

POLS 2150 ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

Dr. Aslan Amani

Please tailor your essay to one of the following four questions. You will notice that these questions cover quite large topics, and you should narrow them down to the aspect of the topic that you find most interesting/important. Please consult the writing hand-out and the grading rubric for guidance, preferably, before you begin writing the essay.

1. *Explain the slogan 'the personal is political.' What political relevance does the slogan have in 21st century Canada?*
2. *In many jurisdictions, the number of elected female officeholders falls significantly below that of males. Should such jurisdictions use quotas to increase women's representation? Why or why not?*
3. *Is multiculturalism bad for women?*
4. *In a 2017 interview with the New York Times, Hilary Clinton blamed misogyny as one of the primary reasons for her election loss against Donald Trump: "This has to be called out for what it is: a cultural, political, economic game that's being played to keep women in their place. Are female politicians running for office facing an uphill battle?"*

Additional instructions:

1. Your essay deadline is 21.03.2019 (11.59 PM). Please submit a digital copy through the Courselink submission drop-box.
2. Your essay should be based on a close reading of two-three texts from the syllabus. The use of additional sources is recommended.
3. The word limit is 1500 words, which includes references/bibliography.
4. Plagiarism is a serious offence!
5. Avoid direct quotes as much as possible. You may quote directly from a text only when paraphrasing the text could result in a loss of meaning. At all other times, you should paraphrase, and reformulate arguments in your own words.
6. Remember, paraphrasing an argument does not make you the 'rightful owner' of that argument – you must include a reference to the passage that is being paraphrased.
7. You should use the in-text (or parenthetical) style of author-date references from the Chicago Manual of Style.
8. All in-text references should include exact page numbers for the passages being discussed.

Writing Advice

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Writing effectively is, perhaps, the most important transferrable skill that you can develop as an undergraduate political science student. However, writing an excellent political science essay is not an easy task. A good essay is well-structured, clearly written, tightly-argued, and exhibits a strong degree of critical engagement with the course literature and academic rigour. By paying attention to the following requirements, avoiding the most commonly-made mistakes, and with some practice and care, you can significantly improve the quality of your essay. You will notice that some of the following points apply to other forms of academic writing, while some are specific to political theory.

Content:

1) The essay you are asked to write in this course has both an explanatory dimension and an evaluative/argumentative one. Inexperienced essay writers often mistake an explanatory task for a descriptive one. An explanation of an argument, claim, or concept is not a merely descriptive statement – it should have an analytical content as well. For example, when engaged in an explanatory task, you may want to analyze what a particular argument stands for, what its components (sub-arguments, premises) are, what connection the author of the text sees between these components, and how these connections bear on the argument at large. While doing this, you also begin to show your readers the respective consistencies and inconsistencies, strengths and weaknesses of the arguments and texts with which your essay engages. As the above summary suggests, in political theory, the explanatory work you do sets the stage for the more argumentative part of your essay, and also contains an important degree of critical and evaluative work. In other words, a good explanation often provides an important degree of critical engagement with the material, and a good argument always contains lots of explanatory work.

2) Narrow focus. Your essay needs to have a narrow focus. Whether it is primarily explanatory or evaluative, the paper has to defend a certain thesis. In a longer essay assignment, you can construct a thesis that comprises several arguments. Or you can examine a connection between two different theses. This does not mean that your paper has multiple theses – it still has one overarching thesis.

Also, please remember that an essay is not a collection of information – it is a structured piece of writing that tries to answer a particular question. A tightly-argued paper is always stronger and more convincing than papers that ramble on despite containing creative material. You should include in your essay only information/arguments/ideas that are directly relevant to the question to which your essay responds and the thesis that it tries to defend. For example, if the connection between a paragraph that you have written and the remainder of your paper is not completely clear, including that paragraph will reduce your paper's strength.

3) Commentary/opinion vs. analysis. The political in the political theory essay should not mislead you. There are different forms of political writing – e.g., policy advocacy, political propaganda, public affairs commentary. Academic writing differs from the above in important ways – in terms of language and substance. The reader of your essay is not interested in learning what your opinions are on a particular issue. Of course, your views and interests will direct you toward a topic or a particular argument. However, once you have selected a question, and decided what thesis you want to defend, you should put some distance between yourself –your ideas, values, etc. – and the argument that you are about to construct. No matter how firmly you believe in the truth of a position, for a proper analysis you must maintain a skeptical tone, and let the argument demonstrate its strength. Furthermore, when trying to justify a particular statement, do not make excessive use of catchy phrases, metaphors or other rhetorical devices.

4) Developing your points, substantiating your arguments: The arguments you construct and the claims you make should be substantiated and well-developed. Under-developed arguments and unsubstantiated claims are common characteristics of a weak essay. The most straightforward way of substantiating a claim is supporting it with textual evidence, and/or, simply, not making claims that cannot be supported with textual evidence. The most important way to develop an argument is to consider counter-arguments, and possible and actual objections, and to show that the argument you are in the process of building can withstand strong criticism.

Also, please bear in mind that academic political theory is mostly a critical conversation, and to keep that conversation developing in a meaningful direction, we have to treat charitably the views that we regard as objectionable.

5) The above brings us to the importance of engaging with the scholarly literature. Although this point does not apply to this particular essay assignment, it will certainly apply to many other assignments that you will be required to write in other political science courses. If you want to write an essay on Marcuse or Habermas, it is crucial that you read what other scholars have written in response to the works of these important authors. You should always engage with the secondary sources when you formulate an argument on a primary text. Remember that a primary text itself is, almost always, a response to another literature that precedes it.

6) In political theory, originality is more often about attention to detail rather than breaking new ground. You are more likely to say or write something that strikes your reader as original when you begin to understand the nuances of the texts we study. Also, your work is more likely to be original when you start to step outside your comfort zone – in political theory, remaining open to a dialogue with ideas and arguments, including the ones you find objectionable or deficient, is crucial.

Structure and Style:

7) The essay should have a clear and concise introduction that states what you are trying to achieve. It is essential to keep the introductory and term-defining remarks reasonably short because a good essay should showcase your analytical skills primarily.

8) Although, as an instructor, I am fully committed to the individuality of writing, and appreciate writing as an expressive medium, a piece of academic literature has to abide by certain standards of clarity, rigour, and structure. Try to impress your reader with the substance of your analysis. If the content of your argument pales in comparison to the writing style, your essay is, probably, not a very strong one.

Some Useful Resources:

<https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/writing>

From other universities

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice>

<http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/strategies-essay-writing>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>