



A* TEAM

How to write an A* ECONOMICS ESSAY at A-Level

A good essay involves planning, a structured approach and evaluation. Developing good essay writing skills now will stand you in good stead for the future, says **SAMUEL SCHMITT**

Just as the reputation of the 'dismal science' has been damaged by the financial crisis, the study and assessment of economics at secondary school level has been put under the spotlight.

As the joke goes, the essay questions remain the same but the answers are different.

In fact, this may be true on two levels. Schools may have finally stopped using the textbook with

the case study on Ireland 'the economic miracle', but equally, as new graduates join the teaching profession, they may find the definitions of economic concepts they teach are deemed incorrect by exam boards or that the advice schools give for writing essays does not satisfy the marking procedures stipulated by different boards and qualifications.

Scoring high marks in economics essays is a combination of exam

technique and knowledge. Training students more broadly in the wider skills of logical analysis, required for a compelling and balanced essay, will equip students with more effective intellectual tools for the future.

Firstly, just as central banks and other public authorities are under pressure to increase transparency to explain decisions, exam boards are under scrutiny to increase standardisation and make marking

more transparent and consistent.

If this article title was that of an essay set to a year 12 or 13 economics student, the most important step would be to know the required procedure. How many points should be made? Are examples required to score application marks? Is evaluation required? How much time should be spent on this section?

It is vital that both teachers and students understand the requirements of each qualification and exam board. At A-Level, the requirements differ from AS to A2, and will change again under the new specifications that start in

material to put analysis and models into context.

It is also important to separate points into well-constructed paragraphs which are clearly focused on the question.

Introduce each paragraph with a topic sentence to signpost how this paragraph and its points answer the question. Then develop a concise and detailed line of analysis, not a description.

Students are often confused by what is expected here, but remember the essay is a chance to show off your economics knowledge and work through a line of reasoning or transmission

FIVE MINUTES THINKING ABOUT THE CRUCIAL POINTS WILL ALLOW A COHERENT AND CLEAR LINE OF ARGUMENT

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So the onus is on teachers and students to read the specifications, examiner reports, and any other guidance they may get hold of.

Secondly, students must make sure they plan their answer. As tempting as rushing into an answer can be, when working under exam conditions, five minutes or so thinking about the crucial points and which concepts you will use to analyse and evaluate your points will allow a coherent and clear line of argument.

Part of this process is a careful analysis of the question that has been asked rather than the one you have revised or answered before!

Students must avoid pre-rehearsed answers and avoid missing key words in the question.

Frequent and costly errors in A2 macro-economics essays are often simple mistakes. These might include failing to link micro-diagrams, such as a tariff diagram, to macro-economic effects, such as unemployment levels.

There is often a failure to focus on the key themes brought up in the question so students might focus on growth rather than development or developing rather than developed countries.

Planning has two other important functions. It should lead to a logical structure to your argument, such as points for and against, so that the direction and conclusion of your essay is clear. Planning should also apply and link theory to stimulus

mechanism of an economic theory, perhaps supported by a diagram.

Analysis must be careful to focus initially on first round effects to ensure a proper understanding is communicated.

For example, focus on the linkages between a reduction in the UK's top rate of income tax from 50 per cent to 45 per cent and tax revenue, before moving onto second round effects and

IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEPARATE POINTS INTO WELL-CONSTRUCTED PARAGRAPHS, CLEARLY FOCUSED ON THE QUESTION

the possible impact of this change on the many areas on which the government spends money.

Additionally, essays should use evidence to justify their arguments, which may be from memory in the exam, or produced through independent research and further reading for typical assignments.

Each paragraph must be concluded and evaluated, or evaluation added in an additional paragraph, so that key points are emphasised and balance provided by the use of counter points.

Two of the most popular techniques adopted by students are to consider the size of the change in some variable and time lags, but

often there is little analytical depth to these approaches and a proper link to the context of the question.

Using any data given in the title or from your own knowledge can help here, or use the economic definitions of the short- and long-run to add a bit more rigour. Try to choose your best points in the planning process so that you can evaluate in depth rather than just list many possible counter points.

Finally, all essays should have an introduction and conclusion.

Economics requires concise analysis so use introductions for definitions of the terms in the question and do not waste time writing on the wider context or rambling about the topic generally.

Save contextual information for evaluation and instead use an introduction to briefly outline your proposed answer and how you will reach it. Then your conclusion, or recapitulation, should follow and bring the key strands of your arguments together to give them weight.

The conclusion shouldn't repeat the content of your arguments but summarise and link the main sections together so you can reach a clear and compelling answer to the question.

There isn't one formula to writing a good economics essay at school, but this advice will help you to show off the quality of your economic understanding.

Knowing the requirements of

each exam board may require a few structural tweaks but, if you have a very thorough understanding of the topics, and can produce a balanced and compelling argument, and perhaps even some original interpretations of your own, you will be rewarded with an A or A*.

More importantly, learning to write a good essay will prepare you for university education and teach you, as John Henry Newman wrote, "to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyse".

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