Answering the Question

When you are asked to give in a piece of writing for assessment, you are usually given questions or a topic to write about. You may need to write a long answer–for example, a 2,000-word coursework essay or an exam essay that you could write in 2 hours–or give short answers (50–100 words) to a series of questions. Either way, it is essential that you fulfil the requirements of the question (even if it is not exactly a question).

A question usually has the following components:

- Topic
- Focus
- Scope
- Angle
- Viewpoint (in some questions)

Topic

The **topic** is likely to be something that you have studied on the course. It may be the object of the instruction verb in the question:

> Evaluate the effectiveness of any two **development theories** ...

The **topic** may follow a question word as subject of the verb:

> How did **textile manufacturers** respond to the economic crisis of the Great Depression?

The **topic** may follow an abstract word + 'of', especially in a 'What?' question:

> What are the definitions of a **'knowledge economy'**?

Focus and Scope

You will probably be asked to write about a particular aspect of the topic (this is your **focus**), and to expand or limit the context in which the topic is considered (this is the **scope**). You can find the focus and scope by asking questions about the topic:

- (Focus) Does the question focus on a particular aspect of the topic? Look for ways that the topic is modified, either before the topic with phrases with 'of', e.g. 'the distribution of....'; or after it using prepositions such as 'by', 'within' or 'as', e.g. '*as* developed by'.
- (Scope) Does the question specify a particular time period or context? Look for phrases with 'in', 'during' or 'for', e.g. '*in* the 1930s'.

Consider this example:

> Evaluate *the effectiveness of* any two development theories studied on the course.

The focus words are in italics: write only about how effective the theories have been.
The scope is underlined: limit your answer to two theories that you have already studied.

The focus may also be in the question word + verb:

> *How can* being born deaf *impair* the acquisition of a natural language?

The focus words are in italics: write about how the condition may impair language acquisition, rather than only about the condition itself.

Key words

The following **abstract nouns**, commonly used in questions, often point to the focus of the question:

> (singular) concept, contrast, definition, difference, extent, factor, function, idea, importance, issue, problem, purpose, relationship, role, structure, value, view
>
> (plural) achievements, advantages, causes, characteristics, concerns, disadvantages, effects, factors, goals, issues, limitations, origins, perspectives, principles, weaknesses

Adjectives may also be used:

> central, effective, key, overall, significant

Phrases that direct the focus of the question:

> in relation to; in the context of; with respect to.

Angle

The type of answer or the **angle** you are expected to give can be found in the **verb** or **question structure**:

Verb	Question structure	
Account for	What are the reasons for ...?	Give reasons for the focus of the topic.
Analyse	How and why ...? In what ways ...?	Write about a number of aspects of the focus of the topic, organizing your points clearly.
Assess	To what extent ...?	Write evaluatively about the focus of the topic you are given.
Compare	How does x differ from y?	Write about two or more aspects of the topic, giving both similarities and differences.
Consider	What is the significance of ...? In what context ...? What impact did ... have?	Think about the topic in relation to the focus and write about what seems to be important.
Contrast (often used with 'compare')		Write about two or more aspects of the topic, showing how different they are.
Define	What does ... mean? What constitutes ...? What do you understand by ...?	Give the meaning of the words or phrases given.
Discuss	What are the implications of ...? What role does ... play?	Write about a number of aspects of the topic or a given statement, evaluating one against another.
Evaluate (often used with 'critically')	How successful was ...? What can you conclude from ...?	Write about the qualities of the topic or the focus, showing how you reached your opinion.
Examine	What factors affect ...? What evidence is there of ...?	Write about the topic in detail, paying attention to the scope of the question.
Explain	Why ...? What caused ...?	Describe the topic and give reasons according to the focus of the question.

A question often has two or more of these verbs, or it may include a question structure:

Describe and distinguish between ice caps, glaciers, icebergs and sea ice.

Assess the impact of ... **How might** outcomes be improved?

Viewpoint

A question may start with a statement which you are asked to discuss:

Trade unions in the workplace can only have a negative impact on productivity. **Discuss.**

Here, you need to write about the arguments that support the statement *and* those which contrast with it. You are not required to take a particular stance.

You may be asked to give your own opinion:

The War on Poverty was a failure. **Would you agree?**

Here, you need to give a balanced discussion of both sides of the argument *and* show which one you prefer.

Exam Question Tips

- Read the instructions before starting the exam–be very clear how many questions you need to answer from each section.
- Analyse the questions carefully, identifying the topic, focus, scope, angle and viewpoint. (Use a highlighter pen.)
- Once you have understood the questions, choose which you will answer and give each a difficulty rating. Answer the easiest question first–if you run out of time, it is better to lose marks on your weakest answer.
- Divide your time according to the marks given per question.
- Do not write a rough draft–make notes and write your essay straight away.
- Use the words of the question in your opening paragraph–it will help you to be sure you are answering it accurately.

UNIT
4.3

Writing Longer Essays

Long essays of 2,500–5,000 words may be required as part of a module assessment. These require more research and organisation than short essays, and this unit provides a guide to how such an assignment can be tackled.

1 Planning your work

Longer assignments are normally set many weeks before their deadline, which means that students should have plenty of time to organise their writing. However, it is worth remembering that at the end of a semester, you may have to complete several writing tasks, so it may be a good idea to finish one earlier.

You should also check the submission requirements of your department. These include style of referencing, method of submission (i.e. electronic, hard copy or both) and place and time of submission. Being clear about these will avoid last-minute panic.

(a) The first thing is to prepare a schedule for your work. An eight-week schedule might look like this:

Week	Stages of Work	Relevant Units in *Academic Writing*
1	Study title and make first outline. Look for and evaluate suitable sources.	1.5
2	Reading and note-making. Keep record of all sources used.	1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 1.8
3	Reading, note-making, paraphrasing and summarising. Modify outline.	1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.7

Week	Stages of Work	Relevant Units in *Academic Writing*
4	Write draft of main body.	1.10
5	Write draft introduction and conclusion.	1.11
6	Rewrite introduction, main body and conclusion, checking for logical development of ideas and relevance to title.	1.12
7	Organise list of references, contents, list of figures and appendices if required. Check all in-text citations.	1.8
8	Proofread the whole essay before handing it in. Make sure that the overall presentation is clear and accurate.	1.12

(b) How you actually plan your schedule is up to you, but the important thing is to organise your time effectively. Leaving the writing stage until the last minute will not lead to a good mark, however much research you have done. Although you may be tempted to postpone writing, the sooner you start the sooner you will be able to begin refining your ideas. Remember that late submission of coursework is usually penalised.

(c) Longer papers may include the following features, in this order:

Title page	Apart from the title, this usually shows the student's name, module title and number.
Content page	This should show the reader the basic organisation of the essay, with page numbers.
List of tables or figures	If the essay includes visual features such as graphs, these need to be listed by title and page number.
Introduction	
Main body	If a numbering system is used, the chief sections of the main body are normally numbered 1, 2, 3 and then subdivided 1.1, 1.2, etc.
Conclusion	
List of references	This is a complete list of all the sources cited in the text. Writers occasionally also include a bibliography, which is a list of sources read but not cited.
Appendices (singular – appendix)	These sections are for data related to the topic that the reader may want to refer to. Each appendix should have a title and be mentioned in the main body.

2 Example essay

■ **Read the following essay on the topic of nuclear energy. In pairs or groups, discuss the following points:**

(a) What is the writer's position on this issue?

(b) How does the writer make his or her position clear?

EVALUATE THE RISKS OF USING NUCLEAR ENERGY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO FOSSIL FUELS

Introduction

The search for sources of energy began when humans first started to burn wood or other forms of biomass to generate heat for cooking and smelting. This was followed by using hydropower from rivers and harnessing wind energy with windmills. Later the exploitation of chemical energy began with the burning of coal, oil and natural gas. Then, in the middle of the twentieth century, nuclear energy appeared for the first time, with the hope that it would allow the efficient production of cheap, clean energy (Bodansky, 2004).

Nuclear energy has, however, become the subject of considerable debate, with its proponents claiming that it is beneficial for the environment, since its production does not create carbon dioxide (CO_2) which can lead to global warming. However, its opponents argue that it can damage the environment by creating radioactive waste. It is also linked to diseases in humans, and there is the additional fear that it may be abused by terrorists in future. These critics further argue that other energy sources, such as solar power, could constitute safer alternatives to fossil fuels without posing an environmental threat.

This essay attempts to assess the risks of using nuclear power, in comparison with other sources of energy. The main arguments for employing nuclear energy are first considered, followed by an examination of the safety issues around this source of power, including the safety and security concerns connected with nuclear waste.

1 Reasons for Using Nuclear Energy

1.1 An Alternative Source of Energy

The rationale behind using nuclear energy stems from the need to find alternative energy sources to fossil fuels (i.e. oil, gas and coal), which are finite. This is a

growing concern, due to the increase in the global population, which is accompanied by an increase in energy demand. Mathew (2006) indicates that the annual energy consumption rate per capita in developed countries is between 4,000 and 9,000 kg of oil, while the rate in less developed countries is around 500 kg. As a result, the demand for total primary energy, which will accompany the population growth, is projected to increase from 12.1 Mtoe (million tons of oil equivalent) to 16.1 Mtoe in 2030. If this increase occurs the total global stock of oil and gas would only be adequate for 250 years, thus requiring the urgent development of other energy sources, which would not deplete the stock of natural resources available for future generations.

1.2 Limitations of Other Energy Sources

Wind energy and solar power are frequently presented as alternative energy sources to fossil fuels. Both are freely available in many parts of the world and their use involves no CO_2 emissions. Sterrett (1994) claims that sufficient wind energy exists to displace approximately eight billion barrels of oil. However, wind energy is unreliable, as wind turbines do not function if the wind speed is too high or low. Similarly, solar power is only effective during the day, and is uneconomic in cool and cloudy climates. Neither of these sources currently offers an efficient and reliable alternative to energy created from fossil fuels.

1.3 Reducing Carbon Dioxide Emissions

An important reason for using nuclear energy is to reduce the emissions of CO_2, which are produced by burning fossil fuels. Bodansky (2004) points out that this type of fuel is the main source of the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide. The amount of CO_2 produced by each source differs due to the differences in their hydrogen content. For example, natural gas contains one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms, which combine with oxygen to produce CO_2. The proportion of CO_2 is lower than with the other sources, because the emission depends on the mass of carbon inside the chemical compounds. Although natural gas is thus cleaner than the alternatives, burning all three fuels contributes to the greenhouse effect which is causing the earth to heat up.

Nuclear energy, however, emits no carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide (SO_2) or nitrous oxide (NOx). It is estimated that in 2003, in the USA, nuclear energy prevented the release of 680 million tons of CO_2, 3.4 millions tons of SO_2 and 1.3 million tons of NOx. If released from coal burning plants, these gases would have caused the deaths of 40,000 people annually (Olah *et al.*, 2006: 127). According to Richard (2008: 273) the use of nuclear energy in France between 1980 and 1987 reduced CO_2 emissions by 34 per cent.

1.4 Cost Efficiency

Nuclear energy could potentially generate more electricity than other current sources. As Murray (2000: 73) explains, a typical reactor, which consumes 4 kg/day of uranium U235, generates 3,000 MW of energy a day, while other sources such as natural gas, coal or oil require many times the equivalent of that amount of uranium to generate the same energy. Therefore nuclear energy is relatively cost efficient as it uses a cheap raw material.

In recent years the price of oil and natural gas has risen sharply, and this trend seems likely to continue in future. Lillington (2004) suggests that the cost of purchasing fuel for nuclear energy is likely to remain low compared to other energy sources, so it seems likely that this cost advantage will become a significant factor in the comparison between nuclear and other energy sources.

2 Health and Safety Concerns

2.1 The Impact of Radiation on the Human Body

Especially since the Chernobyl accident in 1986 there has been persistent concern about the dangers to human health from nuclear power and nuclear waste. However, it must be understood that nuclear energy is not the only source of radiation, and that there are natural sources in the environment which may be more significant. According to Bodansky (2004: 74) there is far more exposure to radiation from natural sources such as radon and cosmic rays than from all human sources, for example X-rays and nuclear medicine.

Some researchers argue that radon is one of the main causes of cancer diseases among uranium miners. However, radon may be found in all types of soil which contain uranium and radium. Bodansky (2004) points out that the concentration of radon in the soil depends on the type of soil. Hence people's exposure to radon depends on their surroundings, so that people living in houses made from limestone or wood are exposed to less radon than those living in houses built with granite. So it seems that it is not only uranium miners who are exposed to radiation, but also people in certain geological districts.

According to US law the maximum permissible exposure for those living close to nuclear plants is 1/200 rem. However, according to Hoyle (1979) this amount is just 1/20th of the radiation that can be experienced from natural background radiation. It has been estimated that nuclear energy is responsible for just 20 deaths per year worldwide, although these figures are disputed by anti-nuclear campaigners who claim that the true figure is as high as 600 deaths. Hoyle (ibid.) claims that the

average American's life-span is reduced by 1.2 hours as a result of nuclear accidents, and contrasts that with the risk from smoking, which is a loss of eight years if one packet a day is smoked. Consequently, it can be seen that the risk to human health from the use of nuclear power is extremely low.

With regard to medical treatment, which is the next largest source of exposure to radiation, X-rays will expose a patient to radiation amounts from 0.4 to 1 rad (radiation absorbed dose). A broken wrist, for instance, is likely to require 4 X-rays with a total exposure of up to 4 rads. The unit of measurement for radiation exposure is the rem, and one rem is equal to the damage caused by 1 rad of X-rays; the maximum amount allowed for workers in nuclear plants is 5 rem per year: the same as the quantity received in the course of a routine medical check-up.

2.2 The Impact of Radioactive Waste on the Environment

Nuclear energy is not alone in producing dangerous waste. Lillington (2004) estimates that nuclear energy, in the course of producing 1,000 megawatts (MWe) of electricity produces annually about 30 tons of highly radioactive waste and about 800 tons of intermediate and low-level waste. In contrast, a coal-burning plant producing the same quantity of electricity would generate about 320,000 tons of coal ash, of which nearly 400 tons would be hazardous waste such as mercury and vanadium, and at least 44,000 tons of sulphur dioxide. So it can be seen that nuclear energy only produces a fraction of the dangerous wastes emitted from coal-fired power stations, and in addition does not produce greenhouse gases.

2.3 Risks of Terrorism

There has been widespread concern that terrorists might steal plutonium to produce nuclear weapons. In general nuclear facilities are tightly controlled, and in practice, it would be very difficult for terrorists to use such stolen material effectively. There are alternative materials such as toxic gas which could produce equally lethal terrorist weapons. However, these concerns could be solved by keeping U233 mixed with U238, which would prevent terrorist groups extracting the plutonium and fabricating a bomb.

Conclusion

The risks of nuclear energy in terms of both human health and the environment have been the subject of widespread debate and controversy. This essay has attempted to examine these risks both in terms of human health and environmental damage. It appears that many of these concerns are exaggerated, and that nuclear

energy can be seen as a safe, reliable and cost-effective alternative to using fossil fuels.

While all energy sources have drawbacks, nuclear should be viewed as a useful and relatively safe component in a mix of sources which can include renewables such as hydro and wind energy and non-renewables such as natural gas. The steady depletion of reserves of oil and the subsequent rise in prices is liable to emphasise this position. Clearly more could be done to make nuclear plants safer and more efficient in future, but until their value is recognised and more work is done on their design and construction their full potential is unlikely to be realised.

References

Bodansky, D. (2004) *Nuclear Energy: Principles, Practices and Prospects*. New York: Springer.

Hoyle, F. (1979) *Energy or Extinction?* London: Heinemann.

Lillington, J. N. (2004) *The Future of Nuclear Power*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Mathew, S. (2006) *Wind Energy: Fundamentals, Resource Analysis and Economics*. Berlin: Springer.

Murray, L. R. (2009) *Nuclear Energy. An Introduction to the Concepts, System and Application of the Nuclear Process*. Oxford: Butterworth.

Olah, A. G., Goeppert, A. and Parakash, S. (2006) *Beyond Oil and Gas: The Methanol Economy*. Wienheim: Wiley.

Sterrett, T. (1994) *The Energy Dilemma*. London: Multivox.

3 Revision

- **Look back at the text and find examples of the following features:**

(a) Background information

(b) A purpose statement

(c) An outline

(d) A definition

(e) A generalisation

(f) The use of brackets to give extra detail

(g) A passive structure

(h) A phrase showing cause and effect

(i) A synonym for 'energy'

(j) An example of tentative or cautious language

(k) An example to support the writer's argument

(l) A counterargument

(m) A citation

(n) A synopsis

THE PASSIVE

The passive = The verb "to be" + The past participle

	ACTIVE	PASSIVE
SIMPLE FUTURE	Parliament will pass a new law	
SIMPLE PRESENT	The police question suspects	
PRESENT CONTINUOUS	Detectives are investigating the robbery	
SIMPLE PAST	Criminals kidnapped 250 people last year	
PAST CONTINUOUS	People traffickers were bringing a record number of illegal immigrants to the UK when the British navy intervened	
PRESENT PERFECT	The judge has sentenced the blackmailer to ten years in prison	
PAST PERFECT	The police had charged Julian Assange with sexual assault in Sweden before his arrest in Britain	

USE: We use the passive,

i) When the object or the action is more important than the subject of the sentence.
ii) To avoid using the subject or when the subject is not important or unknown.
iii) When the subject is so obvious that it does not need to be stated.
iv) To establish a more objective and scientific style.

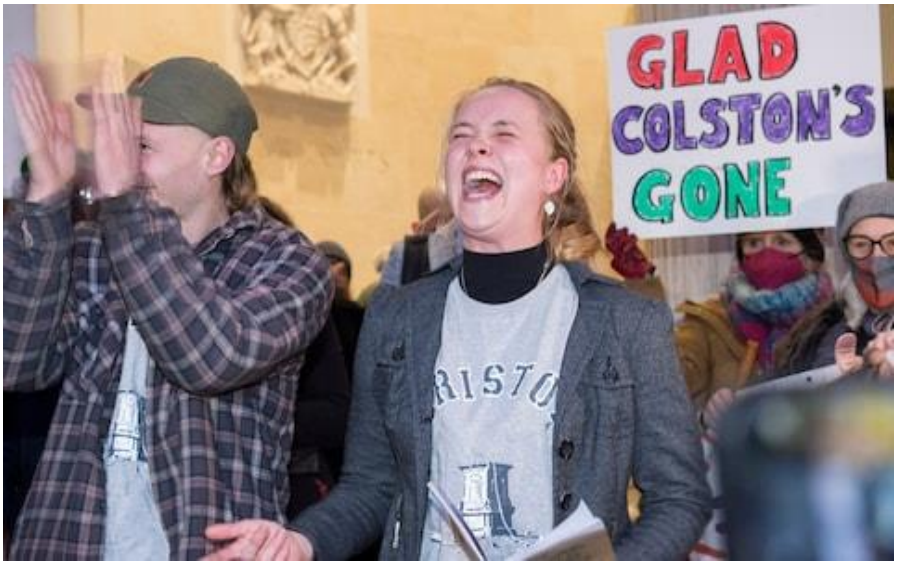
THE PASSIVE: Modal Verbs

MODAL VERB	+	"BE"	+	PAST PARTICIPLE
Can				used
Could		be		told
Must				released
Had to				proved
Will have to				postponed

\+ This prisoner must be released by Friday
— The case against him couldn't be proved
? Can the trial be postponed?

A Monumental Error?

Read the article and watch the video-clip
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OdSP0pgPw0



Four activists, Rhian Graham, 30, Milo Ponsford, 26, Sage Willoughby, 22, and Jake Skuse, 33, were part of an angry crowd that pulled down the statue of Edward Colston during a Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol in June 2020. The 'Colston 4' were captured on CCTV cameras putting ropes around the statue, pulling it off its pedestal and onto the ground, rolling it down the road to the dock and throwing it into the water. As a result, they were arrested and prosecuted for Criminal Damage. They were given the choice of a magistrates' court or trial by jury and opted for the latter.

In January 2022, however, they were found not guilty of Criminal Damage after the jury agreed that they had committed no crime. In a trial that was widely reported, the defence team claimed that the presence of the statue of a 17th-century slave merchant in a public place constituted a hate crime. They also claimed that the defendants effectively owned the statue, as it belonged to the people of Bristol, and they could not be convicted for damaging their own property.

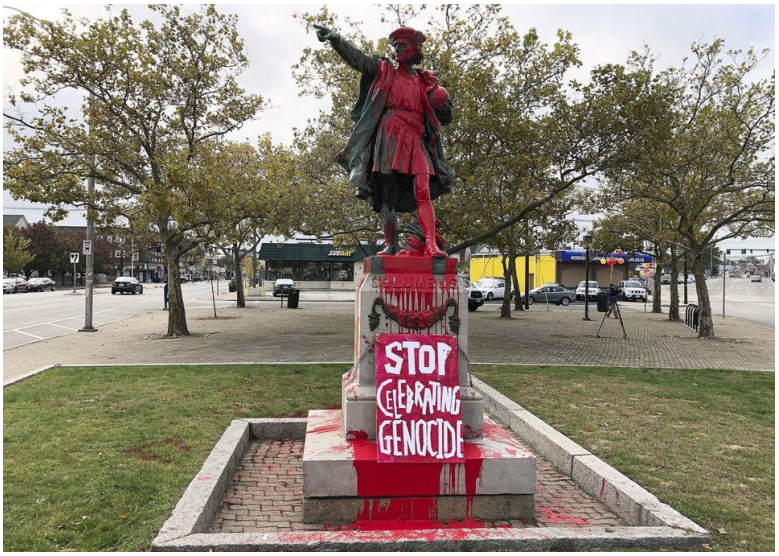
After deliberations lasting less than three hours, the jury cleared the defendants of the charges. The Colston 4 declared their acquittal "a victory for anyone who wants to be on the right side of history."

The prosecution had argued that it was irrelevant who Colston was, the defendants were guilty of a crime, and the verdict has led to concerns that other activists will be encouraged to take the law into their own hands. The defendants' supporters, by contrast, maintain that the trial was a waste of public money and should never have gone ahead in the first place. Some legal experts have claimed that the result justifies the role of the jury system. Adam Wagner, a Human Rights lawyer, said that, although the case has not set a legal precedent, it shows that local juries can sometimes act as a kind societal pressure valve by delivering anomalous verdicts that reflect public opinion.

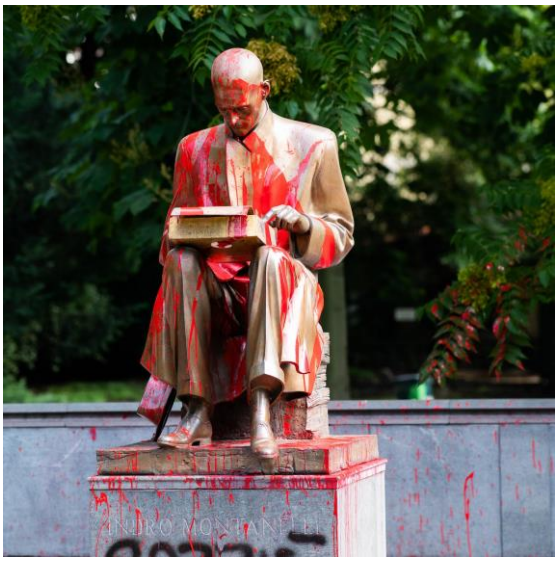
Under current legislation, Criminal Damage can incur a sentence of up to 10 years in jail. But where the damage is less than £5,000, the maximum sentence is three months' imprisonment and a fine of up to £2,500. Given the rising number of similar incidents, Parliament is considering new legislation which would let courts consider the "emotional or wider distress" caused by damage to public property and raise the maximum sentence to 10 years, regardless of the costs involved. The move would extend to flowers or wreaths placed at war memorials, such as the Cenotaph.

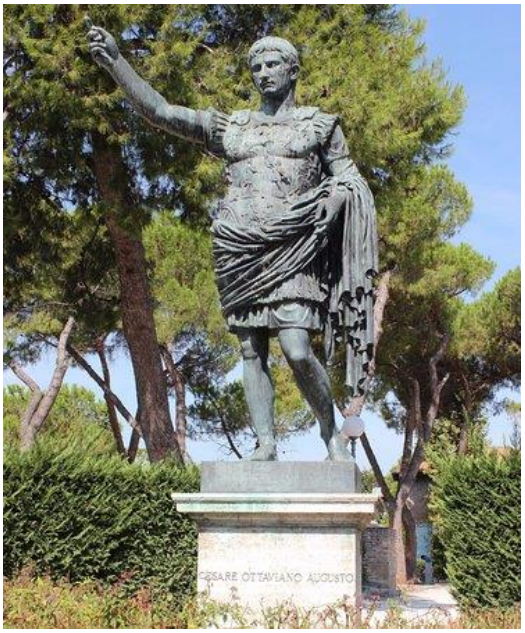
A government Minister said, "Britain is not a country where destroying public property can ever be acceptable. We live in a democracy. If you want to see things changed, you do that through the ballot box or by petitioning your local council. You do not do it by causing criminal damage. For juries to think that statues are on trial, not the defendants, would be laughable if its consequences were not so serious."

Christopher Columbus

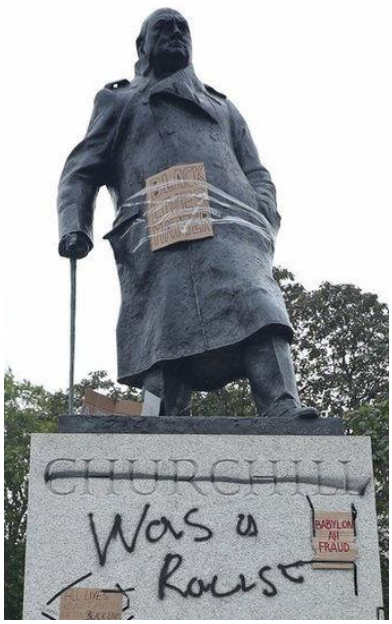


Indro Montanelli





The Emperor Augustus

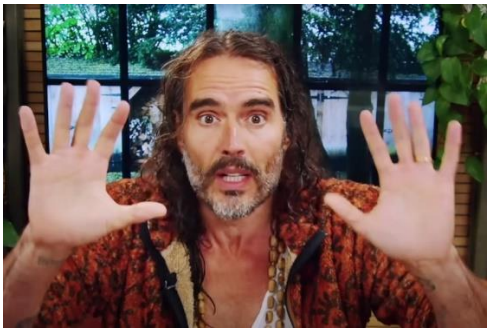


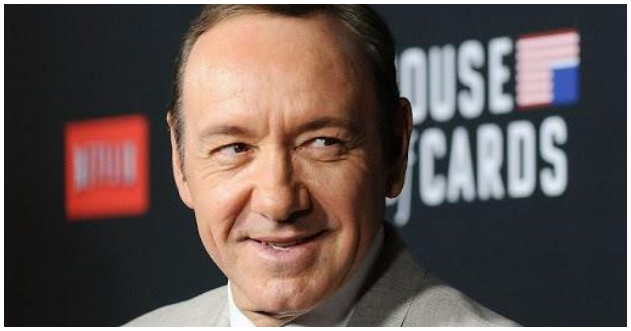
Winston Churchill

Lenin

Genghis Khan

CANCEL CULTURE





DEFINITION: ‘Cancel Culture’ is a desire to delete a person or community from social media platforms. It may lead to a boycott or public shaming of someone whose past behaviour has been offensive, unethical, illegal or wrong, or who has shared a questionable or unpopular opinion. When people are excluded from social or professional circles in this way – online and/or in the real world – they are said to be ‘cancelled’. Famous victims of Cancel Culture include comedians like Russell Brand; the actor Kevin Spacey; the writer J.K. Rowling; the academic Germaine Greer; the film director Roman Polanski and criminals like Harvey Weinstein.

1) Now watch a video-clip explaining the American view of Cancel Culture.
‘An explanation of 'cancel culture' and why it's become such a popular phenomenon’
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9WiyxZqoUE

2) Now watch a documentary showing the Australian view.
‘Cancelling 'Cancel Culture': The rise and fall of the ‘wokerati’
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3MccCsSuU0

3) READING: Cancel Culture duly became an issue in the 2024 US Presidential Election campaign. When Donald Trump became the Republican Party candidate, he called it, “The very definition of totalitarianism” and described its “speech codes designed to muzzle dissent” in these terms: “Americans are exhausted, trying to keep up with the latest list of approved words and phrases” … “The goal of Cancel Culture is to make decent Americans live in fear of being fired, expelled, shamed, humiliated and driven from society as we know it.” … “The Far Left wants to coerce you into saying what you know to be false; to scare you out of saying what you know to be true” … “Our country wasn’t built by Cancel Culture, speech codes and soul-crushing conformity. We are NOT a nation of timid spirits. We are a nation of fierce, proud and independent American patriots. We are a nation of pilgrims, pioneers, adventurers, explorers and trail-blazers who refused to be tied down, held back or in any way reined in. Americans have steel in their spines, grit in their souls and fire in their hearts. There is no-one like us on Earth. Americans build their future; we don’t tear down our past.”

4) ANALYZING ESSAY QUESTIONS

Look at the following essay questions and see how they are structured in terms of Topic, Angle, Focus, Scope and Viewpoint

(a) “The goal of Cancel Culture is to make decent Americans live in fear of being fired, expelled, shamed, humiliated and driven from society as we know it.” To what extent does Donald Trump’s statement reflect the true purpose of Cancel Culture in the 2020’s.

(b) Discuss the positive and negative effects of Cancel Culture on political discourse in a country you are familiar with.

(c) Discuss whether a controversial figure in your own country should or should not be honoured with a statue or a public monument.

Topic = Cancel Culture
Angle = Discuss / To what extent
Focus = the positive and negative effects of Cancel Culture
Scope = in the 2020’s / on political discourse in a country you are familiar with.
Viewpoint = “The goal of Cancel Culture is to make decent Americans live in fear of being fired, expelled, shamed, humiliated and driven from society as we know it.”

5) WRITING: now write essay (a) or (b) or (c).