*Left hand icons:*

* Write
* Activities
* Samples
* Settings

*Right hand icons:*

* Information

Module: TOPIC-BASED ESSAY

‘Write’ Item sequence:

Introduction

Topic

Decode the question

My opinions

My big idea

Putting my ideas together

Write introduction

Write body paragraph 1

Write body paragraphs

Write counter idea

Write conclusion

Review and submit

**Introduction:**

What is an essay? An essay is usually a short piece of writing about a single topic or issue made up of several paragraphs. Why might people write an essay? Essays are often written in schools and universities by students who try to demonstrate to their teachers or markers what they know about a topic. In this situation there is often a question that students must respond to, and it is the question that tells the students the purpose of their essay.

For example, students may be asked by the question to argue for an idea (Q: Argue for why cars should be banned on city streets.), to explain why something exists (Q: Explain why carbon pollution exists.), to examine many sides of a problem or augment (Q: Compare the ideas of those who support smacking children and those that do not.) or to analyse a story, film or other text (Q: Analyse the main ideas of To Kill a Mockingbird.). These are just some examples.

So, now we know that essays are short pieces of writing about a topic or issue, that these can be written for a range of purposes, and that essays are often written by students who attempt to demonstrate to their teachers what they know about a topic, idea or text. Importantly, because your essay is to be read by your teacher it needs to be *formal* – that means you must write your essay using the kind of language you would use when talking to your teacher, and not using the kind of language you would use when talking to your friends in the school yard.

- Read essay samples (open another side panel)

- Difference between formal and casual language (open new window)

Your task is to plan and begin writing a 5 paragraph essay on a topic. This will involve you:

* choosing and/or brainstorming what your essay question means and what it is asking you to do;
* brainstorming your thoughts and ideas about the essay issue so that you can write a response to it;
* planning and writing your essay by drafting your essay paragraphs, which include an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion.

You can use the Activities icon on the left to learn more about essay writing.

**Topic:**

If you have been given a question, write the question in the space below.

\_\_\_\_

If you have to write a question, choose from the list here and write in the space above.

- Questions (open another side panel)

**Decode the question:**

Your question is very important because it tells you *what* to write about and *how* to write about it. Therefore, it is very important to read the question carefully and to think about what it is asking you to do.

To do this, let’s look at the key words in the question. Most essay questions have two types of KEY WORDS. These are topic (or issue) words and task (or command) words.

Topic words tell you what the subject matter of your essay should be. Topic words describe the topic, issue or subject matter that you are to write about. If your essay question is, 'Why are celebrity magazines so popular?', the topic words are celebrity, magazines and popular.

Task words are words in the question that tell you what your essay should do. Task words describe how you should write about the topic, issue or subject matter. Often used task words include: what, why, explain, discuss, argue, and compare. If your question is, ‘Why are celebrity magazines so popular?' the task word is 'why'. These task words tell you that you must *explain* the *reasons* that celebrity magazines are read.

- Decode the question activity link (opens new page with activity)

Carefully read your question and write the topic words here:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ,

Carefully read your question and write the task words here:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

This question is asking me to:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**My opinions:**

Whenever write it is a good idea to create a brainstorm of all the ideas you have about the topic or subject matter of your writing. This can help you to think clearly about the topic, to organise your ideas, to judge and evaluate your ideas, and to help you answer the question. You can begin thinking about the question and topic by asking yourself questions like:

What do I know *for sure* about the topic?

What do I *sort of know* about the topic?

What do I *not know* about the topic?

What is or what could be *other people’s opinions* of the topic?

What is *my opinion* of the topic?

Write down a list of thoughts you have related to the topic and essay question. You can use the above questions to help you.

**My big idea:**

Now that you have thought about the question, you need to use these ideas and thoughts to write your essay about the topic. If you could write a one sentence answer to your essay question, what would it be? Think about it carefully! If you had to write your answer in one sentence, and this sentence was your main ideas, what would that sentence be? Write your sentence below.

I think\_\_\_\_

The main idea that an essay tries to show or argue is called a *thesis statement*. A thesis statement is the main point that your essay makes. This is your essay’s big idea! Usually your thesis statement is a clearly written sentence, often found in the first paragraph of an essay. It tells the reader the main point the writer wants to make in the essay. All of the ideas made in the essay relate to this thesis statement.

- Thesis statement activity

**Putting my ideas together:**

Too often people have opinions and ideas but they cannot explain why they have them, or they cannot give powerful points to support them. To write a good essay, you need to have a main idea (your thesis statement) and then points or evidence that support your main idea. So, for example, if you had to prove that Year 9s are the naughtiest group of students in school, can you think of 3 good points, or find any evidence, to support this opinion?

- Good points (opens another side panel)

- Finding main ideas activity (open in new window)

Now, you need to think of or find through researching at least three good points to support your big idea. You may have already written these down in your brainstorm. Your main points or evidence need to be strong. They need to sound convincing. They should also be supported with evidence, examples or reason. Each of these points should make up one paragraph each in your essay. If you are not sure whether your points are good, share it with a partner or your teacher and ask for their feedback.

Using full sentences, write your points here: \_\_\_\_\_

Remember, you can always alter these later.

**Write my introduction:**

Now we need to organise your ideas, opinions and supporting points into an essay for others to read. Let’s draft your essay using the following 6 parts: •Introduction (introduce your main idea)

•Paragraph 1 (supporting point/evidence)

•Paragraph 2 (supporting point/evidence)

•Paragraph 3 (supporting point/evidence)

•Paragraph 4 (other ideas)

•Conclusion (sum up your essay)

- Read essay samples (open another side panel)

An essay introduction is the first paragraph. Your first paragraph should tell the reader what your essay is about and what your main idea is. It introduces your topic and your opinion in a short paragraph and should be about 4 to 6 sentences long. Try to make your introduction engaging for your reader, although make sure it contains your main point - your reader will want to know what you are arguing or telling them. Once you have written your introduction, ask yourself whether the reader will know what your essay is about and what your main idea is.

Write your introduction here: \_\_\_\_

- Writing a paragraph activity (opens new page)

- Essay language (open another side panel)

**Write my body paragraphs:**

Your introduction is followed by your ‘body’ paragraphs. Each paragraph in your essay makes a point in support of your main idea or opinion. Often the strongest point goes into your first paragraph. Look at the ideas you wrote down earlier and choose one to write your first paragraph about.

Not sure how to begin your paragraph? Begin writing your paragraph with a *topic sentence*. This is a short sentence that tells your reader what your paragraph is about. In this case your topic sentence is a short sentence describing your first main point. Often a topic sentence is the first sentence of a paragraph. After your topic sentence, you can then add more sentences that explain your point, or which provide examples and evidence to support your point.

- Sentence starters (opens another side panel)

In the paragraph below, the student uses sentences 2, 3 and 4 to say that year 11s and 12s are preparing for work or further study. The student uses these sentences to support their point that year 9s are naughty because they are not near the end of their schooling:

Year nines are the naughtiest group of students because they are not near the end of their schooling. When students in year 11 and 12 are at school they are starting to think about and plan their future. For many of these students, they want to get the best grades they can because this will help them get good jobs or help them get into TAFE or university. Year nines do not have that pressure on them yet so many of them muck around.

- Read sample paragraphs (opens another side panel)

Once you have made your point, write your next 2 paragraphs. Each paragraph should be made up of several sentences and each should make a point not covered in your other paragraphs.

**Write counter idea:**

Some essay writing is effective because it recognises and anticipates other ideas or points that challenge the essay’s main idea. These are called counter-arguments because they counter, or go against, your opinion. The counter idea paragraph comes near the end of the essay. It is optional. In the counter-idea paragraph you describe a point against your opinion. Importantly, however, while you describe the counter idea you explain why it is not a powerful, correct or valid point or opinion. You can ask a partner what counter-argument could be made against your opinion.

Write your counter-idea paragraph. If you need help, you could use the following sentence sequence:

Many people disagree with the idea being made by this essay. Some people argue \_\_ . However, this is not a strong point because \_\_\_ .

**Conclusion:**

Every essay should finish with a conclusion. This is a paragraph that sums up your main ideas and leaves your reader thinking that you have made some very strong points. To do this, you should look over the main points you have made in your essay are re-state them in a few sentences. You may even mention the counter-argument and why it was not strong. Your last sentence should be thought-provoking and interesting.

- Read sample conclusions (open another side panel)

Now, write a paragraph that briefly describes your main points

**Review and submit:**

Read and review the writing you have completed. Make sure that you have:

* Written a clear introduction that describes your big idea or opinion;
* Written 3 body paragraphs with each containing one main point that is convincing;
* Written a conclusion that sums up your essay points;
* Check that you have used language appropriate for your teacher.

You can also add an interesting title, share with a partner or teacher and receive some feedback.

You can share your work with others in the Student Library.