

# ESSAY WRITING: PROCESS

An essay presents a well-argued discussion or response to a question or proposition, using analysis and critique of relevant literature. It establishes a proposition or thesis and presents a point of view. The following are suggested steps for writing an essay.

## 1. Analyse the question

- Circle key content words and phrases.
- Underline any instructional words, e.g. discuss, explain, identify, evaluate.
- Be sure you understand what the task is: put the question in your own words.
- Look for hints on structure, i.e. how many parts are there to the question? Is it compare/contrast, cause/effect? A number of factors, features, principles, etc.?

## 2. Brainstorm the question

- Bring all your ideas together on one page to:
  - take stock of what you already know
  - identify any gaps in your knowledge
  - give you the beginnings of a plan for your essay
- Mind-maps are useful at this stage.

## 3. Start your research

- Begin with general reading – start with recommended texts, course notes and books from the library.
- Look for potential ways to structure your essay.
- Record all bibliographical details, including page numbers for your references, as you go to avoid plagiarism.

## 4. Plan the essay

- Decide on your main points and organise the information – use headings and make connections.
- Decide on a logical order for your points.
- Your plan should include:
  - main points and their relationship to the question
  - supporting information and its relationship to the main points
  - references
  - a draft of the introduction.

## 5. Continue your research

- Focus your research, expanding on the main points and arguments, and refine the plan.
- Use search terms from your earlier research to locate precise information/evidence (e.g. from databases).

## 6. Write

- Write using your detailed plan.
- It may be useful to write the body paragraphs first, then the conclusion, then finalise the introduction.
- Write paragraphs containing one main idea stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences should explain, support and give detail, with evidence from research and/or examples.
- Integrate theory and include references as you go.
- Expect to write several drafts. Try to avoid getting stuck looking for the 'right' word.

## 7. Edit

- Focus on checking that the essay is logical, points are linked to the purpose, and information is relevant.
- Make sure your reference list includes all works cited and is correctly set out.
- Proof-read for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. Reading aloud can be useful.
- Check layout, margins, page numbers, line spacing and title page. Check your lecturer's expectations.
- Save additional copies of your essay in different locations, e.g. Google Drive, RMIT H-drive, USB, or Dropbox.

### Essay tasks generally contain:

- **Content** words: what the assignment is about
- **Limiting** words: define the scope of the topic
- **Direction/instruction** words: tell you what to do, e.g. discuss, evaluate.

# ESSAY WRITING: STRUCTURE

