**Introduction**

Almost all students will at some time be expected to write an essay, or some other kind of argument, e.g. a review or discussion section, in a longer piece of writing. In English, an essay is a piece of argumentative writing several paragraphs long written about one topic, usually based on your reading. The aim of the essay should be deduced strictly from the wording of the title or question, and needs to be defined at the beginning. The purpose of an essay is for you to say something for yourself using the ideas of the subject, for you to present ideas you have learned in your own way. The emphasis should be on working with other people's ideas, rather than reproducing their words, but your own voice should show clearly. The ideas and people that you refer to need to made explicit by a system of referencing.

According to Linda Flower (1990, p. v), "students are reading to create a *text* of their own, trying to integrate information from sources with *ideas* of their own, and attempting to do so under the guidance of a *purpose*."

**Organization**

Your essay should have the following sections:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [1. Preliminaries](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#prelim) | Title page |
| [2. Main text](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#main) | Introduction Main body Conclusion |
| [3. End matter](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#end) | References |

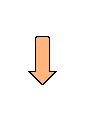
[^](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#top)

**1. Preliminaries**

Before you start the main part of your essay or assignment, there should be a title page. The title page should contain information to enable your lecturer and departmental office or other reader to identify exactly what the piece of work is. It should include your name and course; the title of the assignment and any references; the lecturer it is for etc. [^](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#top)

**2. Main text**

English essays are linear:



- they start at the beginning and finish at the end, with every part contributing to the main line of argument, without digressions or repetition. Writers are responsible for making their line of argument clear and presenting it in an orderly fashion so that the reader can follow. Each paragraph discusses one major point and each paragraph should lead directly to the next. The paragraphs are tied together with an introduction and a conclusion.

The main text of the essay has three main parts:

1. An introduction
2. A main body
3. A conclusion

**I. The introduction.**

The introduction consists of two parts:

* 1. It should include a few general statements about the subject to provide a background to your essay and to attract the reader's attention. It should try to explain why you are writing the essay. It may include a definition of terms in the context of the essay, etc.
  2. It should also include a statement of the specific subdivisions of the topic and/or indication of how the topic is going to be tackled in order to specifically address the question.

It should introduce the central idea or the main purpose of the writing.

**II. The main body.**

The main body consists of one or more paragraphs of ideas and arguments. Each paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic. The paragraphs of the essay contain the main ideas and arguments of the essay together with illustrations or examples. The paragraphs are linked in order to connect the ideas. The purpose of the essay must be made clear and the reader must be able to follow its development.

**III. The conclusion.**

The conclusion includes the writer's final points.

* 1. It should recall the issues raised in the introduction and draw together the points made in the main body
  2. and explain the overall significance of the conclusions. What general points can be drawn from the essay as a whole?

It should clearly signal to the reader that the essay is finished and leave a clear impression that the purpose of the essay has been achieved.

[^](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#top)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PRELIMINARIES | | |
| **↓** | | |
| I. INTRODUCTION | | |
|  | General Statement Organization Statement |  |
| **↓** | | |
| II. MAIN BODY | | |
|  | A. Introductory Sentence Point 1 Point 2 Point 3 ... Concluding Sentence |  |
| **↓** | | |
|  | B. Introductory Sentence Point 1 Point 2 Point 3 ... Concluding Sentence |  |
| **↓** | | |
|  | C. Introductory Sentence Point 1 Point 2 Point 3 ... Concluding Sentence |  |
| **↓** | | |
| III. CONCLUSION | | |
|  | Recall issues in introduction;  draw together main points; final comment. |  |
| **↓** | | |
| END MATTER | | |

[^](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#top)

**3. End Matter**

At the end of the essay, there should be a list of references known as the MLA page. This should give full information about the materials that you have used in the assignment.

**Ways of organizing essays.**

Essays are organized differently according to their purpose. Essays can be divided into the following main types.

**1. The descriptive essay**

[a. Description of object or place](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#descplace)

[b. Describing a sequence of events.](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#descsequ)

[c. Describing a process](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#descproc)

[d. Describing and explaining](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#descexp)

**2. The argument essay**

[a. The balanced view](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#argbal)

[b. The persuasive essay](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#argpers)

[c. The to what extent essay.](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#argextent)

**3. Compare and contrast essays**

[a. The contrast essay](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#contrast)

[b. The compare essay](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#compare)

[c. The compare and contrast essays](http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/essay.htm#compcont)

**1. The descriptive essay**

**a. Description of object or place**

*Describe*essays require you to state the appearance of something, or to state the major characteristics of it. Note the word *state*i.e. you are not asked to comment on the subject or to give your personal point of view on it. Questions are often introduced by:

*Describe ....*  
*Narrate...*  
*Tell....*

Plan:

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction  major aspects of the subject. |
| **↓** |
| description of aspect A |
| **↓** |
| description of aspect B |
| **↓** |
| etc. |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

**b. Describing a sequence of events.**

Describing a sequence of events is simply telling a story.

State clearly when events happened or how one event caused another. Questions may be introduced by:

*Give an account of...  
Trace...  
Examine developments in...*

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction |
| **↓** |
| First situation |
| **↓** |
| then A happened |
| **↓** |
| then B happened |
| **↓** |
| etc. |
| **↓** |
| Final situation |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

**c. Describing a process**

This is like telling a story but here the connections between the facts must be clearly shown and explained. Group the events into steps or stages.

Examples of such questions are:

*Explain/What is the connection between...  
Describe the procedures by which...*

|  |
| --- |
| Definition of process  Main equipment/Main steps |
| **↓** |
| Step One  leads to |
| **↓** |
| Step Two  leads to |
| **↓** |
| Step Three |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion  Summary of process |

**d. Describing and explaining**

Some of the words and phrases which introduce this type of description are:

*Explain the causes/reasons....*  
*Account for....*  
*Analyze the causes....*  
*Comment on (the reasons for)....  
Show that....*  
*Show why...*  
*Examine the effect of....*  
*Suggest reasons for....*  
*Why did...?*  
*What are the implications of...?*  
*Discuss the causes of....*  
*Discuss the reasons for....*

When we are asked to describe or explain causes, factors, functions or results, the examiner wants us to group our facts. Similar causes are put together, for instance the economic causes of a situation. There are basically two main ways to organize this type of essay.

The question is "Describe the causes of A. Illustrate your answer by specific examples."

i.

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to causes of A |
| **↓** |
| Cause 1 + example |
| **↓** |
| Effects 1 |
| **↓** |
| Cause 2 with example |
| **↓** |
| Effects 2 |
| **↓** |
| Cause 3 with examples |
| **↓** |
| Effects 3 |
| **↓** |
| Cause 4 with example |
| **↓** |
| Effects 4 |
| **↓** |
| etc. |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

ii.

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to causes of A |
| **↓** |
| Causes + examples |
| **↓** |
| Transition |
| **↓** |
| Effects |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

**2. The argument essay**

There are two main methods of presenting an argument, and in general the one you choose will depend on exactly how the essay title is worded.

**a. The balanced view**

If the essay title begins with something like:

*Give the arguments for and against....*  
*Assess the importance of....*  
*Examine the arguments for and against....*  
*What are the advantages and disadvantages of...?*  
*Evaluate....*  
*Critically examine the statement that....*  
*To what extent is...true?*

or even just the word

*Discuss....*

then it is clear that a balanced essay is required. That is to say you should present both sides of an argument, without necessarily committing yourself to any points of view, which should always be based on evidence, until the final paragraph.

At its simplest your essay plan will be as follows:

|  |
| --- |
| Introduce the argument to the reader.  e.g. why it is particularly relevant topic nowadays  or refer directly to some comments that have been voiced on it recently. |
| **↓** |
| Reasons against the argument |
| **↓** |
| Reasons in favor of the argument |
| **↓** |
| After summarizing the two sides,  state your own point of view,  and explain why you think as you do |

**b. The persuasive essay**

This second type of argumentative essay involves stating your own point of view immediately, and trying to convince the reader by reasoned argument that you are right. Perhaps the essay title will begin with something like:

*Give your views on....*  
*What do you think about...?*  
*Do you agree that...?*  
*Consider whether....*

Or perhaps the title itself will be so controversial that everyone will hold a definite opinion in one direction or another.

The form of the essay will be, in outline, as follows:

|  |
| --- |
| Introduce the topic briefly in general terms,  and then state your own opinion.  Explain what you plan to prove in the essay. |
| **↓** |
| Reasons against the argument.  Dispose briefly of the main objections to your case. |
| **↓** |
| Reasons for your argument  the arguments to support your own view,  with evidence and examples. |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion - Do not repeat your point of view again.  End your essay with something memorable  e.g. a quotation or a direct question. |

**c. The to what extent essay**

In this type of essay the examiner is giving you a statement. It is obviously true but truth is never 100%. You must decide how true it is? Are there some areas where you disagree with the statement? If so, describe how far you agree, and your points of agreement and disagreement. Words used in the question are:

*To what extent ....*  
*How true ....*  
*How far do you agree....*

A possible answer structure is:

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to problem |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 1 - true |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 1 - false |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 2 - true |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 2 - false |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 3 - true |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 3 - false |
| **↓** |
| etc |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion  a ‘subtraction’ sum |

**3. Compare and contrast essays.**

**a The Contrast essay**

*Contrast* or *distinguish between* questions usually present you with two or more terms, instruments, concepts or procedures that are closely connected, and sometimes confused. The purpose of the essay is to explain the differences between them. The question may be of the form:

*Contrast ....*  
*Distinguish between ...*  
*What is the difference between....*  
*What are the differences between....*  
*How are ... and ... different?*

A suitable answer structure would be:

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to differences between A and B |
| **↓** |
| Contrast A & B in terms of first difference |
| **↓** |
| Contrast A & B in terms of second difference |
| **↓** |
| Contrast A & B in terms of third difference |
| **↓** |
| etc |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

**b. The Compare essay**

*Compare*questions usually present you with two or more terms, instruments, concepts or procedures that are closely connected, and sometimes confused. The purpose of the essay is to explain the similarities between them. Words used are:

*Compare ....*  
*What features do ... and ... have in common?*  
*What are the similarities between....*  
*How are ... and ... similar?*

A suitable answer structure would be:

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to similarities between A and B |
| **↓** |
| Compare A & B  in terms of first similarity |
| **↓** |
| Compare A & B  in terms of second similarity |
| **↓** |
| Compare A & B  in terms of third similarity |
| **↓** |
| etc. |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

**c. The compare and contrast essay**

Compare and contrast essays require you to indicate areas in which the things to be compared are similar and different.

*Compare and contrast....*

There are two main ways to answer such questions:

i.

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to differences and similarities between A and B |
| **↓** |
| Difference 1 |
| **↓** |
| Difference 2 |
| **↓** |
| Difference 3 |
| **↓** |
| etc. |
| **↓** |
| Transition |
| **↓** |
| Similarity 1 |
| **↓** |
| Similarity 2 |
| **↓** |
| Similarity 3 |
| **↓** |
| etc. |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |

ii.

|  |
| --- |
| Introduction to differences and similarities between A and B |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 1 - similarities |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 1 - differences |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 2 - similarities |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 2 - differences |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 3 - similarities |
| **↓** |
| Aspect 3 - differences |
| **↓** |
| etc |
| **↓** |
| Conclusion |