

Writing an Essay

The aim of an essay

In an essay, your main goal is to express an opinion or information to the reader. You should have one main point that you are trying to express. Usually you are expected to *analyse*, *discuss* or *evaluate* an issue, applying research to support an argument.

Planning

Have, at least, a brief plan before you start writing an essay as it can provide a guide for which ideas and information you include. A plan also allows you to lay out your essay structure before you begin writing. By having a plan you can see whether some paragraphs are thin on evidence or have other issues.

Essay structure

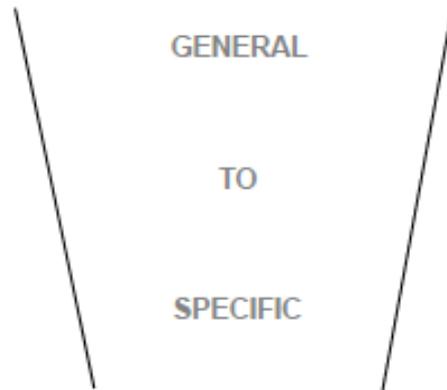
There are four main parts of an essay: the introduction, the body and the conclusion, plus the reference list. One way to describe each part is as follows:

- Introduction: tell them what you're going to say
- Body: say it
- Conclusion: tell them what you said
- Reference List: give credit to people for their ideas

That's oversimplifying it, but it's a quick way to remember the purpose of each section. Here is a visual take on essay structure that shows you generally what to aim for:

Introduction

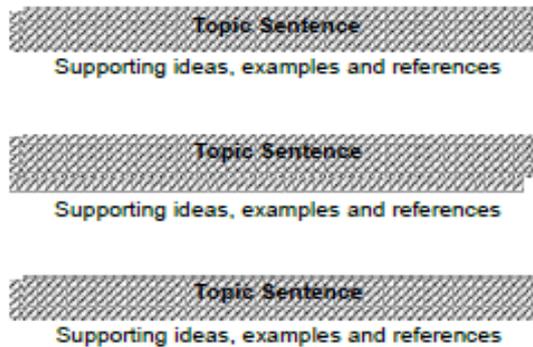
- ⇐ about 15% of total length
- ⇐ one paragraph or several, depending on length



- ← Introduce the topic, provide general background information
- ← Narrow your focus, set context for your argument
- ← Present your viewpoint / line of argument / thesis statement
- ← Outline areas / main points to be discussed

Body

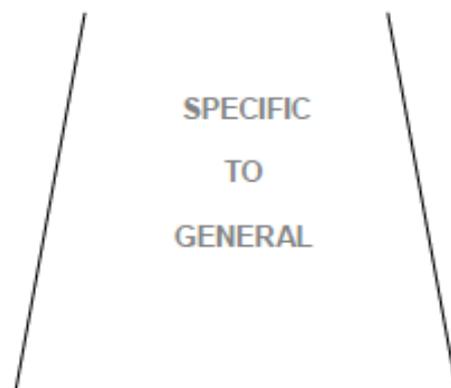
- ⇐ one point per paragraph
- ⇐ a number of paragraphs, depending on length



- Topic sentences support the main argument or thesis statement of the essay.
- A topic sentence should be your own idea.

Conclusion

- ⇐ Usually one paragraph
- ⇐ about 10% of total length



- ← Sum up the main points and reconfirm your thesis statement
No new information is included here
- ← Set the topic in context again. Mention wider implications, or make recommendations for further investigation

Introduction

An introduction is the first thing your audience reads, so it needs to be clear, concise ... and engaging! Some students find it easier to write the introduction in their first draft, while others prefer to write it after their body paragraphs have been finalised.

The introduction can be broken down into four parts:

1. Introduce the topic, provide general background information

Show the context of your essay by introducing some key words or concepts from your essay topic.

Example: Essay topic

“Discuss the impacts of the phenomenon of performance enhancing drugs in Australian professional sports on adolescent athletes.”

As you can see, three key words have been introduced here, which are: ‘performance enhancing drugs’, ‘Australian’ and ‘professional sports’. Following this, you may then want to write another couple of sentences expanding on this information.

2. Narrow your focus, set the context for your argument

Introduce the other key words from your topic to set up the context for your upcoming thesis statement.

The other key words from the original topic are, ‘adolescent athletes’, this completes the picture and now leads the reader towards your specific angle on the subject.

3. Present your viewpoint/line of argument/thesis statement

Next you state the main argument or focus for the body of your essay based on the background information you provided for the reader. Your argument can be a ‘direct answer’ to a question posed in the essay topic, or a statement about an issue highlighted in your essay topic. Just make sure all key words from the topic have been introduced by this stage, so that your reader is given the complete context for your ideas. For example, a thesis statement for the original essay could be:

“Drug taking in sport has only negative impacts on adolescent athletes with regard to their own potential moral code as professional sportspeople and also their propensity for participating in drug taking itself.”

4. Outline areas/main points to be discussed

This leads into the body of your essay, informing your reader about what is coming next. In particular, state what the main points in the paragraphs will be about. For example:

“This essay examines impacts on the attitudes and aspirations of young athletes as a result of drug use in sport, and how these arise as a result of role modelling and exposure to drugs through sports clubs.”

It should be noted that the four sections described above do not have to be followed in this rigid order. Use them as needed in your essays, but always follow your marker’s instructions in the first instance.

Generally, your introduction makes up approximately 15% of your total length. So, if you were asked to write a 2,000 word essay, your introduction would be about 300 words, as a general estimate.

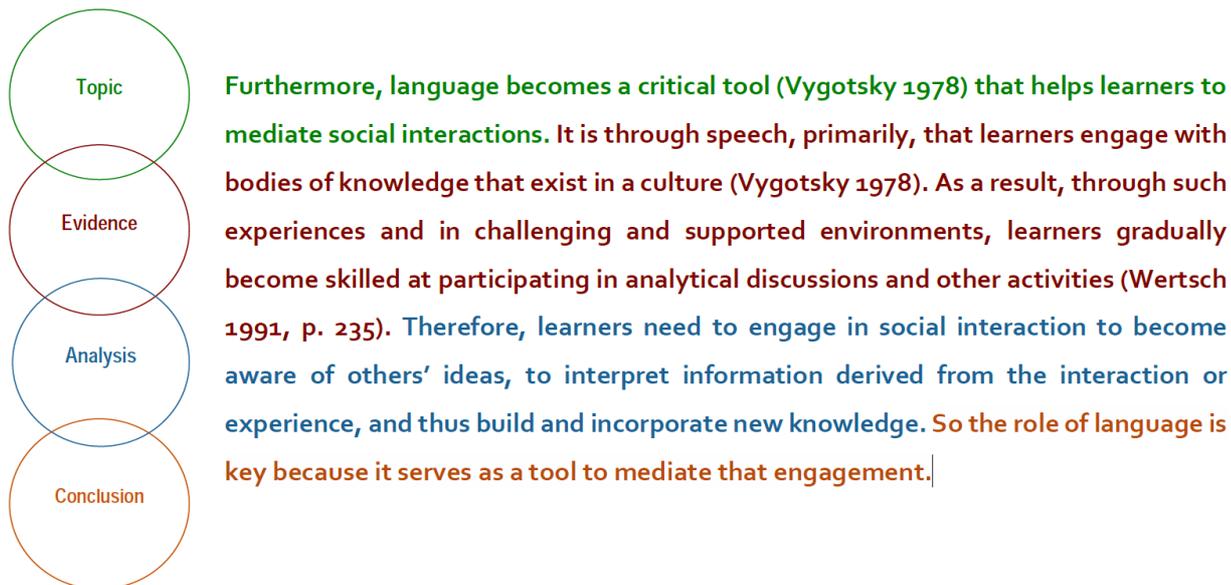
Body

The body of your essay is where you give the main ideas or points of your answer. Therefore, the body consists of a series of paragraphs where each paragraph should cover only one topic, idea or point.

A paragraph is a related group of sentences that develops one main idea. Each paragraph in the body of the essay should contain:

- A **topic sentence** that states the main or controlling idea
- **Supporting sentences** to explain and develop the point you're making
- **Evidence.** Most of the time, your point should be supported by some form of evidence from your reading, or by an example drawn from the subject area.
- **Analysis.** Don't just leave the evidence hanging there - analyse and interpret it! Comment on the implication/significance/impact and finish off the paragraph with a critical conclusion you have drawn from the evidence.
- a **concluding sentence** that restates your point, analyses the evidence or acts as a transition to the next paragraph.

For example:



You can use as many paragraphs as you need to write about all the ideas or points that you want to cover in your answer.

Generally, the body of your essay makes up approximately 80% of your total length. So, if you were asked to write a 2,000 word essay, the body would be about 1,600 words, as a general estimate.

Conclusion

This is where you wrap it all up. It's much like the reverse of the introduction in that you remind your reader what the focus of your essay was. This includes your thesis statement and an outline of your arguments from the body. You then finish up by making recommendations about what research could happen next (if that's appropriate) or writing a neat summary sentence. There should be no new information in the conclusion or any references. This is your own summary of your own writing.

Generally, your conclusion makes up approximately 10% of your total length. So, if you were asked to write a 2,000 word essay, your introduction would be about 200 words, as a general estimate.

Reference List

This section comes after the essay and includes full publication information for all the in-text citations you used to write your essay. In higher education, a reference list is expected for every essay you write. The purpose of the reference list is to allow your sources to be found by your reader. It also gives credit to authors you have consulted for their ideas. All references cited in the text must appear in the reference list.

A **bibliography** is different from a reference list as it lists all the sources used during your research and background reading, not just the ones you refer to in your writing.

Example of a reference list:

References

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(Adapted from Federation University 2018)