

AN UNDERGROUND ENTERPRISES PRODUCT

THE UNDERGROUND
ENGLISH MANUAL

CRASH COURSE EDITION

THE PRAGMATIST'S GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING



BY GRAEME SMITH

T H E U N D E R G R O U N D
ENGLISH MANUAL

CRASH COURSE EDITION
THE PRAGMATIST'S GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING

Underground Enterprises is an educational consulting company specializing in ESOL, literacy, curriculum and materials development, forensic linguistics, as well as technical writing, proofing, and copyediting.

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ISBN 0-9582590-0-3

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Chapter 1: Introduction

If you've experienced the pain and torture of essay writing, then you're probably quite normal.... if the thought of a blank computer screen or piece of paper brings fear into your heart, then this book is for you.

Writing essays is nearly always a pain in the backside. While there are a few strange people who really love writing, they tend to be the exception and not the rule. If you've experienced the pain and torture of essay writing, then you're probably quite normal. If your stomach twists up into knots at the thought of writing academic essays, or if the thought of a blank computer screen or piece of paper brings fear into your heart, then this book is for you.

Working through this short book won't automatically mean that you'll write your essay, but it will teach you a great method of essay writing that has worked well for many students. It's up to you to bring the content of your essay to the method described in this book. This book simply breaks the essay writing process down into a number of easily achievable steps that anyone can follow and complete. You can literally tick off each step along the way.

Some people – let's call them writing snobs – might criticize this method as a paint-by-numbers approach to essay writing. This criticism is quite true. My answer to these creatures – and yours should be the same – is as follows: "Who cares!" Probably, you're not interested in becoming the Michael Angelo of essay writing. Besides, you just want to get your essay finished so that you can carry on with your life. Right? That's why the subtitle of this book is *A Pragmatist's Guide to Academic Writing*. A pragmatist is someone who just wants to get a good job done, and probably as quickly as possible. If that sounds like you, then you're definitely reading the right material.

One thing that the writing snobs don't realize is that they probably work through exactly the same steps as the ones you're going to follow in this book. The big difference though is that either they don't really know how to describe what they are, or they want to keep them a secret so they keep getting better grades than you.

Another thing is that a better metaphor for describing the paint-by-numbers approach which you're about to learn is that it is really more like a set of trainer wheels for your bike. Once you get good at riding the bike – or writing essays, in this case, – you can throw the trainer wheels away.

Let's get started ...

Chapter 2: The Basics

There are really only three things that you need to know. It's easy to think of more than these three things if you have a look through some of the books available on academic writing, but in terms of the basics there really are only three things. You need to know how to:

1. Understand your essay question or topic;
2. Plan your essay;
3. Write your essay.

It really is as simple as that. The thing that makes all the difference is that people who don't have a good method of writing usually try to start at the third bullet point. However, we don't advise that. First, you must really understand what your question or topic is. If you don't, you're likely to head in the wrong direction. Even if you write a great essay, it's a waste of your time if you've written about something completely different to what your teacher wants. Failure to understand the question or topic will result in a bad grade.

Planning is another major stage that most people ignore. Unless you're a really good writer – like genius level – you should have some kind of plan that you work from. Failing to plan is like driving on strange roads without a map. Your plan is the road map for your essay. You might stick to it rigidly, or you might be a bit more flexible and head off in other directions than what you initially thought. The point is that you have a plan and you're not lost or wandering without direction. Writing snobs will tell you that they don't use a plan, but the truth is that they do – it's just in their heads.

The writing part is never easy. However, you can make it easier by following all the steps we outline for the different stages along the way. The Underground approach to essay writing champions something that we call the 'McDonalds's Model of Essay Writing'. It won't produce an instant essay, but it is predictable and it will help you instantly recall what you need to do. More on that later.

One last thing relates to a kind of golden rule or guiding principle for pragmatists. This is as follows:

Always give a monkey a banana.

What this means is that your tutor, teacher, lecturer – whoever set the assignment – is a monkey. What you have to do is give them a banana – that's your essay. What's important is that you give them the right kind of banana. Probably, this person is an academic. An academic is just a monkey with a degree and it's the job of these monkeys to make difficult things more complicated. He or she won't just come out and tell you what kind of banana they want. However, as you work through our method, you can increase your chance of dishing out exactly the right kind of banana.

An academic is just a monkey with a degree and it's the job of these monkeys to make difficult things more complicated.

Chapter 3: Understand your Essay Question or Topic

...for most of the time, most tutors, teachers, lecturers, professors, and other academics can't agree on what the basic meanings of the words are that are used in essay questions and topics.

There's one really big problem that you will face when it comes to trying to understand any essay question or topic. Here it is:

All the people who have anything to do with essay assignments generally never agree on the meanings of the words they use.

This means that for most of the time, most tutors, teachers, lecturers, professors, and other academics can't agree on what the basic meanings of the words are that are used in essay questions and topics. Added to this is the fact that you probably have less of an idea about what the words mean than they do. Either that or you think they mean something else.

This creates something of a dilemma for budding writers with pragmatic tendencies. There's no one solution to this problem, but we have developed a number of strategies that you should use in your attempts to make the question make sense.

- The dictionary strategy
- The subject-specific keyword strategy
- The marking guide strategy
- The "ask your tutor" strategy

THE DICTIONARY STRATEGY

The dictionary strategy is one that you can do at home or anywhere where you have access to a good dictionary. We recommend the following procedure:

1. Get a blank sheet of paper and turn it on its side;
2. Write the essay question or topic in the middle and put a circle around it;
3. Draw a line out from every key word in the essay question or topic to a blank space somewhere on the page;
4. Look up every key word in the dictionary and write the definitions next to the relevant lines.
5. Cross out any definitions that don't relate to your understanding of what the question or topic is about.

By doing the exercise above you should be able to get a better idea of what it is the essay question or topic is trying to ask for. You should have one piece of paper with a bunch of definitions on it that relate to all the important words in the essay question or topic.

If you're really stuck then look the words up in a thesaurus as well. A thesaurus is a big book full of synonyms – that is, words that mean the same as other words. Sometimes a list of these kinds of words will help you understand what the question is asking or what the topic is about. It's also useful to have synonyms for later on when you have to use different words to write about what's in the question or topic.

THE SUBJECT-SPECIFIC KEYWORD STRATEGY

If you're writing essays at university level and you're doing a degree where your courses are in different departments, you will probably find that your tutors and lecturers in one department don't agree with your tutors and lecturers in another department when it comes to the meanings of certain keywords in essay questions and topics. For example, when one lecturer in one department says "Examine" in one essay question and "Discuss" in another, he or she could mean two very different things. However, over in another department, another lecture might use "Examine" and "Discuss" as if they meant the same thing.

We recommend the following as a way of dealing with this schizophrenia:

1. Ask your tutor or lecturer for an official department list – if there is one – of these essay question words and their definitions;
2. In the event that there is no official department list, ask your tutor or lecture for their definition of the word in question;
3. If this fails, then consult the table in the appendix for a general guide as to how you might define these words – assuming of course that they don't all mean the same thing.

It's always better to hear it from the horse's mouth – so to speak. This is one effective way of making sure you're preparing the right kind of banana for your monkey.

THE MARKING GUIDE STRATEGY

Sometimes the person who sets the essay assignment will also give you a marking guide. A marking guide or list of marking criteria is a godsend. Even if they haven't given you one, you could try asking for one. Tutors and lecturers are sometimes reluctant to give these out because it suddenly makes life easier for students due to the fact that students then know what their teachers want.

Typically, the higher up the academic scale you progress, the less use your superiors will be in telling you what they want. On the other hand, further down the scale there is a trend towards outcomes-based assessments (e.g. unit standards). Any kind of outcomes-based assessment will include a set of marking criteria or a marking guide.

If you can get your hands on a marking guide, you should let it guide you as much as possible with regards to the structure of your essay. Usually there will be two kinds of criteria. On the one hand, you'll be marked according to the mechanics of your essay. Basically, this means punctuation and good grammar. The thing that you should be looking for though is particular kinds of content or different aspects of the question or topic. If you can find these kinds of things, it means that when you come to the planning stage you will be approaching your writing with a pre-decided structure that you will impose over the rest of your essay.

...you will probably find that your tutors and lecturers in one department don't agree with your tutors and lecturers in another department when it comes to the meanings of certain keywords in essay questions and topics.

Don't be put off if [your tutors] are not particularly forthcoming with details of what they want in the essay. Probably, they don't really know themselves.

In a nutshell, you should proceed as follows:

1. Ask for a marking guide if you're not given one;
2. Ask for some informal guidance with regards to content and structure if there's no official marking guide;
3. Let whatever marking criteria you've got guide your essay planning as to the major divisions in the body of your essay.

THE "ASK YOUR TUTOR" STRATEGY

This is the most in-your-face strategy. The idea is to go and see your tutor, teacher, lecturer, or professor and ask them a number of direct questions about the essay question. Most tertiary-level staff are required to hold office hours. That means they're paid to be in their offices at certain times to answer your questions. Make an appointment if necessary. Don't be put off if they are not particularly forthcoming with details of what they want in the essay. Probably, they don't really know themselves. Also, go back on a different day if you don't get what you want the first time.

Here are a bunch of questions to ask:

1. Could you tell me in more detail what you really want with this question?
2. I don't really understand what you mean by ... Could you explain this to me?
3. Do you have any model answers that I could look at for this question?
4. Do you have any examples of really good essays that I could have a look at?
5. Could I come and show my essay plan to you once I've started writing?
6. What are you going to be looking for when you mark this?
7. What do I have to do to get an A?

There's also a certain psychological advantage to be had in getting to know your lecturer and them getting to know you and how you intend to answer their question. It's also a great idea to go back to your lecturer after you get your essay back and ask him or her to explain their comments and give you some tips on how to do better next time. Obviously, it's possible to over do it in this area, so you need good judgement in deciding how many times is appropriate to go back and see a particular tutor or lecturer.

Chapter 4: Plan your Essay

The planning stage is very important. You can't just sit down and start writing unless you really know what you're doing. And obviously you don't otherwise you wouldn't be reading this book. There two major steps in the planning process.

1. Brainstorm
2. Outline

Brainstorming is simply a process of developing a lot of different ideas about your essay question or topic. Outlining is when you write down your best ideas in such a way that they act like a road map for your essay. These two steps are explained shortly. First, however, we need to comment briefly on the creative aspect of the writing process.

THE WAR INSIDE YOUR BRAIN

You may remember the old Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck cartoons where when the character is faced with some kind of moral dilemma, a little angel pops up on one shoulder to give one set of choices, while a little devil pops up on the other shoulder to give an opposing set of choices. The angel and devil – representing the character's conscience – are always at war with each other.

This is a good metaphor for what goes on in the process of writing. One part of you – the creative part – is trying hard to generate interesting ideas. Another part of you – the part that is always trying to examine and edit those ideas – is trying hard to shut down the creative process so it can evaluate and criticise what you have written. Now, the creative generator (relating to the angel on Mickey's left shoulder) is fundamentally at war with his counterpart, the editor/critic (relating to the devil on Mickey's right shoulder).

Now it's debatable as to whether either of these functions really relate to different sides of your brain or not, but what is true is that one result of the ongoing war between your creative facilities and editing/critiquing abilities is often paralysis and frustration. And this means writers' block more often than not. The best way to manage this war is to manage the writing process in such a way that you consciously separate your creative activities from your editing/critiquing abilities.

At every step along the writing process you need to first let yourself be creative and turn off or ignore your editing/critiquing devil. After this you can have a look at what you've done and edit it or assess it to the best of your abilities. If, at every step along the way, you can be extremely self conscious about this two-pronged approach of being creative first and critical last, you will find the writing process less like drawing blood and possibly more like fun. Yes, it is possible to enjoy the process of writing essays.

BRAINSTORM

We can break the brainstorming phase down into two more steps, each with a number of sub-steps.

... the creative generator (relating to the angel on Mickey's left shoulder) is fundamentally at war with his counterpart, the editor/critic (relating to the devil on Mickey's right shoulder).

Your problem is that this muscle – your brain – is unfit. Unfortunately, you have to run a marathon – that’s your essay.

1. Do free writing which is:

- a. Unfocused
- b. Focused

2. Use mindmaps to:

- a. Generate
- b. Categorise
- c. Reorganise
- d. Order

We explain these techniques next and break them down into a number of smaller steps. This process of breaking things down into smaller and smaller steps is not to make life more complicated for you, but to make it easier. Each small step is one step closer to completion.

FREE WRITING

Free writing is an easy way of getting some ideas down on paper and – strange as it may sound – it can be fun too. Basically, all you do is set a timer for 10 minutes and write down everything you can think of, without stopping to edit or critique what you’ve written.

The best way to think about free writing is to think of your brain as a big muscle – which it actually is. Your problem is that this muscle – your brain – is unfit. Unfortunately, you have to run a marathon – that’s your essay. Every time you sit down to do some writing, you’re training. But everyone knows that not only do you have to train for a race, you have to do warm up exercises before you start running. It’s just the same as if you’re going to the gym. No one starts on weight training without first doing some stretches to warm up the appropriate muscles. Free writing is a kind of stretching exercise to warm up your brain before you start writing. Remember, if you don’t warm up first, you’re liable to do yourself an injury ... or at least get a headache.

Here are the basic rules:

1. Set your timer for ten minutes;
2. Write without stopping for the whole 10 minutes;
3. Don’t read over what you have written until the time is up;
4. Don’t worry about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure while you’re writing;
5. Don’t worry if parts – or any of it – makes sense;
6. Don’t spend any time fixing mistakes. If you make a mistake – ignore it or put a line through it.
7. If you don’t know what to write, write down something like, ‘I don’t know what to write now’.

There are two kinds of free writing you can use. One is unfocused free writing and the other is focussed free writing. We explain these next.

Unfocused free writing

Unfocused free writing is when you don’t start with any particular topic or idea in mind – you just write about whatever you think about at the time.

This is useful if you don’t know what you’re going to write about or you just want to warm up your writing “muscles”. It’s also a good way to clear your head of unwanted ideas before you really get started or simply to kick start your thinking. One way of thinking about unfocused free writing is to imagine yourself as a radio that needs tuning. When you – the radio – are not tuned correctly there is a lot of static and noise. Once you’re tuned properly, you can hear the music. So, clear your head of unwanted “static” and warm up your brain. Start “tuning in” to your ideas today.

Focused free writing

Focused free writing is when you start with some very specific idea or topic and then try to write down as much as you can about that particular idea. This is useful if you are trying to get started on the first draft of an essay or you're suffering from writers' block. Writer's block is when you are stuck and you feel like you can't write anything.

MINDMAPPING

Mindmapping is another brainstorming technique. The big difference to free writing and other kinds of brainstorming is that it is much more visual. Mindmapping can help you get down a lot of information quickly and on a single piece of paper. There's an example at the bottom of this page.

The basic psychology behind mind maps is that they are a visual representation of how your brain actually works. The various branches and sub-branches show all the important connections between different ideas. Mindmaps are designed to be organic and non-linear. In other words, things are not in a straight line and there's lots of different jumping off points. This is more like how we think and is quite different to a page of notes

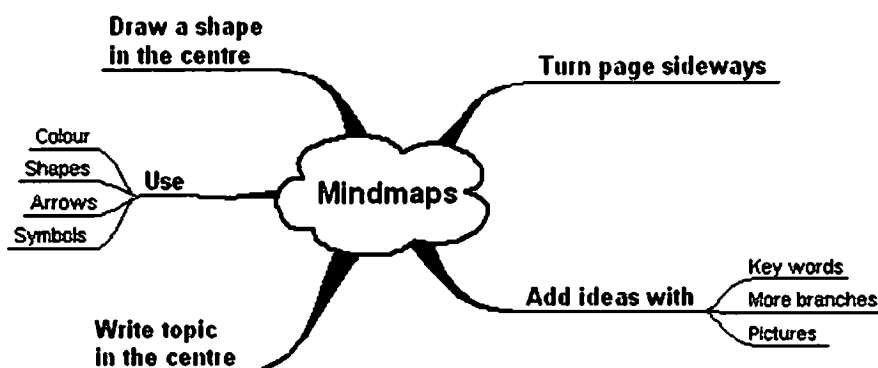
in which the information is generally arranged in a straight line, figuratively speaking. Now all this may or may not be true, but there's no doubt that Mindmaps are a great tool for planning and organising your essay.

The best way to get a handle on mind maps though is simply to have a look at one of the ones in this book and then have a go. Here are the basic rules:

1. Turn your page sideways and draw a circle or some kind of shape in the centre;
2. Write your essay topic or key words in the centre of your page;
3. Add ideas and words to your mind map with branches, arrows, and shapes as you think of them;
4. Use colour, shapes, symbols, and pictures wherever you can.

To get back to your essay planning – there are three important steps at this stage of the brainstorming process that use mind maps. First you must generate ideas. Second you must categorise these ideas. Finally, you must reorganise them. These are explained next.

One way of thinking about unfocused free writing is to imagine yourself as a radio that needs tuning. When you – the radio – are not tuned correctly there is a lot of static and noise. Once you're tuned properly, you can hear the music.



Just write down everything you can think of. Don't be critical - you can delete all the rubbish later on later if it's not useful.

Generate

The idea here in this first step is to use mind-maps to do one main thing. This is to think of and develop as many ideas as you can for your topic without being particularly critical as to how to organise these ideas even as to how useful they are. This is meant to be pure brainstorming, so the main point is just to get down a lot of ideas without doing anything that might slow down or stop the flow.

Here are some steps you can follow:

1. Draw a new branch on your mindmap for every new idea that you can think of.
2. If you do think of ideas that relate to one of your branches, then draw more branches out from that word and write down the other ideas, but don't worry about organising anything at this stage.
3. Just write down everything you can think of. Don't be critical - you can delete all the rubbish later on if it's not useful.
4. You can refer to your free writing for ideas as well, or simply to get started.

Categorise

Once you have some ideas on paper you must begin to bring some order to them. The key point in this second step is to narrow down your ideas and subjects into specific topics and subtopics and think of ways of grouping your ideas into subtopics and categories for your essay. These more specific subtopics and categories will give shape to your writing. Here are some guidelines to help you group similar ideas together.

1. Look at your first mind map and delete anything that you think is not relevant;
2. Now think about which ideas go together. There are different ways in which you can show this:
 - Highlight related ideas in different colours, for example, green = everything that relates to idea 1;
 - Write letters or numbers beside related ideas, for example, B = everything that relates idea 2;
 - Draw shapes around related ideas, for example, a circles around things = everything that relates to idea 3.
3. Now write down names for the different categories or groups of ideas that you have identified.
4. If you have an idea that doesn't fit into any category, you can:
 - Delete it
 - Create a special category just for that one idea.
 - Come back to it later.

Reorganise

In this third step you need to draw up a new mindmap and begin to organise and reorganise your information. This might take a couple of goes. Your objective is to come up with a nice tidy mindmap that shows clearly how you have categorised and organised your ideas. Here are a few simple guidelines:

1. Start with a clean piece of paper for every new mindmap you draw;
2. Draw up a new, more organised mind map that uses the categories you thought of previously as the main branches on this new mind map;
3. Choose only the most important categories and delete any others. Probably you'll need three or four main categories, but it will depend on the size of your essay;
4. Delete anything that you think is not relevant;
5. Rename your categories if you think of better names;
6. Do it again until you get it right.

Order

This is the final stage in the mindmapping process. The main point here is to decide on the best order for your subtopics and supporting points and show this on your mind map. If you do a good job here, it will make your life easier when it comes to developing an effective outline. Here's what to do:

1. Order your the categories – these should be the main branches of your reorganized mindmap. Ask yourself: What is the most logical order for presenting these categories?
2. Use numbers to show the order of these categories and main groups of ideas.
3. Order the sub-branches that come off each of the main branches.
4. Use letters to show the order here.
5. If you have even smaller branches coming of the sub-branches then use roman numbers or another system to show the order here.
6. If you can't think of a logical order at any stage, then just choose an order that looks good to you now. You can always come back and change it later on

OUTLINE

The next step is to transfer the ordered information from your mind map into an outline. Your outline is simply the roadmap for your essay. What we've called categories, groups of ideas, or subtopics in the brainstorming we're now just referring to as subtopics.

Draft and redraft

You must be prepared to draft and redraft the outline until it shows sufficient development under each subtopic and supporting point. The details in the outline should move from the essay topic to subtopics, and then to supporting information and examples. At this stage you shouldn't worry too much about your introduction or conclusion. Here's the basic form:

1. Introduction
2. Body
 - a. Subtopic I
 - i. Support and examples
 - ii. Support and examples
 - b. Subtopic II
 - i. Support and examples
 - ii. Support and examples
 - c. Subtopic III
 - i. Support and examples
 - ii. Support and examples
3. Conclusion

You must be prepared to draft and redraft the outline until it shows sufficient development under each subtopic and supporting point.... At this stage you shouldn't worry too much about your introduction or conclusion.

On the one hand you don't want it to be so rigid that you cannot make any changes, but on the other hand you also don't want to be making so many changes to it that you never make any progress on your writing.

Finalize

This final step in the planning process is where you prepare a final good copy of your outline. While it's important to finalize your outline, you should see it as a work in progress – and not something that is set in concrete. Sometimes you will have too much information and may need to delete some. Alternatively, you might not have enough information and need to add some. On the one hand you don't want it to be so rigid that you cannot make any changes, but on the other hand you also don't want to be making so many changes to it that you never make any progress on your writing. The main point is to try and establish a good logical outline that presents the ideas effectively. Once this is more or less finalized you can move onto the next stage. Balance is the key.

In any case, in the process of finalizing your draft outline you may want to make some changes. There are different reasons for making changes. The chart below provides a very simple problem/solution approach to troubleshooting your outline.

Once you think you've got a pretty good final draft of your outline, there are some questions you should ask yourself:

1. Have I understood the essay topic or question?
2. Will my subtopics allow me to address the essay topic or question?
3. Does the order of subtopics and supporting points reflect a logical progression of thought from beginning to end?
4. Is the relationship among the different points clear and consistent?

Problem	Solution
I have too many subtopics...	Delete some of them or combine some of them. If you combine several subtopics, you'll need to think of new heading for this group.
I don't have enough subtopics...	Add some more. Revisit any of the previous brainstorming steps if necessary.
I have too much information in one place...	Delete some of it, move it, or split it up into other categories. Add new subtopic headings if necessary.
My outline is not detailed enough...	Add more topics, subtopics, and information. Revisit any of the previous brainstorming steps if necessary.
The order doesn't seem right...	Change it. Think of a better or more logical order for some, or all, of the outline. Get another person's opinion.

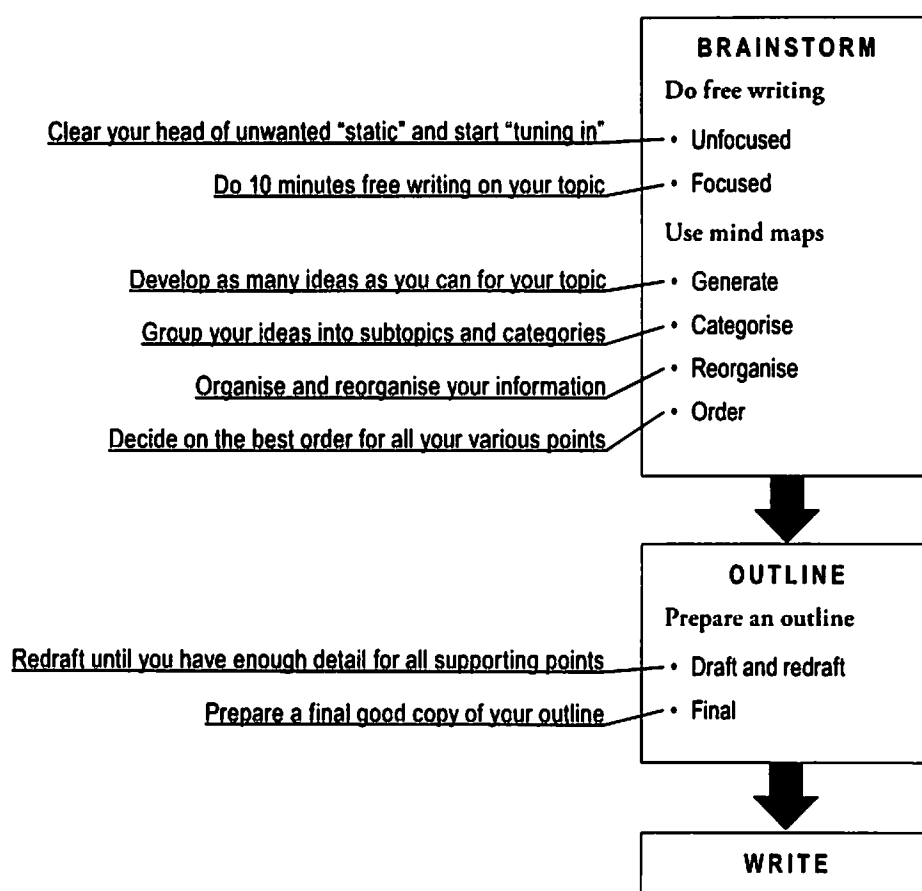
5. Is each entry developed in sufficient detail?
6. Have I edited out all the rubbish?
7. Is the outline complete?

If you can answer “yes” to every question, then you are ready to move on.

ESSAY PLANNING: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

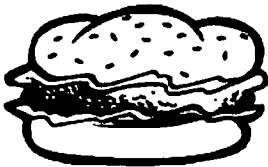
So just to recap here’s a diagram that outlines all the important steps involved in the planning process below, and shows how they lead onto the next step. You can use this as a quick reference guide.

Once you think you’ve got a pretty good final draft of your outline ... ask yourself: Have I understood the essay topic or question?



Chapter 5: Write Your Essay

The easiest way to remember what a good essay looks like is to think of a hamburger. We call this the McDonalds model of essay writing....It's a hamburger for your brain.



Now you are ready to do some writing. Just like having a good planning process makes it easy to get started, if you are going to write a good essay you need to have an idea of what a good essay looks like. The easiest way to remember what a good essay looks like is to think of a hamburger. We call this the McDonalds model of essay writing.

The McDonalds model of essay writing - A hamburger for your brain

First, there's the bun on the top – that's your introduction. Then there's the meat and filling – that's the body of your essay. Finally, there's the bun on the bottom – that's your conclusion. Of course, there's a lot more to it than that, and we'll look at each of these parts of our hamburger-essay in more detail next.

Introduction

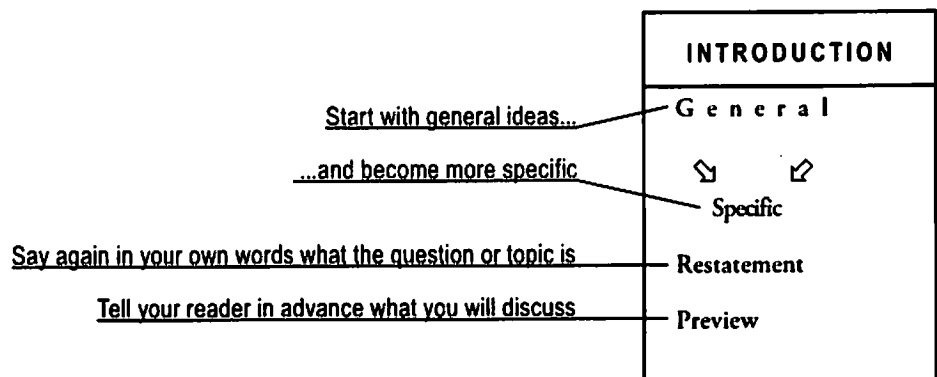
Writing the introduction for an essay can sometimes be the most difficult part of the essay. In fact, you may want to just skip it at this stage and write it later. Sometimes you really just need to ignore your introduction and get on with the rest of your essay and then come back to it at the end. However, presuming that you want to write an introduction now, you can make your life easier

if you remember that the introduction often has several main parts.

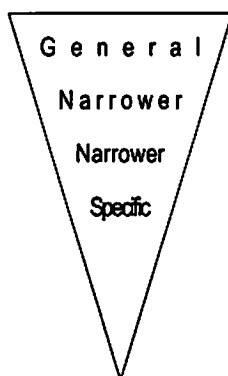
Often, to start with, there are several general statements introducing the topic, perhaps providing some background or a context for the discussion. These statements become more specific and end in a restatement of the essay question and then a brief preview of the essay's structure. The model is presented below, but one other way to remember what you need to do here is to think of the zoom lens on a camera: you begin with wide angle and then focus in on the details.

General to specific

One of the most effective patterns that you can use when writing an introduction is the general to specific pattern. The basic idea is to move from general statements about something to more specific statements. This pattern can be applied to other parts of your writing too, but is a useful way to introduce your essay. The size of your essay often will dictate how much general information you need to include before you narrow down to the specific topic or question that you intend to discuss in your essay. Think of it like this:



As a basic rule, for a short essay you might write two general sentences and follow this up with one or two more specific sentences which lead into your restatement of the essay question or topic.



Restate

One of the most important things you need to do in your introduction is convince the person reading your essay – usually the person marking it – that you understand the topic or question. The best way to convince someone that you do know what you are do-

ing, is to restate the question or topic in your introduction.

You should paraphrase the original question or topic. That means don't use exactly the same words, but make it similar enough so that your teacher can see what you are doing. For example, if part of the question is "Discuss recent developments in communication technology" then your introduction should say something like "This essay will consider recent developments in the field of communication technology and will ... ". Your purpose is to make it extremely clear to your readers that you know what you are writing about. If the essay is very open in terms of a topic, then you will need to create your own specific topic or question. Sometimes this is called a thesis statement.

The key point here is that you should include a sentence that indicates the topic of your essay. There are some expressions below which you can use to do this at the bottom of the page.

You should paraphrase the original question or topic.... Your purpose is to make it extremely clear to your readers that you know what you are writing about.

Expressions to use for restating the topic or essay question	
This essay deals with [the] ...	In this essay I deal with [the] ...
This assignment examines [the] ...	In this assignment I examine [the] ...
This essay will analyse [the] ...	In this essay I analyse [the] ...
This essay will consider [the] ...	In this essay I consider [the] ...
This paper describes [the] ...	Below I describe [the] ...
The purpose of this essay is to ...	My purpose in this essay is to ...
Four major features of [the] ... are considered in this essay.	In this essay I consider the four major features of [the] ...
This essay will first describe [the] ... and will then go on to argue that ...	My essay will first describe [the] ... and will then go on to argue that ...

The key point here is that you should include a sentence that indicates the topic of your essay.... These kinds of essay topic sentences are quite specific and should come towards the end of your introduction ...

These kinds of essay topic sentences are quite specific and should come towards the end of your introduction, but before the preview of your essay structure, which we discuss next.

Preview

The final part of your introduction should be a preview of the essay structure. This sentence indicates the overall plan of the essay. In other words, it tells you how the information will be presented to the reader. You should use words and expressions that clearly show the structure or plan behind your writing. This is usually the last sentence in your introduction. The information that you include here should be drawn directly from the subtopics you used in your outline.

The table below gives some examples of commonly used expressions.

Here are some questions you should ask once you have completed your introduction:

1. Have I left a good first impression for my readers and will they want to carry on reading?
2. Does my introduction show that I understand the essay questions or topic and related issues and implications?
3. Have I shown that I am going to complete the task or answer the question?
4. Have I included all the features of a good introduction including general to specific statements, a restatement of the essay question, and a preview of the essay's structure?

Body

The body of your essay is the meat in the hamburger. The size of your essay will determine how many paragraphs you need to

Expressions to use for previewing your essay structure			
X, Y, and Z	are discussed		below
These three points	are analysed		
This information	are examined		
These details	are considered		
The different aspects	are outlined are evaluated		
I discuss	X, Y, and Z	briefly	
I analyse	these three points	concisely	
I examine	this information	in some detail	
I consider	these details	in some depth	
I outline	the different aspects		
I evaluate			
The essay is divided into four main sections. It will first consider ... It will then go on to describe ... The third part compares ... Finally, I draw some conclusions as to ...			

write here. For a short essay it will be at least three. Any less than that and you're not really writing an essay. In any case, what you need is a bunch of well-formed paragraphs.

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a collection of sentences that all deal with a single topic or idea. If you want to write good paragraphs you need to include at least two main parts.

1. A well-crafted topic sentence;
2. Well-developed, cohesive supporting sentences.

The model is presented below.

Topic sentences

A good paragraph has to have a good topic sentence. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in your paragraph. Because your topic sentence gives the main idea of the paragraph it will also be the most general sentence in that paragraph. When someone reads it they should know what to expect in the rest of the paragraph. The other sentences should be more specific. Like in the

introduction, the pattern here is general to specific.

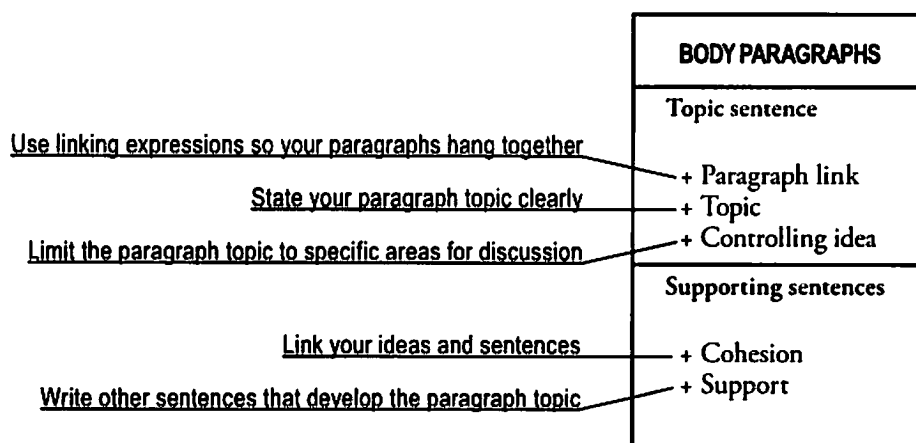
Here are some steps to take when writing topic sentences for you essay:

1. Refer to your essay outline.
2. Look at the key points you have written down for each paragraph.
3. Identify what the main idea or topic of that paragraph is.
4. Write a sentence that summarizes each of those main ideas – the topics – of each paragraph.

Controlling ideas

Just like your introduction contains a preview of the essay's main topics, your topic sentence needs to contain a preview what your subtopics are or how you intend to develop these points in your paragraph. You need to tell your reader specifically what the paragraph will be about. In other words, you need to limit the topic to one or two or several specific areas that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph.

The body of your essay is the meat in the hamburger.



If you write an essay that is not cohesive, you're likely to get back strange comments.... These enigmatic comments are usually left unexplained, and even if you go to the tutor for further feedback, they may not really be able to explain what they mean by them.

These specific areas are called the controlling ideas and should be the same as or similar to your sub-topics in your outline. Often your topic sentence will state both the topic and the controlling idea. At other times, you may wish to write a separate sentence for clarity and to keep the topic sentence short and to the point.

The best way to get your controlling ideas is to think of words or phrases that you can ask questions about. You should be able to ask these kinds of questions about each controlling idea.

1. What?
2. What are they?
3. How?
4. Why?
5. In what ways?
6. What does that mean?
7. Can you explain this?
8. What are some examples?

There are a couple of things that you should avoid when trying to write topic sentences and controlling ideas. For example, don't just write down a simple statement of a fact. This is because there are no controlling ideas that need development in a fact. Also, don't use personal opinion statements like 'I think ...' or 'I like ...' These kind of statements often sound weak and are difficult to support.

Cohesion and linking

The next important thing to do at this stage is to start thinking about cohesion and linking. Cohesion simply refers to how your essay pulls together. Linking words and expressions are like the glue that sticks your paragraphs together in terms of the whole essay, and sticks your sentences together in terms of your paragraphs. It's possible to

write an essay that contains all the right information but lacks cohesion. If you write an essay that is not cohesive, you're likely to get back strange comments from your tutors saying things like "lacks structure" or "doesn't flow". These enigmatic comments are usually left unexplained, and even if you go to the tutor for further feedback, they may not really be able to explain what they mean by them. A good sense of "flow" in an essay is often something that readers feel. Even with an average essay, you can increase your chances of getting a good grade by following the guidelines here regarding cohesion and linking.

There are two kinds of linking that you need to do in your essay. These are linking between paragraphs and linking sentences within paragraphs. Typically, you can use the same kinds of linking words, but it is helpful to make a distinction. Below we will look at linking between paragraphs. We discuss linking within paragraphs later.

Linking between paragraphs

You need to choose a series of linking words or expressions for each of your topic sentences. The idea here is to give a sense of "flow" or some idea of the logical progression of thought from paragraph to paragraph.

We'll look at a whole range of linking words and expressions further on, but for example, check out the diagram below.

Paragraph development

What you have to do next is write other sentences that support your topic and develop the various subtopics you identified in your outline. As you write, refer back to your outline for the subtopics for each paragraph and develop sentences based on these subtopics. These supporting sentences come after the

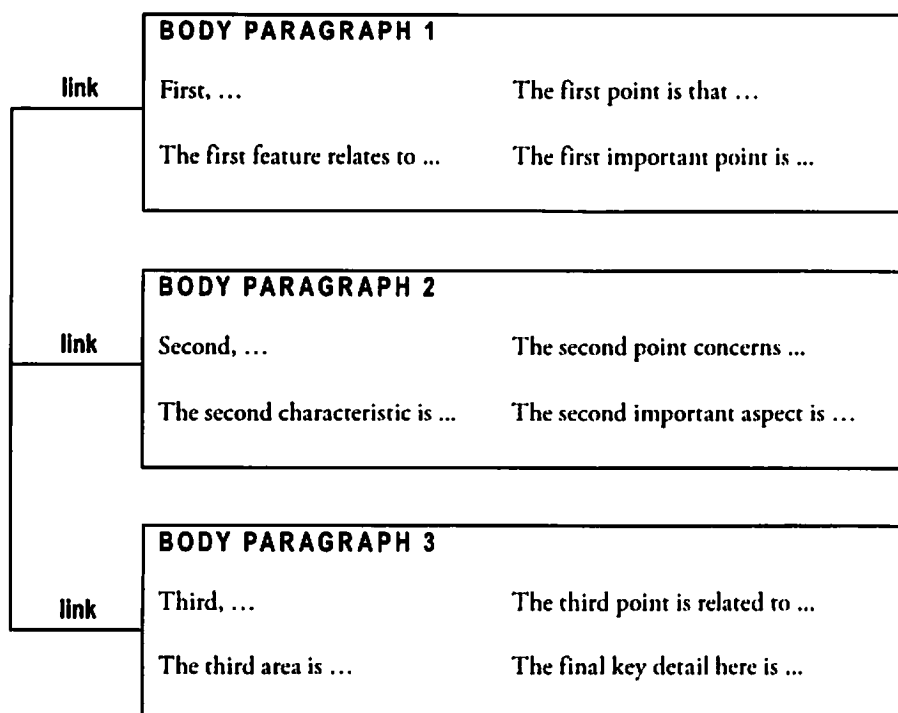
topic sentence. They make up the rest of the paragraph and must develop the main idea of the paragraph. In other words, these sentences explain and expand on the topic sentence. Some of the different ways you can develop paragraphs are to:

1. **Discuss an issue or point:** This means that you “talk about” something. Be careful though to use the language of academic writing. Don’t write as if you are having an actual conversation.
2. **Define something:** This means that you identify the essential characteristics of something. You might want to check a dictionary or encyclopedia for some examples of what it is you’re defining.
3. **Classify things:** This means that you put things into categories, just like you did when you thought of your subtopics for this essay when you were brainstorming.
4. **Describe something:** This means that you have to say what something is like, usually by listing or examining different features.

5. **Investigate cause and effect:** This means that you look at what causes something to happen, and what the results are of some thing happening.
6. **Compare and contrast two or more different things:** This means that you show how two or more things are similar (compare) or different (contrast).
7. **Argue about an issue:** This means that you look at the advantages and disadvantages, pros and cons, or negative and positive effects of something.

More could be said about these different methods of paragraph development. However, keep in mind the point we made earlier that, more often than not, most academics can’t agree on what these words mean. So, if in doubt go to the horse’s mouth. Another point to remember is that these methods of development don’t necessary have to refer only to paragraph development. It is possible to develop an entire essay based around one particular kind of paragraph development.

Discuss ... means that you “talk about” something. Be careful though to use the language of academic writing. Don’t write as if you are having an actual conversation.



... keep in mind the point we made earlier that, more often than not, most academics can't agree on what these words mean. So, if in doubt go to the horse's mouth.

Supporting details

When it comes to supporting what you say, there are two important ways to highlight, further examine, or reinforce the points you might be developing in a particular paragraph. These are using summaries and quotations. Both of these methods of support require you to reference the source of your material in the text of your essay. There is much that could be said about referencing too. At this point though, you should consult your tutor for guidance as most departments and academic disciplines favour different methods.

Linking words and expressions

If you want to write a good paragraph then you need to think through each idea so that you develop it in a way that is logical and clear. You must also guide the reader through your writing by using words and expressions that link ideas together. This means making the sentences in your paragraph fit together. There are many different words and expression you can use to do this.

Check out the chart on the next couple of pages for some examples.

Linking within paragraphs

Just as it is important to link between paragraphs you also need to link within paragraphs. This means linking from sentence to sentence using appropriate words and expressions from the list above.

Don't just use any linking expression though. Think about how appropriate each one is. Also, you don't need one for every sentence. Just use enough to make your sentences "stick" together. Remember to use different expressions too. Don't use the same ones over and over again

Paragraph writing - Putting it all together

Here is a summary of the steps to follow when writing paragraphs for the body of your essay.

1. Refer to your outline for your subtopics and use these to write clear topic sentences with controlling ideas for each;
2. Choose an appropriate linking expression to use in the topic sentences to link each paragraph with the others. Identify the kind of structure you want to use when developing the rest of each paragraph, for example, describing, defining, etc;
3. Write three or four sentences for each paragraph using the additional points that you wrote down in your outline under each of the paragraph subtopics;
4. Check that these sentences line up with the controlling idea in each topic sentence and make changes where necessary;
5. Add any necessary supporting quotations, summaries, or additional information with the appropriate references in the text;
6. Choose appropriate linking words and expressions to link between sentences in each paragraph;

Conclusion

Even though this may seem self-evident, the conclusion is the place where you show the reader that you have completed the essay. Plenty of good essays don't receive the grades they deserve because they contain poorly written or incomplete conclusions.

Writing a good conclusion is easier if you divide this stage into two steps.

1. Summarise your essay. Make sure you restate your purpose for writing and review all your topics.
2. Finish with some kind of suggestion, recommendation, or other comment that

takes you beyond the text of the essay, but doesn't really introduce new material.

The final part of the model is presented below.

Essay summary

If your outline is clear and has good details you should be able to use it in writing a brief summary of your essay's main points. Start with an appropriate linking word or expression – use one that's expressly for the purpose of summarising or concluding, for example, "To sum up". Refer back to the word lists in the section on paragraph writing. Remember to use words and expressions for linking, hedging, and summarizing in other places in your conclusion where appropriate.

Restate purpose

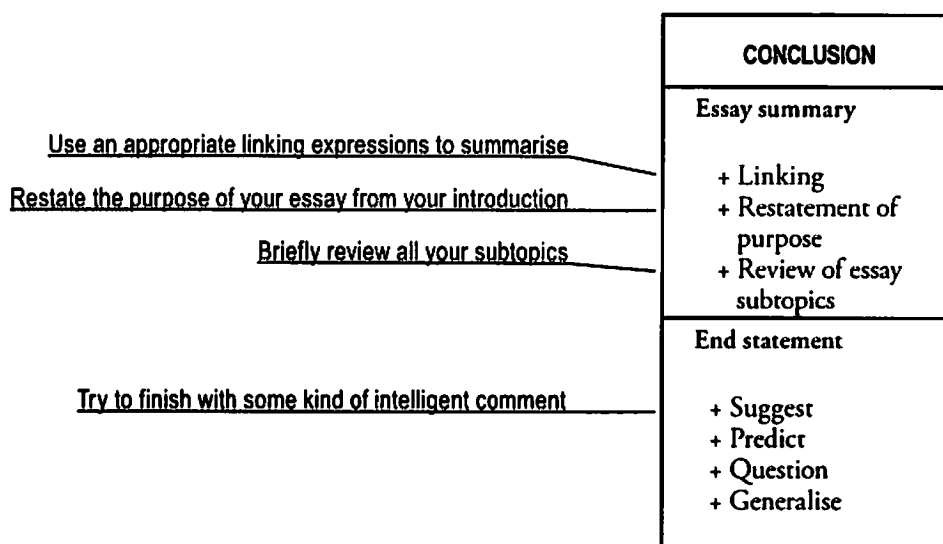
Write a sentence that clearly restates what the main purpose of the essay was. Refer back to your outline. When you wrote your intro-

duction you should have written a sentence that clearly said what the purpose of the essay was. Now at the end of your essay you need to do something similar. Here though, you must make sure the main verb is in the past tense. Also, you must make sure you don't repeat what you wrote in the introduction word for word.

See the chart below for a list of expressions to use.

You do not have to use one of these kinds of expressions. An alternative is just to state the purpose without one of expressions listed above. The advantage of using these expressions though, is that it makes it very clear to your reader – probably your lecturer – that you understand the topic and you know what you are doing in your essay.

Even though this may seem self-evident, the conclusion is the place where you show the reader that you have completed the essay. Plenty of good essays don't receive the grades they deserve because they contain poorly written or incomplete conclusions.



Linking words and expressions			
Adding, reinforcing, strengthening			
Also	Besides	Furthermore	In addition
Moreover	Another	Further to that	too
Equating, showing similarity			
In the same way	like	as	Likewise
Similarly	Also	To compare	In comparison
Summarising, concluding, generalising			
In conclusion	In summary	To conclude	To sum up
In short	In brief	On the whole	Finally
Thus	In general	To generalise	
Referring, giving examples, explaining			
For example	For instance	In particular	To illustrate
To demonstrate such as	As an illustration particularly	that is to say namely	that is
Showing results, expressing consequences			
As a result	Consequently	Hence	So
Therefore	Thus	As a consequence	
Inferring, deducing			
In other words	In that case	If	Then
Otherwise			
Giving alternatives, referring to other possibilities			
Another possibility	Alternatively	On the other hand	Then again
Restating, expressing what you said in another way			
In other words	Rather	To put it simply	Put another way
Comparing, contrasting, showing similarities and differences			
Conversely	In comparison	In contrast	Instead
On the contrary	Whereas	While	Whilst
On the one hand	On the other hand	The key difference	To compare
Conceding, showing other ways of considering something			
After all	All the same	Although	Even though
Even if	However	In spite of	despite this/that
Nevertheless	Yet	Nonetheless	Still

Linking words and expressions			
Words for speculating, hedging, introducing possibility			
often	usual(ly)	tentative(ly)	seeming(ly)
apparent(ly)	virtual(ly)	supposed(ly)	possible
possibly	perhaps	almost	attempt
seek	hope	tend	suggest
try	seem	indicate	sort of
somewhat	should	can	might
would	may	could	Presumably
hypothetically	maybe		
Expressions for speculating, hedging, introducing possibility			
can result in	can be attributed to	appear(s) to	appear(s) that
be inclined to	it is possible	more likely	less likely
is uncertain	is expected	may (even/not) be	might be
could possibly	to a certain extent	this/it seems	in some respects
to some extent	in some ways	if possible	supposing that
it could be said that	it could be the case	it could be argued	seems to indicate
under some circumstances			
Words to use carefully			
indeed	certainly	clearly	central
cardinal	basic	primary	essential
fundamental	principal		
Words and expressions to avoid			
always	undoubtedly	the fact is	absolute
the rule is	everyone knows	everyone agrees	it is true
it is obvious that	it is certain that	it is indisputable that	
it is a known conclusion that		it is generally agreed	
it is common knowledge that			

Most of the time this is simply a game where you pretend that what you've written has some relevance to the real world (that's the one outside of academia).

End statement

The main purpose of an end statement is to round off what you've discussed in the body of your essay with a few final comments. Often essay writers attempt to show the reader – usually only the person marking the essay – that the information in the essay may be applied to their own or other people's lives. Another goal might be to help others gain a new perspective on the topic, which they may not have held before reading the conclusion.

Most of the time this is simply a game where you pretend that what you've written has some relevance to the real world (that's the one outside of academia). Occasionally, it will. However, if it doesn't, don't forget the golden rule: Always give a monkey a banana. The chance of you – a mere undergraduate – being able to tell one of your lecturers or teachers anything new or startling is rather slim. Therefore, do not torture yourself spending too much time struggling to come up with something that is highly original or of great philosophical complexity. It's possible that you may already know all this, but new players often don't. Such cynicism is usually only bred after a few years in the system.

Playing the game of essay writing for monkeys with degrees is part of the giant sausage factory of the University – shaping you through your writing into conformity with the accepted paradigms of the academic world. Of course, it can also train you to think more clearly and critically should you wish to challenge these same paradigms at some stage.

In any case, to play the game well you must at least give the appearance of sincerity. So to increase your chances of convincing the person marking your work that you are sincere in your efforts and you are fulfilling the criteria required for completing an academic essay at tertiary level, we recommend one of the following strategies which should show your professors that you have correctly understood the information in your essay and can offer what seems to be an intelligent comment on it.

1. Strategy 1: Challenge the reader. Sometimes a challenge may be a strong and direct call for some kind of action, and at other times weaker and more indirect. You may simply recommend something to the reader or make a suggestion.
2. Strategy 2: Attempt to predict the future. Sometimes this may be negative – perhaps a warning –, or positive, or perhaps you

Expressions for restating your essay's purpose	
This essay dealt with ...	In this essay I dealt with ...
This assignment examined ...	In this assignment I examined ...
This essay analysed ...	In this essay I analysed ...
This essay considered ...	In this essay I considered ...
This paper described ...	Below I described ...
The purpose of this essay was to ...	My purpose in this essay was to ...
Four major features of ... were considered in this essay.	In this essay I considered the four major features of ...
This essay first described ... and then went on to argue that ...	My essay first described ... and then went on to argue that ...

may leave it to the reader to decide the value of your prediction.

3. **Strategy 3: Posing questions.** There is a danger in posing unanswered questions at the end, especially if you were trying to answer them in your essay. However, if the discussion leads naturally to questions or points to the need for further research or investigation, then posing questions may be appropriate.
4. **Strategy 4: Generalise.** Often, an essay will focus on very specific points or situations. In the end statement, you may wish to now apply what you have discussed to a more general situation.

And finally, here's a list of things to avoid in your concluding paragraph:

1. Don't introduce new ideas or sub topics;
2. Don't focus on a minor point in the essay;
3. Don't apologise for your view by saying wimpy things like "I may not be an expert on this ..." or "This is just my opinion..."
4. Don't attempt to make up for an incomplete structure. For example, if your introduction states that will discuss four subtopics and then only discuss two, do not try to cover these points in a concluding paragraph. Either go back and rewrite your introduction, limiting your essay at the beginning to subtopics you can realistically cover, or do some more work and write the missing paragraphs.

Playing the game of essay writing for monkeys with degrees is part of the giant sausage factory of the University – shaping you through your writing into conformity with the accepted paradigms of the academic world.

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