

ESSAY WRITING

The Fundamentals

What does a strong essay require?

An essay attempts to convince readers of a conclusion or idea based upon evidence and argument.

An essay ought to respond to a question.

- ⊗ It must have a thesis declaration (answer to the question) and an argument(s).
- ⊗ It must attempt to examine or persuade someone of something: to establish a thesis via a series of inter-related propositions by inductive reasoning or deductive logic.
- ⊗ An essay must contain appropriate examples, giving life to evidence and facts from academic journal or credible/relevant sources.



1. Starting the essay

Although there are some essential elements to composing an assignment, essay writing is not a one-way process. You probably will have to revise and redraft sections of your essays a number of times.

Start work as soon as possible

Nobody can write a high quality essay unless you think research and write. In other words, start the essay as soon as you can!

Identify the question and analyse the task

Jotting down what you know about a subject is not sufficient to allow for a high quality essay. Analysing, then responding to the essay's issue or assignment is fundamental.

- ⊗ Be certain that you comprehend precisely what the question demands you to write to.
- ⊗ Categorise the key words (for example, evaluate or analyse) and explain the approach necessary to take.

Brainstorm!

Your opening point for an essay is your first answer to the subject or query. This answer depends on what you know at first instance

This is, nonetheless, the point of commencement only. Next, you are required to research and investigate, query your reply and ascertain some answers.

Draw up an essay brainstorming plan:

- ⊗ Establish working structures for your first thoughts and opinions about the subject and compose a draft essay plan to assist you in your research.
- ⊗ An essay brainstorming plan can assist you in ascertaining how you will respond to the query and which information you will utilise. Essay brainstorming plans, in addition, assist in structuring an essay. As you start writing and researching, your brainstorming plan will likely change and evolve.

The first steps in writing an essay

- ⊗ Analyse the issue and identify key terms
- ⊗ Develop a potential thesis/central argument
- ⊗ Research the subject. Use evidence to support your arguments
- ⊗ Draft an essay plan and organise your ideas
- ⊗ Develop your plan
- ⊗ Edit, Edit, Edit your essay
- ⊗ Write your references, footnotes and bibliography
- ⊗ Hand in your essay



2. Researching the subject area

An aspect of essay writing is that it draws on the work of other writers and researchers. Thus, the skills of interpreting, researching, and writing are essential to essay writing. Researching confers the knowledge and facts that you need you to draft an argument and respond the essay question.

Reading for preparing your essay

Commence reading as soon as you get the question so you have enough plenty time to become acquainted with the subject. When reading the material you have research, remember to read with a purpose. Good question to ask yourself include:

- ⊙ What do I currently know about the subject?
- ⊙ What material is required to answer essay question?
- ⊙ Is the material relevant to the subject?
- ⊙ Can I use these research materials in my argument

Summarise content from the readings

It's essential to summarise what you have read. Your summaries should be the foundation of your essay.

There is no need to take notes in your initial reading of the material. Highlight information or facts you think are useful. You can return to it when you re-read and take notes.

Summarise your research materials with the question of your essay in mind. You must employ the facts and evidence you have found to help assist your Central argument. This, for example, can be summaries or direct quotation from the materials, useful diagrams, case analysis studies or statistical data. Remember to cite everything. Note the bibliographic information of each text you read. Remember to include the date, author, publisher, title and place of publication. This will save your time when doing boring referencing!



3. Planning your thoughts

Begin planning your research findings and ideas into an argument.

Essay strategies

Following your research and development of central arguments to your essay, you ought to draft a second essay plan. This second essay plan will answer the topic and how the thesis will be ordered. The second essay plan ought to include:

- ⊙ Make a decision on a potential answer to the question
- ⊙ Settle on the facts and evidence you will utilise to respond to the question.
- ⊙ Making a decision on which issues you will examine, and the structure in which they will appear.
- ⊙ Jot this all down in point form!

Reading lists

If you are given a list of recommended readings, read as many as you can. Otherwise, find the references in the library. Use the database to search. Once you have your readings:

- ⊙ use the table of contents and the index to find relevant material
- ⊙ skim through the text to locate specific information
- ⊙ when you find something you need to read carefully, highlight the material with a post-it note so you can return for a close reading
- ⊙ photocopy useful sections of materials so you can emphasise and make notes.

Thinking it through

Essay writing requires both creative and critical thinking.

- ⊙ Creative thinking encourages you to broaden your ideas. Try techniques like brainstorming or mind mapping.
- ⊙ Analytical thinking allows you to narrow the focus of your ideas (for example, asking why an example is important to your argument).

Your essay should be balanced:

that is, it should include a range of information and viewpoints from different authors that explore the key arguments and relevant aspects of a particular topic.

Don't only cite evidence that confirm what you are arguing; if there are different or opposing views, then they need to be examined.

You need to evaluate differing arguments - explain why one argument is more convincing than another and how they relate to the conclusion your essay arrives at.



4. Writing the essay

Drafting

Write a first draft to try out the structure and framework of your essay. A draft essay will help you work out how you will answer the question and which evidence and examples you will use; and how your argument will be structured.

Once you have a draft, you can work on writing well. Your first draft will not be your final essay; think of it as raw material you will refine through editing and redrafting.

Structure

Structure your essay to communicate your ideas and answer the question. All essays should include the following structure:

1. Introduction

The introduction moves from general to specific. This is where you:

- ⊕ open with a short orientation (introduce the topic area(s) with a general, broad opening sentence (or two);
- ⊕ answer the question with a thesis statement; and
- ⊕ provide a summary or 'road map' of your essay (keep it brief, but mention all the main ideas).



2. Body

The body of your essay consists of paragraphs. Each is a building block in the construction of your argument. The body is where you:

- ⊕ answer the question by developing a discussion.
- ⊕ show your knowledge and grasp of material you have read.
- ⊕ offer exposition and evidence to develop your argument.
- ⊕ use relevant examples and authoritative quotes.

If your question has more than one part, structure the body into sections that deal with each part of the question.



3. Conclusion

The conclusion moves from specific to general. It should:

- ⊕ restate your answer to the question;
- ⊕ re-summarise the main points and;
- ⊕ include a final, broad statement (about possible implications, future directions for research, to qualify the conclusion etc).

However, NEVER introduce new information or ideas in the conclusion - its purpose is to round off your essay by summing up.

Essay paragraphs

Each paragraph in the body of the essay should deal with one main point/ aspect of your answer.

Each paragraph should contain:

1. a **topic sentence** that states the main or controlling idea;
2. **supporting sentences** to explain and develop the point you're making;
3. **evidence**. Most of the time, your point should be supported by some form of evidence from your reading, or by an example drawn from the subject area.
4. **analysis**. Don't just leave the evidence hanging there - analyse and interpret it! Comment on the implication/ significance/impact.

Finish off the paragraph with a **critical conclusion** you have drawn from the evidence.

Tips for effective writing

Start writing early - the earlier the better. Starting cuts down on anxiety, beats procrastination, and gives you time to develop your ideas.

Don't try to write an essay from beginning to end (especially not in a single study session). Begin with what you are ready to write - a plan, a sentence. Start with the body and work paragraph by paragraph.

Write the introduction and conclusion after the body. Once you know what your essay is about, then write the introduction and conclusion.

Keep the essay's question in mind. Don't lose track of the question or task. Keep it in mind as you draft and edit and work out your argument.

Revise your first draft extensively. Make sure the entire essay flows and that the paragraphs are in a logical order.

Put the essay aside for a few days. This allows you to consider your essay with a fresh eye.

Proof-read your final draft carefully. Check spelling and punctuation.



5. Referencing the essay

All academic essays **MUST** contain references. Referencing guards against plagiarism, a serious academic offence.

Make sure you are familiar with the referencing style your Faculty or School requires; many will have guides specifying the system they prefer. Often Schools/Faculties don't mind which system you use as long as it is consistent. If this is the case, use the system you are most comfortable with.

See *The Learning Centre guides on plagiarism and on various citation styles*



6. Editing in essay

Most essays are dramatically improved by careful editing. If possible, put your essay aside for a few days before you begin to edit. This gives you time to think further about your answer and arguments and return to your work with a fresh perspective.

Don't panic if when you find faults in your essay - this is part of the process. If you find that you need more information, or your argument has holes in it, keep calm and concentrate on fixing the problem.

Once you have a well-organised and fairly complete draft:

- ④ Check the overall structure of your essay; does it have a clear introduction, body and conclusion?
- ④ Make sure that each paragraph has a clear main point that relates to the argument. Make sure that the paragraphs are arranged in logical sequence.
- ④ Revise sentences. Make sure the words you use mean what you think they mean. Check punctuation and spelling. A good dictionary is a useful tool
- ④ Check transition signals. Be sure that a reader can follow the sequence of ideas from sentence to sentence, and from paragraph to paragraph.

Questions to ask yourself

- ④ Have I answered the question as directly and comprehensively as possible?
- ④ Does the argument make sense? Is it balanced and well-researched?
- ④ Is the evidence relevant to and supportive of my argument?
- ④ Have I used a consistent citation style? Have I referenced all my quotes and paraphrases?
- ④ If there were any special instructions or guidelines for this assignment, have I followed them?
- ④ Have I remained within the set word limit?



7. Handing the essay in

You haven't completed your assignment until you've handed it in.

It's important to READ the assignment guidelines in your course outlines and to follow them. Find out how your lecturer/tutor would like assignments presented, and make sure you comply with their requirements.

In general:

- ④ Make sure you know the date the assignment is due. Submitting late work usually incurs a late penalty.
- ④ Make sure you know where and to whom your assignment should be submitted.
- ④ Most assignments require a cover sheet (available from your school office).
- ④ Don't submit your essay in a plastic folder or sleeve (unless you are asked to do so).
- ④ Ensure your essay is formatted correctly. Use double-line spacing and a readable font (size 12 at least). Number pages and set wide margins.
- ④ Print on one side of the page only.
- ④ Staple your essay in the top left-hand corner.
- ④ Keep an extra copy for yourself.

References

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