



What is an essay?

An introduction to writing essays at university

An essay, in the simplest of terms, is a written composition on a particular topic. It begins with an introduction that includes a statement of your point of view in response to the essay question.

Your response to the essay question, which is also known as your argument, should be supported by evidence from appropriate sources. An essay is written formally, and with the intention of being unbiased, well researched, and a truthful and accurate representation of your ideas about the topic.

Your point of view, or argument, is an expression of your ideas about a subject. When you first begin thinking about an essay question you will form ideas based on what you already know. However, and most importantly, the ideas you present in the final version of your essay should have been substantially influenced, and supported, by your research and include information from appropriate sources.

What is an appropriate source will depend on the nature of the subject you are studying. Appropriate sources for a particular essay might include expert opinions and research findings contained in journal articles, textbooks, and conference papers; or information from movies, YouTube videos, and television documentaries. It is a good idea to check with your subject lecturer if you are unsure what sources are considered appropriate for your essay. The information that you find in the sources will provide you with evidence (e.g. research findings, ideas) to support your argument.

Demonstrating academic integrity throughout your work is essential. Every time you include evidence that you read, saw or heard while researching your essay, you must acknowledge the source. The sources provide you with evidence to support your arguments; you must acknowledge the work of those who provide the information by mentioning their names whenever you refer to their work. This process is known as referencing.

The essay writing process takes time and can't be left to the last minute if you are to submit a well-written essay; therefore, start your essay early! Gradually, as you research and become better informed, you will learn more about the topic. This will enable you to refine your argument and redraft your essay to reflect your deepening understanding. The redrafting process is repeated until your work represents a well-considered and informed response to the essay question.

The ability to thoroughly research a topic and present a well-supported argument is central to successful academic outcomes and professional communication – this is why essay writing is such an important aspect of university study.