

ESSAY WRITING: PROCESS

An essay presents a well-argued discussion or response to a question or proposition, using analysis and critique of relevant literature. It establishes a proposition or thesis and presents a point of view. The following are suggested steps for writing an essay.

1. Analyse the question

- Circle key content words and phrases.
- Underline any instructional words, e.g. discuss, explain, identify, evaluate.
- Be sure you understand what the task is: put the question in your own words.
- Look for hints on structure, i.e. how many parts are there to the question? Is it compare/contrast, cause/effect? A number of factors, features, principles, etc.?

2. Brainstorm the question

- Bring all your ideas together on one page to:
 - take stock of what you already know
 - identify any gaps in your knowledge
 - give you the beginnings of a plan for your essay
- Mind-maps are useful at this stage.

3. Start your research

- Begin with general reading – start with recommended texts, course notes and books from the library.
- Look for potential ways to structure your essay.
- Record all bibliographical details, including page numbers for your references, as you go to avoid plagiarism.

4. Plan the essay

- Decide on your main points and organise the information – use headings and make connections.
- Decide on a logical order for your points.
- Your plan should include:
 - main points and their relationship to the question
 - supporting information and its relationship to the main points
 - references
 - a draft of the introduction.

5. Continue your research

- Focus your research, expanding on the main points and arguments, and refine the plan.
- Use search terms from your earlier research to locate precise information/evidence (e.g. from databases).

6. Write

- Write using your detailed plan.
- It may be useful to write the body paragraphs first, then the conclusion, then finalise the introduction.
- Write paragraphs containing one main idea stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences should explain, support and give detail, with evidence from research and/or examples.
- Integrate theory and include references as you go.
- Expect to write several drafts. Try to avoid getting stuck looking for the 'right' word.

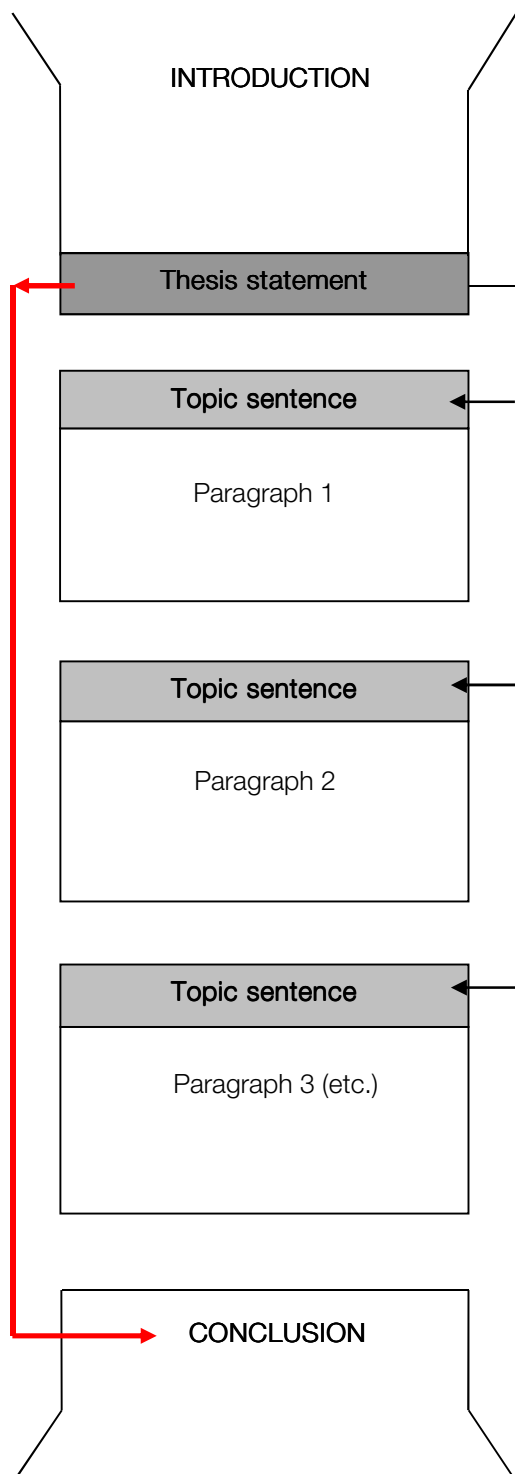
7. Edit

- Focus on checking that the essay is logical, points are linked to the purpose, and information is relevant.
- Make sure your reference list includes all works cited and is correctly set out.
- Proof-read for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. Reading aloud can be useful.
- Check layout, margins, page numbers, line spacing and title page. Check your lecturer's expectations.
- Save additional copies of your essay in different locations, e.g. Google Drive, RMIT H-drive, USB, or Dropbox.

Essay tasks generally contain:

- **Content** words: what the assignment is about
- **Limiting** words: define the scope of the topic
- **Direction/Instruction** words: tell you what to do, e.g. discuss, evaluate.

ESSAY WRITING: STRUCTURE



Introduction – an outline of the argument

Begins with a brief general statement setting the essay in a context (connecting it to the world)

May define terms

Indicates the areas and perspectives discussed in the essay

Leads to a **thesis statement**, which summarises the essay in one sentence, and contains a point of view

Body – made up of connected paragraphs

Each paragraph contains one main idea, expressed in a **topic sentence** (usually the first sentence).

The other sentences in the paragraph expand on the topic sentence, giving details and evidence (with references to the sources), and/or examples.

The final sentence is linked back to the main idea in the topic sentence.

The topic sentences carry the theme or outline of the essay and relate directly back to the thesis statement. This creates logical development and flow of the argument.

Tip: If you cover the main text and read only the topic sentences, the essay should make basic logical sense.

Conclusion – the ‘answer’

Provides an answer: a restatement of the thesis in different words

Gives a very brief summing up of the main points

Often restates the significance of the issue and response

Contains no new points.