

ES1103

English for Academic Purposes



TUTORIAL 3 (PART A)

Centre for English Language Communication

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The Essay Writing Process (1)

Tutorial Learning Outcomes

By the end of this tutorial, you should be better able to:

- analyse an essay prompt to discover the expectations of the task and to plan your response accordingly
- derive an essay outline from the essay prompt

Introduction

Writing essays, reports and other academic papers is a major aspect of student life and learning at the tertiary level. While you have written essays during your school days, the level of writing required at undergraduate level is considerably more demanding than any writing you are likely to have done prior to your university studies.

Understanding these demands and being able to meet them are essential for your studies. Good writing provides evidence of your learning, thinking and academic development. For these reasons, knowing how to write well and having the skills to do so are extremely important for your academic performance.

Steps in Writing an Essay

Writing a good academic paper, such as an essay, takes a considerable amount of time, effort and consideration. An essay should not be written in one sitting. Ideally, it should go through at least two or three versions before it is ready for submission.

It is essential for you to adopt good writing habits from the outset of your academic writing journey. Also, it is important to follow several steps to ensure a well-planned and well-written essay is produced. In this tutorial and the next, we will look at each step in the writing process.

Key Steps in Writing an Essay

1. Interpreting the prompt

2. Planning the overall structure and constructing a working thesis

3. Searching for sources and constructing a sources grid

4. Planning the structure in detail: paragraphs (planning the citations) and progression across paragraphs. Aligning the scope, the paragraphs and the conclusion.

5. Drafting the introduction, the main paragraphs and the conclusion

6. Revising

Steps 1 and 2

Steps 1 and 2 are essential for producing academic writing of high quality.

Many students get stuck while writing their essays because they have not planned well. It is during the planning process that you must:

- analyse what the essay prompt (the question) requires
- consider how to address the question
- research and select information from sources
- determine what specific arguments and supporting evidence to use to make your case
- decide which sources would best support your claims
- determine how best to order your points

Do not be afraid to spend time planning, and **do not be afraid to revise** your plan as you gain more information through research and discussion.



Remember, this planning process is **not a linear one-directional process**. At various points in the process, you may backpedal and **revise** your strategy or main argument. You might also replace a citation or piece of evidence, or rearrange your points.

Step 1: Interpreting the prompt

The first step in planning to write is to find out what the essay prompt (the question) requires the writer to do.

In the past, you might have learnt to identify the 'key words' in an essay prompt.

Task 1

Carefully consider the two following questions.

- What do you understand by the term 'key words'?
- What kind of words do you consider to be 'key words' in an essay prompt?



A well-written prompt to an academic essay is composed of more than 'key words'. In fact, almost every word in the prompt should tell the writer something about how to proceed with planning and writing the essay.

An essay prompt is a guide to writing, and **must be analysed** for the following **four major word types**.

- content words
- instruction words
- value words
- scoping words

Each kind of word has a specific function that **indicates what** should be addressed **and how** it should be addressed by the writer. Such **analysis provides a solid foundation** on which to plan the writing of the essay.

Let's consider each of these words in more detail.

Task 2

What do you think is the function of each type of word within an essay prompt?

- content words
- instruction words
- value words
- scoping words

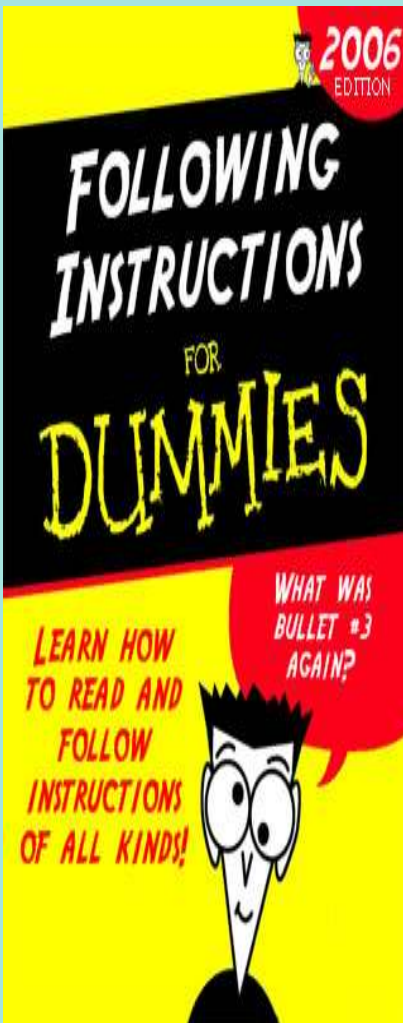
Content Words



These words indicate the **topic** and the **concepts** the essay is about.

They tell you what to write about.

Instruction Words



These words are usually the verbs that **tell the writer what to do**. For example:

- *discuss*
- *analyse*
- *explain*
- *assess*
- *evaluate*

These are very important because they directly link with the type of genre and the structure required.

Evaluate, for example will call for a first stage of 'description', followed by another of 'evaluation'.

A lack of attention to the instruction words can lead to the essay going in the wrong direction or being off prompt.

Value Words



These words indicate an **attitude or a judgement** within the question.

Often they take the form of adjectives or adverbs. For example:

- *always*
- *never*
- *significantly*
- *major*
- *primarily*

A lack of attention to these words could result in you addressing a completely different question from the one intended.

Scoping Words



These words indicate the **boundaries or limitations** of the essay.

For example:

- *in relation to **two areas***
- *with reference to **three theoretical frameworks***
- *taking into consideration the **legal and political factors***

Analysing a Sample Prompt

Now that we have considered the importance of the words within an essay prompt, let's practise analysing a prompt.

Task 3

Look at the essay prompt below and highlight the content, instruction, value and scoping words.

What might you include in an essay to meet the requirement of this prompt?

Essay prompt

Neither the developed nor the developing countries of the world can afford to reduce their future carbon dioxide emissions drastically.

Discuss giving specific examples.



Step 2: Planning the Structure and Constructing a Working Thesis

You should use this prompt analysis approach for any prompt you receive to make sure you know the expectations before you start planning. Also, it is good practice to check your interpretation of a prompt with your professors and tutors.

Instruction words and text structure

Instruction words determine the content and structure of your essay, and to some extent, the choice of expressions you use as well. It is therefore important to understand what common instruction words mean.

Task 4

Consider the **instruction words** below.

- Do you know what they mean and what is expected when they are used in a prompt?
- How might you plan an essay with each of these prompts?

analyse	argue	compare	contrast	critique
debate	describe	discuss	evaluate	examine
illustrate	justify	outline	review	summarise

You can find more information on a range of instruction words at the following webpage. It will be useful to refer to this resource as you analyse the essay prompts for your disciplinary writing assignments.



Essay writing: Purpose & process (uow.edu.au)

(See page 5 for a review of instructional verbs.)

CA2, CA3, CA4, CA5 Problem-Solution Essay

The major assessment component of ES1103 is the Problem-Solution Essay that will be written in stages over the duration of the module. Here is the prompt for the essay.

CA2 CA3, CA4, CA5 Problem-Solution Essay

Using your disciplinary content (or any other theme you choose), describe ONE specific problem connected with an issue of interest to you, explaining what, in your view, the problem is. Your problem should focus on a particular community or country. Where possible, evaluate one or more existing approaches which address your chosen problem and suggest one or more new or improved measures which may further mitigate it.



Task 5

Look at the essay prompt closely and highlight the content, instruction and scoping words.

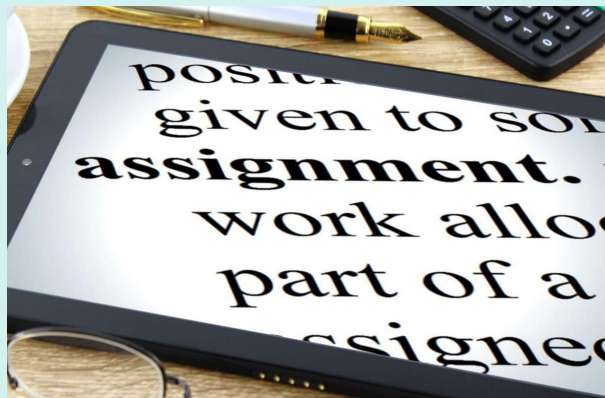
- Do you know what the prompt means?
- How might you plan an essay to address this prompt?

CA2: Establishing the Problem in the Essay

The first task is to work on the problem part of the essay before proceeding to write about the solutions.

For CA2, write about **500 words** to cover the **Introduction and Problem** aspects of the essay (in-text citations only).

You **must not write** the solution, evaluation and conclusion parts of the essay for CA2.



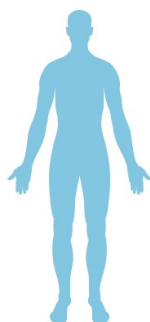
Presenting a problem in a problem-solution essay

An effective way to establish a problem in an essay is to use a standard essay structure to present your ideas in response to the given prompt.

For your CA2, you might want to **use a logical and clearly organised structure** such as the example below.

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Briefly describe a situation.• Identify a problem in the situation.• State the significance of the issue.• State your thesis.
Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the situation in detail by providing information about it.
Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe a major problem in the situation.• Provide facts, figures and authoritative comments to establish the problem.

Planning the structure of your essay will give you **direction before you start writing**. You can also think of the **structure as the bones** and your ideas and **words as the flesh** that completes the body of writing.

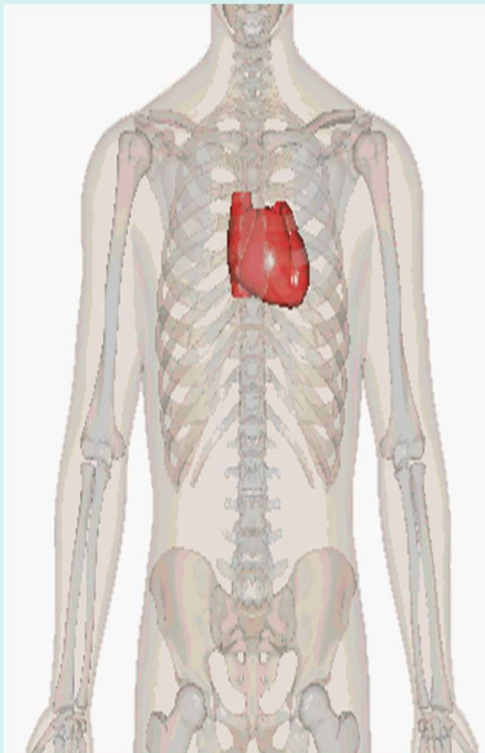


Constructing a Working Thesis

After analysing the essay prompt and deriving a basic structure for addressing the prompt logically, it is necessary to construct a thesis to provide specific focus and direction for the ideas and concepts that are to be presented in the essay.

A well-crafted thesis is essential for all kinds of academic writing. Imagine the thesis as **the heart of the body of writing**.

What is a thesis?



A thesis is the statement of the particular position you take based on your knowledge of the issue and provides direction for your writing.

In an introduction, the thesis statement gives your response to the essay prompt provides a preview of your arguments or evidence.

Your writing should be related to the thesis to support it or to show opposing views to provide a theme for your writing.

Constructing a good thesis takes time and effort, and the working thesis that you start with should evolve and become more precise as you learn more about the topic of the essay. However, it is **important for your thesis to be more than a general statement** on the issue being addressed in response to the prompt.

Let's consider some examples of potential thesis statements and assess how effective these statements are for providing focus and direction to an essay.

Task 6

Consider which of the following statements is an effective thesis.

1. On-line gaming addiction is a major problem in modern society, and many people are affected by it.
2. As with other addictions, on-line gaming addiction can result in poor performance at school and work, ill health and other serious consequences.

Task 7

Consider which of the following statements is an effective thesis.

1. For the past fifty years, smoking tobacco has undeniably been responsible for the deaths of countless people.
2. Tobacco is a plant that has been smoked for hundreds of years.

Task 8

Consider which of the following statements is an effective thesis.

1. There is no doubt that mobile communication devices have changed our lives.
2. Although mobile devices offer convenience and instant communication, they also present an invasion of our privacy and free time.

Remember!

An effective thesis tells the reader in a very small nutshell what your view is on the given topic and how you intend to address it.



In this tutorial, we have considered the first two steps in the six-step process to writing a good academic essay. Step 1 involves analysing and understanding the prompt. Step 2 requires the writer to develop a structure for the piece of writing that is anchored around a well-constructed thesis.

Without these essential first two steps, an essay will lack focus, direction and organisation. In the next tutorial, we will build upon and proceed from these steps to consider the remaining four steps in the essay writing process.