

Essay Structure

An essay is a piece of writing that must have a beginning, middle, and an end. These three stages can be seen as the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.

Introduction

The introduction is usually one paragraph long. In a 1500 word essay, this paragraph would contain about 150 words. Do not rewrite the essay question. The introduction will relate directly to the question and to the written essay to follow. Often it will include:

- A definition or an explanation, appropriately cited, of a main term used in the question. Any definition needs to come from the subject area being studied
- Overview and background information to give a clear idea of what the essay will be about (content) and the direction the essay will take (scope)
- A clear statement of the focus of the essay or the position being argued (purpose).

The introduction moves from more general statements related to the question, to a very specific statement of the main ideas that will be discussed in the body. A sentence coming towards the end of the first paragraph will often begin: *This essay will discuss....*

As the introduction sets the scene for the whole essay, many students do not write their final version of the introduction until after they have finished their essay.

Body

The body of the essay will contain a number of paragraphs organised in a logical sequence and linked through a discussion of the focus of the essay identified in the introduction. Each paragraph needs to develop the argument or position put forward in the introduction. Generally, a paragraph needs to be at least four to six sentences long. A single sentence does not form a paragraph in an academic essay.

A paragraph will often contain the following:

- A topic sentence (a statement of the main idea of the paragraph)
- An explanation or supporting evidence from the student's reading
- Further evidence from reading which either supports or differs from the position being presented
- The application of these ideas to a specific situation or scenario outlined in the question or examples from experience or research
- The student's discussion of, comment on, and evaluation of these ideas
- The drawing of implications that link these ideas back to the essay question, to the main idea of the paragraph, or to the next idea to be introduced.

Conclusion

The conclusion is usually one paragraph long (about 100 to 150 words). It provides a brief summary of the ideas already presented. Do not introduce new ideas or additional examples at this stage of the essay. The conclusion should contain final evaluative comments on the issues already raised. It may have recommendations on the basis of the analysis. Concluding comments also can link the discussion to the ongoing significance of the topic. It is also crucial to link the concluding comments back to the essay question.

For further information:

- Contact the Academic Skills Adviser on your campus
- Visit our web pages on myACU.

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