## ESSAY WRITING

During your studies, you will be asked to write several essays, both in the field of language and literature. In many of these classes you will be asked to write an essay of some kind. Some of your teachers will give you pre-assigned questions while others will expect you to come up with your own topic. Eventually, you will write your Bachelor Thesis.

First of all, when writing an essay one must formulate a theme. A major idea that you will argue for. The teachers will expect you to think for yourself and present your opinion.

In secondary school, you were asked to write book reports on various texts in which you either copied or adapted from the web. It probably included a lot of information on the life of the author and summarized the story. This is not what we want. Similarly, the essays you are asked to write for the Practical Language courses are not what we are looking for.

Let us take Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as an example. If you were to write: "Hamlet is the story of a prince who has to revenge his father's death," this is not a theme but the most basic surface description of the action. Better might be: "Hamlet symbolizes the intellectual incapable of action." This is still, however, fairly unoriginal and obvious. Try to formulate your own 'reading' of the text, such as “Romance in Hamlet.” The nature of your thesis will of course also depend on the length of the essay to be written. If you are assigned a four-page essay, choose a topic which can be reasonably dealt with in that kind of detail. Do not say for example: " In my essay I will discuss the meaning of each of the soliloquies in Hamlet." That is not only a vague thesis, but too much to deal with in a short paper. In general, the rule is: **always narrow your topic as much as possible**. Try to go in depth into one topic, not discuss everything possible under the sun. And if this is not already clear, stick to one topic, only one, not two nor three, but one.

## ESSAY STRUCTURE

An **introduction** for the length of essays you will normally write would probably consist of a paragraph of around four or five sentences. This paragraph's job is to introduce the subject of the essay as clearly as possible. In order to do this certain phrases are customarily used, such as: "In my essay, I would like to examine/ look at/ focus on the question of/ the topic/ the problem ..." The introduction could be compared to a map, helping the reader find out where he or she is going in the rest of the essay. By the end of the introduction, the reader should know what to expect from the remainder of the essay.

**In the introduction you say what you are going to say, in the body you say it, and in the conclusion, you say what you've said.**

Before discussing the actual body of the essay, let us skip to the conclusion. The **conclusion** again, in a relatively short essay, would probably consist of once again a medium sized paragraph in which you bring the essay to a close by summarizing the argument or thesis. Strange as it may sound, the conclusion partially repeats in other words what you have already said in the introduction. Here, once again, certain customary phrases are made use of: " In this paper/essay/work I have tried to point out/explore/examine the question of/the problem of ... I hope I have demonstrated/shown/ indicated that ..." Do not introduce anything new in your conclusion.

**Do not make a statement** such as the following: "Another interesting topic is such and such which is unfortunately outside the scope of my paper." You want to bring things to a close, not open up new possibilities. Also, **do not end your work with a quotation** as it only shows your own lack of resolution, end with your own statement on the matters at hand.

The **body** of your essay will consist of various paragraphs. This may seem once again extremely obvious, but I do occasionally receive essays from students consisting of one never-ending paragraph. **Paragraphs can be understood as storeys in a building**. You are building up your argument, so to speak. Ideally, each paragraph should be something like a mini essay with each of your leading sentences being something like a mini-thesis.

It is also important to make **logical transitions between paragraphs**. There are no fixed rules as to how long a paragraph should be, however, a paragraph of more than half a page is probably getting too long. Paragraphs also serve as rest for the eyes, breaking up the words so as to make them easier to process mentally.

In all of the literary essays you will be expected to write, you will be working with a text, in most cases with a primary text as opposed to the secondary texts, i.e. literary criticism. You will have to quote from the primary text in order to support your argument. You want to find passages in the text analysed which demonstrate the validity of the points you are trying to make. After the quotation, one should comment on what you have chosen, interpreting it in the way which will, once again, contribute to the thesis.

In you intend to make use of secondary texts, these will also need to be cited properly. Citations from any source must be documented. Failure to do so is to commit **plagiarism** or to plagiarize. This is an academic crime and is a punishable offence. Plagiarism amounts to claiming another author's work as your own. This is not only the case when you directly steal a quotation, but also when you take somebody else's idea and pass it off as your own. It is perfectly all right to paraphrase a statement from somewhere as long as you indicate where you took it from, in other words acknowledge your sources. This can be rather tricky at times. What is the line between plagiarism and common knowledge? If I want to refer to the date of Hamlet's publication as a text and look it up in a literary dictionary, I need not cite my source as this is common knowledge. If, however, I read a theory that Hamlet was actually a description of Shakespeare's own son, I need to indicate my source, even if I do not directly quote from the actual book or article.

* **Style**

Students often want to use big words in order to sound intellectual. They have a sophisticated word in their own language, look it up in the dictionary where they are faced with a number of choices and consequently choose the longest, most impressive sounding one, hoping it does the trick. It does not!

**Avoid using metaphorical language**. Do not translate sayings or proverbs from your own language into English, assuming that they will work in the same fashion. They do not.

**Do not use contractions**: I’d, I’ll, isn´t, etc. They are perfectly acceptable in an oral presentation, but not in a formal paper. Either British or American spelling or vocabulary is acceptable, however do not make use of dialect.

**Avoid sentimentality and clichés**. Do not say that the message of the book is that we should all love one another more. Avoid empty statements which say absolutely nothing. Do not begin an essay with: “William Shakespeare was born in the 16th century.” This is common knowledge and not worth saying. Neither is: "Hamlet was written by Shakespeare." Avoid statements such as: “I really love Shakespeare,” or “I want to recommend this book to all readers.”