Checklist for Essays

Every essay is different, but there are common criteria. To be considered adequate for uni, your essay should meet the criteria below (many departments don’t require a synopsis; but all require everything else). So, when you’re ready with a final draft, check it for these; they’re the kind of thing that can make the difference between one letter grade and the next!

1. SYNOPSIS/ABSTRACT (if required)

Sometimes you may be asked to include a synopsis (or “abstract”). If so, it’s a paragraph on a separate sheet, before the essay, that summarises its content. It’s more comprehensive than your introduction; the introduction says what the essay is going to do, but the abstract boils down the whole thing. It should include (not in point form, as here, but in a paragraph):

- The problem or question that you’ve addressed
- Your answer (your “thesis”)
- (if important, your scope; focus; method; sources)
- Your main reasons for your answer /main findings of your research
- Your conclusion (with implications, if any)

2. INTRODUCTION

Does your first paragraph explain the question and (briefly) give your answer and/or indicate how you are going to approach it?

3. IDEAS & EVIDENCE

Does each paragraph make a clearly identifiable point? Is there a sentence, preferably the first sentence that expresses this point?

Does the rest of the paragraph develop that point with explanation and/or evidence from the reading?

4. ARGUMENT & RELEVANCE

Does each section of your essay clearly contribute to your answer?

5. PARAGRAPHING

Does each paragraph develop one idea (not a mixture), and develop it fully?

6. COHERENCE & LINKING
Is there a connection between each point and the one that follows it?

**7. USE OF SOURCES**

Have you put quotation marks around, and a reference after, everything that you have copied directly from your reading?

Have you put a reference after everything that you learned from reading but have put in your own words?

**8. REFERENCES & BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Are the references throughout your essay in the format specified in the study guide for this subject?

Have you included a Bibliography of all the sources you used for this essay (even if you only used one)? Again, for all sources, have you given the details in the order, and with the punctuation, that your guide for this subject prescribes?

**9. PROOFREADING**

Have you carefully checked spelling, etc., by spellchecker, if any, and again by eye? Remember that the spellchecker will accept any word that it has in its vocabulary, and it doesn’t know what word you meant, so it won’t pick up errors like of/off, there/their/they’re, it’s/its, here/where, etc.

Reading your work aloud can help you to notice anything amiss (and savour what sounds really good!)