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A GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING



PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This guide is designed to assist students with basic essay structures, layout and links to useful resources.

THE BASICS

Essays in Higher Education

When you're writing an essay, it's important to read and refer to reliable academic sources, like journal articles. A great essay clearly answers the question, is well-structured, thoroughly researched, and free from errors. It should be written in a formal tone and follow the referencing style that's required for your subject.

There are various types of essays you may need to write throughout your studies. These could include:

- Descriptive essay
 - Describing the topic in detail
 - Creating a clear and immersive picture
 - Not about stating an argument
- Explanatory essay
 - Logically explains a concept/process
 - Presents the facts and evidence without taking a position
- Discussion based essay
 - Presents multiple viewpoints on the topic
 - Usually weighs the pros and cons of the topic/evidence
 - Ends with a balanced conclusion after the discussion
- Reflective essay
 - Explores personal thoughts and experiences on a topic or learning journey
 - What happened, what you learned and how it affected you
 - Connects your experience to broader themes/ideas
- Critical reviews
 - Evaluating and analysing a topic
 - Assessing strengths and weaknesses
 - Reasoned judgement/interpretation based on evidence
- Argumentative/persuasive essay
 - Takes a clear position
 - Aim to convince the reader of your stance
 - Supported with evidence
 - Use of counterarguments strengthens your position

PLANNING YOUR ESSAY

1. Understanding the question

- Key words
- Key concepts
- Understanding the meaning of instructional words (analyse, discuss, examine, evaluate etc) and using synonyms
- Rewriting/rephrasing the question to ensure you know what it is asking of you

2. The topic – bigger picture

- Brainstorm about what you already know about the topic/question (through past classes/content, textbooks etc) – a useful way to do this is through a **mind map**
- Start broad – it will be simpler if you then need to narrow in on specific details

3. Researching

- Focused on finding relevant, useful and accurate information – using **effective search strategies**
- This is not a passive activity – you should be assessing and analysing claims on the topic, while determining the validity of the source (**TRAAP Method**)
- Always include the bibliographic information of the source so you can refer back, and correctly reference the source in your essay

4. Taking a position

- Depending on the type of essay you are writing, you may need to take a position regarding the question (e.g., for or against said topic)
- Ensure that you are clear with what your position is in your writing with effective and direct language

5. Planning your essay

- When you have compiled your research, it is incredibly useful to plan how you will write the essay
- This can be done using the PEEL paragraph structure. This will allow you to organise your thoughts into main ideas, with supporting evidence and explanation/analysis to formulate the essay structure

General Essay Layout

1. Introduction
2. Body Paragraphs
3. Conclusion
4. Reference List

Further Resources

- [Academic Phrasebank](#)
- [Incorporating Sources](#)

ESSAY STRUCTURE

Introductions

Essay introductions generally contain three key parts:

1. General opening statement/sentence
 - a way to capture the attention of readers
2. Background information on the topic
 - enough to provide context for what you will be talking about
 - indication of why it is important
 - what gaps are missing in the research – does your research fill this gap?
3. Thesis statement
 - 1-2 sentences
 - what your main points of the essay will be
 - what perspective you will take

Body Paragraphs

The main (body) paragraphs of your essay generally follow the PEEL structure:

POINT

- Your first sentence
- Think of it as an introduction to your first idea; it tells the reader what the following paragraph will be about
- Needs to be a clear and concise statement that supports your overall argument

EVIDENCE

- Use supporting facts, examples or data to back up your main point of this paragraph (the P!)
- Using previous findings from academic sources is recommended here

EXPLANATION

- Make it clear how the evidence you used supports your point
- Explain why the evidence is important
- A chance to also provide more context to your argument

LINK

- A concluding sentence that links the point of this paragraph to the main topic/question
- You can also use this sentence to smoothly transition into the next paragraph/point

Conclusions

It is crucial that no new information is added to the conclusion. Essay conclusions usually contain three key parts:

1. A summary of the main points and your findings
 - make sure to reword these
2. Your response to the question
 - this can include your argument and any suggested solutions
3. Remaining problems and areas for future research
 - What still needs to be solved/researched
4. Strong concluding sentence
 - Your overall view on the topic, linking it to the broader question/topic

PEEL PARAGRAPH PLANNER

Essay Question	
Key Words/Concepts	
Instructional Words	
Point Your first sentence of the paragraph stating your main point	
Evidence Support your point with evidence and examples	
Explanation Explain how this evidence supports your ideas	
Link Concluding sentence that refers back to the question using key words where appropriate	



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