

Essay Structure (Part A)

Before planning your essay, analyse your essay question. (See [Instructional Words](#) and [How to Analyse Assignment Instructions](#) handouts.)

Structure: An essay has three main parts:

1. Introduction
2. Main body
3. Conclusion

1. Introduction

5-10% of the word count

Make a good first impression - the opening sentence should engage the reader
Introduce the topic(s) - define key terms; explain the relevance or importance of the topic(s); provide context
State your main idea or purpose - the final sentence or two should outline the essay's main purpose and structure

2. Main body

80-90% of the word count

Divide the body into sections based on your assignment instructions and marking guide.

Divide each section into paragraphs (see *Paragraphs* handout).

Each paragraph should deal with **one** main idea only.

Each paragraph should begin with a sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph (this is the **topic sentence**).

Each topic sentence should logically follow on from the main idea of the preceding paragraph and be linked to the essay's main point or argument.

The main idea of each paragraph should be developed with evidence, arguments (from sources such as appropriate books, articles, websites, etc) and/or examples related to the topic.

3. Conclusion

5-10% of the word count

The first sentence of your conclusion should restate (but not word-for-word) the main argument or purpose of your essay as outlined in the last sentence(s) of the introduction.

The sentences that follow should summarise the main findings or points of your essay, suggesting how the main ideas of your paragraphs link to the essay's argument or purpose.
Do NOT introduce new evidence or ideas into your conclusion.

Checklist for 1500 word essay*

1. **Introduction** (approx. 100-150 words)
 - Does your introduction:
 - capture the reader's attention?
 - introduce your topic(s)?
 - define the key terms you will use?
 - outline the essay's **main purpose** or state the essay's **main argument**?
2. **Main Body** (approx. 1000-1300 words across 4-8 paragraphs)
 - Does each paragraph of the main body of your essay contain:
 - a **topic sentence**? This states the main idea of the paragraph and clearly links to the essay's main point or purpose.
 - **evidence** to support your idea? This can include examples and arguments from appropriate sources: books, journal articles, websites, etc. Check marking schedule and assignment instructions for specific guidelines.
 - an **explanation** of the evidence? Show its connection to the paragraph's main idea and the essay's main point.
 - a linking sentence that sums up the main idea of the paragraph and links to the next paragraph? (This is not always necessary; sometimes topic sentences can link paragraphs together effectively.)
 - Has the evidence that you have used:
 - been provided with an appropriate **citation**? (See the *Referencing APA Style* guide.)
3. **Conclusion** (approx. 150-200 words)
 - Does your conclusion:
 - restate – but not merely repeat word-for-word – the main argument or purpose of your essay?
 - recap the main points of your essay and show how they link together?
 - end thoughtfully? Perhaps suggest further areas of study that have emerged from your essay, or limitations you feel your essay contains?
4. **References**
 - Have you provided a **reference list** for all sources that you have cited throughout your essay? (See the [APA Referencing: A Guide for Ara Institute of Canterbury](#).)

* Adjust word length suggestions proportionally for essays longer or shorter than 1500 words.