



# ESSAY WRITING

## WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

An essay is a piece of writing on a specific subject.

It requires you to identify the issues involved and examine them critically.

When you write an essay you are expressing your ideas for the benefit of the reader. You will need to get hold of the reader's attention and then lead the reader point by point through your argument until finally arriving at a satisfactory conclusion.

In a good essay, ideas are presented in a LOGICAL SEQUENCE so that the reader can easily follow your train of thought.

The building blocks of the essay are the PARAGRAPHS.

A paragraph is a group of sentences expressing one main idea or theme. Each paragraph will make one main point which is elaborated with illustration or argument.

An essay flows from paragraph to paragraph (theme to theme) until the development of ideas is complete.

EACH PARAGRAPH MARKS A STEPPING STONE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARGUMENT OR THE EXAMINATION OF AN ISSUE.

## PARAGRAPHING

The main idea or theme of each paragraph is usually in the first sentence as this signposts the theme which you wish to elaborate upon. (You can, however, sometimes lead up to the main point – perhaps making it in the final sentence – but this will depend upon the kind of essay you have been

### ACTIVITY:

- 1) Identify the main idea in this paragraph, and
- 2) note down the sentences in this paragraph that do NOT fit in with the main idea.

In what David Morley (1986) calls the ‘politics of the living room’, the question of who exercises the most power and control over programme choice is firmly linked to gender. His own research, based on 18 families in South London, confirmed that where the men are in paid employment, they have the most control over what is being watched. This was symbolised by their domination over the remote control handset. Peter Collett (1986) recorded one instance where the man carried the remote control with him even when he left the room to go to the toilet.

## ANALYSING QUESTIONS

Before we go any further it is important to discuss how to analyse a question.

Remember it is the essay title that directs you – essay writing is a learning

Look at these titles:

Discuss the view that the Hollywood Studio System produced nothing but conventional, mediocre films during the so-called Golden Period.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the laws and codes of practice which have been set up to control the press in this country.

Justify the study of African and Indian cinema as worthwhile art forms in their own right.

What are the KEY WORDS in each title?

Do you understand what 'discuss', 'justify', 'evaluate' etc. are asking you to do? There is a general glossary of such terms at the back of the booklet.

Do you need to present a reasoned argument, a considered opinion, an assessment or something else? If so, what?

Do you need to arrive at a conclusion or just examine issues and summarise them?

REMEMBER TO SPEND SOME TIME IN ANALYSING WHAT IT IS THE QUESTION REQUIRES OF YOU.

Some questions do not use specific key verbs in the question.

For example, many Media exam questions begin:

'How far do you agree that....'

This requires you to select knowledge and information that relates to the question and develop some kind of critical argument.

'How far?' questions should develop an argument to conclude 'a bit' or 'a lot'.

'Why?' questions should be answered 'because'.

## **PLANNING YOUR ESSAY**

ALWAYS THINK AND PLAN BEFORE BEGINNING TO WRITE.

Planning is the most crucial part of the essay writing process.

Planning means deciding:

- a) What points to make (one per paragraph)
- b) Which order to make them (so the essay flows well)

PLANNING IS NEVER TIME WASTED. On the contrary, planning is particularly important if you are pressed for time – such as in an exam – because it will prevent you from writing long passages of irrelevant material which will gain you no marks.

When you construct your plan, be directed by the essay title.

Select material from your notes to fit the question.

Keep referring back to the essay title as you plan. Check that each paragraph refers directly to the question asked.

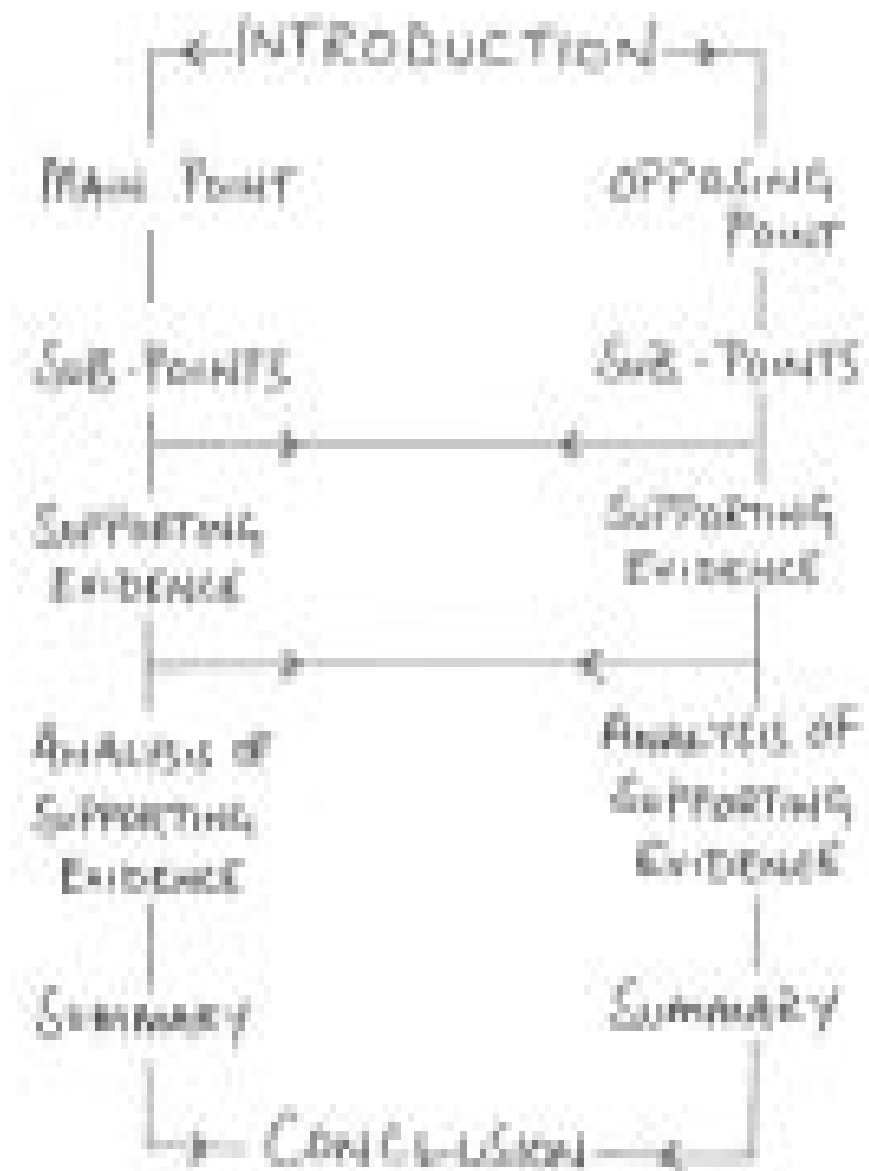
Leave out any material that is not relevant (even if you have spent a long time learning or researching it!)

Before launching into the essay writing, look at the title again to make sure that you have considered every aspect and you have constructed a comprehensive argument.

Now put yourself in the position of the tutor or examiner – if you had asked this question would you be satisfied by this answer?

Good! Now start to write.

## ONE WAY OF PLANNING A WRITTEN ARGUMENT



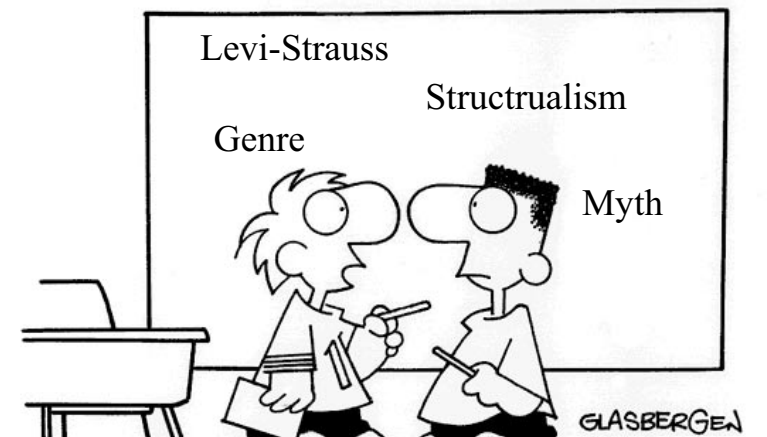
## ESSAY PLANNING – BRAINSTORMING

It is useful to understand how to brainstorm ideas.

- a) On a plain piece of paper, write down ANYWHERE all the ideas that come into your mind concerning a particular topic.
- b) Keep going for 5 minutes.
- c) Take a coloured pen and join up all the ideas that go together under another main idea.
- d) Use another colour to collect together under another main idea.
- e) Keep going
- f) Cross out all the points that you know you do not want.
- g) Decide in what order you would write up the points in each collection and number them,

Decide in what order you would write up each paragraph (that is, what the collection of points would lead up to).

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**“My lawyer says I can sue the school because they’re violating my right to be stupid.”**

# HOW TO CONSTRUCT AN ESSAY

## **Signposting the way**

I analyse the question

I start by referring back to the question

I relate the first sentence to the question

I 'signal' the way to the next paragraph and the main idea



I signal the way onwards again



And again



I continue this way until:

I summarise – sum up – all that has been discussed.  
or I conclude by a) pointing out a case on each side  
or by b) giving a clear sense of 'ending'

(A conclusion does not have to come to a definite stance in many cases.)

## Essay Writing

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Why is it important for today's students to learn essay structure? Because I had to learn this junk in school and now it's your turn, that's why!

Most essays require a SUMMARY and/or a CONCLUSION

It is useful to understand what these words mean and require of you.

A SUMMARY is a brief, concise piece of writing that sums up the content of the whole essay or piece of work.

Here is a summary of the story of The Three Little Pigs:

'Both the pig that built his house of straw and the one that built his house of sticks had to seek refuge in the third little pig's house of bricks when the huffing, puffing wolf blew their houses down. The wolf's defeat at the house of bricks causes great elation.'

A CONCLUSION is a final judgement, a deduction or a result. Using the same story, we might conclude:

'The fact that the Big Bad Wolf dies in the end emphasises that good defeats evil, so this is a tale with a moral. The moral issue is further reinforced by the fact that two of the pigs learnt that thought. Planning and effort rather than speed and convenience can save lives.'

If you read the summary, followed by the conclusion, you will see that these can often go well together and are indeed often both asked for.

## **THE FIRST DRAFT**

When you have planned your essay construction, you are ready for your first draft write-up.

Be prepared to make changes to this draft. For example, you might want to move paragraphs around to make your argument flow more effectively, or to shorten overly long sentences.

### **Some useful tips**

Read your essays out loud, have a pen in hand and LISTEN to what you have written.

Does it flow well?

Is it grammatically correct?

Does it answer the question?

Mark off points that seem out of place or out of sequence when you ‘hear’ your essay.

Ask a friend to read your essay out loud as you listen to it.

### **AN ESSAY IN A NUTSHELL**

First of all, remember that different topics and units will command different writing strategies – it is up to you to find out what each requires. This, however, is a general guideline of rules.

Each paragraph carries a main idea.

The sentences within each paragraph elaborate and develop the main idea.

The paragraphs develop the overall idea in logical sequence.

The essay should end with a summary and/or a conclusion