



Essay Writing Tips

If you have not written essays before (or for a long time), you may want to check out some online resources to assist in how to go about planning and writing an essay. Some brief tips are provided here to get you started.

The most important thing to remember is to answer the question. So, start by analysing it:

- Make sure you understand what the question is asking (e.g., do you understand the terms used).
- Brainstorm (e.g., do a mind map) - what do you already know about the topic; what questions do you already have/ need to know more about.
- Discuss with others but don't share anything in writing (i.e., share your ideas verbally but collusion can happen accidentally or intentionally if you share written notes).

Research the answer to the question.

- Read the Bible!
- What are you learning in the lectures that will help answer the question?
- Read other books – Bible dictionary, commentaries (refer to the recommended reading list for ideas) (NB. You can usually pass a Certificate essay without doing any additional reading but doing extra reading will help you understand the topic better). If you do read other books, see the section below on Referencing.
- If you're not sure if you're on the right track, ask the Teacher.

Write your essay.

- Plan out your essay before you start writing. A normal essay will have three main sections:

Introduction – give a brief indication of why the topic matters, how you are going to deal with the topic, and a 1-2 sentence answer to the question (~100-150 words)

Body – set out why you think the answer you gave in the introduction is the case; write in paragraphs, with one big, supporting point per paragraph in a clear, concise and ordered way (~700-800 words)

Conclusion – summarise your argument and draw your conclusions (~100- 150 words)

- Therefore, make sure that you can answer the question in 1-2 sentences, and you know your 2-3 big reasons why you think this is the answer—these reasons become the big points of the paragraphs.
- Think about how the points you wish to make will flow logically.
- Avoid the temptation to try to restate everything you heard in the lectures – this will not answer the specific question you have been asked (and will blow your word limit!).
- Unless otherwise stated the word limit is 1000 words plus or minus 10% (i.e., 900-1100 words).

Additional tips

Clarity

The aim is to write **clear** prose, which is both **accurate** and **understandable**.

Learning to be clear involves writing complete, grammatical sentences. Although MS Word will pick up some grammatical irregularities, you can use a more comprehensive online grammar & style checker (like www.prowritingaid.com or www.grammarly.com) to double check your work.

Learning to be accurate means that you fairly represent the views of others, should you choose to use them. Accuracy also means that you are aware of the strength of your answer: don't be afraid to use words like "probably" or "could," if that reflects the strength of your argument.

Learning to be understandable means that shorter words and sentences are preferable to long ones. **The use of unfamiliar words should be avoided**—if you are unsure of the meaning of a word, look it up, or use another known word. It may seem obvious, but many students forget that the aim of writing should be to communicate a message or argument to readers as effectively as possible.

Paragraphs

Your essay should be divided into paragraphs, with **one major point** in each paragraph. Usually, the first sentence of the paragraph states this major point, and the following sentences explain it and give evidence, as necessary.

Citing Bible references

Students often make the mistake of quoting or retelling large chunks of Bible text, which use up many words in a short (1000 word) essay. Use your own words to make your point, and then include a reference to the appropriate part/s of the Bible in either brackets or as a footnote.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the reproduction or paraphrasing of substantial unacknowledged written passages in a student's work or pretending that a scholar's ideas are the student's own. Plagiarism is a kind of cheating on an assignment and has become a common issue in university environments, especially since the rise of the internet. We want to help you avoid plagiarism not only because it is inappropriate to use another's words and ideas without acknowledgement, but because we want to know how you have understood what you have learnt and thought about. When someone in your church, or one of your friends or family asks you a tough question that is relevant to your unit, we want you to be able to answer confidently because you've already put it into your own words in the assignment.

To avoid plagiarism, you need to make sure that you acknowledge in the footnotes the sources of extracts, quotations and paraphrased material contained in your work or the source of ideas you are discussing. This includes material from books, journal articles, newspapers, websites, study Bible notes, and anything else that you have consulted. Your assignment will be run through plagiarism-checking software, so please ensure that if you don't understand the rules around plagiarism and acknowledging sources, you seek clarification.

There are some helpful resources that you can access online that provide a good explanation of plagiarism and the variety of ways students may accidentally or intentionally plagiarise others' work:

<https://www.turnitin.com/static/plagiarism-spectrum/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF5eFeJMplA>

<http://www.plagiarism.org/video/understanding-plagiarism-with-help-from-dr-seuss>

We understand that many CCS students will have not studied since high school and may possess little understanding of plagiarism. If plagiarism is detected in your essay, it will be assessed, and the following actions may be taken:

- Minimal or accidental plagiarism, or essays that are not well-referenced – student will receive guidance on how to proceed with future essays (but essays will be marked and passed as appropriate).
- Serious, wilful plagiarism, most of the essay is the work of others – student will receive guidance and asked to resubmit their essay.

Referencing

One way to avoid the risk of plagiarising accidentally is to set up a system for recording the ideas you have read about i.e., as you're taking notes from something you are reading jot down the reference and page number so you can go back to it. There is free software available that provides an easy way for managing references, but this is unlikely to be required at the Certificate level. If, however, you are considering moving onto degree level studies you may wish to start using a program such as Zotero.