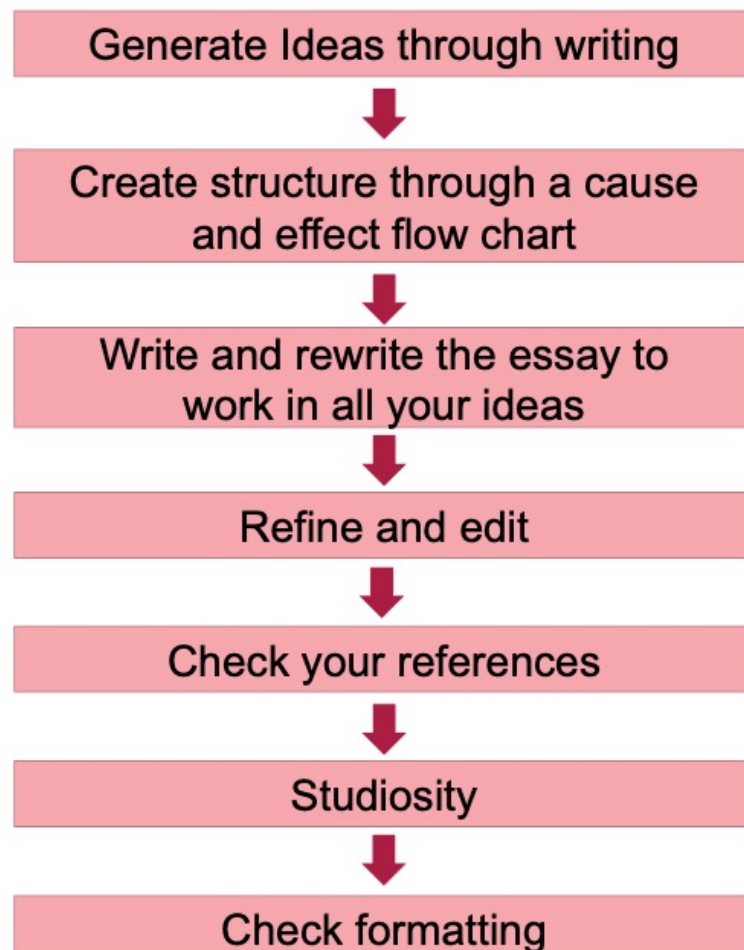


# Writing Essays At University

An essay is a type of paper that presents an evidence-based response to a question or proposition by establishing a thesis and arguing for a particular point-of-view. As with any type of assignment, the first step is to break down the assignment question and start your research. You can learn how to do this by looking at our other resources on *Unpacking the Assignment Task* and *Finding Sources*.

Below are some suggested steps for writing essays that you may find helpful, inspired by Peter Elbow's theory of Low Stakes Writing.



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## Step 1: Generating Ideas

This first step is not about writing a perfect essay on the first attempt. Instead, this step is focused on helping you generate ideas on how to link your research with the answer to your essay question. You can do this by either **brainstorming** or **writing continuously** for 45 minutes with regards to the topic. The point of this exercise is to **declutter your mind**, allowing you to **reduce stress** associated with mentally remembering and sorting ideas, and **visualise your thoughts**.

After writing continuously for 45 minutes, spend 15 minutes reading over your work and writing one sentence or a thesis to synthesise your ideas. This will likely not be your final thesis, but it's a starting point! As you continue writing your essay, it is natural that your thesis will develop and evolve. This shows that you're thinking and linking your evidence and arguments together.

**Tip:** Allow yourself to be messy with this stage. It's about getting everything written down, not about being presentable.

## Step 2: Structure

By the end of this stage, you should **aim to have a tentative structure** to your essay as you will likely think of other pieces of evidence you can use during the essay writing process.

Firstly, spend some time doing a **cause and effect flow chart** for the whole essay and each paragraph. This allows you to organise your essay into a logical structure while checking that all your main and sub-arguments are supported by evidence.

You can then create an **essay plan** using headings for your introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion, to organise your research findings in a logical order that addresses the essay question with ample evidence.

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Example: Did Colonialism make the Modern World?

Structure of Cause and Effect flow chart: Cause 1 -> Cause 2 -> Effect

Economic impact of colonialism -> Political impact of colonialism -> Colonialism made the Modern World.

Corrupt taxation-> Exploitation of the Indigenous populations -> Only the Colonial power profiting -> The economic situation of the Third-World countries in the Modern World.

### Step 3: Writing

You now have your main idea and body paragraphs supported with evidence. During this time, there will still be additional ideas or background information you may feel compelled to add in and that is okay! Simply write them down and keep moving on. Do not worry too much about phrasing or logical sentence structure at this stage and instead, **focus on putting your main ideas into paragraphs**. You may find it easier to write an introduction and conclusion once you have written your body paragraphs. This step **may be repeated a few times**, integrating new information and references each time.

Tip: Include in-text references as you go to save time at the editing stage.

### Step 4: Refining and Editing

Now that you have a logical essay organised, you can begin to **edit and refine your paper**. This step may be done as many times as you see fit. It is a good idea to **leave your essay for a day after writing** it to come back to it with fresh eyes for the editing stage. You may do this digitally or by printing your essay and editing with a red pen.

Instead of rewriting the whole essay, focus on:

- Checking your essay is logical;
- Ensuring your points link to the question and your information is relevant;
- Making sure your reference list includes all cited resources;
- Proofreading for spelling, punctuation, and grammar; and

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- Checking your layout (e.g., font, font size, margins, page numbers, line spacing etc.) conforms to your unit's specifications and you have met the word count.

## Step 5: Referencing

If you have not been inserting proper references as you went, now is the time to go back and **insert all your references**. It is alright to not focus on referencing during your drafts if you feel it disrupts the flow of your argument. However, it is important that you include both **in-text** and **end-of-text references** in your essay to avoid academic misconduct.

## Step 6: Studiosity

Before you submit your assignment to your teacher, you may like to **submit it to Studiosity**. Studiosity is a service that allows you to upload a piece of writing for an online tutor to proofread and provide you with feedback.

Each Murdoch Student is entitled to 20 submissions on Studiosity a year. If you submit your essay through Studiosity, you can receive feedback on it within 24 hours. Read the feedback and then decide how and whether you would like to incorporate it into your essay.

## Step 7: Formatting and Submission

Congratulations! You have finished writing your essay. Now all that is left to do is **name your file as per the requirements of your unit** using the correct application (e.g., Microsoft Word, PowerPoint etc.) and submit your essay via LMS, or print it and submit a physical copy at an on-campus location specified by your Unit Coordinator or tutor.

**Adapted From:** Elbow, Peter. 1973. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
Gert J van der Westhuizen. 2009. "Writing As An Instrument for Learning." *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 27, no. 4: 471-481.

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