

Structuring an Essay

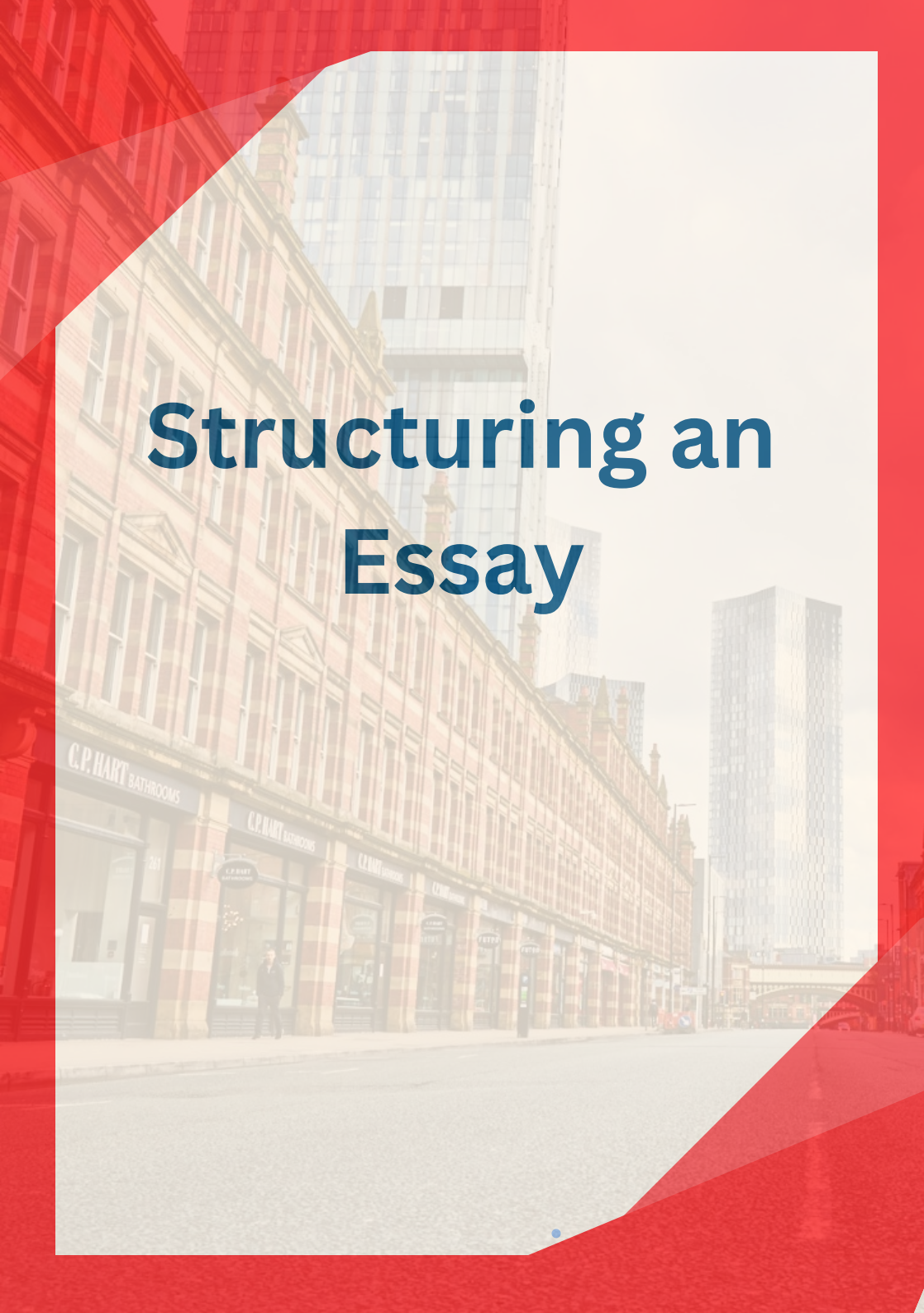
The background image shows a city street. On the left, there is a row of historic brick buildings with multiple stories and many windows. The ground floor of these buildings has shops, with signs for 'C.P. HART BATHROOMS' visible. A person is standing on the sidewalk in front of one of the shops. In the background, several modern skyscrapers with glass facades rise above the historic buildings. The sky is overcast. The entire image is framed by a red border with a white diagonal cutout on the left side, creating a layered effect.

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Using this guide

Starting in Higher Education can feel overwhelming but with the right approach to your studies, you can ensure you get the most out of your course and have a great time doing it!

We recommend that you take some time to work through this guide at the start of our course as a good understanding of this skill and the strategies discussed will help you to elevate your learning.

It is important to note that not every technique will work for you and you should take whichever approach suits your needs best.

This guide has been curated by the Student Experience and Engagement team with the help of other academic resources.

What is an essay?

An essay is a written piece of academic or creative writing that presents a focused argument or idea and explores a specific topic in a structured and coherent manner.

Usually, an essay is comprised of 3 parts: introduction, main body, and conclusion. An essay should also include a reference list at the end. Structuring an assignment effectively is essential for presenting your ideas clearly and logically.

Remember that the structure may vary based on the type of assignment (e.g., essay, report, research paper) and the specific guidelines. Always refer to your assignment brief and any formatting requirements provided. If you have any questions relating to the specific structure of your assignment, please contact your module tutor in the first instance.

What makes a good essay?

A good essay possesses several key qualities that contribute to its effectiveness in conveying ideas, engaging readers, and achieving its intended purpose.

Referenced accurately

A clear argument

Clear flow

Evidence and reasoning

Answers the question

Lead to clear, valid conclusion

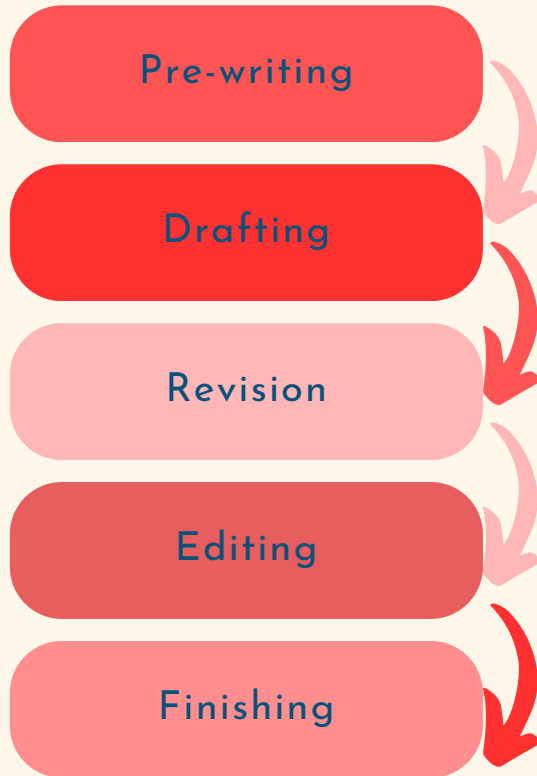
Logical structure

Use of academic literature

Without mistakes

The writing process

The writing process is a series of interconnected steps that writers follow to plan, draft, revise, and polish their written work. It's an approach that helps writers create well-structured, coherent, and effective pieces of writing.



The writing process

Pre-writing

- **Brainstorming:** Generate ideas, topics, or concepts related to your writing task.
- **Research:** Gather information, data, or sources relevant to your topic.
- **Planning:** Outline the structure of your piece, decide on main points, and establish a clear thesis statement.

Drafting

- **Introduction:** Write an engaging introduction that presents the topic and introduces the thesis statement.
- **Body Paragraphs:** Develop each main point in separate paragraphs, providing evidence and examples to support your thesis.
- **Transition Sentences:** Use transitional words and phrases to ensure smooth transitions between paragraphs and ideas.
- **Conclusion:** Summarize the main points, restate the thesis, and offer closure or a broader perspective.

The writing process

Revising

- **Content and Structure:** Review the essay's overall structure, ensuring that each paragraph contributes to the main argument and flows logically.
- **Clarity and Coherence:** Check for clarity, coherence, and logical progression of ideas. Make sure each paragraph has a clear focus.
- **Evidence and Examples:** Verify that the evidence you've used effectively supports your claims and is properly integrated.
- **Word Choice and Style:** Refine your language for clarity, conciseness, and appropriate tone.

Editing

- **Grammar and Spelling:** Proofread for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.
- **Sentence Structure:** Check sentence structure and make sure your sentences are clear and correctly constructed.
- **Formatting and Citations:** Ensure that your formatting adheres to any required guidelines, and that your citations are accurate.

The writing process

Finalising

- **Polishing:** Give your essay a final read-through to catch any remaining errors or areas for improvement.
- **Title:** Choose a title that accurately reflects the content and engages the reader.
- **Submission:** If applicable, submit your final essay according to the guidelines provided.

It's important to note that the writing process is not always linear. You might revisit and revise earlier stages as you refine your ideas and develop a clearer understanding of your topic. Taking the time to go through these stages can significantly improve the quality of your writing and enhance your ability to communicate effectively.

What should an introduction include?

An essay introduction serves as the opening of your paper and should provide a clear overview of the topic you'll be discussing.

- **Thesis Statement:** A clear and concise statement that outlines the main argument or purpose of the essay.
- **Context or Background:** Relevant information to provide readers with an understanding of the topic's significance or historical context.
- **Engagement:** A hook or engaging opening that captures the reader's attention and encourages them to continue reading.
- **Main Points:** A brief overview of the main points or structure of the essay, outlining what will be covered in the body paragraphs.

What should an introduction include?

Example:

- **Thesis Statement:** "This essay seeks to underscore the fundamental role of colour theory in visual art by highlighting its essential function in expressing emotions and establishing the atmosphere within artistic compositions."
- **Context or Background:** "Colour theory, a cornerstone of artistic practice, has roots dating back centuries, with artists from various eras harnessing its principles to evoke specific feelings and create cohesive visual narratives."
- **Engagement:** "Consider a canvas bathed in vibrant reds and oranges, immediately igniting a sense of warmth and passion that beckons viewers to unravel the underlying story."
- **Main Points:** "This discussion will delve into how colour choices can evoke distinct emotional responses, the ways artists use contrasting hues to establish tension, and the cultural nuances that influence colour interpretations."

What should a paragraph include?

A well-structured paragraph in an academic essay should center around a single main idea, often expressed in a topic sentence. This main idea is then supported and elaborated upon through evidence, examples, or explanations.

- **Topic Sentence:** Introduces the main idea of the paragraph.
- **Supporting Details:** Presents evidence, examples, or explanations that support the main idea.
- **Coherence:** Ensures smooth transitions between sentences and ideas.
- **Concluding Sentence:** Summarises key points or bridges to the next paragraph.
- **Clear Argument:** Presents a focused argument or point related to the essay's thesis.
- **Evidence:** Provides supporting evidence to validate the main idea.
- **Flow and Development:** Contributes to the logical progression of the essay's overall structure.

What should a paragraph include?

Example:

- **Topic Sentence:** "The use of colour theory is pivotal in conveying emotions and setting the tone in visual art."
- **Supporting Details:** "Warm colours like red and yellow often evoke feelings of energy and warmth, while cooler tones like blue and green can create a sense of calmness or melancholy."
- **Coherence:** "By strategically employing these colours, artists guide viewers' emotional responses and enhance the overall impact of their work."
- **Concluding Sentence:** "In essence, colour choice becomes an essential tool for artists seeking to establish a specific mood within their creations."
- **Clear Argument:** "This paragraph explores the significance of colour theory as a means of eliciting emotional responses in visual art."

What should a paragraph include?

Example continued:

- **Evidence:** "Notable artists like Vincent van Gogh demonstrated the power of colour through works such as 'Starry Night,' where swirling blues and yellows evoke a sense of tumultuous beauty."
- **Flow and Development:** "As part of the broader discussion on artistic techniques, this paragraph contributes to understanding the multifaceted aspects of visual expression."

What should a conclusion include?

A conclusion in an academic essay should encapsulate the main points discussed in the essay while reaffirming the thesis statement. It should not introduce new information but rather summarise the key arguments and findings.

- **Summary:** Recapitulates the main points and arguments discussed in the essay.
- **Thesis Restatement:** Reaffirms the thesis statement, emphasising its relevance and significance.
- **No New Information:** Avoids introducing new ideas, evidence, or arguments not previously discussed.
- **Closure:** Provides a sense of closure by tying together the essay's various threads.
- **Importance Reiteration:** Reminds the reader of the broader importance of the topic and its implications.
- **Possible Future Directions:** Optionally suggests potential areas for further research or exploration.
- **Lasting Impression:** Leaves the reader with a strong and memorable final impression of the essay's key message.

What should a conclusion include?

Example:

- **Summary:** "To sum up, our exploration has delved into how colour theory plays a crucial role in expressing emotions and establishing the mood within visual art."
- **Thesis Restatement:** "In revisiting the significance of colour theory, we are reminded of its essential role in guiding viewers' emotional responses and enhancing the impact of artistic creations."
- **No New Information:** "Throughout this analysis, we have thoroughly examined the ways in which colour choices influence artistic expressions, drawing attention to its fundamental importance."
- **Closure:** "As we conclude our discussion, the intricate interplay of colours in art serves as a reminder of the artist's power to evoke powerful emotions and convey narratives."

What should a conclusion include?

Example:

- **Importance Reiteration:** "This essay has underscored how colour theory transcends its technical aspects, highlighting its profound influence on the resonance and interpretation of visual compositions."
- **Possible Future Directions:** "Looking ahead, artists and researchers might delve deeper into the psychological and cultural dimensions of colour perception, unraveling even more nuanced layers of meaning."
- **Lasting Impression:** "In closing, colour theory's enduring impact on art is a testament to its ability to communicate the unspoken and engage the senses, leaving a lasting imprint on artistic expression."

Feel free to customise these sentences according to your essay's specific content on colour theory in visual art.

Essay Structure

Different assignments will require slightly different templates owing to their requirements.

This template provides a clear structure for **essay assignments**, including guidelines, submission instructions, and grading criteria.

Title/Question:

Introduction: (10%)

- **Hook:** Start with an attention-grabbing sentence or a compelling fact to engage the reader.
- **Background and Context:** Provide necessary information about the topic's significance or historical context.
- **Thesis Statement:** Clearly state the main argument or purpose of the essay.

Essay Structure Cont.

Main body: (80% - usually 3-5 paragraphs, dependent on word count)

- **Topic Sentence:** Begin each paragraph with a clear sentence that introduces the main point of the paragraph.
- **Supporting Evidence:** Provide evidence, examples, or references that support your topic sentence and contribute to your argument.
- **Analysis:** Explain how the evidence supports your main point and thesis.
- **Transition:** Use transitional phrases to smoothly guide the reader from one paragraph to the next.

Conclusion (10%):

- **Restate Thesis:** Summarize the main argument of your essay by rephrasing your thesis statement.
- **Summarize Main Points:** Briefly recap the key points discussed in your body paragraphs.
- **Final Thought or Implication:** Offer a broader perspective, suggest implications, or leave the reader with a thought-provoking question.

Reference list.

Report Structure

Different assignments will require slightly different templates owing to their requirements.

This template provides a clear structure for **reports**, including guidelines, submission instructions, and grading criteria.

Title Page; title of the report, authors name, date of submission

Table of contents:

- List of sections and subsections with page numbers

Abstract:

- Brief summary of the reports purpose; methodology, findings and conclusions

List of Figures and Tables (if applicable)

- Captions and page numbers for all the figures and tables

Report Structure

(continued)

Introduction

- Background and contents
- Research questions or objectives
- Overview of the methodology

Literature Review

- Review of relevant research and literature
- Identification of gaps or areas of interest

Methodology

- Description of research methods and data collection procedures.

- **Discussion:**

- Interpretation of findings
- Analysis of implications and significance

Conclusion

- Summary of key findings and their relevance

Reference list.

References

- Cottrell, S. (2019). The study skills handbook. Macmillan Education, Limited.
- Sheffield Hallam. (2023). LibGuides: Planning and Structuring Essays. Available at:
<https://libguides.shu.ac.uk/essayplanning/guide>

A final note

Structuring an essay is crucial for effective communication of ideas. It provides a clear and logical framework that guides readers through the content, making the information more accessible and comprehensible.

A well-structured essay enhances readability, ensures a coherent flow of arguments, and helps convey the author's message with precision and impact. Additionally, it enables readers to follow the logical progression of thoughts, facilitating a deeper understanding of the topic and contributing to a more engaging and compelling reading experience.

Consistently consulting this guide during the planning stage is essential to guarantee the creation of a well-structured essay.

A final note

If after working through this booklet you are still unsure about how to structure your essay effectively, please do not hesitate to contact our Student Engagement Officer who can offer additional advice and guidance to build your confidence and skill-set.

- You can contact us via our central email - **studyskills@ucenmanchester.ac.uk**
- One-to-one appointments are available through **Microsoft Bookings**.
- See the digital screens at your campus for drop-in session information

Have your say

Your input is invaluable in helping us to enhance the Study Skills package we provide. Your honest responses will enable us to identify areas of improvement and tailor our approach to better support your learning journey. After you have completed this booklet, please take 5 minutes to let us know what you thought! You can do this by scanning the QR code below!



