The Essay

After determining an essay’s topic, a student will need to analyse the topic, find information, evaluate these resources and present the information in essay format (TAFE SA 2014a). Requirements for essays can vary, but will generally include an introduction, body, conclusion and reference list (TAFE SA 2013). The completed essay will then provide evidence to the assessor of the student’s research and learning (Hill Campbell 2014).

The first step is to carefully analyse the topic in order to fully understand what is and is not required from the essay (Spurr n.d.). Usually a topic will be designed to give students an opportunity to develop an argument and the essay should generally agree or disagree with the central idea (Dawson 2013). Carrodus (2002) stresses to ensure relevance; ‘answer the question, the whole question and nothing but the question’.

Next, resources on the topic should be gathered from a variety of sources such as websites, books, newspapers or journal articles (Summers and Smith 2010). Lecture notes should only be referred to with the agreement of the lecturer (TAFE SA 2014b) and need only be given an in-text citation as these are considered a personal communication (TAFE SA 2013). A quick evaluation of each resource should be undertaken to establish that the information is up-to-date, relevant, and from a reputable author (Dawson 2013). The student should question whether the author’s points are backed up by adequate and convincing evidence and why the author might have published this work (Hill Campbell 2014).

After reading these resources, the student can form an educated opinion and begin to plan the flow of their essay (Jackson et al. 2000). The essay should be typed and include any specified formatting such as page numbering, appropriate headers, footers and a cover sheet (Spurr n.d.). Points made should be supported with quotes, statistics or records from the time (Carrodus 2002), which according to copyright law must all be referenced (Commonwealth Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000; Dawson 2013, p. 106). At TAFE SA the Harvard system of referencing is required (TAFE SA 2014b).

The introduction should comprise about 10% of the essay’s word count (TAFE SA 2014a) to establish an overall point and provide any background information.

The body of the essay will contain several paragraphs, each paragraph dedicated to an argument or fact, and each subsequent paragraph building support for the point of view being suggested (Levin 2004). This section should take about 80% of the word count (TAFE SA 2013).

The essay should end with a clear and concise statement (Dawson 2013) that sums up the argument and matches the point of view expressed in the introduction (TAFE SA 2014a).

On completion of the draft essay, a student should proofread their work for spelling and grammar (Jackson et al. 2000) and re-read the topic to double check that the essay has not strayed from the points being assessed (Carrodus 2002).

An appropriately formatted and well-researched essay serves not only as a tool for learning assessment, but develops ability to build an educated argument in a strong form of communication essential in many careers (Summers and Smith 2010).
References


Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000


Spurr, B n.d., Successful Essay Writing for Senior High School, College and University, New Frontier Publishing, Epping, NSW.


