a referencing system, you need to familiarize yourself with the formatting conventions for the different types of sources that you will use (books, book chapters, journal articles etc). Be consistent in how you cite these sources and make sure that all of your citations are complete. Use pinpoint citations (page numbers) wherever possible.

Referencing is not only necessary whenever you quote an author's words or refer directly to their material, but also when you use their ideas to support your argument. While you don't have to provide a reference after each sentence, you need to cite your work frequently enough in order to demonstrate to the marker that you have engaged with all of the sources that are listed in your reference list and understand how they fit into your overall argument.

If you are citing a particular scholar/political theorist whose work is referred to by a scholar in another

textbook, make sure that you acknowledge this (i.e. Hobbes 1651, cited in Devetak, George & Percy 2017, p.54).

You should also consider the use of a referencing software such as Endnote to keep track of your references, incorporate them into your essay and change the referencing format easily if required. For further information, see here: <https://web.library.uq.edu.au/research-tools-techniques/endnote-referencing-software>

Reference List

You need to include a list of all of the sources that you have used at the end of your essay. Your reference list must be correctly formatted and be alphabetically ordered by surname. Sources should not be divided into separate categories (e.g. books listed separately from journal articles). Reference lists are **not included in the overall word count**.

Unless explicitly requested by your course coordinator, you should include a reference list rather than a bibliography. A bibliography refers to all sources that were consulted but not necessarily cited in the essay, whereas a reference list only includes sources that were cited. If you list 15 sources in the reference list but only cite 5 in your essay, the marker will assume that you have only read 5 sources. Please note that you are required to include a reference list even if you elect to use the Chicago (footnote) referencing system, although the formatting requirements will differ slightly.

Number of References: One of the most commonly asked questions from students is how many sources they should include in order to demonstrate that they have done sufficient research for their essay. There is no 'magic number' of references that can guarantee you a high mark since there multiple criteria that students need to fulfil for their assessments. However, a useful rule of thumb is to ensure that they amount to 1/100 of your overall word count. In other words, if your essay is 1,000 words, then 10 sources will generally constitute a satisfactory amount, while you should aim for around 15 sources for a 1,500 word essay. In some instances your Course Coordinator may stipulate different expectations.

SECTION 3: PENALTIES AND ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Word Count and Word Limit Penalty

Writing to word length specifications is a skill and students are expected to write to the word limit set by the Course Coordinator. All words used in the text of your essay (including the title, quotations, block quotations, in-text citations, tables, figures and headings) count as part of the word limit.

Always make sure that you check your word count (excluding the reference list and footnotes if used) prior to submitting your assessment. If you are using footnotes, you need to exclude reference-only footnotes from the word count.

Essays are usually given a +10% leeway on the word count before a penalty is applied. For example, if your essay is 1,500 words, you may write up to 1,650 before attracting a word count penalty. If your essay exceeds the upper word limit, it will attract a 10% word count penalty. Therefore, if your essay is worth 40 marks, you will lose 4 marks from your allotted grade. Unless specified, penalties only apply to exceeding the word length, not for failure to write a sufficient amount.

Late Penalty

If you submit your essay after the due date without an approved extension, you will lose **10% of your overall mark for every calendar day** (including weekends) that your essay is late, and after 7 days your essay will receive a mark of 0. Therefore, it is essential that you manage your time effectively to ensure that you meet all of your assessment deadlines.

If there are extenuating circumstances that will prevent you from submitting your essay on time, you need to apply for an extension **before** the due date. For more information on what constitutes acceptable grounds for seeking an extension, click [here](#).

Plagiarism

UQ takes academic misconduct seriously. Penalties can range from having to resubmit an assessment and/or automatically failing the course (for lower end offenses) to being suspended or expelled from your degree (for more serious/repeated academic misconduct).

Academic misconduct includes (but is not limited to):

- (a) plagiarising the work of another person and presenting that work as if it is the student's own work, without appropriate acknowledgement;
- (b) colluding with other students on individual assessment items;
- (c) fabricating data or inventing references;
- (d) bringing unauthorised material into an examination without the permission of the supervisor or leaving the material with the examination supervisor immediately on entering an examination;
- (e) submitting the same work or recycling work without prior permission of the Course Coordinator;
- (f) violating policies and procedures and rules governing administration of examinations;
- (g) violating any policies and procedures and rules relating to academic conduct of a course or program.

Using the arguments, ideas or words of another author without acknowledging them via a citation or reference constitutes plagiarism. You will lose marks (in addition to risking being cited for academic misconduct) if you leave large tracts of text unreferenced and consequently fail to acknowledge where you got your ideas from.

Collusion/Contract Cheating

You should not lend your original work to others for any reason unless directed to by your Course Coordinator. Nor should you collude with other people, including but not limited to fellow students, when completing your assessment work unless directed by your Course Coordinator (for instance, if you are undertaking a group essay).

The term 'contract cheating' covers both paid and unpaid agreements made by a student with a third party to complete their assessment task/s for them, which is in turn submitted as the student's own work. Any students that are found to have engaged in contract cheating by employing ghost-writing services will potentially face severe academic penalties.

Click [here](#) for more information on what plagiarism and academic misconduct entails.

SECTION 4: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you are struggling with the course workload or have any additional questions about an assessment task, please contact your tutor and/or Course Coordinator. They will be able to provide you with helpful tips and advice on how to approach your chosen essay question and the additional strategies you can employ in order to succeed in your course and degree.

POLSI encourages students to reach out if they are feeling overwhelmed. The sooner that specific challenges can be identified, the more effectively they can be dealt with.

There are also a range of services that students can access in order help them address these challenges. These include:

POLSI Student Support: <https://polsis.uq.edu.au/student-support>

Student Services: <https://my.uq.edu.au/student-support>