# Essay & paragraph formatting

## Introduction

Writing essays can be a challenging but rewarding experience which requires deep thought about what you are learning. It involves understanding the process and following a plan.

An essay is a piece of writing that follows a standard format.
- It has 3 main parts: introduction; body and conclusion.
- Introductions contain a ‘thesis statement’ (main idea running through the whole essay).
- It is a series of paragraphs, each of which has one main theme
- Each paragraph has a ‘topic sentence’ which summarises the essay (often the first sentence)
- Each paragraph flows from the last in an organised way as described in the introduction.
- The conclusion summarises the main discussion/argument in the assignment.

## Basic format of an essay

![Essay Format Diagram](image)

### ESSAY FORMAT

**INTRODUCTION:**
- Thesis statement
- General statements

**BODY:**
- A. Topic sentence
- B. Support
- C. Support, etc.
- D. Example
- E. E. Reference
  (Concluding sentence)

**CONCLUSION:**
- Main ideas summary
- Final comment

** NOTE:**
The body is the longest part of the essay and may have as many paragraphs as necessary to support the main ideas in your thesis statement.
Essay writing process

A. Planning

1. Create an essay plan by looking at the essay question and the marking schedule. Use a chart with three headings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Word</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
<th>Word search on library database</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(What do I have to do?)</td>
<td>(What do I do it to?)</td>
<td>(Limits such as ‘in New Zealand’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Go through the question and enter each part onto the chart (chart or mindmap).
3. Check what is written against the marking schedule.
4. Search library database for information that is relevant.
5. Start reading widely (not just Wikipedia or the internet. Start with your text books):
   i) Take notes as you go.
   ii) Write up a reference list or put references into your Zotero library as you read so you can find the material later if needed.
   iii) Note readings that say the same thing – two references are better than one.
   iv) Organise your notes into the topics from your plan.

B. Time to write

1. First draft: Getting started is often the hardest part of the assignment – just start remembering this is probably be rewritten before you hand it in.
2. Start with the body of the assignment. How can you introduce a topic until you know what it is. It may help to do a draft introduction just to get you started.
3. Follow your plan. It may help initially to write headings to keep you focussed.
4. There may be many more drafts before you are happy to put it in for marking.
5. Once the body is virtually finished it is time to write the conclusion. Summarise the main points in your essay. Were there any points that the different authors did/did not agree on? What conclusions did you reach? The conclusion should be about 5-10% word count.
6. Time to write your introduction – start with statement/sentence or quote that will catch the marker’s attention then give a short overview of what your essay is about and in the order you will discuss the material – main points only. Ensure it is interesting and makes the reader want to carry on! The introduction should be no more than 10% of the word count.

C. Time to seriously proof read

1. Run the spelling and grammar check over your work – really important! (easy marks).
2. Check your work against the marking schedule. Have you answered the question? (this is where most students lose lots of marks).
3. Do your ideas/paragraphs flow on from each other?
4. Check all facts/opinions are referenced in the text and in the reference list.
5. Have someone else check your work – they cannot say whether it will pass or not.
6. Use your class tutors and the Learning Centre Tutors.

Further Learning Centre Handouts relating to this topic:

- Understanding the assessment instructions
- Instructional words

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