

Linguistics Essay Writing: Tips, Reminders, Suggestions

READ, THINK & PLAN

- **Read with the essay question in mind.** Read as widely as you can, and don't be afraid to **skim and scan** for important or interesting material — it's not always a good use of your time to absorb every paragraph in detail. But do pay close and thoughtful attention when you home in on those crucial sections.



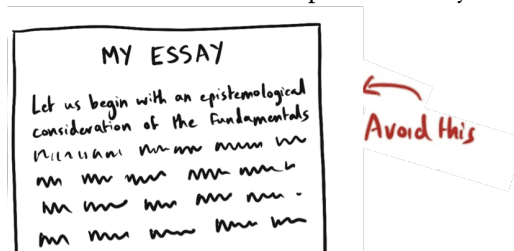
- Take notes as you read, and consider jotting down **page numbers** when you find a passage that might be important. This will help you when writing and referencing later. Try to **develop a note-taking technique** that works well for you — some trial-and-error may be needed! Note your own thoughts and questions as you read too.
- Organise your material and make an **essay plan** before you start writing. At this stage, you might find you need to do some more reading with a close focus on areas where you're lacking material or feeling unsure.
- **Take breaks.** You probably can't do all your reading (or write and revise your whole essay) in a single sitting; your brain needs a chance to absorb and consolidate the information, and your body needs a chance for other activities. Experiment to find the work patterns and the type of breaks that you prefer. Some people find that getting outside for a bit can be particularly conducive to creativity and figuring out problems.

WRITE

- The first draft is always the hardest part, so adopt a non-judgmental attitude towards your initial efforts and don't try to edit or perfect each sentence as you go — **just get something written down!** If you find yourself lacking a good example, the details of a citation, or the ideal wording to express your idea, you might find it helps with flow if you just make a note

to come back to it and keep going. Improving on your first draft is a much less daunting prospect once you have a good chunk of material in front of you. You might also find that you end up cutting out some sections later, so there's no point in wasting time polishing them from the get-go.

- Avoid waffling your way through a lengthy introductory section. You might spend a sentence or two briefly contextualising the question or laying out what makes the topic important, but tutorial essays are short, so **get fairly directly to the meat of your argument.** You can always review your introduction later to see whether there's a missing piece of background information that would help to frame your essay.



- **Concrete examples** are almost always helpful. Include them wherever possible!
- Don't be afraid to include **figures and diagrams**; they can be very useful. If you do, make sure you refer to each figure in the main text and explain what it illustrates.
- **Cite your sources.** See below for detailed advice on how to do this.

REVIEW & EDIT

- If you're struggling to stay within the maximum word count, consider whether you could **narrow the scope** of your essay a little bit to ensure that you tackle a more focused set of ideas in the depth they deserve.
- When reviewing your work, pay particular attention to your concluding paragraph(s). **Have you related your conclusion directly to the essay question?** Have you managed to **synthesise ideas** from throughout the main body of the essay into an overall stance **supported by the evidence**? It's usually best to avoid introducing new pieces of evidence as part of the conclusion; if they're important, find an earlier spot for them.

- Your essay won't be perfect — that's OK! Think of each one as an opportunity to experiment a bit, develop your writing style and your arguments, and improve your understanding and skills. **Think about feedback** that you've received on previous work — are there any areas you need to focus on?



CITATIONS & REFERENCING

- You must include a citation wherever you refer to or make use of someone else's work (which you should do frequently!). This might be a **quotation** (in which case you should make it clear that you are quoting directly), a **paraphrase** in your own words, or a general mention of a **main idea or finding** that they have put forward.
- You're free to use any consistent format for referencing (unless your tutor asks for something specific), but it should have two components: 1) a **citation at the relevant point in the text**; 2) a **bibliography / reference list** at the end of your essay containing all the works you have referred to.
- If you're not sure how to format your citations, a recommended option is to aim for **APA style**, on which you can find lots of helpful articles and information online. Don't worry too much about the fussier details — just use it as a guide and aim to be consistent!

APA Style Referencing: An example text

The Jabberwock is widely regarded as an alarming creature (see Carroll, 1871, for a review). Queen, Hare, and Hatter (1841) note that even unusually fast runners will fail to keep up with this particular foe, but there is debate over whether its attacks are more likely to take the form of 'rattle theft' (Dum & Dee, 1852, p.96) or semantic equivocation (Humpty-Dumpty, 1863). It is clear, however, that challenging the monster without adequate dietary hay intake is likely to be a mistake (Knight, Haigha, & Hatta, 1850). Combatants should also take care to divide a loaf by a knife before commencing their attack (Queen et al., 1841).

References

- Carroll, L. (1871). *Through the looking-glass*. London: Macmillan.
- Dum, T., & Dee, T. (1852). *How to quarrel*. Forestland: Tom Thumb Press.
- Humpty-Dumpty, E. (1863). How to use words in such a way as to mean exactly what you choose. *Looking Glass Linguistics*, 8, 586–624.
- Knight, W., Haigha, M., & Hatta, M. (1850). All the king's horses and all the king's men. In W. Knight & W. King (Eds.), *In the shadow of the lion and the unicorn* (pp. 339–354). Brookton: Seventh Rank Press.
- Queen, R., Hare, M., & Hatter, M. (1841). All the ways about here belong to me: Speed and coverage. *Annals of the Chessboard*, 16(4), 169–271. DOI: 10.114/230523.

PRESENT YOUR WORK

- Feeling techy and/or keen for some typesetting nerdery? You might have fun experimenting with **LaTeX**. It's especially great for things like IPA symbols, linguistic examples with glosses, syntax trees, and formatting your references.
- Before submitting your work, check whether any particular **formatting style** (e.g. double-spaced text) or file type (e.g. PDF) is required. Don't forget to put your name on there somewhere!
- Make sure you have a **copy of your essay** in front of you for the tutorial. You might want to give it a quick **re-read beforehand** to refresh your memory of the topic.

SUMMARY OF TIPS

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| • Read widely, use skimming and scanning | • Include concrete examples | • Think about how to apply previous feedback |
| • Take notes, including page numbers | • Use figures/diagrams if helpful | • Check the formatting |
| • Make an essay plan | • Cite your sources | • Re-read before the tutorial |
| • Take breaks while working | • Narrow the scope if you're short on space | |
| • Don't get psyched out: bash out that first draft, however rough! | • Relate your conclusion directly to the question | |
| • Keep the introduction short | • Synthesise ideas presented throughout | |

