



SLU CALM Resources

Academic Writing

Writing Essays

Unfortunately there is no simple answer to how to write an essay. However, there are general principles you can follow. Remember that by giving you an essay to write, the lecturer is asking you to demonstrate your ability:

- to use the library effectively to find relevant books and articles on the essay you have been given
- to read and understand the complexities of the material
- to recognise similar and differing viewpoints in what you read
- to pick out relevant ideas from the reading to include in the essay
- to write an essay which critically analyses what you read

Below is a model essay which attempts to answer this question.

University essays which receive high marks typically are well researched, flow in a logical and clear manner, and are analytical. It is impossible to write an academic essay without doing adequate research and reading first. The information acquired must then be ordered and each theme is written up as a paragraph. Finally to demonstrate the student's level of understanding of the material, there will need to be some sort of analysis, comparison or evaluation.

An essay always opens with an introductory paragraph, which, like the one above, sets the scene. Besides containing background or explanatory information, it needs to outline key points that the essay will address and give a statement of purpose. The introductory paragraph often opens with a very big, 'global' sentence and then limits the essay focus with a more specific statement (Oshima and Hogue, 1983). Any brief definitions might also be included here or they may form the second paragraph.

The following paragraphs need to be clearly related to the main point and, of course, the essay topic. There should only be one theme in each paragraph. One way of doing this is to start each paragraph with a topic sentence. The whole content of the paragraph must link to this specific topic (Oshima and Hogue, 1983). This should make it easier to decide what supporting material goes into the paragraph and what does not.

In traditional academic essays to be and sound objective is important. There are two ways of achieving this. Firstly it is vital to identify the origin / source of the information. If quotes are cited, then quotation marks must be used and the author's name, the year of publication and the page number of the quote, must also be

included. If paraphrasing is used, i.e. the author's original text has been rewritten in the student's own words, then the author's surname, year and page number must still be included. If a brief summary is used or general idea taken from the author, then the in-text reference only needs the author's surname and the year. Secondly, the use of pronouns such as I, you, we, they, our and your, should be minimized in essays for most subjects.

The critical, and perhaps most difficult part of the essay is the analysis. This is where you highlight similarities or differences between authors. It may require comparing and contrasting the key research. It may require identifying advantages and disadvantages. In brief, this is the section where ideas from different sources are blended together or synthesized.

The final paragraph of the essay is the conclusion. It must focus the major points that have been made in the middle paragraphs back to the essay topic and to the key points outlined in the introductory paragraph. A concluding or summarizing statement 'rounds off' the essay.

(Any academic piece of writing will have a reference list but this is on a separate page after the essay and in the format requested by the lecturer.)