

The advice given here represents example formats and contexts for writing essays and reports. It indicates comparative differences in approach and a common critical framework for argument. It does not represent a complete picture that will fit all situations. Look at the information below and consider how you can adapt it to fit the critical requirements of your own assignments.

Essay question

“What are the impacts of social networking on business?”

MM11220 Past Exam Papers: Business Environment (May-June, 2013)

Report scenario

"You work for a digital marketing company that has been approached by a leading company (identify company and sector). The company wants to improve its social network and digital marketing strategy. Identify key factors that would help that company to develop their strategy and write a report for their Board of Executives. Identify their current position, how the position limits their current capabilities, the options available to them and the main recommendations for an enhanced strategy."

The report scenario is adapted from the essay question “What are the impacts of social networking on business?” from the Past Exam Papers of MM11220: Business Environment (May-June, 2013)

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Essays and reports: developing focus, structure and perspective

Topic interests

- What is the main topic of your assignment?
- Is it a new topic?
- What do you have to say about it that could be considered new, interesting or distinctive?

Information and opinion

- How much information do you have about the topic?
- Have you formed a critical opinion on the topic that can be compared with published research in the same field?
- Have you discussed this with a tutor? Have you discussed it with your peers?

Controversy

- What controversies (if any) surround this topic? Should they be avoided and if so, why? If not, why not?
- If you are working with a new or controversial topic, do you have a critical awareness of other arguments or approaches?
- Are you confident that you could support or defend your argument with adequate reference sources?

From resources to focus

- Do you have enough reference sources to develop a theoretical review?
- Are they available? Do not create too much work for yourself at this stage.
- Have you narrowed the focus adequately?

Added to and adapted from Department of Information Studies Postgraduate Handbook, Aberystwyth University, 2001

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Essay: one possible structure (theory & practice)

Introduction	Background	-----	Contextualise the main issue
	Main issue	----- 	Interpret the question and identify your perspective
	Aims/ structure	-----	Identify possible outcome
Body	Review	-----	What theoretical foundations do you need to review? Who has said what about this issue?
	Practice	-----	Based on the theoretical review can you identify a situation with examples of how things work and can you show advantages and disadvantages?
	<i>Discussion</i>	----- -----	How can these examples and/or statistics be used to illustrate and prove your main argument/thesis? What are the implications for further development of theory or practice?
Conclusion	Background + issue	-----	Provide a review of what the paper was about.
	Procedure	-----	What methods did you use to develop your position ?
	Solution	-----	Have you found a solution to this problem (or otherwise) and do you have any recommendations?

Report: a framework to interpret

Executive Summary	A report differs from an essay in that the executive summary is the introduction <i>and</i> conclusion in one.	
	-----	Why something was done and why it is important
	-----	Purpose of the report (problem solving, feasibility, etc.).
	-----	Main findings and important recommendations.

The introduction and conclusion mentioned in the discussion section below are equivalent to the first and last stages of the main body of the essay.

Discussion Identify problem, position, possibilities, proposal

Introduction	-----	Background to the problem in detail. Review of pertinent issues from the literature.
Proof and development of claims	-----	Analysis of target situation and other related factors. How many sections are needed to interpret the situation?
Conclusion & recommendations	-----	What does this mean in light of review, corporate &/or industry concerns, public reaction, etc. What needs to be done?

Appendices Information (charts, statistics, diagrams) that are too long for including in the discussion. Useful to present, but not directly relevant to the argument. Avoid using more than 2 or 3 pages of appendices if possible (NOTE: they are no part of the word count).

In an essay, theory & research interprets and informs practice, whereas in a report, practice primarily reflects and informs theory.

GOOD PRACTICE: Always cite authors in your essays and reports, when you quote or paraphrase other writers. If your idea is based on someone else's idea or theory, and you don't use or summarise their words, you also need to cite them. Include full references in a bibliography.