

Writing an essay

Overview

The purpose of an essay is to present an argument or point of view and give examples or reasons to support it. The topic will be a question or an issue which people generally have different opinions about. The essay could present both sides of the argument, or just one, depending on the instructions given in the task. An essay should be written in a formal or neutral register and should be well organised, with an introduction, main body and a conclusion. It should include language appropriate for expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing. The vocabulary required will depend upon the topic.

Tips for writing an essay

Language

- think about the audience that the essay is for
- the tone of most essays should be neutral or formal
- your essay should clearly present opinions related to the topic
- include a range of grammatical structures and related vocabulary
- avoid writing very simple sentences with the same grammatical structures and simple repetitive vocabulary.

Organisation:

An essay should be well organised, with an introduction, main body and a conclusion. It should include well-developed ideas.

You should use linking words/phrases which suit a more formal type of writing (e.g. furthermore, however, in conclusion, etc.) to link ideas in sentences and paragraphs.

One way to structure your essay is to have a balanced argument focusing on one side of the argument, then on the other side of the argument:

- Introduction – briefly outline the argument that the essay will discuss. Engage the reader to make them interested in the topic, for example, ask a rhetorical question to make a point and create a stronger effect.
- Present one side of the argument. Support your ideas with examples and/or reasons.
- Present the other side of the argument. Support your ideas with examples and/or reasons.
- Conclusion – this should briefly summarise what you have said and what you think about the argument. You can link your conclusion back to the beginning and/or encourage the reader to decide what they think about the same viewpoint.

Alternatively, an essay can be one-sided. You present one side of the argument, supported with examples and/or reasons. In this case, the organisation of your essay would be the same as above, with either one extended paragraph for the main body, or two or more shorter paragraphs each presenting a different reason to support your point of view.

Example of an essay

	Comments
<p>1 Teenagers love fast food. But is it good for them, or should they avoid it?</p>	<p>1 The candidate introduces the topic in the first paragraph and uses a rhetorical question to engage the reader. No heading is required for an essay.</p>
<p>2 To begin with, 3 it's usually quite tasty. Furthermore, it's quick and easy if you choose to eat fast food. You walk in to a restaurant, give your order, and your food is ready in just few minutes. When you're in a hurry, getting fast food is a good option.</p>	<p>2 The candidate presents arguments in favour of fast food. The second opinion is well supported with reasons.</p>
<p>4 However, there are some disadvantages. 5 The main one is health. 6 Fast food contains fat, sugar and salt – all things that are bad for you and make you gain weight and becoming ill. The truth is that fresh food, cooked at home, is much better for you, even if it sounds boring to most teenagers. Fast food is also waste of money. It might to seem cheap, but if you buy it a lot, your money will soon disappear.</p>	<p>3 The candidate uses a range of appropriate linking words, 'to begin with', 'furthermore', 'so', 'however' and 'also', to link their ideas together.</p> <p>4 In the third paragraph, the candidate presents arguments against fast food and both opinions are well supported with reasons.</p>
<p>7 Overall, I believe eating fast food occasionally isn't a problem, but fresh home-cooked food is best.</p>	<p>5 The candidate includes the ideas from the comments, but uses their own language, by changing grammatical structures and vocabulary where possible.</p> <p>6 The candidate uses some extended sentences and makes a few attempts at more complex structures.</p> <p>7 The candidate provides a clear conclusion which shows that the essay is effectively sequenced and organised. The candidate uses an appropriate choice of words for a neutral to formal register.</p>