SPLASH Introduction to

Planning Essays

# **What is an essay?**

Writing an essay involves responding to a question or title set by a tutor. It often takes the form of an argument (meaning reasons which establish a position), leading the reader from the title to a conclusion.

# **Why are we asked to write essays?**

Is it just to test our knowledge of our subject or is it something more than that?

* Your understanding of the topic
* Your ability to construct an informed opinion
* Your ability to construct a convincing logical argument
* Your ability to critically evaluate ideas of others
* Your ability to acknowledge the ideas of others
* Your ability to express your ideas in a clear, professional writing style

To achieve a clear structure a logical sequence of ideas and clearly expressed arguments, you need to plan what you want to say before you start answering.

# **Where should I start?**

Always start by analysing every word in the question and refer to the assessment criteria in your module handbook

Some common question/instruction words used in essays at university:

**Account for** - explain why and/or how

**Analyse** - break down into parts and examine the relationship between those parts

**Assess** - judge the importance/ value of, give the advantages and disadvantages of

**Comment on** - make remarks, give your opinion

**Contrast** - highlight the differences between 2 or more things

**Criticise** - discuss the strengths and weaknesses of theories or truth of facts

**Describe** - write about the details or characteristics of

**Discuss** - examine using arguments and reference to facts; consider implications

**Evaluate** - make a judgement using specified criteria e.g. reason or available facts

**Examine** - investigate or inquire into in detail

**Explain** - make clear; give reason for; set out in detail the meaning of

**Explore** - examine by going through

**Illustrate** - make clear by giving examples

#  **Reading on your topic**

You will need to have read a range of texts on your topic before you are able to plan your essay. The reading you do will inform your answer and provide evidence for the points you make in your essay. Your reading list is a good place to identify key texts. However, you can also find texts independently. Use topic keywords to search for books, journal articles and other material on SurreySearch, or your subject databases.

# **Starting to plan your essay**

Rough plan

This only needs to consist of your overall argument and the main points that you want to raise to support this.

A plan should consist of a number of arguments or points in a logical sequence.

* In order of priority or importance
* Looking at one side first then the other
* Or according to the stages/parts of the question
* Each point can then be expanded into a paragraph. Remember that each paragraph of your essay deals with one argument or main point only.

# **The anatomy of an essay**

Most essays will look a bit like this:

**Introduction:**

* Explain how you have interpreted the question
* Identify key issues you will explore
* Give a brief outline of how you will deal with each issue and in what order

**Main body:**

Paragraph 1: Covers first thing you said in Intro. Define concepts and Introduce main ideas.

Paragraph 2-onwards: Develop argument. Discuss the issues/ give evidence

**Conclude:**

Revisit question and explain your answer. Give NO new ideas or information here.

**References:**

See the Library website and check your course guidelines

Need further advice on how to improve the quality of your written work?

Go to the SPLASH website for more information: [www.surrey.ac.uk/splash](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/splash)

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