



Politics and International Relations

Year Abroad Assessed Essays

2020-21

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Introduction

This handbook is designed to help you through the process of planning and writing your 4,000-word assignments, and to explain what you can expect from your supervisor.

This year the circumstances have changed due to Covid-19 and not all students will be able to travel abroad, however the form of this task remains the same for all students.

Topic

You may write your essay on any topic, but bear in mind the following:

1. Your essay must clearly relate to the domestic or international politics of the country you are visiting or were meant to visit.
2. Your second essay may relate more narrowly to the placement topic (e.g. a case study of the work of an NGO).
3. Both essays are required to show a link to wider academic literature, including that studied in PIR courses during your first and second years.
4. Your topic will be the focus for the several months and requires detailed research, so make sure it is something that really interests you.

It is your responsibility to submit a brief description of 50 words about the topic by [clicking on this link](#) (which is also available via Learn).

For the first semester, you must do this by midday (GMT) on 21 October 2020. For the second semester, you must do this by midday (GMT) on 10 February 2021.

You are advised to discuss the final wording of the question with your supervisor.

Submission and assessment

Your essay will be assessed by drawing on the [marking descriptors](#) for PIR essays submitted at the University of Edinburgh, although your markers will be aware that you have written them based on independent study rather than within a taught course.

Essays must be in English and have a word limit of 4,000 words each. Standard PIR penalties apply for work submitted late or exceeding the word limit. Standard PIR procedures for extensions also apply. Please note that if you have an extension, then it will be difficult for markers to return completed assignments to you within three weeks, and you should expect to receive a later response.

As with all essays, they should be submitted via ELMA (which can be found in Learn). The deadlines for 2020-21 are as follows:

- **Semester 1: midday (GMT), Wednesday 9 December 2020**
- **Semester 2: midday (GMT), Wednesday 14 April 2021**

Plagiarism: Please read the Honours Handbook regarding matters of plagiarism. Your essays must be your own work and you must reference quotes and arguments properly. Essays will be checked for plagiarism using state-of-the-art detection software, and penalties will be applied if necessary. Do not take any risks, as it may lead to your expulsion from the University of Edinburgh.

Supervision

You will be supported in writing your assessed essay by a member of PIR staff, who acts as supervisor. Supervisors are selected on the basis of research fit, but also workloads, sabbatical programmes, etc. You should receive information regarding your allocated supervisor by within three weeks of submitting your proposal. If you do not receive any information, please get in touch with the Course Administrator.

What can you expect from your supervisor?

Supervisors will be able to give advice on practical issues such as the subject and title of the long essay, its organisation and structure, source material and the bibliography. This may be by email or via 1-2 Teams meetings over the semester (depending on your agreement with the supervisor). Note that supervisors can suggest reading materials in English, but not necessarily in your host language. Supervisors can also be expected to comment on essay plans and timetables. Supervisors will respond to emails within five working days.

What should you not expect from your supervisor?

Supervisors do not direct your work and will not comment on draft essays. They will not check on your progress nor that you are meeting self-defined deadlines. They will not be available during the vacation period. Please remember that supervisors have additional research and teaching responsibilities; supporting your essay is not their only task. So, supervisors will respond with written feedback on your work within 14 working days.

It is your responsibility to contact your supervisor and seek arrangements for supervision. You should allow plenty of time for supervision. You should keep a record of your discussions, including what feedback you have received and when.

In case of any difficulty that cannot be resolved with your supervisor, please contact Dr Katarzyna Kaczmarek.

Writing your essay

You will be expected to use the skills that you have developed over the previous two years of studying Politics and International Relations at Edinburgh University, including demonstrating an understanding of a range of relevant sources, being able to read critically, analysis of documents, collecting data (in some cases), writing clearly, and structuring your essay in a clear, well-signposted manner.

Selecting sources

As part of your studies abroad, it is expected that you will engage with a range of sources, including academic literature. It is expected and encouraged to draw on your studies from the previous years at Edinburgh, as well as sources from the country in which you are based – including in that country's language. You should be able to access most relevant material from the university library online, but may also need to consult libraries and materials in the city you are visiting.

Your supervisor will be able to point you in the direction of some useful sources. However, you will also need to seek out some for yourself. The following may be helpful in getting you started:

- Reading lists for relevant topics from PIR courses in Year 1 and Year 2.
- Following up citations in or reviews of work you have already identified as relevant, or other work by the same author.
- Consulting relevant academic journals (your supervisor will be able to indicate some, or some of the readings will be from a particular journal).

Make sure that you are drawing on original sources and academic texts, and do not rely on newspapers or textbooks as authoritative.

Using material

You will need to review the available literature to narrow down your topic and come up with a more focused question suitable for an essay of 4,000 words. You may want to start by creating an annotated bibliography for yourself in which you make brief notes on what is covered in each journal article or in book chapters. You will need to demonstrate familiarity with a range of readings in your essay.

In order to achieve a high mark for your assignments, you will need to go beyond the reproduction of relevant material. In other words, you should not describe but analyse. You will therefore need to engage critically with research material: consider how the sources reflect on one another; consider and assess the arguments offered and consider how you might challenge or build on them given the rest of your research. Make sure that you reference fully, clearly and consistently.

Structuring your essay

In order to effectively structure your essay, please consider the following:

- Take the time to write a detailed essay plan. This is a crucial step and will save you time and effort later, as well as significantly improving the overall result. Think about how each paragraph or point contributes to a coherent overall structure. In confirming that you have a sufficient grasp of the arguments, it may help to imagine that you have to summarise the key points briefly to an audience.

- Focus on answering your question and exclude material that does not help to answer the question. Signpost clearly what you are doing at each stage to make the argument easy to follow.
- Discussion of literature: in an essay of this length, you may find it helpful to provide an overview of the relevant literature at the start (a shorter version of the literature review that you will be expected to write in the dissertation). However, for other types of essay (e.g. more theoretical topics) it may be better to introduce the literature as you engage with it throughout. Either way, make sure that you are able to go beyond the material presented, offering your own critical engagement and your own overall, coherent, argument-driven structure. You should be demonstrating the ability to offer reasoned argued: avoid unsubstantiated assertion or opinion.
- Balance: ensure that your essay addresses both sides of the question. try to think up the strongest possible counter-arguments to your own conclusions (some of these may be in the literature; some may be original) and respond to them.

Finally, with all good essays comes good presentation. So, ensure that your essay is well-presented, including correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. Try to express yourself as clearly as you can, and do so concisely. Avoid jargon where possible. avoid unnecessarily long paragraphs and sentences.

Key dates

PIR Year Abroad Assessment 1

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| 21 October 2020 | Deadline for submitting proposals |
| 26 October 2020 | Information about supervisor |
| 9 December 2020 | Deadline for submitting assignment |

PIR Year Abroad Assessment 2

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| 10 February 2021 | Deadline for submitting proposals |
| 17 February 2021 | Information about supervisor |
| 14 April 2021 | Deadline for submitting assignment |