

HOW TO WRITE THE FINAL YEAR ESSAY

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Preliminary Stage

- **Definition:** A piece of writing with no more than 15 pages (12pp letter size).
- Remember there is a difference between spoken and written communication, so you have to select your words carefully in order to make your intention as clear as possible.
- Any emphasis has to be done through vocabulary (sentence rhythm or punctuation).

Second Stage

- **Identifying a question or problem:** You need to think to the assumptions behind the question and the implications that arise from the question's statement or assumptions.
- **Key words:** Look for the vital words or sentences that will determine the structure of the answer you will write.

Remember that those key words have important implications on the validity of your essay.

Frequent verbs used in essay questions: Compare, Test, Define, Describe, Criticize, Discuss, Evaluate, Explain, Illustrate, Interpret, Justify, Outline, Relate, Review, State, Summarize, Trace.

Third Stage

Gathering Information

- **Preliminary thinking:** Examine the essay topic and formulate a set of basic questions before you start to read.
- **Browse through sources:** To get ideas and see what others have said about your topic (we find new ideas only when we have some framework which allows us to see their significance).
- **Organize your ideas:** Planning an outline for your essay gives you a basic structure to work and helps you to sort out the main concepts and details that you will need to develop your ideas.

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Selecting the Information

- Think hard about the relevance of the information you have chosen (It is not a good idea to include all the information)
- **Evaluate the information:** There are some basic questions you should ask when evaluating sources (books, periodicals or Web sites):
 - Age: Publication date or last update (Web site)
 - Credibility and accuracy: Author, publisher or creator (Web site). Newspapers tend not to be very accurate.

Fourth Stage

Planning the Essay Outline

- The first step must be to organize your ideas and draw up a plan in order to keep control on your essay and introduce your subject in a logical, concise and coherent way.

- **Basic Framework**
 - An essay should include these three parts:
 - 1) **Introduction (10-15% of total length):** should contain the preliminary comments on the topic and the current state (you should clarify which aspects of the topic you want to deal with and why).

 - 2) **The Body of the Essay**

 - 3) **Conclusion (10-15% of total length):** summarise your main ideas and might be appropriate to provide a tentative answer to the question.

Fifth Stage

Writing the Essay

- **Style:** It is much better to use simple and straightforward language. You should use complex (technical) words and sentences only if it is absolutely necessary. Avoid slang and abbreviations and any reliance to other forms of communication that we can use when we speak. Stick to short sentences.

→ The main objective is to be clear and concise in order to let your reader follow your reasoning easily not getting distracted by irrelevant padding.

- **Layout:** Once you have presented the topic, you must decide what is each paragraph about

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- 1) What diagrams are needed and where should they be placed?
- 2) How must the paragraphs be organized in logical sequence?
- 3) Would sub-headings help the reader?

- **Paragraphs:** Ensure that each paragraph has unity and links naturally with previous and following paragraphs.



- A paragraph normally deals with one issue.
- Two paragraphs may be on different issues but linked by that difference.
- Often, the first sentence of the paragraph is the most important (it explains what the paragraph is about).

- **Transition:** It is essential to maintain continuity and to give verbal signposts to your reader showing how you are moving on, by using linking words:



- **Indicating Contrast** (but, however, although, yet)
- **Indicating Illustration** (for example that is)
- **Indicating Extension** (similarly, moreover, furthermore)
- **Indicating Conclusion** (therefore, consequently, as a result, thus)
- **Indicating the Next Step** (then, after that, ultimately, eventually)

- **Bibliography:** At the end of your essay, you should give a simple list of the publications you have consulted and used. If appropriate, also list the people and organisations you have contacted. This is not only useful to the reader, and also later when you might wish to check back on certain points, but to give credibility to these sources.

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DON'T PLAGIRIZE: Plagiarism, which is using other authors' words without acknowledgement, is something you must avoid when writing an essay. If you use direct quotations you **must indicate it in a footnote with a precise reference to the source of that quotation. Plagiarism invalidates the essay.**

Some useful links:

<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/format/apacitation.html>

http://portal.uc3m.es/portal/page/portal/biblioteca/aprende_usar/como_citar_bibliografia

- **The Review:** Is very useful to use a review checklist to see if you have gone through all the necessary processes in the preparation of your essay:

- 1) Have I answered the particular question that was originally set?
- 2) Have I divided up the question into separate questions and answered to them?
- 3) Have I gone through all the main aspects?
- 4) Have I done it properly?
- 5) Is the content relevant?
- 6) Is the content accurate?
- 7) Have I arranged the material logically?
- 8) Does the reader move smoothly from one section to the next, from paragraph to paragraph?
- 9) Is each point supported by examples and reasons?
- 10) Have I acknowledged all sources and references?
- 11) Have I distinguished clearly between mine and others' ideas?
- 12) Has the essay the right length?
- 13) Have I written plainly and clearly?
- 14) Are the grammar, punctuation and spelling acceptable?
- 15) Have I presented a convincing case which I could justify in a discussion?