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. 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? Is it compare/contrast or cause/effect, list of factors/reasons, etc.?

> **Essay tasks generally contain:**
> - **Content** words: what the assignment is about
> - **Limiting** words: define the scope of the topic
> - **Direction/instruction** words: tell you what to do, e.g. discuss, evaluate.

2. Brainstorm the question

- Bring all your ideas together on one page to:
    - take stock of what you already know
    - identify any gaps in your knowledge
    - give you the beginnings of a plan for your essay.
- Mindmaps 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
    - 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.

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 explain, support and give evidence from research and/or examples.
- Expect to write several drafts. Try to avoid getting stuck looking for the 'right' word.
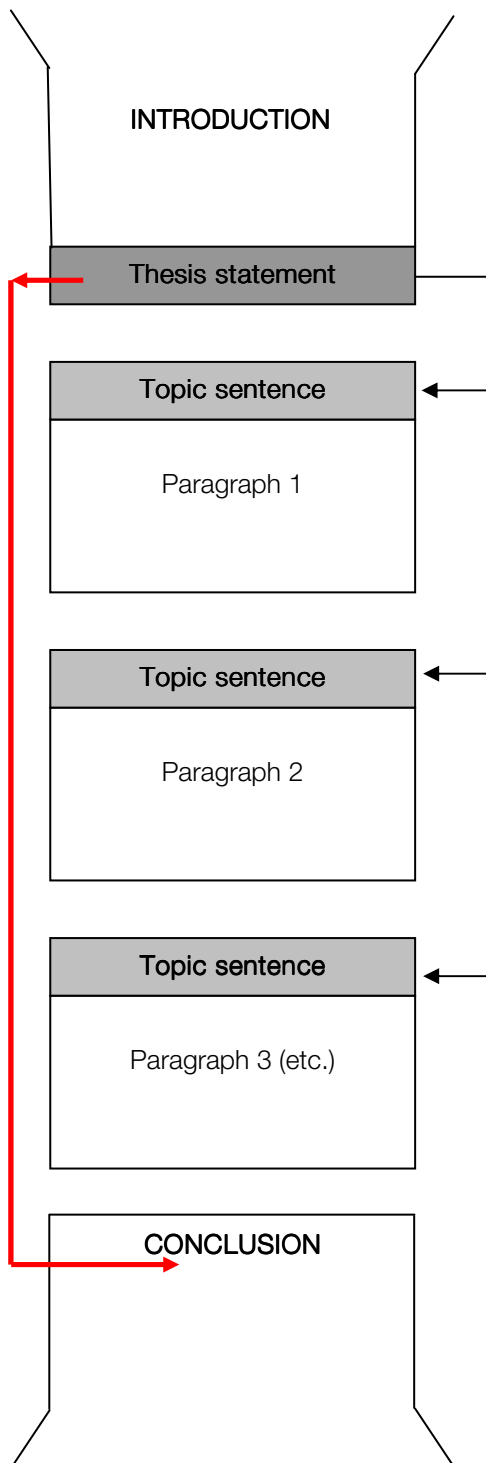- Include your references as you go.

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.
- Proof-read 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 RMIT H-drive, USB, laptop

ESSAY WRITING: STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

Thesis statement

Topic sentence

Paragraph 1

Topic sentence

Paragraph 2

Topic sentence

Paragraph 3 (etc.)

CONCLUSION

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 the 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.