

Student SkillPack

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Essay Writing

STARTER LEVEL

ESSAY WRITING Starter Level

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CONTENTS

- 1 The starting point
- 2 Planning your time
- 3 What next?
- 4 Gathering information
- 5 Starting to write
- 6 Drafting
- 7 Structure
- 8 Language
- 9 Style
- 10 Editing
- 11 Improving what you do
- 12 References and bibliography

The essay is the traditional form of assessment in Higher Education. Essays are used to a great extent in some subjects; in others you may be asked to write one only occasionally, to give you practice at this type of writing. They are often used in exams, where you may be required to write short essays about a topic (eg a 2 hour exam with three questions). A thesis or dissertation may be in the form of an extended essay (check with your tutor).

Essays are mainly used in the academic world. You write about a topic in a way which is well reasoned and moves logically from beginning to end. It allows a writer to explore a topic and write about it in the way they think is appropriate, with the structure being largely up to them. This 'freedom' can make it hard for a writer to see what to include and how.

How is this different from a report? Reports are widely used in employment, professional areas, government etc. A report has a specific structure, with clear numbered sections. It is concise, and gives the results of an investigation to somebody who needs it, usually to help them take action.

You may know your topic well, but how you write your essay will determine your mark or grade.

We suggest you use this SkillPack:

- when you have an essay to write
- to help you improve your essay writing skills in general.

There are margins for your notes and boxes asking specific questions to help you.

NOTES

When you have completed it, you should be able to:

Plan work

- identify the features of an essay
- identify the purpose and audience for the essay, and how this influences it
- identify an appropriate/accepted structure and style for your purpose, audience, situation and the subject matter, including complex subjects
- plan the processes needed
- identify time, resource and information needs.

Use your plan

- use the essay format appropriately for the purpose, subject and audience
- organise and present information/ideas/images to make meaning and argument clear
- use style and language to make meaning and argument clear
- edit/redraft to ensure coherence and clarity, following standard conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation
- pull together and include information/evidence which is accurate, identifying any opinion and bias
- use academic conventions (eg *referencing*).

Review work

- evaluate the essay's effectiveness for its purpose, subject and audience
- identify ways of improving the essay.

(Based on QCA Key Skill specifications, QCA 2000)

1 The starting point

You need to start by making sure you know exactly what is wanted. A very common reason for a low mark/poor grade for an essay is that it is not directed sufficiently to the question or topic and does not meet the requirements. This often happens in exams, when people can be nervous and in a hurry, and do not stop to think about what is needed.

In any writing you should start by identifying the reader and what s/he will expect. This is a vital step in being able to communicate your ideas well to the reader and is possibly the most important aspect to consider.

You also need to interpret what your topic or question means – it may sound straightforward, but it is not always easy to identify the purpose.

1.1 Requirements

Your reader is likely to be your tutor. What will s/he expect and judge to be a good essay? Making notes on the following will help you before you begin work. To find out about the following you could:

- look at any handouts you have been given ('brief') about this essay/assignment
- look at your course/unit handbook to find out about general expectations
- look at the assessment criteria for your assignment
- ask friends in your subject area if you could see their previous essays; try to work out why they got the grade they did
- ask your tutor – s/he may give you examples of good/poor essays.



What you need to know	Your notes
What 'requirements', if any, are there? eg <i>number of words, word-processed, can you include images?</i>	
What will get a good mark or grade? What are the assessment criteria? Is there any weighting, ie what are the things which will most improve your mark/grade?	
What is 'the norm' for essays in your subject area? eg <i>you might be expected to write in the passive voice (ie 'it has been found that...'), or in the first person (ie 'I found that...')</i> eg <i>some subjects do not allow sub-headings, others do.</i>	
Please add other useful information (eg <i>any peer/self-assessment</i>)	

NOTES

NOTES

1.2 Your topic/questions – the purpose and focus

Before you begin working, it is important to know exactly what your topic or question means. You need to identify the words in your topic/question which will most tell you the purpose and focus. For example:

Discuss the issues facing students new to university.

The word we have underlined, 'Discuss', is the 'instruction word', which tells you what to do, ie to write about the issues from various angles or points of view. It also implies that you need to identify the issues in order to write about them. In any topic/question you need to look for what is implied, as well as for what is actually asked for.

The word we have put in bold is 'new'. The tutor wants you to focus on the issues facing new students. This implies that the tutor expects the issues to be different from those facing students who have been at university/college for some time. The tutor will want to hear about only those issues facing new students. This gives you the focus for the essay.

This was a straightforward example. The following is more complex:

The dramatic increase in student numbers in Higher Education has meant that teachers have had to change their teaching methods and develop new ones. Consider the implications of this for students.

Where is the instruction word, which gives you the purpose? 'Consider'. This means something different from 'discuss', as used in the first example – you need to weigh things up and make a judgement about them.

What are the words/phrases which give the focus? '**Implications of this for students**'. You are expected to write about the effect the changed and new methods have had on students.

What is implied? To write about this topic, you will need to identify what the changed and new methods are.

What else will you need to write about? You would need to give information about the increase in student numbers. What might be implied here? You could write about why the increase in student numbers has meant changes in teaching approaches. You might also want to identify the new teaching methods which seem to work best for students, or to identify methods you think would work.

So, if we underline the instruction word and put in bold the words showing the focus the topic might look like this.

*The dramatic increase in student numbers in Higher Education has meant that teachers have had to change their teaching methods and to develop new ones. Consider the **implications** of this for students.*

You can make notes in the box below about your own topic/question. If you are unsure about the meaning of any words in your topic/question, check in a dictionary (this can be very helpful with instruction words such as 'consider', 'discuss', 'describe' etc, even if you know what the word usually means).



What is your topic or question?
What is/are the instruction word/s? What do they suggest about the purpose of the essay and what you need to do?
What is/are the word/s giving the focus?
What is implied?
What else will you need to write about?

NOTES

If you are uncertain, ask your tutor for help before you go any further. Other students may be unsure too.

1.3 Complex topics

The more complex your topic (ie with more elements), the more important it will be to analyse it in the above way – and the harder it will be to do so. The first example in 1.2 above was easier to analyse than the second one.

It may be that with a complex topic/question there is more than one way of interpreting it. Some students will identify certain words and phrases as being those giving the focus, others will think different words/phrases do so. Different students may see different issues implied by their topic and there may be no one correct interpretation. Indeed, the tutor may want to know how you interpret the topic or question.

It will help to think about your topic/question in the way suggested in Section 1.2, and to have good reasons for what you think are the instruction words, the focus words, what is implied, and to check this out with your tutor.

NOTES

2 Planning your time

You will have a deadline by when to hand in your essay. To meet the deadline you need to identify what you have to do and how long it will take, then work back from your deadline to see when you need to start what. A good general rule is to:

- allow equal amounts of time for gathering and using information and for actual writing (people underestimate how long it will take to actually write)
- estimate how long each task will take and add at least half on again. It always takes longer than you think.

You will need to allow time for the other course work you have.

For example:

Deadline 12th December

Task	How long it will take	When to start
<i>Clarifying the topic</i>	<i>2 hours</i>	<i>1st Nov</i>
<i>Identifying information sources</i>	<i>1 day</i>	<i>2nd Nov</i>
<i>Reading information and making notes on it</i>	<i>3 days</i>	<i>5th Nov</i>
<i>Starting to write</i>	<i>up to one day</i>	<i>15th Nov</i>
<i>Drafting</i>	<i>2 days</i>	<i>17th Nov</i>
<i>Editing, presenting final essay</i>	<i>1 day</i>	<i>1st Dec</i>

The rest of this chapter will help you see what work you need to do to produce your essay and how long it might take. For more help see the Starter Level SkillPacks on 'Organising Yourself and Your Time' and on 'Action Planning'.

3 What next?

You will need to gather information for your essay. You also need to get started with the actual writing of it. There is no right order in which to do this and different people have different approaches. However, we suggest you look next at Section 4 'Gathering information' or Section 5 'Starting to write', moving back and forth between them as your ideas develop.

If you are unsure where to start, it might help to begin by gathering the main information you need, then to start writing, because the information will determine what you write about. Once you begin writing you may find you need to look for more information.

4 Gathering information

4.1 What information do you need?

Look at the box you completed in Section 1.2. This will tell you what you need to find out about.

What questions do you need to ask about your essay topic/question? Where might you find that information?

There is no right way. Two different students might identify different questions. One thing that makes some essays better than others is how good you are at identifying what to find out about – your ‘research’ questions.

What makes your ‘research’ questions useful or good? They are likely to:

- get to the heart of the matter, identify the key issues
- cover most of the important aspects of the topic
- look at different angles to the topic (though in your topic, you may need to look at something in depth from one angle only)
- be perceptive or imaginative.

Example. *The dramatic increase in student numbers in Higher Education has meant that teachers have had to change their teaching methods and to develop new ones. Consider the implications of this for students.*

Questions I need to answer	Possible sources of information
<i>How did student numbers increase? What are the statistics? When did they increase?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) publications • Government papers • DfEE or government web sites • Journal articles/books on changes in Higher Education
<i>What are the implications of those increases for HE lecturers?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal articles/books on changes in Higher Education • Lecturers
<i>What were teaching methods like before the numbers increased?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal articles/books on changes in Higher Education • Lecturers
<i>How have teaching methods changed? What are the new ones?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal articles/books on changes in Higher Education • Journal articles/books on teaching in Higher Education • Journal articles/books on using IT to help learning • Lecturers
<i>What was good/poor about the old methods?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • Ex-students
<i>What is good/poor about the new methods?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • Current students

NOTES

NOTES

You could complete the following box for your essay topic/question. Look at your notes in 1.2 to help you identify the questions. If you are unsure about sources of information, look at the SkillPacks on 'Gathering and Using Information' or ask at a library/learning centre. You could particularly look for guidance on the following:

- finding all the information you need
- efficient (quick but thorough) ways of gathering and using the information.



Questions I need to answer	Possible sources of information

4.2 Using information

When selecting useful information try to stay focused on your notes in Section 1.2 above and the questions you identified in Section 4.1 above.

In Higher Education, it will not be enough to only provide relevant and accurate information – you are also expected to identify any opinions and possible bias in the material you use.

Opinion. This is an idea for which there is no supporting evidence, someone's view.

Bias. This means selective, prejudiced or unbalanced (eg *only some information/ideas/sources are chosen to present a particular view, with ideas/information deliberately missed out; incorrect/inaccurate interpretations/statistics*).

You will need to analyse the material you have selected (eg *making sure it is up to date, accurate, reliable, from a reputable source etc*). It may help to look at the SkillPacks on 'Gathering and Using Information'. You could particularly look for guidance on the following:

- finding all the information you need
- efficient (quick but thorough) ways of gathering and using the information
- critically analysing the information.

4.3 Referencing information

Plagiarism is seen as a 'very bad thing' in the academic world. It means using somebody else's ideas/work in your own work without acknowledging where it came from.

To avoid being accused of plagiarism you must give a 'reference' for everything you include in your essay which others produced (eg *from published work, the Web*). This means:

- in your text you show where you have included something from somebody else's work
- at the end of your text you give a list of all the works you have referred to.

For example, in your text:

In their book on student skills, Drew and Bingham (1997) give guidance on a range of topics which are relevant to student work in Higher Education.

Here the (1997) indicates a reference. It is the date of publication of the work.

At the end of your text:

References

Drew, S. and Bingham, R. (1997) The Student Skills Guide, Gower

It is very important that you look at advice on plagiarism and referencing. You could:

- check with your tutor – there may be specific requirements in your subject area
- look in your course/unit handbooks
- look at the Starter Level SkillPack on 'Gathering and Using Information'.

4.4 Making notes about your information

See the SkillPack on 'Note Taking' for guidance on taking and organising notes on any information you use. For example *noting, at the time, all the information you need for the reference will avoid you having to find the item again to give the referencing details in your essay.*

NOTES

NOTES

5 Starting to write

Not knowing where to start when writing an essay is a common problem for students.

There is no one right way. You may hear advice that you should always start by making a plan, but this does not work for everyone. You should find a way which suits you. Each of the authors of this SkillPack, for example, has a different method of working:

- one gathers information, then writes the whole essay straight off the top of her head, and then goes back and re-drafts and revises it
- the other reads around the topic and gathers some initial information, then creates a rough plan and then produces a draft.

Try different ways of working until you find what is best for you, rather than just doing what you have always done. Something else may work better! Here are some different ways of starting to write. They are in no particular order.

5.1 Generating ideas

Brainstorming

The 'rules' are:

- give yourself a time limit (eg *10 minutes*)
- on a big piece of paper, write down all the ideas you can think of about your topic (or speak into a tape recorder)
- do not make any judgements about your ideas, just get them all out, no matter how daft or rude
- think of ideas which 'piggy back' (ie link to or come from) the ideas you've already had.

Then go back over your ideas. Remove those which do look daft or irrelevant (your notes in 1.2 and 4.1 will help you identify relevance). See which of the other ideas seem appropriate. You could then:

- group ideas together where they seem to be about a similar aspect
- put your grouped ideas into an order which seems to make sense (see Section 6.7 below).

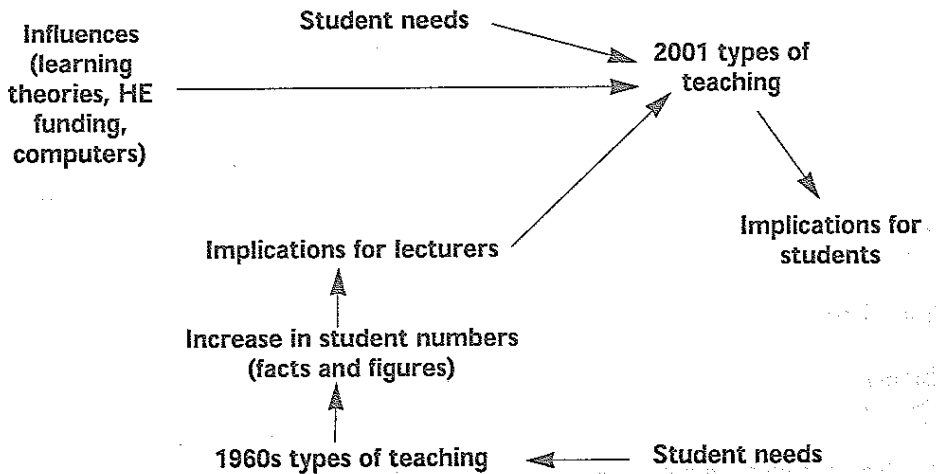
Thinking and clarifying by discussion

Talking about your essay topic to somebody else can help your understanding and get it clear in your mind. If you do this with another student who has the same essay topic, remember that any individual work you hand in must be your own work. You can share ideas and discuss it, but if your work looks too similar to that of somebody else, you may be accused of cheating.

You could even talk to yourself about it, using a tape recorder. Listening to yourself speak on a topic can help you see where it sounds clear and where it seems confused, especially if you leave it for a couple of days before listening.

Creating a flow diagram/mind map

This is similar to brainstorming, but here you put your ideas into a diagram. You link your ideas together with lines or arrows to show relationships between them. Your 'map' may start as a 'doodle', which you refine as your ideas develop.



People who are better visually than with words may find this helpful.

Making a plan

You could begin by writing a plan, or create one after brainstorming/drawing a mind map. Writing one at some point may help you identify specific information you need to gather and keep you focused on the topic.

Your notes in 1.2 above are the beginnings of such a plan. You would show what you are going to include and in what order. See Section 7 below on 'structure' to help you make your plan. How you do a plan will vary with your subject and what works for you. An example is given below.

Example. *The dramatic increase in student numbers in Higher Education has meant that teachers have had to change their teaching methods and to develop new ones. Consider the implications of this for students.*

NOTES

ESSAY WRITING - Starter Level

NOTES

Plan

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Essay will consider implications of recent changes in HE teaching methods</i>
<i>Para 1</i>	<i>Reasons for need to change teaching in HE Increase in student numbers from 1960-2000</i>
<i>Para 2</i>	<i>Increase in funding of HE number of lecturers not proportionate to increase in student numbers Reasons for need to change teaching methods - students having different learning experiences - new understanding of how people learn (eg by doing) - increasing use of technology</i>
<i>Para 3</i>	<i>What teaching was like up to 1960s</i>
<i>Para 4</i>	<i>How teaching approaches have changed</i>
<i>Para 5</i>	<i>How new approaches better for students</i>
<i>Para 6</i>	<i>How new approaches worse for students</i>
<i>Conclusions</i>	<i>Summary of main changes and whether on whole better or worse</i>

Plunging straight in

Some people start to write a draft straight off, as quickly as possible. They then revise and redraft it – or even re-write it completely.

Word-processing your essay is a great help, as you can cut and paste to move sections of your text, and can save different versions of the essay, in case you decide your early draft of a section was the best.

Which methods for starting to write your current essay will you use?

(This area is intentionally left blank for the student to write their response to the question above.)

6 Drafting

At some point you must draft your essay. All good writers, no matter what methods they use, produce a draft which they revise and edit to produce a final version.

If you word-process your work you can quite easily make several different drafts, or keep reworking one draft.

If you handwrite your work, you could write your first draft on every other line and leave wide margins. You can use the empty lines to rephrase sections and the margins to show (eg *by lines or arrows*) where to move sections to. You can then handwrite your final version. If possible, have a break of a few days before reviewing your draft, so you come to it with fresh eyes.

If you have 'writers' block' and just cannot put pen to paper or type a word, you could try the following. This suggestion allows you to start writing without worrying about what you write:

- If handwriting, have two sheets of paper with a sheet of carbon paper between them. Write on the top paper using something with a sharp point, but not a pen or pencil. You will not be able to see what you write, but you will be copying it onto the sheet below through the carbon paper. You can look later at what you have written and amend it.
- If word-processing, switch on the computer, type on the keyboard but have your monitor switched off. You will not be able to see what you are typing but you can save it and amend it later.

7 Structure

You may have had feedback about the 'structure' of your essays, or tutors may tell you the importance of 'structuring the essay'.

This means how you organise the information/ideas/images in your essay, to make your argument flow or to emphasise your point of view. There are two main reasons why an essay may be difficult to understand – using English incorrectly (eg *poor punctuation*) or a confused structure. Poor use of English will reduce your mark/grade. Your structure can either reduce or increase it.

Essays have a beginning (introduction), a middle (main body), and an end (conclusion) and are divided into paragraphs. The following sections cover these areas.

7.1 Introduction

Your essay must have a clear introduction, which explains what you are going to focus on in your essay. It may explain to the reader your approach and how you have interpreted the essay topic or question (in your own words – you should not just repeat the topic word for word). It may say what your main message will be. If you have to prove a statement or hypothesis, it may say what that is.

The introduction should be clear and prepare the reader for what comes next.

Some people write their introduction last, after they have written the main body of the work, by when they are very clear about what they want the introduction to say.

NOTES

NOTES

7.2 Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the building blocks of an essay. (A paragraph is a number of sentences, grouped together, on an aspect of the topic.) If you are word-processing, it is divided from other paragraphs by an extra line space. If you are handwriting it can be divided by a line space or by indenting the first word, ie moving the first word in a few spaces.

This is a new paragraph. Paragraphs are made up of sentences. All the sentences in a paragraph must follow on from one another and be about the same aspect of the topic. A common fault is to confuse a reader by putting sentences about different things in the same paragraph. What confuses the reader even more is to have a sentence about something different in a paragraph, then several paragraphs later have another sentence about it.

If an aspect of the essay is too big for one paragraph (about a third of a page is the maximum length for a paragraph) break down the aspect into smaller parts and have several paragraphs which follow each other about the aspect.

7.3 Putting your paragraphs into an order

Look back at your notes in Section 1.2 above. What was your purpose or aim? In what order could you put your ideas and information to best meet your aim? For example:

If you want to show that new teaching methods are better than old ones, you could put a paragraph about the disadvantages of the old methods before one about the advantages of the new ones. This order might make the contrast stand out.

If you want to show that the old teaching methods are better, you might do the reverse.

You may want to show how teaching methods have developed. In this case a chronological order might be best – what happened first comes first.

There is no 'right order'. It depends what message you want to get over.

You could put items in the second box below in the order in which you think of them – then put a number next to each point to show what order might be best for them.

NOTES

7.5 Examples

Clear	To be avoided
<p>Example of a paragraph where all sentences are about the same aspect.</p>	<p>Example of a paragraph which includes sentences about different aspects.</p>
<p><i>Increasing student numbers, with no increase in funding or number of lecturers, has meant that new ways of teaching have had to be found. This has coincided with the advent of a new type of resource – the computer. A main concern in HE has been to see how the computer can help in teaching, both to make the most of this valuable resource and also to reduce pressure on teaching staff.</i></p>	<p><i>Increasing student numbers, with no increase in funding or number of lecturers, has meant that new ways of teaching have had to be found. There are often problems in using computers for teaching, logging on time, for example. Types of room affect what sort of teaching can be done in them.</i></p>
<p>Paragraphs in an order where they follow on from each other. NB these are short paragraphs to make the point quickly.</p>	<p>Paragraphs not in an order where they follow on from each other. NB these are very short paragraphs to make the point quickly.</p>
<p><i>A main concern in HE has been to see how the computer can help in teaching, both to make the most of this valuable resource and also to reduce pressure on teaching staff.</i></p> <p><i>Using computers as a teaching aid does itself require time and effort from teaching staff. Many have found that adapting teaching materials for the computer takes as much time, if not more, than traditional teaching methods.</i></p> <p><i>However, the benefits of using the computer both to produce work and to find information far outweigh the costs in time in developing teaching approaches using them.</i></p>	<p><i>There are often problems in using computers for teaching, logging on time, for example. Students can become frustrated by network systems which do not work well.</i></p> <p><i>Types of room affect what sort of teaching can be done in them. There are limited teaching activities you can do in a tiered lecture theatre.</i></p> <p><i>Libraries are changing in nature. Many are being renamed 'Learning Centre' and the librarian's job is changing too.</i></p>
	<p>Paragraphs which do not follow on from each other and where not all the sentences in one paragraph are related to one aspect. This is the most confusing (and also quite common).</p>

ESSAY WRITING - Starter Level

Clear	Confusing
	<p><i>There are often problems in using computers for teaching, logging on time, for example. Types of room affect what sort of teaching can be done in them.</i></p> <p><i>Libraries are changing in nature. Many are being renamed 'Learning Centre' and the librarian's job is changing too. Students can become frustrated by network systems which do not work well.</i></p> <p><i>There are limited teaching activities you can do in a tiered lecture theatre.</i></p>

NOTES

7.6 Conclusion

Your last paragraph should not include new ideas or information not covered earlier in your essay. It should round off the essay and draw it to a close. There are various ways of doing this. Which of the following would suit your essay? There may be more than one.



Summarise the main points you have made	
State what you think are the main features of the topic	
Make a judgement about or evaluate aspects of your topic	
Make recommendation about what you think should happen	
Highlight any further areas you think need investigating or further issues to be explored	
Restate a hypotheses you set out to prove	
Other ideas	

NOTES

8 Language

8.1 Academic language

You need to use language in a way which makes your meaning clear and which meets 'academic' expectations. Whatever your subject area your tutors will want you to use appropriate, and often, formal academic language in your essay. This is different from spoken English.

For example:

'We could of done that, no problem.'

Although this is fine in speech, it is unacceptable in an essay. It is not grammatically correct (it should be *'We could **have** done that*) and it uses a slang phrase (*'no problem*).

To convey the same meaning you would need to write, depending on whether you use the personal or passive voice in your subject area, either eg:

'We would have been able to do that without difficulty'

or

'It would have been possible to do that without difficult.'

Some slang phrases are so common they may seem acceptable to you. Until you get used to what is acceptable and what isn't (in an essay that would have to be 'is not'), ask somebody else to read what you have written and to point out any slang or parts which look like spoken English.

8.2 Correct use of English

Incorrect use of English may reduce your marks or grades. Tutors see this as important because it helps them understand your work, and also because any employers in the future will expect you to use good written English.

Areas to look out for include:

- **spelling correctly** – use a spell checker or a dictionary; ask somebody else to look at your work. If you are dyslexic word-processing your work can be a great help, because of the spell checker.
- **punctuation** – punctuating something wrongly may alter. The whole meaning of a sentence. Sorry, we meant 'Punctuating something wrongly may alter the whole meaning of a sentence'. Check your punctuation. Get somebody to read your draft and to point out mistakes you commonly make, to help you avoid them in the future. Use a book on grammar or punctuation (see the references for this chapter for suggestions).
- **grammar** – this can also make the difference between understanding and not understanding your work. Again, ask somebody to read your draft and to point out your common mistakes. Use a book on grammar (see the references for this chapter for suggestions).

9 Style

9.1 Choice of words

You need to use a style which helps your reader understand your meaning and argument. Style is partly about the words you use. Check what is acceptable in your subject area. Are certain technical terms common? If so, you can use them without explaining. If not, you may need to explain them or use other words.

You can create an impression by the type of words you use (eg *technical/non-technical, long/short*). What sort of impression do you want to create and what sort of words will do so?

Generally, it is better to use simple words the reader will understand. Using long or unusual words the reader has difficulty in understanding is not good practice (but some subjects do expect you to use quite sophisticated language). Look at other sorts of items written in your subject area (eg *journal articles*) and check with your tutor what is expected.

9.2 Length of sentences

Short sentences can be easy to understand, but if you only use short sentences, your essay may look simplistic and become tedious to read. Long sentences are more 'sophisticated', but too many following each other can be hard to read after a while. Very long sentences can be confusing.

A mix is probably best, but again, think what impression you want to create and what sort of mix would best create this.

9.3 Layout

How you present your work will help the reader follow it, but check what is expected in your subject area. In some subjects you can include sub-headings and visual images such as diagrams, but not in others.

Whatever the conventions in your subject, make sure the reader can easily read and find their way through your essay (eg *page numbers, 'white space', ie with no text, to break it up, neat*).

If there are requirements for the layout and length (see Section 1.2 above), follow them. Make sure you have a correct list of references.

**What do you need to keep in mind for your subject and topic?
(eg words, sentences, layout)**

NOTES

NOTES

10 Editing

Once you have your final draft you need to edit it to make sure it will get the mark/grade you want. The following checklist may help. ✓

Does it meet the requirements you identified in Section 1.2 above?	
Does it answer the questions you identified in Section 4.1 above?	
Does it have a beginning, a middle and an end?	
Are all the sentences in a paragraph about one aspect?	
Do the paragraphs follow on from each other?	
Are the paragraphs in the best order to get your message across?	
Is your spelling correct?	
Is your punctuation correct?	
Is your grammar correct?	
Have you used formal academic language?	
Have you used appropriate words for your subject area?	
Have you used an appropriate mix of long and short sentences?	
Have you referenced others' work correctly?	
Does your layout help the reader and make the work look attractive?	

11 Improving what you do

You can evaluate how good your essay is by:

- using the editing checklist given in Section 10 above
- reviewing it against the assessment criteria (see Section 1).

You can then ask yourself what you most need to improve in producing essays and how to do so, eg you could:

- *work through this SkillPack again*
- *use the books suggested in the references for this SkillPack*
- *talk to friends or your tutor.*

ESSAY WRITING - Starter Level


What I need to improve	Sources of help	By (date)

NOTES

Thanks to the following for their ideas, which have contributed to this version:
Phil Bannister, Peter Hartley, Teresa Lillis, Noel Williams.

NOTES

12 References and bibliography

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- Roberts, D. (1997), *The Student's Guide to Writing Essays*, Kogan Page

12.1 Student skills product list

Having worked through this SkillPack you might like to know that similar structured, straightforward guidance is also available on the following topics:

- Identifying Strengths and Improving Skills
- Organising Yourself and Your Time
- Note Taking
- Gathering and Using Information
- Critical Analysis
- Report Writing
- Oral Presentation
- Visual Communication
- Solving Problems
- Group Work
- Seminars, Group Tutorials and Meetings
- Negotiating and Assertiveness
- Coping with Pressure
- Revising and Examination Techniques
- Improving Your Learning
- Reflecting on Your Experience
- Action Planning

The Student Skills Guide Second Edition

All of the SkillPacks listed above are gathered together and are available as a paperback workbook (0 566 08430 9).

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