



Department of Culture and Communication  
*Institutionen för kultur och kommunikation (IKK)*  
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ENGLISH 3 (711G23, 711G29)

# *The Language Essay*

Guidelines

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Linköping University  
Department of Culture and Communication  
English

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## Guidelines for Writing the Language C Essay

These notes are meant to serve as an aid to students intending to write a C essay (Bachelor's thesis) in English with a language specialisation. Before we start to offer advice, however, it is necessary to point out that there is no single perfect recipe for success in writing a C essay, or any other kind of scientific paper, journal article, book, etc. As is the case with any creative activity, the writing process entails a combination of keen analytical thinking and a good deal of old-fashioned hard work. What you will find in these brief guidelines is what we perceive to be a standard form of expression in scientific papers of the type that students are required to write at the C level in Swedish universities.

Good luck!

Students are often under the misconception that writing a C essay mainly involves writing, and they are therefore anxious to start producing text as soon as possible. However, the writing tends to come at a (much) later stage of the research process. Instead the essay is built by constructing it part by part and section by section, working more or less from the inside out (see further details below). Only when all of these parts have been drafted is it then time to put the thesis together in its final order. Hence you should not be worried if you don't have a mass of text which resembles a completed thesis until almost at the very end of the project. As far as the amount of pages goes, when all the parts of the text are properly in place, there will more or less automatically be "enough" pages.

In its final form, the C essay would normally include the following sections:

- Title Page (see template<sup>1</sup>)
- Contents (with pages)
- 1. Introduction
- 2. Theoretical Background
- 3. Methodology
- 4. Results
- 5. Discussion and Conclusions
- References
- (Appendix)

As was hinted at above, the sections of your thesis should not be written chronologically in the same order as they will appear in the final version. You are likely to be able to finish at

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<sup>1</sup> At the back of this compendium. This can also be downloaded from the C essay course webpage:  
<http://www.liu.se/ikk/english/e3/course-webpages/c-essay>

least the first half of section three (methodology) first, i.e. how you gathered your data, followed by section four (results). When the results of the empirical investigation have been written up, so that reasonable conclusions (section 5) can be drawn from them (and you have convinced/persuaded your supervisor that this is the case), you can then complete your methodology section (how you analysed the data), before filling the reader in on what theoretical background (section 2) you departed from in the study. Thus the first part of the thesis your supervisor will want to see is the (first part of the) methodology and then the results followed by the discussion and conclusions. The supervisor will, of course, have provided plenty of advice about the specification of the goal of your study, your research questions, the relevant theoretical background and empirical methodology before the actual writing process begins. Once sections three, four and five are in place, the remaining sections usually start to fall in place as well. In other words, once you know what you have actually accomplished in your investigation, it is relatively easy to tell the reader what you have done and why. This means that the introduction is the last section of the thesis to be written, together with the finalising of the title.

Section 1, the **Introduction**, should tell the reader what the basic aim or goal of the investigation to be reported on in the thesis *is*. (In general, you should use the present or past tense in your thesis, but not the future!) The introduction should be kept fairly brief but should at the same time tell the reader what the thesis will be about and why the reader might be interested in reading on. It often starts with a (personal or general) discussion about why the (broader) topic of your study is worthy of attention. When you then present your (more specific) aims, it is recommended that you formulate them as *research questions*, which will then be explicitly addressed again (answered) in the conclusions. Is there any hypothesis underlying your research questions (informed by previous research) or are they more open ended (data-driven)? Also bear in mind that the answers to your research questions should offer a contribution to our current state of knowledge. Even if you don't write this section first, it is a good idea to start out your investigation with one or two research questions to guide you and help keep you on track. Nevertheless, these are usually subject to constant revision during the course of the investigation.

The introduction should also give a brief indication of what *data* you have used and what *method* you have employed to analyse the data in order to answer your research questions. Moreover, in this type of writing there is nothing that prevents the author from providing a foretaste of the *findings* of the study here, at least in outline. In fact, if you want to get the reader interested quickly, this is one way of doing so. This also means you cannot write this section until the very end. Remember, everything else has to be finished before it can be properly introduced to the reader. It is not until the end that the exact **Title** of your thesis can be settled too. Indeed, the introduction and the title need careful coordination, since the introduction should serve as an expansion of the title.

Section 2, the **Theoretical Background**, should aim to situate your own study within the relevant field of research. Thus it is in this section and in the discussion and conclusions (section 5) where most of the references to the background literature should be found. For the C essay, you need to include at least ten references.

Although the writing of this section comes at a relatively late stage in the writing process, you should begin your search for relevant literature early on. Your reading can then fruitfully inform your research design more or less from the outset.

Basically, there are two aspects to cover here (though they may or may not be easily separable in your text): 1) a brief overview of the general field of study of relevance to your

investigation; and 2) a review of related empirical studies. In conjunction with the first, one would expect to find a general introduction to the relevant theory or approach adopted in your study, together with definitions or explications and exemplifications of key theoretical concepts. To address the second, find out whether anyone else done anything like your own study before, and if so, what they found (in a nutshell). In your selection of studies to review consider their reliability (whether they appear in refereed journals) and their currency (how up to date they are). Moreover, your review should also adopt a critical stance (identifying strengths and weaknesses of both the approach adopted and the evidence put forward) and not simply regurgitate the claims of the author(s). Indeed, your own position should also emerge clearly in your review and set the stage for your own approach.

A final word of caution here: don't write too much. Try to keep the argumentation focused on your specific study and your concrete results. The best way to do this is, of course, to have the results and conclusions already clearly organised and formulated!

Section 3, **Methodology**, should address three main issues vis-à-vis your research design: 1) the nature of the data; 2) the procedure for gathering the data; and 3) the procedure for analysing the data. To cover the first, what sources of data were used for the study (recordings, corpora, databanks, texts, informants, subjects)? Who participated in your investigation and in what context? Did you use any equipment or software and what were the 'instruments' of the data collection? For example, were there video recordings, field observations, structured interview questions or was there a questionnaire? In the case of the latter two, what did they consist of? (The full set of questions or questionnaire could be included as an appendix at the end of your thesis.) To deal with the second issue, how did you go about collecting your data in concrete terms? How did you gain access to the data, what was your sampling procedure and were there any ethical issues to consider (e.g. did you need participants' consent)? Thirdly, what research methodology was chosen for the analysis of the data? Was it a *quantitative* (based on statistics) or *qualitative* (interpretive) approach, or something else (e.g. a mixed approach)? Explain concretely how you went about sorting and then analysing your data.

This section should also include a justification of your research design (both your data collection and data analysis procedures), as well as a discussion of the steps you have taken to ensure the validity and reliability of your results. Finally, were there any significant methodological problems that arose at any stage of the process? If so, how did you resolve these (wherever possible)?

Section 4, **Results**, should tell the reader what you found by carrying out your empirical investigation. What did the data look like? If you conducted a qualitative study, could you categorise the data in any way? If so, present an initial overview of the categories. Then take each category in turn and describe its general features (shared by all the examples belonging to this category). For each category, provide also a typical example or two, followed by a more detailed analysis of how each example typifies its features.

If you conducted a quantitative study, consider presenting your data in tables, graphs, figures or charts. If you do so, however, these should be almost self-explanatory or at least require a minimum of explanatory commentary in your text. Also refrain from simply repeating in your text exactly what the tables, graphs, etc. show, but instead comment on the most significant aspects/trends. By looking at your tables, graphs, etc. your supervisor should get a clear picture of the results of your study and be able to draw the same conclusions as you. Even quantitative studies will benefit from exemplification, so consider whether examples might help shed further light on how to interpret the results.

Whichever approach you took, make sure all the tables, figures, graphs, examples, excerpts, etc. have headings and are numbered consecutively and consistently.

At all times bear in mind how your results are related to your (provisional) research questions, revising them whenever necessary. What ‘story’ are you wanting to tell and is this story easily discernible to the reader? Indeed, it is your results which will provide the backbone for your whole study (including the story you wish to tell) and which you and your supervisor will also have to agree on, before the remaining work on your thesis can proceed profitably.

Section 5, **Discussion and Conclusions**, should tell the reader in no uncertain terms what conclusions you think can be drawn from the results presented in section 4 and what contribution your study has made to the scientific field. In other words, this is where you interpret, discuss and evaluate your findings in relation to your research questions, as well as previous studies and theories presented in section 2. If any hypotheses have been confirmed or refuted, you should also inform the reader of the grounds for your claims. Are there any implications of your findings either for the field of study or, say, for the particular practices you have studied (e.g. teaching)?

The need to relate the findings explicitly to your research questions at this stage naturally necessitates the final revising or tweaking of the questions so that they match. When your whole thesis is written, it is essential in any case that none of the research questions raised in your introduction remain unanswered by the end of this section, and conversely that your main findings are closely reflected in corresponding research questions.

To conclude this section, you can discuss the possible limitations of your study and critically evaluate the validity, reliability and generalisability of your findings. This discussion can also include how to address potential weaknesses by suggesting possible ways in which to extend and enhance your investigation in the future, given the time and resources (perhaps in a D essay).

The final compulsory section, **References**, should include all the works cited or referred to in your thesis. Don’t, however, list all the books you have ever read on the subject you have investigated. As stated earlier, you need to refer to at least ten sources in your C essay. We recommend that you follow the Harvard reference style<sup>22</sup>, which uses in-text citation, e.g. (Hatim 1997:157) with the author’s surname, year of publication, a colon followed by the page number within parentheses in the text. The full reference is then given in alphabetical order in this section (in one list without separating them into books, websites, etc.).

The following examples show how to provide references for the most common categories you are likely to need:

#### Books

Hatim, Basil (1997) *Communication Across Cultures. Translation Theory and Contrastive Text Linguistics*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press

#### Essays in an anthology

Hopper, Paul (1998) “Emergent Grammar.” In *The New Psychology of Language*. ed. by M. Tomasello. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.: 155-175

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<sup>22</sup> The MLA reference style taught in *Writing. A College Handbook* is not used within linguistics, though it shares many features with the Harvard reference style, such as in-text citation.

## Articles

Stroud, Christopher (2004) "The Performativity of Codeswitching." *International Journal of Bilingualism* 8, (2) 145-166

## Websites

Chandler, Daniel (2002) *Semiotics for Beginners*. [online] Available from  
<<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>> [19 June 2007]

For trickier questions of when, what, or how to cite or reference, we recommend the *University of Coventry Harvard Style Guide* available at the following web site:  
<http://www.coventry.ac.uk/study-at-coventry/student-support/academic-support/centre-for-academic-writing>

**A word on style.** In general, try to be as lucid and straightforward in your formulations as possible. However, you should not chat with your reader either. Scientific writing should, above all, be informative. Just tell your 'story' as plainly and clearly as you can and let the readers make their own judgements on your claims. If they find your claims valid and interesting, this is all the reward they can reasonably ask for in an academic paper.

**A word on quantity.** The C essay should ordinarily be between 25 to 35 pages in length (single spaced). This does not necessarily mean 25-35 pages of solid text. Instead, this is usually the way it turns out when all the sections are properly written and gathered into one document. Nevertheless, quantity is not rewarded in academic writing. Indeed, most readers of academic research are very busy people who want to be informed or enlightened with as little effort as possible on their part. Hence brevity and quality are what readers want and what the author of the thesis should aim to deliver.

To close this brief outline of our ideas on the art of writing a C essay, we wish to say that this process is an important step towards the presentation of independent research of the type that is found in the articles of research journals. Indeed, if an essay is very well written and the findings are scientifically interesting and soundly supported, we would not hesitate to encourage the author to submit a rewritten version of the essay for publication in a suitable journal.

# Procedure for the Ventilation Seminar

When the C essay has been completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor, a critical ventilation of the essay is scheduled and announced. The ventilation aims at giving others, besides the supervisor, a chance to read, discuss, and constructively criticise the essay. The main responsibility for reading and reviewing the essay is given to an opponent, who has been chosen from the author's peers (a fellow student at the C or perhaps the D level). In what follows we sketch the duties of the opponent in preparation for and during the course of such a ventilation seminar.

The normal time limit for the ventilation seminar is from between **45 to 60 minutes** per C essay.

1. In the first part of the seminar, the opponent is asked to give a **summary of the contents of the essay**. This summary should be short and concise, but should give anyone not having read the essay a good idea of what the essay is about – main conclusions, main lines of reasoning, methods of investigation, etc. This summary should take **about 10 minutes** to present. You may, if you wish, use PowerPoint or provide other visual support for this presentation.
2. After the opponent's presentation, the author of the thesis is given the opportunity to add his/her own comments on whether the presentation has accurately reflected the contents.
3. When the author has commented on the summary, the main review process commences. The opponent is then given the opportunity to **ask critical questions** about the *contents* and (substantial or recurrent aspects of) *form* of the thesis. Most of the seminar will be devoted to this discussion, led primarily by the opponent, but with an opportunity for others to also ask their questions. See the **Edit Sheet** below for general questions to consider in your critical reading of the thesis.

The main aim here is that *the opponent's questions should lead to a discussion* which also allows the author of the essay to defend his/her essay. The opponent should therefore preferably pose critical points as questions, rather than statements, e.g.

"There is no mention of ethical considerations in your methodology section. Were there any ethical considerations?"

"Did your video recordings go perfectly according to plan?"

"How did you go about organizing all your examples?"

"Have you categorised *all* of your examples or were there some left over?"

"Have you thought of any future follow-up studies?"

*Try to make your questions as concrete as possible.*

4. At the end of the discussion, the opponent should make an **overall critical appraisal** of the essay, summing up both the strong and weak points of the essay. This should take **no longer than 5 minutes**. It should also be produced **in written form** (provide a copy for the examiner and author).

# Edit Sheet for the Ventilation Seminar

Critical questions about the **contents** of the essay may include the following:

1. Does the author really fulfil the proposed aim of the study as evident in the title or the introduction to the essay (e.g. as reflected in the research questions)?
2. Is the aim of the study clear and are the claims made in the study theoretically interesting or relevant? (Who cares?/So what?)
3. Is the investigation methodologically properly conducted? (Are the steps for gathering, organising and analysing the data satisfactorily documented? Did the author do what s/he should do when conducting scientific research?)
4. Do you think the study is, in principle, repeatable with the same or similar results? (If you did the study would you arrive at the same results and conclusions?)
5. Does the author need to expand or reduce any of the areas or sections? (Use the essay writing guidelines in this compendium *for each section in turn* to check whether anything is missing or superfluous.)
6. Are the contents of the essay properly focussed on the author's aims, claims and conclusions? Is there any irrelevant material presented in the essay (e.g. unused theoretical concepts, unnecessary diversions or lines of argument)?
7. Are the secondary sources properly quoted or summarised and are these quotations or summaries relevant to the author's argumentation? Are all relevant secondary sources included?
8. Are the claims made in the essay properly supported by the evidence given? (Do you believe the author's claim(s)?)
9. Can conclusions other than those made by the author be drawn from the evidence presented in the essay? Do these complement the conclusions made by the author or do they contradict the author's conclusions?
10. Does the discussion and conclusions section satisfactorily relate previous research to the findings of the present study? Is there any discussion of the implications of the main findings?

Critical comments and questions about the **form** of the essay may consist of the following:

1. Does the title match the contents and the proposed aim of the study?
2. Is the thesis logically structured? (Are the contents sorted into the appropriate sections of the thesis?)
3. Is there sufficient linking and signposting between paragraphs and sections\*?
4. Do the section headings and numbers in the main body of the text match the section headings and numbers in the table of contents\*?
5. Does the page numbering for the sections in the main body match the page numbering in the table of contents\*?
6. Are all charts, tables, figures, examples, etc. given in a clear and readable manner and are they properly labelled\* and numbered\* according to section or subsection?
7. Are all references properly cited and registered in the reference list according to Harvard reference style\*?
8. Is the language used in the essay stylistically and grammatically\* appropriate for scientific writing?

\* **Provide written feedback** on the points with an asterisk (provide a copy for the examiner and author). These don't easily lend themselves to an interesting discussion.





Linköping University  
Department of Culture and Communication  
English

*[First Name Surname]*

*[Main Title]*

**[Secondary Title – if applicable]**

[Swedish Translation of Main Title]

*[Swedish Translation of Secondary Title – if applicable]*

C Essay (Bachelor's Thesis)

Supervisor: [First Name Surname]

[Spring / Autumn Term 201?]