



Essay writing



Essay writing is a common form of assessment at university. Most essays require you to present an idea or perspective, supported with evidence to persuade the reader. Academic essays follow specific rules and conventions that guide the way you write.

Academic essays are not informed by opinions, so to convince the reader of your proposition, you'll need to sound as objective, clear and logical as possible. This is achieved by (also refer to Academic Writing tip sheet):

- writing in the third person (avoiding personal pronouns such as I, me)
- using evidence to support statements and ideas (through academic sources)
- using non-emotive language
- using an objective formal tone.

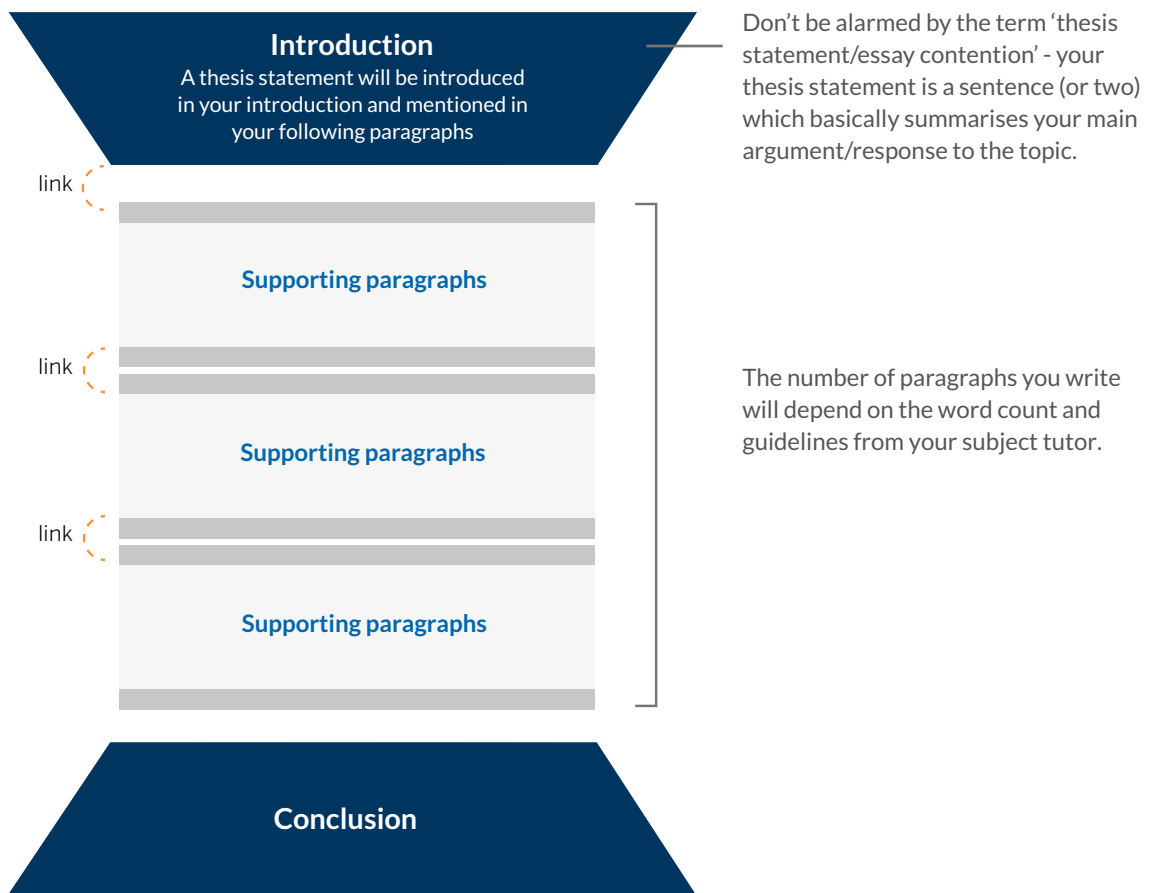
You might be provided with a specific essay topic, or be required to create your own. Generally, the essay topic or question requires some analysis before you start researching and writing. This will help you make sense of the issue and form your response. You can do this by identifying key words, instructional words and context words.

Key terms and topic words: What is the topic about? These words will be the focus of your essay, and inform the research process.

Instructional words: What is the question telling you to do? These are usually identified by words such as 'discuss, explain, compare, analyse'.

Context words: What is the context of the question or topic? Is your research limited by a specific time or location? This can usually be identified by words related to a population, gender, age group and/or socio-economic background for example.

Academic essays usually follow a specific structure, starting with the introduction, followed by supporting body paragraphs and finalised with a concluding paragraph:



Planning your writing:

After analysing the topic or question, you can look at planning and drafting your essay. Here are some ideas to help get you started:

- Formulate your main idea – what are your initial thoughts on the topic? This forms your tentative thesis statement (also known as your essay contention).
- Start brainstorming – what do you know about this topic? How will your lecture notes or weekly readings assist you? Where can you learn more about the key words or concepts? What arguments or ideas can you use to support your tentative thesis statement?
- Start researching and gathering information to use as evidence for your arguments.
- Map out a rough plan of where this information will fit within each section of your essay.
- If your argument has changed since commencing your research then revise your initial thesis statement.

- Start the writing process. If you're getting stuck, begin by writing in dot points to get the ideas flowing.
- Edit and proof read your drafts, and ensure you re-read the assessment criteria.

Introduction:

- Introduce the issue or topic, and background information.
- Define key words and terminology (sourced from the topic or question).
- Aim to position the issue or idea – what is the argument? What is the debate or source of contention? This will build up to your main response to the issue.
- Present your thesis contention or statement. This is the main idea of your essay, which states the purpose and your response to the question or topic.
- Mention your arguments briefly – these support your thesis statement.



What is a thesis statement/essay contention?

- A statement that explains the purpose of the essay – this shows the reader your position in response to the topic and what you will discuss in your essay. So it's important to be clear and logical.
- The thesis statement is explained and supported in the body paragraphs of your essay.
- The body paragraphs relate to the thesis statement and increase the persuasive force of your thesis statement.

Body paragraphs:

- Each paragraph should be a new single idea which is linked to your overall 'thesis'.
- The single idea should be introduced and developed through discussion, analysis and examination, with support of examples and evidence. Any statements made about the idea should be reinforced with evidence.
- One of the simplest ways to construct a paragraph is to follow the T.E.E.L structure:

TEEL PARAGRAPHS	
Topic sentence	Begin the sentence by explaining to the reader what the paragraph will be about
	Link this sentence to the thesis statement or to the previous paragraph
Explanation	Expand and develop the topic sentence
	Include persuasive or analytical discussion of the idea
Evidence	Reinforce your topic sentence with reliable, credible evidence (use your sources and reference appropriately)
Link	Summarise the paragraph by relating your idea back to the topic sentence

Conclusion:

- Conclude your essay by restating the thesis statement.
- Summarise the main arguments addressed in the body paragraphs.
- You can include a sentence about the implications or repercussions of the issue or topic.
- Provide a final thought on the topic, such as a recommendation or prediction.

Differences between essays and reports

Essays are just one form of assessment at university; you might be required to complete different types of written assessments. Report writing can follow a different format and style depending on which discipline you are writing for. Always check with your tutor and marking guide for more specific direction. Here are some differences between essays and reports:

	ESSAY	REPORT
Objective	Presents an idea or proposition (thesis), supported by well -reasoned discussion and use of evidence.	Presentation of a combination of facts, information and/or findings.
	Persuasive force of the argument is developed through growing use of evidence used in body of essay.	Often includes analysis of information to make proposals (and/or a hypothesis statement depending on the discipline)
		Includes research and evidence to support proposals and/or recommendations.
Structure	Structured into paragraphs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Body paragraphs • Conclusion 	Separated into sections (each section will vary, depending on the type of report): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may include headings, subheadings, appendices • may include tables and figures
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal style • Objective • Full sentences, no dot points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal style • Can include figures , tables, graphics • Can include dot points or numbered information (depending on requirements of the assessment).
Topic/question	Generally on a particular topic, question or issue of contention.	Generally a problem, case study, presentation of a study.
	Information can be drawn from readings, lectures, further research.	Information can be drawn from readings, practical work, research/literature reviews.

Helpful resources:

- OUA Tip Sheets: *Academic Writing, Referencing, Note-taking*
- [Smarthinking](#)