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Writing your essay

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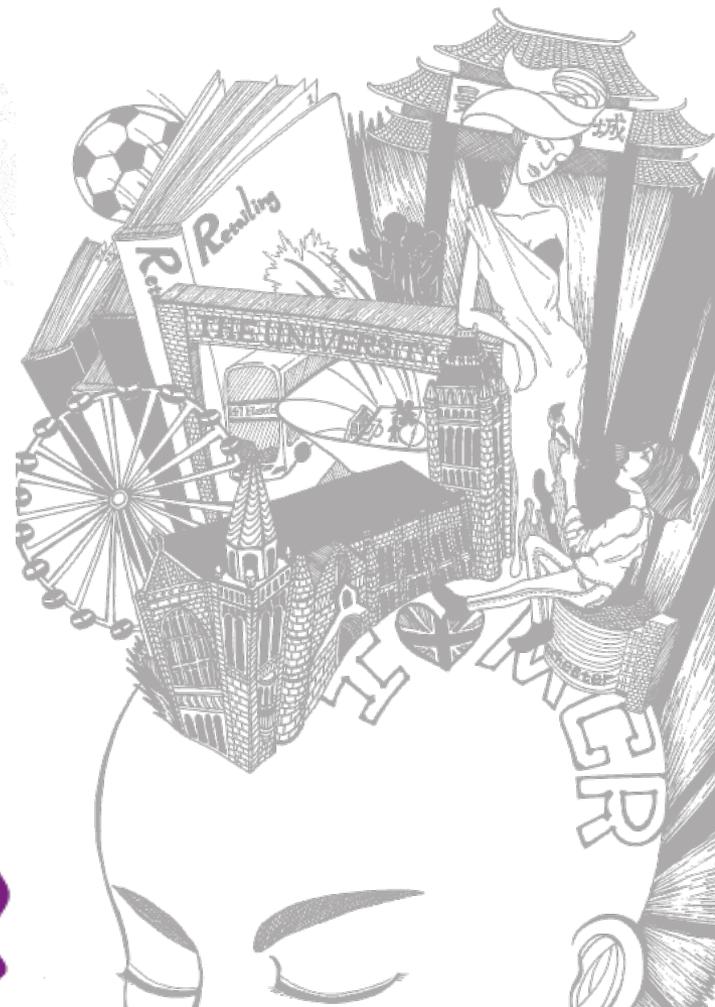


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Introduction

Once you have a clear idea of your argument, you know what you're going to say and you have a coherent plan for your assignment, you are ready to start writing!

You've already done a lot of the hard work in preparing your arguments and structure; now it's time to communicate your ideas to your reader.

This resource explores the purpose and process of writing your essay, highlighting what you ought to include within different sections, and illustrating how you can bridge between your ideas to ensure that your themes echo throughout your work.

1. The purpose of writing

When writing an essay, you are joining in an academic conversation.

Remember that you are writing for your audience. The purpose of your writing is to communicate your ideas to a reader, and every word of your essay must contribute to that purpose.

2. Setting the scene

Your introduction should tell your reader what they should expect from your essay. What is your focus? What are your themes? Where will you take them?

But remember not to reveal everything you're going to say right at the start!

2. Setting the scene: defining your terms

In your introduction, you should be setting the scene for your reader and defining the context you're working in to ensure that you're starting from the same point.

In order to do this, you need to ensure that your reader understands:

- Key terms and vocabulary
- Theories and frameworks
- Key studies or research in the area

Your introduction should define or outline any of these that are relevant to your essay.

2. Setting the scene: themes, ideas and argument

As well as defining terms, your introduction should also lay the ground for what you're going to present to your reader. This involves:

1 Establishing your **THEMES**

Take the time to establish the key points your reader needs to know in order to understand the argument you're going to be presenting. These will be more than just facts: they will be the broad themes that back up your argument.

2 Preparing your **IDEAS**

Your introduction should prepare your reader for the ideas you're going to present in the main body of your work. This does not mean they need to be familiar with your ideas; avoid including anything you're going to repeat later on.

3 Introducing your **ARGUMENT**

End your introduction with your thesis statement; this is your main argument condensed into one sentence. Remember, if you can't present your argument in one sentence, you are not ready to start writing!

Section 2 – Setting the scene: example

Read through this example of a good introduction to an essay with the title "*Contrast the use of social media versus newspaper reporting in at least two recent outbreaks of civil unrest*"

The opening of this introduction specifies which examples are going to be used throughout the essay.

Here we provide some background, and introduce the main themes that will be explored in this essay.

The introduction ends with our thesis statement. This is the primary argument that the rest of this essay will be presenting and supporting.

Introduction

During recent civil unrest, for example the Arab Spring and the recent 2011 riots in the UK, social media and newspaper reporting were used in contrasting ways to cover the event and create the story of what happened. Newspaper reporting, focuses more on in depth reporting and had the time and resources to detail background events and case studies about the civil unrest. Social media, in contrast with newspaper reporting, allows for participants to shape their own stories and make an immediate effect on a situation; however what it gains in speed it lost in depth and continuing coverage of the events. (Ghannam 2011). While both social media and newspaper reporting were used to great extent in these two instances of civil unrest, social media gives participants the opportunity to take control of the story in new ways, working around official censorship and providing quick on the ground coverage of what was occurring.

3. Paragraphs and sections

Your themes should run throughout each section of your essay; every part needs to contribute to the argument you're presenting, and your sections should link seamlessly from one to the next.

3. Paragraphs and sections: short, relevant & critical

When writing your paragraphs, ensure that you keep them **short**, **relevant** and **critical**.

1 Keep it SHORT

Long paragraphs can lead to your reader losing the thread of your argument. In the words of E.B. White, “enormous blocks of print look formidable to a reader... he can lose his way in them”

Start a new paragraph for each new idea you introduce.

2 Keep it RELEVANT

Throughout the writing process, remember that your job as a writer is to help your reader to understand your ideas.

If something does not aid understanding by contributing to your argument, it doesn't belong in your essay!

3 Keep it CRITICAL

For every section of your essay, you need to ensure that your writing is critical, and that it answers the question.

Keep asking yourself:

- Why am I saying this?
- Have I got enough evidence to support this?
- How does this answer the question?

3. Paragraphs and sections: bridging your ideas

As well as keeping your paragraphs short, relevant and critical, you also need to make sure that your writing flows, with each section linking to the next. Here are three ways you can do this.

1 *MAGNIFYING*

Focusing on a different element of the same source or example.

2 *POLARISING*

Discussing an idea in one paragraph, then moving on to an opposing idea in the next.

3 *SIGNPOSTING*

Referring directly back to an idea presented in a previous section to build upon your argument.

3. Paragraphs and sections: bridging your ideas

1 **MAGNIFYING:** focusing on a different element of the same source or example.

An example of this technique would be ending one paragraph with analysis of subjects of a research study, and beginning the next section discussing the time at which the same study was conducted.

To link these two sections, you might write something like:

“Although the participants in Hanley’s study represent a broad demographic, the data requires further scrutiny due to the time at which the study was conducted.”

2 **POLARISING:** discussing an idea in one paragraph, then moving on to an opposing idea in the next section.

An example of this technique would be moving from a paragraph discussing the idea that artificial intelligence will eventually become self-aware, to presenting the opposing view that it will never be anything more than man-made machinery.

To link these two sections, you might write something like:

“Although evidence is growing to support the complexity and potential for self-awareness in artificial intelligence, many people have and always will argue that it will never move beyond its artificial beginnings.”

3. Paragraphs and sections: bridging your ideas

3 SIGNPOSTING: referring directly back to an idea presented in a previous section to build on your argument.

An example of this technique would be referring back to a previous paragraph on Shakespeare's treatment of women in Hamlet to support your current argument on his treatment of women in all his plays.

To link these two sections, you might write something like:

"As previously discussed, Shakespeare's treatment of women in Hamlet demonstrates his keen sensitivity to their emotional states; this empathy is echoed throughout his other works."

4. Summing up

This final section of your essay is your opportunity to tidy up any loose ends, and to invite your reader to act. It should NOT be a **summary** of everything they have just read.

4. Summing up: what to include

The key thing to remember in the final part of your essay is that it is a conclusion, not a summary. You don't need to repeat everything you've just written!

Here are some things you might include instead:

1 LIMITATIONS

You can allay any potential concerns your reader may have developed while reading your essay by referring specifically to the limitations of your analysis.

2 FURTHER RESEARCH

In referring to your limitations, you can emphasise how it can be fixed by indicating what further research is required.

3 NEXT STEPS

You should end your essay with a call to action! Use your conclusion to push your ideas forward, suggest where they might go next and make your reader want to write back!

4. Summing up: example

Read through this example of a good conclusion.

Here we take the opportunity to provide some final details that support our overarching argument. We continue to answer the question by further highlighting the contrast.

Now we are moving beyond what has been discussed in the essay to discuss the impact of this contrast.

We then push into the future by presenting a hypothesis, still supported by what we have argued, about what may happen next.

Conclusion

Social media has changed the impact of civil unrest by allowing participants to shape their own stories without needing to go through official channels or depend on friendly contacts in major media. In contrast, newspapers are able to spend more time on the official and long term story of the events. However, often these stories now include the moment by moment stories as told via social media, greatly increasing the impact of that medium. In future, our ability to understand events may depend on the opportunity to preserve the fleeting tweets, updates and stories told on platforms designed to be impermanent, with greater analysis and understanding, but not the same level of "new" event reporting, being left to the more standard media outlets.

Section 5 – Checking

Checking your work is a vital stage of the writing process; it is essential that you allow enough time for editing and refining your work.

At this stage, we are not just checking for spelling and grammar errors. As you re-read your work, keep asking yourself our key questions:

- Why am I saying this?
- Have I got enough evidence to support this?
- How does this answer the question?

If you can't answer these questions about a sentence or even a whole section of your work, take it out!

Remember, if it doesn't answer the question or support your argument, it doesn't belong in your essay



Summary

We've looked at what you should include within your introductions and conclusions, and how you can structure your paragraphs to link seamlessly between your ideas.

All of this will ensure that your themes run throughout your work, and that every section supports your argument to help your reader to understand your ideas.

You're not quite finished yet, though!

Now you'll need to proofread your work. This is the final step you need to take to ensure that you are communicating your ideas clearly, and that you're fulfilling the goals of your writing.



Keep in touch!



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Related resources

1. Get a grip: understanding your task
2. What's the big idea: developing and organising your argument
3. Better safe than sorry: proofreading your work

