

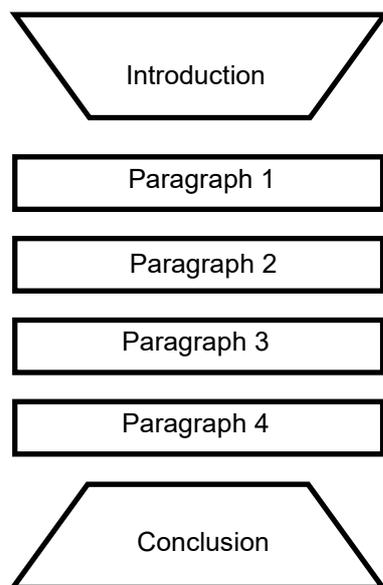
STRUCTURING ESSAYS

Why is structure important?

A strong essay structure helps to build your argument and creates a logical flow in your writing.

A good time to start thinking about the structure of your essay is after you have analysed your assignment question and done some preliminary reading and research to inform your essay.

How do you structure your essay?



The image above shows that introductions move from general information to more specific information, while a conclusion does the opposite (see Introduction and Conclusion Survival Guide)

The paragraphs between the introduction and the conclusion are referred to as the body of the essay.

The **body** consists of separate paragraphs, which together make up the argument of your essay.

Begin each paragraph with a **topic sentence**, which encapsulates the main idea you will develop in the rest of the paragraph. The ideas in each new paragraph should follow on from those expressed in the last sentence of the previous paragraph.

Check that each main idea is directly relevant to your thesis statement (and to the question you are answering).

Introduction

- Opening sentence
- Background information
- Problem identified (optional)
- Definition of a key term (optional)
- Thesis statement
- Outline of the essay
- Closing sentence

Body

- Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.
- Develop each main idea by analysing, comparing, applying examples and using academic sources.
- Conclude by relating back to your main argument and creating a link to the idea being discussed in the next paragraph.

Conclusion

- Summary of the main points
- Restate thesis statement
- Recommendations (optional)
- Implications and significance
- Future research suggestions (optional)

TIP

Plan what each paragraph will cover and what references you will most likely need to support your claims.

Coherence

Even an essay that is well organised and has good paragraphs can still be ineffective if it lacks coherence. Make sure you use words and/or phrases that show the connections between ideas:

- within a paragraph,
- between paragraphs, and
- between sections.

These linking words give your essay **unity**.

Linking words and phrases (sometimes called transition words) help to create flow in your writing. Readers look for these to signal where your writing is heading, so make sure you include them.

Checking that you have used appropriate linking words and phrases is a vital part of doing your final editing and proof reading.

TIP

The number of body paragraphs will depend on your word count limit. Keep this in mind when you are planning your essay structure to allow for space to build each individual point.

Titles

Effective titles provide an edge to your essay. However, it takes time to develop a clear, engaging title that captures what your essay is about. If you want a title that is **catchy and informative**, try the following:

- Develop a provisional title by playing around with the order of the key words of your essay.
- Change it as you get clearer about your main argument.
- Make your final decision when you have completed your essay.

Your title is not your thesis statement, it just outlines the topic. It can often be more creative in tone.

TIP

In the Humanities, essays do not traditionally have subheadings, only reports do. However, for those in science fields, subheadings are encouraged for various writing styles.

Every assessment is designed differently, so always check your unit outline and double check with your tutor for any submission guidelines.

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