Essay guidelines

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LSE

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Essay basics (as explained in syllabus)

- ▶ 2,000 words ($+/-$ 10%, see details about what counts)
- ▶ 20% of final mark
- ▶ due 1st May (first Thursday of summer term)
- ▶ wide choice in what you write about

Essay guidelines (as provided in syllabus)

► "use the material/concepts from the lectures to analyze the topic that interests [you] most"
► common strategies:
  1. "consider a theoretical / empirical argument explained in the lectures and try to apply it to a different situation (it could be an application to a different policy area, a different region, etc)"
  2. "consider two seemingly unrelated topics from the lectures and make an effort to build bridges to see how the two views complement/contradict each other"
► "important elements in the assessed essays are students' own insights/critical assessment on the topic"

Further guidance

It's like an application where you choose the topic. (And work on your own, and don't have to speak in public. . .)

You get credit for applying the ideas you've learned to a particular problem or question.

Analysis > description; define key terms; etc.

Can you think of an example, case study, or empirical analysis that should be used to teach GV478? Write an essay about it.

Getting feedback

We ask you to obtain feedback by email about your proposed topic by
April 1.

Consultations based on surname:

- ▶ A-F: Andy Eggers
- ▶ G-L: Rafael Hortala-Vallve
- ▶ M-R: Kostas Matakos
- ▶ S-Z: Hande Mutlu-Eren

After that you are on your own.

Examples of successful essays (1)

Using theory to explain something:

- ▶ Using ideas about lobbying and collective action to explain the persistence of coal subsidies in Germany.
- ▶ Using ideas about commitment problems to explain why one peace treaty in failed to avert violence in northern Ireland while another succeeded.
- ▶ Using ideas about social capital and cooperation in repeated games to explain features of the informal sector in Tanzania.
- ▶ Using models of coordination and collective action to explain the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution.

Examples of successful essays (2)

Empirical analysis:

- ▶ Duverger's Law in Indonesia: Does it hold?
- ▶ Testing ideas about intra-party politics and spending in Japan
- ▶ An analysis of compliance with decisions by the International Court of Justice

Policy-focused:

- ▶ NHS reform, through lens of "bureau-shaping"
- ▶ Critique of the "war on drugs"
- ▶ Analysis of proposed electoral reform in Jordan

What makes a successful essay?

All **merit** essays will:

- ▶ define key terms
- ▶ make an argument or claim
- ▶ have clear and logically sound analysis
- ▶ choose the appropriate scope: not too broad
- ▶ make appropriate use of concepts from GV478 or of extensions you have pursued on your own

What makes an outstanding essay?

Distinction essays tend to go further:

- ▶ identify a puzzle or problem or gap in knowledge that requires explanation or investigation
- ▶ convince the reader that this analysis helps us address the puzzle or problem or gap above
- ▶ consider alternative approaches/explanations, and provide a convincing explanation why this account is worth adding
- ▶ carry out original data analysis

It is hard to do all these things *and* use GV478 material creatively!

Analysis vs. description

Attempts at definition:

▶ The difference has to do with its effect on the audience. To "analyze" is to make something clearer to an audience. To "describe" is to make something known by an audience.

▶ Analysis usually involves your claim or argument about cause or effect. Description usually involves facts.

▶ Description: "What happened? Who did what? How large is X?" Analysis: "What was/is/would be the effect of X on Y? Why do some countries have X and others have Y? How does X relate to Y?"

▶ Suppose you are talking about someone else's research. If you just report the finding, it is description. If you explain the finding (method), relate it to other findings, critique/evaluate its significance, then it is analysis (and we like it).