

Writing Academic Essays

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses ideas and teaching tips on academic essay writing based on classroom practice. Often, students pay more attention to the content and less to the structure, including introduction, thesis statement, paragraphing, paraphrasing, mechanics of language, conclusion, and referencing. Students describe, rather than build, a sustained argument with critical analysis. An academic essay is sustained writing that answers a question, introduces a thesis, then expands it with reasoned arguments. The thesis is supported point-by-point with evidence from academic texts and credible sources. A salient pedagogic approach in developing these skills generates better academic essays.

Keywords: Academic essays; essay writing; teaching tips for writing.

Introduction

Writing academic essays is a challenge for students and teachers. Models such as PEAL (Point, Explanation, Analysis, and Link) and TEEES (Topic sentence, Explain, Elaborate, Evidence, and So what) provide frameworks for essay writing. Essay writing involves developing dual key skills: the ability to write analytical points within a paragraph, and the ability to structure a sustained argument in response to a specific statement. An essay must focus on and develop a central thesis and each paragraph must have a focus point to support the thesis or argument. An effective essay has a clear introduction, structure and format, mechanics of language, appropriate and adequate referencing, and a clear conclusion reflecting the thesis.

Writing the Introduction

The introduction is the key paragraph that clearly provides the focus and scope of the essay. It includes the topic, the focus points,

the thesis, and a concluding sentence.

What to write in the introduction

- Write a thesis statement (a single sentence), including the topic and the key focus areas, and the scope of the essay.
- Thesis statement – A thesis is a position statement either for or against a topic or problem. Adhere to the thesis statement throughout the essay; do not reverse your stand. The thesis is stated either as the first or the last sentence of the introduction.
- Do not include details on the topic (data) and any in-text citation in the introduction. Do not ask rhetorical question(s) in the introduction, for example, ‘Should medical cannabis be legalised?’ Instead, make a statement ‘It is imperative that medical cannabis be legalised for health and well-being.’ Rhetorical questions are not asked anywhere in an academic essay.

- Use the present tense, for example, ‘This essay examines, argues, analyses, etc.’ Do not write ‘This essay will examine, argue.’ However, the tense can change in the body of the essay depending on the arguments and context.
- Include a concluding sentence in the introduction, which will be expanded in the conclusion of the essay.

A Sample – Introduction

Research and clinical tests have been an essential part of developing safe and effective vaccines and administering vaccines is essential to safeguard health and wellbeing and thus vaccination should be mandatory as it has been proven to minimise the spread of disease. (Thesis) This essay examines vaccination (Topic) with an emphasis on societal fear of vaccines and risks (focus point 1), the research and advancement in vaccines, (focus point 2) and the essential role vaccines play in health of society (focus point 3). Various studies and research have argued that vaccination is an essential medical practice for better health and well-being. (Concluding sentence) (Kibin, 2018).

Structure and Format the Organised Paragraphs

A constructive structure and format provides a consistent flow of ideas, sustained argument, and comprehension. Structure and format include constructive paragraphs with an idea, use of appropriate linking devices (words), indented paragraphs, topic sentences, explaining and elaborating topic sentences with evidence, and providing a concluding statement to each idea in the

paragraph. For effective paragraphs, follow the TEEES model.

Sample paragraph (using the TEEES model)

First, vaccine safety and serious adverse effects are critical concerns for parents. (Topic sentence). Pockets of vaccine objectors, including those who delay vaccination or adopt a selective vaccination schedule, pose a risk to the community by threatening the circles of protection created by herd immunity. (Explain the topic sentence). Danchin and Nolan (2014) argued that for optimal and effective herd immunity, vaccine coverage above 90% is generally required and with the help of vaccination programs, this percentage can be achieved. (Elaborate and give evidence, use in-text citations). Lack of knowledge on developing immunity among the wider demography is a national concern in administering vaccination. Societal knowledge on vaccination needs to be enhanced. (Conclude by summing up the paragraph and introduce the next paragraph). Furthermore, there is still controversy whether parents should immunise their children for benefit to society or withhold vaccines for personal reasons. (mylearningadvisor, 2013)

The format or structure of the essay includes the introduction, body, and conclusion. A general rule is to write a FIVE-paragraph essay. The three focus points stated in the introduction of the essay (paragraph 1) are examined, argued, and analysed in the body of the essay (paragraphs 2-4). The focus points argue the thesis supported with research evidence using in-text citations. The conclusion is the fifth paragraph.

The five-paragraph essay:

Paragraph 1 – **Introduction**

Paragraph 2 (focus point 1)

Paragraph 3 (focus point 2)

Paragraph 4 (focus point 3)

Paragraph 5 – **Conclusion**

Body 1+3+1 = 5 paragraphs

(Taylor, 2012)

Conclusion

The concluding paragraph is a short summary that reflects and confirms the thesis and the key focus points. It has no new ideas or in-text citations, but rather has a few strong objective statements that support the thesis.

A sample concluding paragraph

In summary, research evidence argues for the safe development and the effective use of vaccines. Mandating laws on vaccination manifests progress, welfare, and safety of society. Such laws need to be instituted and implemented, stipulating that vaccines are necessary to help children and adults with medical issues or immunodeficiency disorders. Vaccines save lives. Societal fear of vaccines persists, but development and advancement in vaccines with further education and information protects individuals, families and community, and helps protect future generations by eradicating diseases.

Furthermore, the structure and format includes layout. The layout includes appropriate font and paragraph formatting: font size (12), font theme (Times New Roman), and paragraph (double space,

indented, justified), which gives the whole essay a clean, crisp, polished edge.

Structure and format:

- Indent all paragraphs with one space except the introductory paragraph.
- Use a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph (new idea or extension of the previous idea in a following paragraph). Explain or elaborate the key idea in the body of the paragraph including facts/figures and provide reference (in-text citation). Finish the paragraph with a concluding sentence on the idea expressed. (Write paragraphs using the *TEES* model.)
- Begin a new paragraph with a linking word. The use of linking devices will depend on the context of the new paragraph. For example,

Open the introductory paragraph – *The current debate regarding..... / It is often argued...*

Introduce another viewpoint – *Although... / On the other hand...*

Show cause and effect – *As a consequence*

of... / Influence by...

To show significance of something –
Indicates... / Exemplifies...

Use comparative conjunctions – *However... / Nevertheless... / On the contrary...*

Use of additional conjunctions – *Moreover... / In addition...*

Conjunctions which exemplify and show results – *For example... / Therefore... / As a result...*

Use of temporal conjunctions – *Now... / Previously... / On another occasion...*

Causal conditional conjunctions –
Consequently... / Shaped by...

Ways to sum up or conclude – *It would seem that... / Thus, in summary... / There are many reasons...*

- Paraphrase all information to avoid plagiarism. Include in-text citation for all information, including paraphrased statements, concepts, technical terms, and historical information used verbatim with reference cited.
- Use statistics (data) within paragraphs to support arguments and evidence. Express statistical information in a short summary within the text and avoid details. Provide reference immediately after the statistical evidence.

Mechanics of Language

The mechanics of language ensures effective communication and makes the essay comprehensive and meaningful to the reader.

Correct mechanics of language includes:

- Correct use of spelling and grammar
- Sentence structure
- Paragraph and punctuation
- Using appropriate tone and register
- Linking ideas effectively through coherence and cohesion
- Using literary devices, for example, similes, metaphors, and so on
- Using a combination of simple, compound, and complex sentences
- Using appropriate tense
- Using full words and not contractions, like *cannot* instead of *can't*, *would not* instead of *wouldn't*.

Bibliography / Reference

Writing bibliography and reference is an important skill to develop. Academic essays use ideas from other sources as evidence to support arguments. Other sources help to make a point, add details, provide evidence, and demonstrate informed and scholarly writing. Acknowledge all sources used.

What do bibliography, reference, in-text citations, and annotated bibliography mean? Bibliography is a list of sources read or consulted during the research. It is a comprehensive alphabetical list of all sources browsed during the research of the topic. Reference or reference list includes only those sources closely read, referred to, and used in writing the essay. A referenced source is one used to delineate the information from the writing. In-text citation is a short reference to the author and year in the

paragraphs. An annotated bibliography is a short description for a reference, explaining the accuracy, validity, authenticity, and usefulness. Use a recommended referencing convention like Harvard or APA (American Psychological Association) (TAFE NSW, 2017).

Convention on Bibliography/Reference

- In-text citations need consistency. Use only author's surname and year, for example, (Smyth, 2018). Include the full stop after the citation and not at the end of the sentence. The citation is included as part of the sentence. Use corporate authors if the source has no individual author(s), for example, (The Guardian, 2020).
- Use full name of corporate author for the first time (in citation) and then use abbreviations, for example, British Broadcasting Corporation and then write BBC in subsequent citations of the same. Positioning in-text citations in the paragraph is a useful skill. Insert in-text citations at the beginning, middle or at the end of a paragraph, as appropriate. Varying the position of the in-text citations adds flow, sustains good academic convention, and gives a good scholarly rigour to the writing. Most essays include in-text citations at the end of every paragraph, making the essay monotonous. For example, in-text citations at the *beginning* of the paragraph: *Smith (2017) argued that higher education should be accessible to all.* In the *middle* of the paragraph, *Investment in public education is essential (Smith, 2017) as it enhances literacy.* At the *end* of a paragraph, after writing the

information... (*Smith, 2017*).

- For a direct quote, in-text citation follows immediately after the quote, including the page or paragraph number. For example, Smith (2017, p.6) stated "*investment in education is essential...*" Or Smith (2018, para 12) stated that "*investment in education is essential*". (NOTE: paragraph number is used if the publication has no page number, especially in an on-line publication).
- All references used need consistency following the required convention; references should be alphabetical.
- Use diverse sources to write the essay, rather than one or two sources from the bibliography. Use good academic, researched, and reputable published sources.
- For annotated references, comment on currency (when published, updated), relevance (usefulness), authenticity (who wrote it, correctness, truthfulness), and purpose (why is it written – to inform, argue, to show bias, to point out a fact, to share an opinion).

More Tips

- Do not use headings, subheadings, or bulleted list of points.
- Do not use personal pronouns (*I, we, they, etc.*) and slang/colloquialism.
- Do not use excessive punctuation, especially commas. Avoid it if not sure where to use.
- Do not ask a rhetorical question and

answer it.

- Avoid plagiarism.
- Edit and proofread for logical structure and use of information (content).
- Be prepared to accept constructive criticism.
- Incorporate feedback from teacher/ assessor.
- Read the assessment conditions and marking criteria.

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AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

The General Body meeting is being postponed until next December in view of the prevailing pandemic and the resultant disruption in normality. Consequently, the present office-bearers of ELTAI will continue until the end of December 2021.

Members may access the current as well as some of the past issues of the journal on the Web by clicking on the relevant link given on the Home page of ELTAI's website: www.eltai.in.

They may also get to know their membership details by clicking on 'Member log in' on the Home page of ELTAI's website and entering their Membership ID. If required, they may send an email to: eltai_india@yahoo.co.in OR indiaeltai@gmail.com for relevant information.