

Essay Writing

Although course requirements vary, academic essays are expected to contain focused content, show wide and critical reading through presenting integrated relevant literature, be well structured to demonstrate a logical sequence of ideas, and be presented in academic writing style with the requested formatting. The following is intended as a guide, and further instruction may be given by your class tutor.

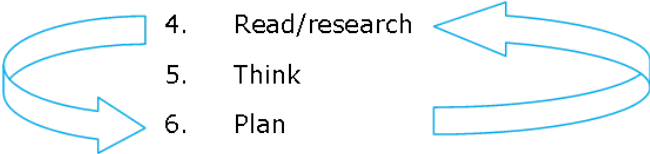
This fact sheet provides information on:

- The process of writing an essay
- Analysing the question
- Drafting an initial essay plan
- Getting ready to research
- Essay structure

There are different types of essays

- Expository essays explain a subject or idea
- Comparative expository essays explain more than one idea or subject and highlight similarities and differences
- Argumentative essays present a point of view with the purpose of persuading the reader

The process of writing an essay

1. Read the question
 2. Analyse the question
 3. Construct initial plan
 4. Read/research
 5. Think
 6. Plan
 7. Write first draft
 8. Redraft as many times as needed
 9. Proofread
 10. Submit
 11. Reflect and review on feedback
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Always consider the question as soon as possible as you may come across relevant information before you start actively researching.

You may have to go around steps 4—6 several times

Start with whichever section you feel most confident to write

Analysing the question

Always read the essay question and the marking schedule.

- Identify the subject or topic of the essay question
- Identify the instruction word/s (refer to the *Instruction Words* study guide)
- Check if there are any other significant words or key aspects to consider.

Drafting an initial essay plan

Planning allows you to break down the task into manageable chunks, identify the main points, and focus your research. Some students find it useful allocate the word count as part of their planning. For example, a 1200 word essay will have approximately 120 words dedicated to the introduction, 120 to 180 to the conclusion, leaving 900 for the body. These are divided across the main points according to emphasis and depth required.

[Break down essay into main points](#)

While researching, add to the plan using keywords to identify key ideas. Each main point may have several supporting details. For example, a plan for a 1200 word essay where the student has identified four main points, each with a different number of supporting details, might look like this:

[Organise into logical order](#)

Example of initial plan for 1200 word essay

Introduction	10% of word count	120 words
Main point one	-supporting detail -supporting detail -supporting detail	300 words
Main point two	-supporting detail -supporting detail	300 words
Main point three	-supporting detail -supporting detail	150 words
Main point four	-supporting detail	150 words
Conclusion	15% of word count	180 words
Total		1200 words

Getting ready to research

Find your own system to research. Some options are:

- Turn main points into questions, so when researching they are [Research methodically](#) looking for answers to questions
- Work from the keywords in your plan [Record all references](#)
- Use a series of research worksheets (one for each main point) or file/folder structures to keep research ordered. A research worksheet might look like this:

Research Worksheet Main Point / Question:	
Research Notes	Reference

Always:

- Critically assess the reference material to ensure the source is credible (refer to the *Evaluating the Credibility of Websites* study guide).
- Keep full reference details.

Research will drive your essay, and you may decide to revise your plan based on what your research reveals.

Essay structure - The introduction

The introduction consists of around 10% of the total word count. Its purpose is to introduce the topic, presenting information from general to specific thereby leading your reader towards the essay's focus. The introduction may be written after the whole structure of the essay is known, and should be revised after the body is completed to ensure it adequately introduces all main points.

- The first few sentences gain the reader's attention and 'sets the scene' for the topic by providing background or contextual information. This might be achieved by stating the importance or relevance of the subject, or mentioning previous relevant literature.
- Next, the central theme of the essay is introduced, with focus on the essay question title.
- Finally, an outline of the essay structure is given, describing to the reader the main points addressed, using verbs (such as discuss, outline, explore, examine, evaluate), to show how these will be addressed. This outline reflects the sequence of the essay material. Refer to the *Sentence Starters and Transitional Words* study guide to find suitable vocabulary.

Gain the reader's attention and provide background information

Introduce the central theme

Outline the main points and state how they will be addressed

To make your introduction interesting, it is sometimes relevant to include the following, but check with your tutor if this is suitable for your type of essay:

- a relevant famous quote or whakatauki
- a short narrative
- reference to a recent case from media
- a rhetorical question
- definition of central terms and concepts.

The body

While researching, you will often develop your own opinion. The essay will be marked on how you present other credible authors' arguments and justified opinions, and your opinion will only be valued if you have been specifically asked to incorporate it. Even then, it must be justified using valid research and logical argument.

- Each main idea should have its own paragraph (refer to the *Paragraph Structure* study guide). Include supporting detail to back up the main idea, and keep illustrations and examples brief and well connected to the points made, with research effectively incorporated.
- Ensure a logical flow from one point to the next, with sequence of ideas following the outline in your introduction. This can be achieved using transitional words (refer to the *Sentence Starters and Transitional Words* study guide).
- Your tutor wants to see that you understand, and can integrate and express the researched information. You might do this by summarising, paraphrasing, or using a few short quotes. Your own words and your own voice must be evident.

Address each main point as outlined in the introduction

Ensure ideas flow

The conclusion

The conclusion consists of up to 15% of the word count. The purpose is to summarise the essay content, re-presenting this content from specific to general information. It is not a repeat of the introduction and the verbs used in the introduction which described how you addressed the topic are not usually present in the conclusion; rather than state that you discussed the topic, summarise the content of the discussion.

Summarise points made in the body

- Firstly, present a summary of main points made;
- then show how these points relate to the essay topic or question; and
- finally, provide a general statement about how the topic relates to its context.

Keep the conclusion content focused

Material adapted from the following sources:

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* 6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Manolo, E., Wong-Toi, G., & Trafford, J. (2001). *The business of writing: Written communication skills for business students*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education.

Thoreau, M. (2006). *Write on track: A guide to academic writing*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education.