



# Writing an essay

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## Introduction

During your time at University you are likely to need to write an essay. This resource addresses key areas to consider when writing an essay.

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## Start early

Writing a good essay will take time. Make sure you start the assignment well in advance of the hand in date so that you do not need to rush. Writing essays and other assignments at university is a process and has several stages – as outlined below.

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## Assignment brief

Before you start to write, make sure that you have carefully read your assignment brief. This will provide information regarding what you should include in your essay and should clarify any questions you have around issues, such as formatting. In order to write a good essay you must ensure that you follow all of the assignment brief guidance. It is therefore a good idea to periodically refer back to the brief as you work on your essay to ensure that your assignment is in line with tutor specifications. If there is an aspect of the assignment brief that you don't understand or think is ambiguous, clarify your understanding by speaking to your tutor or a member of the Study Hub team.

## Who is your audience?

It is important to keep in mind who will be reading your essay. Your prospective audience should influence your use of subject terminology and jargon. Likewise, you should consider how much your prospective audience are likely to know about the essay content and this should influence how deeply you explain concepts/theories.

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## Source quality

In order to write a good essay you will need to research your topic. As with any assignment you should ensure that you only use good quality sources (such as peer reviewed journals, books, official websites). If you were to use poor quality sources, then the quality of what you produce will be undermined. If you are unsure as to what constitute good quality sources, speak to your Academic Liaison Librarian or a member of the Study Hub team.

As you research your essay, it is useful to make notes and/or summaries on relevant or useful sources that you have read. Always make sure that you clearly reference what source(s) your notes and summaries are from.

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## Plan

After you have finished researching your essay you should start to have some ideas about the kind of information you need to include. At this stage it is worth taking the time to provisionally plan out what you will include and the order in which you will present information. Planning your essay will help you to ensure that your essay is written logically and coherently. Remember that a plan is **not** final and if necessary, can be modified.

## **Focus**

A good essay will be to the point and will not contain irrelevant information. When you write an essay ensure that you are addressing just the task at hand and avoid the temptation to go off on interesting (but irrelevant) tangents.

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## **On-going prose**

A key feature of an essay should be a continuous narrative throughout your writing. In that, you will not use headings and sub headings to break up the information that you are discussing (as would be the case with a report).

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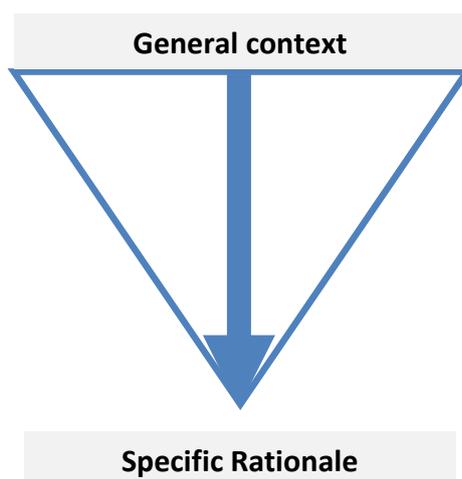
## **Basic structure**

On page 4 you can find an outline of the main parts of an essay:

## Introduction

The purpose of the introduction is to set the scene for your reader in terms of topic context and essay content. Typically, the first few sentences of the introduction will form a rationale (i.e. what topic is being addressed and why this is important). When setting the context you would normally start generally and become more specific. You should aim to outline why it is important to answer your assignment question (other than because your tutor has told you to). References can be included in your introduction. The introduction should then outline how you have addressed the assignment question(s). You should aim to use 10% of your total word count in your introduction.

**It can be useful to think of what an introduction looks like in terms of the following diagram.**



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## Main Body

This is the largest part of your assignment and where you address the question(s). It is important that throughout the main body you make it clear to your reader how you are addressing all parts of the assessment brief. This can be achieved through periodically making connections between what you have written and the relevant part(s) of the assignment question. References must be used throughout. You should aim to use 80% of your total word count in this part of the essay.

## Conclusions

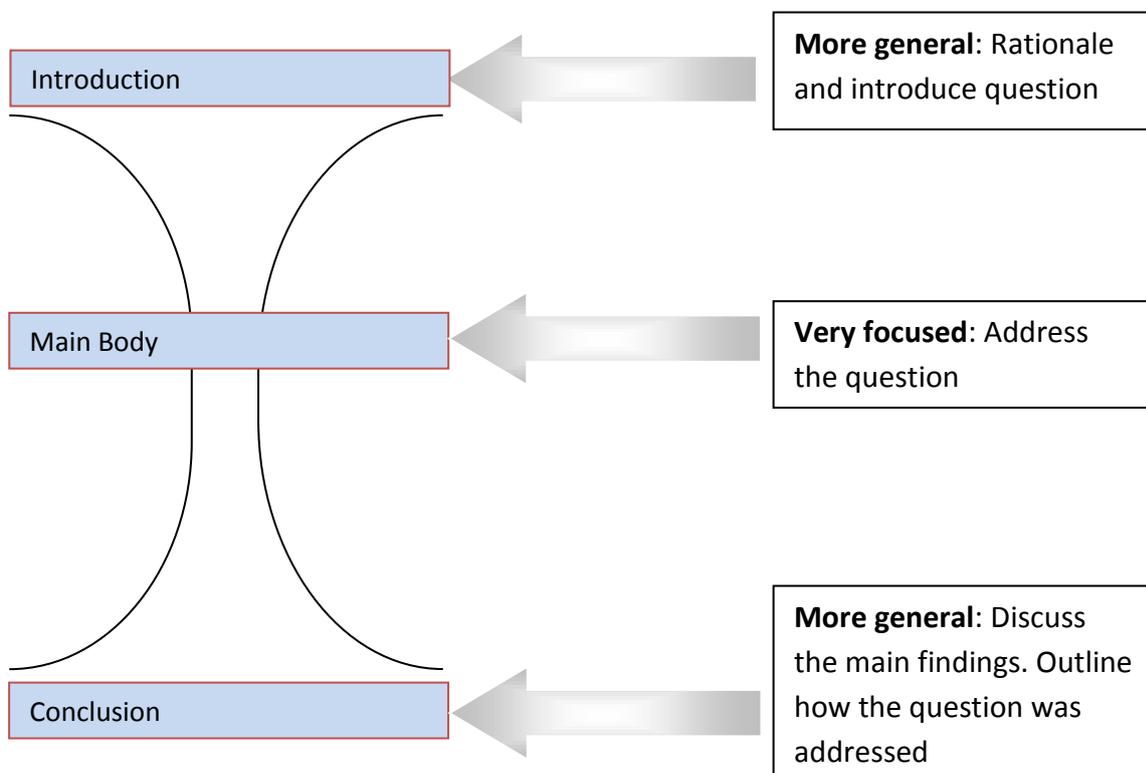
The conclusion should not simply repeat what you have already said. Instead, you should aim to tie together key points that you have made throughout the assignment (but perhaps not explicitly stated) and indicate how you have addressed the assignment question. You should aim to use 10% of your total word count in this part of the essay.

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## References

Make sure that you provided a full reference list and/or bibliography which are presented on separate pages. This must be in accordance with your departmental guidelines.

**Based on this information, it can be useful to think of an essay structure in terms of the following diagram:**



## Linking information

It is essential that your paragraphs link together and show the development of an argument. It is also important to link information together within your paragraphs. Where possible try and find more than one source of information (reference) that you can discuss and show how these relate to the topic that you are addressing (this demonstrates wide reading and will enable you to form a more accurate perspective about the topic you are discussing). Useful words that you can use to link sources together include:

Words to show agreement between sources	Words to show disagreement between sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Likewise</li><li>• Similarly</li><li>• Furthermore</li><li>• In addition</li><li>• Moreover</li><li>• Further</li><li>• This was supported by</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• However</li><li>• Whereas</li><li>• In contrast</li><li>• As opposed to</li></ul>

### **Example:**

Jones (2008) reported that study skills teaching can help students to improve their assignments. **This was supported** by Tudor (2009) who found that study skill workshop attendance was associated with higher degree class.

## Drawing conclusions

After you have connected your references together, you should acknowledge what they collectively tell you about the area you are addressing. There are a number of words/phrases you can use to show that you are doing this:

- Therefore
- Based on this
- Together, this would suggest that
- Consequently, it appears
- Collectively, this implies

### **Example:**

Jones (2008) reported that study skills teaching can help students to improve their assignments. This was supported by Tudor (2009) who found that study skill workshop attendance was associated with higher degree class. **Collectively**, this would suggest that participation in core skills development training can influence student success.

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## Proofreading

Leave enough time to proofread your work between finishing the essay and your hand in date. Aim for a minimum of twenty-four hours. Doing this gives you 'distance' and allows you to see and hear mistakes more easily.

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## Text font, style and colour

It is important that you format your essay in line with faculty guidelines. Typically fonts Arial or Times New Roman are acceptable. Likewise, you should use an appropriate font colour – this will typically be black. Using Broadway font is not suitable – not even for a title.

## Reflect on the writing process

As you write your essay you should reflect on what you are writing. The following is a list of questions that you should consider which will help you fine-tune your writing:

- Is what I am saying clear or does it need further explanation?
- Have I provided enough evidence (references) for the point I am trying to make?
- Is what I am writing relevant to the context of the part on which I am working?  
Might it be better placed elsewhere in the writing?
- Can a reader follow the logic and sequence of my argument?
- Am I providing a balanced view of the topic?
- Have I demonstrated how my own informed ideas about the essay topic have been drawn from consideration of academic sources (references)?

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### Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

**[lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub](http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub)**

