

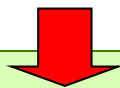
Writing an Essay

The majority of your assessments are done through writing. In most study areas, you will be asked to write essays for assignments and in exams. Essays may be as short as 500 words or as long as 2000–3000 words; therefore, it is important that you develop a good grasp of essay writing and all that it involves:

1. Preparing for writing (steps 1–7)
2. Writing the essay (steps 8–12)

1. Preparing for writing (steps 1–7)

- Step 1: Choose the question.** Think about the time available, the availability of reference material, and your own interests.
- Step 2: Analyse the question.** Identify the instruction words, the topic words, and any restricting words and phrases (see ASO factsheet *Analysing the question*).
- Step 3: Rewrite the question.** After you have analysed the question, try to rewrite it using some different words.
- Step 4: Brainstorm.** Brainstorming will help you to determine how much you already know about the subject. If you cannot come up with any ideas, you will need to do some preliminary reading.
- Step 5: Research.** Go back to the reference material and look for specific examples, evidence, and /or quotes that can be used to support your ideas. Make sure you accurately record the sources of your information and any quotes.
- Step 6: Decide on the order of presentation.** Return to your original notes, finalise the points you will cover, and decide how you will present them. A common order of presentation is the order of decreasing importance.
- Step 7: Plan.** You should now be able to write a plan. In most cases, this should not require more than about one page.



ESSAY PLAN

QUESTION: Write out the question here.

INTRODUCTION: Write what you understand by the question, the direction of your argument, and the angle you are taking. Do you agree or disagree and why?

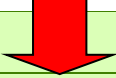
BODY: List the points/topics you are going to use to support your stand or angle.

- Generally, you will have one main point/topic per paragraph with associated supporting evidence.
- The number of points/topics required will depend on the length of your essay. To calculate, consider that the body paragraphs should be 80-90% of the word count. Divide this figure by 200–250 (average length of a paragraph). Thus, for a 1000-word essay, you would have three to four body paragraphs (depending on length) that discuss one point/topic each.
- Put paragraphs in the order of most important point/topic to least important.

CONCLUSION: At this stage, your conclusion will be tentative. A general comment about the points you have presented is sufficient.

2. Writing the essay (steps 8–12)

Step 8: Write the first draft. Write the essay out in full.



THE ESSAY

Introduction

The introduction should identify the topic, give essential background information and/or definitions of key words where necessary, and indicate the direction and angle of your argument by providing an outline of the topics to be presented in the body paragraphs (direction) and the thesis statement (angle).

The Body

The body of the essay consists of a number of paragraphs in which you present your main points and evidence to support them. If you have planned and prepared appropriately, writing the body of the essay should be fairly easy. It will almost be a case of expanding what you have in note form into complete sentences, adding specific details where necessary.

Conclusion

A good conclusion should summarise your main points and, in most cases, make some sort of judgment. It should also refer back to the question, so that you more or less bring the reader back to the starting point.

Step 9: Revise and edit the first draft. Read through what you have written carefully. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does the introduction identify the topic?
- Are there enough points?
- Is each point dealt with in a separate paragraph?
- Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
- Is there enough supporting evidence in each paragraph?
- Are the paragraphs in the best order?
- Does one paragraph lead on to the next smoothly?
- Does the conclusion summarise or comment on the main points?
- Have I answered the question?

You also need to check spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation. Correct all of these on your first draft unless you are making drastic changes that require a significant amount of rewriting. If you choose to use a printed copy of your writing, you might find it useful to use a different pen so that the corrections and alterations are clearly visible. Check sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation as you revise.

Step 10: Redevelop the essay so you have the second draft. This is a good time to put your essay on to the computer, revising the first draft and making corrections. Presentation is important, and you should make sure that you conform to the requirements, including your list of references.

Step 11: Print and proofread. Proofread your essay carefully in hard copy, and make any necessary corrections and/or alterations.

Step 12: Re-read. Before you submit your essay, read through it one more time. Read it aloud. Ask another person to read your essay through. Does it make sense to them and to you?