Essay Writing

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Agenda

The essay writing process

Step 1: Analysing the question
Step 2: Reading and making notes
Step 3: Planning
Step 4: Drafting the essay
Step 5: [Referencing]
Step 6: Editing/Proof reading
Step 3: Making the essay plan

Introduction (c.10%) – the setting/hypothesis

Body - number of paragraphs/ideas
       - possible line of reasoning
       - issues, ideas, examples to be included

Conclusion (c.10%) - overall summary of answer given
Introduction

Interpretation of the question/title
Explanation of key terms
Presentation of background and context
Links to module’s themes/topics
Outline of main ideas
  e.g. This essay will, firstly,…secondly, go on to show…
Outline of evidence used
Paragraphing that structures thought and helps the reader

Each paragraph should contain one key idea – a **Topic** sentence…

**Supporting** sentences that explain and expand the topic sentence…

**Evidence** that supports the supporting sentences + **Evaluation** of that evidence, and where possible a **Link** to the next paragraph

Paragraphs must have **STEEL**
Conclusion

Links to title and introduction
Summary of main argument(s)
Presentation of overall evaluation
Your position
Suggestions or recommendations
‘Broadening’ of the argument BUT…
NO NEW INFORMATION
Quick plans – 2k essay

- Bring forward the initial plan, then…
- Bullet points/headings for introduction
  - Will be 10% c 200 words
- Bullet points/headings for conclusion
  - Will be 10% c 200 words
- c.1600 words in middle/development section
  - This equates to approximately 8 paragraphs (8 x 200)
- Draft topic sentences + evidence for each = skeleton plan
Quick plans – 2k essay

- Embed the draft topic sentences in the Word doc you create?
- As you write these appear on the screen in front of you
  - In bold? Coloured font?
- You write the paragraphs under each one, incorporating the citations/evidence
- Or if you prefer the physical ‘feel’ of longhand, use the draft sentences as headings on paper
Try this out...

1000 words: short essay

*Analyse some of the difficulties that mature students may experience in entering HE. How might they use existing skills, abilities and experiences to overcome these?*

Plan – bullet points for intro. + conclusion; 4-5 topic sentences and evidence for development paragraphs. [‘Evidence’ in this instance = practical experience and ‘lived examples’, not formal academic sources!]
Step 4: Drafting

- Start anywhere?
- Write up individual paragraphs
- Revise, reconsider and rewrite what you have done
- Fill in any gaps and make connections
Drafting

- Now revert to writing in sequence, once your ideas have begun to ‘flow’
- Light edit after each writing session
- More substantial editing later
Drafting – manage the time

• Think about the time-line for your work
• Don’t exhaust yourself
• Regular one to two hour writing blocks, with space between…
• And time for editing
• Don’t pressurise yourself
• Let things ‘settle’
• Aim for a steady day-by-day completion, not frantic all-day (or night!) bursts!
• Manage writing concentration!
**Possible time-line for writing?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 - 2 hr blocks</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Edit</td>
<td>Edit</td>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Gap day</td>
<td>Final edit</td>
<td>Final edit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Write</td>
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<td>Submit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Block 3</strong></td>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Write</td>
<td></td>
<td>Write</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final edit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 4</strong></td>
<td>Write</td>
<td></td>
<td>Edit</td>
<td>Edit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sign-posting

- “There are 3 main characteristics …”
- “First, …”
- “…, however, …”
- “Consequently…”
  - Summarises preceding ‘argument’/directs your reader
  - Explains what you are about to discuss
  - Links what you have said with what you are going to say
  - Helps your reader to follow the structure of your argument

See below – paragraphs/signalling

[http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm](http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm)
Sign-post paragraphs

- As well as ‘signalling’ elements within the paragraph, you can use whole sign-post paragraphs
- These are summary statements that say what has been argued...
- And where the essay is now heading...
- They are interim conclusions, minus an overall judgement
- They can be useful at critical junctions
- **Do not over-use!**
Writing to the word limit/expanding the word limit

- As noted above, it is helpful to conceive of your document as a sequence of linked paragraphs.

- Each paragraph will have a finite length: probably between 200 and 300 words.
  - 3k essay = c 9 to 10 paragraphs; 4k = c 12 to 13 paragraphs etc.

- If you write up each paragraph to this word limit, your overall document will reach the required word limit.
Writing to the word limit/expanding the word limit

• What if you land up with less words than you need?
• Don’t distort the essay by adding waffle or extra arguments you are not necessarily convinced by
• Think about the paragraph elements
• Each one should have evidence + evaluation
• Go through a few paragraphs, add an extra piece of evidence + evaluation
• You are simply expanding the existing argument, not distorting it
• This will put you up to the word limit

*Note the ‘rule’ – generally accepted, but check! – of > 10% over/under*
[Step 5: Referencing]

- Covered in previous session
- Important summary points
  - This is a continuous process
  - Record sources right from the start
  - Note the date(s) you accessed websites
  - Build accurate references into your plans
  - Embed accurate references all the way through
Referencing

- Draft ideas and discussion can be as ‘scrappy’ as you like
  - Only you will see them!
- But make references 100% accurate right from the ‘get-go’!!
- Leave time for referencing
- Check your in-text citations or footnote information is consistent with the reference-list/bibliography
- See below for proof-reading
Step 6: Editing/Proof-reading

- In your first draft, the most important thing is to capture the ‘flow’ of your ideas
- Light editing should not impede this
- Put your in-text citations/footnotes in correctly, as above
- In other respects, ideas are very much ‘in development’
- Don’t spend too long on one section – keep moving, get the thoughts going!...
- But as you write, inevitably, there will be passages you know you must revise substantially
Editing

- Mark them – colour or highlighter
- So your first task in editing is to go back to these parts
- However, before you do this leave a gap between your first draft and your final edit
- This means that you have to manage your time carefully
- But if you edit after a gap you will see what needs changing more clearly
- Re-visit the ‘suspect’ areas first!
Editing

• Then take a ‘layered’ approach
• Go through the document looking for different aspects
  • For example – edit 1, structure and paragraphs; edit 2 spelling, terminology; edit 3 sentences; edit 4 referencing…
• If you try and look for everything at once, the editing takes longer and is less effective
• The more you work with the document, the quicker your editing becomes!
The danger of over-editing and re-writing

- Think about the etymological origins of the term, ‘essay’.
  - As well as ‘a written document’, we would include terms such as ‘an attempt’, ‘a tentative effort’, ‘an initial draft…’ etc.
  - Note the closeness of the verb, ‘to assay’.
    - A test or trial process (formally aligned to the process of determining the quality of a metal)
- So when we write an essay we are *trying something out*
The danger of over-editing and re-writing

- It is our best, evidence-informed, judgement - according to our knowledge and experience at the time
  - In a sense, all writing is provisional!
  - In two year’s time you would look at an essay and want to change it!
  - In two week’s time you have to hand it in!
- Too much polishing/re-drafting can destroy confidence, and the document itself
- Time-define editing, finish, submit, move on…
Academic Conventions

- Keep the personal in check (no emotive language)
- Do not confuse evidence, assumption and opinion.
- Watch your personal pronouns and gendered pronouns
- Check your discipline-specific conventions.
- Avoid ‘chatty’ language e.g. *loads of, huge*
- Have a clear understanding of technical terms.
- Be critical of what you read.
- **Reference your sources (again! 😊)**
Essay writing process

**Step 1: Analysing the question**
- Check requirements
- Check learning outcomes
- Deconstruct question
- Brainstorm ideas

**Step 2: Reading and making notes**
- Focus on question
- Record sources

**Step 3: Making the essay plan**
- Line of reasoning
- Structure

**Step 4: Drafting the essay**
- Introduction
- Paragraphs
- Conclusion

**Step 5: Referencing**
- Matching in-text citations/footnotes with referencing list

**Step 6: Editing**
- Logic and cohesion
- Spelling, grammar, punctuation etc
Further support,

www.kent.ac.uk/uel/learning

Good luck!