



Tips for writing essays

While everyone has an idea what an essay should look like, there can be many pitfalls on the way to writing one. Here are some helpful tips from students.

Perfectionism

Try not to fret. Many students can often get sucked into striving for perfection; don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of 'good'. You **can** write a good essay, and you don't need anywhere near as much evidence as you think.

Make a plan

An essay plan of any kind is your best friend. It can be really painful trying to figure it out, but you will feel much more in control, and thus very much less stressed, once you have something to work from. You will also know what your conclusion will be, so you can steer your argument in that direction and avoid digressions.

Keep to the plan

It is very tempting halfway through an essay, if you have a bright idea, to try to add it in. Make a separate note of it but keep looking at the plan as you write and try not to deviate. In an exam, deviating creates a messy result; for a tutorial, you can add your new bright idea into the conversation, so it will not be lost.

Three paragraphs; three points

You need only three good points for an essay. For an exam, this probably means three paragraphs; for a tutorial you may wish to develop your argument in a supplementary paragraph or two. In each one, begin by offering that paragraph's proposition, back it up with some evidence, and explain how that paragraph helps in answering your question. Treat each paragraph like a mini essay, briefly summing up its argument and its contribution to the answer at the end. Then help your reader by linking your paragraphs, signposting in the last sentence of your paragraph where the next one is going to begin.

Conclusion

A conclusion need not be long. If your argument is clear and you are running out of time, you can dispense with it altogether in an exam. Your conclusion should be short and snappy: a precis of each paragraph's summing-up before finishing with your answer to the essay's question, making sure this agrees with what you said in the introduction.