

## **The Write Place: Tips for a rewarding relationship to academic writing**

### **A resource created by Dr. Vidya Natarajan for The Write Place**

**A good academic essay is not easy to write.** Allow time for multiple drafts and at least one visit to The Write Place or to a Writing Specialist.

**Read your essay prompt or question carefully.** Try to understand **every part** of it; highlight key words (especially verbs like ‘discuss,’ ‘critique,’ or analyse’), and list all the things your instructor is asking you to do. Give thought to how the prompt relates to your course’s learning goals: for example, if the course seeks to familiarize you with theories of justice, make sure your major essay references some of these theories.

**Create a working thesis** to shape your research process, manage your time efficiently, and narrow down your research field. Do some basic research on your topic; then, using your intuitions and common sense, create a rough (‘working’) thesis that will help you narrow your research down further. You may modify or discard the rough thesis, but creating it will prevent your collecting unmanageable amounts of information that become too daunting to organize. A good sequence: preliminary research—working thesis—further, focused research—final thesis/first draft—revisions/ final draft.

**Develop and expand your initial ideas** by adding a) the context of your subject, and b) any abstractions or theories that apply to it. Look for larger theories in your course materials. Susan Weil suggests that non-traditional learners struggle to produce **academic thinking** as opposed to **experientially-based** thinking, and experience conflict between their ‘learner identities’ and the way learning is structured in the university (226). Going beyond personal views, try to make generalizations, using **evidence**.

**Develop confidence** in your ability to express ideas. Life experience is not devalued at university; but you need to learn to capitalize on it and convert it into theory. Get help from your course instructor, the research librarians at the Cardinal Carter Library, and the Write Place tutors and Specialists.

Research suggests that financial issues, relationships with partners or life situation, and struggles with academic research and writing requirements are the biggest barriers faced by mature students at university. If you are trying to understand how university instructors evaluate essays, check out this web page, which shows a range of SAT (Student Aptitude Test) essays, and explains why each one was assigned a particular score on a 1-4 scale. <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sample-questions/essay>.

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