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.

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 a specific role 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 to 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, allowing 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
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 rise to superficial 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.
Marking Rubrics

There are two general grading approaches – holistic and analytic grading. Holistic approach 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:

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

Presentation Assessment

- Institute for Interactive media and Learning, University of Technology Sydney, (Trigwell, K. (1992). Information for UTS Staff on Assessment)

- Example of a Grading Rubric For a Term Paper in Any Discipline, UC Davis, Teaching Resources Center

- Pearson Prentice Hall
  http://www.phschool.com/professional_development/assessment/rub_writing_assignment.html

Tips for Students Presenting

- Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Park University
  http://www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/essay.html

To Reference these pages

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Chan C.(2009) Assessment: Essay, Assessment Resources@HKU, University of Hong Kong [http://ar.cetl.hku.hk]:
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