

Writing an essay

The majority of your assessment is done through writing. In most study areas, you will be asked to write essays for assignments and in exams. Essays may be as short as 500 words or as long as 2000-3000 words. So, it is important that you develop a good grasp of essay writing and all that it involves:

1. Preparing for writing (steps 1-7)
2. Writing the essay (steps 8-12)

1. Preparing for writing (steps 1-7)

Step 1: Choose the question. Think about the time available, the availability of reference material and your own interests.

Step 2: Analyse the question. Identify the instruction words, the topic words and any restricting words and phrases (see ASO factsheet: *Analysing the question*).

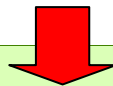
Step 3: Rewrite the question. After you have analysed the question, try to rewrite it using at least some different words.

Step 4: Brainstorm. Brainstorming will help you to determine how much you already know about the subject. If you cannot come up with any ideas, you will need to do some preliminary reading.

Step 5: Research. Go back to the reference material and look for specific examples, evidence and /or quotes which can be used to support your ideas. Make sure you record the sources of your information, and any quotes, accurately.

Step 6: Decide on the order of presentation. Return to your original notes, finalise the points you will cover and decide how you will present them. A common order of presentation is order of decreasing importance.

Step 7: Plan. You should now be able to write a plan. In most cases, this should not require more than about one page.



ESSAY PLAN

QUESTION: Write out the question here.

INTRODUCTION: Write what you understand by the question and the direction of your argument or the angle you are taking. Do you agree or disagree and why?

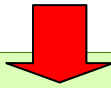
BODY: List the points you are going to use to support your stand or angle.

1. The most important point and evidence to back it up.
2. The final, usually less important point and evidence to back it up.
(You should be able to think of at least three to five points to support your stand.)

CONCLUSION: At this stage, your conclusion will be tentative. A general comment about the points you have presented is sufficient.

2. Writing the essay (steps 8-12)

Step 8: Write the first draft. Write the essay out in full. Use a computer program, such as Word, to draft an essay that will be easy to edit and proofread.



THE ESSAY

The Introduction

The introduction should identify the topic; give essential background information and/or definitions of key words where necessary; and indicate the direction and angle of your argument.

The Body

The body of the essay consists of a number of paragraphs in which you present your main points and evidence to support them. If you have planned and prepared appropriately, writing the body of the essay should be fairly easy. It will almost be a case of expanding what you have in note form into complete sentences, adding specific details where necessary.

Each point in the plan would customarily represent a separate paragraph

Conclusion

A good conclusion should summarise your main points and, in most cases, make some sort of judgment. It should also refer back to the question, so that you more or less bring the reader back to the starting point.

Step 9: Revise and edit the first draft. Read through what you have written carefully.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does the introduction identify the topic?
- Are there enough points?
- Is each point dealt with in a separate paragraph?
- Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
- Is there enough supporting evidence in each paragraph?
- Are the paragraphs in the best order?
- Does one paragraph lead on to the next smoothly?
- Does the conclusion summarise or comment on the main points?
- Have I answered the question?

You also need to check spelling, sentence structure and punctuation. Correct all of these on your first draft unless you are making drastic changes which require a significant amount of rewriting. If you choose to use a printed copy of your writing, you might find it useful to use a different pen so that the corrections and alterations are clearly visible. Check sentence structure, spelling and punctuation as you revise.

Step 10: Redevelop the essay so you have the second draft. If you have not already done so, this is a good time to put your essay on to the computer, including all the revisions and corrections. Presentation is important, and you should make sure that you conform to the requirements, including your list of references.

Step 11: Print and proofread. Proofread your essay carefully in hard copy, and make any necessary corrections and/or alterations.

Step 12: Re-read. Before you hand in your essay, read through it one more time. Read it aloud. Ask another person to read your essay through. Does it make sense to them and to you?

For more detailed information on the process of essay writing, go to the ASO website. Click on Academic skills online and select from the academic writing online workshops in
WRITING BASICS.