

Essay Writing

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You have an essay to write – What now?

1. Read the assessment brief carefully to find out what the essay is about, what you are required to do specifically. What instructions are you given (discuss, explain, explore)? What choices do you need to make?
2. Make a plan for when, where, and how you will research, think, draft, and write your essay.
3. Execute your plan.
4. Finish early. Leave a couple of spare days at the end to edit and proofread.

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Some general advice re essays

Understanding the question – You need to unpick the question and use this to plan the essay

- What are the key instruction words? Are they asking you to be descriptive or critical? (explain, discuss, evaluate etc.)
- What are the key theories, ideas and frameworks mentioned or implied in the question?
- What key information is drawn from the module? What extra reading or exploration is needed?
- What is it not asking? A key consideration – don't write what you hope you'd been asked. Use a plan to stay focused.

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Making a start, using a concept map

Identify the focus question or main topic

- This idea should connect to all others on your map and will guide the hierarchical structure.

Identify all the key concepts that relate to the main idea you identified. Order them with the most general concepts first and the more specific concepts last.

Create a preliminary concept map linking the concepts together.

<https://www.mindmup.com/>

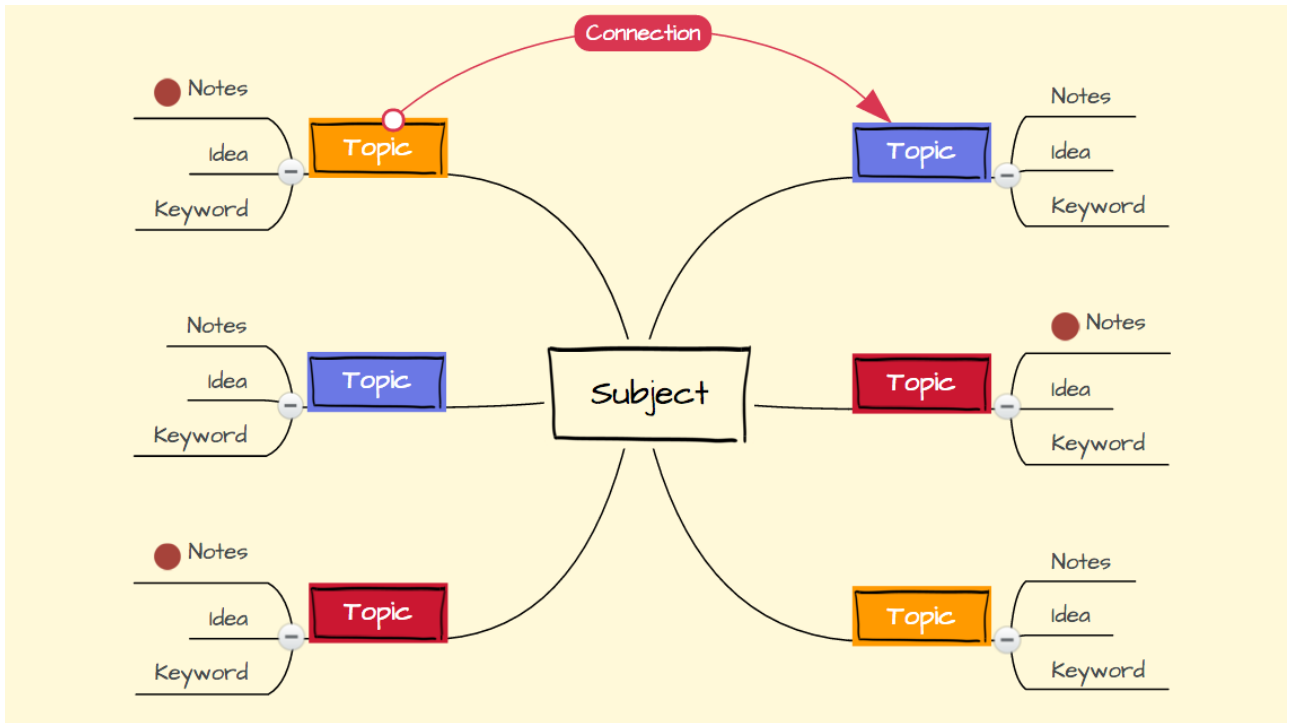
<https://www.inspiration-at.com/inspiration-10/> - installed on all on campus pc's (in the library)

Simple Mind Lite (app)

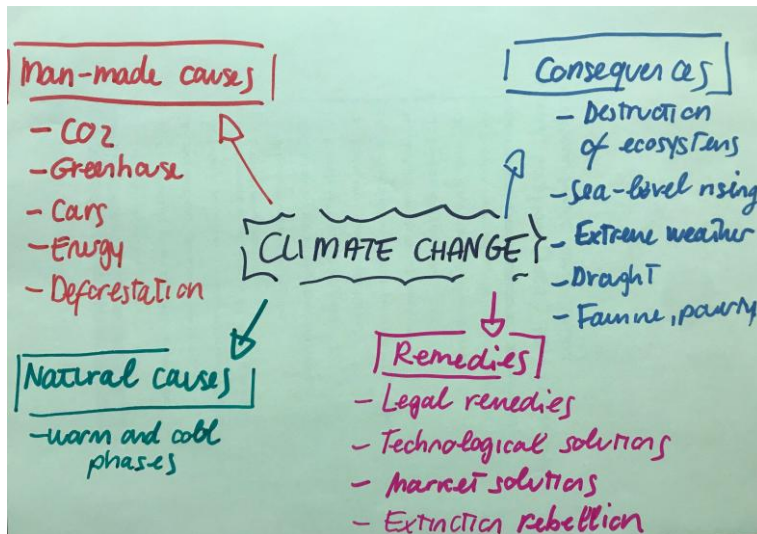
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.modelm akertools.simplemindfree&hl=en>

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/simplemind-mind-mapping/id305727658>

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The Plan

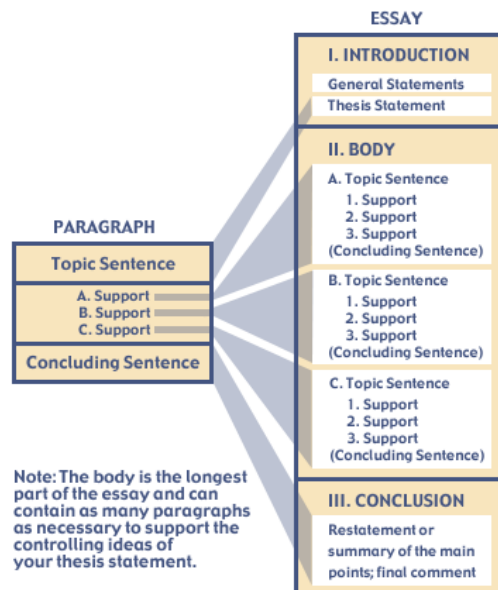
Now skim through any material, lecture notes, course readings to build up a more detailed outline

Note where you will find necessary information on each of the points in the outline – journals, books etc.

Do not overcomplicate your outline – make sure it stays relevant to the question

Once the plan is complete – think about the proportions – there will be a word limit – allocate the majority of words to the main body of the essay.

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(from <http://www.jcu.edu.au/tldinfo/writingskills/essay/structure.html>)

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Write the Introduction

The introduction has two purposes:

1. Show your understanding of the question, which includes showing how you have limited the question, so the reader can understand specifically the question you are answering.
2. Tell the reader how you will answer the question, including the structure of your essay, key examples you will rely upon and an outline of the conclusion that will be reached.

'This is a large topic which has been variously discussed by theorists. The principal tension is between the views of X (citation – author, date) and Y (citation – author, date) who define the main issues as...'

'A variety of factors including economic, social and political, influence A and B. This essay will focus on the social and economic aspects, with particular emphasis on.....'

Keep the introduction **short**, one or two paragraphs, write a provisional introduction to guide the essay that can be rewritten when you finish the first draft

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Write the main body

This should show a logical, evidenced argument that takes the reader on a journey from your understanding of the question in the introduction, to the conclusion you reach.

It needs to show your understanding of the key theories, ideas, frameworks and clearly show how and why the conclusion is the 'correct' answer to the question or appropriate

It will comprise of a blend of researched evidence from readings, and comment.

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Use a matrix to keep track of themes and notes

You can use a simple matrix with examples [here](#)

Or you can use a more complex matrix such as this

Author/Source Title/Year	Purpose /rationale/ Aims/ question posed	Method/sample characteristics/ study type	Results/findings/ conclusions	Key ideas /themes	Strength/weaknesses / Limitations/gaps – areas for further research	Similarities/differences to other studies	Notes/my conclusions/comments /questions arising

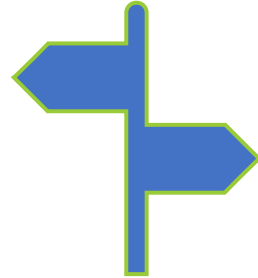
The conclusion

- Should include
- A clear link back to the question
 - A couple of sentences that summarise your main argument in a little more detail than in the introduction
 - Reiterate your main points
 - Do not introduce any new ideas
 - Provide closure

Good writing employs

Topic Sentences and Signposts

- Each paragraph should have its own topic sentence and should focus on only one main idea or point. Every time you move into a new idea, you need a new paragraph and a new topic sentence
- Make sure you link between paragraphs signposting the direction to the reader



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More on paragraphs

Everyone finds it easier to read a text that is broken into short paragraphs

They signal the end of one main point and the beginning of the next and are a group of sentences that are related to aspects of the same point.

Each paragraph introduces an idea and develops it through the subsequent sentences within that paragraph. Keep your sentences short.

Paragraphs should follow logically from each other

They should consist of more than two sentences!

See 'Powerful [paragraphs](#)' from the thesis whisperer

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Concluding a piece of writing

Conclude by

- Conclude by linking the last paragraph to the first

Reiterate

- Reiterate the main points reached in the essay

Don't

- Don't simply summarise your essay.

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Edit, proofread and redraft

Once you have a full draft essay, or when you have a section completed, re-read it, think what you were trying to say and consider if you have said what you intended.

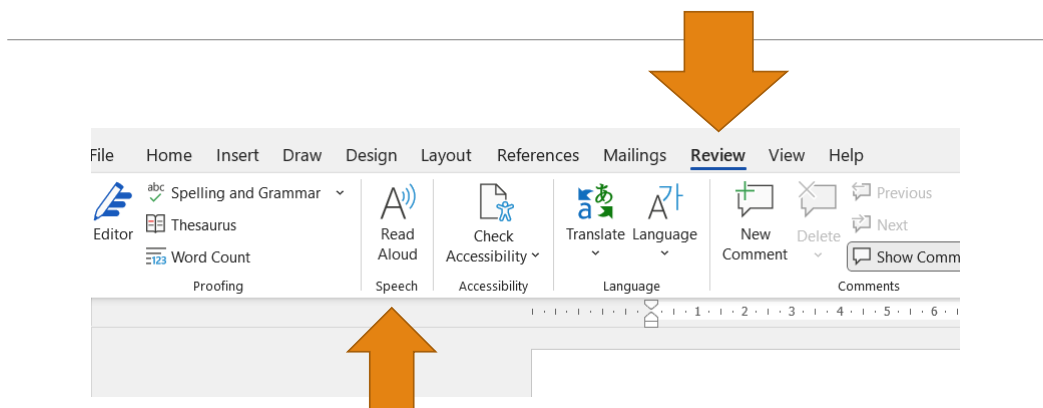
You should **carefully** examine the grammar, punctuation, paragraph structure and word choice of your writing. Do not let typos ruin your essay!

Check your citations and particularly that all of your in-text citations are in the reference list/bibliography. This is crucial to fulfilling the requirements of referencing.

It is a good idea to have a friend/coursemate/relative look through your work to spot the things you cannot. Your brain takes ownership of what it produces, making mistakes harder to spot.

Reading your work out loud is also a good idea; you can often hear mistakes that you cannot read. Use read aloud on Microsoft word

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Keep proper
notes/ use
reference
management
software

For anything you read make sure you record

- The FULL bibliographic/Reference page/Works Cited page citation;
- The methodology;
- The major findings;
- Weaknesses and strengths

When you find a passage that interests you, write down the reason for its significance. If you don't, you might forget its importance later.

www.mybib.com

<https://nuim.libguides.com/ReferenceManagementSoftware/EndNote2025>

<https://nuim.libguides.com/ReferenceManagementSoftware/Zotero>

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Some tips for good writing

Be clear

Clarity is a key aspect of academic writing style. This helps the reader understand and follow your points easily.

- Break down long, complex sentences into shorter, clearer sentences.
- Do not use formal or unusual words where you can use a 'normal' one.
- You will not get points for being overly formal, or 'sounding like an academic' - probably the opposite, as this makes your writing harder to follow.

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Be concise

Academic writing also aims to be concise and use as few words as possible. Words are precious!

Remove words and phrases that don't add anything to your argument. This makes your writing clearer, and also means you'll have more words to make your points with.

After writing a paragraph, read it back and remove any unnecessary words. Be ruthless!

It is possible that this finding shows...

→ This finding may show...

→ This finding suggests...

An example of this is...

→ For example...

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More examples

*Reading accuracy **was found to increase** after the intervention.*

→ Reading accuracy **increased** after the intervention.

*Chen (2018) **makes the argument** that...*

→ Chen (2018) **argues** that...

Smith and Brown (2019) conducted a study on ADHD and emotional regulation, finding a strong relationship between the two factors.

→ Smith and Brown (2019) found a strong relationship between ADHD and emotional regulation.

→ There is a strong relationship between ADHD and emotional regulation (Smith & Brown, 2019).

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Cohesive language

Cohesive words and phrases are used in academic writing style to smoothly link points. They're generally small and fairly simple, but are integral to communicating your argument clearly.

“Features of online resources that students appreciate **include** being able to use them whenever and wherever is convenient (Gorman & Staley, 2018), being in control of pace (Johnston, 2010) **and** the opportunity for immediate feedback (Dugartsyrenova, 2020). **This** is consistent with theories of andragogy, **which** state that adult learners need to be self-directing and able to control their learning (Knowles et al., 2005; Ota et al., 2006). **However**, not all students prefer online resources **and** some miss the in-person support in face-to-face sessions (Nichols Hess, 2014)”.

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Quoting, paraphrasing, summarising

Quoting is where you use the direct words of your source (accompanied by author's surname, date, page number) **NO FIRST NAMES**

- Quotations should not be used as a substitute for your own words. If you use a quote, you should explain it in your own words to indicate its significance to your argument.

Paraphrasing is where you summarise relevant ideas in your own words – you must use this more often than quoting (author's surname, date)

Synthesising is more advanced than paraphrasing, where you integrate and summarise information from multiple sources

DO NOT plagiarise or use AI to generate text. Assignments will be submitted on moodle through Turnitin the Universities plagiarism and AI detection software.

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Finally

Do not forget correct citations and the bibliography, everything you include in the text should be cited – I will put an example on moodle.

We use the Harvard system – in text citations are author, date ONLY

Bibliography is alphabetical by author surname

https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/The%20Ref%20Point%202nd%20ed%20final_0.pdf

<https://nuim.libguides.com/academicwriting>

<https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/strategies-essay-writing>

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Your research essay

- This is the first step on the thesis road
- You will use the essay as an opportunity to scope out the available sources/literature
- The essay is an exercise in **critical thinking**
- It should not be a summary of what you have read, but rather an engaged piece of writing about the topic you are going to examine
 - Theoretical background
 - Relevant sources
 - Not a summary of articles
- GIVE IT A TITLE – so you have a focus
 - What might your title be?
 - Have a think about this

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As it is a starting point ...

We don't expect a mini thesis

- This is a first assignment, it is not marked although your supervisor will give you an *indicative* mark
- It gives us a sense of what you want to look at and how you approach writing
- We don't expect that you will have read and reviewed all the material
- New sources/ possibilities will emerge throughout the year

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Useful links

https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/aewpg_ismaterials.pdf – postgraduate essays

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aB8JLq_woYV9cT4TiedSew5PUlKaopGhgp6hWFe3N8E/edit#heading=h.mwfmg8t3cv8y – writing conclusions