



Politics and International Relations
Junior Year Abroad Assessed Essay
2018-2019

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Introduction

This handbook is designed to help you through the process of planning and writing your two 4000-word Junior Year Abroad assessed essays and to indicate what you can expect from your supervisor.

Topic

You select your own topic for each essay and it is your responsibility to submit a brief (50 word) description of your topic using the form available at the following link by the deadline each semester. The deadlines for submitting topics in 2018/19 are **midday (GMT) 3rd October 2018 and midday (GMT) 13th February 2019**.

<https://edin.ac/2Mjq0Tf> (*please note that this link will be active by week beginning 01/10. If not please contact the course secretary*).

Bear in mind the following in choosing a topic:

- The JYA assessed essays must clearly relate to the domestic or international politics of the country you are visiting.
- Your second essay may also relate more narrowly to the placement topic (e.g. a case study of the work of an NGO).
- Both essays are required to show a link to wider academic literature, including that studied in Politics courses in Years 1 and 2.
- This is a topic you will have to live with for several months and engage in detailed research on: make sure it is something that really interests you.

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

Skills

You will be expected to use the skills you have developed over the past two years of studying Politics at Edinburgh, including demonstrating understanding of a range of relevant sources, reading critically, analysing arguments, collecting data (in some cases), writing clearly, and structuring your essay in a clear, well-signposted manner.

Sources

You are expected to use a wide range of sources, including academic literature during on your Year 1 and 2 Politics courses. You are encouraged (though not required) to use sources in the language of the country you are visiting as well as English sources. (Bibliographic references to these sources should be listed in the original language.) You should be able to access material from Edinburgh Library online, but may also need to consult libraries and materials in the city you are visiting.

Submission and assessment

Your essay will be assessed drawing on the [marking descriptors](#) for PIR essays submitted in 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 4000 words each. Standard Politics & IR department penalties apply for work submitted late or exceeding the word limit. Standard PIR procedures for extensions also apply.

Plagiarism: Please read the Honours Handbook regarding matters of plagiarism. Your essays must be your own work. They will be checked for plagiarism using state-of-the-art detection software, and penalties will be applied if necessary. Do not take any risks. Use a consistent system of referencing and acknowledge all sources

Essays should be submitted via ELMA (in Learn for JYA). The deadlines for submission of your essays in 2018/19 are: **midday (GMT) 13th December 2018 and midday (GMT) 24th April 2019**

Supervision

You will be supported in writing your JYA assessed essay by a member of PIR staff who acts as supervisor. The dissertation convenor, Dr Stephen Hill, will allocate your supervisor upon receiving your topic. Supervisors are selected on the basis of research fit, but also workloads, sabbatical programmes, etc.

What you can 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 Skype meetings over the semester. (Note, however, that supervisors can only be expected to indicate possible reading material in English.) Supervisors can also be expected to comment upon essay plans and timetables. Supervisors should respond to emails within five working days.

What you should not expect from your supervisor: Supervisors are not expected to direct your work or to comment on a draft of the essay; nor are they expected to chase you to check on progress. They will not generally be available during the Christmas and Easter vacations.

Your responsibility: It is up to you to make contact with your supervisor and to make arrangements for supervision (by email or Skype) as suits you both best. Members of staff have other teaching and research commitments and you must allow them time to read and provide feedback. It is important always to check how long they will need between receiving a plan and providing feedback (in the absence of other information, assume two weeks), and to allow time for them to respond to emailed queries. You should keep a record of your discussions including what feedback was received and when.

In case of any difficulty that cannot be resolved with your supervisor, please contact the JYA coordinator.

Writing your essay

Selecting sources: 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 Politics courses in Year 1 and 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 you have already found useful may be from one particular journal).

Make sure that you are drawing on original sources and academic texts, rather than relying on textbooks.

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 4000 words. (In organising the reading, it may help to create an annotated bibliography for yourself in which you make brief notes on what is covered in each paper/chapter.) You will also need to demonstrate familiarity with a range of readings in your essay. However, to achieve a higher grade you will need to go beyond mere reproduction of relevant material or arguments. You will need to engage critically with it: 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:

- 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: exclude irrelevant material. 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 in a 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 counterarguments to your own conclusions (some of these may be in the literature; some may be original) and respond to them.

Presentation: Ensure that your essay is well presented, with correct spellings, grammar, and punctuation. Try to express yourself as clearly and concisely as possible. Avoid over-long paragraphs or sentences. It helps to leave yourself a few days between writing a full final draft and doing a last proof-read, so that you come back to it fresh and can pick up on any errors or unclearities.