Comparing Assessment Tasks

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

- **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

Essay
- Written for the lecturer.

Report
- Written for the audience established in the topic (e.g. client, manager), but in reality your lecturer is also the audience.

Reflective journal
- As a learning experience you’re writing for yourself, although when it’s assessed your lecturer is also the audience.

Format

Essay
- Three parts: introduction, body, conclusion.
- No headings or subheadings.*

Report
- 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.

Reflective journal
- 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

Essay
- Formal English, using paragraphs and complete sentences.
- Needs to objectivity suited to academic study.

Report
- Must be objective.
- Point form is sometimes used.

Reflective journal
- Can be subjective and informal to reflect your own thinking.

Assessment

Essay
- 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.

Report
- Success depends on the demonstration of good research skills and the objective presentation and analysis of relevant information.

Reflective journal
- 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.