Introduction
This document will help you to prepare academic written work. It also give you a guide to
expectations and assessment criteria in Geography and Environmental Studies (GES). The
writing skills required by most university Schools are broadly similar, but may vary at a detailed
level, for example, the style of referencing or whether sub-headings are required or frowned
upon. It is crucial that you develop a regular and consistent approach to essay presentation, and
you will find that you know several styles of presentation by the end of your degree. In effect,
you are developing multiple skills.

Staff are available to give you advice and help in preparing essays. Remember, they are busy
people too and, while very willing to assist you, will appreciate it if you make an appointment
with them to discuss your various needs. All students have email addresses, so you can email
staff to make appointments. If you don’t know your email, contact the IT Help Desk. Students
are also encouraged to make use of the University’s essay writing resource material Scribble
(www.utas.edu.au/scribble/) and the Scientific Communications Skills resource website that can
be accessed via your WebCT Vista home page.

The five headings below (Argument, Evidence, Structure, Presentation, and Referencing)
correspond to the criteria we use for assessing essays (see the end of this guide). Carefully read
each section and to examine the criteria listed on the essay assessment form. By working towards
the criteria, you take much of the guesswork out of preparing essays for assessment in this
School.

Iain Hay’s excellent book Communicating in Geography and the Environmental Sciences
(Meridian Series, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 2006, 3rd ed.), is also a goldmine of
information for GES undergraduate students and is the GES Resource centre and on reserve in
the Morris Miller Library.

The UTas Learning Unit also offers help on essay writing skills. You can contact the Learning
Development Unit, view ‘help’ session times, and find on-line essay advice by going to t heir
web page (www.utas.edu.au/learndev/). Contact them by phone on 6226 1905.

1) Argument
Beyond any other consideration, your essay must answer the set question(s) to which you have
chosen to respond. Be careful to approach the topic from the direction asked, and to reach a clear
conclusion. If you are even slightly unsure about any aspect of the essay question see the
relevant lecturer/tutor. Your answer should be based on broad and thorough reading of relevant
literature from scholarly articles, books and other resources. It should cover the main facts, ideas,
viewpoints, and debates that the question raises. It should cover these areas of knowledge in an
adequate and balanced way, and should use illustrative material (such as maps, diagrams, tables
of data, etc.) wherever appropriate.

2) Evidence
You should be careful to justify your position on the set question(s) and show that you are aware
of and understand a variety of viewpoints. Wherever possible, use your own words and do not
rely on long quotations or close paraphrasing. Occasional quotation is acceptable if the phrasing
cannot be bettered and if the page number is included in the in-text citation (see Referencing
below). The restatement of a text or passage in your own words is called paraphrasing. You
may need to do this in your essay but remember that you need to cite the source of your
information, especially when quoting numbers or particular facts that are not common
knowledge. Merely altering or rearranging a few words in complete sentences or passages is not
acceptable and may constitute plagiarism (see Referencing). Please see the University’s A Guide
to Academic Integrity for Students
(http://www.utas.edu.au/tl/supporting/academicintegrity/students.html) or your tutor/demonstrator/Unit coordinator if you are at all confused about this as it is definitely a trap for beginners!

In some cases it will be appropriate to show concern, strong opinions, feeling and even passion about the issues you are writing about. But your opinions and conclusions should not replace the overall balance and clarity of argument. In offering your own views, always be careful to show that you are fully aware of how your interpretation fits within broad academic discussions of the issue.

3) Structure
The essence of a good essay is a well-structured argument supported by evidence. Your essay must have a clear and logical plan that is explained as part of your introduction to the essay. The introduction, which can also set out the aims, objectives and background to the question, should be followed by a well developed, theme, or series of themes that clearly distinguish the main points you wish to raise. These themes are drawn together in a conclusion that goes beyond summary to offer a concise statement of your position on the issues raised by the question. This position may take the form of a firm opinion, although it may sometimes be appropriate to present informed but preliminary, partial or ambivalent conclusions on highly complex and wide topics.

Academic essays are usually 'signposted' using headings and sub-headings so that the reader knows where the argument has got to and where it is going next. We do not expect detective stories where we are kept in suspense till the all-revealing conclusion. Try to use 'signpost sentences' at key points in the essay - for example, 'Having described the major theories, I now turn to consider their application to empirical examples'. While it is acceptable to use either third person ('this essay') or first person ('I') in essays, it is important to be consistent throughout.

Headings within the essay really do help to provide structure. They also discipline the writer to develop your points in a logical and coherent order and to translate a brief essay plan into a full essay. Nevertheless, they should keep and not interrupt the flow of your essay. Too many headings make an essay hard to follow, and are often a sign of too much unorganised fact and too little argument. Although staff in some disciplines discourage the use of headings, most scholarly journals in our field use them. We thus recommend you use a few headings (4 to 6 perhaps in a typical first year essay), but they are not compulsory.

You should choose key themes to suit your argument and then select and discard information you read to suit these themes. The disparate and often conflicting views of different authors should be integrated within your essay as a series of themes or debates. You should also develop some informed opinions (to offer in that important conclusion). Remember, an essay which reports on a number of themes from only one source or author and then covers similar themes from another is usually weak, repetitive and poorly argued. Your choice of themes, argument, emphasis, and structure is what makes the essay yours; this is where your originality counts when dealing with well-known (and less well-known) source material.

4) Expression and Presentation
An essay should be edited several times before submission to make it as concise, accurate and clear as possible. It is your problem if your argument is not well understood, not the reader's. Get a friend, unfamiliar with the topic, to read a late draft to test your ability to communicate clearly.
The *Style Manual* produced by the Australian Government Printing Service is a good guide to acceptable style, and recent editions include a chapter on non-sexist language. A variety of guides to grammar are also available. Rather than confuse you with too much choice, we require the following basic minimum standards of presentation.

The essay should conform to widely accepted and consistent conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar and the avoidance of gender-specific language. In other words, ensure that there are few, if any, spelling mistakes, punctuation errors, or grammatical errors. Use the word ‘people’ or ‘humankind’ instead of ‘man’ or ‘mankind’, and use plurals such as ‘they’ instead of singulars such as ‘he’ or ‘she’.

Your essay should be presented on untorn and clean A4 paper. Although neat handwriting is acceptable, lecturers usually prefer typewritten essays and there is no time like the present to become proficient with computer word processing packages. Become familiar with the computers in the Schools “PC Labs” as early as possible in your university career! Work should be in a readable 12 point font, spacing can be 1.5 or double spaced, and, unless indicated otherwise in the Unit Outline, can be on two sides of the page. Margins should be generous (three centimetres or more all around) so that feedback can be equally generous. All pages except for the cover page should be consecutively numbered from 1.

The name of the School, the unit for which the essay is being submitted, the name of the tutor, your name and student number, the date the essay is submitted, the assignment number and your essay’s title should all appear on a front page. This information should not be repeated again on the first page of the essay itself.

Essays must be accompanied by a submission form, available from the School Office and at the end of this document. This form provides a record of submission to protect you if the essay is inadvertently lost after submission. It also has the essay assessment schedule against which your work will be graded. Please consider this schedule carefully before and during the writing of your essay.

Illustrations can greatly assist your argument. The first table should be Table 1, the first figure should be Figure 1, and so on. Maps, photographs and diagrams are considered to be figures. All illustrations should have a descriptive title as well as a number. Refer to your illustrations in the text of your essay – don’t expect the reader to stumble upon them. It is essential that the source of each table, figure, or plate is recorded and includes the last name of the author, the date of publication of the reference, and the page number from which the illustration has been taken.

You can refer to tables and figures in two main ways:

    Smith (1997) argues that the demographic transition remains a useful tool by which to explain population change over time (see Figure 1, taken from …).

    Figure 1 illustrates the main elements of a demographic transition. Smith (1997) argues that this model remains a useful tool by which to explain population change over time.

Illustrations should appear in the text near the place where reference is made to them, rather than at the back of the essay as a wad of unrelated materials. Good quality photocopies may be glued in, and should be reduced or enlarged as necessary. There is a scanner available in the GES PC Lab. Tables generally have a title above the table of data, while Figures and Plates generally have their titles below.
Illustrations should also be comprehensible in themselves, and when you refer to them and discuss them in the text, be sure that the reasons for their inclusion and their contribution to your argument are clear. It is not good academic practice to have long captions of explanation under illustrations, nor to have separate boxes to explain points, even though this is done in some textbooks and popular journals.

The essay should be firmly stapled in the top left hand corner. We do not want the essay to be packaged in any other way. Plastic folders, side stapled essays and unusual or irregular sizes are irritating for a marker and may lead to your work not being marked.

5) Referencing
Plagiarism is the act of passing off other people's work as your own. Inadequate referencing may result in unintentional plagiarism and, at the least, will be reflected negatively in assessment. Copying someone else's work word for word without acknowledgement, whether from a book, electronic materials or another student, constitutes intentional plagiarism and is a serious University offence (see www.utas.edu.au/plagiarism). Allowing another student to use or copy your work as though it were that student's own work is also a serious offence.

You must cite or refer to all of the sources - the literature - that you have used in writing your essay. We use what is known as the Harvard system of in-text referencing. In this system, you should list all works specifically referred to in the paper at the end of the essay (see detailed style notes below). Please note that footnotes are not a common practice in this discipline, however, you may be required to use them in some subdisciplines of geography (this will be clearly indicated in any relevant Unit outline).

If too many references are made to a textbook or other secondary sources, it may be that you are not reading widely enough. If in doubt about the appropriate use of references it is better to err on the side of too many rather than too few. Your tutor will tell you if you use too much in-text referencing.

The preferred referencing style is the Harvard System.
The Harvard system is preferred because it is concise and widely used within Geography and Environmental Studies. Details of where to use brackets, commas, semicolons, colons and fullstops vary widely, and different journals have their own conventions. We recommend that you develop your preferred system (which fits within the general guidelines) and get used to using it whenever you can. Within any one piece of work you should be absolutely consistent.

The details below have been taken from the journal Australian Geographical Studies. While it is not compulsory to use this style, it is a standard used by many Australian geographers.

A referencing system has two components - the in-text reference (sometimes called a citation) - and the reference list (headed 'References' with all material referred to listed in alphabetic order by author).

1. In-text references
In writing an essay, you will commonly be drawing upon material written by someone else. Although the new wording is yours, the ideas are theirs. Thus, you might be using a text by A.R. de Souza, called A Geography of World Economy published in Columbus, Ohio by Merrill Publishing Company in 1994. What you need to do is something like this:

According to de Souza (1994), the food-producing capacity of the planet is vast.
or

One author claims that the earth has an enormous food-producing capacity (de Souza, 1994).

Try to place references so that the flow of the sentence is not disturbed. Note that when you put the reference at the end of a sentence or phrase, the in-text reference is placed in a bracket. When the author's name forms part of the sentence, only the date, and page numbers if used, are bracketed.

In-text citations always include the last name of the author(s) and the year of publication of the work. You should not put first names or initials in the in-text citation. Page numbers must be included in the case of direct quotations and the reporting of detailed data, as shown in the example below. It is also common to record page numbers when drawing heavily from or referring specifically to a particular passage/section of a text.

In discussing this question, the complexity of the real world is simplified by many people (Chisholm, 1985, 25-26).

If you need to refer to more than one publication by a particular author published in a given year you put 'a' in the text after the date of the first mentioned publication and 'b', 'c' etc. after subsequent publications in the same year.

Similar principles apply where:

i. several authors have commented on a particular issue, e.g.:

   Many writers (Wood, 1981, 23; Jones, 1984; 32; Smith, 1988, 33-45) have examined the concept of carrying capacity.

ii. the source is a committee or organisation, e.g.:


iii. the source is one author quoted by another author, e.g.:

   It is strongly argued that rural-to-urban migration is the major factor contributing to urbanisation in the Third World (Jones, 1953 in David, 1984, 23).

iv. the source is from the Internet.

   Try to identify the specific author(s) of the information on the web site. Where this is not available, you will have to assume the person or agency that operates the site is the author. Similarly, try to identify the date the information was written. If there is no indication of the date then Use n.d. (not dated). For example, if you get information from the Commonwealth environmental agency site, and no author or date is stated, the citation would be (Environment Australia, n.d.). Do not cite the URL in the text.
2. The list of references
At the end of your paper put the heading 'References' and list all your in-text references in alphabetic order by the surname of the first author. Multiple references to a single author are ordered by year of publication, beginning with the earliest. All work by a single author is listed before joint work where that author is the first named. **The title of published material (normally the title of a book or the journal in which a particular article is published) is italicised** (see over the page). Do not italicise the titles of unpublished conference proceedings or theses. When referencing books, you should also list the publisher’s name and the place of publication.

You should not use the term bibliography, nor refer to any material to which direct reference is not made in the text. The list below gives examples of how to refer to different kinds of publications. Refer to AGPS, 1994, *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, Chapter 9, 145-172 for a comprehensive discussion.

Examples of entries in a reference list

a. *an article in a journal (also called serial or periodical)*


b. *complete books - examples*


c. *an authored monograph (book) published by an organisation*


d. *an institutional author – e.g., a government or other organisation*


e. *an edited volume*

f. a chapter in an edited volume


g. reference to two publications by the same author and published in the same year, and therefore labelled 'a' and 'b' respectively in both the bibliography and the text and listed in the bibliography in the order in which they appear in the text


h. an unpublished paper, thesis etc (no underlining or italics)


i. a web site

Web sites should be listed alphabetically by author in your reference list. The reference must include author (if multiple authors, all must be listed), the year, the title of the information (sometimes the name of the web site, sometimes the name of the page embedded in the web site), the URL enclosed in angle brackets < >, and the date you accessed it.


j. an article in an electronic only journal


k. an article or document from a printed source also available on-line (NOTE: Many print (i.e., hard copy) journals and reports can be accessed on-line, usually as PDF files. Articles accessed in this way are referenced as if from a hard copy source.)

3. **Map references**
Maps are found in a wide variety of materials: as single sheets in a map collection, as government publications, as plates in atlases, as illustrations in books or journals. Digital maps are found on any of numerous web sites, in online research collections, or can be dynamically generated using online mapping services. Just as in written work, ethical scholarship demands that the source of information be cited. An example from a book is given below. Adapt the second part of the citation to reference your map source, such as a journal article or on-line.


**Essay Submission Checklist**
1. Does the essay answer the set question(s)?
2. Does the essay have a clear, logical structure?
3. Does it cover the main facts, ideas, viewpoints and debates relevant to the topic?
4. Is there irrelevant or repetitive material in the essay?
5. Are arguments clear, logically developed and supported by evidence?
6. Is the essay more than a descriptive account of what others have written, developing and supporting a particular position or viewpoint?
7. Is it based on broad and thorough reading?
8. Has a wide variety of source material been read and used effectively?
9. Is expression clear and correct? Are ideas presented simply and without undue emotion?
10. Are spelling and punctuation correct?
11. Does the essay have an introduction which clearly sets out the essay topic, and outlines the objectives and structure of the essay?
12. Is there a conclusion setting out clear views on the topic,?
13. Is referencing full and correct?
14. Is illustrative material appropriately used?
15. Is the essay neatly presented and legible?
16. Does the title page include the correct Unit name and number, your name and student number, marker’s name, date submitted, assignment question and essay title?
Assessment Criteria and Grades
On the following page is an example assessment guide. Most units will include an assessment guide in the Unit Outline.

To reach a particular grade, you will need to achieve the following:

80% and above high distinction; outstanding work with few errors or omissions
70-79% distinction; excellent work which may have some slight flaws
60-69% credit; good to very good work; some errors or omissions are apparent
50-59% pass; minimally satisfactory through to sound work; errors and omissions begin to detract seriously from the work
Less than 50% fail; unsatisfactory fulfilment of many criteria; seriously flawed; inadequate fulfilment of most, if not all criteria; excessively late; without referencing or reference list;

Possible evidence of plagiarism will be referred directly to the relevant Faculty Representative for consideration.