Some basic rules for writing essays.

1. **Structure.** An essay must have a structure. At the most simple level it must have a start, a body and a finish – that is an introduction, the contents and a conclusion.

   In the **introduction** which should be brief – aim for one or two paragraphs. You should outline for the reader the structure of the essay – what is its purpose, what questions will it explore, how will it do this what is the organizational plan? What will be covered? What will not be covered. The aim of the introduction is to inform the reader what it is this whole essay is about.

   In the **main body** you should set out your main argument or content – using plenty of headings (“signposts”) to let your reader know where you are going and how it relates to the rest of your essay.

   In the **conclusion** you should recapitulate the major points of the essay and reflect on “what does it all mean” trying to sum up and cap off the discussion for yourself and the reader.

2. **Referencing**

   The major purpose of referencing is to allow your reader to know what the source of your ideas, claims, assertions or evidence is. A critical reader will want to know the source of your ideas, claims, assertions, reflections, and points of evidence. In the social sciences the Harvard or author/date system is generally used. However you may also use the legal footnoting system as long as all the sufficient referencing details are readily accessible. I would expect a reference list to be included at the end of every essay containing a list of all the references used in the essay set out in alphabetical order by the first author. A reference list is different from a bibliography in that a bibliography may contain more than simply the references used in the essay. A reference list is simply restricted to the references used in the essay. The purpose of the reference list is to allow a reader to get access to the material referred to. So in all cases there must be sufficient detail to allow this access. There are conventions about how much detail is needed these relate to published articles and books.

   With books always provide all the authors in the reference list. If it is an edited collection put (ed.). after the list of editors. Always include the year of publication, the title of the work and finish with Place: publisher. That is place of publication and publisher. Place needs to be sufficiently explicit to recognize it this often means including the abbreviation for a state in the US or a county in the UK.

   Articles also require the full journal title, volume number (issue number only if pages within a volume are not continuous) and the page numbers of the article.

3. **Scholarship** is generally reflected I both the breadth and the depth of your reading and comprehension. With any particular topic a good grasp of the topic and question is essential following this exploration of the dimensions of the question and an appreciation of the issues is generally reflected in the essay.