

How to write an...

Essay

The academic essay is a common assignment in university courses where you have to write about a given topic. The purpose of an essay is to answer a specific question within a given word limit.

How to approach your essay

Read (and re-read) your essay question

- Use the assigned assignment question as a guide and to help you come up with a good plan for finding information in books and journal articles.
- Understand the essay question and what it's asking you to do
- Look for instruction words in the essay question like "describe," "analyse", "compare," or "explain." These will give you a good idea of what the question wants you to do.
- Consult the module reading list
- When you're searching Primo, the library catalogue and subject specific databases for resources, make sure to focus on using keywords that match your topic to find what you need to effectively retrieve relevant books and journal articles.

Be organised

- Once you understand the question, write down your ideas, theories and examples in a detailed list with bullet points.
- Use this list as a starting point for doing more research.
- Also, take a look at the textbooks your lecturer has suggested to investigate further into the topics.
- When you look at information from different sources, it helps you think more critically in your essays.
- After you've searched for literature, start brainstorming your ideas.
- Creating an essay plan will make it easier to come up with a solid answer.
- Just make a rough outline first - this will help you get your thoughts in order and make sure your readers can follow along easily.
- Plus, it'll make the writing process smoother for you too.
- It's a good idea to plan things out before you actually start writing, that way your answer will make sense and flow well.

Think about paragraphs

- The way you set out your essay is important.
- Each paragraph should focus on one main idea, and those ideas should flow into each other smoothly.
- Make sure the order of the paragraphs makes sense.
- Try grouping similar ideas together, either by timeline or theme.
- Keep it organised and easy to follow.

Draft your essay

- This won't be your final essay, it's just the first draft. Think of it as part of the planning stage.
- Don't stress about it being perfectly written or if the order is correct.
- Focus on getting your thoughts down on paper.
- You may want to start your essay by working on the main body first and then concentrate on the introduction and conclusion once you have your thoughts, ideas and evidence in draft format.
- Make notes in the margins of your first draft to remind you of what to add or change.
- Be prepared to revise and rewrite your draft essay a few times before you submit the final version.
- After you finish your draft, take a look at how your essay is organised.
- Make sure each paragraph talks about a different part of the question. And don't forget to use words and sentences to connect your ideas smoothly as you move from one paragraph to the next.
- Don't forget to make sure you're actually answering the essay question and backing up your points with evidence.

References

- The bibliography (or reference list) lists all referenced sources.
- This is where you acknowledge resources you have used.
- Take time and care on this step.
- Follow your departmental/module handbook's referencing style.
- Contact your Subject Librarian for referencing advice.

Edit and proof-read

- This is where you check your work thoroughly.
- Take a look at your essay and make sure you've covered everything in the assignment brief.
- Does your answer make sense? Are you answering the question?
- Check for any grammar, punctuation or spelling mistakes.
- Take a look at any feedback you got on your past assignments and see if there are any suggestions or advice you can work with.
- Make sure you've acknowledged all your sources using the right referencing style (both in-text citation and reference list), and that you've followed all the presentation rules like line-spacing, including images, wordcount, and so on.
- Make sure you leave enough time to edit and proof-read before the deadline.