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## Essay Checklist

- Essay writing takes time; hence you must start as soon as you get the topic. If you wait until it is too late, you will surely submit a shoddy work.
- Before submitting your essay make sure you at least have gone through these five steps. Should you skip any of them; your essay would be weak and you cannot expect maximum marks.

- **Carefully analyse the topic**

Analysing the topic helps you understand what the essay is all about. If you do not know what is required of you, there's no way you'll respond correctly to the essay. So, don't just write, think and discuss the topic with your classmates. If you are still not sure what is required of you, ask your lecturer. Never start writing without making sure you know what's expected of you. If you are off-topic, you'll give a wrong impression to the marker.

- **Brainstorm the topic**

Brainstorm the topic. We all have background information on many topics. Jotting down what you know about the topic helps you in deciding what your standpoint is on the topic. Having a standpoint helps you know beforehand what approach to take, and what argument to mount. Most importantly, you can't do the next step unless you know what you want to say. Brainstorming makes it easy to know what to look for and where to look – whether you google, go to library or conduct interviews.

- **Research the topic**

Research is critical. You may know what you want to say, but Academic Writing is about evidence. You must always support the assertions you make by reading what other people have said about the topic – whether they agree or disagree with your standpoint. Research can take many forms as indicated above. What you must keep in mind is writing down the details of your sources (i.e. author, year, title, place, publisher). Secondary sources show the reader that you have done some reading on the topic. They also enrich your essay because we need to know what other people wrote about the topic. You don't need to only use sources that agree with your standpoint; use those that disagree as well. You must know how to use that information in your essay. Learn how to quote, summarise or paraphrase. Understanding what referencing style to use will help you with this. There are many referencing styles (APA, Harvard, MLA, Chicago etc). We encourage you to use Harvard Style of Referencing. Keep a soft copy of Harvard so that whenever you write you refer to it. This will ensure consistency and accuracy.

- **Write first draft**

After you have researched your essay, now you have enough ammunition to work on your essay. You have your brainstorm, you have your notes from your research, now you are ready to respond to the topic by writing your first draft. Remember, the structure of the essay is important – you need introduction, body and conclusion. Remember, your first draft is not ready for submission. Read it aloud to yourself more than once. Ask yourself if you are adequately addressing the question. Importantly, make sure you include every source you use in the essay (whether you quote directly, summarise or paraphrase) in your reference list. Again make sure you adhere to Harvard in doing so.

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➤ **Edit your essay**

Edit your work. Make sure everything is as you want it. Check your sentences – avoid elision, fragments, run-on sentences, spelling mistakes, and any other careless mistake. Run your work through Turnitin to make sure that you haven't plagiarised. Remember, plagiarism is a crime and is often penalized with zero.

➤ **Write final draft for submission**

Finally, it is time to write the final draft that you'll submit. Presentation is everything. Your essay must be clean and well-written. Unless you are told differently, the font to use is 12 point, Times New Roman, 1.5 spacing. Please justify your paragraphs/essay evenly between the margins.

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➤ **Students sometimes wonder how their mark is arrived at. The marker considers a number of elements in your essay. The marking grid below is critical. Go through it thoroughly so that you know what markers look for in your work.**

- have a clear position/standpoint on the issue
- demonstrate understanding of the question
- argument must flow (use transitions correctly)
- correct sentence structure
- write in grammatically correct sentences
- write in paragraphs
- reference/cite correctly
- have a clear introduction, body and conclusion (see below)

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## Marking Grid

### Analytical Command

**A** Sophisticated insight; penetrating identification and analysis of issues; tight, authoritative development of argument, based on enterprising or wide-ranging reading.

**B** Sound critical insight and analysis; issues sharply and persuasively identified; logical, systematic argument, well-illustrated and substantiated by evidence of very thorough reading.

**C** Coherently thought through analysis, showing clear understanding of the main issues and with evidence of good critical judgement based on careful reading and reflection.

**D** Limited in its range of reference, but shows ability to grasp and analyse some of the main issues and present them thoughtfully and reasonably systematically. Evidence of a real attempt to read closely and thoroughly. Possibly some repetitiveness or inconsistency.

**E** Rather limited or incomplete understanding of issues. Inclined to be descriptive rather than analytical. Attempted coherence of argument, but with some irrelevant or inconsistent sections. Rather lacking in evidence of concentrated reading.

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**F** Shallow or frequently confused presentation of issues. Argument weak and/or disorganised. Likely to rely on mere summary, with or without inaccuracies. Little evidence of concentrated reading. Topic possibly misunderstood.

**G** Very little sign of preliminary reading. Serious misunderstandings and inaccuracies. Argument very confused. Topic not understood.

**H** Right off the topic, or plagiarised.

**Expressive Competence**

**a** Compellingly readable. Command of vocabulary, register, idiom, tone, all strikingly reinforce cogency of argument. Flawless presentation.

**b** Lucid, confidently phrased writing, appropriate to the argument and effectively free of errors in vocabulary, idiom, grammar, punctuation, etc. Thoroughly efficient academic presentation.

**c** Careful, fluent writing, appropriate to the argument, and with few errors. Fully complies with the academic conventions for quotations, acknowledgements, references.

**d** Style and idiom fairly well controlled. Spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, grammar reasonably correct. Has been carefully edited for obvious errors. Possibly some awkwardness in complying with academic conventions for quotations, acknowledgements, references.

**e** Errors of vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, etc., but they do not block intelligibility. Stylistic control and handling of idiom rather insecure. Weak sense of paragraph construction. Possibly some uncertainty about academic conventions for quotations, acknowledgements, references.

**f** Linguistic faults rather frequent and interfere with intelligibility. Style and idiom often inappropriate. Possibly careless about editing and academic presentation.

**g** Many errors. Meaning seriously obscured.

**h** Little familiarity with English. Hardly any intelligible language use.

|   | a        | b        | c        | d        | e        | f        | g        | h  |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----|
| A | 92+      | 88       | 84<br>80 | 76<br>72 |          |          |          |    |
| B | 88<br>84 | 84<br>80 | 80<br>76 | 72       | 68<br>64 |          |          |    |
| C | 80<br>76 | 76<br>72 | 72<br>68 | 68<br>64 | 64<br>60 | 56<br>52 | 48       |    |
| D |          | 68<br>64 | 64<br>60 | 64<br>60 | 60<br>56 | 52<br>48 | 40       |    |
| E |          | 60<br>56 | 56       | 56<br>52 | 52<br>48 | 44       | 40<br>36 | 36 |

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|   |  |    |    |               |               |               |               |               |
|---|--|----|----|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| F |  | 48 | 48 | 48<br>44      | 44<br>40      | 40<br>36      | 32<br>28      | 32<br>28      |
| G |  |    |    | 36            | 36            | 32            | 28            | 28            |
| H |  |    |    | 28<br>or less | 28<br>or less | 28<br>or less | 20<br>or less | 20<br>or less |

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### Points to remember

Remember, adhering to the essay writing format is critical. Essay writing skills are life-long because whatever career path you decide to follow you will be required to write formally in one way or other. Here we will give you the basics which, if you master them, will assist you in your future formal writing. As you surely know by now, any essay must have an introduction, body and conclusion. It is easy to confuse these three components of a winning essay.

First, as pointed out above, before you even start thinking about the essay, an essay topic will be provided. Without the essay topic you'd not know what to write on. So, the starting point of any essay is topic analysis. The topic will give you an idea of what is required of you.

Analyze the topic properly, because if you do not understand the topic then you can't write a good, relevant essay; you'll be off-topic. Don't just look at the key words in the topic, make sure you understand the **instructions**. What are you asked to do? In other words, you need to determine whether the question you are asked is a why, how, what question. You can only brainstorm the topic once you have done a thorough analysis.

Let's make an example: if you are writing an essay on abortion, you need to know whether you are asked to write about why women abort their babies or how they abort or what the consequences of abortion are.

All three areas of focus are direct; you can't just write about what you know about abortion in general terms. Stick to the question. The essay may ask you to explained, described, or argued. Do what you are asked to do!

### Thesis statement

After analyzing the topic and brainstorming it, you will have some idea of what information you want to use in your essay. The thesis statement is key to that. State what you are going to do. Take a stand.

Now that you have decided, at least tentatively, what information you plan to present in your essay, you are ready to write your thesis statement. The thesis statement tells the reader what the essay will be about, and what point you, the author, will be making. You know what the essay will be about. That's what the topic requires of you. So, to make sure your theses statement is clear, check what the **instruction** is. For instance, if the instruction says argue, your theses may go something like this: This essay argues that...

Now you must look at your spider web (brainstorming) and decide what point you will be making, what conclusions do you intend to draw. What do the main ideas and supporting ideas that you listed say about your topic; how many paragraphs are you going to have.

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## Your thesis statement will have two parts

- The first part states the topic.
  - Termination of pregnancy
  - Legalization of abortion
  - Conflicting views on the matter
- The second part states the point of the essay.
  - Pro-life, religion, culture, morals
  - Dangers involved, whose choice?
  - Orphans, neglected children, abused children, right to life ...
- Or in the second part you could simply list the three main ideas you will discuss.
  - Religion
  - culture
  - women's rights

Once you have formulated a thesis statement that fits this pattern and with which you are comfortable, you are ready to write your introduction. The thesis statement forms part of the introduction.

## Introduction

The introduction should be designed to attract the reader's attention and give her/him an idea of the essay's focus. Some writers find that writing the introduction first helps give them a sense of direction and assurance about where they want their writing to go. In this case, the introduction serves as a map. An introduction must always be written with the reader in mind and it can always be altered or improved at any stage during the writing process. Remember, the longer the work, the longer the introduction. The main function of an introduction is the provision to the reader of a clear signpost to where the whole piece of writing is going.

## The introduction may do the following

- (a) Give an overview
- (b) Give the central idea
- (c) Give reasons
- (d) Interpret the title
- (e) Give background; history or context
- (f) Introduce; question
- (g) Make bold statement
- (h) Quote; interest; feel
- (i) Concrete examples; anecdote

## Begin with an attention grabber

The attention grabber you use is up to you, but here are some ideas:

- **Startling information/statistics**  
This information must be true and verifiable, and it doesn't need to be totally new to your readers. It could simply be a pertinent fact that explicitly

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illustrates the point you wish to make.

If you use a piece of startling information, follow it with a sentence or two of elaboration.

➤ **Anecdote**

An *anecdote* is a story that illustrates a point.

Be sure your anecdote is short, to the point, and relevant to your topic. This can be a very effective opener for your essay, but use it carefully.

➤ **Summary Information**

A few sentences explaining your topic in general terms can lead the reader gently to your thesis.

➤ **Define a word or phrase**

Do this only if it is necessary and will add value to your essay.

➤ **Asks rhetorical questions**

then address them in the body of the essay.

**Note:** Each sentence should become gradually more specific, until you reach your thesis.

- If the attention grabber was only a sentence or two, add one or two more sentences that will lead the reader from your opening to your thesis statement.
- Finish the paragraph with your thesis statement.

## Write the Body Paragraphs

In the body of the essay, all the preparation up to this point comes to fruition. The topic you have chosen must now be explained, described, or argued. Each main idea that you wrote down in your diagram or outline or brainstorming will become one of the body paragraphs. If you had three or four main ideas, you will have three or four body paragraphs.

### Each body paragraph will have the same basic structure

- a) Start by writing down one of your main ideas, in sentence form (Topic sentence). If your main idea is "it is God who gives life, and it is God who takes life," you might say this: God has a purpose for each person.
- b) Next, write down each of your supporting points for that main idea (supporting sentences)
- c) Use evidence or examples to strengthen your argument.
- d) Remember to use connecting words or transitions to make your writing flow. You must make sure that you use appropriate transitions!

Once you have fleshed out each of your body paragraphs, one for each main point, you are ready to conclude your essay.

## Write the Conclusion

Your essay lacks only one paragraph now – the conclusion. This paragraph will give the reader a point of exit from your essay. Remember, the conclusion is the last memory the reader will have of your essay. So it must be powerful and relevant.

The conclusion brings closure to the reader, summing up your points or providing a final perspective on your topic. In other words, the conclusion of an essay offers you an

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opportunity to bring together what you have been saying. This has to arise from the writing itself – do not introduce new information here! The conclusion should show that the writer has done what he/she proposed to do in the thesis statement.

### **The conclusion may**

- (a) Summarize the answers to the questions you may have asked in the introduction
- (b) It may point out what the essay has or hasn't been able to answer
- (c) Point the reader to a new related idea
- (d) Offer a solution to the problem dealt with in the essay
- (e) Restate/review the main points dealt with in the essay
- (f) Call for an action
- (g) May use an anecdote

Please note: I expect you to have closely read at least four secondary sources. Make sure the reference list entries are done in accordance with Harvard. Do not list according to the link of the article (i.e. [www://...](http://www://...)). I want to see the details of the article!