



write@uni

Annotated Asian Studies essay

Contents

1. Annotated example of an Asian Studies Essay.
2. Guidelines about essay writing, with examples from the Asian Studies Essay.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Please note that this paper cannot be further copied and used, as copyright for this work remains with the student who wrote it.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Understanding and answering the **essay question** is imperative for attaining good marks! The first two components of this particular question prefaced with 'In what ways' is very open. This phrase signals to students that they are expected to **discover for themselves** the positive and negative changes to Chinese people's lives since the Mao period. The rest of the question emphasises the importance of students referring to the **academic literature to justify their argument**. Unlike sources such as Wikipedia, academic texts have been through a stringent checking process.

The **thesis statement** outlines the specific claim to be defended in the essay through reasoning and by providing evidence (Rowland, 2016). As demonstrated in this example, the thesis statement can also list the subtopics to be addressed in the order that they are to appear in the essay.

In what ways are Chinese lives better now than during the Mao period (1949-1978)? In what ways are they more difficult? Justify your argument with specific examples from the academic literature.

Chinese lives have changed **dramatically** since the **Mao period**. While the rapid changes have improved life for Chinese people, the benefits have not been equally distributed, and old challenges have been replaced with new ones. Characteristics valued for a 'quality life' include wealth, good nutrition, available health care, quality education, job security, freedom of job choice, and opportunities for entertainment and shopping. This essay will discuss the benefits and challenges of changes to Chinese poverty, nutrition, economic equality, education, healthcare, the **iron rice bowl**,¹ leisure and consumption.

The **introductory paragraph** provides the context, introduces the topic, and defines the thesis (point of view) and scope of the essay. The introduction is normally about 10 – 15% of the total essay length.

The **topic sentence** in the introductory paragraph provides the context and background for the essay. Here, the writer captures the readers' attention by simply highlighting that these changes have been dramatic for Chinese people since the Mao period.

Note the use of **signposting** in the final sentence which signals to the reader the overall essay organisation and what will be covered in each of the body paragraphs.

¹ Secure state jobs

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

The **body of an essay** consists of a number of paragraphs in which the writer addresses each subtopic in turn. In this essay the subtopics are listed in the concluding sentence of the introduction.

Peasants in Mao's era experienced **extreme** poverty, which is much less prevalent today. The proportion of rural population below the poverty line has dropped from 33 per cent in 1976 to 3.6 per cent in 2009.² **Collective agriculture** meant less productivity.³ The state took over trade, and ended rural markets which had contributed to peasants' incomes.⁴ Now that **collective agriculture** has been abolished, production has increased, and peasants also have the option of added income, **because** **sideline enterprises** and small businesses are allowed and even encouraged. The rural impoverishment in Mao's time was ultimately unsustainable, and there was a lack of significant improvements in farmer's living standards.⁵ **Although** the struggles of the poor have not been eliminated, they have decreased, and peasant's incomes have risen greatly, especially in coastal regions.⁶

This paragraph begins with a **topic sentence**, which is a general statement indicating what will be discussed within a particular paragraph. Here, the writer signals that she is to address the subtopic of poverty.

Throughout this paragraph the writer **supports her argument** by providing **direct evidence from the literature** for each point she makes in the form of direct quotes or paraphrases. All of the references to the literature in this paragraph are **information prominent** (i.e., the author's name is not mentioned in the body of the text) because the writer wants to put the emphasis on the **information**, not the author.

See how the writer **positions herself** in this essay as being quite **certain** of the claims she is making because she is reporting on a well-documented and recognised historical context and current situation. Therefore, there is no need for her to use hedging devices such as "perhaps" and "seems".

Here, the writer **strengthens her claim** by using the adverb "significantly".

Note the use of the **Chicago referencing style** in this essay. Footnote numbers are used in the text to show another person's ideas or words. This number directs the reader to a footnote at the bottom of the page where footnotes are placed in numerical order; these include the authors' names, details of the works cited, and relevant page numbers.

Today nutrition in China is **significantly** better than it was during Mao's time. Robert Ash's study on rural living standards reveals that, "Even... at the end of Mao's life food consumption for most farmers remained within the subsistence range."⁷ During the **Great**

In contrast to the previous paragraph, the writer has used an **author-prominent** citation here. She has done this to draw attention to the name of the researcher who conducted the study she is citing.

² Patricia B. Ebrey. *China: A Cultural, Social and Political History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 288; Jin Zhu, "China to raise its poverty line," *China Daily*, accessed May 5, 2013. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-10/28/content_11467561.htm.

³ Ebrey, *China: A Cultural*, 283.

Lowered productivity was detrimental for farmers who faced high grain extraction from the government.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ash, Robert, "Squeezing the Peasants: Grain Extraction, Food Consumption and Rural Living Standards in Mao's China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 188, (2006): 98, doi: 10.1017/S0305741006000518

⁶ Ebrey, *China: A Cultural*, 300.

⁷ Ash, *Squeezing the Peasants*, 983.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Leap Forward, many people, especially peasants, "were left with less than half of what they needed to survive."⁸ Today, improvements in nutrition have led to an increase in the average height of Chinese.⁹ From 1959-1962, over thirty million unnecessary deaths occurred due to food shortages, as well as more deaths afterwards due to long years of malnutrition.¹⁰ Life expectancy has risen from "about 41 years in 1950... to 73 years in 2006."¹¹ This **dramatic** improvement in nutrition **is** a sign of better lives in China today.

Although the Chinese have become richer and healthier, the relative economic equality during Mao's time has been replaced by a widening gap between the rich and the poor. **Rightists** suffered then, and the unemployed suffer today. Land distribution and communes during the early Mao period almost eliminated economic inequality. **However**, it also provided a chance for "**land reform activists**" to take revenge on their enemies, and **thus** created social inequality.¹² Landlords and rich peasants suffered **greatly**, losing their land and receiving punishments, sometimes as severe as execution.¹³ **In addition**, those descended from landlords were denied leadership positions.¹⁴ In place of this social injustice, today's economic inequalities cause psychological problems for the poor and middle classes. China has an increasing economic gap, in which an **extremely** small proportion of the population own a major proportion of the wealth.¹⁵ The majority of urban salaried workers and rural labourers feel "angry" and have a sense of injustice due to high income inequality.¹⁶ **Despite** relative financial equality in Mao's day, landlords and rich peasants suffered social injustice, while currently those who are less well-off suffer psychologically from the widening economic gap.

Despite overall improvements to China's healthcare system, the dismantling of communes had negative consequences for the rural poor in the area of healthcare. **Although** poorly educated, '**barefoot doctors**' were once paid for by the communes.

⁸ Ebrey, China: A Cultural, 288.

⁹ Ibid., 299.

¹⁰ Ibid., 288; Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China (New York: Norton, 1990), 583.

¹¹ Xiaoling Shu, and Yifei Zhu, "The Quality of Life in China," *Social Indicators Research* 92, no. 2 (2009):194, doi:10.1007/s 11205-008-9350-4

¹² Ebrey, China: A Cultural, 283.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Edward Vernoff, and Peter J. Seybolt. eds, "The Private Economy," in Through Chinese Eyes: Tradition, Revolution, and Transformation (New York: CITE Books, 2007), 227.

¹⁶ Ibid., 224.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

"Many of the free public health services provided to the rural population have disappeared, and healthcare has become largely a private fee-for-service industry."¹⁷ Because of this, many peasants cannot afford even basic medicine or treatment, and must borrow money to pay a deposit before being admitted to hospital.¹⁸ Although in general China's healthcare has improved, the rural poor have suffered due to unaffordability.

The communes brought education to the countryside, improving the literacy rate, but education nevertheless suffered during Mao's time, and was not as established as it is today. During the Great Leap Forward, children were forcedly taken away from lessons in order to produce steel for 'modernization'.¹⁹ Later, during the Cultural Revolution, schools were closed for the "revolutionary struggle," and teachers were brutally attacked.²⁰ The government now runs a nine-year compulsory education programme.²¹ However, there is still "uneven access to education between urban and rural areas."²² Many people struggle to find enough money to send their children to high school or university. This struggle contributes to the continued economic inequality. While education today is more accessible than during much of the Mao period, it now presents a problem to the poor, who struggle to afford education.

During the Mao period, Chinese workers experienced the stability of the iron rice bowl, whereas today workers have more freedom but less stability. Workers were assigned to jobs in state owned enterprises, where they had guaranteed life time job security and steady income, as well as health insurance, housing, pension and other benefits.²³ Private enterprises, which are very common today, are less stable and do not provide the same benefits as state owned enterprises do. However, the security and benefits of the iron rice bowl came at the expense of personal mobility and job choice, due to controls over travel and the difficulty of changing assigned jobs.²⁴

¹⁷ Shu, *The Quality of Life*, 194.

¹⁸ Ebrey, *China: A Cultural*, 302

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 283; Alan Lawrance, *China since 1919: Revolution and Reform* (London: Routledge, 2004), 170.

²⁰ Spence, *The Search*, 605.

²¹ Shu, *The Quality of Life*, 194.

²² Jongsung Kim, "Income Inequality in China," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2010): 29-50. doi: 30.216.158.78

*Migrant labourers are sometimes even charged 'mandatory donations' for sending their children to primary school.

²³ Richard H. Price, Jin Nam Choi and Sandy Lim, "Beyond the Iron Rice Bowl." in *Unemployment in China: Economy, human resources and labour markets*, ed. Grace O. M. Lee, and Malcolm Warner (New York: Routledge, 2007), 108.; Linsun Cheng, ed. *Huai River to Old Prose Movement*, vol. 3 of *Berkshire encyclopedia of China: modern and historic views of the world's newest and oldest global power* (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Pub. Group, 2009), 1183-4.

²⁴ Spence, *The Search*, 547.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Because jobs are no longer assigned by the state, workers have greater flexibility and choice in employment, with more freedom to work in different cities.

Although unemployment was dealt with in Mao's time, there were major difficulties for rightists, while today the unemployed struggle. Millions who disagreed with government policy, or were simply labelled as such, had no influence at their jobs, or were sent to hard labour in the countryside.²⁵ China's rapid shift towards private enterprise has brought about many new challenges, not for rightists, but for both rural and urban workers. These challenges include the stress of job-searching and unemployment, which can reduce mental health, and lead to dissatisfaction and a lost sense of security.²⁶ While many workers experience more freedom today, employment difficulties have shifted from the rightists to the unemployed, who suffer from instability and frustration.

Leisure in Mao's time was limited and tightly controlled, especially during the Cultural Revolution, but today's entertainment opportunities are abundant. With highly structured, long working hours in Mao's time, people had little time to experience entertainment.²⁷ Today, people have more time for leisure, due to the promotion of two-day weekends, and longer national holidays.²⁸ In Mao's day, meals took place in public mess halls, and tea houses were destroyed, whereas today many people have the freedom to eat at home, buy street food, or dine in any kind of restaurant at their leisure.²⁹ Books and artwork were put to flame, and "foreign music, art, literature, and books ... disappeared from stores," replaced only with revolutionary works such as Jiang Qing's model operas and the works of Communist leaders.³⁰ While some creative leisure continued underground, it was limited and punishable. Today, all kinds of foreign and local news, writing, music and artwork are available in stores or at the click of a button. Shopping in malls and browsing online stores is now prevalent as a form of entertainment. Restaurant dining, theme parks,

²⁵ Ebrey, China: A Cultural, 287.

²⁶ Price, "Beyond the Iron Rice Bowl." 108.; Rachel Murphy, and Ran Tao, "No land and no wage: Unemployment in Rural China." in Unemployment in China: Economy, human resources and labour markets, ed. Grace O. M. Lee, and Malcolm Warner. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 136.

*The older unemployed find this stress particularly challenging, as "all [they] wanted was an iron rice bowl." Price, "Beyond the Iron Rice Bowl." 113.

²⁷ Kevin Latham, "Consumption and Leisure." in Handbook of Contemporary China, ed. William S Tay, and Alvin Y So (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2012), 412.

²⁸ Ibid, 414.

²⁹ Lawrance, China Since 1919, 162.

³⁰ Ebrey, China: A Cultural, 281,294.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

See how the writer **strengthens her claims** by using the adverbial phrase "far beyond the reach of" and the adverbs "greatly" and "widely".

Note the way in which the writer skilfully develops a **coherent and logical argument** in this section. Each sentence is clearly connected to the preceding one. The writer achieves coherence by:

- (1) **elaborating on a claim**; e.g., The writer's claim "spending focussed on essentials such as food ..." is elaborated on in the next sentence with the statement, "Necessities such as rice, flour and oil ..."
- (2) **using a noun phrase** which sums up a previous thought; e.g., "This increase in options ..."
- (3) **using a transition signal** at the beginning of a sentence; e.g., "However". This transition signal indicates that a contrasting idea will be presented.

and travel holidays have become affordable for many Chinese, not just the wealthy in urban areas, although some leisure activities are **far beyond the reach of** most Chinese.³¹

Consumer goods were **greatly** limited throughout Mao's time, **whereas** a variety of consumer goods from necessary to luxury are **widely** available today. In Mao's time, spending focussed on essentials, such as food (over two-thirds of total spending), clothing and fuel, with minimal amounts left to "purchase other items."³² Necessities such as rice, flour and oil, were "rationed and distributed by the state," and other consumer goods were often not available.³³ Even among middle and lower class Chinese, an extensive range of consumption has now become common place. Even consumer services, such as personal training and language classes abound today.³⁴ This increase in options for consumer is a **great** improvement for Chinese consumers, who now have more freedom.

However, the open availability of luxury consumer goods has also brought problems for those who see luxury, but cannot afford it. In Mao's era, some officials could buy items not available to the common people, but this was only

Note the **switch** here between the **past** ("were") **and present** ("are") **tense**. Switches like this occur throughout this essay as the writer seeks to contrast the lives of Chinese people in the Mao period with how they are today.

See how the writer begins two sentences with the same adverb "even". Normally writers would **avoid using the same word as a sentence starter** in the same paragraph. However, in this case the adverb "even" is repeated to emphasise the change in food consumption and consumer services today compared to the time of Mao.

Note the use of the **modal verbs** "cannot" and "could". Both are used in reference to the possibility of something happening; "can" indicates possibility in the present time and "could" indicates possibility in the past.

³¹ Latham, "Consumption and Leisure." 424.

³² Ash, Squeezing the Peasants, 990.

³³ Latham, "Consumption and Leisure." 412.

³⁴ Ibid., 414.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Here, the writer makes a **tentative claim** by using the verb "tend". If she wanted to make a stronger claim, she could have said, "they are more negative ..."

The **concluding paragraph** provides the opportunity for the writer to signal that this is the end of the essay, sum up the argument, and restate the thesis.

Note the use of the **present tense** and **present perfect** here: "has brought" and "has improved". The **present perfect** has been used here to refer to an action which started in the past which is still of current relevance.

See how there is **no reference to the literature** in the concluding paragraph. This is because the writer is **summing up her argument** in this paragraph and not introducing any new thoughts.

done in **secret stores**.³⁵ Today 'luxury spending' on items such as expensive cars, villas, and designer clothing is not only widely available, but openly observed by all citizens through the media.³⁶ **Since** urban residents are exposed to wealth and "commercial advertising, they **tend** to be more negative in their ... evaluations of life quality," and less satisfied.³⁷ **While** even luxury consumption is more accessible today, it also brings dissatisfaction for those who cannot afford luxury items, especially urban residents.

China has a **dramatically** lower poverty and malnutrition rate than during Mao's day. **Though** quite poor, people once experienced better economic equality. **Despite** improvement in wealth, today's widening economic gap has brought a sense of injustice for the poor. **Although** healthcare has improved, it is no longer provided by the government for free, so it presents great difficulties for those who cannot afford basic medicine or hospital treatment. Education is more predominant today, but the poor struggle to afford education for their children, which increases economic inequality. People have more freedom of job choice than in the Mao period, but instability is a challenge, especially for the unemployed. New forms of leisure and consumption

Note the **switch** between **passive** ("are exposed") and **active voice** ("tend") here. The passive voice enables the writer to focus on the *result* of the action (are exposed to wealth and "commercial advertising"), rather than *who* did it, and the active voice enables the writer to focus on the *doer* or *performer* of the action (they).

See how the writer skilfully **concludes her essay** by briefly addressing **each subtopic in turn** in the order in which it was addressed in the essay. The writer follows a similar pattern for each sentence to make the text more readable. She first describes the change and then points out a negative aspect of it; e.g., (1) "Although healthcare has improved" (change), it is no longer provided by the government for free (negative aspect). (2) "People have more freedom of job choice ..." (change) "but instability is a challenge" (negative aspect).

³⁵ Ebrey, China: A Cultural, 287.

³⁶ Latham, "Consumption and Leisure." 414.

³⁷ Shu, The Quality of Life, 219-220.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

See how the writer skilfully sums up the entire essay argument in the **concluding sentence**. The transition signal "overall" indicates to the reader that she is summing up her whole argument. By comparing this sentence to the second sentence of the introduction you can see that the writer is restating the essay thesis: "While the rapid changes have improved life for Chinese people, the benefits have not been equally distributed, and old challenges have been replaced with new ones."

provide pleasure for all Chinese, but a negative result is dissatisfaction, especially for urban residents who cannot afford the signs of wealth they see around them. **Overall**, today Chinese people experience a better quality life than in Mao's time, especially those in coastal cities, but old problems have been replaced with challenges resulting from instability, inequality and insufficient finances, especially for the rural poor and the unemployed, but even for urban residents.

Word count: 1,642

Note the writer's skilful use of **vocabulary** here as each adverb or adjective begins with the prefix "in-". This prefix means "not" or "the opposite of". Learning the meaning of prefixes can help both with comprehending course readings and skilfully producing well-written text.

Note the inclusion of the **word count**, something students are often expected to provide. Do your best to keep to the word count, although you may be allowed to write 10% more or less words. Do not make the mistake of thinking "the more words the better"!

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Essay writing

The above text is an excellent example of an academic essay. This particular essay was written for an Asian Studies course assignment and achieved a high grade because careful consideration was given to the following:

Structure and coherence

As this example illustrates, essays must be well-structured and coherent so that each idea clearly links to the one that precedes it and the one that follows. Essays normally have the following sections: introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The introductory paragraph provides the context, introduces the topic, and defines the thesis (point of view). The body paragraphs give the writer the opportunity to address each subtopic in turn. The concluding paragraph provides the opportunity for the writer to signal that this is the end of the essay, sum up the argument, and restate the thesis.

Within the broad structure of an essay, it is important to develop a coherent argument that clearly links one idea to another. This can be done in a number of ways:

Signposting

One way to develop a coherent argument is through “signposting”, through which the writer signals to the reader what is coming next in the essay or how the essay is being organised as a whole. For example, the writer clearly signals the overall essay organisation in the introductory paragraph:

This essay will discuss the benefits and challenges of changes to Chinese poverty, nutrition, economic equality, education, healthcare, the iron rice bowl,¹ leisure and consumption.

Through this sentence, it is possible to see the subtopics that will be addressed in the essay in the order in which they appear (with the exception of education and healthcare, which are addressed in the reverse order).

Transition signals

Coherence can also be achieved through the use of “transition signals” or “connecting words” that smooth the transition from one idea to another and provide logical links between sentences. Such transitional signals include these adverbs: however, while, whereas, and although; e.g.,

Despite improvement in wealth, today’s widening economic gap has brought a sense of injustice for the poor. Although healthcare has improved ...

An additional way to signal transition is to use a pronoun such as “it”, “this” or “these”. If using a pronoun, however, check that the meaning is clear as in the following example where the pronoun “it” is used in the second half of a sentence and clearly represents “healthcare”:

Although healthcare has improved, it is no longer provided by the government for free, so it presents great difficulties for those who cannot afford basic medicine or hospital treatment.

Otherwise, if the meaning of the pronoun is not clear, it is preferable to repeat the noun or use a synonym or a noun phrase, as shown in this example:

China’s rapid shift towards private enterprise has brought about many new challenges, not for rightists, but for both rural and urban workers. These challenges include the stress of job-searching and unemployment, which can reduce mental health, and lead to dissatisfaction and a lost sense of security.²⁶

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Clear expression of the writer's opinion or "voice"

The writer's "voice" or opinion is clearly expressed in this essay even though the essay is written in the third person. Indeed, as this essay shows, it is not necessary to use "I" to make your opinion clear. Rather it is possible to express your views by using words that express certainty (thus making a strong claim) or uncertainty (thus making a weak or tentative claim).

Strong claims are made by using adverbs that have a strong meaning (e.g., dramatically, extremely). These adverbs along with their adjective counterparts (i.e., dramatic, extreme) are sometimes referred to as "boosters" or "intensifiers". As the following example shows, when making such a claim in the essay, the writer provides evidence for the claim she makes:

Today nutrition in China is significantly better than it was during Mao's time. Robert Ash's study on rural living standards reveals that, "Even... at the end of Mao's life food consumption for most farmers remained within the subsistence range."⁷

Weak or tentative claims can be made by using "hedging" devices such as "perhaps", "may" and "tends". Hedging is a way that writers can express uncertainty, avoid drawing unjustified conclusions and acknowledge that they are not experts; e.g.,

Since urban residents are exposed to wealth and "commercial advertising, they tend to be more negative in their ... evaluations of life quality," and less satisfied.

The extent to which hedging is used in essays is related to the topic of the essay and the room for interpretation within the topic. In this essay, the writer is primarily reporting on a well-documented and recognised historical context and current situation and, therefore, takes a more assertive approach.

Careful attention to verb forms

Writing an excellent essay requires the writer to give careful consideration to tense (present, past), aspect (simple, perfect, progressive), voice (active and passive) and use of modals (e.g., might, could). Each of these serve a variety of functions in academic essays. Indeed, the writer can switch between different verb forms even within or between sentences for specific purposes. Verb forms used in the essay include the simple present and simple past, present perfect, past perfect, modal verbs, and passive voice. A brief overview of the reasons why different verb forms are used is given below.

Tense

The most frequently used tense in this essay is the present tense. The present simple is used for:

- (1) describing something of current relevance; e.g.,
Today nutrition in China is significantly better ...
- (2) referring to generally accepted ideas e.g.,
China has a dramatically lower poverty and malnutrition rate than during Mao's day.

The past simple tense is used to refer to events that have been completed in the past; e.g.,

The state took over trade, and ended rural markets ...

There are constant shifts between the tenses in this essay as the writer contrasts the past situation (landlords and rich peasants suffered social injustice) with the present (currently those who are less well-off suffer psychologically):

Despite relative financial equality in Mao's day, landlords and rich peasants suffered social injustice, while currently those who are less well-off suffer psychologically from the widening economic gap.

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Aspect

The present perfect refers to an action which started in the past and is still of current relevance; e.g.,

Chinese lives have changed dramatically since the Mao period.

The past perfect refers to an action which started and finished in the past before another action took place in the past:

The state took over trade, and ended rural markets which had contributed to peasants' incomes.⁴

Modal verbs

Modal verbs are used for a number of reasons which include:

- (1) showing the intention of the writer; e.g.,

This essay will discuss the benefits and challenges of changes to Chinese poverty, nutrition, economic equality, education, healthcare, the iron rice bowl, leisure and consumption.

- (2) Indicating the possibility of something happening; e.g.,

Because of this, many peasants cannot afford even basic medicine or treatment,

- (3) Indicating necessity

and must borrow money to pay a deposit before being admitted to hospital.¹⁸

Although not used for this purpose in this essay, modal verbs such as "may" or "might" can also be used to make tentative claims or statements.

Voice

The active voice is often used in essay writing because it places the focus of the sentence on the *doer* or *performer* of the action ("Chinese workers") rather than the receiver of the action ("the stability of the iron rice bowl"); e.g.,

During the Mao period, Chinese workers experienced the stability of the iron rice bowl...

The passive voice is used when the writer wants to focus on the *result* of the action (closed for the revolutionary struggle) rather than on *who* did it; e.g.,

Later, during the Cultural Revolution, schools were closed for the "revolutionary struggle," and teachers were brutally attacked.²⁰

Sometimes, however, the actor ("the communes") is identified in the passive:

Although poorly educated, 'barefoot doctors' were once paid for by the communes.

Specialised vocabulary

As this example shows, an important feature of a well-written essay is that specialised vocabulary is correctly used. Indeed, as an essay for Asian Studies, this essay includes a number of subject specific terms; e.g., "Great Leap Forward", "barefoot doctors" and "iron rice bowl".

Using specialised vocabulary means that the word's (or phrase's) correct form is used in an appropriate collocations; that is, with words that frequently combine together; As shown in the following examples, the term 'iron rice bowl' can be described in terms of 'stability' and 'benefits':

During the Mao period, Chinese workers experienced the stability of the iron rice bowl. ...

However, the security and benefits of the iron rice bowl came at the expense of personal mobility and job choice ...

Annotation key

Tentative claims

Strong Claims

Transition signals

Specialised vocabulary

Given the importance of correctly using specialised vocabulary, you may find it useful to build a glossary with these words and focus on learning their meaning, the words they frequently collocate with, and their various forms.

Referencing style

Also of importance is the need to pay special attention to referencing and to ensure that you consistently follow the referencing style of your discipline. In this essay, the Chicago referencing style is used. Numbered superscript figures are used within the text to refer to the full reference; e.g.,

Necessities such as rice, flour and oil, were “rationed and distributed by the state,” and other consumer goods were often not available.³³

The full reference is given on the same page below the text in the footnotes; e.g.,

³³ Latham, “Consumption and Leisure.” 412.