

Essay writing

Planning and writing an essay or composition

Read the question or essay title carefully to make sure you understand exactly what is required.

BRAINSTORMING: Quickly note down some ideas on the topic as you think of them. Then write down some vocabulary that you know you will need to write about this subject.

PLANNING: If you are asked to **discuss a topic** or **give your opinion** it is important to organize your thoughts and present your arguments clearly in paragraphs, and to work out the structure of your essay before you start to write.

ESSAY PLAN

paragraph 1

introduce the topic

paragraph 2

give points of view and information, in support of the argument, with reasons

paragraph 3

give contrasting views

paragraph 4

conclude (give your own opinion or interpretation of the facts)

Using links and markers

Below are some useful words and phrases to help guide your reader through the essay. The examples given are extracts to show how the words and phrases can be used. You should not start every sentence with one of these words or phrases.

Introducing a point:

- Nowadays many children spend their time watching TV rather than being active.
- There are two main reasons for this, **firstly**...

Describing consequences:

- As a result, levels of fitness are declining.
- Consequently, childhood obesity is becoming increasingly widespread.

Giving more information:

- In addition, increasing amounts of fast food are being consumed.
- Furthermore/Moreover, many children spend a great deal of time on the Internet.
- Finally/Lastly, parents are less likely to join their children in sporting activities.

Introducing a contrasting point:

- However, some schools are trying to encourage healthier eating.
- In contrast, other countries have introduced compulsory sports lessons.
- On the other hand, certain sports are experiencing increased popularity.
- There was some resistance to the schemes. Nevertheless the organizers persevered and have had some success.
- While/Whereas the government wants to tackle the issue, advertisers continue to target young children.

Concluding:

- In conclusion / To sum up, it is the responsibility, not of the government, but of individuals to change their lifestyle.

Other types of writing

You may be asked to write a **report**, **review**, **leaflet** or **article**. Consider the following:

- the target reader (who you are writing for)
- the purpose of your writing (to persuade, report, inform, entertain, etc.)
- whether a formal or informal register is necessary
- if titles and subheadings are appropriate

Reports and leaflets need titles and subheadings and are usually written in formal language. Bullet points may be included.

Articles and reviews can be informal in tone, depending on the subject and readership.

REPORT PLAN

paragraph 1

explain the aims and objectives of the report

paragraph 2

describe the method of finding information

paragraph 3

summarize the results of the findings (referring to diagrams/graphs/ tables if appropriate)

paragraph 4

make recommendations and conclude

Useful language for reports:

These are some phrases to use in the paragraphs outlined above:

paragraph 1

- The aim of this report is to...
- The objective of our survey was to...

Paragraph 2

- A sample of... was interviewed.
- ... groups of people were targeted.
- The research was conducted using a questionnaire.

paragraph 3

- The majority thought/said that...
- It seems that...
- It would appear that...
- The graph/table shows that...
- From the data/diagram it can be seen that...

paragraph 4

- A possible improvement would be...
- Changes could be made...
- Some recommendations are...
- One solution is...
- Overall/In future...

Layout

Neat handwriting and clear paragraphs make your work easier to read.

- do write the title of your essay at the top of the page
- don't write everything in capital letters
- don't start a new line for each new sentence
- do leave a line between paragraphs
- do cross out any mistakes neatly (if you have planned your work well you will make fewer errors)
- do avoid wordbreaks (= breaking a word with a hyphen when it starts on one line and finishes on the next) if at all possible.

Quoting and writing a bibliography

You may be expected to include a **bibliography** (= an alphabetical list of all the books, magazines, websites, etc. that you have consulted) at the end of your essay.

When you quote from any published source in your writing you must acknowledge the source of the quotation. You should usually include the following information:

- name of author or editor
- title (in *italics* or underlined)
- place of publication
- publisher
- date of publication
- page number

There are various ways of presenting the information so you should check exactly what style is expected with your teacher or tutor.

Above all it is important to be consistent in style. Two common ways of acknowledging quotations are shown below.

When you quote something put a number in superscript next to the quotation. Give details of the source at the bottom of the page in a **footnote**, or at the end of the essay in an **endnote**:

- Patrick Phillips suggests that "some parts of the city have remained largely untouched by the influences of modern life"¹. He goes on to say that "it is quite unlike any city in the world"²...

¹ Patrick Phillips, *A Brief Guide to Rome* (London: Spire Press, 2001), 36.

If your next quote is from the same source you can just write **ibid.** and the page number:

² *ibid.*, 38

You should repeat the information, in a slightly different order, in the bibliography:

- Phillips, Patrick. *A Brief Guide to Rome*. London: Spire Press, 2001.

If there is more than one author start with the last name of the first author but show the other names normally:

- Brown, John, Katherine Jenkins, and Andrew Smith.

If there are more than three authors you can give the first author's name followed by **et al.** which means 'and others':

- Totten, Jane et al.

If there is no author you can give the name of the editor. You should also give the edition number if it not the first edition:

- Wehmeier, S, ed. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

When you quote from a newspaper or magazine include the title of the article. Give the date, volume number and page number:

- Thomas, Elaine. 'A Better Alternative'. *Healing Today* 59/2, 27-35. April 2001.

To acknowledge a website give the whole Web address and the date on which you accessed the site in a section at the end of the bibliography:

- <http://www.univie.ac.at/Anglistik/voice> (accessed 29 October 2004)

Style 2 – called **author-date** and used particularly for writing on science subjects

When you quote something identify the source by giving the author, date and page number:

- Professor Khara reports that "diet has been shown to inhibit the spread of the disease in up to 85% of cases". (Khara, 2003, 36)

At the end of your essay give full details of all the sources:

- Khara, Tanya. 2003. *Prevention and Cure*. New York: Eliot and Turner.