



## GUIDANCE ON ESSAY WRITING

Certain VCM examinations require written materials in the form of folios, essays or dissertations. For all such work the following guidance should be followed.

### Referencing

VCM hopes to encourage candidates in their learning and to establish good habits within it, including writing. All writing should refer to the original author as good academic practice and the Harvard Author-Date system with bibliography is preferred:

In-text citation - Author (Date, page number) or (Author, Date, page)

E.g. Bloggs (2008, p.54) or (Bloggs, 2008, p.54)

Bibliographical reference – Author. (Date) *Title* Location of publication, publisher

E.g. Bloggs, J. (2008) *My Life in Music*, London, London Music Press

All works cited or consulted should be included, in alphabetical order by author's surname in the bibliography. Referencing allows the assessor to see where your ideas have come from and to avoid problems like plagiarism.

Owing to word count restrictions try to keep quotations short. Large quotations should be placed either in footnotes or as appendices after the body of the essay and referred to as Appendix 1, etc. All material in an appendix should be referenced like the rest of the essay.

Further details can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parenthetical\\_referencing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parenthetical_referencing) . Specific queries such as how to reference particular sources can also be addressed direct to VCM for clarification.

### Formatting

Submissions should be in the following format to help the assessor read it more easily:

Font – Arial

Size – 12

Spacing – 1.5

Justification/alignment (including titles) – Left

Margins – Normal or wide

Header – This should include your name, essay title, grade and subject

Footer – This should include the page number for each page.

File format – Word compatible such as .doc, .docx or .rtf. Pdf scans are also acceptable.

Page size – A4

Entries should, where possible be submitted electronically to [entries@vcmexams.com](mailto:entries@vcmexams.com). If hard copies are submitted these must be single side print and **not** bound.

### Source materials

We encourage candidates to explore the wide range of materials now available in both print and digitally. Traditional print books, journals, scores, collections, anthologies and encyclopaedias are welcome but we also welcome the use of modern online material. Websites, blogs, video and audio (including YouTube etc.), digital journals, newspaper articles, live performance footage (CD/DVD/MP3) etc. are all acceptable for use and should be referenced as any other source. For all online sources the full URL and a date accessed should be given within the bibliography.

Candidates are advised to read as widely as possible around their subject prior to writing and use as many sources as possible.

### Folio, essay or dissertation?

Dependent upon the examination being undertaken, the writing required will take one of the following forms:

- Folio – A collection of notes, materials, thoughts, plans and reflections that make up a case study on a particular topic, usually over a set period of time and focused on an individual. These are generally set for lower level teaching diplomas. It should include a reflective conclusion assessing the case study. Case studies should, where possible, be real people; though if necessary it is acceptable to base a study on an imagined pupil.
- Essay – A piece of critical writing that engages with a specific topic and addresses issues arising from the writer’s research. It must deliver a single sustained argument that the candidate writes about in a clear, persuasive manner. It will be to a specific word count and must include a conclusion that draws the strands of the subject together. Where required the topic or topic area is usually given within the syllabus.
- Dissertation – Only set at Fellowship diploma, this is a substantial, sustained piece of writing on a pre-agreed topic of the candidate’s choice. The candidate must develop and engage critically to an advanced level equivalent to that expected for a master’s degree. A high level of subject knowledge and critical thinking is expected.
- Programme Notes – These should be short and to the point, giving brief biographical details of the composer and information about the work itself.

Further details on writing for VCM exams can be found in *Essay Writing for VCM Diplomas* available to purchase online from [www.VCMPublications.co.uk](http://www.VCMPublications.co.uk) For fuller details on academic writing in the arts *Music in Words, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* by Trevor Herbert, published by ABRSM.

### Results

A numerical mark is not awarded for written submissions. Work is either “approved” or “not approved”. Candidates receive an assessment sheet similar to that below, including the assessor’s comments.

In cases where all requirements of the diploma are met but the written work is “not approved”, the candidate will be notified in writing. Written work can be resubmitted and should take careful account of the assessor’s comments as guidance. Re-submissions attract a fee as shown on the current table of examination fees. Only when all the requirements of the examination are met, will the diploma be awarded.

## ASSESSMENT SHEET FOR ESSAY/FOLIO/THESIS

	LEFT BLOCK			RIGHT BLOCK	
	Definitely unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Marginally unsuccessful	Pass	Honours
<b>Evidence and depth of reading</b>	Minimal/narrow range of reading. Over reliance on the work of others	A narrow range of obvious sources	Reasonable reading but descriptive in nature	Appropriate range of background material	Thorough background reading
<b>Expression and grammar</b>	Poor	Some poor and inappropriate expression and grammar	Reasonable expression and grammar	Work is clearly expressed with just the odd grammatical error	Full and sustained work which is engaging
<b>Clarity of structure</b>	Chaotic and confusing	Lacks coherence	Generally adequate structure	Logical structure	Effective and logical structure
<b>Understanding of concepts</b>	Concepts are misunderstood	Some misunderstandings	Mostly understood but not applied adequately	Concepts understood and applied with a good viewpoint established	A critical understanding with well developed arguments
<b>Validity of deductions &amp; conclusions</b>	No conclusions	Simple conclusions with limited evaluation and reflection	Predictable conclusions with some evaluation of work	Sound conclusions with appropriate recommendations	Strong sustained conclusions with an excellent level of engagement

Examiner to tick one box:

	3 or more boxes ticked Left block	Not Approved
	3 or more boxes ticked Right block	Approved

**Candidates whose work is “not approved” but pass the other elements of the examination, may submit a further attempt for Assessment at the Essay resubmission fee - see Fee Table.**