

Essay Writing

The word essay comes from the Latin word meaning to 'present a case'. So what you have to do when you write an essay is present a case, present the information to the reader, this will involve you presenting other people's arguments.

An essay is continuous prose – this means it is not split up by sub-headings or bullet points; no pictures, illustrations, graphs or charts.

If an essay has a set length or word count, then this is exactly what you must stick to – your lecturers will not be twice as delighted to receive 4,000 words if you have been asked to write 2,000 words. The challenge within the essay is to respond to the task within the set word limit. You are usually permitted 10% of the word count either way.

An essay has a set form – a formal convention. An essay has a beginning, a middle and an end – these are known as an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion; this will be followed by a reference page. Your reference provides the full information of the sources you have 'made reference to' within your main body by providing a citation.

An essay must be academically written; this means considering several factors within your essay:

- No slang terms
 - Use full words – no shortening (can't, won't, shouldn't)
 - No abbreviations like etc, eg, ie (use terms like for ...example... and so on...)
 - Introduce acronyms appropriately [National Health Service (NHS) can then be referred to as NHS throughout your essay]
 - Must be written in 3rd person as if telling a story (no use of I, we, you, us)
 - Ensure you use paragraphs. Paragraphs should be meaty, they are not one or two sentences long, but there should only be one point per paragraph.
 - Always give your essay a title (this may be directed by your lecturer)
 - Never give your opinion, unless you are asked for it
 - Always provide a citation to show where you have retrieved your sources from (a good rule of thumb is one reputable source for every 100 words in your word count)
 - Use appropriate spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - Use size 12 font
 - Use a professional font style
 - Line space your essay at 1.5
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- Always submit a draft!

Structuring your Essay

The main body

Always start with the main body!!! This should contain all of your content that meets criteria; although writing it first, this will be the 'middle' part of your essay. This is where you respond to the task or the question set, by using a series of linking paragraphs.

Within a paragraph an idea is usually introduced, the idea is usually defined, then explored, then evidence is usually provided to support what you are saying before finishing with a concluding point. Try to link to your next paragraph (but you can always do this in your re-draft!) This structure forces you to be analytical and argue the case rather than just describe things or events. If your paragraph is only four or five lines long, then it is not a paragraph... It is sentences!

There should be only one main point per paragraph and these should be ordered in a way that you present your case logically. Think of it as a lawyer building a case in court; one point leads to another and another and voila.... A case is made.

This should be around 80% of your word count.

The introduction

This is the first complete paragraph of your essay. This is where you tell the reader exactly how you are going to tackle the question or address the task; this is specifically where you provide an agenda of your essay and signpost what is to come.

Do not start answering the question or addressing the task, leave this to the main body.

This is an important part of the essay, as no matter what you may think, there is maybe more than one way to answer the question. You must tell the reader what is coming, and give them a framework by which they can judge your essay. They can tell whether you have delivered the goods!

Without an introduction, the reader is continually wondering where the essay is going? What are they looking at? Not only does it make the reader uncomfortable, but it also makes your essay harder to judge, and could award you a low mark for not answering the question properly.

This should be around 10% of your word count.

The conclusion

This is the last complete paragraph of your essay, and usually a little longer than the introduction.

In the conclusion you re-state the main points from your main body to prove that you have answered the question or task.

You must never ever introduce new ideas or evidence in your conclusion, base your final address of the question on what you have signposted in your introduction.

A conclusion is a great way to check your essay, if you have summarised your main points, and these come together to answer the question then you should have a good essay.

This should be around 10% of your word count.

The reader should be able to read the introduction and conclusion and know exactly what is in the main body!

The reference list

This is a record with the full details of the sources you have 'made reference to' within your main body. You have made reference to them by providing a citation. (Authors name and year of publication).

You must use the Harvard Referencing System – Use the Referencing handbook on moodle for this.

This must be in alphabetical order!