

Writing and planning an essay

There are many types of essays with different characteristics. However, in general, an **essay** provides information and evidence to answer a question, respond to a statement or support an argument. The basic structure includes an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion. In an **introduction**, you will take a position or state a thesis in response to the question or prompts for your essay. Your position is then supported by elaborating on a series of key points developed in the **body** of your essay. A **conclusion** reiterates your thesis and summarises the key points made. Always check your assessment requirements, task information and marking rubric for specific guidelines.

The introduction

Orientation to the topic - identify the topic using keywords from your task information followed by relevant background information explaining the significance of the topic.

Definitions - definitions of key terms and concepts essential to an understanding of the topic may be required.

Thesis or position statement - write a clear statement of your position on the issue or topic. Usually one sentence, your position statement includes key words from task information and makes a claim that can be disputed or argued.

Summary of key points - outline the key points that you will make in support of your position in the order in which they will appear in your body paragraphs.

The body

The body of the essay is organised into paragraphs. Body paragraphs support your thesis or position statement and seek to persuade the reader of its validity. Each body paragraph is dedicated to one main idea or point. This point should be stated clearly in the topic sentence (first sentence) of the paragraph. Support this key point with explanations, examples and evidence (use in text citations). A concluding sentence reinforces the paragraph's main idea, linking it to the overall thesis or position statement. It may also link forward to the subsequent paragraph.

A useful model for writing body paragraphs is **the PEEL method**. P (point) represents the topic sentence or key point. The E's signify explanation, elaboration, examples, and evidence. L (link) denotes the concluding sentence that links back to the thesis and may link to the next paragraph.

The conclusion

Restatement of thesis or position - reiterate your position by paraphrasing the statement provided in the introduction. Do not introduce any new information in your conclusion.

Summary of key points - summarise the key points made in support of your position in the body of the essay in the order that they appeared. Give emphasis to how the points support your overall thesis.

Statement of significance - finish your conclusion with a closing statement that indicates the significance or broader implications for your position on the topic.

Essay planner - use this document as a planning template by inserting text as suggested.

Introduction – allow approximately 10% or your word limit for your introduction

Orientation to the question:

Definitions:

Thesis or position statement: Compose a concise thesis or position statement and write it in one sentence here.

Summary of key points:

Body paragraphs - the number and word length will vary depending on word count and task requirements

Body paragraph 1

P (point) – Topic sentence: Compose a concise topic sentence that identifies the key point or main idea in support of your position and write it in full here.

Explanation, examples, evidence:

- Write two or three dot points that support the key point of this paragraph
- Include in text citations to at least three different sources, e.g. (Jones, 2022)
- Use these dot points and citations as the basis for writing the paragraph in full when drafting your essay

L (link) - Concluding sentence: Summarise point and link back to the overall thesis or to the next point/paragraph

Body paragraph 2

P (point) – Topic sentence: Compose a concise topic sentence that identifies the key point or main idea in support of your position and write it in full here.

Explanation, examples, evidence:

- Write two or three dot points that support the key point of this paragraph
- Include in text citations to at least three different sources, e.g. (Jones, 2022)
- Use these dot points and citations as the basis for writing the paragraph in full when drafting your essay

L (link) - Concluding sentence: Summarise point and link back to the overall thesis or to the next point/paragraph

Body paragraph 3

P (point) – Topic sentence: Compose a concise topic sentence that identifies the key point or main idea in support of your position and write it in full here.

Explanation, examples, evidence:

- Write two or three dot points that support the key point of this paragraph
- Include in text citations to at least three different sources, e.g. (Jones, 2022)
- Use these dot points and citations as the basis for writing the paragraph in full when drafting your essay

L (link) - Concluding sentence: Summarise point and link back to the overall thesis or to the next point/paragraph

Continue the same pattern until you have planned each of the key points/body paragraphs you intend to develop in support of your position.

Conclusion – allow approximately 10% of your word limit for your conclusion

Reiterate your position or thesis:

Restate/summarise your main points:

Conclude with a final statement of significance:

Suggestion: complete the instructions in blue in this essay plan in sufficient detail to support drafting your essay.

- Then, start by drafting each of your **body paragraphs**. At this stage, include drafts of your concluding sentences that link to your thesis or position and may link to the next paragraph. See the *Planning and Writing Body Paragraphs* Quick Guide and the Quick Guides under **“Writing at University”**
- Next, draft your **introduction** by completing the components detailed above. See the *Planning and Writing an Introduction* Quick Guide.
- Finally, draft your **conclusion** by re-reading your introduction and body paragraphs and completing the components detailed above. See the *Planning and Writing a Conclusion* Quick Guide.
- At the end of your essay, remember to provide an alphabetically ordered **reference list** on a separate page using the referencing system designated by your lecturer (e.g., APA, Harvard, etc.).

Methods to incorporate citations:

To include another person's ideas:

Brown (2023) claims that... argues that... points out that... reports that... proposes that... suggests that... states that... maintains that... implies that...

To make comments about individual studies:

The study comprised/consisted of ... focused on... has undertaken/attempted...

The findings were reported as... Brown's (2021) study has shown that/found that...

Jones (2022) has indicated that... develops a theoretical perspective that...

...is part of a growing body of work that... redefines the traditional notion/idea of...

...elaborates on the theory that... has undertaken/attempted a...

Brown (2021) raises... proposes... defends... substantiates... justifies the idea notion/proposition...

To make comments about a number of studies:

Research (e.g., Brown, 2023; Smith, 2020) has shown that...

Studies (e.g., Brown, 2023; Smith, 2020) have indicated that...

Studies (e.g., Brown, 2023; Smith, 2020) generally agree/ confirm/disagree/refute...

There is a common view that... The general finding is that...

Traditional theories/ ideas are reworked as...

To give your opinion when you are making a suggestion:

Brown's (2023) claim seems to be that... suggests that... could be interpreted as... appears as though... It would seem that further investigations are needed to...

To make comparisons between studies/ideas:

Whereas previous studies... this study seeks to... While this study... other studies...

Unlike previous studies, this study/article... concludes that...

Similarly, in comparison, in contrast, likewise, conversely, on the other hand, as was evidenced in previous studies, the findings/idea put forward in this study/article...

The research has tended to focus on... rather than on...

Although considerable research effort has been given to... less attention has been paid to.... These studies have emphasised... as opposed to...

To make critical comments (strengths, weaknesses, limitations):

The study was well presented and documented... assumes that... is predicated on the assumption that... Other differences were noted... however...

Even so, many questions were left unanswered.

The problem with these studies... The study does not... There is some contradictory evidence...

The... were questionable/debatable... It is unclear how...

The limitations of the... There are concerns with the...

Methods to introduce a new idea or topic (e.g. in an essay):

Recently there has been a strong interest in... The development of... is a problem...

The... has become a favoured topic because...

The central issue is...

The relationship between... and... has been investigated by...

Many studies have focused on...

Check the *SCU Learning Zone* for more related Quick Guides.