HINTS & TIPS FOR ASPIRING ESSAYISTS

WRITTEN BY
NEWNHAM COLLEGE STAFF & STUDENTS

GUIDING YOU THROUGH THE ESSAY-WRITING PROCESS
OVERVIEW

Writing a response to one of the Newnham College Essay Prize questions may feel a little different to your usual A-level or sixth-form work - especially as we don’t use ‘assessment objectives’ or rigid criteria for marking. We hope this means that you can write about the topics that most interest you!

Primarily, we are looking for:
- a logical argument
- originality
- clarity of thought
- evidence of reading beyond the school curriculum
- a response that does not solely rely on evidence from online texts and articles (pick up a book!)

Lucy Rogers
Schools Liaison and Outreach Officer
'My Modern and Medieval Languages essay was Highly Commended in 2017. I did some introductory reading to solidify what I knew about the specific topic of the question, and from that point on I let my own interests take me in new directions. Think of it as trying to weave together and showcase your best ideas. It’s a great chance to get a feel of the kind of work you’d be doing at Newnham!'

Daisy
Modern & Medieval Languages, 1st Year

'I entered the Woolf Essay Prize when I was in Year 12 and didn’t win, but I found it really useful to help me think about what work at university would be like. It also made me think about the ethos of Newnham - without entering, I probably wouldn’t have applied and I wouldn’t be here!'

Cait
English, 3rd Year
'Aim to make a plan before you start writing. I like to make really detailed plans! This means that I do all of the reading and thinking beforehand, so when it comes to writing, it’s just a case of turning my notes into coherent sentences.'

Rebecca
Psychological & Behavioural Sciences, 2nd Year

Find an approach that suits you best!

'Don’t be afraid to start writing! It doesn’t have to be perfect the first time around, and I find that the best ideas and developments often come whilst you’re writing. The finished essay will form once you’re re-writing and re-working.'

Emma
Modern & Medieval Languages, 4th Year
Lizzie
English, 3rd Year

'Take some time to make your writing environment *nice!* Sit somewhere comfy, play some music to get you in the writing mood... it will make the process so much more enjoyable.'

Sophie
Natural Sciences, 3rd Year

'A good way to add depth to your essay is to think hard about what you have read and researched. If you can analyse and paraphrase something that has been discussed in a paper, it shows that you have really understood the topic. Remember that research findings can sometimes be hypotheses based on evidence, rather than absolute conclusions.'

Beatrice
English, 3rd Year

'Read generously and write fearlessly! Don't get too caught up in what you already know - allow your mind to be changed by the things you read, and when you write about it, don't overthink. There's always time for a re-draft.'
HINTS & TIPS
FROM CURRENT STUDENTS:
THE CONTENT

‘In a scientific essay, try and include diagrams and graphs to illustrate your points. Make sure you label them correctly!’

Izzy
Natural Sciences, 4th Year

‘Open with an introduction that summarises the strands of the argument you are going to put forward, but try to avoid saying ”In this essay, I will...”. Close your essay with a paragraph that shows the relevance of the issue and the points you have made.’

Jazz
Classics, 2nd Year
‘Have a clear plan and remember that concise is often more powerful than complex!’

Hannah
Natural Sciences, 2nd Year

‘Essay Prizes like Newnham’s can be a fantastic way of exploring your subject outside the school curriculum; they offer the chance to show your thinking without strictly defined assessment objectives and will hopefully make you think about some unfamiliar ideas and topics. Don’t be afraid to give these a go - even if you don’t win or get highly placed, these still offer a valuable academic experience which will offer some insight into the field you might want to study longer term. And you never know - your approach might be the one that stands out!’

Dr. Sam Lucy
Admissions Tutor
TICK-A-TASK

I have....

...chosen a question  □
...read into the topic  □
...bullet-pointed the key or common themes  □
...highlighted any phrases I have copied verbatim (word-for-word)  □
...created an essay plan  □
...made my writing environment nice and comfy  □
...started my first draft  □
...rewarded myself with a biscuit for starting my first draft  □
...updated my essay plan  □
...completed my first draft  □
...taken a break from writing  □
...re-visited & re-drafted my essay  □
...chosen an appropriate referencing style  □
TICK-A-TASK

I have....

...swapped essays with a friend or asked a teacher for feedback

...checked my spelling and grammar

...completed a bibliography

...set the font to size 11 or 12

...re-read my final draft and asked myself 'have I answered the question?'

...kept within the word limit

...saved my essay as a pdf. file

...double- (or triple-) checked my spelling and grammar

...SUBMITTED MY ESSAY ON THE NEWNHAM COLLEGE WEBSITE!

...noted what I have learnt and enjoyed (for my personal statement)
ESSAY SUBMISSION DEADLINE

12:00PM (MIDDAY) WEDNESDAY 10th MARCH 2021