



Massey University

Geography Programme,
School of People,
Environment and
Planning

ESSAY WRITING AND FORMAT GUIDE

**FOR
GEOGRAPHY
STUDENTS**

Essay Writing and Format Guide

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Essay Writing and Format Guide for Geography Students

Introduction: Why Write Essays?

As you prepare your essay you may ask ‘what is the point?’ There are a number of arguments against having geography students write essays. The most often expressed is that essay writing has no relevance for what geography graduates actually do in the ‘real’ world. The staff in the Geography Programme are often used by students as referees for job applications, and the first question prospective employers typically ask us is ‘Does s/he have good written communication skills?’. During your geography programme you will be given the opportunity to develop a range these necessary communication skills, of which writing is one of the key ones.

The ability to write clearly, and hence communicate effectively is becoming increasingly important as text based tools such as the internet, and email become essential tools of our daily life. Without being able to communicate face-to-face, our writing needs to be clear and concise in order to both get our message across and to prevent misunderstandings. In this context essay writing provides a means whereby you are able develop the skills of effective communication that will be relevant wherever you end up as a graduate.

This guide has two functions: first, to provide advice as to the process of writing an essay; and second to give guidance as to the specific requirements of essay writing in the Geography Programme.

Types of Essay

There are a range of essay types, and each of these types requires you to do different things. An important first skill, then, in preparing your essay is to identify what sort of essay you are being asked to write, and what this requires you to do.

In general essays fall along a continuum between those that ask you to describe a particular phenomenon, and those that ask to discuss, analyse, criticize and debate particular issues.

At university essays increasingly tend to fall into the latter discussion type. These types of essay require you to go beyond simply repeating what you have been told towards thinking about the information you have found and knitting it into an argument.



TIP: If you are not sure what the essay requires you to do, ask the person setting the question about what they want.

Analysing the Question: Answering the Question

A key point to remember as you prepare your essay is that no matter how well you write the essay, if you do not actually answer the question you will not do well. This seems an obvious point, but in the heat of the moment it is often neglected.

To help you stay on track you can do two simple tasks: first, have a close look at the essay question; second, as you prepare and write your essay continue to look at the question and think if what you are doing matches what the question requires.

It is important to pay close attention to the essay question because the way in which the question is worded often gives clues to the way in which the question is designed to be answered. To help you understand an essay question a simple step is to divide the question up between content words, and command words (Kneale, 1999). Content words are those words in a question that frame the topic; whilst command words are those words that actually indicate what needs to be done with the topic.

Two examples might be:

Discuss and critically (command words) evaluate the processes that are considered to drive plate tectonics (content words).

Critically discuss (command words) the changing structure and geography of the global music industry (content words).

Finally, in understanding an essay question it is very useful to have an idea of what is required when certain command words are used. The list below has examples of command words that are commonly used.

Account for: Give the reasons for, giving an indication of all relevant circumstances. Very different from 'give an account of' which is asking for a detailed description.

Analyse: Study in depth; breaking down data/information into its constituent parts and identifying in detail the main characteristics and what these mean.

Assess: To 'weigh up' a particular situation; to consider in a balanced way strengths and weaknesses, arguments for and against, the pros and cons of a situation. In conclusion, state your judgement clearly.

Comment on: Clearly state your opinion on the material in question and support your views with reference to suitable evidence or explanations.

Compare: Look for similarities and differences between; emphasis on similarities but be aware of differences.

Contrast: As 'compare' but with emphasis on the differences; again do not ignore points of similarity.

Criticise: Express a balanced judgement about the merit of theories, arguments, opinions or the truth of the material in question. Use evidence from the material to support your views.

Define: Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase, in a clear and concise way. Do not give too many details.

Describe: Give a detailed account of something from the material you have.

Discuss: Examine and analyse carefully, considering all aspects of an issue, debating reasons for and against, assessing advantages and disadvantages etc. Be thorough and try to reach a balanced conclusion.

Evaluate: Carefully 'weigh up' the matter in hand; assess the value or worth of something commenting on both the advantages and limitations. Emphasise the views of authorities and to a lesser degree your personal opinion.

Explain: To make plain, to interpret, to account for; give reasons why and try to analyse causes.

Justify: Make out a case for something or give reasons for decisions or conclusions. Be convincing.

Outline: Give the main features or general principles of a subject omitting minor details, and emphasising structure and arrangement.

Relate: Show how 'things' (situations, ideas, facts) are connected to each other; the relationship between them, the extent to which they affect each other. (e.g. causes and effects)

Review: Make a survey of a subject; take an overview; reconsider the material, examine it critically and comment on the important points and stages of development.

Summarise: Give the main points in condensed form leaving out details and examples.

To what extent..: Here you are expected to make your case/present your material in the usual way but you remain aware of the fact that you may not be making a 100% case, i.e. there may be other counterbalancing evidence. This requires careful assessment and weighting of your material.

Sometimes the question posed will use a combination of two or more of the above instructions, for example 'describe and explain', 'compare and contrast', 'account for . . . and justify your

conclusions' and so on. In this situation you must take care to cover all aspects of the question asked otherwise you will be marked out of only half or perhaps one third of the total. It is therefore essential to understand exactly what the title requires you to do.



TIP: Unless otherwise stated make the assumption that every essay question in geography ends with the phrase 'using relevant geographical examples'.

Planning Your Essay

The first stage of planning your essay is to have a good idea of what is being asked for in the essay. If you are having trouble figuring out what is required, ask for help from the teaching staff. They would much rather sort a problem out at the beginning rather than have to read, and grade, an essay that is wildly off the mark. Before you begin your research spend a few minutes jotting down your immediate ideas about the topic. You do not have to use these, but they do provide a baseline to which you can return to get a sense of how your own thinking has developed.

Once you have an idea of what the question is asking for, then it is time to begin reading. This is something you should remember throughout your university programme: there is no substitute for reading widely. Reading in this sense refers primarily to academic literature, not simply a newspaper, magazine, or web site

In many cases essay questions will come with recommended readings. A good rule of thumb is to treat the recommended readings as the starting point for what you should read, rather than the limit of what you need to read. Put another way you should be prepared to extend your reading beyond what is recommended. Lecturers are looking for originality, and moving beyond the

recommended readings is a good way of differentiating your essay from those of other students.

An easy way of extending your reading is to follow up some of the references that have been made to specific authors which you might have found interesting. This will give you a better sense of how an argument has been constructed, and a feeling for the wider debates that frame particular topics. It will also help you get a sense that there are almost inevitably debates over how a topic should be approached, and how particular findings can be interpreted.

Each piece of work that you read will seek to tell a story, so as you read note down what you think the story being told by each author is; how the author has made that story; and how this story differs from others that you have read. As you do this pay attention as to what resources (tables, figures, maps, references) are being woven together to tell the story, because you may be able to draw on them yourself (with the appropriate referencing!). If you undertake this process as you move through your readings you will accumulate a resource base of ideas and materials that you will be able use to answer the essay question.



TIP: A good idea is to quickly go back over the readings that you did early on in your research for a particular essay. You will find that they will make more sense now.

Writing Your Essay

Reading widely is a critical task in preparing your essay, but all that work will go to waste if you are not able to communicate your ideas in the essay itself. Alongside a lack of reading, a common weakness in undergraduate essays is a poorly developed structure. An inadequate structure means that it is difficult to assess the ideas

and argument being made in an essay, and it gives the impression of a baffled and sloppy writer.

To help you develop the structure of the essay, quickly prepare an essay plan that covers the headings of the sections that you want to use, and include under those headings a sentence that articulates the broad point that you want to make in that section. Once you have done this take a step back and consider whether the argument that you want to make follows smoothly through the structure that you have drawn up. If it doesn't, work through your essay plan until you think it does.

Introduction

There is no hard and fast way of introducing your essay, but a clear, concise introduction will immediately create a good impression with the reader. In writing an introduction Pain (2003) identifies a useful strategy that you could use. First, you can set the topic in a wider context by commenting upon its significance to geography or the world in general. Second you can set about showing what you understand by the question. Here you can provide definitions of the key words that you want to use; and your interpretation of the question. Finally, you can outline your essay, and the various stages that the reader will be led through.



TIP: It is often a good idea to re-write your introduction after you have finished the essay in order to make sure that it actually reflects what you have done.

The Body of the Essay

Having grabbed the reader with an engaging introduction it is time to articulate your argument. If you prepared an essay plan this is where it will start to pay dividends. As you work through your

argument constantly refer back to the essay question to make sure you have not gone off on a tangent. The body of the essay should be made up of a series of linked paragraphs, and each paragraph should aim to express one key idea.

One of the key reasons that students do not get good grades is that they fail to construct a convincing argument in the body of their essay. This can be the result of both a lack of detail, and the absence of academic literature to support the argument being made.

A common problem in student essays is a reliance on over-generalised and vague statements that indicate a lack of depth. This is often caused by the assumption that the marker knows what the writer is trying to say. As a rule of thumb, then, you should assume that the marker has little knowledge of the idea that you are writing about. When you are writing your sentences make sure that you include relevant details as to what, who, where, why, and when details.

Your argument can also be strengthened by using examples and quotes from the academic sources that you have read. Quotes taken from other sources can provide a very good way of situating your own argument within a wider academic context. You need to resist the temptation, however, to use quotes to make your argument for you. They should be used to support, and expand, on a point that you have already made.

Another means of deepening your argument is the careful use of graphs, maps, figures, and pictures. You should treat these as you would a quote, as a means of supporting your argument. You should also remember that whilst the meaning of the graphs, maps, figures or pictures that you might use will be evident to you they will not necessarily be so to the reader. So you need to refer

to them in the text, and explain their meaning. Otherwise they risk simply being ornaments that do not add anything to the essay.

Finally, as you prepare the body of your essay it is imperative that that you accurately reference all the ideas and materials that you have used from other people (see the section in this guide on how to reference correctly).



TIP: A failure to include references in your essay may be interpreted as attempt to gain credit for other people's ideas. This is called plagiarism, and is a form of cheating.

If you are caught cheating in this way under Massey University regulations you can be stripped of course credits, and prevented from sitting any exams.

Concluding

Just as a good introduction is important so is a conclusion that is concise and clear. The purpose of the conclusion is threefold. First, to look back into the essay and draw out the main points which have been made. Second, since you have been set an essay question the conclusion provides the opportunity for you to answer it, by providing a clearly articulated verdict on it. This should flow logically from the body of your essay. Third, if you want to you can look outside the essay to make some comments about the bigger picture, and to provide some predictions for the future.



TIP: The conclusion is not the place to add new material. If you have the temptation to do this go back, revisit, and rewrite the body of your essay to incorporate this new material.

Editing

So you think you have finished when you write the last sentence. Think again. Most of the marks that are lost in an essay are because students have only handed in a first draft of their essay.

No matter how good you are an essay takes time to polish, so organise your time so as to leave yourself the space to produce a second and third draft. Doing this will significantly improve the quality of the essay.



TIP: As you edit your essay read it aloud. You will be surprised at how effective a tool it is in uncovering small errors, and helping to improve the flow of the essay.

Writing Style

Correcting simple spelling, and punctuation, errors makes a world of difference to how well your essay will be appreciated. The following section gives you some advice on simple things that you can do to improve your writing.

Spelling

You cannot rely on the automatic spell check to correct your spelling for you, since in English there are many words which have the same sound but different spellings. This produces many mistakes. Among the most common are:

- there** = there is a lot of poor spelling
- their** = their house is for sale
- affect** (verb) = to affect, it affects
- effect** (noun) = the effect, an effect. Example: ‘The policy affected employment in the town, and had a positive effect.’ (There is also a

verb 'to effect', used only in academic writing, which means to achieve, to carry out)

- weather** (noun) = fine weather
- whether** (preposition) = to know whether it has succeeded
- to** = to want, go to town
- too** = there are too many mistakes, he is stupid too.
- lead** = lead mine, she took the lead
- led** = I have led a bad life
- bare** (adjective) = bare minimum
- bear** (verb) = to bear the cost.

Also note also that spell-checkers may not recognise certain specialist words and instead suggest a change to the closest alternative, which may catch the unwary....e.g. lavatory instead of laboratory, sediment entertainment instead of sediment entrainment —these examples have actually appeared in assignments! Finally, spelling should follow English rather than American custom. For example:

- '-our' not '-or'
- '-re' not '-er'
- '-s' not '-z' in the final syllable (harbour, behaviour, centre, hypothesise, urbanise, industrialisation).

Writing numbers

Within written text, numbers less than or equal to twelve should be written out. This is also true for larger, round numbers such as twenty, thirty, a hundred, a thousand, and so on. For example 'There are five trains a day', not 'There are 5 trains a day'; 'There were about a hundred people', not 'about 100 people'. Never write '1000s'.

Grammar: plurals and apostrophes

Nouns (thing-words) can be singular or plural, denoting one or many things. Apostrophes are the mark ‘ used other than for quotations marks (inverted commas). Most students coming to University get these wrong; you must learn to get them right. The correct usage is as follows.

Simple plurals

Simple plurals are normally formed by adding an *s*. Exceptions are words ending in *y*. For instance *firms*, *companies*. **Don't use an apostrophe in these.** This incorrect practice is sometimes derisively known as 'the green grocer's apostrophe' as in *ripe plum's*.

It is *acceptable* to put an apostrophe in simple plurals of **non-standard words** such as foreign words, acronyms and dates, for example *pizza's*, *TNC's*, *1970's*; but it is much clearer and better not to: *pizzas*, *TNCs*, *1970s*.

Possessives

Apostrophes in formal or academic writing should be used only to indicate possession:

- of the firm: *the firm's*
- of the company: *the company's*
- of the firms: *the firms'*
- of the companies: *the companies'*
- of the women: *the women's*

A confusing thing is that possessive pronouns such as *his*, *its*, *hers*, *theirs* and *whose* are written *without* an apostrophe. It is easy to remember not to write *he's*, but many students incorrectly write *it's* and *who's*. For example it is correct to write 'the firm increased its employment'.

Missing out letters

In everyday, informal writing letters can be missed out and replaced by an apostrophe, for example *can't*, *I've*, *he'd*, or *it's* in place of 'it is'. You must not do this in academic writing. **Write out the full words.**

The most common mistake students make with apostrophes is: in *it's/ its/ its'*. Note that:

- its* = of it
- it's* = it is
- its'* = doesn't exist.

The easy thing to remember is that **in academic writing you should only write *its*.**

Syntax: The Structure of Sentences

Many students make mistakes of syntax. This makes the writing much harder to read, as well as giving a bad impression to readers.

- “The Northern economy was weakening, it was suffering from disinvestment”. This is incorrect: it is actually *two* correct sentences, not one. Put in the middle a full-stop, semi-colon (;) or “because”.
- “The Northern economy was weakening. Whereas the South East was booming”. This is *one* correct sentence, not two. Put in a comma.
- A sentence must have an active or passive verb; a participle is not enough. For example “The Northern economy being weaker in this period.” is *not* a correct sentence; it should be “The Northern economy was weaker in this period.”

(Technically, these three examples show the difference between a sentence and a clause - a part of a sentence containing a verb).

Inclusive Writing

When writing about environmental and geographical topics, it is often easy to fall into the use of stereotypes and bias without

thinking. Inclusive writing improves the clarity and accuracy of written work.

It means:

- making it clear whom you are writing about
- avoiding stereotypes
- avoiding practices which compound prejudice
- being aware of how the words you choose might be interpreted

It is especially important if you are dealing with particular countries, cultures, ethnic, gender or other social groups. What follows are examples of good and bad practice —bear them in mind and the clarity and precision of what you are trying to say should improve.

If you mean humanity in general

x

man, men, mankind
he, his
man's impact on the environment
"Each respondent was asked whether **he** wished to participate in the survey."

✓

person, people, human beings, Mankind
he/she, s/he, his/her
human impact on the environment
"Respondents were asked whether they wished to participate in the survey."

If you mean one sex in particular

"The closure of the freezing works contributed to chronic unemployment in the area."
"60% of parents work part time, usually in low paid, low skilled jobs."

(woolly)

"The closure of the freezing works contributed to chronic **male** unemployment in the area."
"60% of **mothers** work part time, usually in low paid, low skilled jobs."

(precise)

No one group should dominate when this is unrepresentative

Example:

"The post-war baby boom was caused by husbands returning home and starting families after the war"

Bad Practice Because:

- it's unrepresentative
- do men start families alone? it takes two to tango...
- were all these parents married?

Justify and identify stereotypes as stereotypes

Example:

"Killing a wild animal for the 'sport' could only appeal to a Neanderthal human male"

Bad Practice Because:

- it generalises
- it's not only *men* who shoot wild animals is it?
- hey - Neanderthals were nice guys with posthumous rights
- generalising like this destroys the effect of what could have been a well argued point

Don't use categories which imply superiority

Example:

"The study shows that common people visit the Warehouse less often than educated ones"

Bad Practice Because:

- it's derogatory
- the categories are fuzzy and impossible to compare
- categories used should be more specific and meaningful, e.g. income or socio-economic group

Don't present one group as 'normal' and another as 'the problem'

Example:

"Asian immigrants to NZ tend to live in ethnic clusters or ghettos."

Bad Practice Because:

- unless this author mentions the fact that white NZers also tend to live in homogenous groups, the implication is that Asians are 'different' and a problem.

Avoid cultural stereotypes

Example

"There are higher infant mortality rates in Highbury because the working class mothers there are poorly educated and less likely to care for their children properly"

Bad Practice Because:

- uses a cultural stereotype
- apportioning blame in a derogatory way
- fails to consider other factors, eg social/economic conditions

Punctuation

It can improve your writing style to use semi-colons (;) and colons (:), but only if used correctly:

- A semi-colon is used like a full stop, but links the two ideas more closely. For example 'Palmerston North is a great place for students; it is the social capital of the south.'
- A colon is followed by an example of, or more detail on, what has just been said. For example 'Palmerston North is the social capital of the south: in the last few years the George St scene has been added to the traditional Fitz.' A colon can often replace 'for example' or 'namely'.

Typefaces

For emphasis, use *italics* or underline. In ordinary text, do not use strange typefaces, **bold** or CAPITALS, as if you were writing an advertisement. Bold or capitals are allowable only in section, table or figure headings, and within tables and figures. **They should never be used in ordinary text.** (They are used in this Portfolio because it is a guide, not an ordinary text. Do as we say, not as we do here!).

Talking of **advertisements**, the style, grammar, syntax and layout of advertisements are the worst possible model for academic writing. You have grown up in a culture saturated with advertising; try to disengage yourself from that influence when writing.

Meanings of Common Abbreviations

e.g. means ‘for example’

i.e. means ‘that is’.

It is always better to use the English words rather than these abbreviations. But if you use them, use them correctly! Many students write ‘i.e.’ when they mean ‘e.g.’, and consequently write nonsense.

Over time you will developed a particular writing style. As you write your essays, remember that it is a formal document, and your language should reflect this fact. This should not mean that your writing needs to be stilted, but you need to avoid using colloquialisms, slang, and abbreviations. Instead always consider that writing in any professional context requires the use of a technical vocabulary, and in this respect geography is no different from any other profession or discipline. Part of your developing writing skills will become evident in the way in which you are able to use this geographic vocabulary. In this context do not be afraid to use definitions to clearly articulate what words or concepts you are going to use, and the way in which you are going to use them. In short, use a technical vocabulary, know what that vocabulary means, and keep the sentences simple. We know when you are bluffing.



TIP: Quality is more important than quantity; do not be tempted to pad essays.

Avoiding Plagiarism

The consequences of plagiarism are severe. However, with practice it is relatively easy to protect yourself. An important first step is

rather than thinking of referencing as the final, extra task to be done before handing the essay in, referencing is an integral task best done as you write your essay. For additional guidance you can consult the Geography Programme guide to plagiarism.

Plagiarism occurs when, ‘we use the ideas or words of others in our own assignments and presentations in a fashion that gives the reader the impression that these are our ideas or words’ (Scheyvens, H, pers. comm.).

In geography we use the Harvard system of referencing which involves making a partial reference in the text of an essay, and providing a full reference in a separate section at the end of the essay.

In-Text Referencing

The first task you need to do is provide the partial in-text references. As you do this you need to distinguish between three types of source, each of which needs to be treated in a different way:

1. material (ideas, arguments, statistics, graphs, etc.) that you have directly reproduced from elsewhere;
2. material that you have used, interpreted, and drawn into your essay through your own words;
3. your own ideas, arguments, and interpretations that you have used in your essay.

For material (1) that you have reproduced from elsewhere you need to provide an in-text reference that includes the author’s surname, the date of publication, and the page numbers where you found the material. An example of this is the following statement, ‘Academic staff are good at noticing words copied from texts and papers without acknowledgement’ (Kneale, 1999, 128). Note the use of single quotation marks to show the text that has been

quoted, and also note the format of the in-text reference (Surname, date of publication, page number).

For material (2) that you have indirectly used from another author you need to follow a similar form. An example is the following sentence. Unacknowledged reproduction of material by students can generally be easily identified by academic staff (Kneale, 1999). Note that in this sentence no material has been directly used, but the idea has been. Thus, no quotation marks or page numbers are needed, but the surname of the author and date of publication are required. The format then is: (Surname, date of publication).

Some times you will find that there are two authors. In this case simply reference both authors' surnames. Thus, for example, if Kneale had had a co-author the in-text reference would be: ... (Kneale and Smith, 1999). Less often you will find a work with three or more authors. Rather than listing all the authors you simply need to list the first author's surname followed by et al. (this is Latin for 'and others'. Thus, if Kneale had had a couple of co-authors the in-text reference would read: ... (Kneale et al., 1999).

Where you have used your own ideas you do not have to reference anybody. If you are lucky you may find other people referencing you!

If you are not sure whether you need to reference something, err on the side of safety and do it.

Bibliographies and Reference Sections

Once you have finished the essay you can compile your reference section. This should be labelled as 'References' and attached to the end of the essay on a separate sheet of paper. There is a distinction between a reference section and a bibliography. A reference

section includes all the material that you have included in-text references for. Conversely a bibliography includes all the material cited within the text and that material that has been consulted in the preparation of the work.

An increasingly important source of information is the internet. Like any other source of information these need to be carefully referenced both in order to protect against plagiarism, but also to help people find the original source. In general an internet reference should follow this format: author (or organisation), year, document title, location of document, date accessed.

There are a wide range of styles that different departments use. For other departments you will need to check what style they use. Your reference section should be organised alphabetically and look like the following list which provides examines, in order, of a book (Bahn and Flenley, 1992), a book section (Berg and Mansvelt, 2000), two journal articles (Brook, 2003; Roche, 1997), and a website (New Zealand Statistics, 2004).

Bahn, P., and Flenley, J. 1992: *Easter Island, Earth Island*, Thames & Hudson, London.

Berg, L., and Mansvelt, J. 2000: Writing In, Speaking Out: Communicating Qualitative Research Findings, in Hay, I. (ed.), *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 161-181.

Brook, M. 2003: The Use of Linear Regression as Part of CPA Methodology, *Local Authority Research & Intelligence News*, 72, 17-18.

Roche, M. 1997: Protest, Police and Place: The 1981 Springbok Tour and the Production and Consumption of Social Space, *New Zealand Geographer*, 53, 50-57.

Statistics New Zealand. 2004: *Latest Statistics*, <http://www.stats.govt.nz>, 19 February 2004.

Formatting

Impressions matter. Markers are human; no matter how well written an essay is, and if it presented in a sloppy manner it will not create a favourable impression. This is doubly so if the presentation of your essay actually prevents the marker from understanding the argument you are making.

Producing a well formatted essay is a relatively simple task, which just requires a little care. In general terms your essay should be written on A4 paper with at least 2cm margins all round. Hand written essays are still accepted, but you need to take care if you want to present a hand written essay that the marker will be able to read your writing. Essays should include a cover sheet, and this should be stapled to the essay. Avoid using plastic sleeves to hold the essay, because they are annoying for the marker to deal with.

The essay's text should be printed in a clear font, no smaller than 12 point, and with a page number on each page. It is also a good idea to have the text spaced at 1.5. This makes it much easier for the marker to read. Within the text paragraphs should be separated either by a single line (such as in this guide) or by having the first line indented. If you want to use headings make sure they are clearly identifiable.



TIP: Remember to put your name and ID number on the essay. It is surprising how often people forget to do this.

Tables and Figures

The inclusion of relevant figures (graphs, maps, diagrams) and tables can help build a strong argument. When you use these items, however, you need format them in a particular way.

All figures and tables need to have a title, and the acknowledgement of a source. Maps require a border. Whilst it is acceptable to include photocopied or scanned items these must have a source, and you need to ensure their relevance to the essay question. When you use figures and tables make sure you actually discuss them in the text of your essay.

All figures need to be carefully labelled. You may know what things mean, but you should not assume that the reader will. In particular this means having a clear informative title, and on graphs clear labels for the X/Y axes. If you use tables and figures include these in the body of the essay, rather than in an appendix.

Examples of Tables and Figures

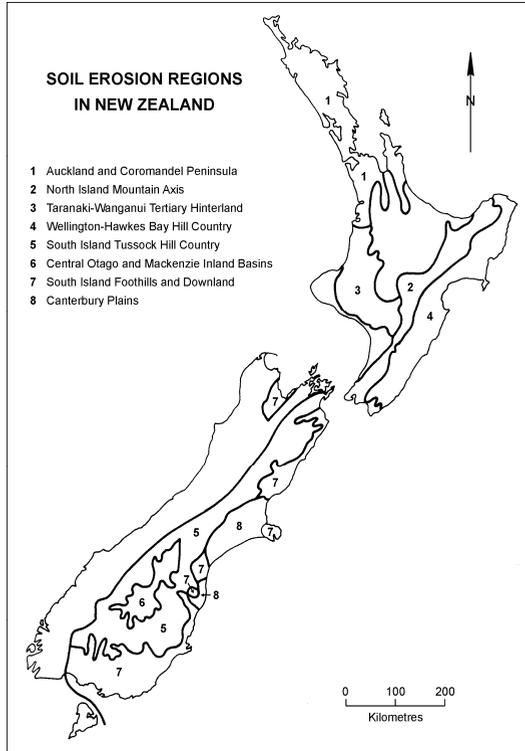
Table 1 Sectoral Distribution of Hong Kong TNCs in ASEAN

Industrial Sector	Sample HKTNCs	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand
Construction	4 (4)	1 (3)	1 (1)	0 (0)	4 (4)	2 (3)
Manufacturing	43 (37)	10 (27)	21 (30)	9 (26)	17 (16)	20 (30)
Commercial and Services	65 (55)	26 (70)	48 (69)	25 (74)	87 (80)	45 (67)
Total	112 (100)	37 (100)	70 (100)	34 (100)	108 (100)	67 (100)

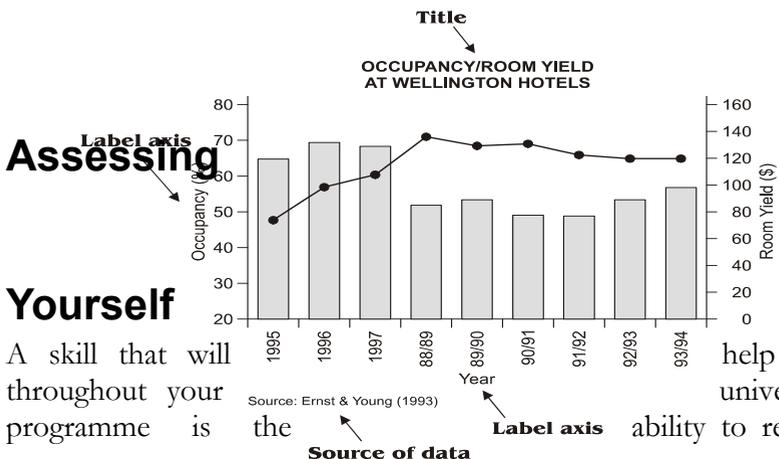
Notes:

- 1 See introduction in the main text and footnote 3 for sampling methods.
- 2 Percentage in parentheses. Country figures are greater than the total HK TNCs in the sample because each HKTNC may have more than one operations in one or more ASEAN countries.

Source: Soffer (2003: 12)



Source : Cumberland, 1994.



Assessing

Yourself

A skill that will
throughout your
programme is the

Source of data

help you
university
ability to reflect

upon your own performance to see where your strengths lie, and what weaknesses could be worked on. One useful technique you can use is to draw up a table such as the following:

Table 1: Essay self-assessment form

Essay title	A	B	C	Fail	
Knowledge					
Topics covered in depth					Superficial responses
Appropriate geographical content					Limited/No geographical content
Structure and Argument					
Logical presentation					Disorganised
Good synthesis and evaluation					No Synthesis and evaluation
Clear, succinct writing style					Rambling and/or repetitious
Creativity					
Includes new ideas					No new ideas
Innovative presentation					Incoherent presentation
Presentation					
Fully and correctly referenced					No references
Correct spelling and grammar					Poor spelling and grammar
Good use of examples					Poor/no use of illustrative materials

Source: adapted from Kneale (1999: 125)

Read through your essay and honestly assess your writing. The categories included in Table 1 give some idea as to the features we are looking for in an essay. Your self-assessment will give you an indication of the areas that could be improved in your essay.



TIP: When you get your graded essay back make sure that you actually read the comments that have been made. No matter how well you did this is an

uncomfortable process, but the way you will improve is by knowing what you did well, and what you could do better.

Further Sources of Help

The Student Learning Centre (SLC) provides a very useful source of help in improving your writing: <http://learning.massey.ac.nz>

The SLC also hosts an online gateway to a wide variety of study resources: <http://owll.massey.ac.nz>

A very good book that you can use to help your writing is:

Venolia, J. 2001: *Write Right: A Desktop Digest of Punctuation, Grammar, and Style*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.

The call number for this book is: 428.2 Ven.

Another very good book which gives some guidance for communication in geography is:

Hay, I. 1996: *Communicating Skills in Geography and the Environmental Sciences*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

The call number for this book is: 378.1702812 Hay.



References

Kneale, P. 1999: *Study Skills for Geography Students: A Practical Guide, 2nd Edition*, Arnold, London.

The call number of a revised edition of this book is *910.711 Kne*. This book is well worth looking at if you want some further guidance.

Pain, R. 2003: Writing Essays and Related Assignments, in Rogers, A., and Viles, H. (eds), *The Student's Companion to Geography, 2nd Edition*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, 180-184.

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Matthew Henry (12/8/2004)