

DISCUSSION ESSAY OVERVIEW

1st discussion essay NOTES on
structure and content
register (appropriateness)
language (accuracy)

Attention to all of the above promotes FLUENCY

Register – maintaining a more formal style

DON'T:

- use abbreviated forms (*don't, isn't, can't*)
- use the second person 'you' (address the reader directly)
- use the imperative form (*just think ..; consider that ..*)
- use rhetorical questions
- use exclamation marks
- overdo the inverted commas «» around words to mark them off (scare quotes)
- use colloquial expressions (*anyway, pretty good, a lot of*)
- find more creative ways to refer to the subject, e.g. to *Marx* as the German philosopher, the illustrious thinker, the father of communism etc etc: plain 'Marx' will suffice throughout.

Structure

Introduction: main components

- Give a reason why the topic is worth discussing
- Give some general information about it, perhaps
- Ideally, provide your thesis statement, i.e. the argument or point you will be developing in your essay; how you will interpret the essay question.

Good introductions

Introduction 1.

Karl Marx was one of the greatest thinkers of 19th century, whose works, centered around the idea that « the forms of society rise and fall as they further and the impede the development of human productive power », inspired the foundation of many communist regimes in the 20th century. He believed that history proceeds through a necessary series of modes of production, culminating in communism. According to German sociologist Reinhard Bendix (*“Social Stratification and Political Power”*- 1952), on the basis of his analysis of capitalism, Marx elaborated three main predictions that have been hotly debated since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991.

[the writer’s point of view only emerges from the discussion that follows; he proceeds to explain and discuss each of the three predictions in the main body of the essay, concluding that ‘as long as capitalism is alive, the communist hypothesis is far from extinct’]

Introduction 2.

Thomas Malthus was an English political economist who lived between the 18th and 19th century. In one of the author's most famous works, “An Essay on the Principle of Population”, which was published in 1798, his main theory can be clearly comprehended: according to the “Malthusian Theory of Population”, the world's population would increase so drastically that food would not be enough to feed the whole planet, leading to famine and starvation. In other words, the Malthusian theory links food supply growth to population, stating that if the latter increased faster than the former, vice and misery would be the obvious consequences of an out-of-control progress. But all things considered, was Malthus right?

[the writer goes on to argue in the next two paragraphs firstly how Malthus was wrong (in his inability to predict technological progress), then how he can be seen to be right, given the unequal distribution of food and other resources on the planet), concluding that Malthus was therefore partly right, but also wrong for the above reasons].

Main body

- Ensure the **transitions** between the paragraphs are clear
- Don't use pronouns to reference the subject of your initial (topic) sentence: use the full name
- Ensure your essay develops around your interpretation of the essay question

CONCLUSION

- DON'T bring in NEW information in your conclusion
- Ensure that your conclusion links up with your thesis statement (which usually appears in the introduction): the conclusion clinches your argument
- Re-formulate what essentially the main point(s) you have been making in the essay.

Good conclusions

Conclusion 1.

In conclusion, whether Malthus was right or wrong is hard to determine: his theories have never seen a direct feedback in real life and his figures were far from reality. However, people's attitude towards the planet may lead to a point of no return. Natural resources are not everlasting, and it is not possible to recreate them once they are gone. So, from heads of state with laws to citizens with everyday habits, everyone should do their best to preserve the world we live in from an exploitation which would have more serious consequences than those speculated by Malthus.

[the writer has argued in the previous paragraphs that although Malthus had not foreseen technological advances, man's unsustainable exploitation of the planet is leading to a situation not far from what Malthus had predicted]

Conclusion 2.

To conclude, Marx forecast the above, and many other things that demonstrate the modernity of his thought, making him one of the greatest thinkers of modern times. But his lessons should be intended to pave the way for a new world, one characterized by justice and fairness. Even if none of these lessons has ever been successfully applied, the hope in a better future should never be lost.

[the writer has discussed two of Marx's predictions which have come true – globalization and inequality – in the previous two paragraphs, and chosen a hortatory conclusion* which works well here, given the bleak situation he has described].

* Hortatory prose is about how the world *should be*; analytical exposition is about how the world *is*.

Language issues

Some common problems in the essays. First, the problem is presented underlined. On the next slide it is addressed.

Reference: non-defining clauses

Capitalism is a valid alternative to communism, that can be pursued without any constriction from the bourgeoisie.

Even though we are the inner workings of development, we should not forget the essential role of governments, institutions and NGOs, REF that are a true link between people's effort and fulfillment of a process which is spreading

Reference

Capitalism is a valid alternative to communism, ~~that~~ which can be pursued without any constraint from the bourgeoisie.

Even though we are the inner workings of development, we should not forget the essential role of governments, institutions and NGOs, REF ~~that~~ which are a true link between people's effort and fulfillment of a process which is spreading.

'That' is wrongly used here to introduce a non-defining relative clause: 'which' is correct in each case.

That can only substitute 'which' and 'who' when the relative clause is defining:

[The problem (that / which) I was discussing yesterday] is still unresolved.

[The scholar who / that wrote the paper] is no longer with us.

In the above 2 examples, the relative clause introduced by that/which or that/who is DEFINING i.e. part of the nominal group [], therefore either which /who or that can be used.

Articles

This prediction partly materialized in the Western Europe in the late 1960's, when the economic growth stopped: governments faced periods of civil unrest, punctuated by general strikes, demonstrations and occupation of factories, with the political support offered by socialist and communist parties.

This vision actually became reality (for example in USSR), as also happened for many of Marx's predictions.

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[the issue of articles will be dealt with in a separate class]

Tense + ability in the past

The labor movement has lost its strength through the years, while the socialist parties were moving toward social democracy, as demonstrated by the global financial crisis of 2008, when trade unions couldn't mobilize the mass they mobilized in the 1960's

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The clause *while the socialist parties ...* is past tense, so the main clause *The labor movement* should also be past tense:

While industrialisation was changing the appearance of the countryside, romantic painters like Constable tried to capture the landscape before it was blighted forever

Ability in the past

The labor movement ~~has~~ lost its strength through the years, while the socialist parties were moving toward social democracy, as demonstrated by the global financial crisis of 2008, when trade unions ~~couldn't~~ were able to mobilize the mass they mobilized in the 1960's.

We use 'could' for general ability in the past and 'was/were able to' for specific ability in the past:

I've always believed that learning to swim is important. John was walking along the canal one day and saw a child drowning in the water. Because he could swim, he was able to save the child.

'could swim' is general ability in the past.

'was able to save the child' is specific ability on a particular occasion.

Register

Based on these facts we could say that Thomas Malthus wasn't completely right, but we need to prevent and plan the way in which we produce our comfort if we don't want to destroy our planet. A good starting point could be to promote birth control by raising awareness of use of contraceptives .

Register

Based on these facts we could say that Thomas Malthus was not completely right, but we need to prevent and plan the way in which we produce our comfort if ~~we don't want to destroy~~ we wish to avoid the destruction of our planet. A good starting point could be to promote birth control by raising awareness of use of contraceptives.

In sophisticated writing, the use of nominalisation – nouns made from verbs – is conventional. So here, 'destroy' becomes 'destruction', and we move from a spoken-like register to a formal written register.

Word order + grammar / wrong word

We could learn that as much as we would like to be able to forecast the unfolding of historical events, it is far beyond our reckoning, but in no way this thought should lead us to withdrawal from our higher goals and political ideas.

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We could learn that as much as we would like to be able to forecast the unfolding of historical events, it is far beyond our reckoning, but in no way **should** this thought ~~should~~ lead us to ~~withdrawal from~~ **abandon** our higher goals and political ideas.

CAN YOU REFORMULATE THIS MORE SUCCINCTLY AND ELEGANTLY?

We could learn that as much as we would like to be able to forecast the unfolding of historical events, it is far beyond our reckoning, but in no way **should** this thought ~~should~~ lead us to ~~withdrawal from~~ **abandon** our higher goals and political ideas.

We could learn that our inability to forecast how history will unfold should not lead us to abandon our higher goals and political ideals.

Inversion with 'not only .. / only ...' 'in no way' ... 'never ..' and with expressions like 'rarely' 'seldom' 'never'

"Never was so much owed by so many to so few .."

Not only was the government effective in lowering taxes, but it also helped to reduce unemployment through careful measures.

Only when citizens adopt environmentally friendly behaviours will we be able to succeed in the fight to save the planet.

Grammar

According to the English economist, the increase of human beings will ensure that each of them will produce less and less resources and therefore the mass will be less and less able to self-sustain itself.

Grammar + economy

According to the English economist, the increase of human beings will ensure that each of them will produce ~~less and less~~ fewer and fewer / increasingly fewer resources and therefore the mass will be ~~less and less~~ increasingly unable to ~~self-sustain~~ support itself.

Less is used with uncountable nouns: less time, less information, less news, less evidence, less advice

Few is used with countable nouns: few people, few data, few countries

NB difference between 'a few' (*alcuni*) and 'few' (*pochi*): a few disagreed; few disagreed

Avoid the structure 'more and more + adjective (difficult / problematic)' Use increasingly difficult / problematic

Word order

Thomas Malthus, economist and demographer, who lived between the 18th and 19th centuries, certainly represents one of the most eminent theorists of his time, able to influence with his theories many other thinkers

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Thomas Malthus, economist and demographer, who lived between the 18th and 19th centuries, certainly represents one of the most eminent theorists of his time, able to influence ~~with his theories~~ many other thinkers **with his theories**.

Tense

Marx elaborated three main predictions that are under discussion since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991.

Karl Marx has been one of the greatest thinkers of 19th century.

Tense

Marx elaborated three main predictions that ~~are~~ **have been** under discussion since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991.

Present perfect with 'since': *Since 1991, Marx's ideas have been the focus of debate [they still are now]*

Karl Marx ~~has been~~ **was** one of the greatest thinkers of 19th century.

Past simple with finished past: Marx is dead and the 19th century has passed.

Articles, tense, wrong word

In conclusion, history of communism seems to contradict the predictions of Marx about where, when and how socialism has taken over ^ capitalism, but also demonstrates the adaptability of the socialist model in a context (Imperial Russia) totally different from the parameters predicted by Marx (Imperial Germany).

Articles, tense

In conclusion, **the** history of communism seems to contradict the predictions of Marx about where, when and how socialism **would take over from** capitalism, but also demonstrates the adaptability of the socialist model in a context (Imperial Russia) totally different from the parameters predicted by Marx (Imperial Germany)