

Essay Writing: A Five Step Guide



1. Analyse the Question

(a) Write the title on a post-it note and have it in front of you all the time.

(b) **BOX & UNDERLINE** - Put a box around the *question* words.
Underline important *content* words

(c) *Ask yourself:*

- What does the question mean?
- What does each word mean?
- What is the link between the words?
- What do I need to include in my answer?

Unpacking definitions and word etymologies are great ways of beginning your research. This kind of attention to detail can transform the effectiveness of your argument!

(d) Check the list of key words in essay titles and what they mean.
Available from: www.qub.ac.uk/lds

Drawing mind-maps can help in the early stages of planning. Getting all your ideas onto paper is a great way to filter and organise topics.

Try numbering your points in order of importance and relevance.

2. Research

Before you start, check out:

- Date essay has to be handed in
- Word limit of essay
- Presentation/layout
- Required reading
- Learning Outcomes
- Marking Criteria
- Reading list

Use a variety of sources to gather information: books, journal articles, internet sources, lectures, seminar and tutorial discussions, questionnaires etc.

Speak to your subject librarian for help accessing resources: www.qub.ac.uk/lib

3. Constructing the Introduction

(a) Aim to create interest, atmosphere or surprise. Good to refer specifically to question title.

(b) Possible ideas:

- State the background that has given rise to the topic
- Define the scope of your topic – what you will cover and what you will not
- Define terms that have a broad meaning – say how the term is being used in your essay
- Identify important issues and state how you will deal with them
- Make an apt quotation
- State a pertinent fact
- Give a definition
- Make a provocative statement
- Give an interesting opinion

Good signposting in the introduction will make it easier for your marker to navigate the body of the essay. The easier that your marker finds reading your essay – the likelier you are to achieve higher marks!

(c) *Ask yourself:*

Would this introduction make anyone want to read on?

Does it introduce the title or purpose of the essay clearly enough?

4. Paragraph Plan

- Around 10% of word limit for introduction and 10% for conclusion
- Write a list of your main points in the order you want them to appear
- New paragraph for each new point.

(a) *Topic sentence* – expresses your main point

(b) *Supporting sentences* - developing the main point, give back-up points, examples/quotes, refs

(c) *Concluding sentence* – gather together the content and leads onto the next paragraph

A clear, well-thought out conclusion should mirror your introduction. It should offer a synopsis of the main points raised and an evaluative comment on the outcomes of the argument. Remember that it is the last thing your marker will read before considering your grade!

Ask yourself:

Does this conclusion leave me with a good impression?

Does it gather together the ideas presented in my essay?

Does it refer back to the title and introduction?

5. Conclusion

- Refer back to question
- Bring together main points
- State the results of your thinking
- End positively
- End strongly – include an interesting opinion