

Assignment Sheet for Essay 3

In this final writing assignment, you will combine the various rhetorical strategies you have learned on the course in a longer, research-based essay of eight to ten pages that considers the following question, “Who should education be for?” There are only two restrictions within this broad topic area for this assignment:

1. You must find and use at least ONE researched source.
2. You should not write a paper that is merely descriptive. Instead, advance a claim that explores a paradoxical, surprising or problematic aspect of the topic you select.

Here are some instances of acceptable approaches and topics:

- Evaluative case studies that examine the educational goals of two countries worldwide or within the same country, in the past and the present. For instance, Singapore provides a number of interesting programmes that embody interesting policy decisions and provide fertile ground for exploration like screening for the Gifted Education Programme, SAP schools, the express versus normal streams, and the Core Curriculum and the Talent Development Programme.
- An exploration of various forms of specialized education, which serves the needs of special-interest groups. Examples include women's education i.e. gender studies; special education for the physically or intellectually disabled; enrichment programmes for economically or socially disadvantaged children; multicultural education for minority groups; religious education; environmental education and moral education. You are free to concentrate on any other form of education that interests you as long as you clear the topic area with your tutor.
- For those who would like to explore verbal portrayals of education, a comparative analysis of literary texts is an option. Examining one or two key passages that reveal key insights about who gets privileged or marginalized in education might offer contrasting views of who education is for.

What else do I need to do

Read the handout **Generating a Viable Question for Your Researched Essay**. It outlines four planning strategies for articulating interesting essay questions.

Remember to use the formatting conventions outlined in the section titled **Manuscript Conventions for Writing Activities and Essays** in *The Student Guide to The Writing Programme*.

Please submit your **final draft in a folder**. In this folder, you will place:

- two copies of your final draft, one copy being stapled to your first draft and letter about your first draft;
- all the textual sources you cite in your bibliography.

What major deadlines do I need to meet

- Seminar 3(6) All students give the tutor two hard copies of Essay 3 for comments plus two hard copies of the one-page letter assignment.
- Seminar 3(10) All students give the tutor two hard copies of Essay 3 for Essay 1 for grading.

Handout **Generating a Viable Question for Your Researched Essay**

As you look back over the semester, you will see that each of the essays written for this module are similar in their emphases on asking a question which is a true question to the mind, and providing evidence for the answer arrived at. Each essay, however, can also be distinguished in various ways.

The first essay – the shortest of the three at 3 to 4 pages – invited you to examine an abstract/theoretical view on education espoused by one writer against a concrete anecdotal experience of education recounted by another writer.

The second essay (slightly longer than the first, at 5 to 6 pages) in turn required you to test two largely theoretical viewpoints about the ends and/or means of education against each other, exploring their fundamental (lack of) compatibility in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the abstractions explored in the two source-texts.

In Unit 3, you will be producing a longer essay of 8 to 10 pages where you will:

- define your question within the scope of the broad frame, “Who Should Education be for?”; and
- locate relevant textual sources which will enable you to answer the above question in one very specific context.

As you reflect on the essays you are writing, you might wish to distinguish between essay sequences that move from motive to text rather than from text to motive. If we consider the essays in this module from this perspective, one could argue that Essays 1 and 2 required you to do the latter, i.e., to use specific texts to create the motive for your essay. In contrast, Essay 3 encourages you to begin with your own lived experience as a motive for researching a topic, and then find one or more academic and/or literary sources as the textual foundation for your researched essay.

The most difficult task for most students in attempting Essay 3 will probably be to find an appropriate question. So, in this handout, we’d like to suggest four strategies you might try in order to help you discover something personally meaningful to write about in your research essay. We’d also like to discuss the challenges associated with asking policy questions.

Four Strategies

The first strategy we’d like to suggest involves re-visiting the questions you generated and noted in your reading dia-log in the process of finding a motive and a question for Essays 1 and 2 which you ended up not using, however, because your would have required other sources of evidence (besides the ones selected from the reading packet) in order to answer these questions satisfactorily.

The second strategy involves a fresh, slow reading of detail-rich texts. You might, for instance, go back to the texts provided in the reading packet, which you did not use in Essay 1. Your task here is to move from a field of factual detail to the task of naming issues

implied in the details. In the case of the Frank McCourt chapter (pp.82-86), for instance, there are any number of topics or issues evident in the narrative, such as the odd or excluded student, or the newcomer; scape-goating in school and the reasons it happens; school discipline or indiscipline and its purposes; how students “mark” each other as members of different social classes/groupings. In the library session, you have received a demonstration of how to use this strategy, extrapolating from the issue/topic you identify in your chosen text to locating sources that will provide the researched evidence for your essay.

The third strategy we would like to suggest harnesses the power of memory as a way of generating powerful writing.

Using this method, Essay 3 would begin with images recollected from your own experience. “Image” here simply means a precisely defined event or moment – a sort of snapshot from memory. Start by generating at least three images from experience, some of them not so recent, perhaps, but all of which hold some significance for **you**. Do not select events because you think they were significant for somebody else. The experiencing agent must be you. Keep in mind, too, that the significant images you choose needn’t and perhaps shouldn’t be the most overwhelming, obvious or traumatic in your autobiography. Good results come when subtler events are given a chance to surface.

Each image or event you select should cause your mind to experience, in some fashion, a doubt. The recollection should perplex you or pose a resistance to your immediate ability to explain the meaning of the image or event. Structurally, the perplexity you glimpse should resemble some of the best questions we’ve seen operating as motives in a number of texts. The images you select from experience should seem meaningful to you, even though the precise articulation of that meaning is elusive now. In other words, reject any images whose meaning you already understand, and please do not cannibalize your Core admission essay.

In your writing, simply narrate the recollected facts of the events. *Interpret nothing. Do not make any inferences.* Simply depict what happened by using sensory reports. Don’t tell the reader what you think things mean. That will come later.

The three images you recount need not be connected in any way. It is probable that their relationship will be more or less random. If apparent connections do arise, that’s alright, but you shouldn’t contrive for this to happen. Also, you may discover that your mind generates more than three images. That’s fine. Go ahead and write them out. Then, select the three most significant and enigmatic of the lot.

And, from these three (with the help of friends/peers), select the single most inscrutable image, and work with your peers to ask the following.

- How can the enigmatic energy of your images be harnessed and turned into explicit questions of the type we’ve been cultivating in this module?
- How can those questions be affiliated with key words and concepts that the library referencing system can understand?

While Essay 3 will evolve from this single most inscrutable image, little or none of the original recollection will appear in your final essay. The enigma within the recollection will remain, however, and you will seek to probe it by way of at least three textual sources which will allow you to shape an evidenced analysis around an issue that you yourself have experienced from the inside as both meaningful and initially puzzling. You will discover these textual sources through original research you will do later.

(adapted from Donatelli, *An Exposé Companion*, p. 6).

A fourth strategy might be to immerse yourself in the field, i.e., to scan the newspapers, magazines, debates in parliament, talk shows, etc. to see if there is anything currently happening in the world that seems enigmatic or perplexing to you, in relation to the broad question of who education should be for (cf. the recent debate at Chinese High eliminating the need for O and A levels for brighter students; the implications for (language) education of the recent Singlish/English debate or the cosmopolitan/heartlander classification; what implications the concept of “a knowledge-based economy” has for educating the elderly in Singapore).

Asking a “should” question

Asking a question that examines reasons why someone should take a particular course of action. However, there are certain challenges with constructing interesting policy questions. Some of these challenges are discussed below. Let’s assume you’ve decided to work on the question “Should Singapore spend more money on education for the disabled?”

The main difficulty here would be figuring out what reasons would your target readers would accept as valid for increasing/not increasing the current budget allotted to education for the disabled.

Mere retelling of information from source-texts, such as the statistics on how much is currently spent on education for the disabled in Singapore in comparison with other periods in Singapore history, or in comparison to other developed nations, and/or based on the personal reflections of disabled individuals who feel more could be done for the disabled in Singapore would be insufficient. This is because your reader may or may not agree with you about what constitutes good reasons for deciding policy.

For example, saying that Singapore spends less now on education for the disabled than it used to five years ago as evidence for your recommendation that more should be spent on education for the disabled, suggests an assumption/expectation that past behaviour represents the standard for measuring present behaviour, and that present behaviour should maintain or outdo past behaviour. You would then have to offer evidence to support this belief.

Saying Singapore should spend more on education for the disabled because it spends less per capita on the disabled than on the able-bodied in turn suggests an assumption of equality, i.e. that we should treat everyone – able-bodied and disabled alike. What textual evidence would you be able to offer in support of this value?

Saying Singapore spends less on education for the disabled (per capita) than other developed nations like the UK or USA and should therefore increase spending on the disabled reflects an assumption/expectation that the basis for Singapore's behaviour is not some internal or absolute standard but comparison with one's peers.

Of the three arguments presented above, which offers the most persuasive reason for the conclusion that Singapore should spend more on education for the disabled? How would you determine this?

Fundamentally, arguments phrased as "should" questions revolve around values/assumptions/expectations that may or may not be amenable to argumentation themselves because these values/assumptions/expectations are based **entirely** on beliefs, rather than evidence comprising a combination of facts, interpretation of the facts, inferences and beliefs.

A more reflective and interpretive question might therefore be: What can we infer about the priorities of a nation where education for the disabled receives the support that Singapore gives it (documented by relevant and up-to-date sources)? The motive for this question would be the search for any anomalies/tensions (e.g. in the spending compared to the espoused aims) which would represent relevant data that could lead others to make a recommendation for a policy change/no policy change.

For further suggestions on posing a question worth exploring in your research essay, refer to section R1a (pp. 51 to 53) of *A Writer's Reference* (4th edition) by Diana Hacker.

Preparation for Seminar 3(1) Reading/Writing a Research Essay

In Seminar 3(1), we will do two things. Firstly, we will discuss two sample research essays. Secondly, we will clarify questions you might have about the search procedures discussed in the Library session.

In preparation for the first activity, you should read the two sample research essays in your reading packet (**The Importance of Jury Instructions** by Tanya Pierce, and **The Death Penalty: For Whom the Bell Tolls** in Ross and Geoffrey Winterowd's book, *The Critical Reader, Thinker, and Writer*. Read the two essays once through quickly to get the overall gist. Which essay did you prefer? Jot down in your reading *dia-log*, specific characteristics which made either preferable.

Now read the texts more carefully, using the questions below to help you become more attuned to the qualities of good research-essay writing.

Thesis

1. For each essay, could you identify an explicit thesis? Where is it in the text? Does placement and explicitness of thesis matter in a text of this length?
2. What made either thesis intellectually stimulating for you? If you didn't find either thesis engaging, what was missing in your intellectual engagement with the topic?
3. What kind of claim is made in each text – factual, policy, value or some combination thereof?
4. What kind of reader would find this thesis engaging?

Literature Review

5. Does the author provide enough context to make clear why the thesis is worth exploring?
6. Where does the author position the contextual information?
7. What specific rhetorical strategies does the writer use to establish a **research niche**? That is, does the writer do any of the following?
 - show opposing viewpoints,
 - reveal ambiguity in definitions or problematic cases,
 - reveal controversial implications to a particular viewpoint,
 - suggest unanticipated complications.

Be prepared to point to specific paragraphs and pages.

Use of Evidence

8. How does the writer use the primary and secondary sources – To confirm? To substantiate? To contest? Identify 3 concrete examples by page and paragraph number to talk about in class.
9. Locate at least two examples of the writers using sources to summarize/paraphrase a viewpoint. Can you readily differentiate the writer's opinions from those expressed by the quoted source?
10. What, if anything, does the writer of the research essay do to establish the credibility of the sources used?
11. How does the writer raise and counter objections to the viewpoint that s/he takes on the issue s/he is addressing?

Preparation for Seminar 3(2) **Assessing the Viability of a Research Topic**

By now, you will have used one or more of the strategies outlined in the handout, **Generating a Viable Question for Your Researched Essay**, to generate workable topics for Essay 3. In Seminar 3(2), we will be discussing what makes a good research topic. So, draft a 1 to 2 page document which concretely describes one or two potential topics that interest you at this stage. Be as specific as you can. State clearly what interests you about this topic and why this motive is likely to be shared by an intelligent public audience. Also, list on this document the textual sources that you think will be relevant to your topic.

As you do this activity, you may find it useful to read the section on **Research Writing** in *A Writer's Reference* (4th edition) by Diana Hacker.

Once you are happy with this document, either make multiple copies of the document for distribution to your peers and tutor in class or put the document on OHT. Please make sure that the OHTs are legible (font-size 14 points or larger; printed/written in black ink).

Preparation for Seminar 3(3) **Evaluating Sources/Managing a Working Bibliography**

Essay 3 is a research essay based on sources like books, journals, magazines, Internet websites, etc. By now you have probably begun two important steps in your research: selecting a topic area that interests you and gathering some general information after your library session.

Your preparation for Seminar 3(3) will continue your research by focusing on the question: how do I select the best available evidence for my essay?

In order to facilitate discussion in class, please read sub-sections R2 (Evaluating Sources) and R3 (Managing Information) in the section on Research Writing in *A Writer's Reference* (4th edition) by Diana Hacker.

Also, draft a 1 to 2 page document, which clearly describes your **research plan**. Include

- your potential question at this stage;
- the motive behind your question;
- the number and types of sources you're considering using.

Be as specific as you can. For instance, the class will want to know you how you arrived at your thesis and motive. Was it based on one or more experiences or textual sources, or a combination of the two? Explain clearly the gap, paradox, uncomplementarity of viewpoint that sparked your interest. Mention, too, any concerns or strategies you have for finding the right types of sources for your essay.

Once you're happy with this document, either make multiple copies for distribution to your peers and tutor in class or put the document on OHT. Please make sure that the OHTs are legible (font-size 14 points or larger; printed/written in black ink).

Preparation for Seminar 3(4)

Evaluating Essay 3's Global Argument Structure: Motive, Thesis and Evidence

Seminar 3(4) is meant to help you sharpen the argumentative focus of your research essays. To prepare for this seminar, please draft a 1 to 2 page document which outlines your motive, potential thesis and evidence for Essay 3, as well as any particular challenges you're facing that you're not quite sure how to overcome. If you like, use the template below to structure your document.

<p>Your Name Seminar group no. Tutor's name Argumentative structure for Essay 3</p>
<p>The motive for my essay is ... <i>(state what you hope the reader will get out of reading your essay)</i></p>
<p>My potential thesis/question, at this stage, is.....<i>(state the question or thesis as specifically as you can at this stage, and describe the context out of which your question was birthed)</i></p>
<p>In order to argue this thesis/find a good answer for my question, I think I will need to do the following: <i>(Outline the strategy you're thinking of using. Include a list of the textual sources you're thinking of using, giving full bibliographic information – as in the reading packet or your essays. For each source, describe exactly how you intend to use specific information from it to support your thesis, e.g. which texts will you use to define the key terms/concepts in your essay; which textual sources will you use to ground the counter-arguments you anticipate addressing and refuting. N.B. Our purpose here will be to help you evaluate if you have the best available tools for each rhetorical job you need to do, i.e., if you have the best sources for each job, and if you are using each source in the best possible way.)</i></p>
<p>The greatest challenge I am facing as I endeavour to ground my thesis in textual evidence, at this stage, is... <i>(again, please be as specific as you can.)</i></p>

Please bring the handout, **Evaluating Arguments**, to Seminar 3(4) with you.

Handout Evaluating Arguments in Essay 3

Listed below are some questions which you might consider as you offer feedback to other writers on the argument structure of their drafts of Essay 3.

- (1) Is the motive clear and does it seem worthwhile to you as a member of an intelligent public audience?
- (2) Does the question/potential thesis encapsulate some issue which seems genuinely puzzling, enigmatic, problematic, surprising to the writer and to you?
- (3) Is the formulation/phrasing of the question/potential thesis specific and clear enough, or does it need further tweaking? Tell the author what is unclear, ambiguous, or vague in the phrasing of the question/potential thesis.
- (4) Does the evidence outlined by the writer support the thesis/question s/he wishes to explore, or does it, in fact, support some other thesis/question?
- (5) Is there any evidence that needs to be here but isn't? Is there evidence here whose relationship to the question at hand seems unclear to you?
- (6) Does the author explain clearly how each textual source will be used to develop the argument encompassed by the question? Explain why or why not to the author.
- (7) Is there an over-use of one kind of textual source? Is there over-kill in terms of the number of sources used to make a point?
- (8) Consider the function served by each source (e.g. to define the key terms of the essay, to raise and refute counter-arguments). Is the right kind of source used to do the job? Can you offer the writer a better alternative in terms of specific readings or the genre of text s/he might use for this purpose?
- (9) Does the writer anticipate counter-arguments in the right places? Does the textual evidence that the writer cites support the specific point s/he intends it to, or does it support a related or even contrary point?

Preparation for Seminar 3(5) Workshop on Opening and Development of Essay 3

In Seminar 3(5), we will be looking closely at two/three drafts of Essay 3, written by your peers. We will focus only on the introduction or opening areas of the essay, specifically, the thesis, motive and literature review sections.

Before you come to class, please read each draft and annotate it, using the questions below to help you read more reflectively. Start by reading each draft to get its overall gist. Then, read each draft more carefully, paying attention to the questions below:

Introduction

1. Underline the thesis of the essay, and identify what kind of claim it embodies: an interpretive claim of cause (X makes Y happen for Reason Z), a value claim (X is desirable), a policy claim (Let's do Y) or some combination of these types of claims?
2. Now, evaluate the quality of the thesis. Is it stated clearly and unambiguously? Is it complex enough to sustain an 8 to 10 page discussion?
3. Does the author provide enough context to explain why the thesis is worth engaging? Why/why not?
4. Does the author do an effective job of using the literature review to explain the research gap and create a niche for his/her paper?
5. Does the author show how the literature review relates to his/her research question/thesis?
6. Does the author engage critically with the sources cited in the literature review or stop at mere summary?
7. Is the literature review section coherent?
8. Have the sources been integrated and attributed so that it is clear which opinions belong to whom?

Development

1. Do the writer's definitions of key terms and assumptions change unexpectedly or confusedly as the evidence and counter-arguments unfold?
2. Does the evidence supporting the thesis provide adequate support?

For example, for causal claims (X caused Y), does the evidence establish agency (X is responsible for Y happening); creation (X makes Y from nothing); construction (X makes Y from something) or correlation (When X happens, Y happens)?

For value claims (X is (un-)desirable), does the evidence establish why something is necessary (This will help us because ...); worthy (This is good because ...) or moral (This is the right thing because ...) etc.

For policy claims (We should (not) do X), does the evidence establish why something is do-able, that is, feasible (We have the time and resources) or effective (This policy can resolve the issue under discussion) etc.

3. Have the sources been integrated and attributed so that it is clear which facts and opinions belong to whom?
4. Does the writer really need to deal with the counter-arguments that s/he raises to the thesis? That is, do they constitute issues that will seriously undermine the thesis' validity for the essay's intended readers? Or, is the writer guilty of the "straw man" fallacy?
5. Are there counter-arguments that the writer hasn't anticipated and refuted, which s/he needs to?

IMPORTANT:

Please remember to write each author a brief note (one or two paragraphs) that clearly explains what work² in terms of his/her conclusion and what needs more work. At the end of the seminar, you will return the drafts to the authors along with your notes.

Preparation for Seminar 3(6) **Workshop on concluding Essay 3**

In Seminar 3(6), we will be looking closely at two/three drafts of Essay 3, written by your peers. We will focus only on the final areas of the essay, specifically, the conclusion that the author reaches, the limitations which s/he highlights, the implications of the author's thesis/research, and any ideas for future research which s/he recommends.

Before you come to class, please read each draft and annotate it, using the questions below to help you read more reflectively. Start by reading each draft to get its overall gist. Then, read each draft more carefully, paying attention to the questions below.

1. Does the essay have a clear conclusion or does it drift or come abruptly to a stop?
2. Judging from the conclusion, what one idea does the author seem to want you to take away from his/her essay?
3. Is the conclusion overly general or does the author qualify his/her conclusion, clearly highlighting the limitations of his/her research?
4. Does the author spell out the implications of his/her research?
5. Does the author make any suggestions for future research, which underscore the liveliness of the topic s/he has explored in this essay?

IMPORTANT:

Please remember to write each author a brief note (one or two paragraphs) that clearly explains what works in terms of his/her conclusion and what needs more work. At the end of the seminar, you will return the drafts to the authors along with your notes.