ESSAY GUIDELINES (4000 words)

- make sure you include the full title of your essay in the title first page of your submission. Do not include an abstract for the essay, as it is not necessary.
- ideally, the essay should develop a critical academic 'argument' on the topic of your choice. This should be analytical in nature, not descriptive.
- the argument should be **focused**, clearly formulated and developed by engaging with a variety of **academic (peer-reviewed) sources**. These are sources that are published by reputed academic publishers (often indicated by their names like: Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Edinburgh University Press, Routledge, Wiley-Blackwell, Palgrave Macmillan, Bloomsbury, I.B. Tauris, Oneworld, Brill, Springer, De Gruyter, and the American university presses of the following universities: Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, Chicago, Yale, New York, California, Princeton, Texas, Indiana, North Carolina, Stanford as well as numerous others university presses. It is texts (monographs, chapters in edited volumes) published by these kinds of publishers that you should include and cite in your essays. **You should not research or cite non-academic sources, as these might adversely impact the academic quality of your essay** (failure to engage with such academic sources risks being awarded a failing mark). Regarding journal articles, you need to be more discerning about the journal publishing the article (the academic repute of a journal is usually indicated by the members of the editorial board listed within). The mere fact that an article is published in a journal and accessible from JSTOR or other repository does not mean that it is of the highest academic quality.
- after surveying and researching a variety of academic sources, it is important to formulate a specific and **focused** research question that guides your research, and to develop the essay argument in response to the research question. It is important to avoid formulating a 'to what extent…?' research question, as this is not a very scholarly / academic one.
- the essay should be very clearly structured (introduction, main body and. Your introduction should be as concise as possible, and should include a summary / overview of your essay argument. You should develop your main argument in the main body of your essay. The main body of the essay should also be very clearly structured. It is often suggested that you try to divide any academic writing into 3 parts (regardless of how long the text is). Dividing it into 3 parts (and further 3 sub-sections) allows you and the reader to (easily) keep track of how the essay is developing. So, whilst the essay is divided into 3 parts (introduction, main body and conclusion), the main body should also be further divided (into 3 sections). Of course, this is not a requirement, but it is good academic practice (also, it is for you to decide what these sections consist of).
- It is highly recommended that you try to develop a detailed evaluation as part of your essay. An evaluation is the most challenging academic / scholarly skill that students (and academics in general) can develop. An evaluation consists of identifying (academic) strengths and weaknesses of the issue / argument you are examining, and based on these, you develop your own academic judgment of the issue / argument. Examiners usually award this significant attention when reading / marking assignments. If this evaluative skill is clearly (and correctly) demonstrated in the assignment, markers are very likely to reward this skill with a higher essay mark. Accordingly, it is highly recommended that you dedicate one of the 3 sections of the main body of the essay to this evaluative exercise (usually this would be the last section).
- the conclusion should not be a summary of your main argument (as this is presented in the introduction). Rather your conclusion should address important issues that arise from your argument, or the significance of your argument. The conclusion represents the 'bigger picture' that becomes clearer considering your essay argument.

- **the essay should be carefully and fully referenced**. **Detailed references should include specific page numbers within the sources cited**. **Crucially, it is not only quotations that page numbers are provided for. Every reference should have a page number(s) relating to the relevant text**. It is only when a text is cited in general that page numbers are not provided in the reference. This is very important, as failure to provide the necessary page numbers for most references means that the academic quality of the essay is adversely affected. **Persistent failure to provide necessary detailed and accurate references constitutes very significant 'bad academic practice', which means that the essay would not be awarded a passing mark.** Full and accurate referencing of sources is the single most academic skill, and much care and attention needs to be awarded to this. If you are not sure if something should be referenced, then reference it. A good indicator of the need to reference something is considering whether your peers would need to be informed in detail about it. Nevertheless, if there is doubt, then it is always prudent to reference it. There is no preference for a particular style of referencing (see academic referencing guide on Moodle page).
- references (in text, footnotes or endnotes) are included in the word limit, whilst the bibliography is not.
- the essay should clearly and accurately indicate the word count.
- the bibliography should include all works cited (only).
- the bibliography should include a reasonable number of academic sources (secondary and primary), normally around 2**5 sources** (for a 4000-word essay).
- style of narrative: there is no preference for style of narrative (first-person or third-person, although third- person is more academically common).
- the essay must not exceed the 4000-word count limit.
- ensure that your essay is thoroughly edited and proofread. Grammatical and spelling errors do not significantly influence the grade, but it is expected that at this level these should be avoided.
- it is of utmost importance that the essay is reflective of your own individual research of the relevant academic sources. Whilst 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI) has become an important academic tool, it is vital that AI is used wisely and efficiently. AI-generated essays constitute very serious academic misconduct and will be treated accordingly. Recently, there has been a significant rise in AI-generated essays submitted by students for assessment, most of which have resulted in students being penalized for serious academic misconduct. Students should not be naïve in thinking that such academic misconduct will go undetected. It is very easy for academics to identify AI-generated material. **If any part of the essay is not authored / written by yourself (i.e. AI-generated)**, then the whole essay will be referred to academic misconduct for investigation. It is thus very important that the temptation to submit AI- generated essays (in whole or in part) is strongly resisted.