

Lesson 12.2

Exam Writing 2: Discursive Essay

Read and complete the exercises below before your final exam. They will familiarise you with the Exam Writing Task 2.

In your writing exam you will be asked to write a 'to what extent' discursive essay (350 words). You will be given a text (approximately 1200 words) relating to the topic. The text should form the basis of your answer, but you should include some of your own information into your answer. This information may be from your general knowledge or information covered during the course. Remind yourselves of the different parts of the task that we looked at last time:

Task requirements

To successfully answer this type of essay question, you will need to do the following:

1. Take a stance

You will be expected to take one side, but may state how far you agree with that side — just like your IWA.

Consider the following question **as an example**:

To what extent was the architect and engineer, Thomas Andrews, responsible for the sinking of the Titanic?

Here are 4 possible stances (there are more possibilities not listed)

1. Andrews was responsible for the sinking of the Titanic.
2. To a large extent Andrews was responsible for the sinking of the Titanic.
3. To some extent Andrews was responsible for the sinking of the Titanic.
4. Andrews was not responsible for the sinking of the Titanic.

2. Justify your stance

Once you have taken a stance, the rest of your essay will be concerned with giving reasons why you chose that stance. You can do this by using:

- **Arguments**

- **Counter-arguments and concessions**

- o These should tell the reader the argument(s) against your stance. 'Counter-arguments' are points you think are *invalid*. 'Concessions' are points you accept as *valid*.

- **Rebuttals**

- o These are reasons why the counter-argument(s) are invalid.

- **Further justification and examples**

- o These should be used to support arguments, counter-arguments/ concessions and rebuttals

Note: If you have selected a stance similar 'to some extent', you will need to justify why you have chosen this position rather than a clear for or against stance.

Organization

A common way to organize a 'to what extent' paragraph, or even the entire essay is:

1. Give a stance (clearly in the thesis statement)
2. State a counter-argument/concession
3. Give a rebuttal with a reason
4. Provide further reasons/ arguments

Exercise 1

The following essay is a model answer to the question above. Skim it to answer the questions.

At the time of its construction, the R.M.S. Titanic was the largest ship ever built and some even suggested it was unsinkable. However, on April 14, 1912, the Titanic collided with an iceberg and sank in under three hours. Since the disaster, there has been much debate about who was at fault. While many factors contributed to the number of lives lost during the disaster, some blame the actual sinking of the ship on its architect and engineer, Thomas Andrews. Although to some extent Andrews was responsible, he was not solely to blame for the sinking of the Titanic.

It is true that Andrews made an engineering flaw when designing the watertight compartments in the bottom of the ship. The purpose of these compartments was to prevent leaking water if the outside of the ship was punctured. However, the compartments that Andrews designed were too short, and their tops were open. As a result, the water overflowed causing the Titanic to sink much faster. Despite this, scientists admit that a change in the design would have only delayed the sinking of the ship by six hours rather than stopped it due to extensive damage from the iceberg. While more lives could have been saved if Andrews had created a better design, he could not have prevented it from sinking.

It has been argued that the material of the rivets used to fasten the body of the Titanic also contributed to the sinking of the ship. The rivets were made from iron which was too weak to withstand a collision. However, the original design by Andrews included steel rivets, which are much stronger. The construction company had changed the original design and used iron rivets in order to save time and money. Although Andrews could have supervised the construction of the ship more closely, his original design was not at fault.

It is true that Andrews made mistakes as an engineer. He should have designed the watertight compartments to better delay the flooding and have overseen the construction of the ship, which was his ethical duty. However, he was not solely responsible for the sinking of the Titanic. Instead, it was a series of events and factors that led to the disaster. The only positive outcome of this event has been that engineers have been able to study and learn from the mistakes in order to avoid any future disasters. (399 words)

1. What is the writer's stance?

2. What information is included in the introduction?
3. What is the argument and organization of the first body paragraph?
4. What is the argument and organization of the second body paragraph?
5. Which paragraphs include a counter-argument/concession and rebuttal?
(Note: It is not necessary to have a counter-argument/concession in every paragraph, but one paragraph **must** have this structure in order to fulfil the task).
6. What information is included in the conclusion?

Input Text

When you receive the input text, you need to analyse it carefully so that you are as prepared as possible for writing your answer. You should do the following:

- Make sure you understand the argument
- Consider both sides of the argument
- Consider possible questions that may be asked in the exam
- Consider your stance for each possible question
- Consider which are the strongest arguments for both sides

Note:

- You will not be able to include all the arguments from the text in your essay.
- When selecting a counter-argument, choose the strongest argument, not the weakest.
- Don't forget, you should try to include some information from outside the input text, perhaps something from the course or that you have read in self-study.