

Structuring an Academic Essay

A clear structure will improve your text, making it more accessible to the reader. This will make it easier for the marker to see your argument and evidence, and may result in a better mark for the essay.



Why Structure Matters

A clear structure makes essays easier to write and easier to read. It helps you:

- Stay focused on the question
- Organise your ideas logically
- Avoid repetition and irrelevant material

Before You Start Writing

Before thinking about introductions and paragraphs, make sure you:

1. understand the essay title;
2. gather relevant sources and notes;
3. create a rough plan of the points you want to make.

The Basic Structure of an Essay

Most academic essays contain three main sections:

Introduction (around 10%)

The introduction should:

- Provide brief background or context
- Identify the main themes or issues
- Indicate the direction of the essay

By the end of the introduction, the reader should understand what the essay will discuss and how the discussion will be organised.

Main Body (around 70-80%)

The main body develops your argument through a series of linked paragraphs.

Each paragraph should contain:

- A clear topic sentence, expressing your one main point

- Examples or supporting evidence, including references to relevant sources
- Some discussion or interpretation of the evidence
- A link to the next point or paragraph

Linking is very important, because paragraphs should work together to develop the overall argument rather than functioning as separate pieces of information.

Conclusion (around 10%)

The conclusion should:

- Return to the main focus of the essay
- Draw together the key points
- Explain the significance of the discussion

Avoid introducing new evidence or major new arguments in the conclusion.

Planning Your Main Body

A useful approach is to identify three or four key themes, arguments, or issues that need to be discussed.

For each section, ask yourself:

- What point am I making?
- What evidence supports that point?
- How does it help answer the question?

Keeping the Essay Connected

Readers should be able to follow your line of reasoning from beginning to end.

Useful linking words include:

- However
- Therefore
- In contrast
- Similarly
- Alternatively

These help show relationships between ideas and create smoother transitions between paragraphs.

Find out more tips and resources at tcd.ie/sld