

Individual Essay

Objectives

One of the learning objectives of the course Trends in Forest and Nature Conservation is to critically understand the ideas and assumptions found within academic papers, understand their implications and communicate well what the published results mean.

Most academic communication is by means of published papers. It is important, therefore, that you learn to communicate information effectively.

Developing an ability to communicate ideas on paper is a crucial part of your education. For the majority of people this is a creative skill that is developed over many years, and experience is the only way to achieve proficiency. By preparing an essay you will learn to:

1. obtain information from refereed scientific literature,
2. synthesize information from diverse refereed sources (scientific articles, books),
3. critically evaluate and discuss different statements and develop your own ideas and conclusions on a topic, and finally
4. communicate these to the reader.

Instruction for the essay

Write an essay on one of the current trends in conservation and management of ecological systems explored in the five themes of this course (i.e. resilience of socio-ecological systems, spare vs. share views, plurality of governance, ecosystem approach, new approaches of manifesting conservation science).

To facilitate your writing we have 12 sessions supervised by lecturers, self-study sessions, peer-review exercises and the support of the Wageningen Writing Lab.

Your essay should be **1500-2000** words (without counting references).

Your essay should at least have **15 references** (scientific papers and books)

Essay submission:

The deadline for submission of the final essay is **Tuesday 15 October at 17:15**

You should send the essay to the **Turnitin link for Assignment 2 in Brightspace**

How will you be evaluated?

This essay counts for **45% of the course evaluation**. The evaluation of the essay will be performed by two reviewers based on the following criteria:

- 1) Topic (originality; within the framework of the course; emanating from lecture discussions: 10%)
- 2) Structure (logical conceptual framework developed, resulting in structure with paragraphs and headings: 30%)
- 3) Clarity (clear problem statements and questions, hypotheses and conclusions: 30%)
- 4) Inter / multi -disciplinarity (degree of attention given to both the social and ecological approaches and theories: 15%)
- 5) Literature use (relevance of selected literature (selection, interpretation, analysis and argumentation concerning the selected articles: 15%).

All essays are automatically controlled for plagiarism check. Essays that do not meet specification as spelled out above (number of words; references) will not be evaluated.

What makes a good scientific essay?

The answer is: good structure and good content. A scientific essay should be clear, concise and pertinent. It consists of three main sections:

1. An introduction: identifies the problem
2. An analytical part: presents the theories and data and evaluates the arguments. It is usually divided in separate sections with headings that help the reader.
3. A conclusion.

Look at essays (or perspectives) published in journals such as *Science, Nature, Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, Trends in Ecology and Evolution, Society and Natural Resources*. Why do you like these papers? Because the structure guides you through the subject in an accessible way. The story flows in a clear and engaging way.

Remember:

- the introduction sets the scene;
- separate sections have headings;
- longer sections are divided into sub-sections, with sub-headings, so you don't have to plough through long sections of text (careful not overdoing it!);
- tables, diagrams and photographs illustrate or summarize key points, while also breaking the text (textbook editors are skilled at making the pages appear interesting);
- conclusion puts everything in perspective, and typically suggests where further work is needed;
- references cover key areas referred to in the text.

A good essay is a critical analysis of the topic. This means that we expect you to read widely about the topic, and to select the best relevant references!