

The Required Academic Essay (EOH/MPH)

In the context of an academic (graduate-level) piece of work in an applied science one should think of an ‘essay’ in the following terms. It should be a short (20-25 pages double-spaced text + figures, excluding references) composition, analytical or interpretive in nature, but dealing with the subject in a limited and not overly technical fashion (< 1/3 data, figures, tables *etc.*). That is, simply expanding a research report is not acceptable.

[*Note:* In a non-academic setting, the purpose behind a report might very well be to help your company/organization offer a better product, or service, to customers – this could simply involve summarizing existing literature, filling in some gaps in technical information, or devising a plan of how some other employee(s) might do this. However, the academic essay requires that you go further.]

An acceptable essay can be either balanced or opinionated, but will contain at least 6 distinct sections and conform to the following criteria:

1) Title Page – title of essay, author’s name, submission date, readers’ names.

2) Introduction – subject matter, public-health relevance, statement of purpose, intended readership? (1-2 pages)

There should be some statement of objectives; including, why the particular subject was chosen, its relevance to environmental or occupational public health, the targeted readership and why the approach employed has been selected (data mining, literature review, experimental, field work, pure *a priori* reasoning, or whatever).

3) Review – the bigger picture, then the little picture. (8-10 pages)

Broad review with references of why the subject is of interest, especially in the context of public health; followed by a more narrowly focused treatment relevant to the material in the next (analytical) section.

4) Analytical Section – data, analysis, interpretation *etc.* (8-10 pages)

It is not necessary to present a detailed description of ‘methods’; if important, such details can be included in the legends to figures, or notes in tables.

5) Concluding Remarks – conclusions, critique, opinions, suggestions *etc.* (3-5 pages)

The essay should end with one or more firm conclusions, or strong statements of opinion, plus critique of any relevant existing dogma and suggestions of how things could be done differently in the future – simply summarizing what has already been written is not good enough. This section is where you demonstrate your master’s-level competence as an emerging public health professional.

6) Bibliography

Websites are to be discouraged, but if used, the date of access should be included. Reputable government websites, such as those of ATSDR, EPA, NIOSH, OSHA, *etc.* are reliable sources. However, citations to blogs, sites run by advocacy groups, law firms, insurance

companies, and information sources such as Wikipedia, while acceptable in some limited circumstances, are generally to be discouraged. As many as possible of the references (certainly more than half) must be from the primary literature (*i.e.* peer-reviewed publications).

7) Formatting Style – must conform to GSPH guidelines for Dissertations/Theses/Essays.

8) Progress & Assessment – must be “passed” by a minimum of two Readers, one internal (EOH faculty) and one external (non-EOH Pitt faculty). The quality of the final document is expected to be near-professional standard for depositing in the university library system, aiming for a “B grade” will not be good enough. The essay requires a significant effort on the part of author and readers. Typically, faculty are not in a position to drop everything else and attend to an essay draft at the exact time it arrives and at least two weeks must be allowed for readers to critique any particular draft. The Internal Reader will want to see two or three versions of the full-length manuscript before it goes to the External Reader and, at each stage, there may be substantial revisions required that may take the Author a week or more to complete. Therefore, following several rounds of revision, **there will be a period of two to three months from completion of the initial full-length document to acceptance of the final essay.** The following stipulations reflect this reality.

9) Approval & Supervision

The subject matter of the Essay and selection of internal Reader should be approved by the Program Director before any writing starts. Approval should be obtained no later than the first month of the semester before the one in which you plan to graduate (*i.e.* **before the end of September for graduation at the end of the following Spring**). Candidates are strongly encouraged, however, to start the process earlier during the Summer if at all possible. The internal Reader will act as the Essay advisor/editor and assist with the identification of an appropriate external Reader.

10) Deadlines

A draft manuscript of suitable quality (as judged by the Internal Reader) for submitting to the External Reader is due **no later than February 15** for Spring graduation. If, however, you wish us to petition on your behalf for part-time enrollment in the Spring semester, a draft suitable for submission to the External Reader must be seen and approved by the Internal Reader **no later than December 31**.

Summary Timeline (for Spring graduation*)	
Title and Abstract to be approved before....	September 30
Initial full-length draft submitted before.....	November 15
Draft to Ext Reader, on or before.....	December 31 for part-time Spring enrollment
Draft to Ext Reader, on or before.....	February 15 for full-time Spring enrollment
Missing a deadline may necessitate Summer graduation with continuation fees incurred	