



Essay writing process

An essay presents a well-argued discussion or response to a question or proposition, using analysis and critique of relevant literature. It establishes a proposition or thesis and presents a point of view.

Process

The following are suggested steps for writing an essay.

1. Analyse the question

- Underline instructional words, e.g. discuss, explain, describe, justify.
- Circle key content words and phrases.
- Be clear about what the task is: put the question in your own words.
- Look for hints on structure, i.e. how many parts are there to the question?
- Compare/contrast or cause/effect, list of factors/reasons, etc.?

2. Brainstorm the question

- Bring all of your ideas together on one page to:
 - ✓ take stock of what you already know;
 - ✓ identify any gaps in your knowledge, and
 - ✓ give you the beginnings of a plan for your essay.
- Mind maps are useful at this stage.

3. Start your research

- Begin with general reading – start with recommended texts and books from the library.
- Look for potential ways to structure your essay.
- Record all bibliographical details, including page numbers for your references, as you go.

4. Plan the essay

- Organise the information – use headings and make connections.
- Decide on a logical order for your points.
- Your plan should include:
 - ✓ main points and their relationship to the question;
 - ✓ secondary points and their relationship to the main points;
 - ✓ references, and
 - ✓ a draft of your introduction.

5. Continue your research

- Focus your research, expanding on the main points and arguments.
- Use search terms from your earlier research to locate precise information/evidence e.g. on data bases, such as [Primo](#).

6. Write

- Write using your detailed plan.
- Some writers write the body first, then the conclusion, then the introduction.
- A paragraph must contain one idea, which is stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences should support and give evidence from research and/or examples and explain how the evidence relates to the idea and your overall argument.
- Expect to write several drafts. Try to avoid getting stuck looking for the 'right' word.
- Include your references as you go.

7. Edit

- Are my points connected? Read the topic sentences only – to see if there is a logical argument.
- Make sure your reference list includes all work cited.
- Proofread for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. Reading aloud can be useful here.
- Check layout, margins, page numbers, line spacing and the title page. Check your lecturer's expectations.
- Always keep additional copies of your essay in different locations, e.g. your USB, laptop or on cloud storage such as Dropbox, Google Drive, OneDrive or iCloud.

Structure

Introduction – an outline for the reader

- Begins with a brief general statement setting the essay in a context (connecting it to the world)
- May define terms
- Indicates the areas and perspectives to be discussed in the essay
- Leads to a **thesis statement**, which summarises the essay in one sentence, and contains a point of view

Body – made up of connected paragraphs

- Each paragraph contains one main idea, expressed in a topic sentence (usually the first sentence).
 - The rest of the sentences in the paragraph expand on the topic sentence, giving evidence (with references to the sources) and/or examples.
 - The final sentence is linked back to the main idea in the topic sentence.
 - The topic sentences carry the theme or outline of the essay and relate directly back to the thesis statement. This creates logical development and flow of the argument.
- ✓ Tip: If you cover all the main text and read only the topic sentences, the essay should make basic logical sense.

Conclusion

- Provides a restatement of the thesis in different words (often with additional knowledge).
- Gives a very brief summing up of the main points.
- May open out with recommendations or predictions (connects back to the world again).
- Contains no new information.

Reach out for help

The Charles Sturt Academic Skills team is here to help you develop your learning skills. You can also:

- ask a question on our [Ask an Academic Skills Adviser forum](#),
- join one of our [Academic Skills workshops](#), or
- access further information about all of our available services and learning resources, including assignment writing feedback, at csu.edu.au/academicskills.