

Differences between Essays, Reports and Journals

Essays, reports and reflective journal writing are the most common forms of writing you're likely to experience as a student, so it's useful to see how each differs.

In the tables, there are comparisons between each type of writing in the areas of:

- Purpose
- Topic
- Audience
- Format
- Style
- Assessment

Purpose

Essay	Report	Journal
To write a well argued response to the question or proposition. An essay establishes a proposition (thesis).	To investigate, present and analyse information thoroughly and logically. Often to recommend action to solve a problem. A report usually makes proposals.	To record the development of your ideas and insights; reflect on the content of the subject and on your own learning process; and analyse and discuss key issues covered by classwork and/or readings.

Topic

Essay	Report	Journal
Usually a question or proposition. Based on reading, sometimes fieldwork.	Often a problem or case study which sets up a hypothetical situation. Based on reading, fieldwork or practical work.	Often a response to the class content including lectures, tutorials and/or set readings; may be broadly based or focus on a particular issue or aspect covered in class.

Audience

Essay	Report	Journal
Written for the lecturer.	Usually written for the audience established in the topic (eg. client, manager), but in reality your lecturer or teacher is also the audience.	As a learning experience, you're writing for yourself, although when it's assessed your lecturer is also the audience.

Format

Essay	Report	Journal
Usually no headings or sub-headings. (NOTE: Many lecturers in Business and Nursing require headings – see the relevant Faculty guide. An essay in this format is sometimes called a Research Report. However, apart from the format, all other points relating to essay writing are relevant).	Always in sections and sub-sections with headings, with their order often shown by numbers or a combination of letters and numbers. It's important to know what sections are required and what information they should contain.	Frequently no headings or sub-headings, but you may choose to use sections if you wish. There are no formal format requirements but it's usual to date your work so that you can trace the development of your ideas and learning.

Style

Essay	Report	Journal
May be a little subjective, but needs the impersonality suited to an academic study.	Must be objective. Point form is sometimes used.	Can be subjective and informal to reflect your own thinking.

Assessment

Essay	Report	Journal
Success depends on the argument, how one point is related to the next and how well it establishes the proposition.	Success depends on the demonstration of good research skills and the objective presentation and analysis of relevant information.	Success depends on development of your insights into the topic. Your ideas may change during the semester as you gain new understanding of the inter-relationships between different aspects of the content.

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