

Academic Essay Writing: Short Guide

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An academic essay involves collecting and ordering relevant information, organising ideas and arguments, presenting your work so that others can understand your ideas and arguments.

I. Structure of an essay

You need to present a clear argument in your essay and organize your ideas in a structured way to present your topic clearly. The structure is simple.

- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Body of the essay
 - Chapters
- Conclusions
- Bibliography

Table of contents

Contents include the titles of the chapters and sub-chapters of the essay. Titles should be short and clear, and they should not have differences with the titles found in the body of the essay.

Introduction

Around 10% of the word count.

In introduction is where you introduce your topic and the aspect of the topic you are focusing on. By the end of the introduction your reader should be able to predict what kind of points you are going to make.

In the introduction you should include the topic you have chosen in general. Next, you will demonstrate the specific aspect of the topic you decided to write about in order to limit the scope of the essay. Finally, in your introduction you give an outline of the points you will make. The outline must follow the order of the points as they appear in the body of the essay.

Example: Climate change is a pressing environmental concern for humanity in the twenty-first century. In recent decades, climate change has been widely debated in science, politics and in the mass media. However, climate science is a complex field that is often simplified by the media in order to communicate to a wide audience. For this reason, the topic of global

warming is often used by the media as 'short-hand' for the broader issue of climate change. This essay will argue that while global warming is a significant feature of climate change in modern times, it is not the only factor. This essay will give a brief outline of climate change through history and show the ways in which the current debate is represented in various media. This will show that, in an age of increasingly visual media, global warming has become the key focal point of an urgent environmental issue.

Body of the essay

Around 80% of the word count.

In the body of the essay, you present each idea and point in its own chapter. Group similar ideas together.

Think of chapters as mini-essays. Start with an introduction to the main topic of the chapter; explain that point further; summarise the point and demonstrate how it links to your overall argument.

Every chapter should begin with a paragraph that signals the reader to the point you are making in that chapter. After the first paragraph you explain your point in more detail and you present arguments to support your point.

In longer essays it is better for paragraphs to be grouped into themes to give your arguments a bit more organisation. Paragraphs should be based in a logical and consistent ways and linked. Paragraphs should link to the next using transition words or phrases such as 'furthermore', 'consequently' etc.

Example of a paragraph in the body: The terms 'global warming' and 'climate change' have been conflated in recent times due to a new urgency around environmental issues. This year, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change defined climate change more narrowly than previous definitions as, 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods' (2011). This recent definition emphasises more clearly than ever before the impacts of human activity on climate change. In addition, this definition points to atmospheric changes which positions change may be a strategy to bypass the arguments of 'climate sceptics' who attempt to play down impacts of human civilisation on the environment. Thus, this most recent definition of climate change, which highlights the largely man-made problem of global warming, suggests a desire to motivate action on environmental issues.

Conclusion

Around 10% of the word count.

Once you have analysed each point in its own chapter, you conclude your essay by summarizing the points you have made. New information should not be introduced in conclusion. In your conclusion you make a final summary of what you have said. In addition, in conclusion you could make recommendations if applicable.

Until the end of the conclusion, it should be clear that it is the end of your arguments.

Example: Climate change is not simply about global warming, but it is, in the twenty-first century, central to the debate. While global warming and climate change are not interchangeable terms, this essay has argued that their recent conflation in the mass media is not a mistake but an attempt to transform an abstract environmental issue into a resonant concern for individuals worldwide. The representational strategies used by the media to discuss global warming have produced powerful visual metaphors that dominate the climate change debate. Impacts of global warming such as the melting of ice caps create striking images that seem more substantial and understandable than other less tangible, but equally significant changes such as increasing ocean acidity. The use of these kinds of images in news and other media hark back to biblical and mythical narratives of apocalypse to create a moral component to the climate change debate. Global warming is now the key issue in the discussion around climate change and, as politicians and scientists argue, it is a problem that we can solve. The influence of the mass media points to its power over the future directions of this ongoing and urgent environmental debate.

Bibliography

In bibliography, you provide a list of the references that includes all the sources you have referred to. Bibliography is divided into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include statistics, interviews, cases, treaties. Secondary sources include books, journals, websites.

The bibliography list should be organized in alphabetical order and formatted according to the reference style that you have used.

II. Academic writing

- **Write in a formal style.** Avoid clichés and language that we use as we speak. Prefer formal words e.g., ‘obtain’ is more appropriate than ‘get’.
- **Use academic caution.** Choose words that are less forceful such as ‘tends’, ‘could’, ‘may’.
- **Write impersonal.** Academic writing must be objective. Do not use ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘me’. E.g., instead of writing ‘I argue that’, prefer the phrase ‘It can be argued that’.

- **Be simple and clear:** Use shorter sentences that are not too complicated. Avoid long sentences.
- **Back up your points with evidence.** Use evidence from reliable sources (articles, books, reports etc.).
- **Connect paragraphs so they are logical.** Transitional words and phrases are essential tools for connecting ideas (further, in addition, besides, similarly, indeed, in fact, in particular, for instance, in other words, likewise, in contrast, notwithstanding, consequently, therefore, hence, in brief, in short etc.).
- **Be objective.** Avoid words and phrases that are overly emotive.
- **Follow the word limit:** Do not exceed the word limit of the essay. It is normally acceptable to be 10% above or below this word limit.

III. Schedule your essay

Stages of writing:

- Thinking about the topic.
- Gathering information and ideas.
- Organising your ideas.
- Write a first draft.
- Review your draft.
- Produce a final draft.

Possible steps:

- **Analyse the question and define key terms** based on your topic: be sure that you understand the question. Key verbs and key ideas give you direction in thinking about how to approach the essay title.
You can organise your main points as bullet points or as a diagram. Write down as many points as you can.
- **Establish a point of view:** identify the focus and the particular aspect of a topic.
- **Research the topic** by using books, journals and other credible sources for support and evidence. It is important and helpful to organise the material and to divide according to the thematic units of the essay.

- **Take notes** from your reading. Only take notes on material you might use. Use your own words rather than copying out what you read.
- **Write an essay plan where you organize your ideas in chapters:** Working out what to include, what to leave out and how to organise your material. You respond to the topic. The essay plan helps you answer the question of your subject.
Decide on which points you will discuss and in which order.
- **Write a first draft** that includes introduction, body and conclusion.
- **Edit and redraft** your essay.
- **Complete your bibliography.**

Tips for effectiveness: start writing early, begin by writing bullet points, keep the topic in your mind, write the introduction and conclusion after the body, use an academic phrasebank database (<https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>).

IV. Document layout

- Cover sheet: includes the name of the student, course, title.
- The essay must contain chapters and sub-chapters.
- Margins: between 2 cm and 2,54 cm.
- Line spacing: either 1,5 or double-line.
- Alignment: fully justified.
- Font: Calibri, times new roman, arial.
- Font size: 11 or 12 point.
- Numbered pages.

V. References

Through references you acknowledge the contribution and work of others in your writing by citing the sources. All academic essays must contain references. Referencing guards against plagiarism (copying someone else's ideas and presenting them as your own).

Remember to list all the sources that you have used in the essay in the Bibliography list at the final page.

References can be in-text or **footnotes**. In text citations (Goward 2004: 35). Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the page.

How to insert footnotes in word: Click where you want to reference to the footnote > on the references tab, select insert footnote > enter what you want in the footnote.

Poor academic quality: **Do not quote too much** – use your own words and use reference- 10% of the paper quotes

Self-plagiarism – with new documentation

How to avoid plagiarism:

- When you use a direct quotation, you must use quotation marks.
- If you summarise another writer's views, you must cite the source.
- If you paraphrase someone else's thought, you must document the source.

Citation styles

The most common citation styles are MLA, APA, Chicago, Harvard, OSCOLA.

APA style examples

Journal article

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (Year). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*, volume number (issue number), pages. DOI or URL

Example:

Flaxman, P. E., & Bond, F. W. (2010). Worksite stress management training: Moderated effects and clinical significance. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 15(4), 347–358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020522>

Book

Author, A. A. (Year). *Title of work* (edition, volume). Publisher. URL

Example:

Gaberson, K., Oermann, M., & Shellenbarger, T. (2015). *Clinical teaching strategies in nursing* (4th ed.). Springer Publishing Company.

Chapter in an edited book

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year of publication). Title of chapter. In A. Editor & B. Editor (Eds.), *Title of book* (edition, pages of chapter). Publisher. DOI

Example:

Ingram, R. E. (2004). Childhood depression. In *Encyclopedia of human emotion* (vol. 4, pp.113- 122). Academic Press.

Website

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year, Month day). *Title of page/article*. Title of site. URL

