

ESSAYS, REPORTS, REFLECTIVE WRITING

Essays, reports and reflective writing are common forms of academic writing. They generally differ in these respects:

- purpose
- topic
- audience
- format
- style
- assessment

Purpose

Essay	Report	Reflective writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To present a well-argued response to a question or proposition, using analysis and discussion of relevant literature • To establish a proposition (thesis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To investigate and analyse an issue and present information thoroughly and logically • Often to recommend action to solve a problem • Usually to make proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To record the development of your ideas and insights and the possible implications for practice • To reflect on the content of the subject and on your own learning • To identify and discuss your responses to concepts/issues in course work, reading, and/or practical placement, etc.

Topic

Essay	Report	Reflective writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually a question or proposition • Based on research, sometimes fieldwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually a problem or case study, based on a real or hypothetical situation • Refers to readings, fieldwork or practical work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often a response to an aspect of a course, e.g. class/ studio/ lab, practical placement (WIL), and/or course readings • Generally focuses on a particular aspect of course content and its potential application to theory and/or practice

STUDY TIPS

Audience

Essay	Report	Reflective writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written for an academic audience (your lecturer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written for the audience established in the topic (a decision-maker, e.g. client, manager), but in reality your lecturer is also the audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically written for yourself – as a record of an insight or learning experience – but your lecturer is also the audience in an assessment task

Format

Essay	Report	Reflective writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three parts: introduction, body conclusion May contain images in art, design, etc. Typically no bullet points, graphs, tables, headings or sub-headings* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divided into sections with headings; sections vary according to type and length of report Headings and sub-headings may be numbered May contain bullet points, figures and tables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal format requirements, but often dated if part of a journal to trace the development of ideas, insights and learning Usually no headings; may be separated into sections if it suits the purpose Frequently written as a blog

Style

Essay	Report	Reflective writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal standard English in paragraphs and complete sentences Needs the objectivity suited to an academic argument and discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal standard English Must be objective to reflect academic and professional context Point form sometimes used – to allow for easy access to key information; text often supported by figures and tables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard written English, using paragraphs and complete sentences; use of first person 'I' is permitted May be subjective to reflect your responses, speculations and interpretations

Assessment

Essay	Report	Reflective writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success depends on the quality of the argument, how each point relates to the thesis, and how well evidence from the literature is used to support the claims and main ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success depends on the demonstration of good research, objective presentation, and analysis of relevant information that responds to the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success depends on demonstration of insights into the course content, and developing awareness of inter-relationships and implications of different aspects of course content

* Some lecturers in business and nursing require headings – see relevant guides.