

INSTRUCTIONS: WRITING AN ESSAY

Before You Start Writing

Make sure you understand the assignment correctly. When in doubt, ask – it's better than doing unnecessary work. The purpose of the essay is to answer a question that you set based on the assignment brief. To start with, do as much research as you can, note down various arguments and opinions of authors, and look for your own approach. Write down complete bibliographic data for sources from the beginning – looking it up later is a waste of time. Determine the main ideas for your essay and sketch an outline (perhaps a preliminary one) and think about how to structure your text.

Structure

1. Introduction

In the opening section, write a short summary of your essay – introduce the topic you will be dealing with and the question you will be answering. A short paragraph, an introduction to the issue, is enough. The structure of the text and the method used can also be indicated here. If the topic is too broad, focusing on a partial aspect is better, but you must clearly state and explain the reasons behind your choice of focus.

2. The Main Section

Make sure your text is logically structured. The prepared outline will help you with this. Divide the text into subsections in which you will address specific questions. Divide these further into paragraphs that should be focused on one idea and not be too long. Delete everything that is not directly related to the topic. First, inform the reader who has written about the chosen topic and from what point of view. Be critical. Give arguments and counterarguments, taking into account the plurality of opinions. It is often necessary to recharacterize terms and specify in what sense you are using them. Don't jump from one topic to another – avoid digressions that unnecessarily break up the text. Keep in mind the issue you are writing about. When writing, avoid merely descriptive passages – describe only if you have a reason to do so, e.g., if the description is necessary for a new interpretation. Don't stay on the surface – ask why, and look for meanings. Don't stick too closely to what the literature says – it should serve as a starting point. The essay should not be just a compilation; try developing your own hypotheses and

viewpoints – but remember that everything needs to be backed up with relevant arguments.

3. Conclusion

The conclusion does not only repeat what has already been said in the essay. Rather, it is your own synthesis of the given issue, and it should answer the question posed in the introduction. Present precise formulations and evaluations supported by arguments from the main part of the text, and avoid stating vague impressions.

Language

The essay is a professional text – make sure you use suitably academic language and avoid colloquial expressions. Check for spelling errors (not just those underlined in red) and write the titles of the works in Czech or the original. Don't overdo it with foreign words.

Working with Literature, Notes & Bibliography

All the literature you work with **must be listed** in the essay so the reader can easily find the source. The options are:

1. **Direct quotations** in the text should support your argument – it is not advisable to include them too often or to quote long passages unless the original text is your main topic. Quotations are always put **in quotation marks, with a reference to the source**. The reference format used should be as friendly as possible to the reader and simple for the writer as well; for extended essays, variants of the **Harvard system** are more suitable, which we hereby recommend: a brief reference is written in parentheses immediately after the citation (Surname, Year, Page), e.g., (Wittlich, 1982, 45). However, the data in the bibliography must be adapted to this, i.e., Surname, First name, Year. Name. Place of publication: Publisher., e.g., Wittlich, Petr, 1982. Czech Art Nouveau. Prague: Odeon. See [here](#) for more detailed information. Alternatively, you can use the APA or MLA system (among others – if in doubt, consult with your tutor). There is no strict regulation on which reference format to use, but whatever system you do use, you must use it consistently throughout the essay
2. **Paraphrases** are also borrowed ideas, so a source must be provided for them. It must be clear from your text what is taken from the source and what is your own

contribution. The neatest solution is to quote a paraphrase (following the system in use), e.g., as follows: „Wittlich (1982, p. 45) writes...” or „Wittlich in the book Czech Secession (p. 45) states...,” possibly also use the year here (1982, p. 45), in case there are several editions. If it is not possible (e.g., for stylistic reasons) to formulate paraphrases this way, then use other verbal or graphic (paragraphs, etc.) solutions – everything must be distinct and clear.

3. If you draw part of your text from several sources, **all of them** must appear in the note (e.g., in the form: „For more details, see“...“). For generally known facts, a note is not necessary. If you hesitate, it is always better to mention a source than to leave out.
4. **Quotations, summaries of parts of somebody else’s text, and use of any part, idea, or material from the work of another author or authors must be acknowledged. Otherwise, there is a risk that your text will be marked as plagiarism!**
5. **Bibliography.** All literature you cite in the text and from which you draw must be listed in alphabetical order by the author’s last name in the bibliography. It is recommended to cite all major literature on the topic, even if you have not explicitly used it (it is good to mention it in the initial literature review), so that it does not appear that you have omitted some major, albeit older, title. Dictionaries are problematic – those with author’s entries are cited, ordinary dictionaries are not, but it always depends on the specific case here.
6. Use **online sources** in the case of otherwise unavailable articles or books (but beware! if they also exist in „paper“ form, they must be listed classically, along with a further note that they are available online – e.g., at the JSTOR online library). For the official websites of artists and institutions, interviews, etc., you must always state the date of the search. You **should not include** sources of a non-expert nature in your bibliography – no Wikipedia and similar anonymous informative pages, the informative value of which is problematic and must be verified elsewhere anyway.