



Structuring Essays

A strong essay structure helps to build your argument and creates a logical flow in your writing.

A good time to start thinking about the structure of your essay is after you have analysed your assignment question and done some preliminary reading and research to inform your essay.

Structuring your essay

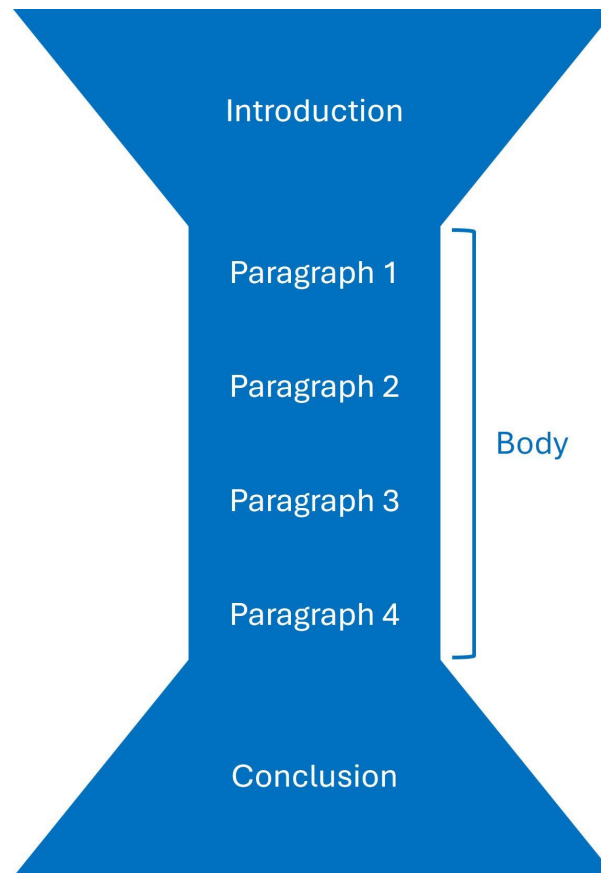


Figure 1: Essay structure.

Image long description: a vertical diagram showing the structure of an essay. Introduction is at the top. Next are Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4, which are grouped together by a bracket labelled 'Body.' Conclusion is at the end.

In an essay, the **introduction** moves from the broad (context and background) to the specific (narrowing the scope to specific ideas). The **conclusion** moves the opposite way – from the specific details to the broader application of the ideas covered in the essay.

The paragraphs between the introduction and the conclusion constitute the body of the essay. The **body** consists of separate paragraphs, each built around a separate idea or point which develops the overall argument of your essay. The ideas in each new paragraph should follow on from those expressed in the last sentence of the previous paragraph.

Check that each main idea is directly relevant to your **thesis statement** (and to the question you are answering).

What goes in each section

An introduction includes:

- opening sentence
- background information
- explanation of the relevance, currency or problem
- definition of a key term (optional)
- thesis statement
- outline of the essay
- closing sentence.

Body sections involve:

- beginning each paragraph with a topic sentence
- developing each main idea by analysing, comparing, applying examples and using academic sources
- concluding by relating back to your main argument or thesis statement, and creating a link to the idea being discussed in the next paragraph.

A conclusion includes:

- a restatement of the thesis statement
- summary of the main points
- recommendations (optional)
- implications and significance
- future research suggestions (optional).

You can find further guidance about writing an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion through our online [academic skills resources](#).

Planning your paragraphs

Plan what each paragraph will cover and what references you will most likely need to support your claims.

The number of body paragraphs will depend on your word count limit. Keep this in mind when you are planning your essay structure to allow for space to build each individual point.

Coherence

Even an essay that is well organised and has good paragraphs can still be ineffective if it lacks coherence. Make sure you use words and/or phrases that show the connections between ideas:

- within a paragraph;
- between paragraphs; and
- between sections.

These linking words give your essay unity.

Linking words and phrases (sometimes called transition words) help to create flow in your writing. Readers look for these to signal where your writing is heading, so make sure you include them.

Useful linking words and phrases

- To add: *also, in addition, furthermore.*
- To compare: *similarly, in the same way.*
- To contrast: *however, on the other hand.*
- To give examples: *for example, for instance.*
- To summarise: *therefore, thus, hence.*

Titles

Effective titles provide an edge to your essay. However, it takes time to develop a clear, engaging title that captures what your essay is about.

Note: your title is not the assignment question or your thesis statement. It should indicate the purpose and topic of your essay succinctly. Titles can often be creative as well as informative. If you want a title that is catchy and informative, try the following:

1. Develop a provisional title by playing around with the order of the keywords of your essay question.
2. Change it as you get clearer about your main argument.
3. Make your final decision when you have completed your essay.

Every assessment is designed differently. In the Humanities, essays do not traditionally have subheadings, only reports do; however, for those in science fields, subheadings are encouraged for various writing styles. Always check your unit outline and double-check with your tutor for any submission guidelines.