



Academic Learning Support



# Essay Writing Workbook

## The Essay Structure

**Introduction**  
(10% of word count)

General statements on broad topic  
(Definitions of important terms)  
Statement of the central argument  
Listing of main points to be covered

**Body**  
(80% of word count)

**Paragraph** ⇒

Topic sentence  
Explanation & evidence  
Evaluation  
Concluding sentence (Optional)

⇕ Link

**Paragraph** ⇒

Topic sentence  
Explanation & evidence  
Evaluation  
Concluding sentence (Optional)

⇕ Link

**Paragraph** ⇒

Topic sentence  
Explanation & evidence  
Evaluation  
Concluding sentence (Optional)

**Conclusion**  
(10% of word count)

Restatement of the central argument  
Summary of main points covered  
Final statements



## The Introduction

- \* The *Introduction* should generally be 1 paragraph. It should be no more than 10% of your word count.
- \* Indicate the general topic or thesis: what is this essay about?
- \* Explain your opinion of the topic: what is your central argument?
- \* Outline the main topics you discuss: what are the main points you use to back up your argument?
- \* Explain any main terms you feel need defining.

## The Body

\* The essay is written as a series of *paragraphs* and the *Body* makes up roughly 80% of the word count. Write the *body* of your essay *first* (then the conclusion & finally the introduction).

To write a paragraph:

- \* Start with a *topic sentence*. This is the first sentence of a paragraph. It should outline the main point discussed in that paragraph and make links to the central argument. The topic sentence should be *in your own words*.
- \* Following the topic sentence, a paragraph is usually structured from general information to specific details. These specific details may be statistics, quotations, theories or examples that support the main point you are putting forward in that paragraph.

\* In an essay you must present a *central argument*, with several points to support your argument. Critical thinking involves thinking through *both sides of an argument* (this includes developing a *counter argument*). Thus, you will need to be aware of the *exceptions* to your argument, as well as the facts that *support* your argument. Discussing the *counter arguments* or claims against your central argument and explaining why they are incorrect can make your argument stronger and demonstrate your broad understanding of the topic.

\* It is essential to *reference carefully*. *In-text references* should be placed *immediately after all quotations and paraphrases*. Always acknowledge from where your information is coming. Failure to do so is considered PLAGIARISM. ☹

## The Conclusion

- \* The *Conclusion* should be 1-2 paragraphs and no more than 10% of your word count.
- \* Restate the main argument.
- \* Summarise the main points you used to support your argument.
- \* Make a final statement.

## The Reference List

- \* Start on a new page with the heading '**Reference list**'.
- \* Follow the *Harvard Referencing System* to format your reference list. You need to provide the full details of all the sources you referred to within your essay.

## **FORMATTING TIPS**

### Headings

- Write the title of your essay at the top of the first page.
- Do not use subheadings (unless advised to in your course profile or by your tutor).
- Start the Reference List on a new page.


### Paragraphs

- Separate all paragraphs with a line space.


### The key to writing a good essay is understanding and researching the question!

 Read the question carefully.

- Identify the **directive words** – these words tell you *how* to approach the essay, for example, 'analyse', 'compare', 'describe'. (See last pages for a list of definitions of directive words)
- Identify the **content words** – these words tell you *what* your essay will be about.

 Research the question – look for appropriate sources.


- Use the content words and synonyms of the content words as *keywords* for your searches.
- Look for suitable academic books and journals in libraries (CQUniversity Library, City of Sydney Libraries, or your local council library) and for electronic journals containing academic (or 'scholarly') articles through the Electronic Resources section of the Library website.
- Make sure you are familiar with all the resources available through the Library website by completing the Research Workshop, doing the online tutorial or making an appointment with a librarian.

 List the titles of possible materials to use.

- Read the list carefully and cross off anything that does not look directly relevant to your topic.

 Take notes from the materials you have selected.

- Take care to write the full referencing details at the top of your notes.
- Write any copied material in inverted commas so that you know it is a quotation.

 Write an outline for your essay by listing the *main arguments* you are planning to discuss.

- In an essay, you must show both that you *understand* the topic, and demonstrate that you have *analysed* the topic critically.

 Write your essay by following the guidelines below.

- Many people find it easiest to write the body of the essay first. You should do whatever works best for you!

 Edit your draft carefully.

- Is your argument logical and clear?
- Have you supported each of your main points with evidence from your research?
- Are your quotes and paraphrases correctly referenced?
- Have you included a list of References?
- Does your essay contain grammar or spelling errors?

 Having problems? Get help from the LSU.

#### REMEMBER

Quotations are not included in your word count. You need to learn how to put material into your own words.

## Examine the Question and Brainstorm

**Example question:** Analyse the major causes of water shortage in the world today.

**Key Content Words:** Major causes, water shortage, world today

**Key Directive Words:** analyse

**See last pages for definitions of words commonly used in assignment and exam questions.**

**Analyse:** Divide something into parts and then describe how the various parts are related so that you can evaluate its importance.

### **Major Causes:**

- ✓ main reasons for something
- ✓ the outcome from an event - either due to natural causes or human activity

### **Water shortage:**

- ✓ an absolute, not a relative, shortage of water
- ✓ not enough water to meet minimum needs

### **World today:**

- ✓ not only in one country or continent, but all over the world
- ✓ not in the past, but now and over the past few years

**Examples:** The Murray River in Australia, Aquifers all over the world

**My interpretation of the question:** What are the main reasons for current water shortages worldwide? Are the reasons due to human activity or natural causes? What evidence is there to support the reasons given?

## Using the Voices of Experts to Support Your Opinion

On the following pages you will find a sample essay analysing the major causes of water shortage in the world today (Dinyar 2003, cited in Brick 2006, pp. 108-111). In the side notes Brick demonstrates how 'voice' is used in this essay to incorporate the opinions of experts to support the writer's arguments.

*Voice* refers to whose thoughts or opinions are heard in any one part of the text – the voice of the writer, or the voice of his or her sources. In an academic essay, both must be present. When writing an essay, your voice presents the central argument or thesis, writes the topic sentences, expresses your opinions and states the final conclusions. You do not reference your own voice. The voices of your sources are used to support your argument. These voices are used to provide expert evidence, such as expert opinion, examples, case studies, and statistics. The voices of these sources are always referenced. How you use the voices of others depends on how much you want them to dominate your essay.

The **direct voice** of a quotation is the most intrusive voice you can use. When you use a direct quote, you should bring your own voice back into the essay by commenting on the quote and explaining why you have included it. This also demonstrates your understanding of the quoted material.

Less intrusive is the **indirect voice**, when you paraphrase the ideas of the source and refer to the author's name, followed by the date of publication in parentheses. Such a reference makes the author's name prominent in the sentence. Brick (2006) suggests that although not as dominant as the direct voice, using the indirect voice too much may cause your own voice to be lost in the essay.

The least intrusive use of a source is called the **external voice**, which allows your voice to be dominant as it paraphrases the information. You reference the source by including the author's name and year of publication in parentheses at the end of the sentence. For example: Australians can help reduce national greenhouse emissions by sensibly managing their household appliances (Smith 2008).

A good essay should include your own voice and the use of indirect and external voices. Although you can choose to use the direct voice (quotes), you should use it only occasionally as it dominates the text and removes your voice from the essay.

**A Sample Essay Demonstrating the Use of Voice**

**(Source: Brick, J 2006, *Academic culture: a student's guide to studying at university*, Macquarie University, Sydney, pp. 109-111.)**

<b>Sample essay</b>	
<b>TEXT 39</b>	
<b>Text</b>	<b>Whose voice is speaking?</b>
<p><sup>1</sup>During the 20th century, the world's population tripled while water consumption grew sevenfold. <sup>2</sup>As a result, in almost every area of the world today there is a water problem. <sup>3</sup>While the causes of the problem vary, most relate to human activity. <sup>4</sup>Mismanagement and profligate use of available water supplies are a major problem, as are pollution and privatisation of water supplies.</p> <p><sup>5</sup>Overuse of water resources is a major problem all over the world. <sup>6</sup>The crisis is particularly acute in relation to groundwater reserves which lie deep under the surface in aquifers. <sup>7</sup>One-third of the world's population depends on these aquifers, which have taken thousands of years to develop (Brown 2001). <sup>8</sup>Because the reserves of water they hold are large, they have been used without any thought of the future. <sup>9</sup>Payal Sampat (in Brown 2001) states that worldwide, people use about 200 billion cubic metres more water than can be replaced. <sup>10</sup>In other words, the world's water capital is being steadily used up.</p> <p><sup>11</sup>Often, water is used in ways that are wasteful and unproductive. <sup>12</sup>Take California, a dry state which nevertheless has well-watered lawns and 560 000 swimming pools. <sup>13</sup>Barlow and Clark (2002) point out that water from the Colorado River has been used to the limit, and now the region's aquifers are being drained. <sup>14</sup>They predict that by 2020 there will be a water shortfall nearly equivalent to what the state is</p>	<p><b>Sentences 1–2:</b> Essay writer's voice – introduces topic.</p> <p><b>Sentences 3–4:</b> Essay writer's voice – indicates position writer will present.</p> <p><b>Sentences 5–6:</b> Essay writer's voice – introduces first argument: overuse of groundwater reserves.</p> <p><b>Sentence 7:</b> Essay writer's voice – importance of groundwater: supported by the external voice of Brown.</p> <p><b>Sentence 8:</b> Essay writer's voice – development of first argument: groundwater reserves are being used wastefully.</p> <p><b>Sentence 9:</b> Indirect source's voice – information from Sampat used to support essay writer's point.</p> <p><b>Sentence 10:</b> Essay writer's voice – draws conclusion from this section of argument.</p> <p><b>Sentences 11–12:</b> Essay writer's voice – expansion of first argument: example of misuse of groundwater reserves.</p> <p><b>Sentences 13–14:</b> Indirect source's voice – information from Barlow and Clark used to support essay writer's point.</p>

*Continued ...*



Text	Whose voice is speaking?
<p>currently using. <sup>15</sup>Otchet (2002) reports on a huge project in Libya which plans to draw water from an aquifer beneath the Sahara desert and transfer it 3500 kilometres by a network of giant pipelines to irrigate the country. <sup>16</sup>She points out that the cost is estimated at \$32 billion and that the water will be so dear – at about \$10 000 to irrigate a hectare, that whatever is grown will not be able to cover the cost of supply. <sup>17</sup>The aquifer can never be renewed, as hardly any rain falls in the Sahara and the reserves are estimated to last only between 15 and 50 years. <sup>18</sup>Even more seriously, George (2003) claims the project may result in huge subsidence in the Sahara and the prospect of the Nile seeping into the emptying aquifer, thus plunging Egypt into crisis.</p> <p><sup>19</sup>A related problem is the wasteful model of agriculture that has turned food growing into an industrial process which requires intensive irrigation. <sup>20</sup>Today, farming accounts for 70 per cent of water use with the lion's share taken by irrigation. <sup>21</sup>A UNEP Report (2002) states that irrigation and poor management have led to the salinisation of a full 20 per cent of the world's irrigated land. <sup>22</sup>Postal (1999) suggests that up to 10 per cent of the world's grain is being produced by water that will not be renewed.</p> <p><sup>23</sup>Pollution is another major problem (Barlow and Clarke 2002; Bowch 2002). <sup>24</sup>Much of Eastern Europe has filthy rivers – in Poland the problem is so bad that the water of the majority of its rivers cannot even be put to industrial use. <sup>25</sup>Even more seriously, aquifers are also being polluted, and the pollution of aquifers is generally irreversible. <sup>26</sup>A WHO report on groundwater (2002) states that groundwater around major cities, near industrial developments or beneath industrial farms inevitably contains contaminants. <sup>27</sup>The report points out that in the US, 60 per cent of liquid industrial waste is injected straight into deep groundwater. <sup>28</sup>Together, these activities are a deadly form of short sightedness.</p>	<p><b>Sentences 15–17:</b> Indirect source's voice – summary of Otchet used to support essay writer's point.</p> <p><b>Sentence 18:</b> Indirect source's voice – claim from George used to support essay writer's point.</p> <p><b>Sentences 19–20:</b> Essay writer's voice – second argument: irrigation as a wasteful farming practice.</p> <p><b>Sentence 21:</b> Indirect source's voice – information from UNEP report supports essay writer's point.</p> <p><b>Sentence 22:</b> Indirect source's voice – information from Postal supports essay writer's point.</p> <p><b>Sentence 23:</b> Essay writer's voice and reference to other sources – third argument: pollution; external voices of Barlow and Clarke, and of Bowch.</p> <p><b>Sentences 24–25:</b> Essay writer's voice – presents examples of pollution.</p> <p><b>Sentences 26–27:</b> Indirect source's voice – information from WHO report supports essay writer's point.</p> <p><b>Sentence 28:</b> Essay writer's voice – draws conclusion from this section of argument.</p>

Text	Whose voice is speaking?
<p><sup>29</sup>As a solution to the world's water problems, the IMF and World Bank encourage privatisation. <sup>30</sup>They are supported by a number of transnational water companies, such as Suez, which focuses on the most profitable sectors, mostly in wealthy areas. <sup>31</sup>Such companies demand tax concessions from governments, raise prices and cut off people unable to pay. <sup>32</sup>The poorer sections of the community are badly disadvantaged by this model. <sup>33</sup>In addition, privatisation contributes greatly to over-exploitation of water resources. <sup>34</sup>As environmental activist Vandana Shiva (2002: 23) argues, 'The water crisis is an ecological crisis with commercial causes but no market solutions. <sup>35</sup>Market solutions destroy the earth and aggravate inequality'.</p> <p><sup>36</sup>It is clear that the water crisis being experienced around the globe is largely the result of poor water management. <sup>37</sup>Water is wasted on non-essential or poorly planned projects, without thought of replacement. <sup>38</sup>At the same time, water sources are being polluted as a result of poor agricultural and industrial management practices. <sup>39</sup>Market solutions to the water crisis favour the rich at the expense of the poor. <sup>40</sup>Immediate measures must be taken to regulate the use of water internationally in order to ensure that everyone has access to a safe and sufficient source of water.</p>	<p><b>Sentence 29:</b> Essay writer's voice – fourth argument: privatisation of water supply.</p> <p><b>Sentences 30–33:</b> Essay writer's voice – outlines problems with IMF/World Bank position.</p> <p><b>Sentences 34–35:</b> Direct source's voice – source's voice used to support essay writer's position.</p> <p><b>Sentences 36–40:</b> Essay writer's voice – draws conclusions from evidence presented in essay.</p>

Based on Dinyar, G. (2003). Precious fluid. *New Internationalist*, 354.

### Comments on Text 39

The essay writer's voice introduces each new point and presents the argument. You can see this in paragraph 2. Sentence 5 uses the writer's voice to introduce the first argument, which is about overuse of groundwater. Sentences 6 and 7 continue using the writer's voice to point out why groundwater is important. A reference to Brown at the end of sentence 7 supports the point; however, we don't hear Brown's voice. Sentence 8 uses the writer's voice to make another point – that groundwater is being used carelessly. Sampat's voice is brought in to support this point. Finally, the writer's voice in sentence 10 restates the point that groundwater is being over-used without thought.

## A Sample Essay (for Exercise 1)

Title of the essay

### ***A Discussion of Critical Thinking and Rote Learning***

#### **Introduction**

State the main topic.  
Indicate the central argument.  
Define the main terms.  
List the main topics discussed.

This essay contrasts the benefits of rote learning and critical thinking in the context of university education. It argues that although rote learning is important for passing exams in some subjects, the development of critical thinking skills is far more crucial in succeeding overall within the tertiary education environment. Whereas rote learning involves memorising information, the central aspect of critical thinking is to ask questions and to think independently. Critical thinking carries across to all aspects of learning, including participating actively in the classroom, selecting and reading source material carefully, and constructing logical arguments in written work. This essay focuses on the importance of critical thinking for assessing the validity and relevance of information and for constructing a coherent argument.

#### **Body**

Contains separate paragraphs for each new point you are making.

Studies have indicated that critical thinking skills are more important than memorising information in order to perform well at university. For example, in her article, 'Critical thinking and college success', Jeanne Higbee (2003) writes that 'habits of mind' are far more important than 'specific content knowledge' to succeed at tertiary level. The skills that were found to be most crucial for study are outlined in the following quotation:

#### **Long quotation**

Start on new line.  
Indent 1cm from both margins.  
Use smaller font size.

The habits of the mind include critical thinking; analytical thinking and problem solving; an inquisitive nature and interest in taking advantage of what a research university has to offer; the willingness to accept critical feedback and to adjust based on such feedback; openness to possible failures from time to time and the ability and desire to cope with frustration and ambiguous learning tasks.  
(Higbee 2003, p.78)

#### **Topic sentences**

Start each paragraph with a topic sentence. This summarises the main argument contained in that paragraph. It should be *in your own words*.

Higbee's article discusses the results of a study which identified the learning behaviours of successful students in relation to a range of subject areas including Mathematics, Science and English. She concludes that those who succeed at tertiary level are active, independent and curious learners who are able to construct logical arguments and support these with relevant information.

#### **Counter Argument**

Critical thinking is also vital for assessing the validity of different information. It is important to question the arguments presented in different sources, and identify what stance the writer is taking in relation to the material. To read critically, it is important to determine whether the information is consistent with other sources read on the subject; what sources the writer uses to back up their arguments, and whether these are reliable sources; and the strengths and weaknesses of the writer's argument.

#### **Paraphrase**

Write the information from a source in your own words. Put the reference immediately following the section you have paraphrased.

In comparison, rote learning does not develop the skills which are important for university education. Although in some subjects it is necessary to memorise information such as formulae used in maths, science and statistics, it is more important to understand the application and relevance of these formulae. Rote learning also does not assist students to construct valid arguments, as it fails to teach students to think independently. For example, it has been argued that rote learners are more likely to use inductive

### Short quotation

Use inverted commas around the words copied from the source.

fallacies, in which case their reasoning will not be sound (Sternberg 2004). These fallacies include the 'ad populum' argument in which the reason given for the conclusion is that the majority of people agree with it. Sternberg writes that 'the essence of this fallacy lies in our need to conform to popular views and conclusions' (2004, p. 69). Critical thinking, on the other hand, enables students to construct logical arguments, which is essential to all university work.

### Conclusion

Restate the main argument.  
Summarise the main points used to support your argument.  
Make a final statement.

In conclusion, although rote learning is necessary in some situations, it is far more important to develop critical thinking skills in order to succeed at university level. The skills involved in thinking critically and analytically can assist students to construct sound arguments and to assess their reading material in terms of the validity of its content. Whereas memorising information has limited value in terms of university education, critical thinking is one of the most crucial aspects of university study.

### Reference List

Start this on a new page.  
Give the full details of all sources you have referred to in your essay.  
Format using the *Harvard System of Referencing*.

### Reference List

Higbee, J 2003, 'Critical thinking and college success', *Research & Teaching in Developmental Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp.77-82 (online ProQuest).

Sternberg, RJ 2004, 'Four alternative futures for education in the United States: it's our choice', *School Psychology Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 67-78 (online ProQuest).

### **STYLE TIPS**

- Make sure your writing *flows*. Once you have written a draft of your essay, check that the paragraphs are ordered in a logical way. Read over the topic sentences: do they follow a logical sequence?
- Always write in the *third person*. Do NOT use: I, my, me, we, our, us, you, or your.
- Use the *present tense* when you are writing about other people's work, such as, "Johnson points out that..." or "Studies indicate that..."
- Do NOT start paragraphs with quotations. Write topic sentences.
- Always use *gender neutral language*: he/she, their, the author, the researcher, and so on.
- Use *formal language*: Do NOT use words such as "things"! Be specific!
- Use the *passive voice*.

*Make appointments with staff at Academic Learning Support to get extra help with your essays!* ☎

## Exercise 1 - Understanding the Essay

Read the sample essay (page 10 & 11). Form groups and complete the following tasks.

1. Read the **introduction** of the sample essay on pages 10 & 11.
  - a. **Highlight** the writer's argument/thesis.
  - b. **Underline** the 4 points that the writer is going to discuss to defend their argument. Number them 1-4.
  
2. Read only the **topic sentence** (the first sentence) of each body paragraph.
  - a. Match each of the paragraphs to one of the 4 points from the introduction.
  - b. Write the matching number next to the paragraph.  
(Note: there are 5 body paragraphs, but only 4 points.)
  
3. Select one **body paragraph** to analyse.
  - a. Find the part in the paragraph where the writer explains how the point supports their argument.
  - b. **Underline** the evidence in your paragraph
  - c. How strong is the voice of this evidence? Is it direct, indirect, or external?
  - d. **Highlight** the sentences where the writer's voice is heard.
  - e. Look at the list below. These words are linking words called *cohesive devices* or *transitional phrases*. **Circle** the words or phrases below that are used in your paragraph:

It is clear	Another major problem
Together, these	In addition
In other words	Nevertheless
Even more seriously	A related problem
At the same time	Because
  
4. Read the **concluding paragraph**
  - a. **Highlight** the restated argument/thesis
  - b. **Underline** the sentences where the writer summarises the essay's main points
  - c. Identify the *voice* in which it is written.

## Essay Outline

Below is the framework of an academic essay. Each section refers to one paragraph.

Read the sample essay again (pg. 10 & 11) and identify the parts of the essay and the sections of each paragraph. Use this Outline to plan your own essays.

<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General statement</li> <li>• Definitions of important terms</li> <li>• Statement of the central argument, thesis or opinion</li> <li>• List of main points</li> </ul>	
<b>Body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point 1 topic sentence</li> <li>• Explanation</li> <li>• Supporting evidence (theories, statistics, examples)</li> <li>• Concluding sentence (optional)</li> </ul>	
<b>Body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point 2 topic sentence</li> <li>• Explanation</li> <li>• Supporting evidence (theories, statistics, examples)</li> <li>• Concluding sentence (optional)</li> </ul>	
<b>Body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point 3 topic sentence</li> <li>• Explanation</li> <li>• Supporting evidence (theories, statistics, examples)</li> <li>• Concluding sentence (optional)</li> </ul>	

<b>Body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point 4 topic sentence</li> <li>• Explanation</li> <li>• Supporting evidence (theories, statistics, examples)</li> <li>• Concluding sentence (optional)</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point 5 topic sentence (Counter argument)</li> <li>• Explanation</li> <li>• Supporting evidence (theories, statistics, examples)</li> <li>• Concluding sentence (optional)</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restatement of central argument or thesis</li> <li>• Summary of the main points</li> <li>• Final statement of possible implications or recommendations</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Reference List</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start on a new page with the heading 'Reference List'</li> <li>• Follow the Harvard Referencing System</li> </ul>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Academic English is aimed at emphasising **OBJECTIVITY** and avoiding **ERROR**. It is written using:

1. **the third person**
2. **qualifiers to avoid generalisations and**
3. **a formal, academic vocabulary**

**1. Use the 'third' person and avoid the 'first' and 'second' person:**

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> First Person	I/me	we/us/our
<input type="checkbox"/> Second Person	you/your	you/your
<input type="checkbox"/> Third Person	<b>he/she/it</b> <b>him/her/it</b> <b>his/her/its</b>	<b>they</b> <b>them</b> <b>their</b>



**NOTE:** Avoid using he, his or himself or she, her or herself when referring to people in general. Use she/he or he/she. Alternatively, rewrite the sentence in the plural – they, them, and themselves.

Using the third person minimises personal interest in the subject, and makes the writer appear **objective**.

**2. Use qualifiers to avoid generalisations**

Academic writing strives to be accurate by avoiding generalisations.

There are many qualifying words, which reduce a blanket statement to one which only applies in certain circumstances.

Avoid the following words or expressions:

- ☹ **Always**
- ☹ **Invariably**
- ☹ **Never**
- ☹ **It is always (the case that)**
- ☹ **It is never (the case that)**

Replace with qualifiers:

- 😊 **Mostly**
- 😊 **Mainly**
- 😊 **It seems to be (the case that)**
- 😊 **It appears to be (the case that)**

Similarly, **avoid overly emotive words**, such as *perfect*, *terrible*, or *amazing*.

**WARNING:** Do not go too far down this route, as it is possible to become overly-cautious and no definite statements are made. This can make the work weak and unconvincing.



### 3. Use formal, academic vocabulary:

Academic writing uses:

- the technical vocabulary of the subject and
- a formal, academic vocabulary.

For example, the word “kids” is often used in informal writing; however it is more appropriate to use formal synonyms, such as “children” or “students”, in academic writing.

⊗Instead of	☺Use
Says	argues, claims, maintains, asserts, contends, alleges, insists, suggests, points out, states...
Nowadays	In recent years, currently...
People who like	Those who agree with, supporters of, proponents of, those in favour of, advocates of, pro- (e.g. pro-slavery)...
People who dislike	Those who disagree with, opponents of, those opposed to, critics of, objectors to, anti- (e.g. anti-slavery)...
[The article] is about	[The article] discusses, outlines, analyses, explains...
Lots of	Many, several, numerous...
Find out, come up with	Explore, investigate, study, research, discover, determine, ascertain...
Get	Obtain, receive, achieve...
Doing	(be more specific) investigating, completing, responding, answering, solving...
He	He/she; he or she

Also, avoid contractions and abbreviations:

⊗Instead of	☺Use
Don't	Do not
Can't	Can not
They're	They are
It's	It is
e.g.	For example
<i>etc.</i> (etcetera)	<i>such as, including, for example.</i> (These phrases suggest there are other examples, which could also be included.)

**To show ownership**, an apostrophe s ('s) is placed after a proper noun (the *book's* title; the *child's* toy). For pronouns, such as *her*, *their*, or *it*, simply add an *s*: *hers*, *theirs*, *its*. Meanwhile, *Him* becomes *his*.

**Acronyms** are a series of letters, usually capitalised, formed from the initial letters of other words, such as that used for Human Resource Management (HRM) or North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). These can be very useful, but the reader needs to be introduced to the acronym when it is first mentioned by stating the words in full, followed by the acronym in brackets. The acronym can be then used alone. Some acronyms like the UN or radar, have become so widely used, they no longer need such an explanation.

**Source:** Brunton, K 2002, 'Academic English Skills Pack', *London Metropolitan University*, viewed 6 November 2003, <http://www.lgu.ac.uk/ldu/lduwebpages/aeskillspack.doc>.

## Definitions of words often used in assignment or exam questions

Assignment and examination questions use a variety of words that have specific meanings. The following list contains definitions of some commonly used key words.

**Account for:** Explain why something is as it is; explain the causes for something.

**Analyse:** Divide something into parts and then describe how the various parts are related so that you can evaluate its importance.

**Argue:** Present the case for and/or against something.

**Assess:** Decide how important something is and give your reasons.

**By referring to or with reference to:** Include this text, case study or example in your answer.

**Comment on:** Point out the important features and criticise.

**Compare:** Describe the similarities between two or more things.

**Contrast:** Describe the differences between two or more things.

**Compare and Contrast:** Describe both the similarities and the differences between two or more things.

**Concise:** Short or brief (description, explanation or answer).

**Criteria:** Rules or requirements that apply to something.

**Criticise:** Give your opinion about the merit or truth of opinions expressed, and then draw conclusions discussing both the limitations and the good points.

**Deduction:** The conclusion or generalisation you come to after carefully examining all the facts.

**Define:** Give a brief, clear and authoritative explanation of what something means. This explanation should also give the limitations of the definition, but leave out detailed explanation. Sometimes it is also necessary to show how the item defined differs from other items.

**Describe:** Give a detailed account of something by recounting, characterising, outlining and relating in sequence.

**Diagram:** A drawing, chart, plan or graph. This should be labelled and have an accompanying explanation.

**Discuss:** Give both sides of an argument and then your own opinion.

**Distinguish between:** Describe the differences between two or more things.

**Elaborate on:** Write about a statement or a quotation that is part of the question. Explain the statement or quotation in more detail and then state your point of view concerning the statement or quotation.

**Evaluate:** Give an opinion, supported by evidence, on the worth or value of something.

**Examine:** Critically investigate and appraise a subject in detail.

**Explain:** Clarify, interpret and elaborate on the material presented. Give reasons for differences of opinions or results, and try to analyse the causes for these differences.

**Give an account of:** Describe/give a statement of facts in sequence, or in report form.

**Identify:** Point out and describe/name.

**Illustrate:** Give examples (or diagrams) to explain or clarify something.

**Implications:** Why something is significant or important; the long term impact, effects or results.

**Indicate:** Identify, and then demonstrate to clarify.

**In relation to:** Refer to a specific aspect of something.

**In the context of:** In a particular setting; by referring to.

**Justify:** Give reasons for your conclusions or opinions.

**Limitations:** Give reasons why something is not perfect.

**List:** Present a group of items in the required order without comment unless asked for.

**Outline:** Describe the essential parts, showing the main points and subordinate points, but omitting minor details.

**Relate X to Y:** Show what the connections are between X and Y by discussing the similarities and differences.

**Review:** Discuss something critically, analysing and commenting on the important or controversial statements/ aspects.

**Role:** The function of something; the part something plays; how something works, especially in relation to other things.

**Scope:** The extent or influence of something.

**Show:** Give reasons and causes.

**Significance:** The consequences and importance of something.

**State:** Present the main points in a brief, clear sequence, usually omitting details or examples.

**Summarise:** Give main points, omitting details.

**Suggest:** Propose a theory or method and defend it by showing how it could work.

**To what extent:** Explain the ways in which something is true and the ways in which it is not true.

**Trace:** Follow the development of something from its starting point.

**Validate/verify:** Provide evidence or facts to show something is or is not true