

To produce a high quality essay you need to:

- understand the precise task set by the essay question
- identify the appropriate material to read
- understand and evaluate that material
- select the most relevant material to refer to in your essay
- construct an effective argument
- arrive at a well-supported conclusion.



Common criticism given to students:

- does not address the essay question
- misunderstands source material
- poor structure
- too descriptive (not enough critical writing)

Developing an Argument

Making a good argument is very important in academic writing, this entails *taking a position* on a subject and *supporting your position with evidence*.

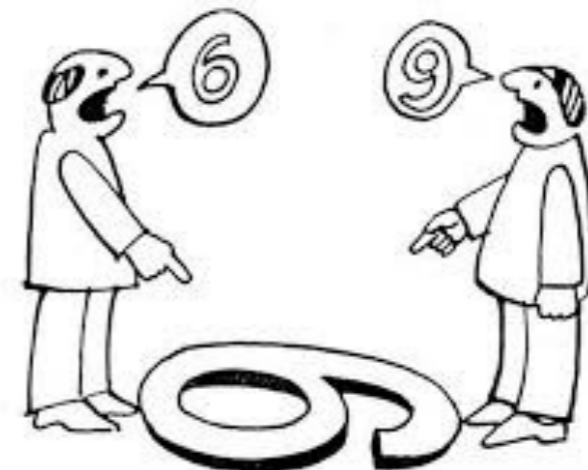
An argument is usually a main idea, stated briefly in your *thesis statement* which is developed over the course of your essay, and backed up with evidence that supports the idea.

Often you will be asked to examine and interpret the arguments of others, as part of your own argument. This is different from summarising, or simply describing the information available.

“You will need to develop a point of view on or interpretation of that material and provide evidence for your position”

Good arguments take time to develop:

1. Describe your content
2. Define your terms
3. Locate your position
4. Back up your position with evidence
5. This becomes the basis of your argument



How do I engage in critical writing?

Critical writing involves an analysis (not only a description)

An analysis is expected if you are being asked to analyse, discuss, explain, relate, review or suggest

Start by breaking an issue into its constituent parts.

Find and describe the main ideas.

Show how these ideas are related and why they are important.

Point out any mistakes or weaknesses *as well as* strong points.

Provide a balanced answer.

“Always question your sources, a healthy scepticism makes your academic work stronger”



Essay structure

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- provides context for reader
- contains thesis statement
- introduce but not define key terms

Body Paragraphs:

- each paragraph highlights **one main point** from your thesis statement
- each paragraph explains, develops, and defends your thesis statement.
- each paragraph leads on to the next, in a logical order (use transition words and phrases)

Conclusion:

- restate your thesis statement (using different words)
- summarise the supporting evidence and make clear how it supports your thesis statement.
- do not introduce any new information or ideas.

Constructing a Thesis Statement

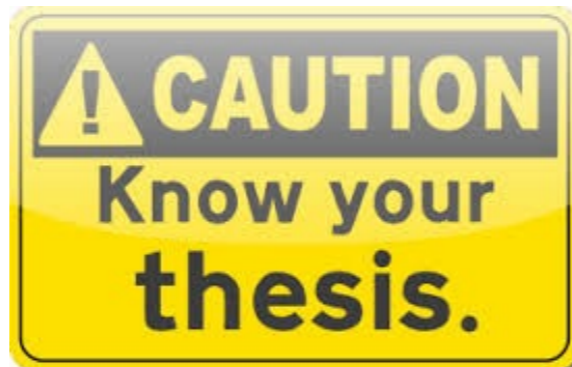
Your thesis statement tells the reader how you will address of the subject matter under discussion. It is a statement that introduces your argument.

It forms a road map for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.

A thesis statement is *an interpretation of a question or subject* - this is where *your argument* comes in. In other words, it is not enough to just rewrite the essay question as your thesis statement.

Your thesis statement shows that:

1. You understand the essay question
2. You are able to critically engage the readings
3. You have a plan on how to address the essay question
4. Your plan centres around an argument that involves the use of specific evidence.



Developing Your Thesis Statement

The thesis controls the entire essay — all your main points will be a development of it, and all the minor supporting details will illustrate it.

Make sure that the thesis expresses an idea that is neither too broad nor too specific to develop effectively and that it does not simply state the obvious.

First, analyze your essay question and your primary sources

Decide on what position you are taking

Write down your thoughts (rough draft)

An effective thesis has a definable, arguable claim.

A thesis should be as clear and specific as possible

A thesis does not simply restate the essay question

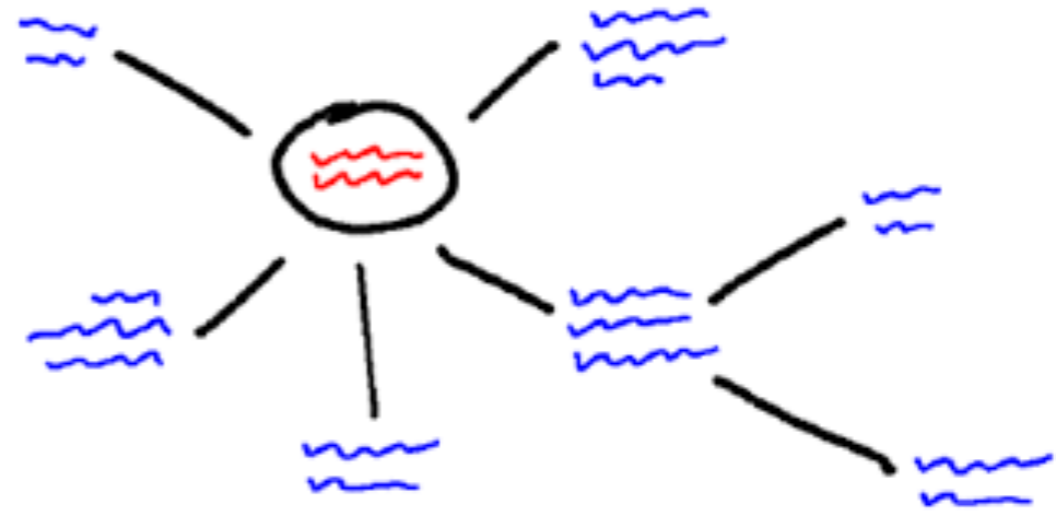
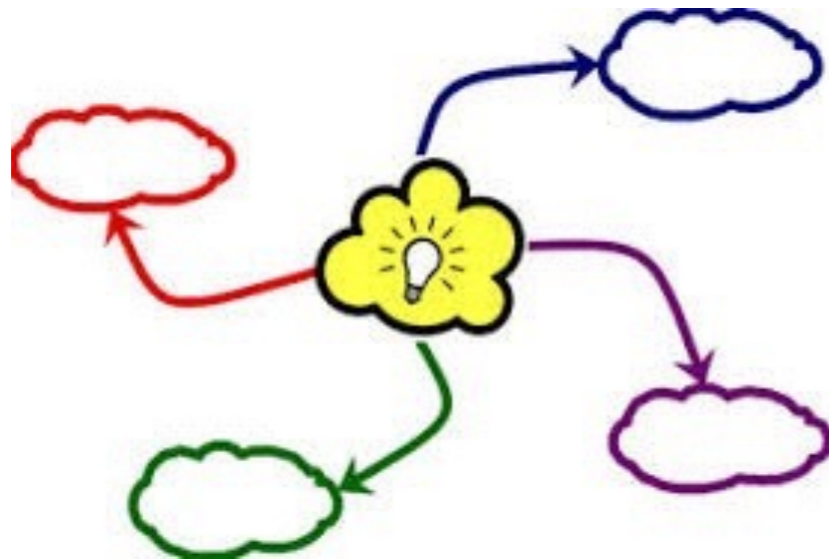
Thesis Generator

1. What is your topic?
2. What is your position or claim?
3. What is your rationale for this position?
4. Topic + Position + Reasoning = Thesis

Constructing an effective argument

Most academic essays will require you to present an argument through reasoning and the use of evidence

Brainstorm or mind map to generate ideas. Write down whatever comes to mind.



Based on your brainstorming, generate a working thesis statement – it doesn't matter if it is clumsily expressed at this point. You can revise it later.

Begin planning your essay. Allow a rough draft to be rough. In a rough draft you are writing for yourself, not for your reader.

Learn to hedge or use language cautiously

Hedging is an important way of using language in academic writing. It means being academically cautious and not making bold statements that cannot be supported.

Here are some verbs you can use in attributing claims to other writers, with an indication of how far you agree with the writer's opinion.

These verbs show that you are convinced by a writer's conclusion:

The writer proves...

The writer demonstrates...

The writer indicates...

The writer points out...

The writer shows...

The following verbs are more neutral:

The writer argues...

The writer claims...

The writer suggests...

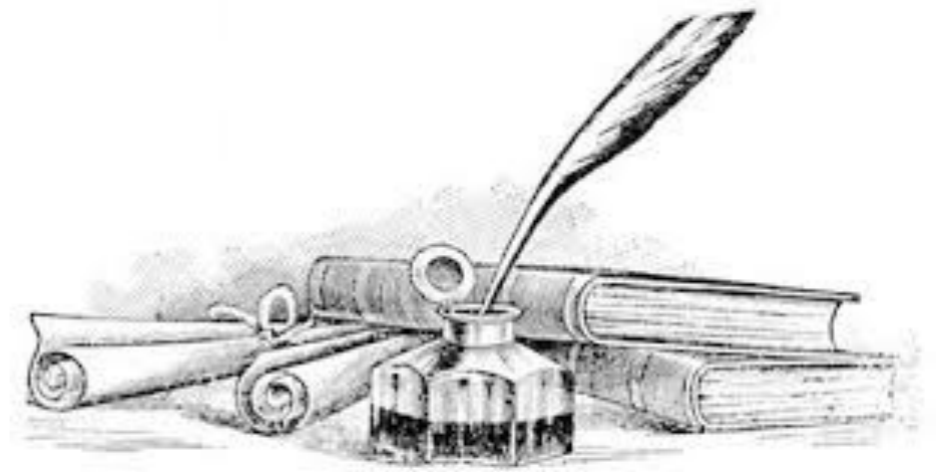


(<http://www.essay.uk.com/guides/essay/hedging.php>)

Writing your Essay

A Good Introduction

1. Provides a context for your thesis statement
2. Provides a roadmap for the rest of the essay
3. Introduce but not define key terms



Body Guidelines

Raise only one point per paragraph! Do not attempt to discuss multiple ideas. You need to show how each new idea/point/paragraph is related to the essay topic.

Every paragraph in a paper should be:

1. **Unified:** Everything in the paragraph should be related to a single controlling idea.
2. **Clearly related to the thesis:** The paragraph should refer to the central idea, or thesis, of the paper.
3. **Coherent:** The sentences should be arranged in a logical manner and should follow a definite plan for development.
4. **Well-developed:** Every idea discussed in the paragraph should be adequately explained and supported through evidence and details that work together to explain the paragraph's controlling idea (Rosen and Behrens 119).

The body paragraphs are where you will explain, develop, and defend your thesis statement. A typical essay will have a minimum of three body paragraphs. Obviously, essays with higher word-counts will require more than three paragraphs. For each body paragraph you will need to:

Explain: each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence. Typically, this sentence will make a clear reference to your thesis statement. The reader should never be surprised by the content of a topic sentence, because the thesis statement has already told them what to expect.

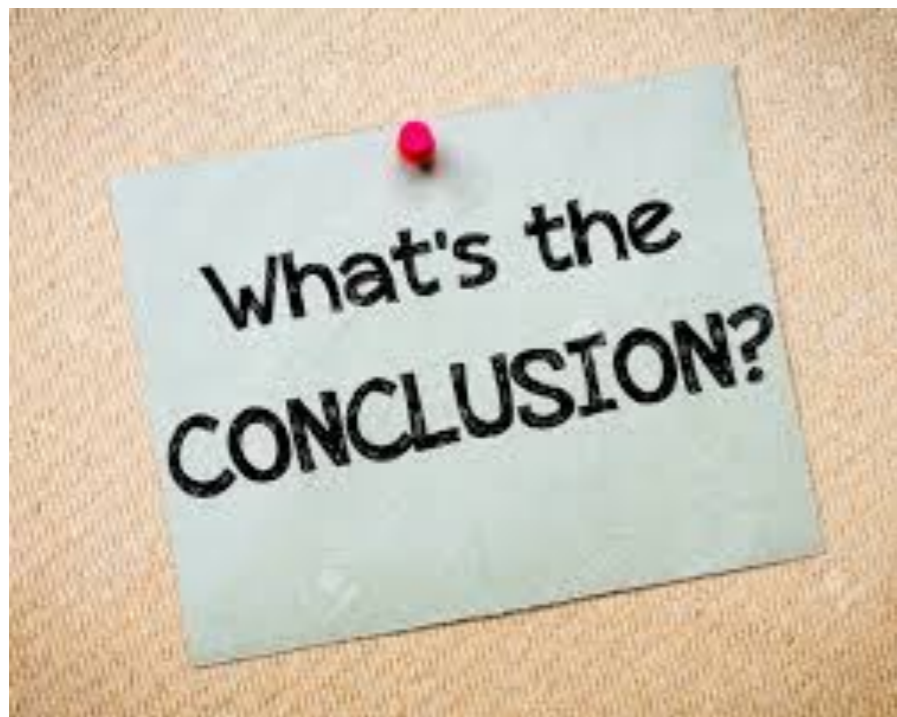
Develop: the sentences following the topic sentences are used to go into detail and expound on the topic sentence. This development typically includes a discussion of your understanding/analysis of the research you may have done for the essay. If the essay does not require research, this development is typically your explanation of the logic behind the claim/point you raised in the topic sentence.

Defend: avoid assuming that your reader is always on the same wavelength. In other words, be sure to always 'spell out' exactly what you are trying to say. For instance, if you include a quotation from an outside source to help you illustrate a point, explain to your reader(s) why you have included the quote, and what you want it to illustrate. If you include an observation about the data/content you are working with, explain how and/or why you have made that observation.

Conclusion

The conclusion signals the end of the essay. Be sure to use 'concluding' vocabulary/phrases that indicates the discussion is ending. Examples of decisive 'concluding' vocabulary/phrases include: in conclusion, overall, and ultimately. Your conclusion needs to include the following:

- Restate your thesis statement.
- Summarise the supporting evidence and make clear how it supports your thesis statement.
- Do not introduce any new information or ideas.



Your thesis statement provides the overview of your argument

Your argument provides the structure for your paragraphs

Your thesis and argument combined and summarised, forms your conclusion

Sources consulted

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