



School of Communications

Student Handbook

'Truth is never pure and rarely simple.'

– Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Editors' Note:

This handbook is intended to act as a guide addressing some of the questions most commonly asked by students. We should stress at the outset that at university, primary responsibility for gathering information relevant to progress through academic life lies with you the student. The onus is on you to check course requirements, to keep abreast of deadlines, to understand what conditions may be imposed on your taking one option or another etc. To this end we would encourage you to become familiar with the DCU website and to check your DCU email for messages from lecturers on at least a daily basis.

It should also be borne in mind that this handbook does not claim to be a definitive guide to every problem you may encounter. Rather it is a work in progress which will be updated on an ongoing basis. To this end any comments, corrections or any suggestions that might improve it will be welcomed by the editors who will include them in updated versions. Speak to your programme board chair.

Disclaimer:

Though every effort has been made to ensure that this document is accurate and up-to-date it should not be taken as legally binding.

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HOW WE'RE ORGANISED

The School of Communications is home to three undergraduate degrees and seven post-grad degrees. We call them programmes, and each is managed by a Programme Board. You will need to know who is in charge of your programme.

Programme Board chairs 2009-10

<i>Programme</i>	Chair	Room	Phone*	email
BA Communication Studies	Des McGuinness	C131	5369	des.mcguinness@dcu.ie
BA Journalism	Patrick Kinsella	C172	5031	patrick.kinsella@dcu.ie
BSc Multimedia	Declan Tuite	C2117	8368	declan.tuite@dcu.ie
MA Film & Television	Dr. Roddy Flynn	C128	8355	roderick.flynn@dcu.ie
MA Journalism	John O'Sullivan	C2118	5704	john.osullivan@dcu.ie
MA Political Communication	Prof Farrel Corcoran	C126	5219	farrel.corcoran@dcu.ie
MSc Multimedia	Dr Tom Lawrence	C175	5595	tom.lawrence@dcu.ie
MSc Science Communication	Brian Trench	C2122	5668	brian.trench@dcu.ie
MA International Journalism Studies	Prof Steven Knowlton	C148	542	steven.knowlton@dcu.ie
MA International Communication	Prof Paschal Preston	C142A	5478	paschal.preston@dcu.ie

**off campus, phone (01) 700-xxxx*

Each programme is made up of *modules* (specific units of study, like CM136 Communication Theory). Some of them will be delivered by other schools within the Faculty of Humanities & Social Science – like LG101 Introduction to Law, taught by members of the School of Law & Government.

WHOM TO CONTACT

Your point of contact for information or advice depends on the nature of your query.

If it is a personal matter, your best point of call may be to drop in at the Student Advice Centre, on the ground floor of the Henry Grattan Building – opposite the restaurant.

For personal or general academic issues, undergraduates can ask for a meeting with their personal tutor – assigned to you during orientation week in first year. Make a note of their email. Or contact the programme chair.

For specific academic questions, the most useful person to see is the lecturer who teaches that module: in class, just after class, or email for an appointment. If it is

something that concerns the whole class (like a clash of assignment deadlines), bring it up with your elected class representatives, rather than having a lot of people contact the lecturer with the same point.

For issues that concern more than one module, see your programme chair.

USING EMAIL

You are expected to use e-mail in a professional manner and refrain from any comments which could be regarded as disrespectful or offensive. Bear in mind that e-mails are easily misunderstood and therefore it is important to ensure that the message conveys the intended tone (i.e. professional, friendly, courteous). Think of your correspondence over e-mail as practice for the work environment after university.

Follow these guidelines for effective communication:

- Always use your @dcu.ie account for DCU business
- Insert a relevant subject line, including your programme and the module name if relevant. (e.g. 'CS request for meeting on choice of modules')
- Begin the e-mail with a salutation (e.g. Hi Tom/Dear Professor X)
- In the body of the e-mail, state who you are (e.g. student in the CM104 module), explain the purpose of your e-mail, make a polite request, thank the receiver and sign off properly (e.g. kind regards, best wishes)
- Adopt a friendly and personable tone
- Do not write anything that you would not be happy for everyone to see or that you would not say to the recipient's face
- Proof-read your e-mail before you send it. Do not give the impression that you do not wish to take the time to write properly.
- Be careful with your user name or any tagline on your e-mail ('lazysod' as a tagline may be amusing to friends, but is not appropriate if the email is sent to DCU staff or potential employers).
- Do not use text abbreviations such as 'b4', 'gr8' etc. in an e-mail

Before mailing, think about whether you can find what you need on the DCU web, or by asking a question in class; and do not send the same request for information to more than one person at once.

REGISTERING & CHANGING MODULES

Some of your modules are *core* – you have to take them. Others are *options*, from which you choose the required number. You register your choice for both semesters at the beginning of the academic year in September, but you can change your mind.

Changing your choice is free of charge in the first and second week of each semester, and there is a fee in the third week – do it from your portal page.

But bear in mind that lecturers will not be able to make special arrangements for you if you turn up to lectures for the first time in week three: if you have doubts, attend *all* modules you are thinking about for the first two weeks.

PORTAL PAGE

Your portal page is your personal home page on the DCU web site. It includes information about your timetable, modules you are registered for, and much more. Just go to www.dcu.ie/portal, and enter your DCU computer account password.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance at class should be regarded as compulsory. Students who do not attend class regularly are likely to have poor grades or, indeed, fail. Individual lecturers are not required to issue warnings to students with poor attendance records. The responsibility for attending class lies solely with you. Although a roll may be not called, lecturers do note student attendance patterns. Good time-keeping, regular attendance and active participation in workshops and seminars are required of all students.

In addition you should note that it is your responsibility to keep up with the progress of the course. If you are unable to attend classes you should inform the lecturer of this and make it your business to ascertain what you missed and to acquire any course materials given out during your absence.

MOODLE

Moodle is DCU's online learning environment through which lecturers can give electronic access to material like lecture notes, and activities like discussion forums – a bit like a Facebook group for each module.

The use of Moodle varies from module to module – some use it a little, some use it a lot. Individual lecturers will speak to you about the requirements for their module. It is essential that you become comfortable with this environment as soon as possible, as it will be used throughout your studies at DCU. Go to <http://moodle.dcu.ie/> to get started.

PROGRESSION

You have to pass all the modules required by your programme to move from one year to the next, and to graduate. Depending on the module, that means continuous assessment (essays and other projects) or an examination, or a combination. The module lecturer – sometimes with assistance of other academics or external examiners – will assess your work, and decide the % mark. That mark will be considered and approved by the programme board (in this case it adopts the name Progression and Award Board, or PAB), and finally by the university's Academic Council. This sequence matters if you want special circumstances taken into account, or if you want to appeal – procedures outlined below.

DEADLINES AND DELIVERY

Examinations are held at specific times, during two weeks in January for semester one modules, and during two weeks in May for semester two modules. The exam schedules are published in December and April.

The delivery dates (deadlines) for continuous assessment assignments are set by the lecturer. Lecturers are not obliged to accept work that is delivered late. In that case, your mark for that assignment will be zero. Lecturers who do accept late work are bound by School of Communications policy as follows:

- for every day late (including Saturday and Sunday) 5% is deducted from the mark before it is issued to you
- No work will be accepted if it is more than 5 days late.

Unless lecturers have specified another method of delivery (such as e-mail or Moodle) all assignments should be left in the project box outside room C142 (the School Secretary's Office). All work should be submitted before 12 noon on the due date. As the project submission bin will not be emptied at weekends work submitted over a weekend will be regarded as having been submitted on MONDAY (or Tuesday after a public holiday).

You are advised to keep copies of all your work. Occasionally an external examiner may decide to re-examine work submitted previously. It is therefore important that you retain copies at least until marks for the semester are posted.

Consult Appendix 1: *Writing a Good Essay* below for guidance on layout and presentation, and note that every assignment must be accompanied by your signature on the School of Communications declaration available on your portal page.

EXTENSIONS

If you are ill, or other circumstances beyond your control prevent you completing an assignment on time, the lecturer may grant you an extension of the deadline. That will not affect your grade – but the lecturer is not obliged to grant the extension, and is unlikely to do so if you do not seek a meeting to explain yourself BEFORE the original deadline has passed.

GRADING STRUCTURES

Numerical marks, both in individual modules and in overall year and degree results, are translated into grades as follows:

UNDERGRADUATE GRADES

70%+	First class honours (I)
60-69%	Second class honours, grade 1 (II.1)
50-59%	Second class honours, grade 2 (II.2)

40-49%	Third class honours (III)
under 40%	Fail

Undergraduate students who narrowly fail one or two modules in any year may be eligible for compensation (award of a pass without reaching 40%) if their other marks are good enough. See the section on COMPENSATION below.

MASTERS' GRADES

70%+	First class honours
60-69%	Second class honours
40-59%	Pass
under 40%	Fail

WHAT YOUR MARKS MEAN

Undergraduate work in exams and essays is marked using the following standards. Note that these are broad criteria and each module – and particularly continuous assessment projects - will also have more specific criteria.

First Class (70%+)

The answer contains all relevant information and has a coherent, logical and precise argument. It also shows an awareness of the broad and more subtle implications of the issues. There is evidence of wide knowledge and reading, an understanding of the issues and a critical analysis including original and fresh insights into the problem.

II.1 (60-69%)

The question is approached in a confident manner, the issues are identified, evidence and reading are used and some awareness of broader issues is displayed. There is some critical analysis but lacks the poise and fluency of a first class answer.

II.2 (50-59%)

There is a solid answer which grasps the material, but does not always recognise the broader implications. Whilst it shows some intelligent application and understanding it lacks a clear grasp of the critical analysis required.

III (45-49%)

Shows some basic knowledge but there is difficulty in comprehending the material in general and the question in particular. Critical analysis and awareness of the broader implications and subtle issues in the debate is lacking.

III (40-44%)

Weak development of argument, showing little evidence that substantial work was carried out by student. Barely adequate.

Fail (0-39%)

Little, if any, evidence of a grasp of the basic course material - a simplistic approach to the question, disorganised, insufficient material and awareness of reading. Shows

no awareness of the issues and related debates. May well contain errors of fact and understanding.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

If you feel your performance in an examination or in completing an assignment was affected by circumstances outside your control (generally: illness or family bereavement), you can ask the programme board to take account of this before finally deciding your mark. Normally you will be offered a second attempt at the exam or assignments, your first attempt being disregarded. (This is called a *deferral*.) Only rarely will a programme board raise a low mark because of extenuating circumstances.

The form for making this request is here:
<http://www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/R30.pdf>

Note that you must make this request before the programme board meets to decide on marks – do not wait until your semester marks have been notified to you. You can make the request to the lecturer, the programme board chair or to the Examinations Office in Registry.

If your circumstances are likely to remain difficult for some time, you can request a deferral of an exam or assessment using this form:
<http://www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/r33.pdf>

COMPENSATION

Compensation is the award of a pass for an undergraduate module where your mark is under 40%. There are strict limitations.

- this is your first attempt at the module – not a resit nor a repeat
- your mark in the failed module must be at least 35%
- you can compensate no more than 1/6th of your total modules for the year – normally one or two
- your overall score for the year must be at least 45%
- in each programme, some modules are not eligible for compensation because of their importance – e.g. final year thesis or project.

You do not have to apply for compensation – it is applied automatically if you meet the conditions.

RECHECKS

After your marks have been issued, you can ask for a recheck if you think there has been a mistake in a module. This only involves checking that marks have been properly recorded and calculated – it is not a re-evaluation of the mark. Contact the programme board chair. If you ask for a recheck in more than one module, the chair will probably ask you to make an appeal.

APPEALS

If you feel that the marks awarded by the Progression and Awards Board at the end of the assessment process do not accurately reflect the quality of your work, you may appeal against the decision in one or more modules. Appeals are considered only on specified grounds:

- the programme board didn't give enough weight to your extenuating circumstances
- there were extenuating circumstances you didn't tell the board about for valid reasons
- the exam or assessment was conducted in breach of University regulations
- there was a substantial error of judgment by the examiner(s)
- there was a material administrative error or irregularity that made a difference to your mark.

Appeals must be made within 14 days of the publication of the marks, on this form: <http://www.dcu.ie/registry/forms/pdfs/Appeals.pdf>

The form must be accompanied by documentary evidence to support your claim, and by a fee of €100.

RESITTING FAILED MODULES

If you fail an exam, you will be offered the opportunity to *resit* in August.

If you fail continuous assessment, you *may* be offered an opportunity to do the work again during the summer. But note that ***this may not be feasible in some modules*** because of the nature of the assignments.

If you are allowed to resit, you only have to redo work that you have failed, retaining any pass marks for other elements including exams.

REPEATING FAILED MODULES

If you fail an exam or continuous assessment a second time, or if a resit of continuous assessment is not possible, you must register to *repeat* the module the coming year. You will not retain marks for any elements of that module previously passed, and you may not be permitted to move into the next level of study. A third year at the same module is not permitted.

WRITING AN ESSAY

Although we often take it for granted that we have the ability to write, it is important to stress that academic writing poses a unique set of challenges. Putting together a good academic essay involves not only the presentation of facts and figures but also requires that you learn to marshal that information to construct convincing and coherent arguments. Very few people have an innate ability to do this - it is a skill that

must be learned through practice. Once acquired, however, it is a skill that can dramatically impact upon your grade performance throughout your academic career.

Why do essays at all?

- They provide important feedback to the teaching staff.
- They make you construct arguments, using ideas with which you are beginning to become familiar as a student.
- They make you aware of what you know and what you don't know in a given field, helping you to clarify and organise ideas.
- They make you read around the subject, and therefore less dependent on the lecturer's point of view.
- Taken together with lecturer's comments they make useful revision material.

The traditional view of academic work often portrays the process of study as being primarily about reading. When the process of reading has been accomplished, it is assumed that the student will have completed his or her studies. In fact being a student is a job in at least this respect: ultimately, it's not about consumption but the production in written form of one's own take on the material addressed in lectures. Reading plays a very large part in this; but it is not an end in itself.

In sum, we would argue that it is impossible to know what one has learnt until one demonstrates the ability to express it. In practice, therefore, discussing course material with classmates, writing notes, short pieces and essays is a necessary part of study as well as a requirement of academic life.

More extensive advice on essays, including layout and referencing, is in Appendix 1: *Writing a Good Essay* at the end of this document.

THESIS GUIDELINES

Detailed guidelines on preparation and presentation of theses, dissertations and final year projects are issued separately.

PLAGIARISM : DEFINITION

Within an academic context, plagiarism is considered one of the worst possible offences - it constitutes intellectual theft. Dublin City University defines plagiarism as follows:

It is the deliberate act of taking and using another person's work as your own. It includes absent references, reproducing the work (even with small changes) of another, taken from books, journals, articles, TV programmes, the Internet, lecture notes and so on. It also includes self plagiarism, i.e. submitting own work for more than one assessment, copying another person's work, with or without his/her consent. Also included is collusion where a group of people collaborate or collude to present an assessment or a substantial part thereof,

when the examiner required individual research and outcome.

Plagiarism includes presenting extracts (edited or not) from another source but only referencing (giving a source for) the last sentence. The best rule of thumb (and your best protection) is that when you're not sure if a source needs to be acknowledged with a reference, then you should acknowledge it. You can never have too many references.

Other dishonest practices which are very serious offences include faking or falsification of data, cheating, or the uttering of false statements about your work.

It is also a serious offence to present work for one module which has been prepared or presented for another module.

Students should be aware that they may be required to attend for an oral examination on the content of any assignments they have submitted.

PLAGIARISM : PENALTIES

Copying is quite easily detected through search engines and the use of online submission services such as Turnitin. Regrettably, examples are discovered every year. There is always a penalty.

In very minor cases (for instance, minor occurrence of poor referencing), offenders will be deemed to have failed the assignment, and will be required to repeat the work, perhaps with additional assignments being required. In cases of clear deception, the School may record a failure of the entire module and impose a requirement to repeat it the following year.

Very serious offenders will automatically be referred to the Disciplinary Committee of the University, which has the power to require the repeat of a module, a repeat of the whole year, suspension for a period, or even expulsion from the university.

Review the guidelines on referencing in Appendix 3 below.

TECHNICIANS' OFFICES AND LOANS

Room C105 is where you borrow and return audio-visual equipment (sound recorders, video cameras, lights) needed to complete some practical assignments.

The Loans desk in C105 is open from 10am-1pm and 2-5pm Monday to Friday.

Students should be conscious that at any one time there are up to 650 others who may need equipment and need it urgently. Inevitably, this leads to queues at peak times.

It is therefore essential that all returns are made on time, as the equipment rarely spends too long on the shelf before it is borrowed again. We would also ask that you ensure the batteries in your machine are recharged. If this was not done notify the loans officer so that the next user may be informed or if time permits the machine may be recharged.

C105 is not only a loans facility but is also the home to our technical support staff led by Damien Hickey and Eoin Campbell. If you experience problems in any of the studios, editing rooms or media-related areas technical staff are available to troubleshoot from 10am until 5pm during term time.

Photography equipment is held at room C100, under the supervision of David O'Callaghan. Hours are 8.45am to 10.30am and 11.15am to 1.00pm, Monday to Friday in term time. News and announcements about the photo studio can be found at <http://dcuphotography.blogspot.com>

EQUIPMENT TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- No student card, no loan (nor return of equipment).
- All audio recording equipment is loaned out on a first-come first-served basis and must be returned before 1pm on the day it's due.
- Audio loans usually span a two day period, i.e. borrow Monday, return Wednesday with the exception of equipment borrowed on Thursday, which must be returned Friday morning. We would ask that all returns be made before 1pm. Weekend loans may be taken on Friday am until Monday am.
- All video equipment must be *booked* with loans staff at least 24 hours in advance. It is typically loaned out in the morning and due back before 4.30pm same day. If the equipment is required overnight, it must first be agreed with your lecturer and then a written submission stating your reasons, and details for transport and storage of the equipment. This must be signed and include contact details. (A form will be available from the loans office)
- Late returns will result in a one week ban for the first time, a 2 week ban for the second, 3 weeks for the third and so on up to a 6 week ban. This applies to late returns up to two days late. Returns later than this will be subject to a review by the school and will result in a much longer ban.
- Equipment borrowed is the sole responsibility of the borrower and only they may return it. If this is not possible, alternative arrangements must be made with a technician, otherwise it will be treated as a late return with the appropriate penalty starting with a 2 week ban.
- Equipment lost or broken will be subject to a review by the school, and will result in a minimum of a 2 week ban up to a complete ban depending on the circumstances.
- Be aware that a ban will not be lifted just because you have an assignment due.
- Equipment is only available for courses scheduled to use it and then only while doing project work.

STUDIOS AND LABS

There are computers for general use on the second floor of the Henry Grattan building. On the first floor, the School of Communications has dedicated computer laboratories in rooms C101, C102, C106, C107, C116 and C165; they have different software configurations suitable for photography, audio, video or multimedia, and lecturers will let you know which lab you should be using in each module.

There are radio studios in C117 and in the room beside C142 and a TV studio in C139/C140. There is a photo lab and darkroom in C100.

Their use is subject to conditions:

- All studios and labs must be kept tidy
- NO food or drink is allowed in any of the rooms
- Studios and room C165 must be booked at least 24 hours in advance
- Studios are available from 10am to 5pm. Late use must be arranged with a technician.
- No equipment may be rewired or reconfigured or removed from any of the labs or studios without prior consent from the technical staff

Appendix 1: **WRITING A GOOD ESSAY**

Before planning your first essay, review the section above *WHAT YOUR MARKS MEAN*.

In general terms, a good essay is one which:

- Is well-presented
- Has a clear structure
- Expresses a cogent, coherent and convincing argument
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of the subject and, where appropriate, an ability to use the abstract theoretical concepts encountered in the study of that subject
- Displays knowledge of the relevant facts/data
- Backs up its arguments with reference to clearly identified, relevant source material.

Let us consider these characteristics in turn:

Presentation

This may come as a surprise but marks are frequently lost not because the student doesn't understand the subject but because they are unable to clearly express that understanding. This often comes down to a failure of presentation: poor writing and poor proof-reading. At an absolute minimum it is assumed that essays will be presented in a typed/word-processed form. In addition it is taken for granted that students have proofed their essay for spelling and sense. Finally it is assumed that no student will submit an essay which does not have good syntax, punctuation and grammar.

Please note that running a word processor spell-check or grammar-check does not constitute proofing for the following reasons:

- The spell-check may fail to pick up words which although incorrectly spelled in context are nonetheless real words (e.g. "there" when you meant "their").
- The particular dictionary installed on the word processor you are using may not be set up for UK English. (It is not safe to assume that your lecturer will accept US English spelling as correct. If in doubt stick with UK spelling.)
- Spell-check dictionaries can be customised, added to and therefore screwed up. In short to rely on the spell-check not only means placing your faith in the good people of Microsoft© (or some other corporation) but also the person who previously used that word processor.
- In particular, computer grammar checks are not an effective way of ensuring good syntax, punctuation and grammar.

Given this, the best way to make sure an essay is readable, is to print it out and read it yourself or to have someone else read it for you. There are numerous textbooks on

writing, that are geared specifically to students. Check the library holdings on this subject. A copy of William Strunk's 1918 classic *The Elements of Style* is available online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141>. Despite its age it remains an excellent resource. One obvious caveat however: the book was written for a US audience and uses US spelling. This should not be interpreted as justifying the use of US English in your own essays.

Structure

"Structure: a set of interconnecting parts of any complex thing; a framework"
- - Oxford English Reference Dictionary 1996 edition.

Your essay is a "complex thing", as it should include plenty of raw data, your own ideas, reasoned argument and relevant conclusions. Structure renders this "complex thing" comprehensible to the ordinary reader i.e. your examiner.

Although in general terms a structured essay is one which moves in a logical sequence from an introduction, to developing an argument, to reaching a conclusion, it should be stressed that structure is not a single given thing. Rather the structure of your essay should be shaped by the content of your argument: since no two essays are likely to present precisely the same argument it follows that no two essays will have exactly the same structure. It follows that you should customise your structure with a view to making your argument as clear and convincing as possible.

Notwithstanding this, the traditional dictum - that essays have a clear beginning, a middle and an end - still holds good. Put another way, your essay should firstly have an introduction, in which you state the argument you are going to pursue (and briefly indicate how you are going to set about the task). The following section should pursue the argument in orderly fashion, marshalling data, facts, reason and analysis. Finally, your conclusion should review the argument and offer a summary of your judgments on the matter (which should in any case already be implicit in the main body of your argument). You will achieve all this more successfully if you remember some basic rules:

- The attainment of clarity and structure are both served by careful paragraphing. Each paragraph should deal with a single topic and no more. You should be able to put a (mental) headline on each paragraph which summarises the subject-matter dealt with there. If you can't identify one clear subject for each single paragraph, then your essay is muddled and needs restructuring.
- You should group together all things you have to say on a particular topic. Don't introduce a particular issue and then leave it for something else, before coming back to it again (or worse still just leave the issue hanging in the air, unrelated to anything else in your essay). This produces a disconnected feel to your essay, is often repetitive, wastes space and ultimately tries your reader's patience.

Argument

In considering what an argument is we should first note that in writing an academic essay the terms "structure" and "argument" are practically indivisible. It's virtually

impossible to construct a strong argument in the absence of a structure that allows the reader to comprehend that argument. By the same token, a clear structure allows you as the writer to assess whether or not what you have written actually constitutes an argument.

The argument in an essay can be thought of as a series of "If X, then Y" statements. In other words, having presented a piece of data or information, you as the writer then draw a conclusion on that basis. That conclusion may in turn constitute the basis for a further conclusion. It is critical to stress that the points that you make should connect with each other, cumulatively developing an overall argument. In this regard consider the following parable:

"A developer approaches two builders she's never worked with before. She needs evidence that the builders are capable of actually constructing a house. Builder A goes off to a supplier and gets the materials needed for building that house but rather startlingly leaves them in a pile. Meanwhile Builder B gets the same raw materials but goes on to assemble them into a house. When the developer returns she awards the contract to Builder B. Builder A is disappointed and complains that if the developer had taken the time to go through all the material he's assembled then she could have 'inferred' that he was capable of building the house. The developer responds that in fact no such thing can definitively be inferred and that she would have to take it on trust that the Builder A really understood how to assemble an entire building. By contrast Builder B had clearly demonstrated such an ability."

Now replace the word "builder" with "student", "developer" with "lecturer", "house" with "argument" etc. If you just put down a series of isolated, disconnected bits of information, which you nonetheless feel are related to the topic of your essay, your lecturer will complain that the essay is 'bitty', that there is no discernible argument. It is not sufficient to present information in a form that demands that the lecturer must infer your argument/understanding of a subject - you must demonstrate it. You can help develop a coherent and flowing argument through careful use of language which clearly demonstrates the links between points, e.g.:

"Further support of this argument has come from ..."

"Additionally, we might consider the evidence presented by ..."

"This position could be further strengthened by ..."

"Therefore, we might suggest that ..."

Your finished essay should have links of this kind between each of the points that you make. Each point should lead on smoothly to the next. (Do try and be conscious, however, of the danger that over-reliance on the specific examples given immediately above will render your writing style rather formulaic - do try and retain a natural quality to your writing.)

Understanding of the subject

As noted above the writing of an essay is a demonstration of a working knowledge and understanding of a particular topic. Acquiring such knowledge and understanding

means:

- attending lectures
- undertaking purposeful reading
- discussing study material with your classmates
- writing about what you've learnt

The last two in particular deserve particular emphasis - it is sometimes assumed that attending lectures and diligently working through prescribed reading material will automatically lead to "understanding". Yet while these activities are critical your understanding of a subject will be infinitely enriched by actively working through the material in verbal discussion and in your writing.

To this end you should consider setting aside within your personal timetable space for discussing course material in groups. It is no exaggeration to say that such activities may do more to enhance your understanding than any other study method.

For writing, reading should serve the specific ends of the particular essay. Given a crowded work schedule this may mean that leisured reading, for 'reading around' your subject may have to be pushed down the list of priorities. By all means try to make time for background and related reading but finish the main job first.

Note also that you should examine carefully the proportion of your time devoted to writing or its active preparation. It probably isn't enough. Learning takes place in the activity of writing notes and essays - i.e. in learning to actively use the ideas - not just in passive reading. It's here, too that revision is located; and this ought to be an all-year-round activity.

Be critical of what you read. Always ask "Do I understand this?" and "Do I understand how it fits in with other things I want to say in the essay?" Don't expect to understand everything, and its relevance, straight off. Not understanding, making mistakes, are important ways of learning. They should be acknowledged, at least to yourself and used as points of development. In sum the function of reading is not just to learn but also to identify what you haven't yet understood.

Understanding implies that you have acquired the ability to see limitations in one's own and others' approaches, and to arrive at some reconciliations or decisions regarding these. An essay is always improved by an author showing awareness of counter-arguments and attempting to deal with evidence that does not fit the argument being presented.

Planning an essay

It should go without saying that good time management is a prerequisite for successful essay writing. On time management, you should consult library material on good study practice such as Stella Cottrell: *The Study Skills Handbook* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) or Joan Turner: *How To Study – a short introduction* (Sage Publications, 2002) for guidance.

Moving to consider the planning of the essay itself:

- Decide what is required of you in the question. “What topics, problems, principles, etc. will need to be dealt with somewhere in my essay if I’m to answer this?”
- Jot down any ideas, headings, notes, queries and references that occur to you.
- Decide what books or other sources look like being useful.
- With each, check the contents page and index for chunks that seem useful.
- Skim these to see if they are, in fact, any use.
- If so, make notes, either on index cards or on loose leaf sheets, as follows: Author, title, publisher date at top. Page numbers down the left-hand side and, alongside, whatever notes or quotes you want to make. Check the bibliography for anything else that may be worth adding to your reading list.
- Repeat until you feel you’ve got enough material.
- Read over all your notes and decide what the main points are. Try summing these up in a few sentences.
- At this point it would be useful to discuss these points with your classmates to subject them to a critical focus before you commit them to your essay
- Order them for importance.
- Organise these main points/chunks into a logical sequence perhaps by putting them on bits of paper and shuffling them around. What you’re after is some reasonably coherent structure.
- Focus your attention on the first “main chunk” and try to decide what minor or supporting material should go in at this point.
- And so on, perhaps changing your logical sequences as you go (for this reason, a first draft makes sense).

At the end of this you should produce a plan or outline BEFORE writing. An outline should clarify:

- that you have a clear, relevant and workable topic
- how the essay is structured - in chapter or section headings
- that your essay has a focus and object
- that your essay plan is efficient and to the point of the title
- that the different sections are inter-related as a necessary part of a coherent discussion and not merely casually related to the title
- that your approach / method is critical and analytical rather than simply discursive
- that your use of source material is adequate and balanced
- that your essay has a conclusion.

The outline should contain a very brief discursive statement of the overall argument. This is not easy. It requires tight construction and it serves to highlight the coherence of the outline and to control the volume of information and the direction of the

discussion in the process of writing.

You are strongly recommended to plan to finish writing your essay at least one full day before the deadline. Then, after a break to refresh your mind, print it out and give it a final read through, to correct grammar and spelling errors, and tidy up any remaining lack of clarity.

Finally...what you must NOT do:

1. Do not chat to the reader (“I”/“you”), asking coy questions and generally presenting the stuff in a light-hearted way. A proper note of solemnity is necessary.
2. Do not make assertions that are wide-open to questions and/or have no supporting argument. Cultivate the diplomatic phrase (“It has been suggested that...” or “X has argued that...”; rather than “It has been shown that...” or “It is common knowledge...”).
3. Try to avoid unsupported assertions of an ethical or emotive kind ('should' vs 'should not', or 'right' vs 'wrong'). Normative assertions (assertions that proceed from a subjective moral or ethical stance) are not considered academically valid precisely because they are subjective, based on unstated assumptions about how the world is or should be. This is not to suggest that such stances can be entirely factored out of your work but they need to be explicitly subjected to critical analysis.
4. Do not use the “blunderbuss” technique (lots of points fired randomly in the hope that some stick) or the “machine-gun” technique (staccato statement, of great obscurity delivered in a rapid but disjointed stream).
5. Do not use logical connections (“Hence”, “Thus”, “As a result”, “It follows that” etc.) when there’s no logical connection or where it’s so badly expressed it isn’t clear to anyone except you.
6. Essays should not exceed the requested length - those in excess may be penalised.
7. Because the ethical and political values which guide instructors will be apparent in the lectures and seminars, students may be tempted not to question them or not to take an opposing view in essays, either as a gut reaction or as an insurance against a low mark. This is a mistake. Essays are not viewed by lecturers as a personal challenge, but as an exercise to be evaluated according to academic norms.
8. Do not use extravagant language, unless you are 100% confident of the meaning of the words you’re using. Samuel Coleridge Taylor in his *Biographia Literaria* described good English as “the best possible words in the best possible order”. “Best” doesn't necessarily mean the biggest. Indeed if you are to explain complex ideas successfully, you will almost certainly need to use plain English. Using “big” words in an effort to impress is actually likely to do the opposite if you don't fully understand the meaning of the words you are using.

Appendix 2: ESSAY PRESENTATION FORMAT

You must in every case complete, sign and include the School of Communications **declaration** shown in Appendix 4 below.

For the main body of text, do not choose a font that looks pretty/funky/futuristic simply for the sake of making your essay look pretty/funky/futuristic. Times Roman or Arial (or one of their derivatives) in font size 12 are generally fine. Furthermore don't mix fonts or font sizes - if you do need to make font distinctions for emphasis or clarity, use *italics* or **bold** or underlining. With regard to line spacing you should bear in mind that dense text is not easy to read - keep line spacing at 1½. The end of paragraphs should be signalled by a double return (i.e. hitting "enter" twice).

To be absolutely safe follow the guidelines below:

Font: Times New Roman or Arial

Font Size: 12

Line Spacing: 1.5 lines

Paragraph spacing: double return

Page Number: Right justified in footer (i.e. at bottom right of page)

Margins: No strict rules here but as a guideline, margins should not be less than 1 inch on all sides (i.e. top, bottom, left and right).

Footnotes can be by-the-way elaboration of points made in the main text, or brief references to citations (including page numbers) where citations are not given in brackets within the text.

The full bibliography should be at the end, including every work referred to, alphabetically by author, with full publication details. More on this in Appendix 3 and the DCU Library guides referred to there.

Appendix 3: **REFERENCING GUIDELINES**

As noted already, failure to fully reference your writing leaves you open to possible accusations of plagiarism. To avoid this, cite references for every quote, statistic or opinion that is not your own. By "reference" we mean both in the body of the text and a full bibliography. (Note these comments would not apply to journalistic writing, i.e. pieces of assessment suitable for broadcast or for publication in a newspaper, magazine or online. Journalism has its own conventions for attributing opinions and facts to their sources.)

A reference is a set of data describing a document, or part of a document, in a sufficiently precise and detailed manner as to identify it and to enable it to be located.

You need to give a reference

- if you quote the exact words of another author (which should *always* be inside quote marks)
- if you paraphrase or summarise a passage by another author
- if you use an idea or material based directly on the work of another author

Failure to do this can leave you open to accusations of plagiarism. However, there are other reasons for knowing how to write a reference:

- it enables you to find an item you have consulted previously
- it allows you to accurately communicate details of an item that you have consulted
- it contains all the information that School of Communication lecturers will need to obtain an item you have used in your work with which we are unfamiliar (and which we may wish to introduce to the library).

There are a number of widely-used referencing standards. The School of Communications has adopted the Harvard System and all students will be expected to use the same system. This system is outlined in the DCU Library's guides to citation and referencing, available from the library's information desk, and here:

<http://www.library.dcu.ie/citing&refguide08.pdf>

and

<http://www.library.dcu.ie/about/QuickGuide-citing&Ref.pdf>

Students must familiarise themselves with the Harvard system so that all work presented for assessment will have cited accurately the sources of all quotations, paraphrases, summaries, tables, diagrams or any other material which have been used from the work of others.

In addition, students must provide a complete bibliography of all works and sources used in the preparation of projects, essays, assignments and dissertations and to include a personally signed School of Communications declaration (see Appendix 4).

Appendix 4:

DCU School of Communications Assignment Submission Cover Form Incorporating the University's Declaration on Plagiarism

This form must be completed by the student (or students) submitting an assignment, and included as a cover page. Assignments submitted without the completed form will not be accepted or marked.

Student Name(s):	
Student ID Number(s):	
Programme:	
Module Code:	
Lecturer:	
Assignment Title:	
Submission Date:	

I declare that this material, which I now submit for assessment, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I understand that plagiarism, collusion, and copying is a grave and serious offence in the university and accept the penalties that would be imposed should I engage in plagiarism, collusion, or copying. I have read and understood the Assignment Regulations set out in the module documentation. I have identified and included the source of all facts, ideas, opinions, viewpoints of others in the assignment references. Direct quotations from books, journal articles, internet sources, module text, or any other source whatsoever are acknowledged and the source cited are identified in the assignment references. I have not copied or paraphrased an extract of any length from any source without identifying the source and using quotation marks as appropriate. Any images, audio recordings, video or other materials have likewise been originated and produced by me or are fully acknowledged and identified.

This assignment, or any part of it, has not been previously submitted by me or any other person for assessment on this or any other course of study. I have read and understood the referencing guidelines found at <http://www.library.dcu.ie/citing&refguide08.pdf> and/or recommended in the assignment guidelines.

I understand that I may be required to discuss with the module lecturer/s the contents of this submission.

I/me/my incorporates we/us/our in the case of group work, which is signed by all of us.

Signature(s):

If submitting on-line, please tick the following box to indicate that you have read and that you agree with the statements above

/END OF HANDBOOK/