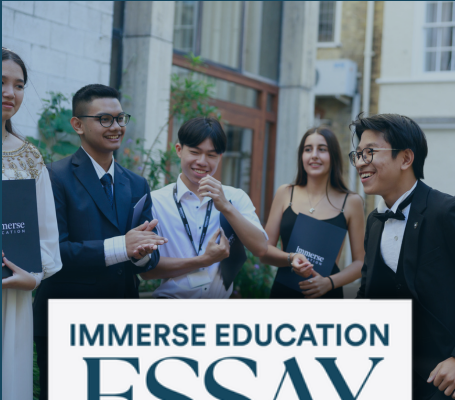




FULL GUIDE
2027

Win a 100% scholarship to experience
university-level study in Oxford or Cambridge



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Welcome and introduction

About Immerse Education

Founded to inspire the next generation of leaders and thinkers, Immerse Education delivers transformative learning experiences that bridge the gap between school and university.

Since launching, we've welcomed over 15,000 students from 125+ countries to our residential summer schools and online research programmes.

Extraordinary Host Cities: Study in world-renowned university cities including Oxford, Cambridge, Sydney, Tokyo, and San Francisco, or join online.

Advanced Subjects: Explore specialist fields including Medicine, Engineering, Law, Business Management, and AI.

University-Style Learning: Build confidence through small-group teaching, personalised feedback, and practical skills development.

Academic Insights

The ultimate prize is a place on our premier Academic Insights summer school, where you'll live and study like an undergraduate in prestigious university settings, including the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge.

World-Class Tutors

Learn through small, university-style seminars led by expert tutors from leading global universities, with a focus on critical thinking, discussion, and undergraduate-level learning.

University Subject Exploration

Explore university-level study beyond the school curriculum in subjects including Medicine, Law, Engineering, Creative Writing, Psychology, Computer Science, and many more.

For many entrants, a winning essay is the first step towards this unforgettable academic experience.

Competition overview

The annual Immerse Education Essay Competition challenges students to think critically, explore university-level ideas, and develop original arguments beyond the school curriculum. Inspired by undergraduate study at Oxford and Cambridge, our essay prompts reward independent thinking, rigorous reasoning, and evidence-based analysis.

"I entered the essay competition to strengthen my academic portfolio and explore subjects I'm passionate about. The research and writing process helped me develop valuable skills in critical thinking and academic writing while deepening my interest in the topic.

I'd encourage anyone to enter. It's a rewarding experience that helps you build skills, stand out in university applications, and gain confidence in academic research."

Zoe, Cambridge

Win A 100% Scholarship

The ultimate destination for the competition's best entries is a place to study at our Academic Insights Summer School, with up to 10 scholarships awarded.

Academic Insights Summer School

Ideal for high-school students aiming to deepen their academic knowledge and develop essential skills to excel at school and beyond.

Programme outcomes:

Participants gain in-depth academic knowledge, develop critical thinking skills through experiential project-based learning, and network with peers worldwide, enhancing confidence in their future academic pursuits.

ACADEMIC SESSIONS

Our summer schools combine rigorous, university-style learning with practical application. You'll engage in interactive lectures, discussion-led seminars, and hands-on workshops that apply complex concepts to real-world scenarios. 1:1 tutoring will guide your independent personal project - a tangible output to showcase on future applications.

EXTRACURRICULARS & CULTURE

Beyond the classroom, you will enjoy an enriching balance of social, cultural, and leadership activities designed to build confidence and lifelong connections. The timetable features university-style debates, team challenges, guest speakers and guided excursions exploring the heritage of your host city.

ACCOMMODATION & CAMPUS LIFE

Experience authentic campus life by living and learning in premium student accommodation within inspiring academic hubs. Students stay in safe, secure environments equipped with modern facilities, dedicated study spaces, and comfortable communal areas.



Immerse locations:



CAMBRIDGE



OXFORD



SINGAPORE



SYDNEY



TORONTO



ONLINE

How to enter the competition

Entering the competition is a straightforward process. Follow these steps to select your topic, write your essay, and submit your entry

1: Select your question according to your age category and interests.

Select a pre-set essay prompt or create your own within one of our available subjects. Choose a topic that matches your interests and age category to make the writing process more engaging and rewarding.

Important: The essay question you choose will not limit your choice of summer school subject if you earn a scholarship.

2: Write your essay

Write an original essay using independent research, clear reasoning, and evidence. Be sure to follow the word count and formatting guidelines.

3: Submit your essay online

Upload your completed essay through our official submission portal at **www.immerse.education/essay-competition** before the final deadline.

Timeline

3rd August 2026

Competition opens



25th October 2026

Submission deadline (23:59)



9th November 2026

Winners announced via email



25th November 2026

Award acceptance deadline



Ages 13–15: Thinking beyond the classroom

Welcome to the essay competition! If you are used to school assignments where the goal is simply to find the "right answer," memorize facts, or summarize a topic, these questions are going to look a bit different.

We aren't asking you to write a report; we are inviting you to join a grand academic debate. These prompts introduce you to **foundational concepts and methods** in your favourite subjects, introducing the core frameworks that university students use to look at the world.

- **Forget the Google Search approach:** You won't find a single "correct" answer to these prompts on Wikipedia.
- **Embrace the "Why" and "How":** We want to see how you think. If you choose a History prompt, don't just tell us what happened; tell us how a historian's own life changes how they see the past. If you choose Economics, look at how human psychology can get in the way of neat mathematical models.
- **Your Goal:** Take a big, fundamental idea, pick a side, and use clear logic and examples to defend your argument. Show us that you are ready to question the very rules of the subject you love.

Each question has been inspired by university-learning: either a first-year exam paper or a foundational text that all undergraduates read at some point in their studies.

Question guide for ages 13-15

Architecture

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Do the buildings and neighborhoods we live in actively shape our daily behavior, or do we build them purely to fit our existing habits?

Inspired by introductory design history and spatial theory in the Cambridge Architecture degree. It explores the relationship between spaces and society: do buildings change how we act, or do they just reflect how we already live?

Business Management

[VIEW COURSE](#)

"A luxury brand does not sell a physical product; it sells an artificial feeling of social superiority.' Is luxury branding just a psychological trick, or is making a customer feel special a genuine service that a business has every right to charge for?"

Inspired by the Oxford Economics & Management degree. It looks at Consumer Psychology, exploring why humans pay massive amounts of money for a brand name or a feeling, rather than just the object itself.

Computer Science

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Why do we need to sort and organize data efficiently? How does the choice of how we store information change how fast a computer can solve an everyday problem?

Inspired by basic algorithms and data structures taught in the first term at Oxford University. It looks at how the clever organization of data changes how fast a computer can think and solve daily tasks.

Economics

[VIEW COURSE](#)

"Can economic models accurately predict human behaviour using maths, or is human psychology too unpredictable for economics to be a true science?"

*Inspired by Milton Friedman's famous essays on how economics can use scientific models, contrasted with modern **Behavioral Economics**, which studies how real human emotions and messy choices disrupt those neat mathematical rules.*

Engineering

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Should modern engineers always look to nature to solve mechanical problems (like mimicking bird wings for airplanes), or can human-designed technology outperform biological evolution?

*Inspired by **Biomimetics** (copying nature's designs) taught in the first year of the Cambridge Engineering degree. It asks if millions of years of natural evolution create better structures than human invention.*

Question guide for ages 13–15

English Literature

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Does the ultimate meaning of a novel belong to its author or its reader?

*Inspired by a famous 1946 essay called *The Intentional Fallacy*. It explores a major debate in literary criticism: should we judge a book by what the author meant to say, or does the text belong entirely to the reader's imagination?*

History

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Can a historian ever write an entirely objective account of the past, or are they inevitably trapped by the context of their own time?

*Inspired by E.H. Carr's famous book *What is History?* and Cambridge University history courses. It looks at whether historians can ever be completely unbiased, or if they are always influenced by the world they live in.*

International Relations

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Is a stable international order best maintained when one single superpower dominates the global system, or when power is evenly distributed among multiple competing nations?

*Inspired by Cambridge University International Relations courses. This introduces students to the big debate between *Hegemonic Stability Theory* (peace via one big boss) versus the *Balance of Power Theory* (peace via equal rivals).*

Law

[VIEW COURSE](#)

If a law is deeply immoral or unjust, do citizens still have a legal duty to obey it, or does it cease to be a true law?

*Inspired by the famous **Hart-Fuller Debate (1958)**. This is a classic legal argument between two ideas: *Legal Positivism* (the rule is the law, regardless of morals) and *Natural Law Theory* (true laws must be fair and moral).*

Medicine

[VIEW COURSE](#)

How does the human body detect changes in its surroundings and adjust its internal systems to survive? What is the most vital mechanism it uses to maintain this balance?

*Inspired by the study of *Homeostasis* in the Cambridge Medical degree. It looks at how the human body acts like an automatic smart-thermostat to constantly monitor and balance its internal systems so we don't die.*

Question guide for ages 13-15

Philosophy

[VIEW COURSE](#)

How can you prove that you are not currently dreaming?

Inspired directly by the French philosopher René Descartes and his famous ""Dream Argument"" from his Meditations on First Philosophy. It introduces students to epistemology - the study of how we know what is actually real.

Physics

[VIEW COURSE](#)

How do scientists build models of planetary and cosmic systems we cannot directly see - like the centre of the Earth or the structure of an atom?

Inspired by "Scientific Epistemology" in the Oxford University Physics course. This looks at how physicists use clues, math, and indirect observations to create accurate working models of things too small or too distant to ever see.

Psychology

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Are human behaviours, such as aggression or kindness, deeply hardwired into our biology, or are they entirely learned from our environment?

Inspired by the main debate in the Cambridge University Psychology degree. It explores the clash between behaviourism (the idea that we learn everything from our environment) and evolutionary psychology (the idea that our actions are built into our DNA).



Ages 16-18: Step into the University Tutorial

Welcome to the Senior category! These prompts are modelled after real, first-year exam papers from the world's top universities. We aren't testing your ability to memorise a textbook; we want to see how you handle big, conflicting ideas. Here is how to tackle them:

- **Don't take the bait:** When a question hands you an absolute statement (like "Form dictates meaning" or "Judges should never make law"), your job isn't to just accept it. Dig under the surface. When is that statement actually true? Where does it completely fall apart? What is the question secretly taking for granted?
- **Ditch the school formula:** Leave the rigid "five-paragraph essay" and basic pro-and-con lists behind. University-level writing thrives on messy, complicated truths. Aim to build a layered argument that shows balance - something like: "While this idea works perfectly under condition A, it completely fails when we look at condition B."
- **Think like an undergraduate:** Trade broad generalisations for sharp, specific evidence. You don't need university jargon to stand out; you just need clear logic and highly targeted examples. Treat this less like a standard homework assignment, and more like your very first mini-university thesis.

Question guide for ages 16-18

Architecture

[VIEW COURSE](#)

How does the physical and spatial configuration of a built environment actively construct or constrain human social behavior?

Inspired by Spatial Sociology and theories by Henri Lefebvre. It explores how the physical design of cities and buildings isn't neutral, but actively shapes or restricts human interaction and social power dynamics.

Artificial Intelligence

[VIEW COURSE](#)

'Modern language models demonstrate that linguistic mastery can be achieved without consciousness.' If a system can generate perfect prose without experiencing the world, does this undermine our definition of intelligence?

*Inspired by the **Philosophy of Cognitive Science** and Alan Turing's classic work. It questions whether true intelligence requires conscious, lived experience, or if advanced mathematical pattern-matching is enough.*

Biology

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Is the rising global threat of antimicrobial resistance primarily a failure of chemical drug discovery?

*Inspired by **Evolutionary Pathology** within the Cambridge Natural Sciences degree. It looks at whether superbug resistance is a failure of pharmaceutical design or an inevitable result of natural selection when bacteria adapt to drugs.*

Business Management

[VIEW COURSE](#)

'Firms do not fail because of bad strategy; they fail because of structural inertia.' Evaluate the claim that an organization's internal structure dictates its survival more than external market conditions.

*Inspired by **Organizational Ecology** taught in the Oxford Economics and Management degree. It evaluates why massive, established companies frequently fail to adapt to market shifts due to internal bureaucracy and structural rigidity.*

Chemistry

[VIEW COURSE](#)

We are taught that chemical reactions either happen or they don't based on neat textbook formulas. How do chemical systems behave when they are kept far away from balance, and why is this chaos essential for life to exist?

*Inspired by **Non-Equilibrium Thermodynamics** in the Oxford Chemistry course. It explores how living systems must constantly consume energy to avoid reaching chemical balance, which is effectively death, relying instead on dynamic chaos to survive.*

Question guide for ages 16-18

Computer Science

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Will a computer program ever be capable of true creativity, or is 'artificial creativity' just a clever illusion made of math?

*Inspired by **Computability Theory** from the Oxford Computer Science degree. It investigates whether creative code is a genuine act of imagination or just a complex statistical rearrangement of human data.*

Creative Writing & English Literature

[VIEW COURSES](#)

'The structure of a text dictates its meaning.' Evaluate the claim that formal choices (such as narrative voice, poetic meter, or generic constraints) shape interpretation far more than plot.

*Inspired by **Formalism and Structuralist Literary Theory** within the Cambridge English degree. It argues that how a story is told (its mechanics, style, and structure) completely defines what it means, regardless of the basic plot.*

Earth Sciences & Physics

[VIEW COURSES](#)

Physics often treats time as a simple timeline that moves forward. If the fundamental laws of nature work exactly the same way whether time runs forward or backward, why do we experience time in only one direction?

*Inspired by the **Arrow of Time** paradox in the Oxford Physics course. It tackles why time strictly flows forward macroscopically (governed by disorder and entropy) even though microscopic physics laws are completely reversible.*

Economics

[VIEW COURSE](#)

If humans are naturally emotional and make irrational choices, can economic models ever truly predict how markets will behave in the real world, or are our financial theories fundamentally broken?

*Inspired by the clash between traditional **Neoclassical Economics** and modern **Behavioral Economics** in the Oxford PPE course. It examines the friction between rigid mathematical predictions and messy human psychology.*

Engineering

[VIEW COURSE](#)

'Optimizing for structural safety inevitably compromises environmental sustainability.' Critically evaluate how engineering design must resolve the conflict between material safety margins and life-cycle carbon footprints.

*Inspired by **Structural Optimization** in the Cambridge Engineering degree. It looks at the difficult design trade-offs engineers must make between building ultra-safe structures and minimizing their total lifetime carbon footprint.*

Question guide for ages 16-18

Film Studies & Fine Art

[VIEW COURSE](#)

'The medium is the message.' How do changes in technology (such as digital animation, virtual reality, or algorithmic curation) fundamentally alter the aesthetic and political value of art and cinema?

*Inspired by **Critical & Visual Media** Theory and Walter Benjamin's work on mechanical reproduction. It explores how technological shifts in how we deliver art completely change its political and artistic impact on society.*

History

[VIEW COURSE](#)

'Historical narratives are not discovered; they are constructed.' Assess the claim that empirical evidence is ultimately subordinate to the linguistic and ideological frameworks of the historian.

*Inspired by **Historiography** & Historical Thinking within the Cambridge Historical Tripos. It debates whether history can ever be a purely factual science, or if writing about the past inevitably filters facts through the writer's own language and political biases.*

International Relations

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Do international organizations like the United Nations actually have the power to stop powerful nations from doing whatever they want, or do they exist to justify their inevitable actions?

*Inspired by the core debate between **Structural Realism** and **Institutionalism** in the Cambridge HSPS course. It tackles whether global politics is driven strictly by raw military power or if international laws can actually keep peace.*

Law

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Do judges simply apply the law as written, or do they actively create it?

*Inspired by the clash between **Judicial Activism** and **Legal Formalism** in Oxford Law courses. It examines whether judges act merely as neutral rule-checkers or if interpreting vague laws means they are effectively inventing new policies.*

Mathematics

[VIEW COURSE](#)

Many mathematicians describe their favorite equations as 'beautiful.' Does discovering math rely on human artistic intuition, or is math purely cold, hard logic that exists entirely independent of us?

*Inspired by **Mathematical Platonism** in the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos. It questions whether mathematical laws are physical truths waiting in the universe to be discovered, or if math is just an artificial language humans invented.*

Question guide for ages 16-18

Nanotechnology

[VIEW COURSE](#)

When building macroscopic structures, engineers rely on predictable material behaviors. At the nanoscale, gravitational forces disappear and static friction dominates. How does engineering change when the primary challenge is no longer structural strength, but the chaotic forces of the atomic world?

*Inspired by **Molecular Mechanics** within the Cambridge Engineering and Material Sciences degrees. It looks at how traditional physics rules break down at the nanoscale, forcing engineers to design around atomic and quantum forces rather than gravity.*

Psychology

[VIEW COURSE](#)

'Human memory is inherently dysfunctional.' Evaluate the evolutionary argument that the primary purpose of memory is not to record the past accurately, but to construct flexible simulations of the future.

*Inspired by **Adaptive Memory and Schema Theory** in the Cambridge Psychology degree. It explores whether memory "flaws" like forgetting are actually useful design features that allow our brains to remix the past to plan for the future.*

Philosophy, Politics & Economics

[VIEW COURSES](#)

If modern algorithmic data can predict exactly which social or economic policies will maximize a population's collective welfare, does a government still need a moral or philosophical framework to govern, or does politics simply become a problem of optimization?

*Inspired by the tension between **Technocracy** and **Normative Rights** in Oxford PPE. It examines whether data-driven governance eliminates the need for ethical debate, or if calculating the "greatest good" mathematically still violates rights.*

Veterinary Studies & Medicine

[VIEW COURSES](#)

'Zoonotic diseases (pathogens jumping between animals and humans) show that medicine cannot be human-centric.' Critically evaluate the biological and ecological challenges of managing cross-species health crises.

*Inspired by **Epidemiology and One Health frameworks** in final-year Oxbridge medical modules. It focuses on how human health is completely linked to animal health and ecology, changing how we fight global pandemics.*



Essay Writing Workbook

Writing an essay is a challenging feat, which is why we want to make the process as pain-free as possible. You can download our free printable Essay Writing Workbook here. This workbook is designed to help you write your essay in the most effective way by breaking the process down into 5 steps:



- ✓ Understand your essay question: We help you dissect and understand what the question is asking
- ✓ Understand your task, how it will be marked by examiners, and what you therefore need to include
- ✓ Identify your existing knowledge and opinions so that you can make your essay unique - and find gaps in your knowledge so that you can plan your research
- ✓ Conduct research effectively
- ✓ Answer the question in a structured way, using evidence to support your claims and a 'write and re-write' approach to perfecting your work

[Download Workbook](#)

Mark Scheme

When you enter the competition, you're likely going to be wondering how your essay will be marked by the examiners. The following five areas are what you will be marked on.

Communicating ideas effectively
worth 30%

Using evidence and inference
worth 20%

Word choice and structure
worth 20%

Spelling, punctuation and grammar
worth 10%

Critical analysis
worth 20%

A high-quality essay will have met the criteria in the following ways.

COMMUNICATING IDEAS EFFECTIVELY

- Ideas clearly, effectively and imaginatively communicated
- Careful selection of tone, adapted where necessary, along with, style and register for the form and purpose of the essay
- Shows a clear understanding of its audience
- Has organised information and ideas effectively, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts
- Employs original and creative approaches to explore and present ideas

WORD CHOICE & STRUCTURE

- Uses a relevant range of vocabulary
- Uses a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect
- Accurate spelling and punctuation
- Uses relevant and consistent topical terminology
- Channels the author's authentic voice

Mark Scheme

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

- Effectively explains, comments on and analyses the essay question
- Shares insightful knowledge and a deep understanding of the topic at hand
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding and a range of perspectives
- Objective yet reflects a personal understanding informed by comprehensive research.

USING EVIDENCE AND INFERENCES

- Effectively identifies and interprets explicit and implicit information
- Uses reputable sources of evidence
- References sources correctly using the right format
- Relevant ideas have been selected and synthesised using evidence from different sources to support the claims made
- Uses in-text citations correctly
- Creates an accurate reference list as per the referencing guide

SPELLING, PUNCTUATION AND GRAMMAR

- This submission is free from spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.
- Demonstrates a firm grasp of the conventions of standard English throughout their writing

To see the full Immerse Education Essay Competition Rubric, [click here](#).

To see the competition terms & conditions, [click here](#).



Submission requirements

Entrants should ensure they have read these specifications prior to submission as failure to comply may result in disqualification.

YOUR ENTRY

- Only one entry is allowed per person.
- Essays should be submitted directly via the competition entry form.
- Essays received by email will not be considered.

FORMATTING

Your answers should be no more than 500 words +/- 10% (excluding references, headings and title text.)

PLAGIARISM

Citations give your work credibility, whereas plagiarism - presenting someone else's ideas or images as your own - is easily caught by academic staff and detection software. Any content duplication will lead to disqualification.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Originality is at the heart of a successful essay. Our mark scheme states that a winning essay...

- Is objective yet reflects a personal understanding, informed by comprehensive research.
- Channels the author's authentic voice.
- Employs original and creative approaches to explore and present ideas.

AI tools are useful for research and editing, but submitting directly replicated AI content will fail the marking criteria and jeopardize your scholarship chances.

Referencing Guide



What Is Referencing?

When constructing your essay, you should show your research through your sources. It is important to use books and other texts to support your arguments and that these are recorded through referencing.

References act as a record that you have used another person's words or ideas. All points taken from other authors should be referenced accordingly. Bibliographies list the texts and other sources that you have used for your work.

References and bibliographies allow the reader to identify the exact sources of what you have written, and ensure that you have not plagiarised in your work.

References are used throughout the work (for example, a book, article, image, etc.). It shows readers where specific pieces of information came from and how readers can find them themselves. It acknowledges or gives credit to the author who actually created the content being used.

Harvard Referencing Style

We would like you to use the Harvard referencing style. This consists of two elements: in-text citations and a reference list at the end of the document. It is important that you follow the guidelines laid out in this document exactly, to ensure good academic practice and consistency throughout your work.

How to Use Harvard References

In-Text Citations

In-text citations should be used whenever you refer to a source - whether you're quoting, paraphrasing, or summarising. These should include the author's surname and year of publication, e.g. (Smith, 2020). If you're quoting, also include the page number, e.g. (Smith, 2020, p. 45). In-text citations should appear immediately after the information you are referencing and be included within the sentence punctuation.

Reference List

Your reference list should appear at the end of your document and include full details of all sources cited in your in-text citations.

- It should be arranged alphabetically by author surname
- All sources should follow a consistent format
- Only sources that were actually cited in your text should appear here
- Films referred to in the text should be included in the list, alphabetically by title

Referencing different formats

Different types of sources require slightly different reference formats. Below are examples of how to format various types of sources in your reference list:

Book

Smith, J. (2019) Understanding Environmental Science. London: Greenleaf Publishing.

Journal Article

Patel, R. and Khan, T. (2020) 'Impacts of climate change on urban planning', Urban Studies Review, 45(3), pp. 201–217.

Harvard Referencing Example

Below is an example of the Harvard referencing system. It is a two-part system that includes a reference in the main body of your text (known as an in-text citation) and a full reference in the list at the end of the essay.

In-text citation

In-text citations in the Harvard style appear in brackets immediately after the relevant information, and include the author's surname(s) and the year of publication. If quoting directly or referring to a specific part of the text, you must also include a page number, e.g. (Furukawa, Misawa and Moore, 2018, p. 2712).

According to a recent study, food waste recycling could be contributing to the increase in antibiotic resistance (Furukawa, Misawa and Moore, 2018).

Reference list entry (at the end of the document):

The first part of the reference provides the names of the authors, followed by the year of publication in brackets. The article title is in single quotation marks. The next part, in italics, is the journal name, followed by the volume number and issue number in brackets. The page range of the article is provided at the end.

Furukawa, M., Misawa, N. and Moore, J. (2018) 'Recycling of domestic food waste', *British Food Journal*, 120(11), pp. 2710–2715.





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