

Festina Lente Essay Award

Interview with Arbiana, from Kings Oxford (2nd place 2023)

Friday 30th June 2023

Earlier this month we visited Kings Oxford, to sit down with the second-place finalist of 2023, learning about her experiences and thoughts of the Festina Lente Essay Award and plans for the future.

Arbiana is currently in Year 12 studying History, Politics and Business at A-Level, in the hope of pursuing Law at university. Now she has a list of around 10 possible university choices and is in the process of narrowing this down. Options include the University of Oxford, London School of Economics and Political Science, King's College London and the University of Edinburgh. Arbiana joined Kings Oxford, following GCSE studies in her home country of Albania. After receiving a scholarship to study at Kings Oxford, Arbiana has gone from strength to strength and comes across as a highly motivated individual constantly seeking new challenges and opportunities to secure relevant super-curricular opportunities.

"I thought it would be more interesting if I chose something which was out of my comfort zone to challenge myself...you have to push your limits and your boundaries"



Karyatides statues, Eretheio, on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Image licensed to Relaxed Snail Ltd.

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What made you choose this essay question?

Arbiana's question was "Athenian democracy prioritized people's welfare more than current democracies. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?". Whilst her university aspiration is Law, Arbiana had some background knowledge of Ancient Greece prior to taking part in the essay and she wanted to have an opportunity to showcase a different interest whilst still displaying similar academic skills which would be highly useful to a Law application. Moreover, she felt that her A-Level content from Business allowed her to critically engage with topics related to social welfare. Furthermore, she wanted to challenge herself with a topic outside her comfort zone.

How did you find the process of writing your essay?

"The most difficult part was to narrow down which information is valuable to the essay or not specifically. The sources where you get your information from – considering it's academic you have to get sources which are good to support your essay". Arbiana went on to say that "Research is a common thing to do but when you go into the detail and start to narrow down, I think that's the most difficult part". There was also a challenge to fit within our 1,500 wordcount. "I went above the wordcount the first time I finished the essay. So I had to narrow it down and some of my ideas would fall apart if I had to narrow it down so I had to rewrite it a couple of times for me to get the wordcount right". Arbiana had around five or six drafts before submitting her essay. The conclusion, in particular, was something she spent a long time restructuring: "You can write out a very nice essay but then if your conclusion is not that good maybe the reader would get lost and then all your essay's worth will be gone".

Do you have any tips for finding academic sources?

Arbiana used Google Scholar, as well as some physical books. She also asked for help from her History teacher to find high-quality research, such as peer-reviewed journal articles. On the back of those articles, through checking their bibliographies, she then found additional sources.

Will the Festina Lente Essay Award strengthen your university application?

"I think it's a really good and useful thing to have on your personal statement because if they're going to see that I've done an essay competition they're going to be like 'OK well her writing skills and research skills'...which are things that I've actually read on university websites that they are looking for". Arbiana identified that the skills developed by submitting an essay tie in with what helps you succeed at university – "The actual skills that you need for essay writing matches up to the skills that universities require you to have". Also, it's good to push yourself: "I thought it would be more interesting [on my UCAS application] if I chose something which was out of my comfort zone to challenge myself...you have to push your limits and your boundaries".

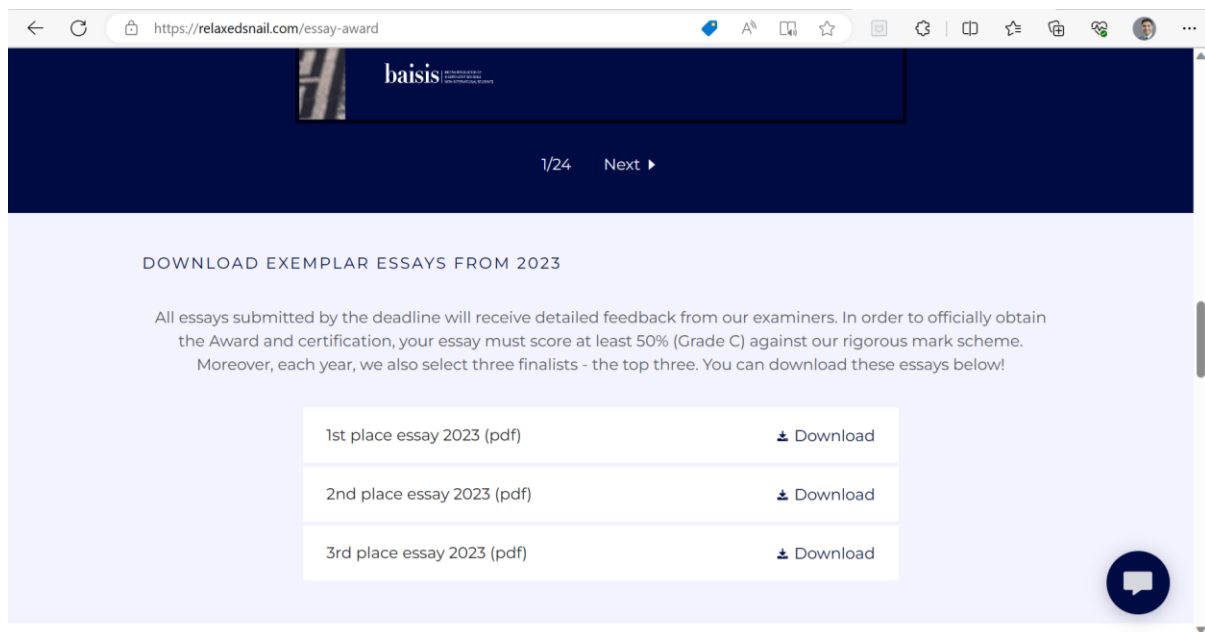
What will you do next to prepare for university?

Arbiana wants to increase her portfolio of super-curricular experiences relevant for Law. This includes an internship back at home in Albania with a law firm and more wider reading. We at Relaxed Snail are also helping by putting Arbiana in contact with some of our associates who have worked in the legal sector.

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What tips would you give to future students hoping to submit an essay to the Festina Lente Essay Award?

Arbiana talked about the need to follow your academic passion and find your own niche in selecting a question as opposed to being too broad or choosing a topic just because it happens to be highly popular with the times. Choosing a question you are really passionate about will help make you more memorable and thus separate yourself from the competition when university admission tutors are assessing applications. "The first step is finding a topic they're passionate about. I think many students tend to choose topics that are popular at the moment. I know many cases where students will talk about like social media or mental health because those things have become a popular topic to write about but it's not always the best idea because they can become overwhelming and not very specific. So, I think people should choose from a smaller circle of topics. Choose topics that are very specific. It's better for narrowing down your information, your research and it's going to be better for them in the process of writing the essay rather than having a very general topic...With general topics, it may lose the focus of what you'd like to study at university".



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://relaxedsnail.com/essay-award>. The page features the Baisis logo at the top. Below the logo, there is a navigation bar with "1/24" and "Next ▶". The main content area is titled "DOWNLOAD EXEMPLAR ESSAYS FROM 2023". It contains the following text: "All essays submitted by the deadline will receive detailed feedback from our examiners. In order to officially obtain the Award and certification, your essay must score at least 50% (Grade C) against our rigorous mark scheme. Moreover, each year, we also select three finalists - the top three. You can download these essays below!". Below this text is a table with three rows, each representing a finalist's essay and a "Download" button.

1st place essay 2023 (pdf)	Download
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We congratulate all students who have submitted an essay to the Festina Lente Essay Award. If you would like to read Arbiana's essay, visit www.relaxedsnail.com/essay-award and scroll down to see a list of exemplary essays from 2023. Moreover, we will be soon releasing an assortment of essays which will be published in an anthology. This can also be accessed on our website.

If you would like any further information please email essayaward@relaxedsnail.com

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