

Basic Steps in Essay Writing

Step 1: Select the question

- Choose one that interests you and one with which you have some background information/knowledge.

Step 2: Question the question

- Highlight any instructional words, eg. discuss, comment.
- Highlight the key words.
- Brainstorm using target questions.
- Identify the issues.

Step 3: Construct an initial plan

- Brainstorm.
- Create a mind-map.
- Decide your themes and the order of your themes.

Step 4: Find relevant sources of information

- Find the answers to your questions.
- Write the answers on separate pieces of paper.
- Remember to record your references.

Step 5: Think critically to sort out:

- Personal points of view/own opinions.
- Assumptions.
- Evidence.
- Irrelevant details.
- Personal anecdotes.
- Illustrations/examples.
- Ideas – general, very important, potentially useful, only good.
- Useful quotations.
- Specific reference.
- Expert's point of view.

Step 6: Make an essay plan

- Your time eg. when is your essay due?
- Plan the order of your themes/ paragraphs.
- Put these on separate pieces of paper.

Step 7: Write First Draft

First drafts are working drafts and different processes can work for different people. If you like the way you work and if you achieve the results you want, stay with it. Following are some suggestions from successful students:

Essay Writing



- Write conclusions first (the answer in a nut shell).
- Write what you know about – do not worry about logical sequence.
- One long burst of effort may be more productive than several shorter ones.
- Write on every second line or down half a page (or use 1.5 spacing on a word processor, so you can hand edit).
- Keep an ideas-sheet (questions, mind map) handy so that you can jot down ideas that occur while you are writing.
- Do not worry about style, but write quickly and spontaneously.
- Write your introductions last - it fits your essay and avoids blocks.
- Write your introductions first - keeps you on track, provides a blueprint.
- Work from a structured plan - refer to it frequently.
- Start each paragraph with a main idea - each paragraph becomes an achievement.
- Leave time for the first draft to cool before editing.
- Select and simplify research material.
- Talk about your essay - it shifts blocks, makes writing easier, and gives confidence.

Step 8: Edit, and redraft

As many times as is necessary.

Step 9: Proof read and check

- Spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Binding?
- Cover.
- Check the guidelines and marking schedule.
- Check.

Step 10: Submit your essay on time

What Do You Need to Find Out About the Essay Before You Start?

- **Due date:** how much time have you got?
- **Length:** number of words or pages required?
- **Structure:** are headings and subsections required?
- **Presentation:** margin, typed, cover page?
- **Referencing:** what system?
- **Sources of information:** your own experiences, books, journals, interviews, class notes, internet?
- What is the essay question asking you to do?
- Does the marking schedule give more details?
- How are the marks allocated?
- How does the question relate to your course objectives?
- What is it that the programme needs you to know/understand?



Structure of an Essay

Introduction

- Probably the most important paragraph: the first impression that you have a clear idea of how to answer the question.
- Often makes a general statement to start, leading to more specific information relating directly to the essay question.
- Outlines the main ideas of the essay and the order in which they will be presented (like a map of the route you will be taking).
- Gives a clear definition of the topic or question.
- States your stance on the topic.
- Interests your reader.

Body

- A structured argument or discussion.
- A logical sequence of ideas.
- One idea per paragraph.
- Supported by evidence, including quotes, examples, or statistics.
- Shows that you are well informed about the topic.
- Leads to a logical conclusion.
- Written in clear language for the reader.

Conclusion

- Very important: the final words your marker will read.
- Reflects on the main points of the essay and draws them together into a logical statement.
- Sums up the argument.
- The 'who-dunnit' of the essay.
- Makes an overall concluding statement without bringing in any new evidence.
- Gives the option to state your opinion without having to write "I think...".
- In general, conclusions do not contain quotes.

Reference List

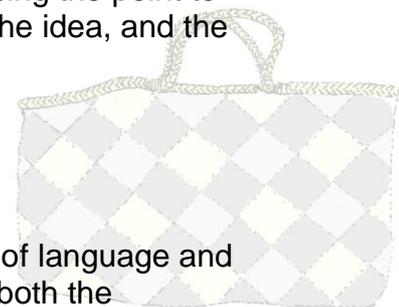
- A list of all the sources you used in your essay.
- Uses the format required by your department, school, institution or discipline.

Paragraphs

Essays are constructed of a series of paragraphs, which are tied in to the major points identified in the introduction. Not every paragraph will be introducing a new point; some issues may take a number of paragraphs to develop, or be followed by examples. Transition phrases and topic sentences make the link to



the 'map' of your essay given in the introduction. As a very general formula, there are three parts to a paragraph: a topic sentence (introducing the point to be made in the paragraph and its relevance), development of the idea, and the evidence.



Transitions or Signposts

Transitions are words or phrases that highlight the importance of language and link paragraphs so that your ideas flow. These can be used at both the beginning and end of a paragraph.

For Introductions you can use:

- First I intend to examine in depth and in detail...
- ...then I will analyse ...
- ...and finally I will present several pros and cons regarding the significance and application of these factors in relation to ...
- Evidence will be shown that ...
- This essay is concerned with describing some of the ...
- It is also concerned with identifying views from the ... and ... the perspective.
- Only a limited description of ... is provided.
- This essay is divided into two parts.
- The first part provides an (outline, overview, summary, profile).
- This essay will discuss ...
- Firstly, it is important to realise ...
- The themes/factors/elements/aspects that will be discussed at length are ...
- Views on ... range from ... to ...
- The advantages/ benefits/ disadvantages of ...
- The evidence shows that ...
- All these factors will contribute to ...

The Transitions and Topic Sentence Formula:

- It is apparent that ...
- Considering that ... we can assume ...
- In comparison ...
- However, ...
- By contrast
- In addition, ...
- In fact, ...
- A clear case for ...
- Another aspect ...
- It can be seen that ...
- These factors contribute to ...
- Essentially, ...
- The major concern ...



- At this point ...
- After examining ...
- This leads to ...
- After ...
- Much can be gained from ...

References

Greetham, B. (2001). How to write better essays. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

McClaren, S. (1997). Easy writing. Australia: Pascal Press.

Rountree, K. (1991). Writing for success: a practical guide for New Zealand students. London: Longman Paul.