Discursive writing discusses. It presents an argument in a more balanced way than argumentative and persuasive writing and does not argue for or against a point throughout the essay. After having assessed and evaluated all arguments, however, the writer generally states his/her opinion.

General characteristics of discursive writing:

- Discursive essays are often written in answer to questions such as "Do you agree (or disagree)...", "Discuss..." or "To what extent..."
- The thesis statement is generally non-comittal, i.e., it merely presents the controversy, without indicating what conclusion the writer will come to. A typical thesis statement for a discursive essay would be: "In order to come to a considered conclusion about ..., we must take a number of factors into account".
- The essay is written in an objective, impersonal style, without the personal opinion of the writer intruding. Opinions or arguments are often attributed to some anonymous "authority", for example: "Whilst some people argue that ... others are of the opinion that...".
- The topic sentences of the paragraphs may stress continuity between similar arguments, for example: "It is also argued that...", "A further argument that one frequently encounters in this context is that ..."
- However, the topic sentence may also highlight the progression of the discussion by pointing out the contrasts between the opposing arguments. For example: "However there are also strong arguments against this point of view...", "Another counter argument is that..."
- In the conclusion, the writer often comes to a conclusion and gives his/her opinion more or less tentatively. Again, this is often expressed impersonally, for example: "Given the reaction this issue has caused...., it seems fair to conclude that...", "After evaluating these arguments, the conclusion seems inescapable that...", "After examining all the evidence, one is bound to admit that..."

Examples of discursive writing assignments:

- Weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of studying/beginning to work at 18... of living alone/with other people... and so on.
- "All marketing strategies are essentially manipulative." Discuss, using examples from your experience.
- "All students, regardless of faculty and course of study, should have to spend a year abroad" To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- To what extent are gender roles and stereotypes influenced by the media?

N.B.: Most of these questions could also be answered in a persuasive or an argumentative essay (where the writer argues for or against the statement or for or against one side of the issue).

Your assignment:

- Write a discursive essay least two pages.
- The topic is up to you. Be careful not to choose a topic that is too broad for an essay of this length!

- The essay should have:
  - an interesting question (to which the essay ultimately supplies an answer)
  - an introduction that draws the reader into the essay, announces the topic and has a clear (but balanced) thesis statement
  - supporting paragraphs which clearly and logically develop the ideas and link up similar and opposing arguments
  - a conclusion which draws everything together and in which the writer gives his/her personal opinion.