



Essay Writing

Essay writing often seems like a daunting and overwhelming task. It is an assessment format which combines content knowledge but also requires a variety of skills, including:

- research skills
- information organisation & structuring skills
- argumentation skills
- academic writing skills
- summarising, paraphrasing & synthesising skills, and
- citing and referencing skills

Refer to [Learning Support resources](#) for additional information on these skills.

This handout aims to make the essay writing process clear and easier for you. It provides information on how to deconstruct and manage the process, how to formulate a good structure and some writing tips.

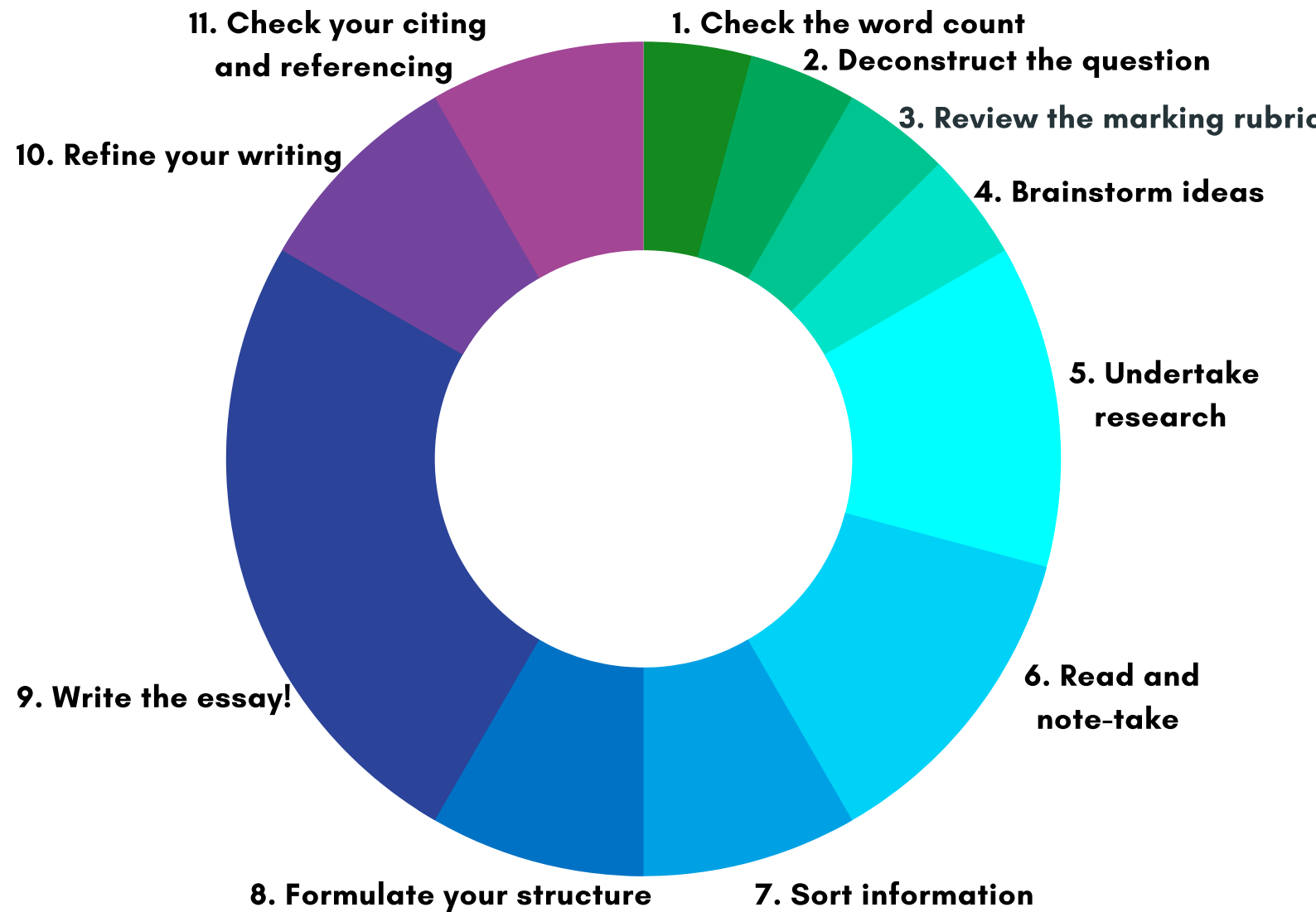
What makes a good essay?

“For me, answering the essay question is just the start. So much of the quality of an essay comes down to how that answer is explained. How has the student presented their argument, what is the flow or narrative or journey the student takes the reader on, what evidence or theory does the student use to back up their arguments and how is this used, and how are critiques of the literature used in a meaningful way to drive the narrative?”

Dr. Chris Kilby

Senior Lecturer, Associate Head of School for Learning and Teaching

A PROCESS FOR WRITING YOUR ESSAY



What makes a good essay?

STRUCTURE

good research

*polished - no
spelling and
grammar errors*

*Correct citing and
referencing*

Well expressed

answers the question

1. *Check the word count*

The word count is the first information you need to plan your essay. This will provide you with an approximate number of paragraphs and therefore provide an indication of the number of themes or central ideas. For instance:

- 1000 word essay equates to approximately 5 paragraphs
- 2000 word essay equates to approximately 10 paragraphs
- 2500 word essay equates to approximately 13 paragraphs
- 3000 word essay equates to approximately 15 paragraphs

You don't need to strictly adhere to this number, but it will assist you as a planning tool to structure your essay.

2. *Deconstruct the question*

Feedback from lecturers often states that an essay question was not answered. In order that you *do* answer the question, spend some time deconstructing it to ensure you are clear about what it is asking you to do. If you are not clear, ask for clarification in class or on the Canvas discussion board. When it comes to writing, here are some tips to ensure you are answering the question:

- Use the key terms and phrases from the question to show you are responding directly to it.
- The question may provide you with a structure to follow by providing key themes or directions. For instance, if there is an "and" in the question or there are two sentences, it is likely your answer will require two parts.

3. *Review the marking rubric*

Always look closely at the marking rubric to ensure you understand how you will be marked. This may provide further detail as to that you should include. Also, note the marks allocated to each criterion – if one aspect receives 30% of the mark, then this suggests you may need to spend at least 30% of the word count on it.

4. *Brainstorm ideas*

Write down your ideas arising from the question. This may include your initial response or hypothesis, ideas for what you need to search for (search terms), what the main arguments may be, the main themes or topics you need to consider and how you think you may structure the essay. The important thing at this stage is to just generate some ideas and understand what you may need to look for in your research.

5. *Undertake research*

Locate the articles or information you may need by searching the library resources. Remember to also search the databases – [EBSCOhost](#) or [ProQuest](#) may provide more results than you will find from the general Library search page. Refine your results with key terms and phrases, year of publication and if you are looking for an article, then choose peer reviewed journals. Look at abstracts to determine if the article is on topic and when you have what you need, start reading! **Tip:** Ask your lecturer if they can give you some guidance about how many articles you may need for your assessment task.

6. *Read and note-take*

Read efficiently and effectively by knowing what you are looking for. You may find it helpful to create a spreadsheet to track resources (and its page number) with the various aspects or themes of your essay.

7. *Sort Information*

Spend some time sorting all your information and ideas to establish the key arguments or themes or topics you will be considering. Using colour, keywords, sticky notes or a spreadsheet can all help this sorting process. Try and identify *who says what* and where this will fit in your essay.

8. Formulate your structure

This stage involves creating an essay plan. If you have approximately 10 paragraphs to write (2000 words), then 1 paragraph will be for the introduction, 1 for the conclusion and approximately 8 paragraphs for the body. Look at the question again and work out what what main themes/ ideas/ arguments/ topics need to occupy each paragraph. (When "theme" is used, think of a key word that covers the content being explored).

Essay Plan	
Introduction	(1 paragraph)
Body	
Part 1 of essay question	(4 paragraphs)
Theme 1 (describe/explain/ justify)	(2)
Wong 2019 p. 22 Macklin 2022 p. 62 Bishop 2016 p. 8	
Theme 2 (describe/explain/ justify)	(2)
Wong 2019 p. 28-30 Gillard 2021 p. 97	
Part 2 of essay question	(4 paragraphs)
Theme 3 (describe/explain/ justify)	(2)
Bishop 2016 p. 19 Kirner 2010 p. 6 Ellis 2011 p. 3	
Theme 4 (describe/explain/ justify)	(2)
Gillard 2021 p. 97 Macklin 2022 p. 62	
Conclusion	(1 paragraph)

For example, you may have 2 parts of the question which will each require about 50% of the essay, so that will be 4 paragraphs each. In those paragraphs, break down the question into the themes or arguments that arise.

If you need to focus on 2 themes for part A and part B of the question, then you can spend 2 paragraphs on each. You can use these paragraphs to describe or state the argument/issue/ topic and then explain it utilising your research. If you are making an argument then the first paragraph may describe and explain and the second may provide further reasoning with evidence and analysis.

However you choose to structure your essay, follow the question, guidelines and rubric and ensure there is a logical flow from one part to the next.

IMPORTANT!

Follow the instructions provided to you with respect to content, structure and suggested words for each section. If you have questions to answer, then use these as the key topics for your paragraphs.

For each of the body paragraphs consider the relevant research and any quotes that you would like to use.

At the end of this process you will be clear about what you need to cover in your essay, what each paragraph will include and the research that is relevant to each.

Note that this essay structure or plan is just a plan. Things can change as you write and you may find that you don't need a full paragraph to cover what you want to say. That's fine – the plan will at least provide you with some clarity and direction.

Headings?

While the APA7 Manual allows for headings, it is preferred that essays do not include them. If you are thinking about including headings in your essay, make sure you **check with your unit coordinator first** – perhaps this is a great question for your unit discussion board so all students can see the answer.

9. Write the essay!

If you have done your research and have a structure planned out, then you are ready to write! You can start at the introduction if you are clear about the structure of the essay and what you think. Sometimes you may not know exactly what you think until you start the writing process, so that's fine – just start writing to sort through your ideas. You can write the introduction at the end.

Feeling daunted?

If you feel daunted by the writing, just focus on a theme or paragraph at a time. You do not need to have the writing perfectly drafted in your head – all writers need to review and edit and it is fine to restructure and re write later – so don't aim for perfection in your first draft. Another strategy to overcome feeling daunted, is to talk through what you think – your explanations, your reasoning etc. Record this and then transcribe what you say – this will assist you to get something written.

Guide your reader

The main thing to remember when writing your essay is that it is your role to guide your reader through the information in a logical and concise manner. This is achieved by being specific in the introduction about what you are arguing or what you are responding to and outlining what you will be doing. You then follow that outline in detail in the body of your essay and reiterate the main points in the concluding paragraph. The following provides some ideas about what you will include in each section of your essay.

“Forming an argument is like building a house. You must have a solid foundation at the bottom (evidence); joists to hold up the structure (reasons) and a roof which provides an overarching point (contention). Without solid reasons and reputable evidence, your contention will fall down. For depth to your argument, include reasons for your reasons, consider objections (counter arguments) and rebuttals, and disclose any assumptions being made.”

Dr Fiona Patterson
Student Learning Support Advisor

ARGUMENTS

If you are presenting an argument then decide what you think, why and the evidence you can provide.

What is an argument?

An argument comprises two main elements – a contention/ position or hypothesis and (at least one) reason to believe that contention. The reason aims to support the contention, but it not effective unless it has solid evidence. This is where your research helps you. It provides evidence which is the foundation for your reasons. This in turn supports your contention.



So if you are presenting an argument, establish what you are contending (which should respond directly to the question), then establish how many reasons you have for believing that to be true, and the evidence you have which supports those reasons.

ESSAY RECIPE: INGREDIENTS TO INCLUDE

INTRODUCTION

- Context to set the scene for your topic
- Issue/problem under consideration
- Response to the question or contention being argued
- Outline of essay or what follow (i.e. themes)

BODY

- May include background, theories or frameworks being considered and themes identified and explored

CONCLUSION

- Restatement of issue/problem under consideration and argument presented (where applicable)
- Overview of what has been considered (main themes)
- Findings (key points)
- Rounding off – return to context (bigger picture). Here you can state significance or implications of findings or further research required.

*First or
third
person?*

Typically you will write in third person, though in reflective essays, first person may be more appropriate. If in doubt, ask your unit coordinator.

Third person/ impersonal examples:

This essay will consider...
This paper will argue...
It could be concluded that...
One may consider...
They propose that...

First person examples:

I argue that..
Upon reflection, it seemed to me that...
My perspective is based upon..

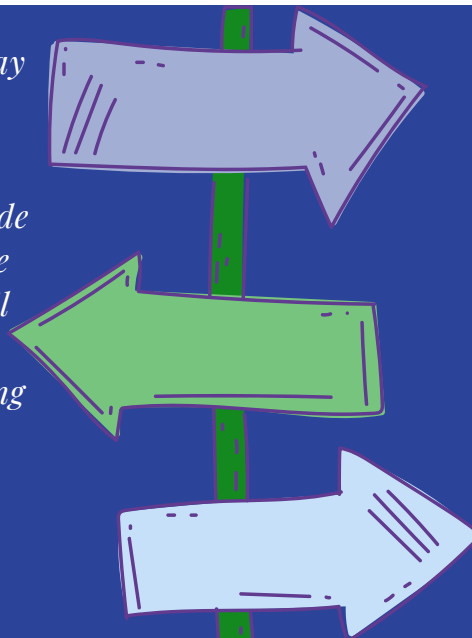
This is a general essay list of ingredients!

Remember to follow the specific instructions provided to you.

Use the language provided in the essay question to make it clear you are answering the question.

Think of yourself as the readers' guide – provide an overview of what will be considered in the introduction; detail in the body paragraphs and sum up what has been found in the concluding paragraph.

Finish your essay by rounding it off – such as referring back to the initial context or future research required.



Use signpost language (or indicator terms) to indicate the structure of your argument and reasoning.

Examples:

This essay considers three theories... First... Second... Third...
This paper will contend that...
The reasons are threefold...
X is due to...
This argument is compelling, however...
The conclusion is...

10. Refine your writing

When you have finished your essay, you may be tempted to submit it straight away and get it crossed off your *to do* list. However, if you want to receive a good mark, you will need to refine your essay. You will need to proofread it to locate errors, edit to fix spelling and grammar, and you may need to improve its logical flow by clarifying the introduction, the topic sentences and by using signposting language. Here are some tips for refining:

- Use Microsoft Word's spelling and grammar tool (in the Review tab) or download and utilise [Grammarly](#).
- Read it out loud to detect errors (or use *Read Aloud* feature in Word's Review tab)
- Look at each paragraph and ensure there is one clear point and that this point is apparent in the first sentence of the paragraph (topic sentence).
- Ensure you have answered the question by utilising the language of the essay question.
- Replace vague and imprecise language, e.g. *few, many, some, impossible, never*
- Replace informal language with formal counterpart, e.g. *no idea, makes no sense, big, like*.
- Replace contractions with complete words, e.g. *isn't, don't, can't*
- Ensure tense is consistent.
- Ensure personal pronouns are consistent and appropriate (typically third person will be used).
- Ensure paraphrases and quotes are properly cited. Refer APA7 Manual or [Library APA7 resources](#).
- Ensure formatting is consistent. Refer [Assessment Submission Style Guide](#)

11. Check your citing and referencing

Ensuring your citing and referencing is correct is vital. Poor citing and referencing will negatively impact your mark and you may find you have unintentionally plagiarised. To ensure your citing and referencing is correct, here are a few steps to take:

1. Keep careful notes and records of information you use.
2. Remember that paraphrasing requires a citation if the idea is from others' work
3. Quotes must be contained in double quotation marks with a citation (including page number/s).
4. Remember to use a hanging indent for the second and subsequent lines in reference list entries.
5. All citing and referencing should adhere to the APA7 manual. There are copies of the Manual in the Library and the Learning Support Advisor and Librarians can assist you if you are unsure of how to cite or reference a particular reference.

