

# Essay Writing

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# Essay Writing

At university, you will be expected to complete different types of assignments. You may be asked to write reports, literature reviews, journals and research proposals but the academic essay is the most common form of written assessment.

Remember, writing is developmental. New skills are learnt with practice over time. You learn — and think— through the very act of writing, and the more conscious you are of what you are doing as you write, the better you will write and learn (Creme & Lea, 2003, p. 179). Knowledge of key writing techniques and strategies will also help you identify what academics are looking for when they mark your assignments.

To get you started, this session focuses on:

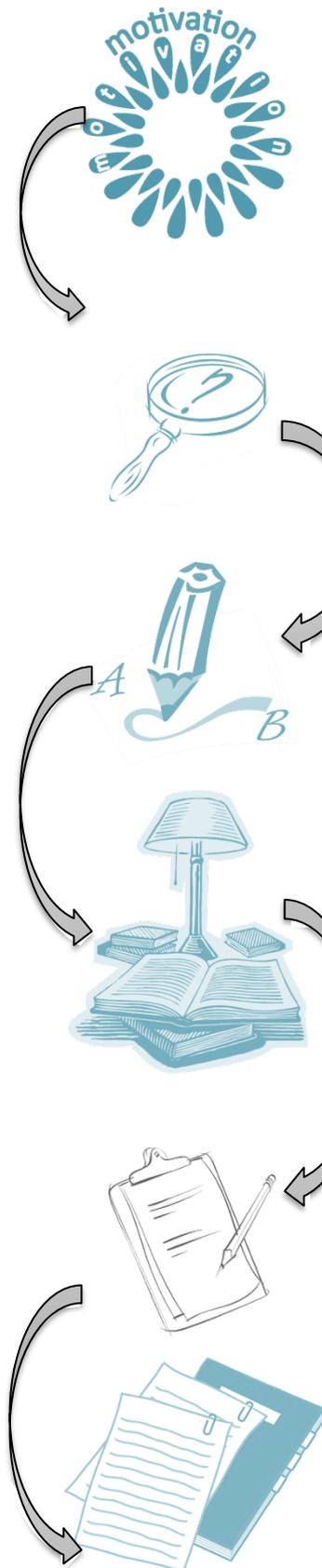
- Smart tips for academic writing
- Essay writing process
- Analysing the question
- Structure of an essay
- Effective paraphrasing
- When to cite
- Essay structure
- Editing checklist

## Reference

Creme, P., & Lea, M.R. (2003). *Writing at university: A guide for students*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.



# Essay Writing Process



## Step 1: Get Started

Forces working for:

Forces working against:

- ✓ Success and achievement
- ✓ Early efforts leading to more thought, feedback, better access to materials, etc.
- ✗ Time
- ✗ Lethargy/procrastination
- ✗ Lack of confidence or experience
- ✗ Other pressures

## Step 2: Understand what you have to do

- ✓ Understand what is being asked
- ✓ Make a summary in your own words
- ✓ Check the key words, definitions
- ✓ Know limits within the question

## Step 3: Plan your response

- ✓ Brainstorm and group ideas
- ✓ Create a skeleton outline

## Step 4: Gather supporting evidence

- ✓ Use reading lists, textbooks – ask a subject librarian if you need help
- ✓ Review notes and reading sources, etc.
- ✓ Check back to your essay plan
- ✓ Make notes and acknowledge sources and your question analysis
- ✓ Explore other possibilities
- ✓ Make sure sources are relevant–sift and select.

## Step 5: Start writing

- Check for logic, style, clarity, tone, structure and accuracy
- ✓ Does it answer the question?
  - ✓ Be critical

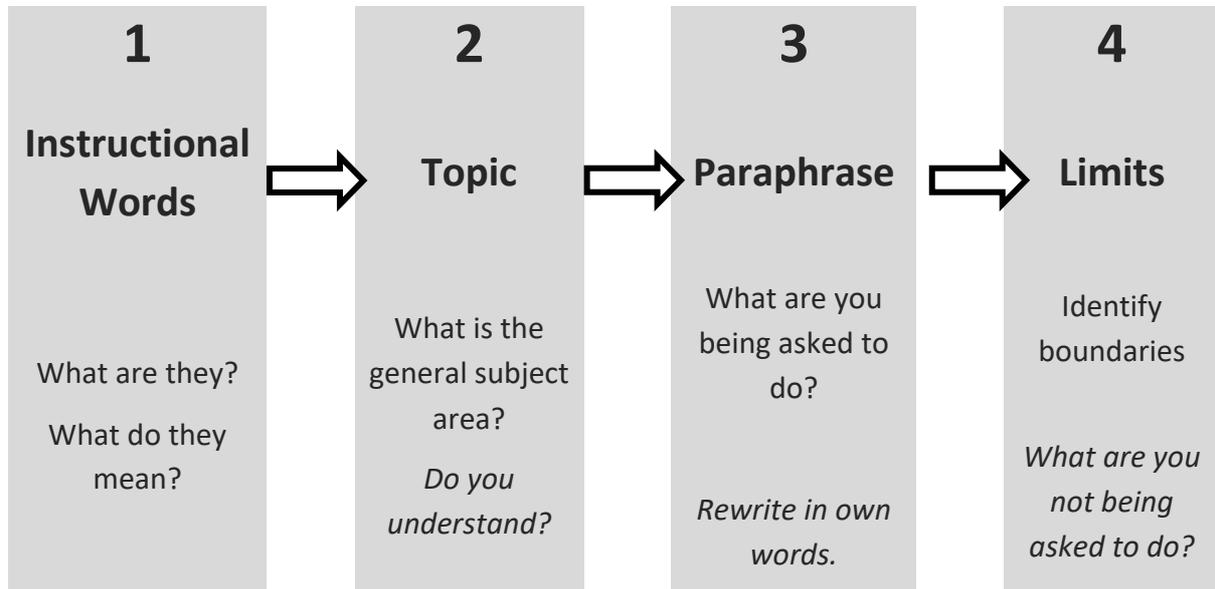
## Step 6: Polish and proofread

Check for spelling, punctuation, grammar, correct format, correct references, and whether it is within the limits set.

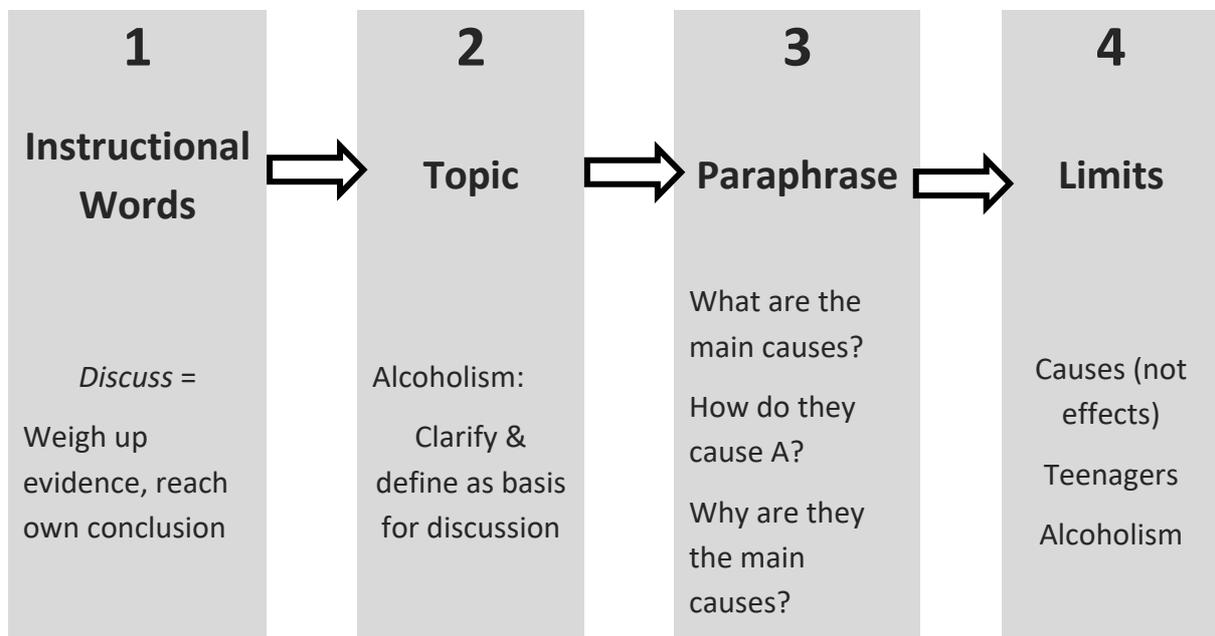
# Analysing the Question

This is a crucial first step as it sets the parameters for your essay or assignment and gives you direction to get you started.

Here is a **Four Step Approach** you could use:



*Example: Outline the key reasons why university education should be free*



# Structure of an Essay

## Introduction

(10% of total words)

- Gains the reader's attention
- Provides brief background material about the meaning, context and significance of the topic.  
Includes definitions of keywords if necessary.
- Identifies the 'gap', problem or issue outlined in the question. Gives the reader some understanding of the order in which the ideas in the essay will be presented.
- Clearly identifies the author's point of view in a thesis statement.

## The body of the essay

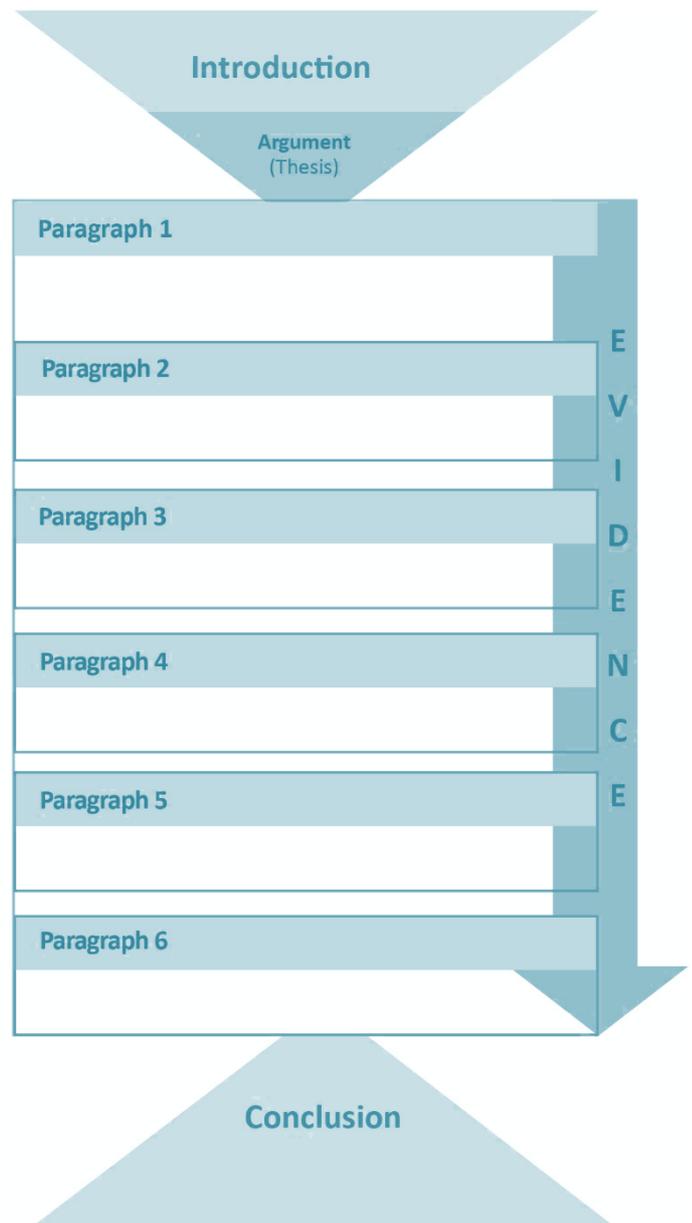
(100–200 words per paragraph)

- Your argument is developed through paragraphs.  
Each paragraph should contain only one main idea, as stated by the topic sentence.
- Each paragraph supports the main idea by explaining the issue, and providing evidence - eg quotes, statistics, facts, examples, case studies.
- Decide how many points you wish to make and in what order.
- Link the paragraphs together.
- The number of paragraphs will depend on the essay length.
- For essay flow, make sure paragraphs follow a logical sequence which matches that promised in the introduction.

## The conclusion

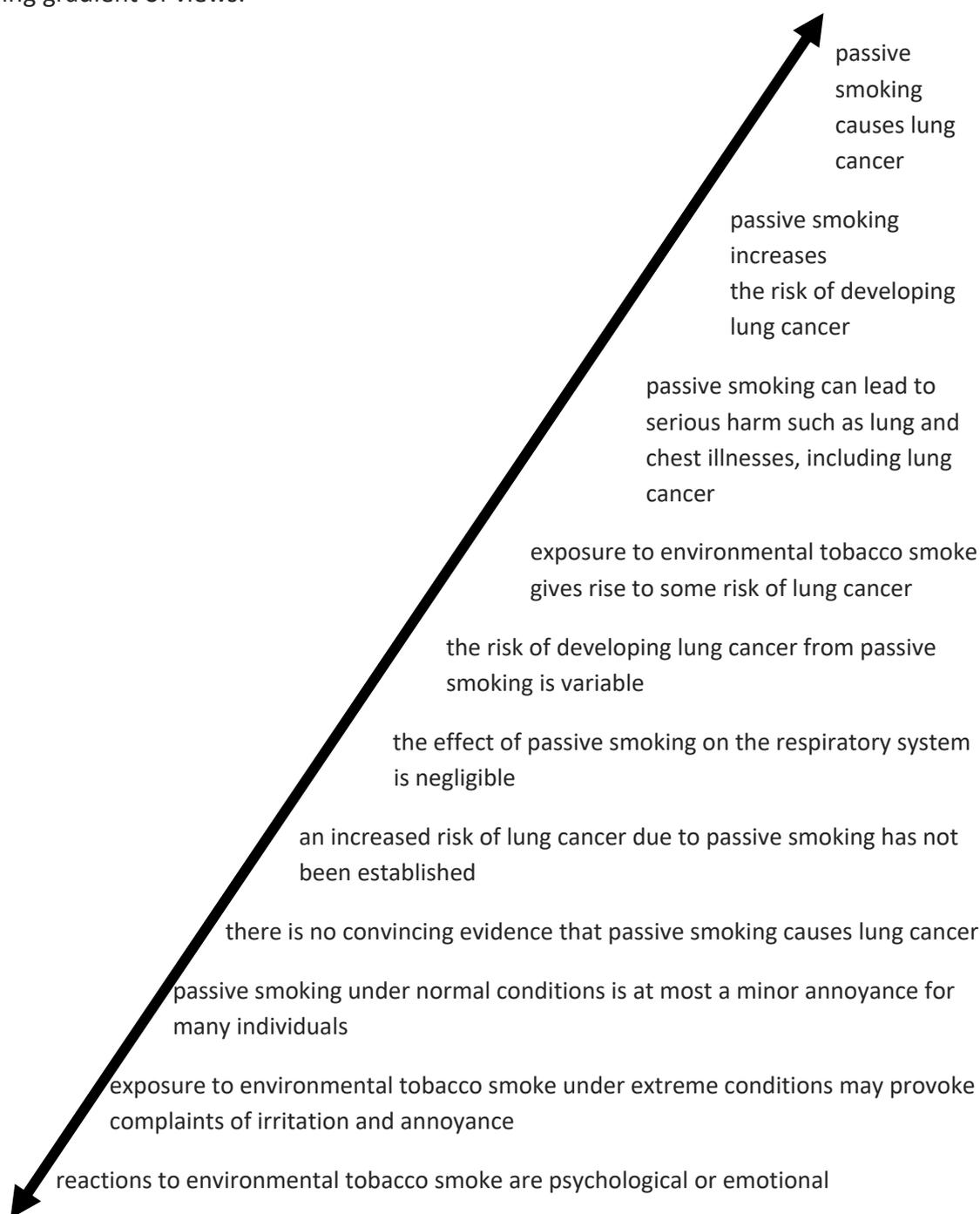
(10% of total words)

- Sum up your main points.
- Tie these back to the thesis statement.
- Avoid adding new material or using quotes.
- Possibly comment or make recommendations for further discussion of topic.
- Include your reference list or bibliography.

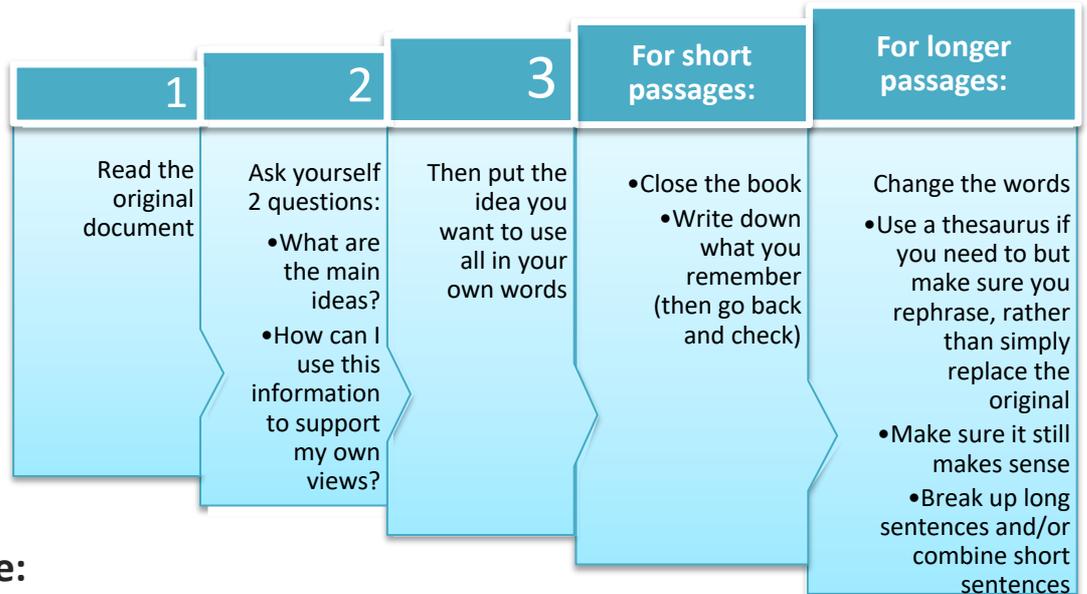


When you are researching a topic, you will probably come across a range of positions, sometimes extremely opposed to each other. You will then have to evaluate each position and decide why one position is more valid than another. This will help you decide what your own position is, so that you can establish the thesis of your essay.

Using the essay question '**Passive smoking is harmful**'. **Discuss**. Try and make a position statement to identify where you stand on the effects of passive smoking by using the following gradient of views.



# Effective Paraphrasing



## For example:

**Original passage:** from J.C. Flugel. *The Psychology of Clothes*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), page 75.

Garments can become symbolic of severity of moral standard and purity of moral conscience — an ethical symbolism that plays a very considerable role in the more austere and formal costumes of modern men. In the thickness of material and solidity of structure of their tailored garments, in the heavy and sober blackness of their shoes, in the virgin whiteness of their shirtfronts, men exhibit to the outside world their would-be strength, steadfastness and immunity from frivolous distraction.

**Paraphrase (= rewrite in your own words)**

*The clothes we wear can serve as an indication of our values. Such moral implications are an obvious factor in contemporary men's traditional outfits. Formal business suits, made of heavy fabric according to a fixed design, conservative dark footwear and pure white shirts send a message to others that their wearers are potentially strong, trustworthy, and likely to take things seriously (Flugel, 1950, p. 75).*

**Use the information in your essay to support your own views:**

*...Clothing also plays a symbolic role as an outward manifestation of one's inner self. Because of this, you can influence people's perceptions simply by changing your clothes. For example, a student is likely to exchange his everyday jeans and t-shirt for a suit and tie before going to a job interview. According to *The Psychology of Clothes* (Flugel, 1950), by wearing a traditionally conservative uniform, the candidate presents himself as someone people will regard as trustworthy and reliable. Even though this value-laden interpretation dates from last century, it still holds true, with both businessmen and women nowadays 'power-dressing' for effect.*

If you can do this, you are showing that you can

- effectively incorporate material from your course readings (and that you understand what you have read)
- reference your sources correctly and
- justify the significance of your readings to support your argument.

Now it's your turn.

**Original passage:** taken from a Management 101 textbook

“Competitive advantage arises when an organisation acquires or develops an attribute or combination of attributes that allows it to outperform its competitors. These attributes can include access to natural resources, such as high grade ore or inexpensive power, or access to highly trained and skilled personnel – human resources. New technologies such as robotics and information technology – either to be included as part of the product, or to assist in making it – are often important sources of competitive advantage” (Campling et al., 2008, p. 204).

Try putting it into your own words to express what you want to say:



# When to Cite

1. In an article, you find the phrase, “cultural tapeworm”, and decide to use it in your assignment.  
 have to cite       do not have to cite
2. You’ve recently read in several places about how popular water coolers are in both offices and public spaces. You mention in your essay that the use of water coolers is widespread nowadays.  
 have to cite       do not have to cite
3. While researching about climate change online, you find photos of the receding snowline on Mt Kilimanjaro, which you copy and paste into your work.  
 have to cite       do not have to cite
4. During one of her regular classes, your lecturer refers to the latest and still unpublished results of her research. You decide to mention these results in an assignment for another class.  
 have to cite       do not have to cite
5. You locate a brilliant article that supports an idea you are advancing in your assignment. You rewrite it completely in your own words.  
 have to cite       do not have to cite
6. You only need to put reference details at the end of the essay.  
 True       False
7. You should use lots of quotes (“...”) to back up your own argument.  
 True       False
8. If there is no information about the author, you don’t need to cite the source.  
 True       False
9. Among your notes you find material that is perfect for your essay...but you’ve forgotten where it came from. Unless you find the source, you cannot use it.  
 True       False
10. Accurate citations and references enhance the quality of your written work.  
 True       False

(Adapted from Harris, Robert A. 2001 *The Plagiarism Handbook*. Los Angeles, CA: Pycszak Publishing)

# Essay Structure

Making it clear for your reader.

**Identify the elements of an academic essay:**

**INTRODUCTION:**

e.g. Broad opening statement



Definition of issue  
Thesis statement:  
Part 1 of essay  
Part 2 of essay

**BODY:**

**Part 1:** General topic  
Topic sentence 1  
Supporting evidence

Topic sentence 2  
Supporting evidence

## Japan and the USA – Different but Alike.

The culture of a place is an integral part of its society whether that place is a remote Indian village in Brazil or a highly industrialised city in Western Europe. The culture of Japan fascinates Americans because, at first glance, it seems so different. Everything that characterises the United States – newness, racial heterogeneity, vast territory, informality, and an ethic of individualism – is absent in Japan. There one finds an ancient and homogenous society, an ethic that emphasises the importance of groups, and a tradition of formal behaviour governing every aspect of daily living, from drinking tea to saying hello. On the surface, Japanese and American societies seem totally opposite, but in reality, they share a number of common characteristics.

One of the most obvious differences is the people. Japan is a homogenous society of one nationality and a few underrepresented minority groups, such as the ethnic Chinese and Koreans (Wilson & Smart, 2002). However, all areas of government and society are controlled by the Japanese majority. In contrast, although the United States is a country with originally European roots, its liberal immigration policies have resulted in its becoming a heterogeneous society of many ethnicities – Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Latinos (American Immigration Department, 2005). All are represented in all areas of American society, including business, education, and politics.

Other areas of difference involve issues of group interaction and sense of space. Whereas Americans pride themselves on individualism and informality, Japanese value groups and formality. Americans admire and reward a person who rises above the crowd; in contrast, a Japanese proverb says, “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down” (Kashigawa, 1995, p. 104). In addition, while Americans’ sense of size and scale developed out of the vastness of the North American continent, Japanese genius lies in the diminutive and miniature. For example, America builds aeroplanes, while Japan produces transistors.

**Part Two:**  
General topic  
Topic sentence 3  
Supporting evidence

In spite of these differences, however, these two apparently opposite cultures share several important experiences. Both, for example, have transplanted cultures. As Southern points out in *East Meets West* (2003, p. 26), each nation has a 'mother' society – China for Japan and Great Britain for the United States -- that has influenced the daughter in countless ways: language, religion, art, literature, social customs, and ways of thinking. Japan, of course, has had more time than the United States to work out its unique interpretation of the older Chinese culture, but both countries reflect their cultural ancestry.

Topic sentence 4  
Supporting evidence

Both societies, moreover, have developed the art of business and commerce, of buying and selling, of advertising and mass-producing, to the highest levels. Few sights are more reassuring to Americans than the tens of thousands of bustling stores seen in Japan, especially the beautiful, well-stocked department stores. To American eyes, they seem just like Macy's or Neiman Marcus at home (Southern, 2003). In addition, both Japan and America are consumer societies. The people of both countries love to shop and are enthusiastic consumers of convenience products and fast foods. Vending machines selling everything from fresh flowers to hot coffee are as common in Japan as they are in America, and fast-food noodle shops are as common in Japan as McDonald's restaurants are in America.

Topic sentence 5  
Supporting evidence

A final similarity is that both Japanese and American societies have always emphasized the importance of work, and both are paying penalties for their commitment to it: increasing stress and weakening family bonds. Americans, especially those in business and in the professions, regularly put in twelve or more hours a day at their business (Atkins, 2004), just as many Japanese executives do (Southern, 2003). Also, while the normal Japanese workweek is six days, many Americans who want to get ahead also voluntarily work on Saturday and/or Sunday in addition to their normal five-day working week.

**CONCLUSION:**

Summary of thesis statement

Summary of paragraph topics:  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5

General concluding statement, placing discussion in a wider context

**Now take a different coloured pen and highlight all the 'signposts' (key words, links, etc.) that make the argument clear for the reader.**

Japan and America: different, yet alike. Although the two societies differ in many areas such as racial heterogeneity versus racial homogeneity, and individualism versus group cooperation, they share a number of common experiences, in terms of cultural heritage, attitudes towards consumerism and increasing pressures of work. Both differences and similarities contribute toward the mutual interest the two countries have in each other. It will be interesting to see where this reciprocal fascination leads in the future.

**References**

- American Immigration Department. (2005). *America's immigration story*. [Online] Retrieved from <http://www.us-immigration.org>
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- Kashigawa, Y. (1995). *Japanese proverbs*. Tokyo, Japan: Shinkansen Press.
- Southern, P. (2003). *East meets west: social & cultural change in twentieth-century Asia*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University press.
- Wilson, A. & Smart, G.W. (2002). *Studies in international demography*. New York, NY: Kingston Press

(Essay adapted from Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1999). *Writing academic English*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. White Plains, NY: Longman, p.141)

# Editing Checklist

Make sure you read your work carefully. This checklist will help you identify the areas to work on during your SL appointment. **You can also access SL handouts from [victoria.ac.nz/studyhub](http://victoria.ac.nz/studyhub)**

<b>First, examine the whole:</b>		✓
	I have answered every part of the question	
	I have answered the question explicitly	
	I emphasise key words from the question in the intro, conclusion and body	
	My argument is strong and clear	
	My assignment is well-organised	
	My work makes sense	
	My assignment fits the word limit	
<b>Next, focus on each section:</b>		✓
	My assignment is well-balanced in terms of the attention given to each part	
	The different sections are easily recognisable	
	The transitions between sections are smooth	
<b>Then, focus on individual paragraphs:</b>		✓
	Each paragraph is on one topic	
	The main point is clear	
	Sentences are in the right order	
	Paragraph breaks are in the right place	
	Transitions between paragraphs are smooth	
	Every paragraph contributes to answering the question	
<b>Finally, examine each sentence:</b>		✓
	Each sentence is complete	
	Each subject and verb agree	
	The tenses are consistent	
	The meaning is clear	
	The grammar is correct	
	Every word is spelled correctly	
	All sources are used correctly	
	Referencing details are correctly cited	
	I've included my list of references	

# Essay Writing

## Six steps to success

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## Notes

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## How to create a study routine for university



Check out the Study Routine module on how to create a good study routine for university: [victoria.ac.nz/modules/routine](https://victoria.ac.nz/modules/routine)

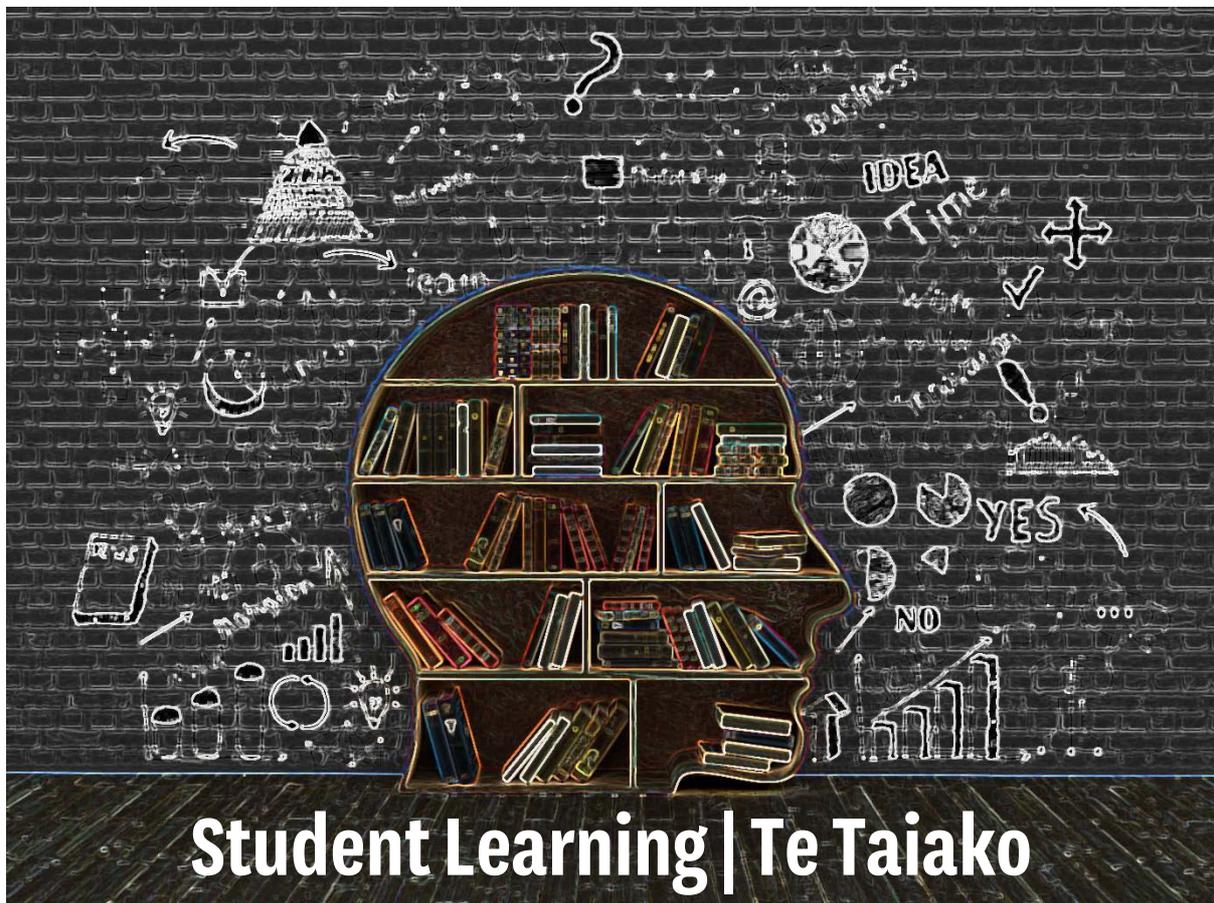
## Finding answers on Campus—just ask

If you have queries, the place to ask is *Victoria Info Ihonui* at the Kelburn Library entrances on Levels 1 and 2 of the Hub. Friendly staff are available to answer general queries and questions about:

- Student services
- Library services
- Finding your way around
- 15-minute Study and Writing Help Desk appointments with learning advisers
- Referrals for longer consultations with Student Services staff or librarians

[wgt.ac.nz/infoihonui](https://wgt.ac.nz/infoihonui)





Make an appointment with a Learning Adviser at any stage during the essay-writing process, to discuss your studies.

## If you want to know more about...

- ⇒ Plagiarism
- ⇒ Referencing
- ⇒ Essay writing
- ⇒ Exam skills
- ⇒ Grammar
- ⇒ Note taking
- ⇒ Reading
- ⇒ Learning strategies
- ⇒ Maths and Statistics
- ⇒ PASS
- ⇒ Postgraduate support
- ⇒ One-to-one appointments
- ⇒ Workshops

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