

# Survival Guide To Essay Writing



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## STUDENT SERVICES FACTSHEET

There are several stages involved in creating an effective essay at university. This factsheet provides a step-by-step guide to writing better essays.

	Stage	Why?	How?
1	Analyse the question	To make sure you answer the question(s) fully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify important subject words in the title.</li><li>Identify instruction words and decide what you need to do.</li></ul>
2	Check the assessment guidelines	To fulfil the assessment criteria and meet the learning objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Read the assessment guidelines thoroughly.</li><li>Check you understand the learning objectives.</li></ul>
3	Make a rough plan	To identify relevant research topics and limit unnecessary reading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Brainstorm: write down your ideas and identify what you need to research.</li><li>Mind-map your initial ideas: try to identify links, common themes and a possible order.</li><li>Use reading lists to look for clues, and select the most relevant sources.</li></ul>
4	Read/ research and make notes	To improve your understanding and provide reliable, academic evidence for your ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Start with an overview of each book or article: look at the table of contents, the abstract, the subheadings.</li><li>Think of your key questions: have them in front of you as you read, to keep you focussed.</li><li>Write down the answers as you find them, keeping a clear record of sources and page numbers.</li><li>Write a short summary of what each source says before moving on to the next one.</li></ul>
5	Plan the structure of your essay	A good plan keeps you on track and highlights how much weight (how many words) to give to each topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Draw a mind-map or spider diagram.</li><li>Use colour and images to connect ideas.</li><li>Identify an appropriate / logical order.</li><li>Draw up a list of points and subpoints.</li><li>Divide up your word count: allow 10% each for the introduction and the conclusion, and decide how much to spend on each of your points and subpoints.</li></ul>

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6	Draft the body of your text	To present and develop your argument.	Write a paragraph for each idea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the idea.</li> <li>• Explain the idea.</li> <li>• Give supporting evidence.</li> <li>• Use sign-posting words and phrases to move from one paragraph to the next.</li> </ul>
7	Edit and check against your plan	To make sure your points answer the question and are presented in a logical order.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think Big – Have you followed your plan?</li> <li>• Think Medium – Does each paragraph stick to one point?</li> <li>• Think Small – Does each sentence make sense?</li> </ul>
8	Write the introduction and conclusion	The introduction needs to make a good first impression, and present your argument. The conclusion clearly states the position you have arrived at.	<p>The introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States the position you are taking (your 'thesis statement').</li> <li>• Gives an outline of your structure.</li> </ul> <p>The conclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sums up key points and implications.</li> <li>• Clarifies the 'message' that you want the reader to remember.</li> </ul>
9	Proofread	Good spelling, grammar and punctuation make your ideas clearer, and stop you losing marks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read your work aloud, paying particular attention to commas (short pauses) and full stops (longer pauses).</li> <li>• Avoid contractions: write 'do not' for 'don't'.</li> <li>• TextHELP is installed on University computers: use this software to read your work back to you.</li> </ul>
10	Referencing	Acknowledge the sources of the ideas that you have used, to avoid plagiarism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Search for 'referencing' on the 'Library and IT' homepage for course-specific guidance.</li> <li>• List all your sources in alphabetical order by surname of author in the reference list.</li> </ul>