

A STYLE GUIDE FOR ESSAY WRITING (<https://style.mla.org/>)

The Modern Language Association (MLA) General Format

Essay Format

The preparation of essays and manuscripts in MLA Style is covered in part four of the *MLA Style Manual*. Below are some basic guidelines for formatting an essay in *MLA Style*:

General Guidelines

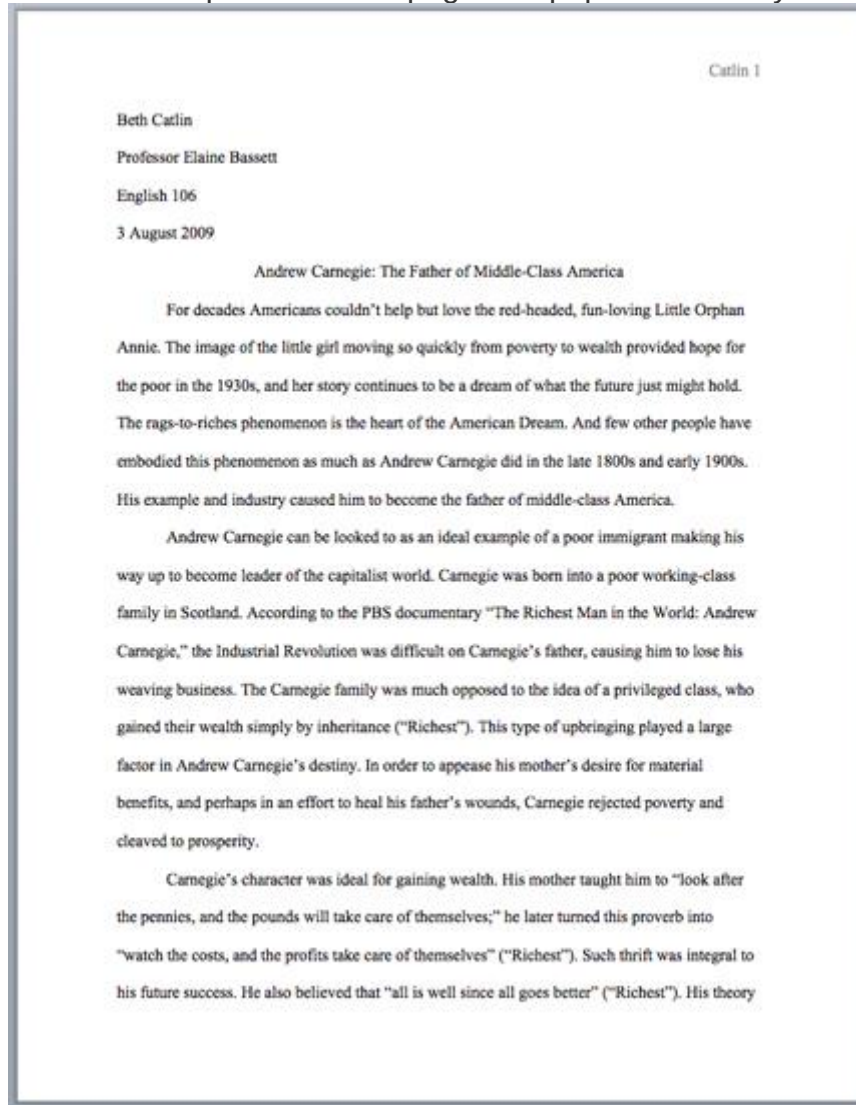
- Type your essay on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper.
- Double-space the text of your essay and use a standard legible font (e.g. Arial or Times New Roman). The font size should be 12 pt.
- Make sure that the text is justified.
- Leave only one space after full stops or other punctuation marks (unless otherwise prompted by your instructor).
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of each paragraph one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the “Tab” key.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
- Use italics throughout your essay to indicate (i) the titles of longer works and (ii) words in a foreign language.

Formatting the First Page of Your Essay

- Do not make a title page for your essay unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date, using double-spaced text.
- Double space again and centre the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks. Write the title in Title Case (i.e. standard capitalization), not all in capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and/or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text, e.g. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as Morality Play
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.

- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number. Number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.

Here is a sample of the first page of a paper in MLA style:



Section Headings

In longer essays, writers sometimes use section headings to improve a document's readability. MLA recommends that, when dividing a longer essay into sections, you number those sections with an Arabic number and a period followed by a space and a subheading.

1. Early Writings
 - 1.1. Short Stories
 - 1.2. Novels

2. The London Years
3. Travelling the Continent
4. The Final Years

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

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'.

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

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:

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.

Students on a sociolinguistics module were asked to write a short reflection on a variety of English they found personally important.

Student A used sources more successfully than Student B.

Student A

The writer has a point to make, so it is easier to use sources to support that point.	An important variety of English for me is Australian English (henceforth AusE), for three reasons. First, Australia is the nearest inner circle English-speaking country (Kachru, 1985) to my own, and as a result has political and economic importance for us.	The reference shows who originated this term.
Paraphrase	The second is that AusE resembles British English in many respects (Smith, 2012), probably because it is a former British colony. While it is true that these similarities are greater in some varieties of AusE than others (Mitchell & Delbridge, 1965, cited in Smith, 2012), their existence makes AusE easier for those of us who learned British English at school.	The position of the reference shows that the first half of the sentence comes from the source, but not the second.
The writer knows that this is common knowledge; no reference needed.	Finally, AusE is distinctive in several ways. One is the use of shortened forms like 'barbie' for barbecue and 'arvo' for afternoon (Smith, 2012). Indeed, Simpson, 2001, identifies 346 Australian hypocorisms for place names alone. There are also a number of Aboriginal terms, such as 'kookaburra' and 'wallaby' (Melchers & Shaw, 2011). This combination of 'borrowed' and 'native' features creates an interesting effect, or, as Smith enthusiastically puts it, 'an exciting, twenty-first century mélange of ... the old and new world' (2001, p. 45). My shared fascination for this mixture helps explain my liking for this variety of English.	Secondary citation This writer uses several sources and relates them to each other. In the second paragraph, Smith's general statement is limited by Mitchell and Delbridge.
'Enthusiastically' gives the writer's interpretation of Smith; the enthusiastic wording may be why the writer felt a quotation was needed.		
Quotation marks show where the quotation begins and ends. An ellipsis (...) shows omitted words.	References Kachru B. B. (1985) Standards ...	By citing a range of sources, the writer gives a more thorough view of the topic. Reference list

Student B

A less clear focus leads the writer into the trap of simply listing facts from sources, rather than using them for a purpose.	I have chosen to write about Australian English, which is very similar to British English, especially in its phonology and ... But some parts of Australian English are different, too, including some words like the pervasive Australian hypocorisms, which are shortened word forms. Smith (2012) gives examples such as 'barbie' (barbecue), 'brekky' (breakfast) and 'addy' (address). So, because of these similarities and differences, Australian English is an important variety.	It is unclear from the position of the reference that this and the preceding sentence both come from Smith.
Copying with changes is not a good paraphrase.		

From Smith, chapter four: Australian English

Australian English (AusE) presents an interesting case for the sociolinguistic observer. Its description usually takes British English as a reference variety, and many similarities exist. Indeed, what has been termed 'cultivated' AusE is extremely close to RP (Mitchell & Delbridge, 1965). Phonologically, AusE is non-rhotic, and its long vowels ...

However, it would be wrong to disregard the many features which make this variety unique. One of the most typical examples is the pervasive Australian hypocorisms: shortened word forms such as 'barbie' (barbecue), 'brekky' (breakfast) and 'addy' (address). Other lexical features of note include ...

Australia is commonly perceived around the world as a vibrant, dynamic young country. It is possible that the unique variety of English which has emerged there—an exciting, twenty-first century mélange of the European and the antipodal, the old and new world—is in part responsible for that view.

What Are Smart Drugs? - Dara O Briain's Science Club – BBC

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHfsFzB_Z84

THE CONVENTIONAL ORDER OF STEPS IN A DISCUSSION ESSAY

- STEP 1. ⇒ THE TITLE: attracting the reader's attention and indicating the general subject area.
- STEP 2. ⇒ INTRODUCTION: situating the discussion in a meaningful context. If any special terms are to be used in the discussion which follows, they should be defined here.
- STEP 3. ⇒ STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.
- STEP 4. ⇒ ADVANTAGES OF ONE POINT OF VIEW: listing the ideas in sequence or in order of importance.
- STEP 5. ⇒ DISADVANTAGES OF THIS POINT OF VIEW: listing the ideas in sequence.
- STEP 6. ⇒ ADVANTAGES OF ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW: evaluating possible alternative hypotheses.
- STEP 7. ⇒ CONCLUSION: presenting your own opinion.

Step 1 SMART DRUGS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Step 2 University life in the twenty-first century is more stressful and competitive than ever before. With debts to pay off averaging £44,000, British undergraduates are under huge pressure to excel. Consequently, many resort to 'smart drugs', such as Ritalin, Adderall and Modafinil, as a way of dealing with the huge volume of academic work demanded of them. All of these drugs are basically amphetamines and although they are legal and doctors may prescribe them in the UK, the question remains:

Step 3 do they constitute an unfair advantage and should they be banned by the university authorities?

Step 4 As any student will tell you, smart drugs have their advantages. To begin with, they allow you to work harder and study longer, providing a level of concentration that is rare in modern life. Not only that, they enhance your memory, improve your problem-solving abilities and free your mind of all distractions, which enables you to perform at your best under the most stressful exam conditions. Moreover, they are cheap and legal and can be seen as an innocuous form of cognitive enhancement, much like nicotine or caffeine. Furthermore, you might not like the idea of using smart drugs yourself but you will probably find yourself in competition with those who do, as the trend which started in US higher education inexorably spreads throughout Europe.

Step 5 However, smart drugs have some obvious disadvantages. Firstly, nobody knows what the long-term effects may be of healthy people medicating themselves with substances designed to combat neurological conditions such as narcolepsy, hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder. Teenage undergraduates, in particular, may be altering the chemical balance of their developing brains, with disastrous consequences in later life. Secondly, side-effects such as headaches, nausea and stomach pain are common, and habitual users report more serious withdrawal symptoms when they attempt to give up entirely. Thirdly, employers will probably expect a similar level of performance to the one you achieved while medicated, which opens up the alarming prospect of drug dependency, on the one hand, and stress, overwork and/or professional failure on the other.

Step 6 Many students claim that it is unfair to blame individuals when universities themselves have been slow to confront the growing problem of smart drugs on their campuses. Elite institutions, such as Harvard, Yale, Oxford and Cambridge, appear to have no consistent policy with regard to the misuse of prescription drugs to enhance academic performance. Others, like Duke University in North Carolina, ban smart drugs during exams but not in the revision period that precedes them. Until clear boundaries have been established by university authorities, it is perhaps understandable that ambitious undergraduates who are driven to succeed at all costs will seize upon any advantage permitted to them by law.

Step 7 In conclusion, I would say that although smart drugs may not be illegal, their misuse by unscrupulous candidates constitutes an unfair advantage that should be outlawed as a form of cheating. Universities must act more responsibly, here, and deal with the issue by setting stricter rules with regard to prescription drugs, establishing anti-doping test procedures, if necessary. In the meantime, students should be made aware that the best means of cognitive enhancement, apart from a university education, is vigorous physical exercise, which oxygenates the brain and liberates endorphins. After walking, running, weightlifting or dancing, undergraduates will find that they become not only more productive but happier and more fulfilled as well.

1) RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

When you write a discussion essay, the conventional order of STEPS is: 1, 2 and 3, then 4 and/or 5 and/or 6, plus 7.

2) PARAGRAPHING

Each paragraph should,

- (i) consist of sentences which share the same topic
- (ii) indicate a change of topic from the paragraph which precedes it

3) COHESION & COHERENCE: CONNECTING A TEXT

Use the sequencing words, sentence adverbs and logical connectives shown below to connect your ideas.

Sequencing Words (to be followed by a comma):

- i) *Firstly, secondly, thirdly, lastly.*
- ii) *First of all, moreover, furthermore, finally.*
To begin with,

Sentence Adverbs (to be followed by a comma):

Naturally, of course, anyway, in fact, fortunately, unfortunately, in any case, nevertheless.

Logical Connectives:

And	Or	But	Because	As a result	In conclusion
<i>In addition</i>	<i>alternatively</i>	<i>however</i>	<i>as</i>	<i>therefore</i>	<i>to sum up</i>
<i>Plus</i>	<i>on the one hand</i>	<i>although</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>thus</i>	<i>on balance</i>
<i>Also</i>	<i>on the other hand</i>	<i>by contrast</i>		<i>consequently</i>	
		<i>whereas</i>		<i>so</i>	

4) BUILDING A CONVINCING ARGUMENT

Now look at the discussion essay on the following page and then complete the text by choosing the best alternative, (a) or (b) or (c) from the list shown below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. (a) Furthermore (b) On the contrary (c) In fact | 16. (a) As a result (b) For this (c) Moreover |
| 2. (a) so (b) then (c) to sum up | 17. (a) therefore (b) for this (c) alternatively |
| 3. (a) At first sight (b) In the beginning (c) In the first place | 18. (a) As a result (b) Alternatively (c) Or |
| 4. (a) alternatively (b) so (c) but | 19. (a) thus (b) and (c) but |
| 5. (a) consequently (b) or (c) secondly | 20. (a) because (b) finally (c) so |
| 6. (a) however (b) firstly (c) moreover | 21. (a) On balance (b) Since (c) Furthermore |
| 7. (a) to sum up (b) because of (c) in spite of | 22. (a) due to (b) furthermore (c) instead |
| 8. (a) Lastly (b) Thirdly (c) Secondly | 23. (a) although (b) to sum up (c) thus |
| 9. (a) because (b) in any case (c) meanwhile | 24. (a) but (b) also (c) alternatively |
| 10. (a) Thirdly (b) As a result (c) On the other hand | 25. (a) unfortunately (b) in fact (c) whereas |
| 11. (a) consequently (b) whereas (c) so | 26. (a) As a result (b) For this (c) In conclusion |
| 12. (a) On the other hand (b) As a result (c) So | 27. (a) As a result (b) However (c) And |
| 13. (a) Apart from that (b) To begin with (c) Indeed | 28. (a) consequently (b) because (c) and |
| 14. (a) due to (b) whereas (c) also | 29. (a) Thus (b) On balance (c) Fortunately |
| 15. (a) so (b) as well (c) secondly | 30. (a) whereas (b) or (c) however |

HOW MUCH SHOULD ENGLISH STUDENTS PAY FOR A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION?

In 2024, British universities received a record number of applications.1....., more than 40% of the nation's 18-year-olds have just entered higher education, according to the Department for Education, and2..... UK universities are more popular than ever.3....., this might seem like a sign of progress4..... it also raises a difficult question: ought the government to pay for their tuition5..... should it be up to each individual to do so?

Many people believe that university should be free for anyone who is talented enough to go there. There are many reasons for this:6....., the short-term cost to the nation of providing courses is irrelevant in the long term7..... the economic benefits that accrue from having a highly educated and flexible workforce.8....., there is the question of basic social justice. Why should a potential doctor be prevented from studying Medicine9..... his parents cannot afford to put him through Medical School?10....., Germany, Chile and Denmark have all agreed to waive tuition fees for their citizens,11..... why is this not possible in England?

.....12....., critics of the free education policy which characterized the post-war British system point out that England in the 2020's is a very different place to England in the 1960's.13....., only 50,000 people managed to enter university in 196514..... the limited number of places available15..... funding their studies with student grants at a time of full employment was a feasible prospect for the government of the day. The current figure of 700,000 represents a huge and unaffordable increase which the ruling Labour party is reluctant to pay for.16....., today's students are financed by student loans or bursaries, and17..... do not have to repay their debt to the State until they have found a well-paid job.18....., today's students are better motivated, harder working19..... more responsible precisely20..... they know that they will have to repay a debt of £44,000, whatever their final degree result might be.21....., as the university authorities point out, higher fees have led to a leaner, more efficient system. Standards are steadily improving, fewer undergraduates are dropping out and pointless subjects with no obvious career prospects are being dropped from the curriculum,22..... lack of interest.

Both views have their advocates23..... both ignore the fundamental issue of fairness. Maybe it is inevitable that British students should now pay something for their tuition24....., if so, why do Northern Irish students pay £4,030 a year25..... English undergraduates pay £9,250 and their neighbours in Scotland pay nothing? Why do Physics and Engineering courses, with all the expensive equipment those subjects require, cost the same as those in Philosophy or Psychology which, presumably, cost far less to provide?

.....26....., I think that it is probably right that undergraduates should contribute something to the cost of their tuition.27....., £9,250 a year seems excessive at a time when young adults' real wages and disposable income are both falling. According to some estimates, many of today's students will be paying off their student loans until they 50 years old, after which they will be expected to buy their

own houses and fund their own pensions. The sad prospect, here, is not so much a generation of highly-educated professionals finding their place in the competitive, globalised economy but men and women whose entire working lives will be circumscribed by debt, unable to start families28..... they cannot afford to do so.29....., then, a charge of £1,000 a year would put higher education within everyone's reach30..... £3,000 ought to be the absolute maximum that any undergraduate should be expected to pay.

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).