Comparing Assessment Tasks

Essays, reports and reflective journals are common forms of academic writing. They generally differ in these respects:

- **Purpose**
- **Topic**
- **Audience**
- **Format**
- **Style**
- **Assessment**

### Purpose

**Essay**
- To write a well-argued response to a question or proposition, using an analysis and discussion of the relevant literature.
- To establish a proposition or contention (thesis).

**Report**
- To investigate, present and analyse information thoroughly and logically.
- Often to recommend action to solve a problem.
- Usually to make proposals.

**Reflective journal**
- To record the development of your ideas and insights.
- To reflect on the content of the subject and on your own learning process.
- To analyse and discuss key issues covered by class work and / or readings.

### Topic

**Essay**
- Usually a question or proposition.
- Required reading, sometimes fieldwork.

**Report**
- Often a problem or case study based on a real hypothetical situation.
- Requires reading, fieldwork or practical work.

**Reflective journal**
- Often a response to the class content, including lectures, tutorials, set readings or practical placement.
- May be broadly based, or focus on a particular issue or aspect covered in class.
### Audience

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<tr>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Reflective journal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written for the lecturer.</td>
<td>Written for the audience established in the topic (e.g. client, manager), but in reality your lecturer is also the audience.</td>
<td>As a learning experience you’re writing for yourself, although when it’s assessed your lecturer is also the audience.</td>
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### Format

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| Three parts: introduction, body, conclusion.  
No headings or subheadings.* | Divided into sections. Sections will vary depending on type and length of report.  
Uses heading and subheadings; the order is often shown by numbers or a combination of letters and numbers. | There are no formal format requirements but often it is dated so that you can trace the development of your ideas and learning.  
Frequently no headings or subheadings, but you may choose to use sections if you wish. |

*Some lecturers require headings – see relevant guides.

### Style

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| Formal English, using paragraphs and complete sentences.  
Needs to objectivity suited to academic study. | Must be objective.  
Point form is sometimes used. | Can be subjective and informal to reflect your own thinking. |

### Assessment

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| Success depends on the argument, how one point is related to the next and how well you use the evidence from the literature to support your ideas. | Success depends on the demonstration of good research skills and the objective presentation and analysis of relevant information. | Success depends on development of your insights into the topic.  
Your ideas may change during the course as you gain new understanding of the inter-relationships between different aspects of the content. |