

ESSAY (ACADEMIC ESSAY)

An essay (sometimes called an academic essay) is a piece of writing that explores a topic and reaches a conclusion on that topic. The aim of an essay is to make a sound academic argument based on reliable evidence. You need to utilise critical thinking, go beyond simply describing or summarising, and generate an interesting analysis. An essay needs to contain a central argument, which is your answer to the topic question, and demonstrates reasons based on reliable evidence for your conclusion.

Note: If you are writing a reflective essay, please see our separate writing guide on reflective essays.

Content

The content of an essay is based around research of the topic. This means explaining and justifying your ideas based on information and examples from reliable sources. It is important that your essay has a central idea or argument that the essay content is focused on. This is known as a thesis statement.

Depending on the essay question, the essay may contain:

- a thesis statement (claim, proposition, main idea)
- context (background, framework, setting)
- reasons (support, evidence, examples)
- counter-arguments (objections, contrary considerations)
- responses (refutations, answers to objections)

Structure

Usually, an essay has four main components: an introduction, a series of body paragraphs, a conclusion, and a reference list.



Introduction

The introduction consists of:

- a general statement (usually called a 'topic sentence') about the topic/issue under discussion
- background information on the topic/issue
- definitions of key terms (if applicable) *
- an outline of the main structure of the essay (usually called 'signposting'). This can be drawn from the content area/s you need to address
- a thesis statement that introduces the argument/s you will be making in your essay (usually your answer to the assignment question)

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\* Any terminology, jargon words, or words that relate to the essay topic should be defined using relevant theory (and should be referenced correctly). Any key terms you use should come from journal articles, books, and other reliable sources. Note that general dictionary definitions usually do not have the same word meaning/s as those used in your specialised area/s of study.  
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Generally, an introduction is approximately 5%-10% of your actual word count.

Body Paragraphs

The body of your essay expands on your arguments/thesis statement. In each body paragraph, you present relevant information and research that supports your arguments/thesis statement. It is important that the information is organised into clear paragraphs with a logical order. When writing your body paragraphs you should aim to guide the reader through your reasoning process and offer a clear explanation of each point you make so that you develop your argument effectively. **Each paragraph should explore just one main idea.** Body paragraphs have the following structure:

- a topic sentence identifying what the paragraph will be about (usually developing from a previous paragraph's linking sentence)
- a series of supporting sentences that develop the topic of the paragraph, and include explanations, examples, details, research, quotations, and references
- a linking sentence (sometimes called a concluding sentence) that identifies what the main topic of the paragraph was, and links to the next paragraph (note that the last body paragraphs in an essay usually does not have a linking sentence)

Avoid using paragraphs consisting of only one or two sentences, or that are longer than one double-spaced page.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, you need to summarise the **main points and ideas** that you presented in your essay. You should draw conclusions from what you have discussed and include a restatement (paraphrased) of your thesis statement (from the introduction). There should be **no new material** included in the conclusion; new material needs to be placed in your body paragraphs.

The Reference List

For information about creating a reference list using APA 7th edition, click [here](#).

Style

Essays should incorporate plenty of linking words/phrases and signposts make your essay easy for the reader to follow. These words/phrases help by making the connections between sentences and paragraphs clear and indicate the flow of your ideas. They also signal to the reader how to approach the information that follows. For example:

- Use words like *similarly*, *also* and *in addition* to indicate that you are adding a similar idea to one already presented
- Use words like *in contrast*, *however*, and *on the other hand* to make a contrast or add an opposite idea to one already presented
- Use words like *therefore*, *consequently* and *as a result* to show an outcome from one of the ideas presented
- Use words like *for example* and *for instance* to give an example that further develops an idea you have presented

Linking words are very useful in creating cohesion and 'flow' in your writing. Without them, your assignment will read like a series of sentences that do not flow or present a logical argument.

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On the following page, you will find a checklist that you can use to ensure that you have followed all aspects of essay writing and formatting.  
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Generally, a conclusion is approximately 5%-10% of your actual word count.

Checklist for your essay

- I have formatted my paper using ACAP formatting guidelines.
- I have included a completed Cover Sheet with my paper (if applicable).
- I have a clear introduction that introduces the topic, outlines the structure of my essay and gives my thesis statement.
- Each paragraph is focused on one main point that develops my argument.
- All key terms and concepts are defined and referenced correctly.
- I have demonstrated that I have read widely yet remained focused on the topic.
- I have grouped ideas clearly, so that there is a logical flow to my writing.
- I have included plenty of linking words/phrases and signposts.
- I have acknowledged all sources of information according to APA 7 guidelines.
- I have a strong conclusion that summarises my main points and reiterates (paraphrases) my thesis statement.
- There is no new material introduced in the conclusion.