

How to succeed@essay writing

This leaflet tells you everything you need to know about writing essays - how to structure them, what kind of language to use, how to avoid plagiarism and more. Read through the leaflet and use these techniques if you want to get good grades.

Remember, this is a summary, so if you want the full info, visit 'How to succeed@writingacademically' which you'll find in succeed@solent on myCourse.



How to get started on your essay

Analyse the question

Your first step in writing an essay **MUST** always be to make sure you understand the question. The key to this is to:

- Identify the *process word* (e.g. 'evaluate', 'discuss', 'compare and contrast');
- Identify the *topic* of the essay (the area from your subject it is about);
- Identify the *limits* of the essay (for instance, is it restricted to a particular time, a particular country or a particular number of cases?).

Check the marking criteria

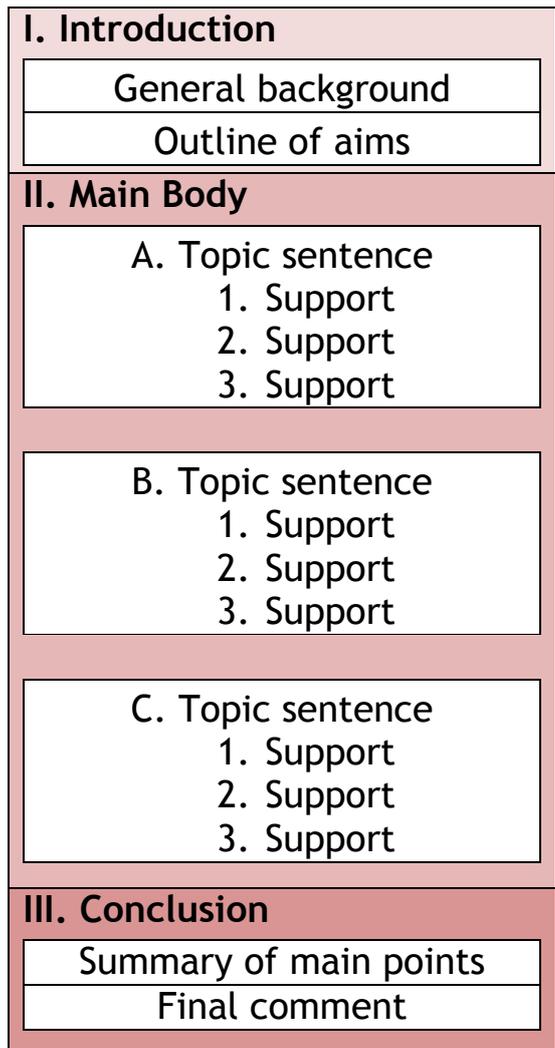
The way that your paper will be marked is not a secret!

Your tutor has a set of marking criteria that shows how marks are awarded for your paper. Make sure you have a copy for your essay. If you haven't got it, ask your tutor for it. The criteria itself may give you a good way to start thinking about the best content and structure for your essay.

Brainstorm

Some people find that the best way to get started on an essay is to brainstorm everything they know about the topic onto a piece of paper. Try it. Once you have got it all out of your head you can begin to plan some structure into your ideas. You should also notice where there are gaps in your knowledge, which will guide you towards the place to begin your research.

The basic five-part essay



For an explanation of this diagram, turn the page.

Essay structure

An academic essay must always follow a set structure.

Introduction

- Introduces the topic
- Gives a little background
- Outlines the aims (what you are going to do in the essay)

Main Body

- Develops the introduction
- Presents your argument (following the process given in the essay question)
- Refers to your source material

Conclusion

- Suggests further reading
- Sums up and closes the essay
- Introduces new ideas and leaves the reader thinking

In our model, '*The basic five-part essay*' there are three paragraphs in the main body. However, in reality the main body can have as many paragraphs as necessary to fully answer the question.

Topic sentence

Each paragraph must have only one main idea and that main idea is introduced by a *topic sentence*. These are often the first sentence, but may come later if the paragraph begins with a sentence linking it to previous content.

Further sentences all *support* the topic sentence.

Types of support include:

- explanation
- definition
- examples
- evidence
- relevant quotation

Essay structure rules

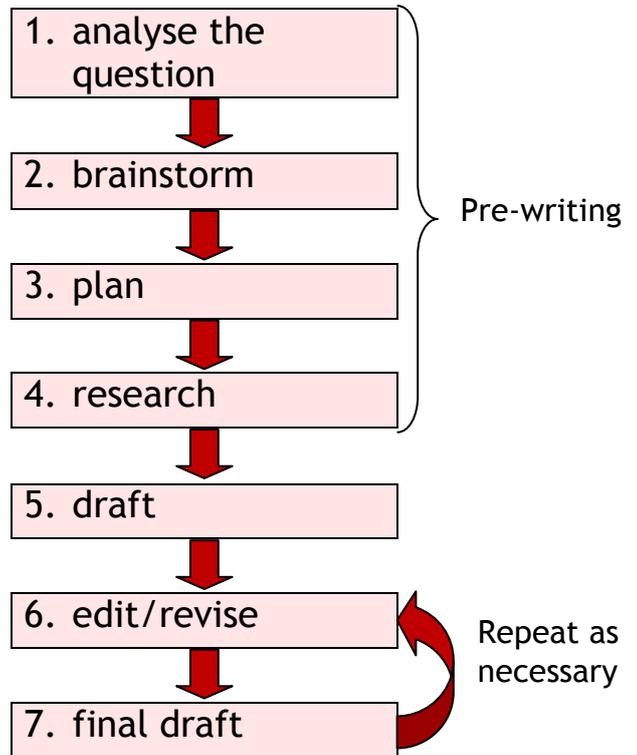
1. The essay must be clearly split into *introduction, main body* and *conclusion*.
2. The main body develops all the aims outlined in the introduction.
3. Every paragraph is related to the question topic.
4. Every paragraph has only one main idea.
5. The *topic sentence* states the main idea of the paragraph.
6. All other sentences in the paragraph support the topic.
7. Linking phrases are used to show the connections between paragraphs.
8. With each new main idea, start a new paragraph.

The writing process

The writing process is a series of steps you should take in order to make sure your essay is well thought out and well structured.

These steps include:

- Pre-writing (analysing the question, brainstorming, planning and researching)
- Drafting
- Editing and revising what you have written



Analyse the question

You need to pick out the *process, topic* and *limits* in your essay question and use these to begin your planning. Visit 'How to succeed@understanding your assignment' to learn how to do this.

Planning

Time spent planning is invaluable - it gives your essay structure from the start and allows you to keep the essay question in mind at all times. It also gives direction to your research. Many people find it useful to begin planning with a *brainstorming* session to get everything you know about the topic out of your head.

Editing and revising

You really can't do enough of this, so do as much as time allows. And remember, always get someone else to read your essay before you hand it in just to check for any mistakes or confusions that you may have missed.

Write well

It's really important that you remember to write your essay in an appropriately **academic style**. This means that you should:

- Use formal language - not slang or 'spoken' language
- Use correct and technical language appropriate to your subject
- Use correct, full spellings - not abbreviations or text speak
- Write in grammatically correct, well-structured sentences
- Do not write in the first person (don't use 'I', 'me', 'my' or 'mine')

Other things you ought to consider if you want to have a good writing style are:

- Make it your aim to have writing that is clear and easy to understand
- Keep it simple, don't use overly complex language - it's not clever or impressive, it's confusing and off-putting
 - Don't try to dress up your writing with lots of long and difficult words
 - Short, simple sentences are better whenever it is possible to use them

Always check grammar and spelling with your word processing software. Try reading your writing out loud to check if it is easy to read, and always get someone else to read through your paper for the same reason.

Note: Your writing needs variety to make reading it more pleasurable.

Connect your ideas together

To make your essay easy to follow, you need to put up signposts that will help your reader find the correct way through the writing. This means you need to get into the habit of using linking expressions that connect ideas together, that show when you are moving from one idea to another and which show the relationships between ideas, for example:

'Firstly,...'

'Consequently,...'

'One the one hand,...'

'Having looked at the first cause,...'

'The next problem to look at is...'

'There are two opposing points of view on this.'

Avoid plagiarism

Plagiarism is a real problem in university writing - it's a problem for universities because a lot of people seem to be doing it these days. It's problem for you, the student, because if you don't know how to avoid it and you actually do it, you could lose marks, not have your essay marked at all, or in the worst case, be expelled from the university - it's that serious.

To avoid plagiarism and to show that you have done research to back up your essay's ideas, you must give other people's writing in **quotations** and **paraphrase**. When you do so, you must say in the paper where you took the words or ideas from. A **reference** is a note of the author, text title, publisher, etc. of your source material. A **reference list** is a list of all of the sources you have referred to in your paper which you must put at the end of your essay.

You must know what reference system your department prefers you to use. At Solent University, the majority of subjects use the **Harvard Referencing System**. However, there are also at least two other methods in use: **APA** for psychology students and the **Law** system. There are detailed explanations of how to use each of these in the tutorial 'How to succeed@referencing', which you can find in succeed@research on myCourse.

Layout and appearance

Your essay must be word processed on a computer, and it must follow the layout guidelines provided by your department.

Generally, you will be expected to write in 12pt font, with 1.5 spacing. The university's font is Trebuchet MS.

There are essay templates following these guidelines available to download in succeed@solent.

Further help

Visit succeed@solent for further information and downloadable resources.

Contact your Learning Skills Tutors, Carina Buckley and Helen Capstick, in ML002 for further guidance and support.

Email: succeed@solent.ac.uk