



## Your Written Assignment

This handout was written specially for the Area Studies Scotland class. It contains information and tips related to the written assignment for this class.

- (1) Information on the different kinds of written assignment possible at the end of this class
- (2) Tips for writing a traditional term paper
- (3) Tips for producing materials for use in school
- (4) Information on how to acknowledge your sources
- (5) How to write your bibliography
- (6) Using clear English

### (1) Choice of written assignment

Firstly, please remember that any written assignment has a different purpose and form from your oral presentation, i.e. the written assignment is not just a written version of your talk.

In this class you have a choice:

- you can write a traditional kind of paper in which you put forward your "thesis" on the topic, presenting the supporting arguments or backup information.
- you can produce materials you could actually use in (English) class in school. This option is very popular, and not only with future teachers.
- you could do a combination of both.

You can do your written work alone, or with a partner or in a team, making use of what the others have already found out and combining your ideas and/or your skills.

In my office I have a collection of past written assignments you can consult, with topics such as The Geology of Scotland, Scotland's Geography, Tourism, and Tartan. Most of the materials created for use in school are now freely available in FyF. See the Scotland section, under Teaching about Scotland.

## (2) Tips for your written paper

### Organising your paper

This is about how to avoid writing a kind of “shopping list“ of information. The most important thing to do is to find an organising principle, your “thesis“, argument, the point you want to make.

This concept of having an organising principle is equally valid for when you want to create materials for use in school.

Here is a simple example:

One student decided to look at tourism. In her talk in class she gave us some interesting facts and figures e.g. statistics on who goes to Scotland when and to do what where, and how much money this brings in. But before she did her written paper she followed up her feeling that tourism has both positive and negative effects on Scotland and did some more reading and thinking. She tried to come to her own conclusion, and then based her written paper on the “thesis”: Tourism does more good than harm to Scotland.

Her paper presented some positive effects, some negative effects, and her conclusion that the positive ones outweigh the negative ones.

The rest of the tips and comments here can be applied to **all** academic work, **any** written paper you do in English.

- From the written paper it should be clear that you actually attended the course, i.e. the conclusions you draw should relate to the knowledge you have gained during the whole course. For this reason I do not expect you to hand in any written assignment before the end of the course.
- Try to read several sources, including current newspapers so that you can attempt to form your own opinions. You should be able to draw your own conclusions, not just write a summary of some secondary literature.
- Be careful with your sources. The writer’s name under the title of a newspaper article should remind you that this is one individual’s opinion. With web sources you have to be particularly careful. Nowadays people like to quote Web sources. It’s trendy. But do you know who is behind these Web pages? A civil servant? A government department? A political party? A private person? A writer? A journalist? Don’t just take anything you find on the Internet and present it as TheTruth.
- Your writing should be well organised, with a clear beginning, a middle and an end (conclusion).
- There should always be a table of contents.
- There should always be a bibliography.

- For this class people seem to find it quite easy to write about 6 typed pages, though more is also welcome. It is quality and relevance and usefulness, not quantity, that I am looking for.
- Please use one and a half line spacing. That gives me room for language corrections. And don't forget to leave a margin for me to write comments on the content.
- You should come to me with an outline of the written paper and your bibliography, before you actually write it.
- For further tips on writing a term paper see the Handouts section of FyF.

### **(3) Tips for writing materials for use in school**

- Choose your topic area e.g. Food, Legends, Dance. It doesn't have to be the same topic as in your oral presentation.
- Decide on your target group. What age group do you know best? What are they most interested in at that age? How much English will they know?
- Decide how much time should be made available e.g. 2 school periods of 45 minutes, or one double unit, or one period plus 2 weeks time for working outside of class.
- Decide on your aims. What should the class know or be able to do at the end of the unit?
- How are you going to reach this aim? What activities are there going to be and what materials will you use?

Materials for use in school can be based on visuals (maps, photos, diagrams, video clips etc), written texts (from magazines, newspapers, brochures etc.), audio texts (music CDs, films etc). It is easy nowadays to find things on the Internet that look/sound good, but they still have to be prepared, by you, for use in class.

Whatever you take as your basis has to be changed to make it relevant for your target group and what is more, you have to create tasks which are appropriate and meaningful. You can make gap texts, jumbled texts, quizzes, puzzles, crosswords etc. , make interviews, plan holidays, cook, dance and so on.

There is nothing more killing for a learner than to be given a newspaper article on something they know nothing about, with a thousand new words, and to be told to read it (and then answer the teacher's questions). That leads to (boredom)<sup>10</sup>

Being given a list of "difficult" words doesn't help as this kills off the learner's natural instinct to search for meaning.

So whenever you have found what looks to you like a good “text” ask yourself first:

- Why am I using this “text”?
- What do I want the learners to get out of it? - some new words? one new idea? very specific information?..? ...?

The point is that all texts should be read with some specific question in mind (Example: when you go to the canteen, very hungry, on a Friday you don't read the menu from beginning to end Monday to Friday, for every single word and every single piece of information, do you?)

Once you have decided what you want out of the text, then you can consider how best you can do that, and I really mean do that, and nothing else. Once your learners have got out of it what you wanted them to get, then it's finished. Don't insist on ploughing through it word for word. The same goes for any kind of “text“, from video clip to feature film.

Bring your ideas and draft plans so that we can talk about them before you finalise everything, and take a look at some of the materials already available at FyF.

#### **(4) Acknowledging your sources**

You must always acknowledge your sources. This has to be done **in** your text. With the materials for use in school you have to be very careful to name your source immediately after every text/picture etc. It is not enough just to write a bibliography.

- If you wrote (approximately):  
*Most people in Scotland today drink tea with whisky in it.*  
I would ask: How do you know? Did you interview everyone in Scotland?  
No, obviously not, so you have to name your source.

Like this:

*Most people in Scotland today drink tea with whisky in it. (Robertson, 1998)*

or

*According to Robertson, 1998, most people in Scotland today drink tea with whisky in it.*

You might find another source with a very different opinion :-)

- If you wrote:  
*Scotland, shorn of its nationhood yet knowing it was somehow not simply a part of England, in casting around for a new identity found the Tartan and all it represented.*

I would say: That is obviously not an opinion you could form yourself, AND it is terribly obviously not your English. It is obviously a direct quote so you have to put it in inverted commas and name your source.

Like this:

*"Scotland, shorn of its nationhood yet knowing it was somehow not simply a part of England, in casting around for a new identity found the Tartan and all it represented. " (Macdonald, 2000, p. 248)*

You can not just copy out whole sections of books/articles and make it look as if it is your own ideas and words. That counts as plagiarism.

## **(5) How to write your bibliography**

You should be consistent in the way you write your bibliography. For all books you should give the title, author, publisher, place of publication and date.

Example:

Robertson, D. (1998). Haggis for Foreigners. Wildduck Books, Hongkong.

Or

Robertson, D. Haggis for Foreigners. Wildduck Books, Hongkong, 1998.

There are many different ways of giving the publication details. Choose one way of doing it, then stick to it.

## **(6) Using clear English**

Keep the language clear and uncomplicated e.g.

*I would like to consider / take a look at .....*

*I would like to give an overview of .....*

*I would like to give an analysis of .....*

*I would like to argue that .....*

*Firstly, .....*

*Secondly, .....*

*Finally, .....*

*In conclusion .....*

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