

How to structure an essay - transcript

Slide 1: Welcome to this short presentation on how to structure your essay. If you are just starting out, you may wish to pause this and review the 'A guide to planning essays' and 'How to research' presentations. You can return when you are ready to start writing your essay. If you have already watched these, you are in the right place. You can pause, rewind and fast forward at any point and watch it as many times as you need. In order to actively learn, it is recommended that you take notes during this presentation.

Slide 2: It is useful to think of your essay like a river, flowing a course to the sea, with many tributaries along the way. Your essay needs to get from introduction to conclusion, with different paragraphs containing ideas, feeding in like the tributaries of a river.

Slide 3: At this point you will have planned your essay. Looking at your plan and research, try to think of your main message, with this in mind, group your ideas together in a logical order and leave out any points that seem irrelevant. You want to avoid confusing the reader by having lots of relevant points but in a disjointed order. Some people choose to write a draft essay first in order to piece their thoughts and evidence together. You can watch 'A guide to planning essays' for more information on this.

Slide 4: Introduction. Your introduction is the beginning of the journey, it should be an outline of what your essay will include, explaining key terms and contexts that the reader will need to understand it. The introduction is usually quite short and to the point, and will make up approximately 10% of your word count. You may need to see your assignment brief for more details on this. On the screen is a checklist of things you may want to consider and include in your introduction. You can pause and make notes or take a screen shot for future reference.

Slide 5: Signposting. This is an important aspect of all essays. It allows you to direct the reader through the main points in your essay meaning it is easy to follow and you can gain credit where credit is due. Your introduction signposts should indicate what the aim of your essay is, what will be discussed and in what order. On the screen are good examples of signposting sentences for an introduction. You may wish to pause and make a note of these.

Slide 6: Signposting should be used throughout your essay, preferably for each main point you make and there should be some element of signposting in each paragraph. You may have large scale signposts of full sentences that tell the reader what has come and gone before or small scale signposts such as short words like 'however', 'additionally' or 'alternatively'. Avoid the temptation to dot these signposts randomly throughout your essay, think about linking the paragraphs and choosing the appropriate words.

Slide 7: Remember the river? Well your paragraphs are the tributaries of the river, they flow in to make up the main body. Try to keep paragraphs no more than 8-10 lines and including only one main point or argument. Begin with making this point, use your research to support this point, remembering to use correct citation. Interpret this evidence and link it back to the main question you are addressing.

Slide 8: Your main body will be made up of paragraphs that show good academic practice. Remember, nearly every academic paragraph will have a reference. You may wish to use the acronym 'PEE', point, evidence, explanation to help you to structure your paragraphs. It is usually the explanation part of your paragraphs that you will gain the most credit for by demonstrating your ability to discuss and analyse the evidence you have presented.

Answers to low level questions in your essay, like who, what, when and where will provide you with factual and descriptive responses but remember the need to answer higher level ones such as why, how and to what extent, answers which provoke more discussion.

Slide 9: Top tips for the main body of your essay. Make sure you have differing viewpoints and explain these, make sure you are critical about what you have read and chosen to include. If you are unsure about this, pause this presentation and head over to the presentation on 'Being critical' for further guidance. Make sure the data you present to support your arguments is relevant. Don't just give a descriptive account of the evidence, explain how it supports your position in the argument and if there are any areas that require further evidence or more research,

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identify this.

Slide 10: So you are on to your conclusion. This also needs to be around 10% of your total word count. This is your opportunity to summarise and make conclusions, not to repeat what you have already said. There should be no new points here and no new references. Here are some top tips for writing a conclusion and some examples of signposting sentences you could use. You may want to pause at this point to note these down.

Slide 11: Hopefully now you are more confident about structuring your essay. Remember, decide what your main message is, plan, plan and plan again, use signposts to direct your reader, pay attention to the structure of your paragraphs and know what roles the introduction and conclusion play in your essay. If you require further support with essay structure or any of the other presentations you have viewed you can contact your Academic Skills Tutors but remember, you will be asked what you have tried out, so have a go first, you may surprise yourself.