

Structuring your Essay

There are three main parts to an essay: introduction, body, and conclusion.

Introduction

- About 10% of the total essay length; and can be one paragraph or several, depending on essay length.

In this section you will:

- Introduce** the topic, provide general background information.
- Narrow your focus, set context for your argument.
- Present your viewpoint / line of argument.
- Outline areas / main points to be discussed.

Body

- About 80% of total essay length; with typically one topic/point per paragraph, where the number of paragraphs depends on the essay length.

In this section you will:

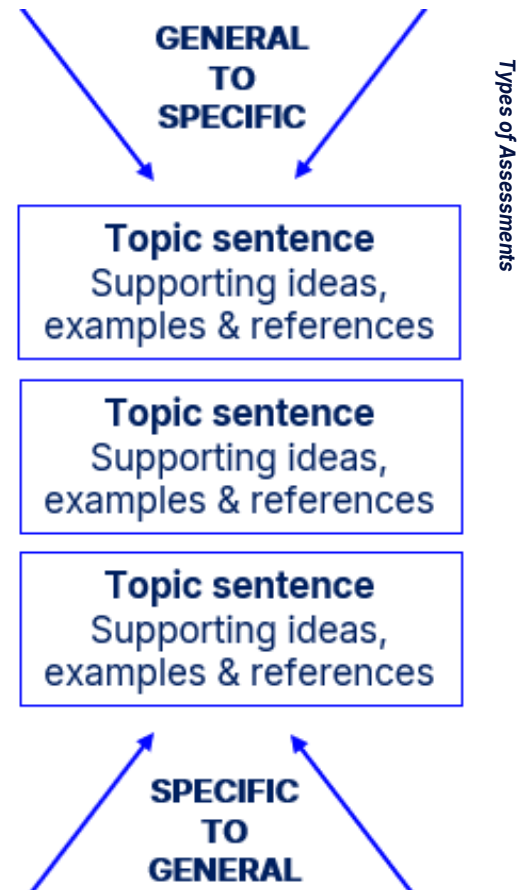
- Support** your main argument with evidence.
- Have paragraph ideas based on topic sentences.

Conclusion

- About 10% of the total essay length; and will typically be one paragraph.

In this section you will:

- Reconfirm** your topic and sum up the main points.
- Set the topic in context again, mentioning the wider implications.
- No *new* information or research should be introduced here.

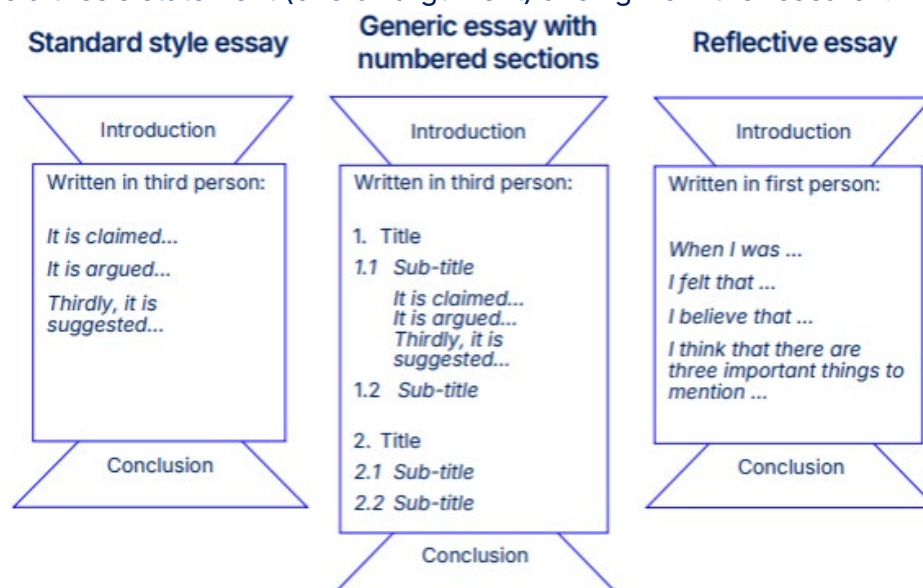


Essay Formats

Essays at university generally follow the standard format or structure, but variations are possible. If you are in doubt, ask your lecturer/tutor for their recommendation.

It is customary to introduce an essay as follows:

- outline the general topic
- narrow down to a specific issue (delimiting the topic range)
- provide an outline of the essay, and
- provide a thesis statement (overall argument) arising from the research.



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Sample essay structure

Topic: *What barriers do first-year university students face in understanding assessment tasks, and what strategies and supports best enhance their academic success?*

Introduction

Background information

Narrowing focus

Outline of main ideas

Understanding assessment tasks is one of the most important skills first-year university students must develop to succeed academically. However, many new students face barriers such as unfamiliar academic language, competing responsibilities, and limited experience with independent learning. By combining effective personal strategies—like time-management and boundary-setting—with appropriate institutional supports, students can strengthen their assessment literacy and improve their overall academic confidence.

Body

Topic sentence

Evidence

Linking words

First-year students frequently struggle to interpret assessment questions due to factors such as workload pressure, unclear expectations, and the transition from structured secondary learning to self-directed study. Moreover, developing strong time-management skills helps students break assessment tasks into manageable steps, reducing stress and allowing more time to read prompts carefully and seek clarification when needed (Albon, 2030). Specifically, setting boundaries—such as limiting work hours, managing social commitments, or establishing dedicated study periods—also enables students to focus more effectively on understanding their tasks (Inman & North, 2029). Furthermore, university supports play an essential role as well: Learning Skills Advisors (LSAs) provide guidance on analysing assignment instructions; Peer Support Desks and PASS sessions help students discuss concepts collaboratively; counselling services assist with wellbeing challenges that affect study focus; and scholarships can ease financial pressures that compete with study time (Rawson, 2030; Stewart, 2028). Therefore, together, these strategies and supports empower students to better understand what assessments are asking and how to meet the required standards.

Conclusion

Reminder of main essay topic

Re-statement of main points

Concluding statement

Although first-year students may experience significant barriers in interpreting assessment tasks, combining personal strategies with university support services can greatly enhance their confidence and academic performance. By managing their time, setting boundaries, and using available resources such as learning advisors, peer programs, counselling, and scholarships, students place themselves in a strong position to understand their assessments and succeed at university.

Related Helpsheets

- University Speak
- Writing in an Academic Style



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