Essay writing

An essay puts forward an argument supported by evidence. Its purpose is to persuade and inform. It is an assessment tool showing that (a) you can present and argue ideas logically and (b) you have read the texts. Look at these steps for writing an essay:

1. Analyse the question
   - Underline instructional words, e.g. discuss, explain, describe, justify …
   - Underline key content words and phrases.
   - Be clear about what the question means.
   - Look for hints on structure—e.g. How many parts are there to the question?

2. Start your research
   - Begin with general reading—use recommended texts
   - Look for potential ways to structure your essay, e.g. compare/contrast/or advantage/disadvantage.
   - Record all bibliographical details, including page numbers as you go.

3. Plan the essay
   - Bring all your information together on one page—brainstorm to take stock of what you already know.
   - Mind maps are very useful at this planning stage.
   - Organise the information—make headings and connections.
   - Your plan should include:
     * Main points—their relationship to the question
     * Secondary points—their relationship to the main points
     * References
   - Decide on a logical order for the points—number your points.

4. Continue your research
   - This is focused research, expanding on the main points/arguments.

5. Write
   - Detailed plan—write directly from the plan—introduction/body/conclusion.
   - OR write the body first, then conclusion, then introduction.
   - Decide on the framework and logical order for your points/arguments.
   - A paragraph must contain one idea—stated in the topic sentence. Other sentences should explain, support or give examples.
   - Concentrate on one point at a time, but then make sure the points are linked—this may involve writing some additional linking sentences.
   - Expect to write several drafts—perhaps some sections more than others.
   - Try to avoid being stuck looking for the ‘right’ word until the main content of the essay is done.

6. Edit
   - Focus on logic and coherence. Ask: does it flow? Does it make sense? Does it respond to the topic?
Essay structure

Introduction—a promise to the reader

- Begins with a brief general statement setting the essay/assignment in a context (connecting it to the world).
- May define terms.
- Indicates the areas and perspectives to be discussed in the essay.
- Leads to a thesis statement, which summarises the essay in one sentence, and contains a point of view.

Body—made up of connected paragraphs

- Each paragraph contains one main idea, which is expressed in a topic sentence (usually the first sentence).
- The topic sentences carry the theme or outline of the essay and relate directly back to the thesis statement.
- The rest of the paragraph expands on the topic sentence or gives evidence or examples.
- The paragraphs need to be linked to create logical development and flow for the reader.

TEST: If you cover all the main text and read only the topic sentences, the essay should make basic logical sense.

Conclusion

- A restatement of the thesis in different words (often with additional knowledge).
- Very brief summary of the main points.
- May open out with recommendations or predictions (connect back to the world again).
- Contains no new information.