

# Writing Essays



# Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this lecture you will learn how to

- Analyse your essay topic,
- Plan your essay,
- Select and record relevant information,
- Use this information appropriately, and
- Construct your essay.
- Reference your sources.



# Essays

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- An essay is a piece of writing that generally shows the author's view on a particular subject.
- In each essay you can
  - Explore a topic in detail.
  - Develop and organise your own ideas through writing.
  - Develop your writing skills.
  - Express your ideas, thoughts and opinions about a topic.
- Essays help tutors to assess your progress and provide you with feedback.
- They also serves as a communication tool.



# Basic Characteristics of an Essay

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An essay

- Is directed toward a specific audience.
- Maintains a tight focus on the question or topic.
- Uses formal, but not unnatural structure, vocabulary, and style.
- Shows command of the subject matter.
- Follows a clear plan of organisation.
- Includes specific examples to support the topic or thesis statement.
- Shows, rather than tells.



# Types of Essays



There are many different kinds of essays, including narrative, descriptive, and persuasive.

- A **narrative essay** is an essay that tells a story.
- A **descriptive essay** describes a person, place, or thing.
- The purpose of a **persuasive essay** is to convince the reader to agree with your viewpoint or to accept your recommendation for a course of action.

# A Persuasive Essay



A successful **persuasive** essay will

- Use evidence to support your viewpoint.
  - You will need to present statistics, facts, quotations from experts, and examples that will help you to support your argument.
- Consider opposing views.
  - Consider different points of view, and explain why your viewpoint or recommendation is the best one, in order to present a balanced, planned argument.
- Present a strong conclusion.
  - Use your supporting evidence and explanations to build a strong conclusion, in which you summarise your views and make your recommendations in a clear way.



# Stages in Essay Writing



- Understanding the topic.
- Organise and plan.
- Collect and record information.
- Reflect and evaluate.
- Write an outline and the first draft.
- Revise the first draft.
- Write the final draft.



# Understand the Topic



- An essay topic may be assigned to you or you may be asked to choose a topic.
- Examine the topic to understand what exactly is required.

## *Example topic:*

**Explain what the term recycling means to you and discuss its importance in relation to Sri Lanka.**

Look closely at your essay topic.

- What does the essay question require you to do?
- What information do you have to look at?
- What are you writing about?

- Understand the topic
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# Understand the Topic



**Explain what the term recycling means to you and discuss its importance in relation to Sri Lanka.**

You need to identify three types of words and/or phrases.

- Instruction words.
- Content words.
- Relationship words.

## Instruction words

- These are the action words in the topic that tell you what to do.
  - Some examples are: analyse, describe, discuss, justify, compare.

# Understand the Topic



**Explain what the term recycling means to you and discuss its importance in relation to Sri Lanka.**

## Content Words

- Content words are generally nouns and verbs that represent the key concepts of the essay.

## Remember:

**It is important that you check the meanings of the content words and make sure you know what they are referring to.**

# Understand the Topic



**Explain what the term recycling means to you and discuss its importance in relation to Sri Lanka.**

## Relationship words

- Relationship words connect different aspects of the essay.

Some common relationship words are:

- ☐ with reference to
- ☐ drawing on
- ☐ according to
- ☐ influenced by

***Tip for visual learners***

Try to break down the topic into sections or points to help you to focus on what you need to write about.

# Organise and Plan



Before you start developing a plan for your essay, **brainstorm** some ideas.

When **brainstorming**, write down everything that occurs to you about your topic. At this stage, do not edit or worry about something that seems silly or unimportant.

- Look for patterns once you've had a brainstorm about your topic.
- You may have a number of thoughts about one part of your topic, and fewer thoughts about another.
- Note the patterns, this will help you to direct your research toward the areas about which you have less information, or help you to narrow your topic to a more manageable size.



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# Organise and Plan – Learning Styles



## Make a plan

- Once you have done some initial brainstorming, make a plan.
- There are many techniques you can use to develop a plan.
- The technique you choose will depend on your learning style.

## What are learning styles?

Learning styles are different ways that a person can learn. Most people prefer some particular method of interacting with, taking in, and processing information.

- Some people learn by seeing (**visual**)
- Others learn by hearing (**aural**)
- others by processing text (**reading/writing**), and
- others learn by doing (**kinaesthetic**)



# Organise and Plan – Learning Styles



How do you think you learn?

- Here are three techniques you could use to make your plan.
- Remember, the one you prefer will probably reflect your learning style.
- Have a look at all three approaches, then choose one.
- The plan you develop here can guide your essay structure and form the basis of your paragraphs.
  - ☐ Question Approach
  - ☐ Using Tables
  - ☐ Mind Mapping



# Organise and Plan – Learning Styles



## Question Approach

- Use the question approach to gather or organise your information. Your ideas can form the basis for paragraphs and help guide your essay structure.

### *Tip*

The word '**Discuss**' means: examine key points and possible interpretations; give arguments for and against, and draw a conclusion.

## Using tables

- Using a table is a good way to manage and organise your thoughts and information.

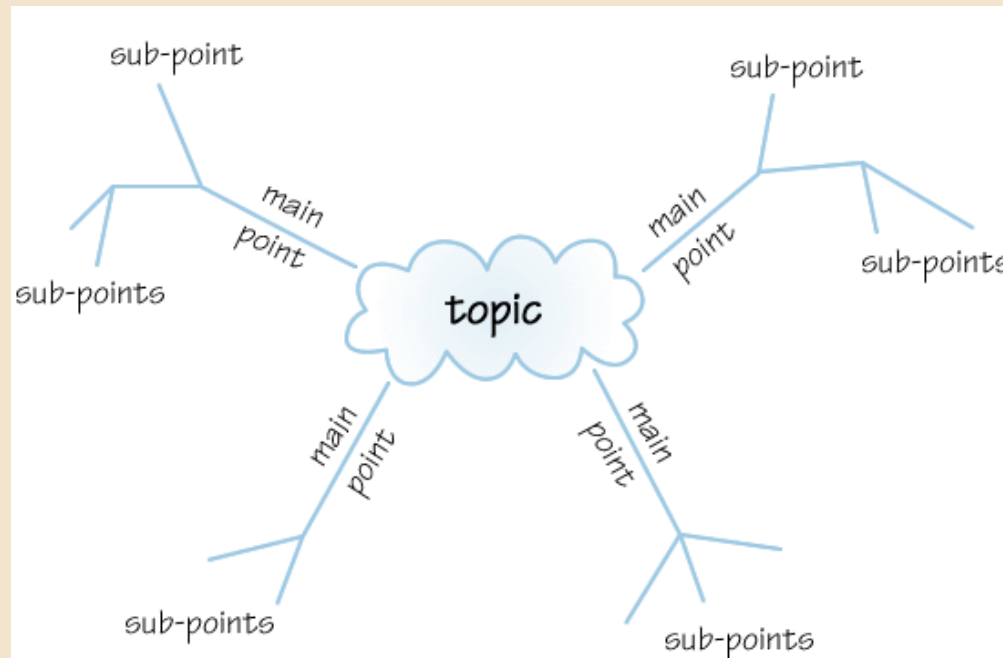
**Explain what the term recycling means to you and discuss its importance in relation to Sri Lanka.**

# Organise and Plan – Learning Styles



## Mind mapping

- Use a mind map to gather and organise your information.
- Mind mapping refers to diagrams used for brainstorming and for organising information that has been gathered.
- Given below is an example of a basic mind map. They can be drawn by hand or developed in computer programmes such as Inspiration.





# Collect and Record Information



- Be selective about the information you collect. You will not be able to use everything you collect (be focused).
- Record information as you go along.
  - Where you found the information and ideas (bibliographic details, URLs, etc.)
  - Summarise the information.
- Types of material.
  - Factual information.
  - Ideas, theories, opinions.
  - Experiences.
- Sources.
  - Books, articles, official reports, surveys, newspapers.
  - Lecture notes, data from laboratory work and projects, talking to others, interviews.
  - Internet, television, radio.

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# Collect and Record Information – Sources



## Books

- Some or all of a book's contents may be relevant to your research and will provide good general background information.

## Remember

Information contained within a book may have taken years to compile. It must then be published, printed and sold to bookshops and libraries.

As a result, information in books tends to be less current than information found in other sources, such as journal and newspaper articles.



## Articles

- An article is a brief composition, written on a specific subject.
- Articles appear in academic journals, popular magazines, newspapers and the internet, and appeal to a wide range of audiences.
- Information found in an article can be very up-to-date, such as that found in a daily newspaper.

# Reflect and Evaluate



You will now be in a better position to evaluate the information that you are using.

When using information you should consider

- ☐ Is the information appropriate?
- ☐ Is the information current?



## ■ Think about the information you have gathered.

- What have you discovered?
- Has your viewpoint changed?
- Have you collected sufficient evidence/examples
- What arguments or evidence oppose your point of view? Are they valid?
- Is the topic clearer to you?

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# Organise and Plan – Outlines



- Once you have done some brainstorming to note down your thoughts and ideas, you will need to develop an outline showing your main ideas and the order in which you are going to write about them

**Explain what the term recycling means to you and discuss its importance in relation to Sri Lanka.**

Point 1 –

1.1 – sub-topic – in support of point 1.

1.2 – sub-topic – in support of point 1.

Point 2 –

Point 3 –



# Write an Outline and the First Draft



Structure your writing.

- Refine your outline / structure.
- Write a first draft.
  - You may find it easier to write the headings / structure first.
  - Begin with whatever seems easiest.
  - To begin with, write clearly and simply in short sentences.

**Title**

**Introduction**

**Body**

**Paragraph**

**Paragraph**

**Paragraph**

**Conclusion**

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# Structuring an Essay



Essays have a recognisable structure.

## ■ Title

- Usually contains the question.

## ■ Introduction

- Often begins with a general statement about the topic.
- Informs the reader about your point of view.
- Identifies the issues that you are going to explore.
- Gives a brief outline of how you will deal with each issue.

## ■ Body

- Paragraphs
  - Limit each paragraph or section to one main idea.
  - Prove your points by using specific examples, quotations, statistics, etc.
  - Ensure that there is a smooth flow of ideas from one paragraph to the other.



# Structuring an Essay



- Conclusion

- This is the last section of the essay. It does not contain new material.
  - Summarise your main argument and points, linking them to the title / question.
  - State your general conclusions, explaining why they are important.

- Bibliography (or References)

- A bibliography is an alphabetical list all the books, articles, online and other material you have referred to within the essay. This is given at the end of the essay.



# Revise the First Draft



- You will need to
  - Revise the draft several times.
  - Adapt the structure.
  - Organise the writing into paragraphs.
  - Ensure that your argument is clear.
  - Check that you have included evidence and examples to support your points.
  - Prepare a bibliography.



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# Write the Final Drafts



Try to set aside your draft for a day or two before revising. This makes it easier to view your work objectively and spot any gaps or problems.

- Revising your final draft.
  - **Meaning, organisation, and structure** – Is your essay focused, does it answer the question, do the argument and main points flow smoothly, is the information presented in the best order?
  - **Evidence** – Have you included sufficient and appropriate examples, statistics, research, etc. in support of your argument?
  - **Bibliography** – Have you referenced your sources, credited material used in the essay, etc.?
  - **Proof-read** – Check for typing, spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes.

**Remember... Be careful not to plagiarise!**

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# Appropriate Use of Language



A successful student considers how he or she uses language. Bear in mind the following points.

## Academic tone

- Interested, open-minded, but logical.
- Trustworthy (acknowledging sources).
- Use Standard Written English.
- Avoid the use of informal language such as; TXT language, verbal contractions ('don't, won't') and abbreviations (& cos, tho).



# Appropriate Use of Language



## Audience

- Consider your audience and what they know. Your audience for an academic essay may also be the marker of your essay – your lecturer or your tutor.
- Ask yourself these questions when thinking about your audience:
  1. Does the audience know more, as much, or less than I do about the subject?
  2. How should I express my attitude to the subject?
  3. How formal should my writing be?
  4. How am I going to persuade or convince my audience about my point of view?



# Plagiarism



- Plagiarism is using someone else's ideas and / or words in your writing, without giving credit to the person who created them.
- Anything writers create from their own mind (music, art, writing, etc.) is considered to be their personal *intellectual property* to which they own the *copyright*.
- Plagiarism is considered a major offence.

*Tip...*

***Always give credit to the author !***

# Tips to Help Avoid Plagiarism



Citing sources **within the text**:

## *Example 1:*

You read in a book written by P Sheldrake that dogs were the first animals to be domesticated, and you use this information in your essay or report.

This is how you would give a reference (cite) to the original information within the text .

❖ ***This is the information you read in P Sheldrake's book.***

Many anthropologists and archaeologists believe that ***dogs were the first animals to be domesticated for something other than a food source.\* (Sheldrake, 1999)***

Their wild ancestors were probably wolves rather than jackals. The earliest evidence for domesticated dogs dates to around 11,000 BC, but it is possible that wolves were tamed and trained at an earlier date to help in hunting.



# Tips to Help Avoid Plagiarism



## Example 2:

If you use some text from Sheldrake's book without changing any words, you must use quotation marks ('...') and must insert the author's name, date of publication and the page number of the quotation.

- ❖ **These are the exact words that you have used from Sheldrake's book – a direct quote.**

*The full details of the book (author, title publisher, place of publication, year of publication, etc) must be given in the list of references or bibliography at the end of your report or essay.*

**'The domestication of dogs long predated the domestication of other animals.'** \* (Sheldrake, 1999: 5). Their wild ancestors were probably wolves rather than jackals. The earliest evidence for domesticated dogs dates to around 11,000 BC, but it is possible that wolves were tamed and trained at an earlier date to help in hunting.

# Tips to Help Avoid Plagiarism



- The **Bibliography** at the end of your essay or report must contain the complete details of books, journals, reports, websites, etc. from which you took information for your written document.
- This list is arranged in alphabetical order.

## *Example:*

Anderson, J. and Poole, M., (1998). *Assignment and thesis writing*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Davies, M., (2019). *Quoting, paraphrasing and plagiarism*. [online]. Available from: [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Book%3A\\_Oregon\\_Writes\\_Open\\_Writing\\_Text\\_\(Kepka\)/03%3A\\_Research/3.01%3A\\_Quoting%2C\\_Paraphrasing%2C\\_and\\_Avoiding\\_Plagiarism](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Book%3A_Oregon_Writes_Open_Writing_Text_(Kepka)/03%3A_Research/3.01%3A_Quoting%2C_Paraphrasing%2C_and_Avoiding_Plagiarism). [Accessed: 12 March 2023].

Sheldrake, P., (2006). *Domestic animals*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage Publishers.

# Summary



Topics covered in today's lecture:

- Analysing your topic.
- Planning your essay.
- Selecting and recording relevant information.
- Using this information appropriately, and
- Constructing your essay.
- Referencing your sources

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## References

- Infoplease, (2023). *How to Write an Essay*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.infoplease.com/homework-help/writing-grammar/homework-center-writing-skills-how-write-essay-advanced>. [Accessed 4 July 2023].
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