

The field of education is extremely broad and throughout your studies you may be expected to prepare a variety of different assignments. Some of the assignments you might come across are:

- Critical analysis essays
- Argumentative essays
- Research essays
- Article and book reviews
- Personal reflections
- Literature reviews
- Presentations
- Lesson plans
- Workshops
- Reports
- Blog entries
- Opinion articles
- Videos: E.g. book trailers, short films, vlogs, instructional videos

## Essays

- **Critical analysis** essays, whereby you need to critically analyze and discuss some kind of point, issue or idea. You might need to consider differing perspectives or contexts.
- **Argumentative** essays, in which you argue a particular point.
- **Research** essays, in which you demonstrate your depth of understanding on a particular issue and provide insight.

All essays require a clear, argumentative thesis statement demonstrated through an organized development of arguments that relate to the main claim to be made. You might be asked to “evaluate,” or “critically assess” and may need to include multiple sub-questions to ensure that you effectively cover the scope of the topic.

Research and understanding of the literature and/or perspectives on the problem are necessary. Try to narrow the scope of your argument and offer sufficient examples (from case studies, citations or sources, text analysis) to demonstrate your claims in an in-depth and focused way.

## Article and book reviews

Article and book reviews involve identifying and critically assessing the thesis made by the author of the article/book and the arguments provided to support the thesis. There is some summary, but the emphasis is on a critical reflection on the meaning, significance and implications of the arguments or ideas made in the article/book.

With regard to book reviews in particular, you should think about who the intended audience is (e.g. pre-K teachers, Grade 6 students etc.) and whether or not the book would be interesting, useful and/or relevant to them.

## Personal reflections

Part of being a good teacher means constantly reflecting critically on your practice and experiences. You will be expected to consider your experiences critically, reflecting on worked well, what didn't, why this was the case, how you might improve, and you will often be expected to tie this to appropriate educational theory.



Personal reflections should still conform to typical writing standards, including having a clear thesis statement, introduction/conclusion and paragraphs. While they are personal in nature, you should also be sure that the tenor of your writing doesn't fall into the conversational.

Great guide to writing reflective papers:

- <https://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/documents/Reflectivewriting.pdf>

## Literature reviews

A literature review is a summary and explanation of the complete and current state of knowledge on a particular topic. A literature review requires surveying the field thoroughly and providing an overview of many academic books and journal articles in order to come to a conclusion, and identify where further research is heading or any potential gaps of knowledge.

A literature review might be:

- a stand-alone assignment in a course, or
- in preparation for a longer work such as a thesis or research report.

## Presentations

Presentations involve giving information to an audience in the form of a speech.

It is always a good idea to not just prepare your presentation, but practice it as well. Practice what you are going to say aloud, and it is a good idea to enlist the help of a friend to give you feedback on your speaking as well. Try to enunciate your words clearly, speak in a comfortable manner that is not too fast nor too slow, modulate your voice so as to avoid a monotone, and give your audience a good amount of eye contact. Try to be as engaging and as confident as possible.

It is always a good idea to include visual aids (such as notes, charts, PowerPoints, images etc.) to ensure that your information is presented in a way that is easily understood by your audience, all of whom will learn and absorb that information in different ways.

DO NOT simply put your speech in a PowerPoint and read the notes to your audience! This is boring and you will lose your audience's engagement very quickly! You should have a good grasp of what you are talking about; the notes in your slides are there for your audience as a summary of the main ideas.

Include your audience in your presentation. Ask them questions, ask them for their opinions on various matters etc. If your presentation is long, or if you are teaching people something, it can also be useful to include some kind of experiential activity that is relevant to your topic.

Some more useful tips for giving presentations can be found here:

- <http://www.d.umn.edu/~jgallian/goodPPtalk.pdf>
- [http://postdocs.stanford.edu/education/Scientific%20Management%20Series/Presentation\\_Sue%20McConnell.ppt](http://postdocs.stanford.edu/education/Scientific%20Management%20Series/Presentation_Sue%20McConnell.ppt)



## Lesson plans

The writing and formatting of lesson plans is very context dependent. For example, on your first few practicums you might be expected to produce detailed plans including teacher talk, what students are doing, time limits for activities, materials/resources required, specific questions you will ask students etc. This level of detail is really important when you are building your skills as you need to be able to think about all of the variables in a classroom and they they can affect your lesson. Professors and supervising teachers want to see your thought process. When you are actually employed in a school, your lesson plans will most probably be much briefer as you will have a good understanding of all of the factors that impact lessons and a natural feel for how long an activity might take, what questions to ask students etc.

Lesson plans differ quite a bit depending on the subject you are teaching. Lesson plans for Math, Drama, Social Studies and Art all look very different! Ask your professor or supervising teacher if they have a preferred format for lesson plans. Often they will provide you with templates and models.

It is also important to remember that lesson plans are working documents. They should be user friendly and meaningful to you as a teacher. If your lesson plan is overly complicated or difficult to understand it is not going to be helpful to you.

## Workshops

Workshops can be very similar to lessons but are generally 'one off' experiences, whereas lessons tend to have sequential qualities. Workshops can be developed and implemented for all kinds of groups including school students, community groups, your colleagues etc. Things to consider when planning a workshop include:

- The participants. Consider what kinds of learning experiences, language choices, materials etc. would be appropriate for the people who will be participating in your workshop.
- The purpose of your workshop. What do you want your participants to take away from your workshop? What do you want them to learn and achieve in the time you have together? How are you going to do this?
- Learning materials. Would it be best to use a PowerPoint presentation? Or would a handout work more effectively? Are your participants just sitting down listening to you for 60 mins? Can you create opportunities for them to talk and engage with each other? Would it be effective to include some practical and experiential activities?
- Time. How long do you have with your participants? 30min? 3 hours? There will only be so much work you can cover and it is important to ensure that you simultaneous don't overwhelm your participants with information, or allow them to become bored. Consider what information is most important and which activities will most effectively make use of the time you have available.

## Reports

A report is a formal, analytical and structured piece of writing that usually presents the findings of some research, an enquiry, or an information gathering process. Reports are often thought of as being mainly scientific and technical, but they can be produced in any subject area. In education, you could come across reports that examine the state of First Nations education in Canada, adult literacy in rural areas, or young people's engagement with Canadian theatre for young people.

Your instructor should provide you with a clear format for report writing, however a useful guide can also be found here:



- <http://www.bradford.ac.uk/academic-skills/media/academicsskillsadvice/documents/academicsskillsresources/writing-reports/Infosheet-Report-Writing-for-UGs.pdf>

## **Blog entries / opinion articles**

You might be required to produce a series of blog entries as an assignment for a course. The mode, length and general requirements for this kind of assignment will vary and your instructor should give you a good idea of what they are looking for. These kinds of assignments usually require ongoing work over the course of the semester and might have sequential qualities (e.g. you might be asked to show how your thoughts, ideas, opinions etc. have changed as a result of engaging with the course content).

An opinion article is similar to a blog in the sense that it can be a more informal and personal genre to write in about a particular topic, however, unlike a series of blog entries, an opinion article is normally a stand alone piece of writing.

Just like an essay, a blog or opinion article should have a central focus or thesis statement, paragraphs, and follow conventional writing formats. Just because these genres are more informal in nature doesn't mean that you ramble on with disparate points or ideas. It is also important to consider the tenor of the piece. You can be personal without being overly conversational.

## **Videos: E.g. book trailers, short films, vlogs, instructional videos**

Part of being a good teacher means being up-to-date with technology and thinking about contemporary and innovative ways that you can engage your students in learning. Your instructors think about this too and might encourage you to produce assignments in a more practical form.

Your instructor should be able to provide you with examples of what these kinds of assignments might look like, but there are many available for you to find online as well. There are also lots of cheap or free software platforms that you can use to help create your video-based assignment, including:

- Garage Band
- Movie Maker
- iMovie
- Lightworks
- VideoPad Video Editor

There is no need to be intimidated by these kinds of assignments if they are new to you! This can be a fun learning experience where you can pick up new skills that will be invaluable to you as a teacher. Most of people have phones or laptops that record video, so the equipment you will need should be easily available.

You can also rent audio visual equipment at UVic:

<https://www.uvic.ca/systems/support/avmultimedia/equipmentrentals/>

