**Reading Skills Practise:**

Essay On: Why Write Essays?

**Example Essay:**

***Question:***

*Discuss why assignment essays are common assessment tasks in undergraduate tertiary coursework, and evaluate the effectiveness of assignments as an avenue for learning. (Word limit 500 words – 10% leeway) Please note that the APA referencing style is used in this sample essay.*

***Introduction:***

Assignment essays are developed from set questions that give students a period of time to research a topic and produce their answer with references to their sources of information. While there are some disadvantages with using assignment essays as an assessment tool, there are sound educational purposes underpinning this practice. This essay examines the reasons why assignment essays are beneficial for student learning and considers some of the problems with this method of assessment.

***Body paragraph 1:***

Assignment essay tasks are set to assist students to develop mastery of their study subject. Firstly, assignment tasks enhance understandings about subject matter. Yang and Baker (2005) reason that “to master your learning materials and extend your understandings, you need to write about the meanings you gain from your research” (p. 1). Secondly, research (Jinx, 2004; Zapper, 2006) clearly demonstrates that students learn the writing conventions of a subject area while they are researching, reading and writing in their discipline. This activity helps them to “crack the code” of the discipline (Bloggs, 2003, p. 44). Thus, students are learning subject matter and how to write in that disciplinary area by researching and writing assignment essays.

***Body paragraph 2:***

Using assignment essays for assessment supports student learning better than the traditional examination system. It is considered that course-work assignment essays can lessen the extreme stress experienced by some students over ‘sudden-death’ end of semester examinations:

If we insist that all students write about everything they have learned in their study courses at the same time and in the same place (e.g. in examinations), we are not giving all of our students equal opportunities. Some students are not daunted by the exam experience while others suffer ‘exam nerves’ and perform at the lowest level of their capabilities. (Wonderland University, 2006, p. 4)

Additionally, Jones et al. (2004, pp. 36-37) propose that assignment essays can be used to assess student learning mid-course and so provide them with helpful feedback before they are subjected to the exam experience. Exams only provide students with a mark rather than specific feedback on their progress. Therefore, setting assignment essays for a substantial part of student assessment is a much fairer approach than one-off examination testing.

***Body paragraph 3:***

As an assessment tool, assignment essays have some disadvantages for lecturers and students. It has been found that assignment essays consume a great deal of staff time and money to mark and student time to prepare (Sankey & Liger, 2005, p. 192). A consequence of these problems is that feedback to students is frequently delayed, and this is much less useful to students than rapid feedback (p. 294). It is partly because of these disadvantages of time and expense that other assessments such as multiple-choice tests and short answer questions have an enduring place in the tertiary learning environment.

***Conclusion:***

To conclude, it seems that assignment essays continue to have a prominent role in tertiary education as an assessment tool. This is mainly because they are very effective in developing knowledge and writing skills for subject areas. Also, assignment essays can be less stressful than examinations as they allow students to show their understanding of content in less pressured circumstances. On the other hand, the time consuming nature of writing and marking essays points to some disadvantages that also need to be considered. The weight of evidence, however, supports the writing of assignment essays for student assessment because this approach has such positive and proven effects for improved student learning.

**References**

Bloggs, J. (2003). *Linking teaching, learning and succeeding in higher education*. London: Bookworld.

Jinx, J.M. (2004). Student essay writing. *Journal of Research in University Education, 9*(2), 114-125.

Jones, J., Smith, P.L., Brown, K., Zong J., Thompson, K., & Fung, P.A. (2004). *Helpline: Essays and the university student*. Tokyo: Courtyard Printers.

Sankey, J.M., & Liger, T.U. (2003). *Learning to write essays* [CD-ROM]. Sydney: Wonderland University.

Taylor, G. (1989). *The student’s writing guide for the arts and social sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wonderland University. (2006). *Attributes of a university graduate*. doi:10.1098/063-112

Yang, S., & Baker, O.E. (2005). *Essay writing and the tertiary student*. Melbourne: Diamond Press.

Zapper, Y. (2006). Learning essay writing. In F.T. Fax & Y. Phoney (Eds.), *Learning Experiences at University* (pp. 55-70). Calcutta: Academic Scholar Press.

**Interpreting Explicit Information:**

* *Decipher meanings of complex words and phrases from context*

1. Use the context of the following words or phrases to hypothesise about their meaning:
2. Undergraduate (question)
3. Writing conventions (paragraph 1)
4. Disciplinary area (paragraph 1)
5. Et al (paragraph 2)
6. Tertiary learning environment (paragraph 3)

* *Relationships between ideas – recognising when ideas support or contradict an overarching concept*

1. State the overarching idea of this essay and give supporting ideas (in dot points) from each body paragraph of the essay to prove this.
2. What section has ideas that contradict the overarching concept
3. how has the author reconciled this section with the rest of the essay? (careful – the reconciliation is NOT in the paragraph)

* *Extracting meaning from texts with abstract ideas and technical or nuanced text*

1. Use the information in paragraph 1 to determine what ‘mastery’ of a topic is making sure to give evidence from the passage

* *Main ideas vs supporting detail AND Multiple links across long text or between text types*

1. Using the following site: (<http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/featfram.htm>

a) Fill in the structure (use the Organisation tab to do this) below

b) The Other Formal Language Features section should be filled in from rest of site. Make sure you read the information for each section

c) NOT from the site but from observation say what the conventions (normal features) of a reference list are.

**Features of a Formal Essay:**

***The introduction paragraph:***

***Body paragraph 1:***

***Body paragraph 2:***

***Body paragraph 3:***

***The conclusion paragraph:***

***Other Formal Language Features not already covered:***

***The reference list:***