

WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

An essay is a formal piece of writing which is intended to answer a specific question. Essay writing involves presenting a reasoned argument and a conclusion based on the available evidence.

INTERPRETING THE QUESTION

The student should answer the exact question in the title. Time should be given to analysing the question carefully.

In most essay questions, there will be a **key instruction** (a key word or phrase) and a definite focus.

The key words in General Level essay titles are:

- **Account for:** Give reasons for; explain why something happens
- **Outline:** Give the main characteristics or features of something or describe the main events.
- **Explain:** Make clear why something happens, or why something is the way it is; give reasons or causes
- **Was:** State whether something is true, partially true, or false; if false or partially true, suggest what is true; give reasons

Sometimes questions are double-barrelled, such as 'Outline and explain...' Both parts of the questions should be answered and, unless there is good reason to do otherwise, both parts should be given equal weighting.

The whole line of reasoning through an essay should be anchored to the key instruction. This line of reasoning is called the 'argument'.

READING AND TAKING NOTES

Reading could include: the relevant PACE; an encyclopaedia entry; online sources; a library book.

Reading should be active; pursuing an answer to a question.

Note taking involves reading a text and writing down information which will be useful in answering the question.

DEVELOPING AN ESSAY PLAN

Planning an essay is crucial. A plan provides focus, direction and allows the student to break an essay down into sensible, manageable parts. The guidelines in English PACEs 1094 and 1096 can be used to develop a plan.

English PACE 1094, pages 16 – 43, has instructions on topic sentences and different types of paragraphs.

English PACE 1096, pages 28 – 43, has instructions for organising the paragraphs of a composition (essay) into main topics (also called main points in these notes), sub-topics and supporting points.

English PACEs 1094 and 1096 give all the essential information for organising an essay plan.

English PACE 1097, pages 25 – 38 examines essay outlines in detail. Please note that in PACE 1097, in the small box towards the bottom of page 25, it states: 'There is never only one main topic...' This means that there is never only one main topic in an entire composition or essay. However, there is only one main topic or main points in each paragraph.

Also, on page 25 of English PACE 1097, students are introduced to the distinction between a 'sentence outline' and a 'topic outline'. Here 'topic outline' indicates that the main topics (Murmuring, Plague and Escape) plus sub-topics and supporting points are given in note form. 'Sentence outline' simply indicates that the same topics are outlines in sentence form.

The following optional methods can be used as aids in forming an essay outline:

Colour-coding:

- Identify the main topics/points and allocate a colour to each one
- Mark notes according to colour
- Reorganise notes according to colour

Some sections of notes might have more than one colour it is even possible to end up with a particular paragraph looking like a rainbow! This is fine. It alerts the student to overlapping themes. It helps the student to see how one theme links to another, or to several others. But it is up to the student to unravel and deploy the information in addressing the assignment.

A mind map (or spider graph) is a way to plan an essay outline visually:

- Write the essay title in a box which is drawn in the middle of an A4 sheet of paper.

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- Draw lines from the central box to other boxes which will have the main topics/points or sub-topics written in them.
- Make connecting lines between boxes wherever a connection is identified between two points.
- Write key words or phrases on connecting lines between the spider's body and the main topic/point boxes; or between one main topic/point box and another. Use only key words or simple phrases. Too much information clutters up the mind map.
- Use symbols, pictures, arrows or colour-coding if helpful.

If the mind map looks like a jumbled mess of lines, re-draw it so that the connections can be seen more clearly. Then cross-references and inter-connections should become clear.

The 'best' method is the one which works for a particular student.

Whichever method the student uses, they should have an essay outline made up of main topics or points, which supporting sub-topics or points.

WRITING AN ESSAY

The title of the essay must conform exactly to the title given.

All essays should have an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The introduction always comes first.

INTRODUCTION

An introduction should have a thesis statement and a statement of organisation.

The statement of purpose should announce, briefly and clearly, the core argument which will be developed; and it should be tied to the key instruction in the title. The statement of organisation should, briefly, raise key issues or signpost the main topics, points or themes to be discussed.

The first paragraph should introduce the main point of your essay. Your goal for the introductory paragraph is to clearly and concisely let the reader know what your essay is all about, and exactly what it is you are trying to communicate. Be specific. The point of an introduction is to clearly present a thesis statement. As far as organisation of your first paragraph is concerned, you should start by providing the necessary background information on your topic and then conclude with your thesis statement. The objective to be discussed, demonstrated and/or defended in your essay.

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This is important. Remember that a thesis statement is not merely a repetition of the question, but instead, is a positive and definite statement in which your objective (as the writer of the essay) is clearly stated. Be sure your thesis statement addresses the question directly. The quality of your thesis statement will affect the overall impact of your essay.

Very few students, if any, can approach their topic with a clear concept, fully-formed, prior to beginning. Since introductory paragraphs can often be the most difficult part of the essay, sometimes the best approach is to write a preliminary first paragraph, knowing that you will want to change it later. Often you will find that after you have written the first draft of your essay, you have gained some additional insight into the essay question and this might change your thesis statement.

Unrelated topics or themes should never be included in an introduction, since they will weaken your essay's effectiveness and clarity by distracting the reader's attention from the essay's main purpose.

Remember, the introduction should be finalised only when the rest of the essay has been completed!

MAIN BODY

The main body of the essay should be made up of paragraphs. The simplest kinds of paragraph is a narrative. A narrative basically tells a story: it tells *what* happened. Words like 'outline' and 'describe' indicate that narrative is called for. However, most essays require more than just narrative: they require analysis. A narrative simply tells *what*, but an analytical essay answers the question of *why*.

The body is the main component of your essay. The body must supply ample evidence in support of your thesis. The correct format for presenting your evidence is within body paragraphs, the fundamental units in essay writing. Each paragraph should represent and develop a single distinct idea.

Just as an essay as a whole, needs clear and cohesive organisation, your paragraphs must also be organised around a central theme. This theme is always stated in a topic sentence, which is most often the first sentence in that paragraph. Body paragraph sentences can express different types of information, all of which are potentially beneficial in developing string paragraphs and essays. For example, they can provide reasons for a particular point of view, concrete details, specific examples, facts, dates, statistics, or incidents and anecdotes. Individually or together, these sentence types will function in a paragraph to support and prove the topic sentence and thesis statement.

After you have written enough sentences to support the topic sentence of your paragraph (the number can vary from five to fifteen), you should write a concluding sentence that summarises the main point of the paragraph. This process is then repeated for each paragraph within the body of your essay.

Give an honest answer based upon evidence. An essay is not a platform for stating unjustified opinions.

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Avoid 'potted biographies'. Brief biographical details are acceptable when they are necessary to the analysis.

Answer the title question precisely and directly in the final sentence.

Four Basic Elements Found in Strong Paragraphs:

- **Completeness:** a paragraph must have enough information in it to give the reader a clear picture or a full discussion of its main idea (the topic sentence). A paragraph without details or examples will be vague, unconvincing, and incomplete.
- **Logical and sensible order:** a paragraph's sentences should be in a logical or sensible order so that the reader is not confused or forced to miss the main point of the paragraph.
- **Unity:** all sentences in a good paragraph relate to the topic sentence, when any idea does not relate specifically to the paragraph's main point, the paragraph is not unified.
- **Coherence:** all the paragraph's sentences should be clearly connected to each other.

CONCLUSION

Your final paragraph of your essay is the conclusion. This paragraph should briefly draw together your evidence and reaffirm your thesis statement. If you have a firm understanding of the material, well-selected evidence, and a strong thesis, your conclusion should write itself. In other words, the conclusion summarises what the essay argues or sets out to demonstrate. It provides the culmination of the evidence in a manner which you, as the writer, want to convince the reader to discern, understand, and/or believe about the topic.

Keep in mind that your conclusion is the place where your writing needs to be strongest, clearest, and most concise since it is the part of the essay that a reader will read last and be most remembered.

Do not repeat whole arguments in the conclusion.

More than one draft will be required in order to produce an acceptable essay.

WRITING STYLE

An essay is a formal piece of writing; therefore, the style should be formal rather than informal or 'chatty'.

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Students should avoid using sub-headings; avoid rhetorical questions; and avoid using unnecessarily complex languages.

Students should avoid contractions such as: don't and won't. Write: do not, will not, etc. Always write 'it is' and never 'it's'. Firstly, 'it's' is an unnecessary contraction; and secondly, it is often used incorrectly in place of 'its'.

Students should not use pronouns without being specific about what they refer to. They should never use personal pronouns such as 'I', 'you', 'we' and 'us' in reference to themselves or their readers.

COMPLETING THE ESSAY

The most important thing you can do, once you have written your essay, is to revise it and then revise again. Then revise some more, just in case you missed something. Revision is the process of finishing the essay. A lack of revision is usually self-evident, especially when your essay contains spelling and/or grammar errors. Take pride in your work by making sure there are no obvious errors in it.

Because revising your work takes time, you will need to plan ahead and compose the first draft of your essay before any deadline. Seek help from others in revising your essay. Although it is important that your essay be your own work, there is nothing wrong with asking someone else to read over your first draft and make appropriate suggestions on improving it. Often a second reader can point out mistakes in your essay that you missed simply because you have stared at it too much. Finally, always remember to remain focused. The purpose of writing is to communicate. If any part of your essay, be it a sentence, a paragraph, or a theme, is unclear, then the reader might have a hard time understanding your work. Maintain purpose throughout the entire essay, and do not be ambiguous or too wordy. Avoid 'flowery' writing, which means, do not use complex words or cluttered phrases when plain words will do. Do not use colloquial expressions in formal writing.

Finally, make sure you have answered the question. Re-read the question carefully and then go through the essay. Have all the points been covered? Does it make sense? Have you shown that you understood the question and its implications? Are all the references relevant? Does the essay make sense?

FORMATE

Use a standard font with at least size 12 text. Double space the sentence lines and number the pages. Acknowledge all your sources and always quote a source exactly. Give page numbers for your quotations. A bibliography is required. Please follow the bibliography guide on the following page.

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HOW TO COMPILE A BIBLIOGRAPHY

Writing requires research. This means reading part or all of several books and articles dealing with the subject about which you are writing. Since research writing is based upon what others have written, sources need to be recognised. We do this by listing them in a bibliography. The bibliography is placed at the end of a research essay and needs to take the following format:

Edman, V. Raymond, *Finney Lives On*, Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1971.

Finney, Charles G., *Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography*, Old Tappan, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908.

Hefley, James C., *How Great Christians Met Christ*, Moody Press, 1973.

Reese Ed, *The Life and Ministry of Charles Finney*, Glenwood Fundamental Publishers, 1976.

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Finney- visited 24/11/09

www.gospeltruth.net/life_of_finney.htm- visited 24/11/09

www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/finney/htm – visited 24/11/09

NOTE THE FOLLOWING

- Write the title in italics and remember the capitalisation. If you are completing hand-written work, underline the title.
- If the information runs over the line, then remember to indent the second and any subsequent lines.
- The author's surname comes before his first name.
- Study all punctuation carefully. Always end each entry with a full stop (period).
- Place authors in alphabetical order.
- For Internet sites, please include all the pages and sections of a site and add the date you visited the site.

Plagiarism can be identified by inconsistent language and will be penalised.

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QUOTATIONS AND REFERENCING

Quotations are generally used in three ways: long direct quotations; short direct quotations; and indirect quotations.

Here are some examples of quotations from *The English Reformation*, by A. G. Dickens. Firstly, a long, direct quotation:

Dickens refutes the view that the royal divorce caused the rise of Protestantism in England:

We must avoid the temptation to equate the Henrician Schism with the Protestant Reformation. The divorce-suit did not create either Protestantism or those anti-papal and anti-sacerdotal forces which smoothed its path.

Dickens (1967, p154)

Short, direct quotations can be incorporated into the essay writer's own sentence. They are generally to be preferred to long quotations. They make the writer think more precisely. This is a short, direct quotation:

Dickens (1967, p154) has argued that Henry's "... divorce suit did not create...Protestantism". It was Protestantism that presented him with an opportunity for his desired divorce.

Indirect quotations are summaries of an author's arguments in the student's own words. Here is an indirect quotation:

Dickens (1967, p154) has shown that anti-Roman ideas paved the way for the rise of Protestantism in England long before Henry thought about a divorce.

A bibliography of all sources used should be presented at the end of the essay in alphabetical order of authors.

Dickens, A. G. *The English Reformation*. London: Fontana, 1967.

Jones, C. T. The Royal Divorce and the English Reformation. *Studies in Reformation History*, 22, pp. 28-42, 1973.

Wright, T. O. *Fantastic facts and frivolous fancies: the Tudors*. At <http://www.historyforfree.org.uk/tudors/reformation> [Visited 15 October 2005]

Note that the title of the book or journal is given in italics. All other references are in normal type.
(The Jones and Wright titles are made up)

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WORD COUNT

The essay word count can be within 10% either side of the required amount. A plan for wording:

In 1000 words:

- Introduction paragraph (1) up to 100 words
- Body paragraphs (2 – 8) up to 800 words (total)
- Summary paragraph up to 100 words

In 1500 words:

- Introduction paragraph (1) up to 100 words
- Body paragraphs (2 – 8) up to 1300 words (total)
- Summary paragraph up to 100 words

The word count does not include the bibliography. Write in essay form and not in note form with subtitles and headings. Aim to write about the title of the essay. Do not write about material surrounding the subject e.g. 'How did Martin Luther become disillusioned with the Roman Church' does not require a detailed life study of Martin Luther.

GRAMMAR FOR HISTORY ESSAYS

Here are some common grammatical problems that arise in history essays, listed with the correction mark for each, and the solution to the problem.

Mixed verb tenses ('tense'):

'George Fox presented a positive view of the French because he wants to protect himself from recrimination'. (Put 'wants' in the same tense as 'presented' – 'wanted'.)

Passive voice ('passive'):

'The Aztecs were destroyed in droves, and finally defeated'. (Identify the proper subject of this sentence and re-work, as in 'The Spanish destroyed the Aztecs and droves, and finally defeated them'.)

Run-on sentence ('run-on'):

'Coffee contains caffeine furthermore, chocolate, tea, and cola also contain significant amounts of caffeine'. (Add a semi-colon after 'caffeine' to properly conjoin two independent clauses.)

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Comma splice ('splice'):

'Many mill-owners thought workers lazy, as a result they paid their employees poorly'. (Replace comma after 'lazy' with a semi-colon to properly conjoin two independent clauses.)

Sentence fragment ('frag'):

'The rotten borough of Old Sarum, in the 1832 Reform Bill, caught in the public imagination'.. (The sentence needs a verb for its subject, Old Sarum.)

Faulty pronoun reference ('ref'):

'The Catholic hated the Anabaptist because of their religious beliefs'. (The referent for 'their' (Anabaptist) is singular; change 'their' to 'his'.)

Subject-verb agreement ('s-v'):

'The army required each one of the soldiers to carry their own entrenching tool'. ('Their' is plural, yet refers to the singular 'one', not 'soldiers'. 'The army required each soldier to carry his own entrenching tool'.)

Faulty predication ('pred'):

The belief in predestination cannot conceive of man having a free will'. ('Conceiving' is a verb that 'belief' is incapable of carrying out. Identify proper subject for the verb: 'People who believe in predestination cannot conceive. . . .')

Misplaced modifier ('mod'):

'The slaves burned the farmhouse, furious at their masters'. (The participial phrase 'furious at their masters' cannot modify 'farmhouse'; it must be placed immediately after 'slaves'.)

Dangling modifier ('mod'):

'Arriving by boat in Calais, the weather was brutal'. (The weather cannot arrive by boat in Calais; identify the proper subject for the first clause, as in 'Arriving by boat in Calais, the English found the weather brutal'.)

Faulty parallel structure ('parallel'):

'Ways of preventing workers from voting included the Combinations Act and holding public polls'. (A noun, 'Combination Act' is listed in series with a verb, 'holding'. Re-work so both are the same, as in ". . . included the Combinations Act and public polls'.)

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Colloquial (colloq’):

‘Some critics try to sit on the fence between standard and revisionist interpretations of history’. (Substitute non-colloquial phrase for ‘sit on the fence’, as in ‘Some critics endorse elements of both standard and revisions interpretations of history’.)

Word choice (‘w.c.’):

‘One slave tells of how he was able to get a job after the war and earn enough money to travel to Jamaica to find his long-separated mother’. (His mother had probably remained in once piece; substitute ‘lost’ for ‘separated’.)

Other Corrections:

Source? What is your source for saying this? Add a citation telling your readers where this came from.

Evidence? What is the evidence that supports this argument? You need to incorporate primary or secondary source evidence.

ASSISTING STUDENTS

A Supervisor must use discretion over how much help to give a student.

The supervisor could assist a student in tracking down sources. Then, at the ‘planning’ stage, before the first draft has been started, a supervisor could legitimately ask leading questions, including questions about the subject matter, which prompt the student to think.

When commenting upon a draft essay a supervisor course legitimately remind a student to think about aspects of the essay in relations to the marking guidelines; but the supervisor must not discuss the subject matter of the essay at all.

A supervisor could instruct a student to revise an unsatisfactory conclusion, but should not make any suggestions at all about the content of a conclusion.

It would be advisable for a student to attempt one or two trial essays prior to competing an essay for submission. Substantial assistance could be given to a student with planning and writing trial essays.

Pointers for checking the first draft:

- Are there any glaring errors?
- Has the question been answered?

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- Is it balanced and fair?
- Are the ideas consistent with a biblical worldview?
- Have the arguments been supported?
- Are there spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes?
- Is it interesting or boring?
- Can the line or argument be traced e.g. does it follow through logically or is it muddled?
- Has the outline been followed?
- Is it detailed and thorough or too general?
- Does it start ok but tail away at the end or is it fine throughout and finish with a weak final sentence?

REMEMBER

Essay writing arises naturally with:

- Stimulus: an essay title, a discussion, a newspaper article, an exciting event, a challenging book, a passage of scripture.
- Practice: ask for an extended piece of writing regularly – 1 per month/per term; start with 500 words; gradually increase to 800 words
- Critiquing: read it through, noticing technical flaws, where it has wandered from the point, where it does not make sense. Point these out in a general tactful way.
- Revising: give opportunity for a second or even third draft.
- Grading: give feedback – a grade and constructive comments.

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A GUIDE TO GRADING

The Excellent Essay:

Thesis: Easily identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear.

Structure: Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Primary source information used to buttress every point with at least one example. Examples support mini-thesis and fit within paragraph. Excellent integration of quoted material into sentences.

Analysis: Author clearly relates evidence to mini-thesis; analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think of the material.

Logic and argumentation: All ideas in the paper flow logically; the argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes novel connections to outside material (from sources other than the PACE) which illuminate the thesis.

Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction excellent; correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run-on sentences or comma splices.

The Good Essay:

Thesis: Promising, but may be slightly unclear, or lacking in insight or originality.

Structure: Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Examples used to support most points. Some evidence does not support point, or may appear where inappropriate. Quotes well integrated into sentences.

Analysis: Evidence often related to mini-thesis, though links perhaps not very clear.

Logic and argumentation: Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Occasional insightful connections to outside material made.

Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction strong despite occasional lapses; punctuation and citation style often used correctly. Some (minor) spelling errors; may have one run-on sentence, sentence fragment, or comma splice

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The Average Essay:

Thesis: May be unclear (contain many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new; provides little around which to structure the paper.

Structure: Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Examples used to support some points. Points often lack supporting evidence, or evidence used where inappropriate (often because there may be no clear point). Quotes may be poorly integrated into sentences.

Analysis: Quotes appear often without analysis relating them to mini-thesis (or there is a weak mini-thesis to support), or analysis offers nothing beyond the quote.

Logic and argumentation: Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections. May contain logical contradictions.

Mechanics: Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction (usually not major). Errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have several run-on sentences or comma splices.

The Poor Essay

Thesis: Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point.

Structure: Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent. Transitions confusing and unclear. Few topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence seems to support no statement. Quotes not integrated into sentences; 'dropped in' in improper manner.

Analysis: Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to argument; may be no identifiable argument, or no evidence to relate it to.

Logic and argumentation: Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp possible alternative views. Many logical contradictions, or simply too incoherent to determine.

Mechanics: Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices.