



Harper Adams
University College

A Guide to Essay Writing

September 2011

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1. INTRODUCTION

Effective written communication skills will be of great importance to you both at College and in your career. The purpose of this document is to help you to develop these skills by acting as a handy reference during your course.

Effective written communication depends on adapting your writing to the circumstances, to the nature of the message and, above all, to the requirements of the reader. For this reason, you will need to use many different forms of communication in your career. You may need to write business or technical reports, essays, business letters, memos, instruction manuals and so on. This guide concentrates on only one of these, essay writing. However, the principles set out here apply to many other types of communication.

1.1 What is an essay?

An essay is a written response to a given problem or question. It calls upon you to organise information to support a structured argument and to communicate the argument clearly and concisely.

The important elements in effective essay writing are the research, planning and style of writing. Each of these will be covered in the pages that follow.

2. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COURSEWORK AND EXAM ESSAYS

| | Coursework | Examinations |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Structure | Introduction, main body and conclusion in both essays. | |
| Questions | Set in advance by module leader. Deadline given. | Generally unseen prior to examination. You have to think quickly and choose wisely. Answer questions. Use knowledge gained during revision. |
| Length | Longer. More detailed with time to read around the topic. | Shorter. Depends on marks allocated and question set. |
| Referencing | Extremely important in essay and in Reference Section at end. | May not be as important. Check with module tutors. |
| Accuracy | Extremely important. Marks deducted for poor spelling, grammar and punctuation (check with your tutor and brief). | College Marking Policy means all students are treated more sympathetically during stresses of examination conditions. |

3. WHAT ARE TUTORS LOOKING FOR?

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Answer the question. | A clear, logical structure is essential. | Give your own analysis, not mere description. | We want to see a fresh, original approach. |
| Clear, consistent references are essential. | Base your essay on extensive relevant reading and research. | Indecisive 'it's a bit of both' essays are disappointing. | Argue your case, with your own point of view. |
| Use commas properly. Learn how to deploy semi-colons. | We want to see evidence of independent thought. | Try to avoid formulas, clichés, and the obvious approaches. | Have a clear, relevant introduction and conclusion. |
| It's important to know the difference between "it's" and its alter ego, "its". | Don't allude to anything you've read without giving a reference for it. | Avoid a purely 'journalistic' style, in academic essays. | Don't waffle. It's not cunning, it just suggests you've got little to say. |
| Illustrate your points with up-to-date examples. | Construct your sentences carefully. | Use the internet – but with care and discrimination. | Don't fill an essay with irrelevant historical detail. |
| Use electronic resources to find material (see library website). | Check your spelling and punctuation. Seriously. | Ensure your essay is the required length. | Bring the subject to <i>life!</i> |

(Source: Gauntlett, 1998).

4. THE ESSAY WRITING PROCESS

This guide takes you through the whole essay writing process – from the initial stage of understanding an essay title, through researching, to the organisation of an essay and the final stage of proofreading.

Figure 1 shows that the writing process is not linear and is much more complex than just a beginning with an analysis of the question and ending with a consideration of your tutor's comments. It involves frequent revisiting of earlier stages, checking and reflecting: two steps forward, one step back. You may notice how much depends on a constant referring back to the question.

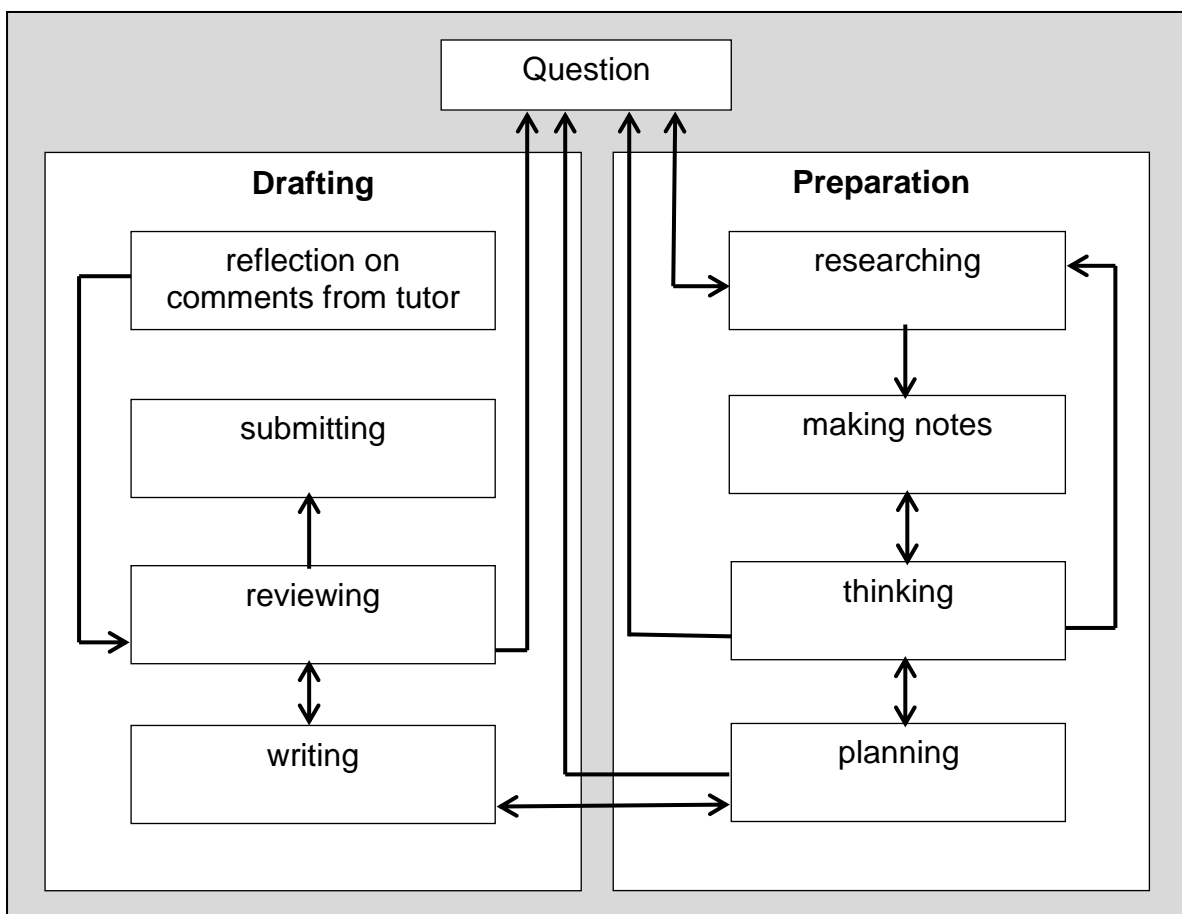


Figure 1 – The several stages involved in essay writing

(Source: Openlearn, not dated).

Essays are an opportunity for you to deepen your understanding of a subject and show your ability to research a topic, weigh up arguments and organise your thoughts. These thoughts then need to be expressed in a logical coherent manner. They need to arrive at a conclusion which follows naturally from the evidence and/or arguments you put forward. Most essays have a word limit so you will need to be selective in the material you choose to include. You must think through the topic and spend sufficient time considering your essay structure in order to achieve a good grade.

5. STAGES IN WRITING AN ESSAY

The first place to start is to plan your time up to submission or end time in an examination.

5.1 Managing your time

Coursework essays: work back from your submission date listing set deadlines in a diary/planner for each stage in the writing process.

For example: you have been given an assignment brief for this essay question:

“Describe the growth of the European Union since 1975 and suggest its likely form by 2010”

Figure 2 shows a suggested time plan for this essay.

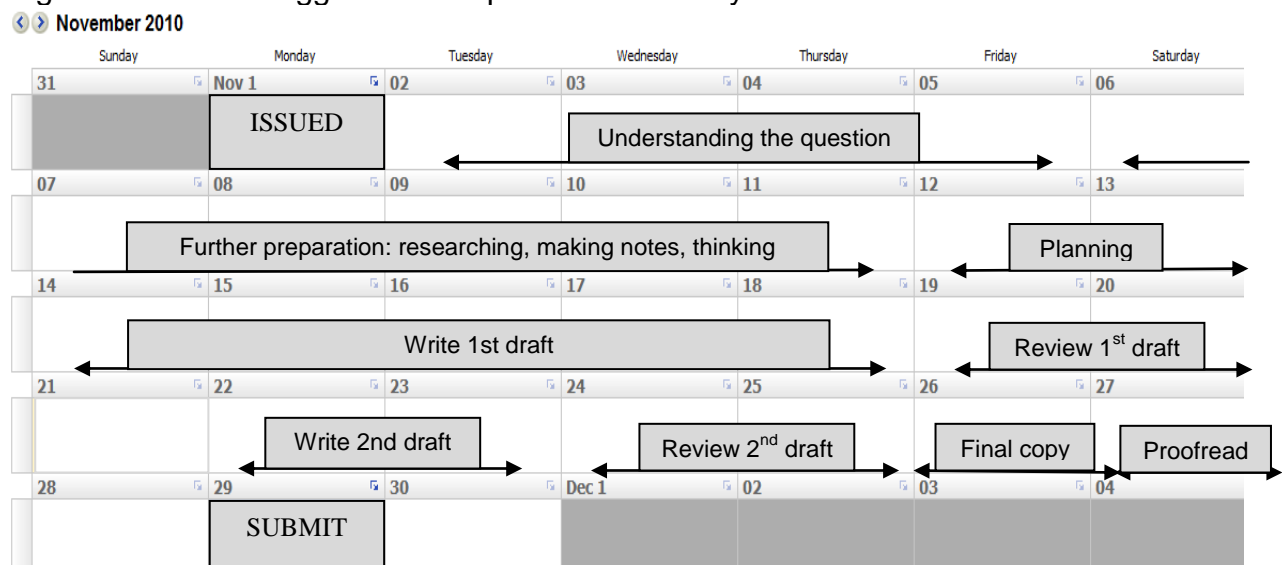


Figure 2: Suggested time plan for an essay

(Source: Author's own, 2011).

Examination essays: make sure you are familiar with the rubric (information on the front of the exam paper) which states:

- how many questions you will need to answer
- total time for exam

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have a rough idea on how long you are going to spend on each essay or other sections of the paper prior to the actual examination. Planning your time is therefore essential in addition to practising exam papers. In addition, make sure you are familiar with the 20-point examination marking scheme for discursive essays (Appendix 1) available in your course handbook. See Section 7 for further details.

5.2 Understanding the question

This is the MOST important stage of the essay writing process. Remember, failing to answer the question is the most likely cause of poor marks. The essay question must be “taken apart” word for word to ensure you are clear on what the tutor is asking for.

There are four main steps in order to understand your essay question fully; start your journey below.

Step 1 – identify the academic instruction word(s)

Examples include: *discuss, explain, evaluate, analyse.*

See Appendix 2 for a list of academic instruction words and their meanings.

Step 2 – identify the topic and focus

Step 3 – rewrite the question in your own words

Step 4 - move from the question to the library: developing a plan of action

Before going to the library and/or accessing the internet you MUST have produced a plan of action with specific tasks to keep research focused.

Select your search terms carefully when searching databases and the internet. For guidance refer to http://wizard.harper-adams.ac.uk/format_information.html

Example Question:

Explain what is meant by ‘soil quality’ and outline the threats to soil quality in the UK. Using examples identify the government policies in place for protecting soil as a valuable resource and describe some methods used to protect soil quality.

Step 1 - identify the academic instruction word(s)

Explain what is meant by ‘soil quality’ and outline the threats to soil quality in the UK. Using examples identify the government policies in place for protecting soil as a valuable resource and describe some methods used to protect soil quality.

Step 2 – identify the topic and focus in each part of the question

- Explain **soil quality**
(topic: **soil quality**)
- Outline the **threats to soil quality in the UK**
(topic: **threats to soil quality** / focus: *in the UK*)
- Identify **UK government policies in place for protecting soil** – using examples
(topic: **policies in place for protecting soil** / focus: *UK government policies*)

- Describe methods to protect soil quality
(topic: **soil quality** / focus: *methods to protect*)

Step 3 - rewrite the question in your own words

Provide an answer that offers a detailed and exact explanation of the principles of soil quality.

Cover the main threats to soil quality in the UK making sure the basic structure is presented.

Find and list only the UK government policies in place for protecting soil using specific examples.

Give the main features of several methods used to protect soil quality.

Step 4 - move from the question to the library: developing a plan of action

Select useful search terms for the specific question:

soil quality; soil protection; soil management; / policies; legislation; / soil erosion; pollution; / united kingdom; uk; england; wales etc.

1. Read widely (skimming) about soil quality (look for references regarding width and depth of threats, policies and protection).
2. Look for references for your topic area of soil quality with regards to threats and protection.
3. Find and record three examples of government policies put in place to protect soil **and** methods used to protect soil quality.



Need help? Use 'The Wizard' a site dedicated to helping you with searching, evaluating and other information skills topics. Produced by staff in the Bamford library:
<http://www2.harper-adams.ac.uk/Library/wizard2/topics.html>

5.3 Research

Guidelines

When you have read the question and taken it apart, check the guidelines given in the brief:

- how long should the essay be?
- what is the deadline?
- what other requirements are there (presentation, referencing, bibliography, etc.)
- have you been issued with any marking criteria?

Select materials

Keep the question in mind as you start to select materials. Start with basic reading:

- lecture notes
- handouts
- relevant chapters in core texts.

More detailed texts

When you are familiar with the basics, go on to more detailed texts:

- articles in journals
- texts referred to by your lecturer
- references in handouts
- references in core texts.

Be selective

Keep the question in mind, and check that the material you read and note down is relevant to it.



Useful Tips

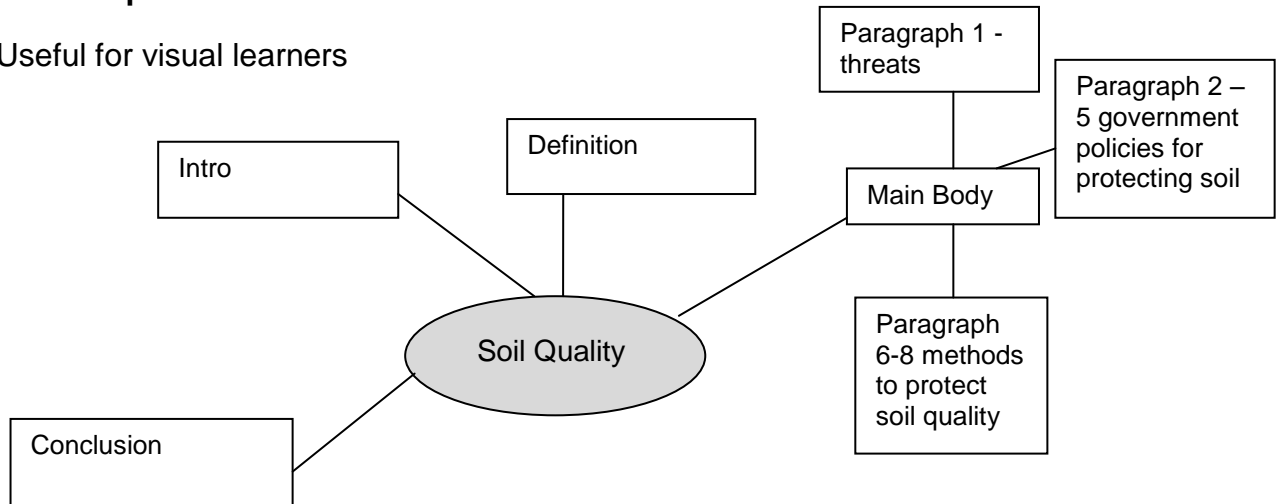
- (1) Write your notes on a separate piece of paper or index card for each reference. This allows you to sort them out into a logical order later on to match the structure of the report.
- (2) For each reference, write down full details of author, title, chapter, date, etc. This can save lots of time when you come to write your reference list, as you will not have to go back to the original documents.
- (3) Alternatively, use the electronic record system in WORD ('references' tab).

5.4 Planning

The next stage is to effectively plan your essay so that it has a coherent and logical structure. Here are five methods of organising your material: mind maps, grid of pros and cons, index cards, post-it notes and linear notes.

- **Mind maps**

Useful for visual learners



A dedicated software package called 'MindGenius' can be used on campus computers for mind-mapping.

- **Grid of pros and cons**

Assign pluses and minuses to aspects of the essay question.

- **Post-it notes**

Use post-it notes of different colours and shapes with your key words or ideas on. Move the post-it notes around on a wall or large piece of paper to organise.

- **Index cards**

Write a separate card for each key word.

Add: Important phrases, quotations and cross-references to your notes

Arrange: Arrange cards in various sequences until you find the one that works best

Number: Number the cards once happy with the order.

- **Linear notes**

Intro: Soil quality is (definition)

Main Body: Threats to soil quality in the UK are.....
UK government policies for protecting soil

Example 1 -

Example 2 -

Example 3 -

Methods to protect soil quality

A

B

C

Conclusion: To conclude.....

The information in Figure 3 can help you to formalise your essay structure:

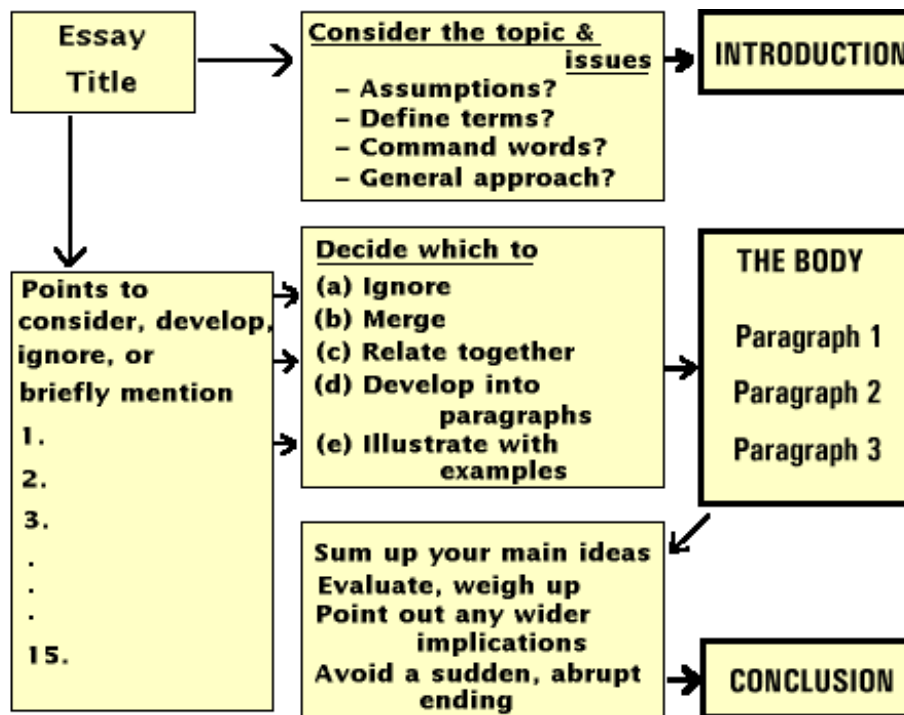


Figure 3: A suggested model for an essay plan

(Source: BIZED, 2010).

5.5 Writing

Introduction

The 'introductory' paragraph(s) are one of the most difficult aspects of writing an essay. If you are clear at the outset exactly what the question is asking, what you want to cover and the importance of the topic you will assure the reader that you have thoroughly planned your essay. Make sure you include the:

- interpretation of the question (what is it getting at?)
- structure of your answer, the map the reader is going to follow.

Main Body

Go back to your plan and check what main ideas and points you need to cover and the order you are going to put them in – remember this can be changed later. Select an idea/point for a paragraph and start writing ensuring you:

- have a clear topic sentence which picks up on an issue already highlighted in your introduction
- develop the topic of the paragraph through analysis, criticism and discussion
- make reference to evidence and examples that illustrate and support the points you have made
- complete the paragraph by connecting it to the next.

See section 6.4 for further support.

Conclusion

Your conclusion should show that the essay has achieved something and this can be done by returning directly to the essay question. Use phrases like 'In conclusion..' or 'To conclude..' to restate your argument or discussion, using one sentence to sum up each paragraph in the essay. Your conclusion will:

- usually be one paragraph of 5-6 lines
- sum up main points in essay
- refer back to question and provide an answer or say why you are unable to reach a definite decision
- not include new material
- make sure this is a logical summing up of what has been discussed and analysed.

5.6 Drafts and editing

- When you have completed your first draft, read your essay aloud to yourself or use Natural Readers (<http://www.naturalreaders.com/index.htm>) to make sure spelling and punctuation are as accurate as possible. Assignments are expected to be more accurate than essays written under examination conditions. You may need to improve or change sections.
- Asking a friend to read your work for constructive criticism is also worthwhile. Even experienced writers draft and re-draft their work.
- Finding your own style or 'voice' is important and needs practice. Try to make your writing style 'flow' so the reader enjoys your skilful writing.
- Use the checklist in Appendix 3 to help you edit your final draft.

5.7 Learning from your essay

As you plan, research and write your essay it is helpful to ask yourself several questions about your progress and record the answers on paper or electronically (blog/diary/learning log) to support you with future writing tasks i.e.

- did the task take longer/less time than estimated?
- was the task more difficult to complete than you first thought?
- which stages of writing your essay were challenging and why?
- if you were asked to complete the same task again would you do anything different?
- were there any tasks that you completed with ease?

6. STYLE

6.1 Introduction

Do not be frightened by the use of the word “style”. Style simply means the way you use words and sentences in your writing. The style of effective essays is direct, simple and straightforward. This is easy to say but more difficult to achieve: as George Bernard Shaw once wrote: “I am sorry to have written such a long letter but I did not have time to write a short one” (Shaw, not dated). Some rules to help you follow.

6.2 Words and sentences

George Orwell wrote some helpful rules for scientists who write. In summary he wrote:

- a) “Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- b) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out” (Orwell, 1999).

Some examples of word savings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Superfluous words and alternatives

| Superfluous words | Better English |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| on account of the fact that | as |
| in order to | to |
| at the present time | now |
| on the occasion of | when |
| with the result that | so that |
| in the college environment | in college |
| it is apparent therefore | thus |
| forward planning | planning |

(Source: Author’s own, 2010).

6.3 Useful words and phrases

It is important to use a variety of words and phrases throughout your essay to keep the reader interested in your writing. A list of common words and phrases used to introduce paragraphs, ideas and references can be found in Appendix 4.

6.4 Use of paragraphs

In order to maintain and make obvious a clear structure, be aware of the nature of the paragraph as the basic structuring unit in the essay. Basically, every paragraph should represent and flesh out a heading or sub-heading in the outline. The paragraph is the building block of the essay. Therefore:

1. a paragraph should be at least a third to half a page in length, but not too long or the reader will get lost. No one-sentence paragraphs!
2. it should have what is known as a topic sentence, near the beginning, that announces the theme of the paragraph. The paragraph should not deviate from this theme or introduce any new themes.

3. the first sentence should somehow be linked to, or contrast with, the last sentence of the previous paragraph.
4. the first paragraph should announce clearly the theme of the essay. In the first paragraph also you should define your version of the title and make it clear. If the marker knows from the beginning what you are going to do, s/he can bear it in mind and be aware that you are sticking to the point and developing it, because s/he will know what the point is.

The main thing is to make each paragraph a solid unit that develops a clearly announced sub-theme of the essay. This way the intended outline that is behind it will be obvious (not too obvious: do not write subheadings before every paragraph) and the marker will not have that terrible lost feeling.

6.5 Tense

Essays are normally written in the past tense and impersonally.

| |
|---|
| e.g. <u>It is</u> recommended that NOT <u>I</u> recommend that |
|---|

6.6 Use of figures and tables

Tables, diagrams and photographs can be inserted into spaces which you leave in the text. Whenever you use a table, diagram or image in your essay **you must:**

- cite the source (e.g. from Smith, 1989) in the text
- **use your own caption**, not the original one (captions go ABOVE a table and BELOW a figure)

Refer to the HAUC Guide to Referencing (2011) and HAUC Guide to Report Writing (2011) for further information.

6.7 Font type and size

You should always follow the guidelines in your assignment brief or those issued by your tutor. However, where no specific guidance on font type and size is issued it is recommended that Arial 12 is used.

7. ESSAYS IN EXAMINATIONS

In examinations, answers are often required to be written in ESSAY format. HAUC has a 20-point examination marking scheme for discursive essays which is a guide to how the marks are allocated – see Appendix 1.

Before you start to write an essay, always construct a plan. This can take the form of:

- a) headings, sub-headings etc.
- b) mind mapping

Your essay should consist of 3 identifiable parts:

1. Introduction
2. Main Body
3. Conclusion

1. Introduction (Usually ONE paragraph)

Your introduction should:

- demonstrate that you have understood the question by defining the academic instruction word in the question e.g. Analyse, Explain, Describe, Examine
- define the main concept / jargon or unusual words
- explain where the essay is going and how it is going to get there (the process the essay will follow)
- introduce the topic.

2. Main body

This will consist of as many paragraphs as necessary – usually determined by the number of words in the essay. A 1000 word essay would have approximately 5 paragraphs in the main body.

One point = one paragraph

In each paragraph:

- ensure that everything written is relevant – do not ‘waffle’, or try to ‘pad out’ the essay with irrelevant information
- avoid simple narration, i.e. stating information without offering reasons, examples, explanations or conclusions, etc.

- try to analyse points raised in each paragraph
- demonstrate careful consideration of the point by adopting a tone of balance and moderation – avoid a ‘soap box’ approach.

Structure of the paragraph

A well-structured paragraph has 3 identifiable parts:

- the Topic Sentence: the sentence that tells us what the paragraph is about
- the Controlling Idea : the general theme of the paragraph
- expansion: all the supporting evidence and examples, analysis, etc.

3. Conclusion (Usually ONE paragraph)

Your conclusion should:

- sum up the main points of the essay
- refer back to the question and provide an answer (NB. Some essays may not reach a definite conclusion on one side or the other – you may have to ‘sit on the fence’)
- avoid introducing new material. Do not use the conclusion to introduce new/extra information
- have a logical development and summing up of what has already been discussed and analysed.

Example of an exam question with plan and possible answer

Example question:

'Effective communication in a business is essential for success. In what ways can a business ensure effective communication?'

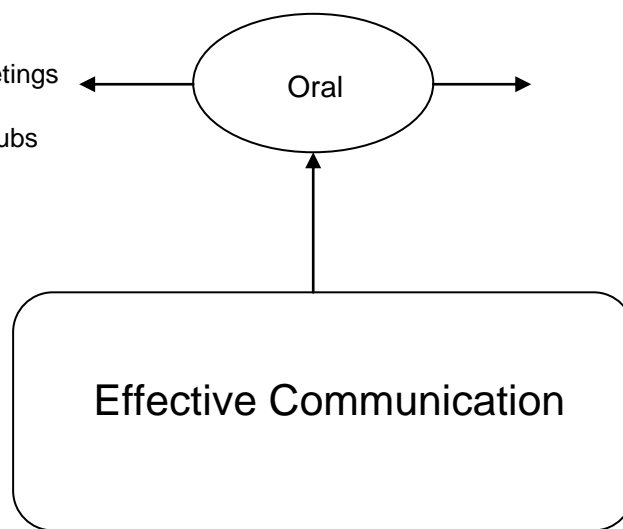
Plan

Internal

External

- Praise
- Weekly (?) meetings
- Social chat
- Social/sports clubs

- Telephone manner
- Reception area
- Marketing opportunities



- Emails
- Memos
- Letters
- Notice boards
- Clear policies for everything
- Suggestion box

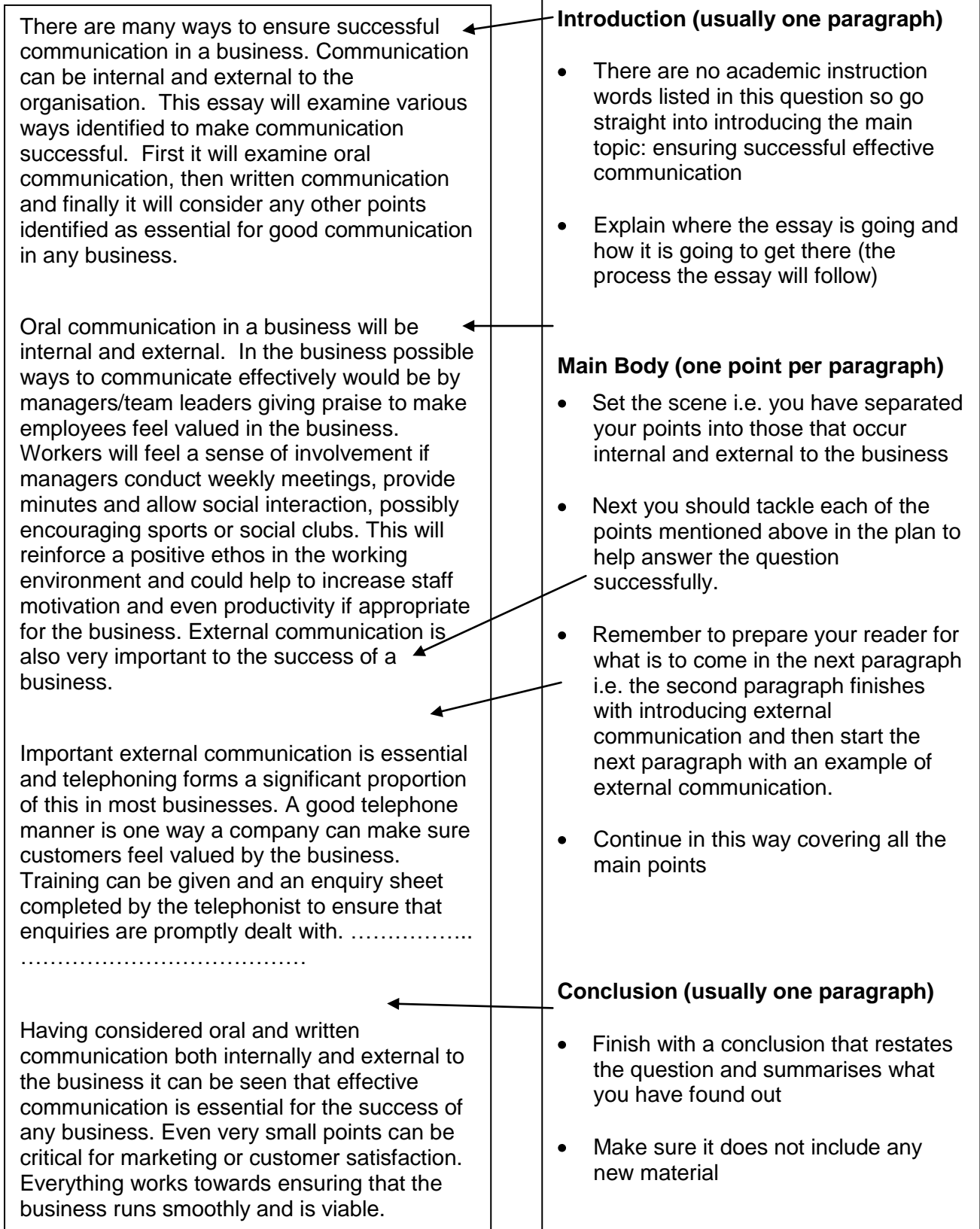
- Website
- Emails
- Advertising
- Special offers
- Feedback questionnaires

- Information systems
- Induction
- Good recruitment
- Promotion chances
- Training courses
- Computer literacy
- Rewards

- Information storage
- PR work (raffle prizes)
- Customer delivery
- Warranties/guarantees

Possible answer

Effective communication in a business is essential for success. In what ways can a business ensure effective communication?



8. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
20-point Examination Marking Scheme for discursive essays

The following provides a **guide** to allocating marks. Alignment with all criteria descriptors would deserve a mark at the top end of the associated range, whereas fulfilment of only a few of the descriptors would deserve a mark at the lower end of the range. Tutors are also reminded to take account of the context within which assessed work has been produced, and judge what is reasonable within assessment constraints (such as time availability or word limit).

| Level | | | | | Descriptor (All levels subsume the expectations below) |
|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------------|--|
| FE3 3 | Cert 4 | Int 5 | Hons 6 | Master's 7 | |
| | | | | 17≤20 | An outstanding answer which indicates wide research and commitment to scholarship and displays, at a high level, the skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and rational argument. Answers display imagination or creativity or originality or the ability to deal with complexity or gaps in the knowledge base. A mark in this range represents the best that can be expected under examination conditions and not a perfect answer. |
| | | | 18≤20 | 15≤17 | An outstanding answer which indicates wide research and commitment to scholarship and displays, at a high level , the skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and rational argument. For undergraduate students, demonstration of independent study should be informed by primary sources and knowledge at the forefront of the discipline |
| | | 18≤20 | 15≤18 | 13≤15 | A well organised, comprehensive and coherent answer, informed by independent study, practical or professional experience which displays, as appropriate, the higher skills of analysis and either synthesis or evaluation and rational argument . |
| 18≤20 | 17≤20 | 15≤18 | 13≤15 | 10≤13 | A well organised, comprehensive and coherent answer, informed by independent study, practical or professional experience which displays, as appropriate, the higher skill of analysis . |
| 15≤18 | 13≤17 | 12≤15 | 10≤13 | 8≤10 | A well organised and coherent answer, with no fundamental errors, which demonstrates the student's understanding of all key concepts and the ability to select appropriate information drawn from the teaching programme, from independent study or from practical or professional experience and apply it to the intellectual demands of the question. For postgraduate students, demonstration of independent study should be informed by primary sources and knowledge at the forefront of the discipline. |
| 12≤15 | 11≤13 | 9≤12 | 8≤10 | 7≤8 | A well organised answer , with no fundamental errors, which demonstrates the student's understanding of a range of key concepts and the ability to select and apply information derived from the teaching programme to the intellectual demands of the question . |
| 8≤12 | 8≤11 | 7≤9 | 5≤8 | 4≤7 | Most of the important elements of knowledge and understanding required to construct an answer to the question are applied, with few errors . |
| 6≤8 | 5≤8 | 5≤7 | 0≤5 | 0≤4 | Only a minority of the most important elements of knowledge and understanding required for an appropriate answer are presented but there is evidence that the student could achieve a pass with limited further individual study |
| 0≤6 | 0≤5 | 0≤5 | | | The answer presented is such that the student clearly requires substantial additional study and guidance. |

Where each successive behaviour subsumes that preceding:

Knowledge = recognition and recall of facts

Understanding = interpretation, translation, summary or paraphrasing of information

Application = use of information in a situation different from original situation or learning context

Analysis = separation of whole into its parts, until relationship between the elements is clear

Synthesis = combination of elements to form a new entity

Evaluation = decision making, judging or selection based on criteria and rationale

APPENDIX 2

Academic instruction words and their meanings

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Analyse | Examine in very close detail. Break down an argument or information into component parts and identify ways in which these parts are related. |
| Analyse the extent to which... | Show judgement over the relevant importance of different arguments or events. Arguments for and against needed. |
| Assess | Make some kind of judgement on the relative importance of a particular aspect, discussing the influence of other factors or events that influence the topic. |
| Compare | Show how two or more things are similar. Indicate the relevance or consequences of these similarities. |
| Contrast | Set two or more items or arguments in opposition so as to draw out differences. Indicate whether the differences are significant. If appropriate, give reasons why one item or argument may be preferable. |
| Critically evaluate | Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing the strength of evidence on both sides. |
| Define | Give the exact meaning of. Where relevant, show that you understand why the definition may be problematic. |
| Describe | Give the main characteristics or features of something, or outline the main events. |
| Discuss | Write about the most important aspects of; give arguments for and against; consider the implications of. |
| Distinguish | Bring out the differences between two items. |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Evaluate | Assess the worth, importance or usefulness of something, using evidence. There will probably be cases to be made <i>for</i> and <i>against</i> . |
| Examine | Put the subject 'under the microscope' looking at it in detail. If appropriate, 'critically evaluate' it as well. |
| Explain | Make clear why something happens, or why something is the way it is. |
| Illustrate | Make something clear and explicit, give examples or evidence. |
| Interpret | Give the meaning and relevance of data or other material presented. |
| Justify | Give evidence which supports an argument or idea; show why a decision or conclusions were made, considering objections that others might make. |
| Narrate | Concentrate on saying <i>what</i> happened, telling it as a story. |
| Outline | Give only the main points, showing the main structure. |
| Relate | Show similarities and connections between two or more things. |
| State | Give the main features, in very clear English. |
| Summarise | Draw out the main points only, omitting details or examples. |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| To what extent | Consider how far something is true, or contributes to a final outcome. Consider also ways in which the proposition is not true. |
| Trace | Follow the order of different stages in an event or process. |

APPENDIX 3

Editing final drafts

| Content and argument | | Style | |
|----------------------|--|---------|---|
| | The text answers the central question(s) posed by the title | | The text is not too informal or chatty |
| | Sufficient words have been given to the most important points | | It is free of slang and colloquialisms |
| | All the information included is relevant to the set question | | Technical vocabulary is used correctly |
| | The main line of argument is clear | | The words used are my own |
| | | | The text is not repetitive |
| Research material | | | The text can be read aloud easily |
| | There are sufficient examples and evidence to prove or illustrate my points | | |
| | My own ideas and opinions are clear to the reader | General | |
| | Structure and grouping | | Introduction is suitable |
| | The text is in the appropriate structure or format | | Conclusion is suitable |
| | Ideas are suitably linked | | Spelling, grammar and punctuation are correct |
| | Each paragraph is well structured | | References are correct |
| | Ideas are presented in a logical order | | I have taken account of earlier feedback I received |
| | It is clear how each paragraph links to the others | | |
| | | | |
| Clarity | | | |
| | There is nothing the reader will find confusing | | |
| | The language is clear and straightforward | | |
| | Sentences are of reasonable length and uncomplicated | | |
| | It is clear which sentence in my introduction summarises my viewpoint / argument | | |
| | | | |

Adapted from Cottrell (2008) 'Checklist: Editing Final Drafts'

Cottrell, S. 2008. *The study skills handbook*. 3rd ed. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

APPENDIX 4

Useful key words and phrases

Establishing the importance of the topic:

- X is a common...
- X is an important...
- Recent development in...
- In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in...
- Recent developments in the field of x...
- Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in...

Highlighting a problem or controversy in the field of study:

- However, these rapid changes are having a serious effect...
- However, a major problem with this is...
- To date there has been little agreement on what...
- More recently, literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about...
- There is increasing concern that...
- Concerns have been raised by several relevant bodies...
- The issue of x has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of...
- The issue has grown in importance in light of recent...

Highlighting a knowledge gap in the field of study (for research):

- So far, however, there has been little discussion about...
- However, far too little attention has been paid to...
- Most studies in x have only been carried out in a small number of areas...
- The research to date has tended to focus on x rather than y...

Focus and aim:

- This paper will focus on...
- This paper will examine...
- This paper will give an account of...
- This paper seeks to address the following questions...
- This essay critically examines...
- This essay critically discusses...
- The purpose of this paper is to review recent research into the...
- This paper will review the research conducted on...
- This chapter reviews the literature concerning the usefulness of ...
- The aim of this paper is to determine...
- The aim of this study was to evaluate and validate...

Referring to literature:

General descriptions of the relevant literature:

- A considerable amount of literature has been published on x. These studies...
- In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on...
- A large and growing body of literature has investigated...

General reference to previous research:

- Many have argued that...
- Numerous studies have attempted to explain...
- Recent evidence suggests that...
- Previous studies have reported that...
- A number of studies have found that...

Reference to single investigations:

- Smith (1999) found that.....
- Smith (1999) stated that...
- Smith (1999) showed that...
- Smith (1999) investigated the...
- Smith (1999) studied the effects of...
- Smith (1999) carried out a number of investigations into the...
- In 1999, Smith *et al.* published a paper in which they described...
- A recent study by Smith (1999) involved...
- A small scale study by Smith (1999) reaches different conclusions...
- To determine the effects of x, Smith (1999) compared...
- Smith (1999) identified...
- Smith (1999) listed three reasons why...
- Smith (1999) provided in-depth analysis of work...
- Smith (1999) discussed the challenges and strategies for...
- Smith (1999) questioned whether...

Reference other writers' ideas:

- According to Smith (1999)...
- Smith (1999) argues that...
- Smith (1999) maintains that...
- This view is supported by Smith (1999) who writes...
- As Smith (1999) reminds us...

Ways of introducing quotations:

- Smith (1999) concluded...
- As Smith (1999) stated.....

Being critical!

- One major criticism of Smith's (1999) work is that...
- Many writers have challenged Smith's (1999) claim on the grounds that...

Introducing other people's criticisms:

- However, Smith (1999) pointed out that...
- Smith (1999) argued that...

Adapted from: The University of Manchester (2005) 'Academic phrasebank'.

The University of Manchester. 2005. *Academic phrasebank*. [On-line]. Available from: <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/> [Accessed on 29th September 2011].