

Essay Writing

Study Guide

This guide will explain how to write a general essay. Requirements may vary from course to course, so check with your lecturer for the particular requirements for your course.

What is an essay?

An essay is a relatively short, written assignment on a specific topic. It aims to answer a question and convince the reader of your point of view, with well-researched and supported facts (evidence).

It will have four parts:

Introduction (about 10% of word count)

- to establish your point of view, and its importance
- to provide background information, scope and define terms

Body (about 80%)

- arguments and facts (evidence) to build and support this point of view
- comprises several paragraphs, each focusing on one idea

Conclusion (10%)

- finalises the essay and restates your point of view
- Should match the view expressed in the introduction

Bibliography or reference list (not used as part of the word count)

- a list of all sources of information used for the essay

Choose the topic

If you have been given a list of essay topics, ask yourself the following questions to decide which topic is best for you:

- Does the topic interest you? Would you like to learn more about this topic?
- Is the topic personally or professionally relevant to you?
- Do you already know something or have an opinion about the topic?
- Does the topic have a lot of information available about it?

Step 1: Analyse the topic

You must answer the topic or question provided. Read the topic carefully. Discuss the topic with your lecturer if you do not understand what is required.

- What are your instructions? Do you need to 'discuss', 'analyse', 'compare', 'contrast', 'evaluate' etc.?
- If you need to take a certain point of view, decide what that will be
- Is there a particular time frame, or country, or group of people you need to focus on?
- When is the due date? What is the word count?
- Understand the keywords. Think of broader subjects that your topic might be under, e.g. **climate change** might be under **environment** or **sustainability**
- Brainstorm (write down all the thoughts that you have about the topic)
- What do you know already? What more do you need to find out?
- Use a dictionary to find definitions

- List synonyms (or words that mean the same as words in your topic) that you can later use as search terms
- What are the main points? How are they linked together?
- List the information that you need, and to what depth

Step 2: Find information

Think of the types of resources where you might find this information ie. videos, legislation, websites, newspapers, interviews etc.

- See the library guide **My Information Skills** at tafesa.libguides.com/myinfoskills for more help on resources
- Has the lecturer specified certain resources?
- Locate these resources. The TAFE SA Libraries catalogue is a good starting point
- Ask a librarian (if available) for more assistance if required

Step 3: Evaluate resources

- Check that the information is up to date
- Read the contents page/index/summary to see if it covers the topic you will be writing about
- Do a quick scan of the contents
- Check the author (if it is a well-known author or organisation in the field you are studying in, it will be a good resource)
- If using websites, check the library guide [Evaluating Web Sites](#) for more information
- Take notes: your notes should be brief and summarise what you have read
- Be selective: only write down information that is relevant to your topic
- Organize your notes: use headings, cards
- Be sure to write down quotes to be used in your essay, with the author's surname, year of publication and page number
- Keep a record of your source: author, title, place, publisher, year of publication, page numbers, volume no., web address etc. for your bibliography

Step 4: Present your information

- Do a rough plan. Use headings and dot points. Arrange your ideas in a logical order
- Type your essay. This helps with readability, arranging content, editing, spell checking, word count etc.
- Save continually and backup
- Start writing the body of the essay first. Your introduction (outlining the topic and your point of view) and your conclusion (summarising or briefly restating your point of view) are best written last. These will be only be a paragraph or two long.
- Keep your sentences short, using your own words
- Avoid jargon, slang and colloquial terms
- Add quotes where necessary to support your argument. DON'T forget to reference the sources of information after quotes, or after summarising an author's ideas
- Create a reference list or bibliography. This is usually on a separate page. See the relevant library guide for referencing
- Evaluate your first draft. Ideally this should be done 1-2 days after you have finished the draft
- Read your essay aloud, or have someone else read the essay
- Check for understanding, spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors, capitalization, word count and correct referencing
- Add page numbers and any required footers
- Create a title page containing your name, ID number, course/subject, lecturer and due date, or, if available, use the standard cover page for your course
- Back up or photocopy before handing in your essay