HOW TO WRITE AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

Constructing an academic essay can be a daunting process if you're not entirely sure what is expected of you, especially at the university level. However, armed with the knowledge of what you need to do to become a successful academic writer, and with practice of course, you will be able to get to grips with exactly what 'good' academic writing consists of. Bear in mind that the advice offered here cannot possibly accommodate all programmes of study (e.g. Chemistry, Psychology, Sociology and so on). Therefore, a lot of the advice given is generic, in that it applies to all academic writing, regardless of what subject you're studying (though some examples of essays provided here inevitably derive from specific departments). On the other hand, to discover more discipline-specific writing conventions, it will be up to you to discuss with your lecturers exactly what the finer points are with regard to appropriate style within your department (e.g. using first person or not, which tense to use, using figures of speech and so on).

Let us now start by considering a real-world analogy with regard to constructing an academic essay: **the construction of a building**:

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: CONSTRUCTING YOUR ESSAY'S ARGUMENT

The main point of the essay, called an ARGUMENT or THESIS, is the foundation on which the entire essay lies. It is more than just the subject of the essay; it is the *specific point* you wish to make about the essay's subject.

BUILDING THE STRUCTURE – ADDING YOUR BODY PARAGRAPHS

Now you're beginning to add flesh to the essay, in terms of constructing the mid-section – everything that comes after the introduction and before the conclusion.

THE FINISHED PRODUCT – THE COMPLETED ESSAY

The finished product – a perfected essay ready for submission. After this brief overview, let's now start by asking the next logical question:

What is the purpose of your essay?

1. THE PURPOSE OF YOUR ESSAY

Your essay's purpose refers to its main rhetorical function with regard to why it is being written in the first place. Are you seeking to *describe, narrate, argue* or *explain*, these being the four common purposes for writing academic essays. Below is a brief description of each purpose, or 'mode', illustrated with examples.

ESSAY MODES

- **Exposition** – You seek to **inform your reader about a given subject** and explain what it's all about. An expository essay sample below is provided:

  The behaviour of water when it drops below 3° is regarded as 'anomalous' precisely because it defies expectation. Rather than continue to contract, it suddenly expands. This explains why the water levels are raised in an ice cube tray – it is due to the fact that the water, having reached a certain temperature, begins to rise, not continue to contract. This behaviour might imply that.....

The sample above helps to explain a property of water and continues with the start of a personal observation in the final sentence. Rather than merely describe (see the discussion below), expository writing serves to go into more analytical depth, very often in the form of one's personal understanding of the subject.

- **Description** – There are two ways to consider what is meant by 'description'. One involves **creating a picture of your subject**, whether it's a person, place or an animal, often referring to the ways in which the senses are involved.

This kind of description can be useful in academic essays, for example, describing a mountain range within a geology essay (e.g. using words like *rugged, majestic* and *imposing*); describing the Mona Lisa's expression for an art class (e.g.

the Mona Lisa has a *wry* smile); or describing the smell, sight and texture of a specific dish, written for a cooking class, in which respective words such as *fragrant, inviting* and *crumbly* might be used.

- A second kind of description does not necessarily rely on adjectives to describe any of the five senses involved within a certain subject. Instead, this kind of description simply discusses basic information about your subject: **what it is and what it's about, but offers little more.**

Description of this kind should not dominate your essays, but should be used as a prelude to more analytical writing (more on this later). An example is provided below:

> **The film *Psycho* (1960) is about a young woman, Marian Crane, on the run, having stolen money from her employer. One rainy night she stops at the Bates Motel, where she checks in for the night. She meets the manager, Norman Bates, who seems friendly, if a little nervous. After she checks in, she meets him in his parlor for supper, where he discusses the problems with his mother.....**

Hopefully, you can see the direction this essay is going in. It does little more than recount the events of a film, without any analysis (e.g. discussing how the use of camera helps to create tension, or pondering the Norman Bates' character on a deeper level) or going into more explanatory depth. This is what distinguishes this kind of description from exposition. As mentioned, exposition goes into more detail than just the surface information of a subject, such as its definition or a step-by-step account of the basics. Exposition is essentially about 'here are the facts explained as I see them'. An example of a more expository approach taken to the paragraph above might read thus:

> **The film *Psycho* (1960) is about a young woman, Marian Crane, on the run, having stolen money from her employer, *in order to help her down on his luck boyfriend. Though we know she's committed a crime, we somehow sympathise with her.* One rainy night during her travels, she stops at the Bates Motel, where she checks in for the night. She meets the manager, Norman Bates, who seems friendly, if a little nervous. *He invites her to supper with him, happy to make her some food. It is perhaps obvious to***

***Marian that he is atttracted to her, though she does not seem to feel threatened. During her meal*, Norman discusses the problems with his mother.....**

The italicised portions serve to offer more of the expository depth needed for an academic essay.

- **Narration** – You seek to **tell a story** (**or case study**), relevant to your essay's main focus. Bear in mind that narration can in itself function as expository writing – the difference is in its method. In other words, you're using a story in order to explain events relevant to your essay.

  With regard to the issue of the current economic crisis, the story of Maria Jones is unfortunately typical. She was made redundant from her job as a caretaker just one month ago, which forced her to move from her rented apartment into a rented garage. Even living in no more than a cramped single room presents a struggle for her to make the rent. She rises at 6:00 every day in order to help her two sons get ready for the day ahead of them.....

As can be seen, the kind of narration used within certain departments (check with your lecturers to see if yours is one of them) often functions to put a human face on the subject under discussion (common in the Social Sciences). This differs of course from the kind of narration found in fiction, but broadly, they are both the same in that they present a story for the reader. With fiction, the story seeks to entertain; with academic essays, the story seeks to inform.

- **Argumentation** – You seek to **persuade your reader** that your opinion on a given subject is the most valid. Any issue which has more than one viewpoint is a potential argument.

  Nowadays, the issue of animal rights would appear to be at the forefront of a great debate. The debate in question revolves around the issue of whether or not we should or should not allow animal testing for the purposes of benefiting mankind, but when weighing up the benefits, the answer should fall in favour of people. People who have life threatening diseases can, and have been helped, precisely because testing animals, albeit under the most humane of conditions, has helped to discover treatments that can benefit them. We need, therefore, to consider the

long term benefits to people, before rushing to condemn the work of scientists and doctors whose role is to benefit mankind.

Do bear in mind, however, that in terms of academic essays, there is no 'pure' mode, because very often, your essay will rely on several modes to make its points, albeit secondary to the essay's main purpose. This is also true in the real world. Consider film, in which a scienc fiction film, such as *Star Wars*, offers more than just sci-fi . However, amidst the secondary genres of *fantasy,adventure* and *action*, the main genre (or mode) of *Star Wars* is indeed science-fiction.

To illustrate this notion of a 'hybrid essay mode' further , if discussing your personal language use within an essay, this would largely be expository based, but can very often involve some narration (e.g. recounting stories of how you learned language as a child) and even have a touch of argument, such as arguing against the idea that one accent is 'better' or 'worse' than another.

In the end, it is **the instructions for your essay assignments** (i.e. the essay question itself) that dicate the main rhetorical function of your essay, and learning to analyse essay questions is very important. Analysing the question is basically about **isolating the key words** from the question and then seeing how **they all fit together to form one coherent essay purpose**. Some essay questions can be no more than a sentence; others may consist of more detailed information provided in bullet points. Consider the following:

Write an essay which argues for or against a government provided health care system in the USA.

In the example above, look at the key words:

- *argue(s)*
- *or*
- *health care system in the USA*

1. ARGUE

Clearly, the main purpose of this essay is to argue. Think about this term, obvious though it may seem. If you're arguing with a friend or colleague, what are you really trying to do? Insult them? Hurt their feelings? Hopefully not, and such language is

pretty much off limits in academic writing anyway. Are you trying to persuade them that you are right and they are wrong? Well, perhaps. But in academic writing terms, we would generally avoid notions of 'right' and 'wrong' as they sound too absolute, overly assertive and perhaps a bit too emotional. Therefore, for the essay above, persuasion is indeed the right way to go, but in a logical manner, one based on facts, and less on emotion. Think of it this way: have you ever heard someone give an argument (such as on a debate team) which relied on powerful use of language (but not too much emotion) and a logical chain of thought and reasoning? Perhaps you didn't agree with their argument, but *you agreed that is was well presented*. This is the stuff that an argument essay is made of.

2. OR

Even a seemingly innocent word like 'or' can have a bit effect on the essay question's understanding and subsequently, how well you answer the question (or not). Basically, you need to focus on just one side of the coin regarding the argument, based on the use of the word 'or' in the question. Not all argument essays have to follow this 'one-sided' aspect necessarily, but again, the instructions will tell you what is required. If you were required to discuss both sides of the coin, regardless of which side you're on, then the question might read thus (but of course, does not):

'*Write an essay which argues for or against a government provided health care system in the USA, showing the sides of both arguments, however – both private and socialised medicine'.*

3. HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN THE USA

This is the focus of the essay in terms of the subject of the very argument you're making. You would need to research the health care system in the USA, but as most arguments are concerned with opposites, then we can expect that the opposite of 'government provided health care' (such as that in the UK), would be privatised medicine. This in turn involves health care plans and insurance that you must pay for yourself.

If you were to argue for a government provided health care system in the USA, then what support would you give? You could, for example, focus on the benefits of such a system, using information gleaned from countries which have such

health care (again, the UK, Sweden, Canada and so on). You might want to also refute the current health care system in the USA, offering support as to why it is *not* as effective as some might otherwise believe. In the end, there would be many ways to provide support, but we're still at the starting post for your essay after all: deciding what the main purpose of the essay is, and based on this example, the importance of analysing essay questions has hopefully been made clear.

Finally, we could imagine that besides making an argument, other modes may play a part too in the essay described above:

EXPOSITION – It stands to reason that when arguing about something, you need to explain something about it first. In this case, there would need to be some exposition perhaps, telling your reader about the different health plans provided in the USA – their names, what they cover, what they don't cover, costs to the company, costs if a person pays for them privately and so on. The main issue is that the reader understands the facts before you start to argue your side.

In the USA, privatised health care plans come in a variety of packages, with some covering more than others, but at a greater price. Blue Cross and Kaiser, for example, are two main providers. For the employed, their company provides a comprehensive health care plan, with usually a relatively small contribution from the employee. However, this only applies to the *full-time* employee. Where does that leave those who are part-time, self-employed or unemployed?

A brief background is provided above, which then serves to lead into the actual argument, seen indirectly, but seen nonetheless, with the use of the rhetorical question in the final sentence. Prior to this, however, the writer is withholding his/her argument and simply explaining the facts, to make the reader more aware of the subject which is being argued.

NARRATION – Here's where you might feel it necessary to provide 'stories' as it were, which could involve the following:

- **Personal experience with either system** (though ensure that narratives, especially first person narratives, are acceptable within your department's writing)
- **Examples of case studies or other people's experiences with either health care system** (taken from news reports perhaps)

A personal narrative might read thus:

When I was just a boy, I was in need of an appendectomy. In the local hospital in my hometown, no one on staff asked my parents to provide them with evidence of medical insurance, however. Instead, I was operated on within three hours, had professional follow-up care and all within a comfortable environment. The fact that my parents wouldn't have been able to pay for privatised medicine emphasises the point that free health care to all should be a right, and not based on a system of privilege where only a few have the means to pay for it.

In the sample above, the writer, through the use of a personal narrative, is also implying that free health care serves to somewhat break down the class barriers, as it's provided for all a country's citizens, rich and poor alike. Though this is not *the* argument that the essay calls for, it is being used presumably as *support* for the main argument.

DESCRIPTION – Finally, description within the argument essay might involve painting a picture of the way in which the senses are involved. For example, what are the sights and sounds of the hospital you might wish to focus on?

The hospitals that private insurance companies provide offer patients all the comforts of home that they would expect, such as private bedrooms, a TV with cable, quality food and immaculate surroundings. You can even rely on fresh flowers every day in some cases. If items such as TVs and flowers have been taken care of, then it is a safe assumption that the most important thing of all – professional medical care – has been taken care of also.

Again, we can see how an argument is being built up to, in this case with a description first, consisting of adjectives such as *quality, immaculate* and *fresh*, all of which combine to create a vivid visual image in the reader's mind as to what the hospital might look like.

2. THE SCORING CRITERIA

The scoring criteria may differ somewhat from one department to another, as the terminology may not be exactly the same. However, the criteria on which your essay will be scored never changes, and **argument and structure**, discussed below, are two

very important considerations. In order to help you understand what is meant by the explanations offered (within the box below) for the various scoring criteria (e.g. what does 'coherent' mean in essay writing terms?), clear and complete information is provided, in addition to samples of essays. Therefore, the explanations and terminology provided in the boxes which discuss the scoring criteria will be made clear to you.

criterion	class	%	Descriptors
Argument & Structure	1	70-100	A coherent, well-focused, persuasive and original argument, wholly relevant to the task & with good support and justification.
	2i	60-69	A generally clear and coherent argument with good focus, support or justification, which is directly relevant to the task.
	2ii	50-59	Easy to follow but with lapses in organisation; argument not always well-focused/ supported; generally relevant to the stated task.
	3	40-49	A clear attempt to produce a coherent argument but may lack focus or support and/or have a significant degree of irrelevance.
	CF	33-39	*An argument that shows little coherence and/or is only intermittently relevant to the question or which omits a very significant point*
	F	0-32	*A rambling, unoriginal or otherwise inadequate argument, lacking focus, support or justification and/or is irrelevant to the task.*

2.1 ARGUMENT AND STRUCTURE

Argument

The term 'argument' in relation to one of your essay's assessment criteria does not mean making an argument (i.e. writing an argument essay). Instead, argument refers to your essay's main point, its 'gist', also referred to as your essay's 'thesis', as was mentioned already. All essays must have a main point, which should be stated in your essay's introduction paragraph. Therefore, when being assessed for argument, your marker is asking two questions:

Does this essay have a clearly stated main focus?

Does each and every sentence relate to said main focus?

In other words, you need to ensure that you establish a clear main point and do not deviate from it within your essay at all. This will ensure that you have **a unified focus throughout** (referred to as 'unity'), and, in keeping with the terminology provided in the box above, your essay will be *well-focused* and *wholly relevant to the task*. Without a discernible thesis, however, the lecturer might write *'where is your argument?'* in the margin of your essay.

However, a good thesis is more than just simply stating the subject that you are going to write about. Choosing a subject, or having a subject given to you, is one thing; *you must then have a specific point to make about your essay's subject*. Again, the essay instructions will very often provide you with a main point. Having said that, as we saw in the example about the US healthcare system, one student's main point will differ from another student's main point, in that they may be arguing two different things, even within the same essay assignment.

Telling your reader that 'this essay will discuss child language acquisition' is not a thesis as such as it only refers to the essay's subject, but offers no point about it. On the other hand, 'this essay will discuss the first stages of child language acquisition' is a degree more specific. Moreover, 'this essay will discuss the first stages of child language acquisition, explaining that all cultures acquire language in a similar way' is even better, as it makes a much clearer point with regard to what the essay seeks to do. As a result, the reader is left in no doubt whatsoever.

In order to create a good thesis, you must ensure the following:

- **A good thesis must not be too broad or too narrow**. Determining if your thesis is too broad or narrow is dependent on the length of your essay. If your essay is 2000 words or less, that does not leave as much scope for discussion and exploration of your thesis of course as a 12,000 word dissertation.
- **A good thesis is not written in vague language**; every word within your thesis (and your entire essay for that matter) should be very clear and specific. This makes sense because after all, your thesis is the crux of your essay – the entire essay's existence depends on your thesis. Without a thesis, you don't really have an essay at all.
- **A thesis can be written directly as a statement – in which case it is one sentence long – or it can be implied within your introduction based on the**

overall information contained within. Both a thesis statement and an implied thesis work just fine – neither is better than the other. As long as you *have* a thesis, that's all that matters.

- **Ensure that your thesis is not just a statement of fact.** If you state a fact, then you have no point as such as everyone will already agree with you. Therefore, 'global warming is a serious issue and must be dealt with' is unlikely to find much disagreement. Even if it does, there's still the issue of your thesis being too broad. However, a thesis such as 'the solution to global warming starts with the USA honouring the Kyoto Treaty' is an opinion, and therefore, it has a definite point to make. In other words, opinions make for good points because not everyone will agree with your opinions and therefore, this means you actually have something to write about and discuss!

As mentioned before, even if your essay question is assigned to you (as opposed to choosing it yourself, as is the case with dissertations), you will still need to find a point to make, but based on what the essay's purpose is of course. Once you've determined the main purpose of your essay, then bear in mind the advice above, and you're on your way.

Now, consider the following potential thesis statement:

There is too much crime in cities nowadays.

Assuming an average length essay of 2000 words or less, then this thesis statement is possibly OK with regard to being fairly clear in meaning, superficially at least. However, there are two other issues to think about. First, as mentioned, a thesis needs to be clear, as does all your academic writing. While the thesis is clear on the surface, what exactly does 'too much crime' refer to? Are we dealing with teenage crime, arson, murder, robbery or all of the above? 'All of the above' might be too much to deal with, however, for a 2000 word essay; the writer needs to choose one specific focus instead, which comes under the larger category of 'crime'. Finally, do you think most people would or would not agree with the thesis statement? It's more likely that most would agree but not necessarily *all* people. However, even if

this thesis is an opinion which will be developed into an argument, it is still lacking a point, which can lead to the *so what thesis*.

The 'so what thesis' refers to a thesis which does not specifically offer a point beyond an otherwise obvious statement, which can lead your reader to ask *so what?* If you believe that there is too much crime in cities nowadays, what do you propose to do about it? Do you plan to offer a solution to the problem? If so, this sounds like a clear argument essay. Perhaps you plan to discuss the rise of crime and its roots and causes; if so, this sounds like the essay's primary purpose is exposition. Consider, then, two potential 'fixes' to the thesis of 'there is too much crime in cities nowadays':

An argument essay thesis statement:
The solution to juvenile crime in cities nowadays is to treat children as adults when passing sentences.

The thesis above is improved on all levels: it's more specific, as it focuses on juvenile crime (and the essay will presumably explain *what kinds* of juvenile crime, thus leading to a bit of necessary exposition). The thesis statement also offers a clear opinion, as not everybody would agree that treating children as adults when punishing them within the legal system is the best approach.

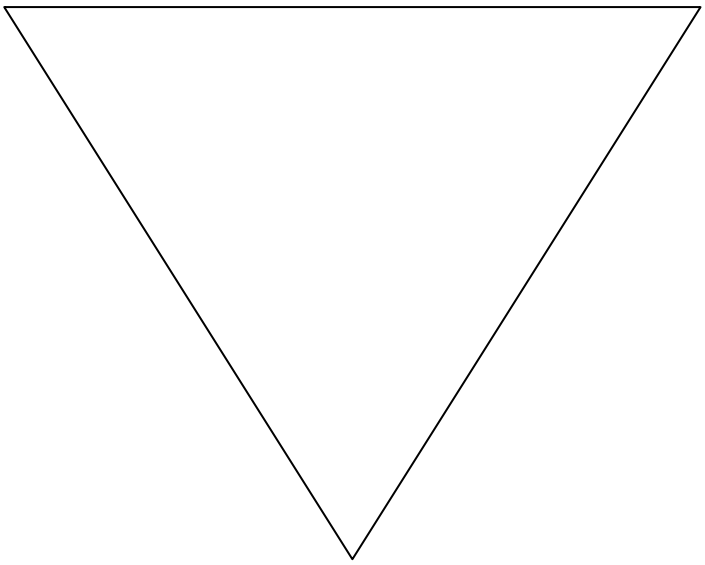
An expository essay thesis statement:
The causes of inner-city crime are multiple, though this essay will focus on the major cause: the breakdown of family values.

The thesis statement is now more tightly written and like all good thesis statements, offers one specific focus: the breakdown of family values. As the primary purpose is to explain, we can assume that the essay will explain what the writer means exactly by 'family values' and how they have deteriorated and why. However, the hybrid nature of essay genre can be seen as the thesis statement itself offers an opinion perhaps not shared by all (i.e. that family problems are the main reason for increased crime).

The Additional Components of an Introduction Paragraph: Background, Essay Map and 'the Hook'

Background

In addition to a thesis, your introduction should also contain background information about your essay's subject, in order to acquaint the reader better. A good way to construct your introduction is to consider it from the perspective of an inverted triangle:



In other words, consider beginning your essay with broad background information and then making your focus progressively narrower, culminating with your thesis. To illustrate, let's take a look at an introduction from a student's essay within a course unit entitled 'Aspects of Literacy', in order to see how the information is presented:

Every area of life is filled with literacy, so much so that often people participate in literacy events and practices unwittingly or unintentionally. The variety of these literacy events and practices is immense, but for this assignment I will focus upon only six samples of literacy materials (a pedestrian crossing, a magazine quiz, clothes with slogans, a text message, a take-away restaurant's flyer, and a university lecture) and use them to demonstrate the social basis of literacy, as provided by Barton, (1994: 33).

The opening gives a brief background to the subject – literacy – and then progresses into the student's thesis: *focusing on six samples of literacy* *in order to*

demonstrate its social basis. The introduction is clear in purpose and goal, and presents its information very much to the point.

The introduction below, however, taken from a course unit entitled 'Computer-Mediated Intercultural Communication', appears to discuss the essay's subject, but offers no thesis as such:

The communication with my Korean partner has only been asynchronously, through e-mailing. These e-mails can be seen in appendix 1. As I was not sure from Dong Sung Kim's name whether he was male or female I kept the questions in my e-mails very neutral. I made sure that I mentioned that I was a girl in my first e-mail, just in case he was not sure of my gender either. From the reply I got I am assuming that he is a boy as he said that he likes sports such as basketball and baseball and he is studying maths. Reflecting on this now it is a presumption entirely made from my prejudices and I cannot actually be sure that this person really is male. For practical purposes I will however refer to this person as a 'he' whilst acknowledging the fact that I may well be mistaken.

In addition to lacking a thesis, the introduction offers no background information either, but gets right to the point without an adequate 'build-up'. While it is clear enough what the essay is about (i.e. computer based communication between the student and a counterpart in Korea), the purpose of the essay – its thesis – is missing, and that also means that it is not even implied. The purpose of the Computer-Mediated Intercultural Communication essay in terms of its thesis might be somewhat different for every student, but no doubt the thesis revolves around *computer mediated communication as a means to help build increased cultural awareness*. However, your readers should never have to guess what you're trying to say; make it clear to them by *writing clearly* at all times.

Essay Map

An essay map is simply a statement of the order in which you will discuss the various aspects – known as *topics* – of your thesis. This map is usually accomplished within just one sentence. Therefore, an essay map makes it clear to your reader what the topics of your essay are and in what order they will be presented. Though an essay map is not a requirement for an introduction paragraph, it is a good idea to use as a means to help guide your reader better and it is advised when writing longer research papers in particular, such as your final-year dissertation. In the introduction

paragraph from the Aspects of Literacy essay, you can see how the student provided an essay map in conjunction with background information and a thesis:

.....for this assignment I will focus upon only six samples of literacy materials (a pedestrian crossing, a magazine quiz, clothes with slogans, a text message, a take-away restaurant's flyer, and a university lecture).

The reader now knows what the essay's topics will be before he/she starts to even read the body of the essay; in this way, the writer is giving a 'preview' of the essay to the reader. Again, this helps to make a 'reader-friendly' essay.

The 'Hook'

The hook as it's called serves to simply 'hook' your readers and 'bring them in', a device to attract their attention. This is usually contained within the first sentence of the introduction and can consist of many items: a rhetorical question, a quotation, a statistic, an idiom and so on. When choosing a hook make sure that it's relevant to your subject and thesis and appropriate for the overall tone of the essay. For example, a joke might fit perfectly well as the opening to a more personal essay on a humorous subject, whereas an essay detailing child abuse would be best served perhaps with a sobering statistic as its way to grab your readers' attention. Therefore, a hook serves to engage your readers, and peak their interest, but in a manner that is context dependent. It needs to be mentioned again, however, that the writing conventions of your specific discipline need to be considered when deciding what is and is not 'appropriate' academic writing, for a hook or anything else within the essay.

Examples of hooks:

Idiom: It has been said that 'one bad apple spoils a bunch'.
Quotation: Smith (2000, p. 15) believes that 'Mother Nature is being killed by her earthly children'.
Rhetorical Question: Have you ever wondered why God put men and women together?
Metaphor: Every person has his or her own "linguistic fingerprints".

As a final reminder, then: ensure that you create a clear thesis – a main point – and place it within an introduction paragraph that also offers background information for your reader, and perhaps an attention-grabbing opening sentence, as well as a plan for your essay's topics, a 'map'. Let's now look at an introduction paragraph in detail.

ANALYSIS OF AN INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPH

Analyzing introduction paragraphs can help you to determine if an argument exists or not, as well as accurate grammar and an overall appropriate style. Once again, it's a case of first establishing the thesis and ensuring that each sentence within the paragraph relates to it; if some sentences do not, then complete unity is not present. Do the sentences all have a logical connection into each other? Moreover, you'll be able to determine whether or not the background information is present, as well as the hook and maybe the inclusion of an essay map:

Nowadays, an increasing number of older people are returning to school in the hope of securing a better future for themselves. Many of these 'mature' students realize that had they studied harder when they attended high school or college, they may be in a more rewarding job now, both professionally and financially. However, these students may face prejudice from their younger counterparts when they enter the classroom, a factor that can impact on an older student's last chance to finish his or her education. For those who are therefore able to motivate themselves to go 'back to the books', it could be that a better life awaits, with increased job satisfaction, more money and even increased self-esteem. Is it easy? No. This is especially true for those who are married with children and in full-time work. However, anything worth having doesn't always come easy.

The paragraph above is by all accounts a good piece of academic writing, with accurate grammar, an overall nice style and it sounds confident. The introduction promises an expository-based essay which will inform the reader of the challenges faced by older students. However, it is not quite perfect. Why do you think this is so? Here are some key points you might want to consider:

Which sentence is the thesis statement (or is the thesis implied?)
Do any sentences not connect with the thesis?
Are there any sentences which could be deleted and wouldn't be missed?
If there are any sentences which don't fit, could we adjust them to make them fit?
What kind of background information is supplied?

Is there an essay map?
Do you like the opening or not?

The thesis is implied, with a combination of the first two sentences in particular, as well as the information contained within the overall introduction. Sentence one works as 'half' of a thesis, as it makes a statement, but doesn't necessarily offer a point. Sentence two, however, offers the second half of the thesis. In other words, if you combined the first two sentences, then you might have a thesis statement that resembled the following:

Many mature students realize that had they studied harder during their school days, they would be in a better career now and are therefore returning to school in the hope of improving their futures.

Granted, the resulting statement is perhaps a bit 'wordy' but it is certainly not wrong, as 'wordiness' is a style issue, not a grammatical one. In addition, summarizing the entire content of an essay in just one sentence means that inevitably, it can't always be done concisely. Now that we have determined the thesis of the eventual essay, we can decide whether or not each of the sentences which follow fits with it. Hopefully, it is clear to you that sentence three does *not* fit. In fact, my response to sentence three would be 'so what?', 'why mention this at all?' and of course, *what does sentence three have to do with the thesis?* In fact, sentence three seems to suggest a brand new thesis, in which case the writer should use it for a new essay or delete it. While it may be the case that mature students do face prejudice from younger students, this is completely incidental to the thesis at hand. Furthermore, sentence four's use of the word 'therefore' creates confusion; clearly, the word 'therefore' in sentence four could only logically follow sentence two, not sentence three.

As a result, by deleting sentence three, we would have a perfectly unified introduction paragraph. If, however, you argue that sentence three *could* fit, then difficult though it may be, it wouldn't be impossible to 'tweak' sentence three to indeed make it a better fit. Consider the paragraph again, identical except for a newly revised sentence three.

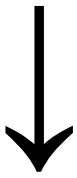
Nowadays, an increasing number of older people are returning to school in the hope of securing a better future for themselves. Many of these 'mature' students realize that had they studied harder when they attended high school or college, they may be in a more rewarding job now, both professionally and financially. Despite both the personal and societal challenges sometimes involved with being a so-called mature student, the educational journey is one worth taking. For those who are therefore able to motivate themselves to go 'back to the books', it could be that a better life awaits, with increased job satisfaction, more money and even increased self-esteem. Is it easy? No. This is especially true for those who are married with children and in full-time work. However, anything worth having doesn't always come easy.

Hopefully, you can start to develop a sense of power as you come to understand the components of academic writing and in doing so, be able to recognize when such components, like pieces in a puzzle, are missing.

2.2 STRUCTURE

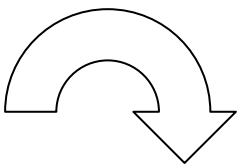
Now that you have constructed a successful introduction paragraph, you are ready to plan the body of your essay. The body paragraphs are those which come after the introduction and before your conclusion. Ultimately, what you are aiming for within your essay is one long straight line, representing linear development from the thesis to the conclusion.

THESIS

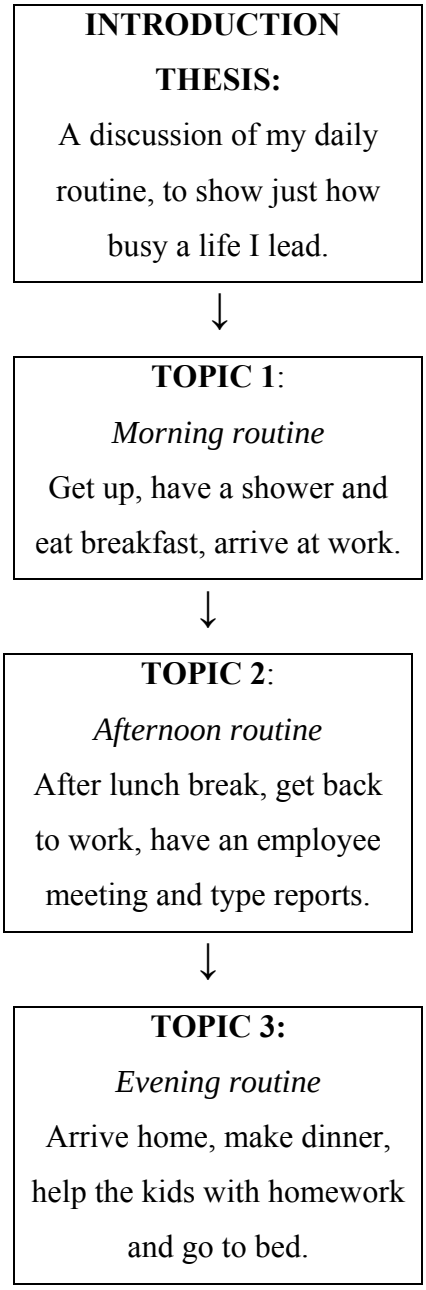


CONCLUSION

Therefore, in order to maintain one straight line from start to finish, ensure that you don't suddenly 'detour' in your writing by introducing new subjects which are not related to your thesis.



Once you have made sure that **all your essay's topics relate to, connect with and illustrate your thesis**, you then need to arrange the topics in a logical sequence so that your reader can follow your train of thought. This is what is referred to as a *coherent* structure, a word used in the argument and structure discussion.



The above 'flow chart' (also known as an 'essay skeleton') is much more coherent than an essay whose first topic is arriving at work in the morning and then jumps to arriving at home in the evening, before going backwards to talk about the

afternoon schedule. Such an essay would be confusing for your reader, even if you have perfect grammar and an otherwise great style.

When deciding how to present your essay's topics, there is no rule as such as to the order in which you need present them (unless it's implied by the essay question of course), except for the example above which involves chronological time. It is up to you, then, as the writer to decide what *you* believe should be topic one, topic two and so on. In addition, for an essay of 2000 words or so, three topics may well be enough for your essay and for each body paragraph, a good structure is *generally* achieved by focusing on **only one new topic per paragraph** (as placing two or more topics in one paragraph can be awkward for your reader). The word 'generally' is emphasised because once again, the length of your essay determines how you achieve paragraph coherence. For example, you may feel that a particular topic is so important and necessary in developing your thesis that you have more to say about it. And if you have more to say about a certain topic within your essay, then it's better to discuss it within *two* paragraphs rather than create a body paragraph that takes up an entire page!

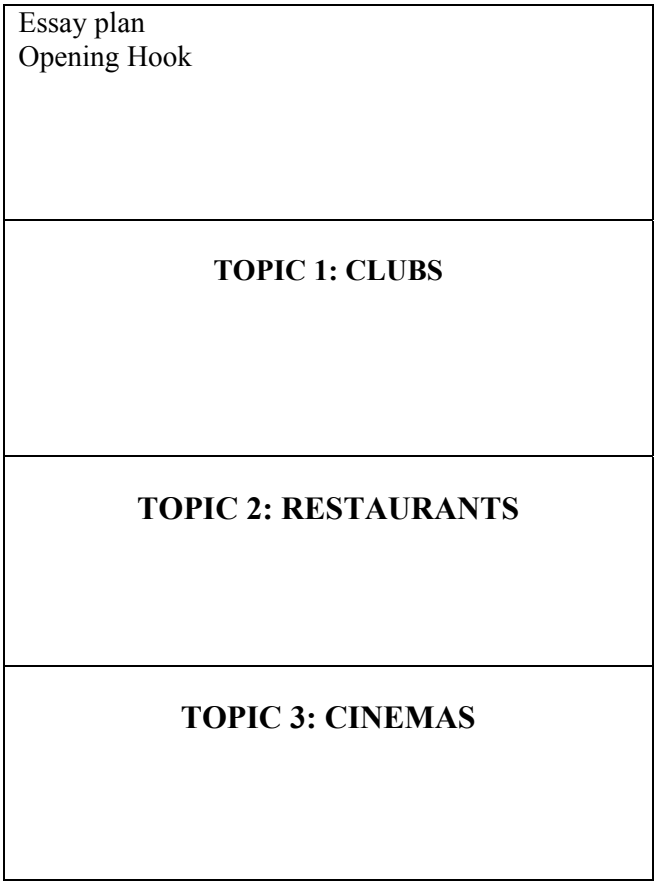
Also note that your individual body paragraphs usually begin with a **topic sentence**, a single sentence which introduces your reader to what the paragraph will talk about. Remember, the topic sentence announces a topic which itself relates to the overall thesis; it is not a brand new topic which has no connection with your thesis. Furthermore, if you're writing a longer essay, such as a 6,000 word research report, then you'll probably divide your essay into one topic *per section*, just as this handbook has been divided (i.e. section 1, 2, 3, 3.1, 3.2 and so on); this is also a good way to structure your essay and give it coherence. For much longer essays such as the dissertation, then one main topic *per chapter* is the rule. For longer essays, however, you will have the guidance of a supervisor to help you throughout the writing process, so you need not worry about this now!

Below is another example of achieving a coherent structure for your essay:

Achieving paragraph coherence within an academic essay

INTRODUCTION

1. THESIS: The nightlife of Manchester is extremely varied and offers something for everyone.
2. USUALLY GIVE A BACKGROUND
OPTIONAL:



And if you look at the menu of most DVDs nowadays, you will see that films, like essays, also rely on 'paragraphs' of their own, with which to divide the action up into recognisable and coherent chunks. Consider *Revenge of the Sith*:

***Revenge of the Sith* (2005) and filmic coherence:**

INTRODUCTION

Opening Logos

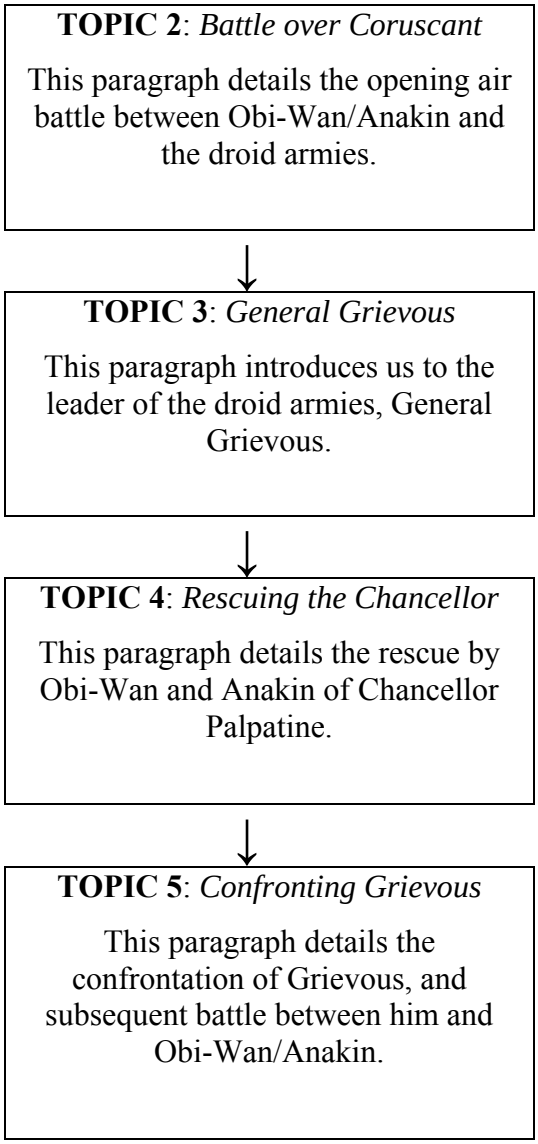
This is the familiar 20th Century Fox logo.

↓

TOPIC 1: *Revenge of the Sith*

This is the opening 'crawl', in which a summary of the action is given.

↓



As you can see, each paragraph has a recognisable topic, with the action and events within the paragraph illustrating the topic.

THE UNITY-COHERENCE CONNECTION

If you have a sentence(s) in a paragraph that does not relate to your thesis, the implication is that this given sentence will not logically follow from, or logically lead into, sentences which *do* relate to your thesis. Look at the paragraph below, which is a body paragraph found within an essay whose thesis is the following:

THESIS: *Because of its 'pop-culture style', Baz Luhrmann's Romeo and Juliet (1996) is the most accessible film for introducing reluctant students to the work of Shakespeare*.

The film makes strong use of actors who are well known to a younger audience. For example, Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes are more popular with the high school crowd than, say, Laurence Harvey and Susan Shentall. DiCaprio in particular plays Romeo with a youthful zest that many teens will arguably be able to relate to. In fact, teenagers have a great deal of angst in their lives and this is an issue that needs to be addressed. In addition, Claire Danes brings a real 21st-century feminine assertiveness to her character, and is more than merely a damsel in distress. By using actors that teens can relate to, director Luhrmann is assured that the audience will in turn be able to relate to Shakespeare.

Because sentence four is the 'odd man out' regarding the fact that it does not necessarily relate to the thesis, this means that it creates incoherence at both the sentence and paragraph level. At the sentence level, the paragraph displays more of an A – B – C – *Z* pattern, rather than A – B – C – D. Likewise, because sentence four implies another area for discussion other than the one provided in the thesis statement and the topic sentence of the body paragraph, this means that there is more than one topic within the paragraph, and paragraphs of course are designed for one topic at a time.

Sentence four does not fit with the paragraph or overall essay because it introduces a new subject – and thesis. Its subject focuses on 'the tribulations of adolescence' or something to that effect. Going further, however, you might argue that sentence four *could* fit after all. It might be said that the anxiety and emotional distress experienced by adolescent teens is depicted, at least indirectly, by the youthful DiCaprio and Danes on the big screen. Seen from a broad perspective, then, perhaps we could incorporate sentence four into the overall topic and thesis and by doing so, achieve both improved unity *and* coherence. However, it would take some unnecessary hard work to make sentence four fit because it would still not relate **directly** to the thesis: the thesis is not about teenage angst; it is about *the style of Luhrmann's film and how it helps young students relate to Shakespeare*.

You have now seen how unity and coherence are more related than perhaps you originally thought. As such, try to achieve unity within your essays and you may find that coherence generally follows.

The Conclusion

In military terms, your essay can be simplified as follows:

- **Introduction** – Tell your reader what subject you're going to discuss, and identify the thesis.
- **Body** – Discuss your subject.
- **Conclusion** – Tell your reader again what you've just discussed.

However, a conclusion shouldn't simply repeat your introduction verbatim. Instead, a conclusion should accomplish the following:

- **A conclusion should give a summary of what your essay has just discussed**. This involves a restatement of your thesis and/or the topics of your essay **but not word for word!**
- In keeping with the bulleted point above, **a conclusion should also outline the implications of the important findings that you have discovered within your essay and research**. For example, if you've discovered that 70% of people in your study do not speak a language other than English, then it might make sense to mention this again, especially within a thesis which is focused on second language learning in the UK among native speakers of English. *What might be the implications of this finding?*
- **A conclusion should close with an effective ending**, a 'closing thought', which is usually a sentence long, to give the reader something to remember. Like a hook, it might be a rhetorical question (though don't overuse this device), a quotation or even a prediction for the future, based on the results of your research.
- **A conclusion should never introduce a new subject that was not already discussed in the essay's body**. Even if you wish to introduce a subject that is related to your thesis, don't place it in your conclusion if you didn't mention it in your essay's body; leave it for another essay instead.

Based on the conclusion below, taken from an essay discussing 'the language of clothing', you should be able to identify the author's thesis (*to explain the ways in which different types and styles of clothing can communicate to people and what they communicate*); the implications of the research ("*I am sure that the definition of clothing would now include non-verbal communication across all cultures"*); a summary of the main topics covered (e.g. the colour/cut of fabric); and finally, the closing thought (an assertion that clothing is indeed a language in its own right). In other words, if we can identify the main components of an essay in its conclusion (e.g. thesis, topics), then chances are it's a well written conclusion. Moreover, your conclusion and introduction should look like two sides of the same coin essentially – this means that they same pretty much the same thing, but as mentioned, not in the same way, with the same words.

Conclusion

After having seen the effects that clothing can have and the communication that can be sought from this attire, I am sure that the definition of clothing would now include non-verbal communication across all cultures. From the colour and cut to the number of accessories, all garments can say something about the wearer and often lead to judgement being formed. What is most remarkable is how closely clothing links to actual spoken language. With grammar rules, context and cross-cultural variations, it would not be inappropriate to say that clothing does constitute as a language.

One final point to make about conclusions: make sure that the conclusion makes the essay 'sound concluded'. This is why the 'closing thought' is so effective, as it truly makes the essay sound complete and finished. To illustrate, imagine the following conclusion:

As we have seen, clothing forms a language all of its own, with a set of 'rules' for what to wear and when to wear it. It is therefore important that we know what is appropriate clothing based on the occasion. A three-piece suit may look nice, but would not necessarily be useful if you work at a building site. Furthermore, clothing is a kind of non-verbal communication (NVC).

The conclusion directly above works fine in many ways: we can assume that it reiterates the basic theme of the essay in sentence one, offers the implications of this theme in sentence two and sentence three gives a final example. All three sentences, therefore, flow very nicely into each other. Sentence four, however, even if it is a topic discussed in the essay's body, veers away from the first three sentences because it is focused on NVC, which, while related to language (referenced in sentence one), is deserving of its own further discussion. The writer, however, offers no further discussion and as a result, the final sentence seems a bit 'stuck on'. It does not bring the essay to a conclusion; rather, it brings the essay to a dead stop. This is something to avoid, therefore, when you construct your conclusions.

3. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge & Understanding	1	70-100	Makes highly effective use of a strong knowledge base and thorough understanding of wide range of relevant material.
	2i	60-69	Makes good use of a substantial knowledge base showing a generally sound grasp of relevant themes and issues.
	2ii	50-59	Adequate knowledge of a reasonable range of relevant material and intermittent evidence of an appreciation of its significance.
	3	40-49	A basic understanding of a limited range of material.
	CF	33-39	*A limited understanding of a narrow range of material.*
	F	0-32	*Lack of evidence of the basic knowledge necessary for an understanding of the topic.*

There is little to say for this section as knowledge and understanding should be self-explanatory. You are being assessed in your essays based on how well you demonstrate that you understand the subject and how broad your knowledge of the subject is, ideally showing evidence of reading that was not assigned in class. Therefore, markers are keen to make sure that you are not:

- Misunderstanding the class material
- Misquoting theorists
- Assigning the wrong theorists' names to specific theories
- Using technical words without adequately explaining what they mean or what their relevance is

Examples of how mistakes can be made in all four of the above areas are shown below:

Misunderstanding the class material

1. Being 'text message literate' means that you own a mobile phone.

Being text message literate would mean that you can actually text; owning a mobile phone is not evidence that you can text at all, just as owning a computer does not mean that you can do advanced programming.

Misquoting theorists

2. Einstein said that all life is a miracle.

Einstein did not say that all life is a miracle; he said we could view life as if everything were a miracle or view life as if nothing were a miracle.

Assigning the wrong theorists' names to specific theories

3. Saussure pioneered linguistic anchorage.

The theorist connected with the concept of linguistic anchorage is not Saussure; it is Barthes.

Using technical words without adequately explaining what they mean or what their relevance is

4. There are many ways to discuss writing, such as *connectionism*, *the writing models* and general *cognitive processes*. This essay will discuss writing in terms of which teaching approach works best.

While technical language (known as 'jargon') is part of academic vocabulary, to refer to such language within your essay in passing, as the fourth example does, without defining the words and/or discussing how they are relevant to your essay, gives the reader the impression that you are simply using the words for the sake of using them. This means you should not simply use technical language to try to 'sound academic'; sounding academic means you do more than use fancy words, **it means you show that you understand what they mean, and you explain their significance within your essay**. If you do not do this, then there is little reason for your reader to believe that you actually understand the terms as such.

Granted, the four examples above may not be entirely relevant to you, but in principle they are because they illustrate four of the most common mistakes students make in terms of demonstrating that they have not clearly understood the class material and thus, their knowledge and understanding is not entirely accurate. On the other hand, they may indeed understand the material very well, but simply communicate it in either vague terms and/or don't give enough examples or illustration of what they're referring to. To avoid this problem, you need to read your essay before submission and ask yourself this question: *After reading my essay, will my instructor understand what I've written the way I understand it?*

Also bear in mind that within your essays, you should avoid relying too much on your lecture notes and class handouts. While referring to material from lecture notes/handouts/assigned reading shows that you understand the subject of course, it

can also show that you have no original ideas of your own or that you're simply learning 'parrot fashion'. Therefore, while quoting from your handouts and lecture notes, and even from your lecturer, try to occasionally be inventive and find a way to discuss the subject by using your own personal examples with which to explain it (and, as mentioned, show evidence of textbook reading that was *not* on the reading list). This shows *application*, meaning that you have taken the subject matter that you have learned in class and are not afraid to use your own personal examples to describe and explain it.

For example, if writing about the subject of celebrity advertising, a personal example might involve discussing Sharon Osbourne's endorsement of Asda, further mentioning that this was not perceived by the public to be a very successful ad campaign because no one really believed that Sharon Osbourne would shop at Asda, especially since she lives in the US! Assuming this example was not brought up in class or retrieved from textbooks, then this would be a good way to show that you really understand the subject of how celebrities are chosen to advertise certain products, and what the public perceptions are of such endorsements. This is a very effective way to show knowledge and understanding, because it comes from *you*, and is not simply retrieved from a textbook, class handout, class discussion or from the lecturer.

4. USE OF SOURCES

Use of Sources	1	70-100	Wide background reading; fully relevant in supporting the argument. Entirely appropriate use of referencing/bibliography.
	2i	60-69	Good background reading; generally relevant in supporting the argument. Good use of referencing/bibliographical conventions.
	2ii	50-59	Adequate background reading; may not always be relevant to the argument. Acceptable referencing/bibliography.
	3	40-49	Limited background reading and some over-reliance on source material; relevance not always clear; weak bibliography/referencing.
	CF	33-39	*Very sparse reading and over-dependence on source material; frequently irrelevant to the argument; weak bibliography/referencing.*
	F	0-32	*Inadequate reading; plagiarism or extreme reliance on sources; relevance unclear; weak or no bibliography.*

For information on how to cite quotations using the correct format, please refer to the handbook which is used for your programme of study, though many disciplines use the Harvard system. This will ensure that you have, as mentioned in the box above, 'entirely appropriate use of referencing/bibliography'.

However, important as correct formatting is, so is **choosing the best quotations** (those which are relevant to your essay's focus) and **putting them in the best place within your essay**. Essentially, your use of quotations and paraphrases is the way you demonstrate that you have done a great deal of background reading on the subject. Let's now look at the paragraph below in terms of its use of a quotation:

> **The issues involved with obesity are largely social, not just biological. If we live in a consumer culture, where bigger is better, is it really a surprise that this mantra also applies to the size of our food portions? Jackson (2005, p. 281) believes that 'obesity is a major source of concern'. If we continue to believe that eating smaller portions is somehow an attack against our personal right to choose what we do or simply not as enjoyable as eating as much as we want, then the problem looks set to stay.**

The quotation in and of itself is fine. The issue is that it's simply misplaced. While it's related to the surrounding text in the paragraph, it's related on a very broad level, a bit *too* broad, because the focus is on the narrower topic of *socio-cultural influences involved with obesity*. The topic, then, is much more than just 'obesity is a major source of concern'. Besides, the fact that 'obesity is a major source of concern' is all too obvious – who *wouldn't* agree with this? In another context, however, the quotation might work much better. Imagine the quotation being used to start your essay; in this context, it might make for an interesting hook.

Have a look at another way in which you should avoid using quotations:

> **'The colourisation of classic black and white films, such as *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*, is a misguided practice' (Hawkins 2006, p. 86). In fact, Franklin (1999, p. 23) considers it to be 'a travesty'. Furthermore, why would we want to tamper with a classic anyway? In fact, 'rather than brighten things up, the use of colour can actually serve to take away the beauty of a classic black and white film' (Rogers, 2000, pg 5).**

Hopefully you can recognize right away the problem with the paragraph above. While the quotations are well chosen, they drown out the writer's voice. In

effect, the paragraph is simply 'top-heavy' with quotations. The opposite of course is to not have enough. Deciding how much is *too much* or *too little* is not an exact science. Your lecturer might suggest a number of references to use, which refers to the total number of sources you must show in your references page, but not to the number of actual quotations you should use within your essay, simply because it's hard to say, as each essay is unique. In the end, two quotations per paragraph is a guide but *only* a guide. There is nothing wrong with just one quotation or even three per paragraph (it depends in part on the length of the paragraph). The important thing is to hear more of your voice in comparison with the voice of others via the use of quotations.

An example of a good use of support occurs when a relevant quotation is used to introduce your own argument; in addition, do not be afraid to take on, and disagree with, the theories of others. For example:

> **Martin's early writing consists of what Rhoda Kellogg refers to as placement patterns (Beard 2000). Martin appears to draw circle shapes frequently (see appendix IX). Beard (2000) states that by the age of three, most children will draw single line shapes such as circles, squares and rectangles. These shapes are said to show evidence of "planning and deliberation" by the child (Beard 2000:60). In the sessions that I spent with Martin the scribbling which he produced only ever resembled one letter form, which was 'o', as he drew numerous circular shapes.**

The student introduces her subject, a young boy named Martin, and references his writing with the work of a theorist named Kellogg. She also references the work of Beard, and is not afraid, however subtly, to suggest perhaps that all children are unique, thus Martin's writing development cannot be predicted by the work of another theorist (i.e. Beard). This is good use of quotations for several reasons:

- The quotations are entirely relevant to the essay's subject (i.e. a child's writing development).
- The quotations are not just descriptive; they analyse the subject of writing development, particularly seen with Beard's mention of 'planning and deliberation'.
- The quotations are integrated smoothly within the student's own writing, as opposed to being placed at the end of the paragraph, for example, in which case they would sound 'tagged on' and thus, their power would be diminished.

5. ANALYSIS

Analysis (& Application where relevant)	1	70-100	Very good analysis of the evidence with clear and illuminating conclusions. Well-justified, clear application of theory with examples.
	2i	60-69	Clear and orderly analysis. Good, justified application of theory.
	2ii	50-59	Some analysis but prone to description or narrative; application of theory supports the argument, but not always very directly/clearly.
	3	40-49	Largely descriptive. The application of theory is generally appropriate but limited in scope, originality and/or relevance to theme.
	CF	33-39	*Heavy dependence on description and paraphrase is common. The application of theory is very limited or largely irrelevant.*
	F	0-32	*Inadequate and/or inaccurate description or paraphrase. No significant application of theory.*

'Analysis' as a concept should be fairly clear in meaning already and furthermore, it is not something that any handbook can necessarily teach you anyway. Analysis is a skill that simply comes with practice. The more you look closely, the more you can see. Imagine, for example, watching your favourite film. You could probably remember a few quotations, several scenes and even what the hero was wearing. But if you *analyse* your favourite film, you might then be able to talk about the camera angles used, editing style and use of lighting, and how that all comes together to affect your perceptions and understanding of the characters. You might also pick out a theme, so that after analysing *Titanic* (1998), you could say that the theme is 'love is blind' or the theme focuses on class relations; nothing to do with a sinking ship at this point!

Consider how you might analyse a football match; you would do more than simply say 'Jones passed the ball to Smith, who then scored a goal'. You might go 'beneath the surface' and say, *'Jones kicked the ball to Smith because Smith was there waiting for the pass; he must have anticipated Jones' decision. Having got the ball, he knew it was now or never and he scored'.*

These two examples involve the writer offering an opinion and in part, speculating about the subject under analysis, be it directing style or a football strategy. This is analysis, then: **looking closely and discovering what the deeper meaning is,**

or implications might be, for the subject under study. If you don't analyse the subject within your essay, and merely describe it (i.e. discuss the basics of what it is and what it's about, but no more), then this could also indicate **a lack of knowledge and understanding**, because a lack of analysis might imply the writer doesn't know much about the subject at hand, and hence, can not analyse something which is not clearly understood. Indeed, the lower scores for analysis are often based on too much description, as it states in the box above (especially for a third).

For example, if you write 'text messaging seems to be more and more common nowadays, and even the older generation are getting involved with this practice', then you have merely described the subject of text messaging. This is perfectly fine of course as a means to introduce your subject, but if you simply continue discussing the subject in such general terms (e.g. *text messaging uses symbols to communicate; text messaging is a way for friends to talk to each other; text messaging is a recent phenomenon*), then where is the analysis? In other words, explain more about the symbols used to communicate, explain more about the communicative aspects and explain more about how recent text messaging actually is. Example:

> **Text messaging uses symbols to communicate, known as emoticons. These represent emotions such as sadness and happiness, and it could be argued that 'texting' is therefore a visual language and one that a person can be literate in. It is not, however, a lazy form of communication.**

As you can see from the paragraph above, the basic information about how texting involves the use of symbols, is then followed by *explaining* what the symbols are called (emoticons), which is then followed by examples of what they refer to (sadness, happiness). Furthermore, the writer delves deeper by giving an opinion on the subject by means of discussing the implications of widespread texting: it is a language in its own right. This is followed by arguing against the notion that texting is somehow 'lazy communication' and is instead simply one of many ways to communicate with others. This is what analysis is all about. Now perhaps consider your own examples of how an analysis might follow the other two italicised sentences (i.e. *text messaging is a way for friends to talk to each other; text messaging is a recent phenomenon*).

Therefore, when you write your essays, consider offering a definition for your subject first, and then beginning your analysis. Don't forget, of course, that you should support your beliefs where possible, with relevant quotations. If none exist, do not be afraid to nonetheless make your claims (how to do this is explained in the next section). Consider the examples below, all of which show what analysis means:

- *Global warming is steadily increasing. This suggest that we are not doing enough to stop this or even worse, it is simply too late to stop.*
- *There are those who believe that there is only one 'correct' way to speak English. The implications for society is that this belief suggests that no one is an individual.*
- *It has been suggested by Jonhson (2000) that the clothes we wear greatly affect people's perceptions. This might explain why we are more likely to trust a person in a business suit than someone who dresses casually.*

Generally, analysing your subject often involves the use of expressions such as 'what this means/suggests is.....'; 'the implications that this has are.....'; 'this might lead to.....', and so on. Once again, don't forget that if your essay merely describes the subject (i.e. defining the subject and/or simply telling the readers basic information that they already know) without analysing it, points will be lost as a result.

The three underlined examples above are admittedly just one sentence long, and analysis often involves more than just a sentence. However, they show how analysis can *begin*, by first introducing your opinion on a given matter and then illustrating it, either by quotations, personal examples or both. Below is another example of what good analysis, and not mere description, looks like in an academic essay:

> **Aboud also agrees with the social reflection theory that parental values affect prejudice in children, but warns that we are too quick to attribute prejudice in children to their innocent imitation of adults, rather than to their own personal preferences (p.2).**
> **Personally, I agree with the social reflection theory, and after thinking about ways in which parents could pass on prejudice specifically about clothing to their children, I realised that this would happen daily. Parents dress their children, and often tell them they have to wear certain clothing to look a certain way, smart for example.**

Discussing the subject of prejudice in children within an academic study, the writer introduces the work of a theorist – Aboud – and then presents an analysis in the

second paragraph. Specifically, the writer, having previously defined the 'social reflection theory', is now illustrating how it can be witnessed on a daily basis, by offering the example of how children are exposed to their own parent's prejudices and pick up on them. If the writer only included the first paragraph, without the subsequent analysis, then the marker would essentially be left mainly with a description of the subject (i.e. the research of Aboud/defining a theory), but nothing to 'take it further', which is what good analysis seeks to do.

Finally, when discussing the results of her study, the writer interprets – hence, analyses – the reactions of one of her child paraticipants to a picture of a woman wearing a veil.

> **The photograph that the children had the most to say about was photograph i. Participants 1, 3, 4, 9 all commented on the 'mask' shown in the photograph. Besides Participant 4, who had a unique reason for picking the photograph she did, these participants confirmed my hypothesis of the person in photograph i being regarded as 'strange' and even humorous (shown by Participant 3's giggles), due to lack of understanding about why those clothes are worn highlighted by Participant 9's question: 'why has she got a mask on?'. <u>This lack of understanding leads to prejudice due to fear of the unknown.</u>**

The final sentence illustrates that analysis can sometimes be just one sentence long after all, because the writer has done more than simply describe the reactions of her child participants. She then *interprets and speculates* what implications their reactions might have in terms of the essay's focus on prejudice in children; specifically, the writer is putting forth the view that what we don't understand, we fear and subsequently, can develop a prejudice toward it. Though this may not be an entirely original insight, it is nonetheless well used when applied to children, as opposed to adult participants.

6. PRESENTATION AND LANGUAGE

Presentation & Language	1	70-100	Meticulously presented; completely appropriate use of academic style; few, if any, surface errors; guides reader at all times.
	2i	60-69	Very well presented; appropriate use of academic style, paragraph/sentence structure and with few surface errors. Guides reader.
	2ii	50-59	Well presented; only minor lapses in style or slight inaccuracies in spelling and syntax. Easy to follow.
	3	40-49	Presentation and/or style may show lapses that may pose occasional obstacles for the reader.
	CF	33-39	*Weaknesses in presentation and academic style; many surface errors.*
	F	0-32	*Serious weaknesses in presentation, academic style and language; errors frequent and may impede understanding.*

Presentation and language combine to refer to correct use of Standard English grammar, appropriate style (both academic style overall and the writing style of your specific department) and correct formatting. Regarding grammar, below is a list of the most common grammatical mistakes made in essay writing: easy to make, easy to avoid.

6.1 Grammar

1. Singing in the shower, a cat started meowing.
2. I can dance well. Although I can't sing.
3. I attend school every day I like it here.
4. I attend school every day, I like it here.
5. The cat hurt it's paw.
6. A famous person should always sign their autographs for fans.

Example 1 is known as a **dangling modifier** and refers to sentences in which the *–ing* form of the verb has nothing or no one to connect to. In other words, who is singing in the shower – the cat or someone else? Since cats can't sing, we can safely assume that a human being is the intended referent of the verb *singing*. By attaching a human subject to the sentence, the verb of *singing* no longer 'dangles'; it now has someone to connect to.

While I was singing in the shower, a cat started meowing.

Now we have a grammatically acceptable sentence.

The second sentence in example 2 is a **sentence fragment**; an incomplete sentence punctuated though it were complete (hence the use of the full stop after 'sing'). When you begin a sentence with 'although', you need to have 'two parts' as it were: one before the comma and one after the comma, such as:

Although I can't sing, I love to try.

The issue with the second sentence in example 2 is that it only gives us one half of the puzzle; we need a second half to complete it and create a grammatically perfect sentence.

Examples 3 and 4 are similar in that they place two sentences together. You can separate two sentences with a **conjunction** (*and, but, so*) but example 3 uses no punctuation (such as a full stop) or a conjunction. Example 3, therefore, is a **run-on sentence**: two or more sentences punctuated as just one sentence and for this reason, there is only one full stop at the end.

Example 4 is known as a **comma splice**. This is simply two complete sentences separated by a comma, which is not grammatical in Standard English. Therefore, avoid placing two complete thoughts – and sentences – together if separated only by a comma. Instead, use a conjunction, a semicolon or a full stop.

Example 5 is a mistake which can drive teachers to distraction! *It's* is a contraction for *it is*, so example 5 would literally mean *the cat hurt it is paw*, which makes no sense. Learn to use *its* without the apostrophe when you are showing that 'a thing' (i.e. animals, countries, buildings, cars, etc.) 'owns' something such as *its paw*, *its* (the country's) *capital*, *its* (the building's) *penthouse* and *its* (the car's) *new paint job*. Remember! *Its* is the equivalent of *his* or *her* and *it's* means *it is*; beware of the difference.

Example 6 is perhaps common in speech nowadays and has therefore been transferred into writing. Basically, *a famous person* is a singular noun (plural would of course be 'people'). However, when referring to this individual's autographs, why use the plural form of *their* instead of *his* or *her*? This is perhaps due to the tendency for individuals (and rightly so) to not refer to an unknown person automatically as 'he'. However, rather than saying *he* or *she*, it is perhaps easier to simply default to *they*, even though an individual person can only be a *he* or a *she*! In your essays, however, wherever possible, you can simply use the plural form of the people you are

referring to (e.g. *doctor**s**, teacher**s**, researcher**s***) in which case the pronoun of *they* makes grammatical sense and also avoids unintentional sexism in your writing.

6.2 Style

We have seen how 'style' within academic writing in general refers to a clear focus in your essay and a coherent structure, among other things. However, there is also the issue of style within your academic writing at a more narrow level. What now follows are samples of students' writing in which individual word choices, metaphors and irony all contribute to students revealing themselves within their academic writing.

Informal Expression

> **Something that struck me throughout the exchange was that written words carry a great deal more power than spoken words. Once said, spoken words are forgotten, even though the content is usually remembered it is rare that the exact words are. However, when words are written down they can be looked at time and time again, and almost become 'cringe-worthy', seeming more and more unnatural every time they are read.**

The word 'cringe-worthy' is predominantly used in spoken English. The student's use of quotation marks around the word could suggest that she is indeed aware that she is using a spoken, rather than written, style of English. While a more formal word choice might have been 'unnatural' or 'uncomfortable', an important factor is that the use of the expression cringe-worthy was not prescribed by the lecturer; therefore, allowance was given for a relatively informal expression within an otherwise academic essay.

Metaphor

> **The leaflet has been produced to a professional standard. The graphics and text are informative and appealing. The 'product' is effective in that it provides an adequate amount of information without overloading the reader. By offering a 'taste' of the University and contact information it would encourage a prospective student (the main target audience) to find out more.**

In the sample above, the student is discussing a leaflet used to advertise the University of Manchester to prospective students. The word 'taste' shows that the

student is communicating in a manner that she possibly feels more comfortable with – in this case, a metaphor. By using quotation marks around the word, the student is also suggesting that she is aware that the word represents a figure of speech and she might even be claiming its use as her own (e.g. along the lines of 'this is my expression – I chose to use it'). The student could have used the word 'idea' or 'glimpse', but instead chose to use the arguably more expressive word choice of 'taste'.

Irony

> **The whole of the United States were attracted to the story; the parents of the child did not wish for her to be operated on, as a result there was a sense of public outcry. However, this 'outcry' was undoubtedly instigated if not totally created by the sensationalism and pleas recorded in the media. Biklen (1987) states how this story and countless others are framed in such a way that the audience is taught how to construe the meaning of disability.**

In discussing the history of Deaf people as represented in the media, the student reveals a touch of irony with the use of quotations around the word 'outcry'. In this case, the use of quotation marks signals the student's disbelief toward the public outcry, as the student seems to regard it as instigated by the media (as is indeed stated in the same sentence), as opposed to being based entirely on public thought.

Coining an Expression

> **Every person has his or her own "linguistic fingerprints". The way we use our language, in terms of speech and writing, places us in a social category amongst our friends and our society. Each person reshapes and twists the English Language in their own unique way, therefore no two people speak exactly alike. Differences in speech may be due to age, sex, state of health, size, personality, emotional state and personal idiosyncrasies (Fromkin and Rodman, 1998:399). It is these unique characteristics that make it able for us to identify a relative or close friend just by hearing them talk.**

Sometimes, quotation marks, single or double, can be used around expressions which are created by the writer, that is to say, they are not expressions widely used, if at all, by the general public. While the student may have come across the expression 'linguistic fingerprints' on TV or in a newspaper and chose to use it, it is nonetheless a unique expression and therefore, the quotation marks are the student's way of

acknowledging this fact, if not actually saying, as mentioned above, 'this is *my* expression, *I created it!*'

Italics

> **Unlike their Anglo-American counterparts, Mexican-American children *are* poor.**

Italics relate to style as they are an effective way in which to emphasise a word or expression within your essay. The use of italics above is also a way in which the writer reveals her opinion simply by emphasising the word 'are'. It is her way of saying, 'I believe that compared with non-Hispanic Americans, we Mexicans are poor indeed'. In other words, the use of italics can be a more subtle way to reveal personal opinion on a given matter; try reading the sentence without and then with the italics and see how your perception changes.

Unclear Words

> **I have been told that I have a 'sing-song' voice'.**
> **My accent is now somewhat softer.**

Both the examples above reflect what is essentially a poor style in academic writing; using words which are broad or vague and as a result, the writer's specific meaning is not understood by the marker. This relates to previous information, in which it was said that even though students may understand the subject very well, if they don't communicate it in a clear manner, the student's knowledge and understanding might be questioned. Don't forget that you will not be present to clarify any misunderstandings that the marker might have about your writing and therefore, ensure that each and every word is as clear as possible, as this handbook has already mentioned (to include offering examples and illustrations of your ideas at times). In fact, the first sentence above prompted the marker to ask for a more concrete explanation than 'sing-song', and the second sentence led to the marker asking the writer to explain the word 'softer' in *linguistic terms*.

There is of course a lot more to be said about style; it can also involve sentence length, the order of words within your sentences and much more. Hopefully, however, this brief discussion has given you some ideas regarding how the word style can be witnessed within your essay writing at a narrower level

6.2.1 Mistakes to Avoid

Though stylistic choices are not strictly 'right' or 'wrong', there are certain ways of expressing your ideas which need to be avoided in academic writing. One of these is discussed below: using constructions which assert the very thing that you need to argue first:

> *Many researchers believe* that this is a serious issue.

The problem with the construction above (i.e. the italicized portion of the sentence), is that it suggests that the writer is trying desperately to win his/her argument by making an assertion which may not have been supported enough. The example begs the question, *which researchers? Who believes this?* If of course there are researchers' names available, then you must include them:

> Many researchers (Jones, 1999; Smith, 2000; Higgins, 2003) believe that this is a serious issue.

Now the sentence is fine. It tells your lecturer that you know your stuff. You are aware of *who* believes *what*. Without the name of a researcher (just one is fine by the way), a statement like 'many researchers believe' sounds empty and does not assist in providing support for your essay at all.

Another construction to avoid is seen in the sentence below:

> *It has been proven* that this is the best way forward.

When using the word 'proof' (or 'proven') in your essay, you have to be careful. Unless you can demonstrate in an absolute sense that something really has been proven (i.e. it's a fact which won't change and is predictable), then nothing has really been proven after all. In fact, the expression above is a case of **hyperbole**, which refers to exaggeration in your essay writing. We exaggerate on a regular basis in our speech and informal writing of course, such as *I'd give my right arm to go to Paris!* However, such over the top expressions and emotions in academic writing don't work well, especially as a means to argue a point; it actually comes across as immature writing. Therefore, avoid phrases and even individual words which are

hyperbolic (e.g. *the opposing argument to mine is **ridiculous**; academic writing **massacres** all of a student's creativity*).

Therefore, you need to tone down your overly assertive statements, especially when trying to argue a point. This is a practice called **hedging** and essentially involves showing modesty for your claims by using expressions such as the following:

- *It has been suggested* that this is the best way forward.
- The results of my research *indicate* that there *may* be evidence for this issue.
- There is *reason to believe* that my findings indicate a relationship between *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and US fears of Communism in the 1950s.

Can you see, and appreciate, the difference? The three examples above are no less confident simply because they have been 'toned down'. In fact, they sound more confident because the writer is acknowledging that nothing has been proven, but is not afraid to admit it. In the absence of absolute proof for your argument, the best you can do is simply *persuade* others of what you believe. This does not mean that they'll automatically believe your argument. It does mean, however, that they will at least consider it.

Something else to avoid in your essays is to rely too much on the use of emotion; this is known as **pathos**. Using pathos as the means to try to win your argument means, in simple English, making an appeal to people's emotions. Emotion might seem like the more effective way to argue, as we can perhaps win money for a charity by describing the fetid, squalid conditions in which third world children live, "without food, water or love" (a logical argument, however, might read "if we can make these people self-sufficient now, they will not need outside help in the future"). Likewise, by describing AIDS sufferers as "fellow human beings who have suffered enough and don't deserve to be locked up like animals" we can perhaps tap into our audience's dormant guilt, thereby convincing them of the validity of our argument. On the other hand, appealing to your audience's emotions can make some feel as if they are being manipulated. Having said that, *all* arguments try to manipulate people, regardless as to whether they use logic or emotion to do so. After all, to try to

convince someone that they're 'wrong' and you're 'right' involves a degree of manipulation. Nonetheless, an academic argument usually seeks to appeal to people's logic, not emotion, and therefore is the level at which the majority of your arguments *should* be argued. This can be achieved of course by the obvious: using quotations in order to support your claim, as quotations from academic researchers rarely use emotion. A minimum of emotion and a maximum of logic will help to win your audience's respect.

A final point, though quite micro-level, is to avoid contractions in your academic writing, such as *he's*, *they're*, *it's* and so on, as it's better style to give the full form, such as *he is*, *they are* and *it is*. While this handbook uses quite a lot of contractions, this has been done to create a more informal tone, in the hope of making reading that bit easier. However, within an academic essay, contractions are perhaps *too* informal.

7. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Don't let anyone fool you: *writing is a messy business*. It takes time to develop a good essay, involving lots of planning, writing, rewriting, revising, editing and fine tuning. And just when you think you're finished, you can end up going back to the beginning and starting all over again. On the other hand, you might just feel that your essay needs a bit of final polish before submitting it to your lecturer. Once you've composed the finished essay and before you submit it to your lecturer, a good piece of advice is to *read your essay out loud*. If you read your essay out loud as opposed to just silent reading (i.e. reading in your head), you will train your eyes and ears to detect problems in your writing. For example, you will learn to detect grammatical problems with sentences that simply 'don't sound right' – maybe because you have a sentence fragment or a run-on sentence. Regarding style, you will be able to detect repetition of the same words in a sentence, for example, or you may even reconsider a certain word choice and replace it with a new one. The point is that you're training your ear to listen carefully to each and every nuance of your writing and you're training your eyes to scan for every possible mistake, such as misplaced commas.

Moreover, it's strongly recommended that you read your essay out loud with a copy of it in your hand, as opposed to reading your essay out loud off a computer screen. With this method, you might discover that there are even more items in need of revision. Yes, it's time consuming and can be frustrating to force yourself to read

your essay out loud, especially if it's a longer essay, in which case, you might want to read it section by section, taking necessary breaks along the way. However, these approaches do work to help you become a better writer.

After you're convinced that you've done all the revision you can do, wait a few days then read your essay again. By giving yourself time to get away from your essay for a few days, you will give your mind a break and in turn, allow your 'mental batteries' to be recharged. Then, when you go back to your essay again, you'll see things differently and maybe have some brand new ideas and insights. Revision is the name of the game and in the end, **writing one essay three times will help you to understand more about good writing than writing three separate essays just once**. Also remember to submit your essay on time otherwise you'll lose points strictly by default. There are essays submitted which may have been deserving of a first class score in terms of attainment, but because they were submitted late, they received a lowered score.

There is so much more to be said about the nuts and bolts of academic writing, but what you have just read has given you an overview of the basics, as well as the more essential information about academic writing which you should know from the start. This handbook has also been designed to be used as a reference guide to help you with your writing assignments, from short essays to the final-year dissertation, and it is hoped that you will become familiar with it.

Good luck!

ESSAY ANALYSIS

What now follows is an example of an academic essay which is analysed paragraph by paragraph, with comments from a lecturer.

HOOK
BACKGROUND INFORMATION
THESIS

INTRODUCTION

When I first saw *Dead Poets Society*, it was nothing I expected. The film is quite serious and it is without question the best movie I've ever seen. It takes place in 1959 at Welton Academy, a private collage prep school for boys where discipline is the most important goal and any demonstration of free thought is strictly prohibited. One voice stands out among narrow-minded administration - John Keating's eccentric and inspiring teacher. He wants his students to "suck the marrow out of life", "to seize the day", and to make their lives "extraordinary". Keating teaches poetry, but his students get a lot more than that - they learn passion, courage, and romance. *A group of his students dare to form the Dead Poets Society, a secret organization. One of the boys, Neil, who wants to be an actor but whose overbearing father forbids him to, commits suicide and dies. His roommate, Todd, is trying to live up to expectations after his brother becomes the school's valedictorian. At the end, Mr. Keating is fired after being accused of having a negative impact on his students.*

Labelling the opening sentence(s) of an introduction automatically as a hook is not necessarily 'wrong' as it stands to reason that the opening of your essay is the logical place to insert your intended hook. You may or may not find the personal information within the opening in this essay as 'hook-worthy' but it can help to create an interesting opening by praising the film and thus make the reader intrigued as to why he/she should continue reading. Again, personal revelation is not off limits, more so within the English department to which your writing class belongs; it becomes an issue simply when it drowns out more of your objective support, especially within an argument essay. I also like the fact that the writer has used direct quotes from the film itself. However, saying that the film is 'quite serious' doesn't

say an awful lot and more clear language would help matters (e.g. *the film delivers a serious message of.....*).

However, the italicized portion in the introduction seems a bit 'tagged-on' – I feel the introduction would be better off without it and the details of Neil, for example, could come later in the body. Furthermore, saying that Neil 'dies' as a result of suicide is redundant – it's obvious that death would be the result of one's suicide. The background works well though, as it serves to orient the reader and for those who have not watched the film, they would be in no doubt as to what the film – and essay – is all about.

TOPIC ONE: Self-esteem.

Self-esteem becomes one of the centres of the movie. Neil's low self-esteem reveals itself only in the relationship with Neil's father, but leads Neil to his tragic end. On the other hand, Todd, with the help of Professor Keating, is able to build up his self-esteem. John Keating wasn't a regular professor: his teaching methods were very different from those of others in Welton Academy. The relationship between Todd and professor Keating is quite interesting because we can see the transformation that Todd went through from being afraid to answer a teacher's questions to being the first one to show his appreciation for Mr. Keating when doing so could lead to being expelled from the school.

The mention of Neil is too brief, especially for such a tragic character. We need to know more about him, especially since his suicide was mentioned in the introduction. Sentence four also seems out of place. First, it doesn't necessarily derive from sentence three and it's also quite vague; in what ways was Keating not a 'regular professor'? Here is where support is needed from the film, which would not only avoid vagueness, but would also help to persuade the reader about how Keating helped Todd. As is, the writer only refers to Todd's 'transformation', but doesn't show it with a specific example. This illustrates the need for you to give specific examples from a film in order to give support and not assume that just because your teacher knows what you're referring to that details aren't needed.

TOPIC TWO: How Keating establishes a relationship with his students.

<u>It is very interesting to see how John Keating establishes the relationship with his students</u>. He is quite open with his students about his attitude towards the world and his ideas about the purposes of life, and other general things, however, at the same time he doesn't reveal his personal life. This is very understandable due to the fact that he is a teacher and his role as a teacher prevents him from getting too personal with his students. Moreover, in my opinion, it was very important to keep this barrier between the professor and his students because otherwise they could've lost their respect for him as a teacher. At the same time, Keating is eccentric and open enough to make his students be interested in him which helped in getting their attention to poetry.

Is the topic fully illustrated and explored? Having read the paragraph, I'd say not. Again, the writing is too general and vague – we need to see *specific examples* from the film which show how Keating established a relationship with his students. Some examples of vagueness include:

- *He is quite open with his students* – How? In what ways? Tell us.
- *His ideas about the purposes of life?* – What *are* his ideas? What does he think the purposes of life are exactly?
- *…and other general things* – This is *too* general!
- *Keating is eccentric* – Tell the reader *how* he's eccentric – what does he do to show this? Moreover, some might interpret 'eccentric' to be a negative character trait, especially for a teacher. As the writer is arguing in favour of Keating, however, then we need to know exactly how Keating's eccentricity is a positive character trait and helps his student. Specifically, the thesis of **Keating teaches poetry, but his students get a lot more than that – they learn passion, courage, and romance**; how does Keating's eccentricity relate to such a thesis?

Furthermore, having seen the film several times, I don't agree that Keating kept a barrier between himself and the students at all – in fact, the writer implies the opposite in the first two sentences of the paragraph above. True, Keating reveals little about his personal life (except in one scene with Neil), but he breaks down all barriers between himself and his students and if you've seen the film, I'm sure you can think

of several scenes which demonstrate this. If the student can support this claim of Keating establishing barriers, however, then it is definitely needed here.

TOPIC THREE: People's dependence on others for acceptance.

Unfortunately, we live in the world "with more emphasis on what is wrong with us than on what's right about us" (Michael Cody), and because of that there are people who depend on the approval of others in order to feel good about themselves. People with low self-esteem try to avoid showing their unfavourable characteristics and in order to do so they avoid taking action at all. When Todd Andersen refuses to read his poem in professor Keating's class, he is afraid of getting negative opinions from his classmates, moreover, he truly believes that he is not able to write poetry. However, John Keating neither gives him an "F" nor lets him sit down. What does he do? He makes Todd believe in himself. He says: "Mr. Anderson thinks that everything inside of him is worthless and embarrassing, isn't that right Todd, isn't that your worst fear? Well, I think you're wrong, I think you have something inside of you that is worth a great deal." Saying this is enough to make Todd believe that he is just as any other student in his class and is able to write a poem. And he does improvise a poem so well that he impresses Keating and all his friends. When individuals experience success, they grow in self-confidence. And as their self-esteem grows, they will feel more comfortable to face new challenges.

I like the fact that the student has taken a real-world issue regarding self-esteem and related it to events in the film. This is actually quite clever. And unlike the previous paragraphs, this one offers specific support in the form of a poetry improvisation exercise that was conducted between Keating and Todd, which in turn helps Todd to develop his self-esteem. And as you can see, the broad background from which this body paragraph begins, also serves to wrap things up nicely. A case of BROAD (i.e. self-esteem issues in society) – NARROW (Todd and Keating) – BROAD (how self-esteem grows in *individuals in general*, with Todd as one example). On the other hand, the writing becomes perhaps a bit too broad by referring to self-esteem in society; momentarily at least, the focus on the film itself is lost and is placed on a societal issue instead.

TOPIC FOUR: Knowing oneself.

Perhaps the highest purpose of education is for the individual to become aware of his/herself because when people know themselves they can maximize good outcomes, for it is through awareness that we are able to choose our goals and create our destiny. Todd suffers from low self-esteem, and this low self-esteem prevents him from seeing his own strength thus making Todd unaware of his positive traits. He himself creates his own limits by having a negative concept of himself.

We begin again with a topic sentence which cleverly relates to the real world and applies to us all, not just characters in a film. The key, however, is *to show the reader how the characters in the film illustrate the topic and subsequently, the thesis*. It's a question as usual of balance; relating the events in a film to the outside world, to include personal experience, is fine. It can add depth. However, you need to ensure that you don't talk more about the outside world/personal experience to the extent that this drowns out the real focus of the essay: in this case, a focus on the events in a film, not on the outside world and/or one's personal experience. However, I feel that the necessary support is inadequate for two reasons.

One, because we've already heard about Todd – I think it would be more effective to read about other students who were also guided by Keating. Second, the information about Todd is again too vague and simply not detailed enough. Understand that sentence four is not vague in and of itself; the problem is that what follows does not show the reader exactly how Todd suffers from a low self-esteem, though it was mentioned earlier (another reason why it doesn't need to be mentioned again).

TOPIC FIVE: The writer's changed self-perception.

***Dead Poets Society* changed my own perception of myself and others. I have a low self-esteem: I am very sensitive to what others think about me. This movie helped me to realize that my low self-esteem is a big problem and that because of it I probably miss out on many things. My academic achievements are not as high as I would want it to be because I am afraid of speaking in public,**

participating in classes. It would probably change if I was more confident in myself. I suddenly realized that my low self-esteem might be the cause of the biggest mistake of my life- quitting my piano lessons. This realization is painful for me- I have not found anything that would interest me as much as playing piano did. I quit because one morning I woke up thinking that I would never be able to be really good at it, I would never be able to sit in front of hundreds of people and play. Thinking that every person in the audience would evaluate me, noticing every little mistake, the way I dress, sit, made me feel so terrible, I just couldn't face it.

This body paragraph is a clear example of going off course regarding an essay's thesis. The topic is clear enough and there is also clear, concrete support more than any other paragraph so far. However, the support is simply not related to the task at hand: *to write an essay which supports Keating*. As mentioned, a bit of personal anecdotal support is fine. But in an essay which is focused on the character in a film and therefore relies largely on filmic support, to devote an entire body paragraph to personal support is simply too much. This results in a lack of unity. Again, personal support for your essay's thesis is fine, especially when you have firsthand experience to share. However, it must not dominate and in an essay which is arguing for the character of Mr. Keating as an example of a good teacher, an entire body paragraph devoted to personal issues, though they may relate to issues in the film, creates a new essay. I had mentioned this before regarding the need to avoid writing 'two essays in one'. However, this is the effect that the sudden personal focus has on the overall unity of the essay. On a relatively smaller note, sentence four also has a grammatical error: 'academic achievements', while plural, are referred to in the singular as 'it'.

TOPIC SIX: The writer's need to find herself.

Mr. John Keating guides his students into an expended awareness of life's possibilities, and I can only wish to find someone who will help me to find myself. For now, I am alone: neither my parents, friends, nor my boyfriend will help me, and I don't blame them. In their eyes I am a young sophisticated women who knows where she goes and what she wants from life, but inside I am a scared little girl who is not sure about anything in her life. I realized after watching this

movie that we are too complex and many sided to rate ourselves as "bad" or "good", even more than that , we shouldn't rate ourselves at all. However, it is part of our nature to often evaluate ourselves, and self doubt might become our companion throughout our lives; still it doesn't mean that we have to think about ourselves as "good" of "bad" in general. We might want to evaluate our specific actions in specific circumstances in order to avoid mistakes that we made in the future. By assuming that we are bad, we program ourselves for the failure.

The topic indicates again a further digression from the subject at hand onto a personal discussion of the writer herself, with Mr. Keating, who is the focus of the essay, only receiving a small mention. Sentence three has another grammatical error in that the writer refers to herself in the plural as 'women' instead of 'woman'. Also, the word 'expended' in the topic sentence has a completely different meaning than the intended word – *expanded*. The penultimate sentence mentions 'mistakes that we made in the future', which makes no sense as the writer is using a past tense verb – *made* – to refer to the future. These issues are not indicative of 'bad' writing at all, however. Actually, this paragraph would work well in a personal essay in which the writer chose to discuss her self-esteem issues. However, the thesis is about why Mr. Keating is a good teacher, not about personal issues.

TOPIC SEVEN: Being happy within ourselves.

In our culture, many of us have hopes that are too high and expectations of ourselves that are very hard to accomplish. I, myself, set the goals that even I know I probably wouldn't be able to reach. I want everything the best: my own successful company, perfect family, big house, I want to be healthy, beautiful, and loved by everyone. I want everybody to like me and that's why the opinion of others is so important. Meanwhile, I know that it is not possible for everyone to like me, there will be people with opinions that are different from mines and there will be people who don't like the way I look. John Keating urged his students to make their lives extraordinary, and I don't think he meant that they have to make their lives seem extraordinary in the eyes of others. We'd better live in such a way that we are satisfied with what we are doing, rewarding every little success, being who we are. Being who we are is difficult; our society expects us to act in a certain way, which is often very different from what we really want.

The writer now has a third body paragraph which is about her and also societal pressure on people, though the mention of 'society expects us to act in a certain way' is vague and leaves the reader guessing as to what it really means. The brief mention of Keating ironically seems to offer support for the writer's personal beliefs, *as opposed to her personal beliefs supporting Keating as a teacher!* However, I think the writer's essay is very introspective and offers some truly deep and interesting insights. Again, the writer's focus on herself is in no way 'bad'; it's simply *inappropriate* because it appears too much in the wrong essay at the wrong time. If, however, the writer's personal focus were to be transferred to a personal expository essay which focuses on the personal issues she discusses here, then she would have a very good essay indeed in that specific context.

CONCLUSION

I hope I'll be able to learn to love myself, to see in myself things that are positive. If I think hard, I might come up with some things already: I do adore children, I like helping people, and I am generous. I guess it makes me a better person. Todd was very fortunate to open up, to believe in himself. I hope that some day I will be able to be so fortunate too, but first I'll have to do a lot of looking, exploring, learning, listening and living. It's the only way to find the answers about who I really am.

If you compare the conclusion with the introduction, you can clearly see how they offer two completely different theses. The introduction promised the following thesis: **Keating teaches poetry, but his students get a lot more than that – they learn passion, courage, and romance.** However, the conclusion suggests a completely different thesis, one about a personal quest to find the real person within. We again have a brief mention of the character Todd but it serves no purpose because the focus by this point has become so overwhelmingly fixed on the writer, and not the film. Moreover, since the thesis mentions passion, courage and romance, we might have expected to have read about them in the essay, but we didn't really see any of these three specific words referred to at all. Instead, we only read about Todd's increased confidence, but little more.

I have not provided you with this essay as an example of poor writing. As I said, it would work much better if the writer stayed with the original focus, which would improve the unity dramatically. Moreover, with a bit more illustrative support from the film, the essay would be much more persuasive and much clearer. However, that the essay is in need of revision is in no doubt. And learning to be a better writer involves more than just analyzing perfected texts; you also need to analyze texts which represent *works in progress*. Having done so, you now have a visual of just what such an essay looks like – an essay which has got the potential to go much further but needs some revision before it can do so.

WRITING YOUR DISSERTATION

(Taken from the Language, Literacy and Communication Dissertation Handbook, School of Education)

1) How do I choose my Dissertation topic?

For many students, the process of choosing a suitable research topic for the Dissertation is a challenging one. To help you through this stage, it is important to bear the following pointers in mind - your topic should be:

a) enjoyable

You will invest a great deal of effort in your Dissertation. If you become disillusioned with the topic part-way through the process, your motivation will suffer, and this is very likely to impact on the level of success with which you complete the work, thus affecting the final grade you achieve. Take your time when choosing your topic and ensure that you are confident that this topic has sufficient interest for you and that it will not lose its appeal prematurely.

b) useful

Given the amount of effort you will put into the Dissertation, it makes good sense that the topic you choose is useful for you in some way. It may be useful in that it consolidates an area of work and study you have already embarked upon and thus give you some sense of conclusion to that line of activity. Equally, the topic may be useful in terms of the doors that it might open in terms of future employment.

c) manageable

It makes good sense to choose a topic which lies well within your grasp. For example, you might choose a topic which builds upon work you have already completed so that you are not beginning the Dissertation from a standing start but are already 'up-and-running' on the topic. This point applies equally to the topic and to the proposed approach and methods.

d) feasible as a Dissertation topic

Your Supervisor will advise you about whether or not the topic you have chosen and the particular way in which you have focused your study of it are feasible within the parameters of a Dissertation within your department. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that, because the Dissertation is a big piece of work, you must therefore embark on a big topic or a large-scale study within it. Your Supervisor is there to help guard against this danger.

e) focused

Usually, the Dissertations which have the sharpest focus are often the best pieces of work. This is because such a focus enables you to ensure that all your work is relevant. It also gives you ample space in which to explore the precise issues involved in some depth. In this way, your critical insights will be clearly in evidence. In practice, your

focus may be attained through the development of clearly defined issue, challenge, problem, or hypothesis which the Dissertation then addresses.

f) relevant

Although this is the 6th point, it is perhaps the most obvious one. The topic chosen must clearly lie within your chosen programme of study, i.e. you should be able to justify its relevance to the aims and objectives of your programme. Before you embark on a lot of work for your proposed Dissertation topic, check with your Supervisor that it is relevant to your programme.

g) analytical (critical thinking)

Whatever your topic, and however you approach it, Dissertations must not only consist of purely descriptive work. There should be elements of interpretation, critical awareness, and evaluation in your proposed topic and the way in which you explore it. To put it another way, you must engage with the ideas that you present; you must put your imprint on the issues you discuss; and you must acknowledge previous work in similar areas but also position your work as an addition to this body of work.

h) original

This criterion is placed last in our discussion because it is perhaps the one that is often misunderstood. Certainly, your work must not be plagiaristic (and the same penalties regarding plagiarism apply as much in your Dissertation as in any other piece of submitted work). Your work will be informed by previous work in the areas related to your topic but the analytical and critical stance you adopt towards this topic (see previous point) will mean that you will not be simply repeating what somebody else has already done but rather seeking to add something, however small, to the body of understandings available to scholars on the topic. In this sense, your work will be original but it does not mean that you have to be the next Einstein, inventing some completely new ideas and theories.

TASK 1

Brainstorm possible broad topics which you might like to explore in your Dissertation. List them below.

Possible Broad Topic 1: _____

_____
__

Possible Broad Topic 2: _____

_____
__

Possible Broad Topic 3: _____

_____
__

TASK 2

Evaluate each of the above possibilities in terms of the following Criteria:

Broad Topic Possibilities		Enjoyable	Useful for you	Manageable for you	Feasible as a Dissertation	Focused	relevant	original
1								
2								
3								

In each case, think about either:

- whether or not the criterion is met (if 'yes', put a tick in the box); and / or
- to what extent each criterion is met (place a number from 0-5 in the box, with 0 = 'not met at all' and 5 = 'fully met').

TASK 3

The promising broad topic is:

_____

_____
__

TASK 4

To brainstorm possible focuses within the most promising broad topic you have selected in Task 3, you need to complete the following sentence in different ways as indicated below.

In this Dissertation, I want to ……. (1 sentence max).

First, decide which verb you want to use. For example, "In this Dissertation, I want to explore [something]". Possible verbs include (but you can try using others as well):

consider, evaluate, explore, find out (more) about, investigate, propose, prove, test

Second, decide which WH-word you want to use next. For example, “In this Dissertation, I want to explore how literacy activities are organised in pre-school institutions”. Possible WH-verbs include:

how, if, what, when, where, whether, which, who, why

There are very many permutations here so use you instincts and play with those which seem most appealing, most in line with your emerging thinking. Use the space provided below for your experiments in completing this sentence.

In this Dissertation, I want to …..

TASK 5

Record here the most promising of the sentences you brainstormed in Task 4.

In this Dissertation, I want to
_____

_____
__

_____
__

1) Title _____

_____

2) One-sentence statement of purpose: *In this Dissertation, I want to …*_____

_____

_____

3) Focusing Research Question(s)

- _____
  _____

_____

- _____
  _____

_____

- _____
  _____

_____

- _____
  _____

_____

- _____
  _____

_____

2) DISSERTATION STRUCTURE (SKELETON OUTLINE)

2.1 A coherent whole composed of many parts

Dissertations can vary in structure and it is crucial that you negotiate a suitable structure for your Dissertation with your Supervisor. In this section, information is given about those parts which are common to all. More illustrative advice is also given about possible presentational matters related to the parts which are likely to vary from one Dissertation to the next.

If you appreciate at the outset that the final Dissertation will be composed of a number of distinct sections, and that each section will have a definite purpose, this should make the process of writing it much easier. It should also help you to achieve an appropriate balance between the relative lengths of the different sections. However, these parts need to be assembled into a coherent whole, a task that often happens late in the writing process and takes more time and redrafting effort than might be expected. Plan your time accordingly!

2.2 Parts common to all Dissertations

The following list provides an indication of the elements which most, if not all, Dissertations will include. This listing is sequential, i.e. as your reader opens your Dissertation, they can expect to see these elements in the order set out below.

Dissertation Structure Skeleton
Front Matter • Title Page • Acknowledgements • Abstract • Table of Contents

Main Body of the Dissertation
• Introduction • Main discussion subdivided into several Chapters as discussed further below • Conclusions
End Matter
• References • Appendices

Of the three chunks set about above, the Front Matter is the shortest, and Main Body is clearly the largest. The parts within each of these chunks are now discussed in turn. Please note that the suggested lengths for each part (especially of the sections within the Main Body of the Dissertation) are approximate. You will need to agree section word lengths with your Supervisor and ensure that you are clear and comfortable with the weighting each section will carry in your negotiated and agreed Dissertation outline.

2.3 Presentational aspects common to all Dissertations

Regardless of which type of Dissertation you choose, your final text should be:

- double line-spaced with blank lines between paragraphs and between blocks of text (eg before and after a free-standing quotation or a block of bullet points);
- divided into larger units (usually called Chapters) which are numbered and have a title which is informative (ie which signposts the content of that chapter);
- divided also into smaller units (usually called sections) and even smaller units (usually called subsections), all of which are numbered and given informative titles;
- carefully signposted, i.e. you need to provide your reader with a clearly-delineated path to follow and, throughout the text, you need to provide them with reassuring confirmations of where they have been and where they will be taken next on this consciously adopted path.

1.The Main Body of the Dissertation

This section provides a detailed account of ONE suggested Dissertation structure as guidance on what you may want to include. As already mentioned, Dissertations vary considerably according to topic and methodology. Therefore, you are NOT compelled to use this structure when writing your own Dissertation but you DO need to discuss this with your Supervisor.

a) The Introduction (i.e. the first section of the Main Body)

You can view this as a short (e.g. two pages), free-standing introduction to the chapters which follow. Alternatively, you can view it as the first Chapter in the Main Body, in which case it tends to be slightly longer (approximately four pages). Either way, the Introduction has several functions including:

- introducing your reader to your topic and glossing the title (which, because it is in title-format, might be a little cryptic and you want at all costs and especially at this initial stage to ensure that your readers have not misunderstood what it is you are writing about);

- introducing your reader to the purpose you have set yourself in your Dissertation - here it may be useful to think in terms of the principle verb (e.g. explore, evaluate, test, and so on) which best characterises your intentions;

- explaining why you have chosen this topic (i.e. to situate yourself in the research endeavour);

- providing an initial clarification of any key or problematic terms central to your work; and

- providing a brief rationale for the research.

Additionally, most Introductions are likely to provide some background literature, thereby clarifying key findings from previous research, and helping you to identify the niche or gap in the research which your work aims to occupy. The statement of what this niche is will be closely connected with the statement of your objectives. Such Introductions are also likely to present an initial research question or set of questions that the study is seeking to explore (although these may be modified, clarified, enlarged, and otherwise modified through the discussion of the literature which will follow in the next chapter).

Occasionally, students undertake Dissertations which are rooted to a specific context (e.g. an evaluation of the effectiveness of a local homework club). In such cases, the Introduction is also likely to identify an issue which the writer has come across in the context which they wish to address in the research. This may take the form of a question, or consist of statement describing the issue, problem, or challenge concerned.

b) Literature Review or exploration of the literature

Initial comments

The purpose of this chapter(s) (the literature review very often consists of more than one chapter) can vary from one type of Dissertation to another. However, in all Dissertations you must show that you are:

Knowledgeable about the literature relevant to your topic and research approach; and

- In control of this literature base, i.e. able to pick elements from it at will to suit your research purposes.

It should be emphasised that the best Dissertations do not simply summarise what the literature says. Instead, the researcher should have a good understanding of what the relevant and up-to-date literature covers. Such understanding of the literature needs to be systematic, to show depth as well as breadth of understanding, and to be presented as a coherent discussion rather than as a series of summaries of items in that literature.

Your understanding of the literature should inform the discussion in the Dissertation wherever appropriate. Therefore, you should aim to show your knowledge of the literature not just in the literature review chapters but wherever and whenever it is appropriate to the discussion. This will demonstrate to your reader that your thinking is informed by this foundational understanding of the relevant literature.

It goes without saying that this exploration of the literature needs to be fully, properly and consistently referenced according to the standard conventions (see your Programme Handbook for guidance on this).

Coverage

In terms of coverage, what should this literature-informed understanding of the topic include? As a rule, you will present a general overview of the main area and the sub areas within it, and then zoom in on particular parts of this territory which are of special relevance to your study. Your reader can expect you to provide a greater depth of discussion and insight about the areas that you have zoomed in on than you do for the initial territory-mapping overview with which you began. The reason for such general-specific discussion is to enable you to locate your particular topic within the larger picture painted in the literature in general. Thus, the areas you zoom in on should be directly relevant to your particular focus. In this way, the relationship between your work and the existing body of knowledge can be seen by your reader. This will help you delineate for your reader exactly what contribution you are making to the development of our understandings of the topic.

Your exploration of the literature should include the definition of all the key terms and concepts your study involves. You will need to do so with a clear recognition of how these terms and concepts are used differently by different writers in the literature. The important thing is to show that you know the possibilities regarding the possible definitions and that you have chosen or developed a specific set of definitions which suit your purposes. You then need to clearly stick to these definitions throughout your work.

Research Question(s)

Your exploration of the relevant literature enables you to formulate one or more Research Questions which your study seeks to address. It may be that you began your discussion in the Introduction with some statement of these questions, or you may have used your Introduction to identify the general issue, concern, problem, or challenge you want to address. Towards the end of the literature review chapter(s) you need to either include some fine-tuning of the earlier Research Questions you posed in your Introduction (or some more informed commentary on them) or you need to reformulate your concern, problem, challenge etc. in terms of Research Questions. It is important that you do state such research questions clearly because they provide an anchor to which you can return when you interpret the findings resulting form the analysis of the data you manage to gather.

The general idea is that you use your discussion of the literature to re-state or generate your research questions - therefore, you need to ensure that your research questions are clearly informed by your understanding of the literature.

Possible variation according to Dissertation type

In most Dissertations, it is important that the knowledge-territory (as available through the relevant literature) is well mapped out (ie systematically and in good depth) because this will ensure that the niche you are filling with your work can be clearly located within that overall field. Thus, the objective is to provide a clear, extensive, up-to-date map of the topic. Very occasionally, the discussion of the literature can be focused on two or three select texts which are then discussed in a great deal of detail. This is usually the case when the research topic is tied closely to a previous, already published, study. However, such Dissertations are quite rare - for most, a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the literature is required.

Length and title

Because of the subtle variations which the different types of Dissertation are likely to display regarding their treatment of the literature, it is difficult to be precise about the length of the exploration of the literature section. However, this is a substantial part of your Dissertation and, as with the Introduction, it is essential that you discuss the content and structure of this chapter with your Supervisor. A starting figure for such discussions might be reasonably set at approximately six-eight pages (approx 4000 words).

Finally, although such chapters are often simply titled “Literature Review”, increasingly they are being given titles which provide a clearer indication of the coverage. Thus, if the topic of the Dissertation is connected with Non-Verbal Communication, you might choose to label your chapter accordingly rather than with the more traditional “Literature Review”.

c) Reporting the Research Project

After the exploration of the literature, most Dissertations are structured around a report on the Research Project on which the Dissertation is based. Such reports typically have three main chunks:

Reporting the Research Study
i. A presentation of the approach, methods, and instruments you used;
ii. A presentation of the data you gathered and an analysis of them; and
iii. A discussion of the findings resulting from your analysis and the interpretation of what they might mean in relation to the Research Questions you have used to focus your study.

These three chunks can be presented as three separate chapters. Alternatively, you may choose to integrate your data analysis and discussion (chunks ii and iii) in order to present your findings in direct response to your Research Questions. However, these are only suggestions and you should negotiate this with your Supervisor.

I will now discuss the content of each chunk in order to give you some guidance on what this part of your Dissertation might include.

The design and conduct of the study

This is often the 3rd chapter of the Dissertation and can be entitled: "The Research Study" or "Research Methods" or something similar. You will devote a great deal of time and energy thinking about the design of your research project and then carrying it out. This 3rd chapter is the part of your Dissertation where this hard work is documented. Above all, your reader needs to have a clear and systematic presentation of:

- the literature-informed decisions (large and small) which you have made about the design and conduct of your study; (e.g. in an empirical study - the research methods used such as interviews, participant observations, survey)
- the instruments (e.g. interview schedules, questionnaires, observation records etc) you have developed for use in the study;
- the processes and stages through which your study has been conducted.

The design and conduct of the study need to be clearly coherent with the objectives and Research Questions which you have presented earlier. Your presentation of this design and conduct must explain not only what you did but why you did it since this combination of what and why provides an indicator of the validity (and in some cases reliability) of your approach and methods.

Other areas which might be included in this part of your Dissertation include (depending on their relevance to your study): a re-statement of the purpose of your study; the choice of research approach (ie qualitative or quantitative, or both); the sampling methodology (eg the size and type of sample used, with justification; how sample was contacted, how many contacted, and response rate); the methods of data collection used (e.g. questionnaire, interview, focus group, etc); and presentation of the instruments used (here, your discussion may refer to the actual instruments which are included as Appendices). In each case, it is essential that you provide your reasons for the choices you have made.

This chapter is very important in the overall assessment of your Project, since it is here that your reader needs to be able to understand exactly what you were trying to do, how you did it, and why you did it like this. There is no right or wrong answer about how the topic should have been investigated but you have an obligation to make sure your reader knows exactly why you have designed and undertaken it as you have.

This chapter will be approximately four - six pages long (2000 words). It is usually written in the past tense, reading as though you have already completed the research.

Analysis and initial findings / results

The analysis usually involves the following elements:

- a clear and systematic presentation of what data was successfully gathered (and here you can usefully include in the Appendices samples of each type of data gathered such as an interview transcript, a set of observation notes, etc);

- an indication of how this actual data-set matches the quantity and type of data that you set out to obtain (and should account for any discrepancies);

- a statement of what data preparation and analytical processes you used with your data set;

- a systematic presentation of your analysis and the results emerging from it (and some of the analytical workings, e.g. statistical / numerical and/or coding, may be included for illustrative purposes in the Appendices); and

- a summary of what you have found out so far as a result of analysing your data

This section can vary quite considerably in length. It always takes more time and space to clearly and systematically present and analyse your data. However, a typical analysis chapter may be six-eight pages in length (3000 words). There are usually notable differences in this section of your Dissertation between studies which are more quantitative and qualitative in approach and data type. Accordingly, you will need to work closely with your Supervisor on this section.

Discussion / Interpretation

You also need to explicitly discuss, evaluate, and interpret your results in relation to the Research Questions you set yourself earlier. This discussion should also relate back to issues raised in your exploration of the literature and your rationale for the research study. However, the main purpose here is to discuss what insights your Research Study provides you with concerning your Research Questions. As with the previous section, the ways in which you present your discussion and the length of the resulting text may vary considerably according to your topic and research approach and consultation with your Supervisor is essential. A good starting point for this section is six-eight pages (3000 words).

d) Conclusions / recommendations for further research

This is the final section of the Main Body of your Dissertation. Conclusions follow naturally from the analysis and interpretation of the data. The points you make here need to be justifiable in terms of what has gone before, i.e. this is not a time for introducing new, unsubstantiated ideas. It should instead be a carefully measured section in which you may take a critical view of what you have and have not achieved through your study. This critical perspective may help you to identify the significance of your work but also its limitations. It should also help you to identify areas where further work could focus building on what has been achieved here. Finally, you might consider what practical application or implications your work might have (especially if your work is rooted to a specific context). Typically, this is a fairly short section in the Dissertation (approximately two-four pages - 1000 words).

3.3 The End Matter

a) References

During the previous two years, you have submitted many assignments in each of which you will have been practising these academic referencing conventions. You should therefore be fairly confident in this area. Check your assignment feedback to see if there were any referencing problems which you can consciously avoid in the pinnacle of your BA studies, ie the Dissertation. If in doubt, check referencing uncertainties with your Supervisor. It is a great pity for the quality of your Dissertation to be negatively affected by problems with this area of your work.

You MUST include an alphabetically-arranged reference list of all the sources to which you refer in your Dissertation. This list needs to be:

exhaustive, ie ALL the resources you refer to should be included);

consistently formed, ie using the same conventions in each item); and

honest - you should, in your main body, refer to those works which have informed your thinking even if you do not quote directly from them, and, as a result, all of these works will be included in your References thus guarding against some charges of plagiarism or unacknowledged influences on your thinking.

You will have marks deducted if you do not correctly reference all work cited in your Dissertation.

b) Appendices

Appendices are a useful way of including information that is important in the overall understanding of your research, but would otherwise be too bulky to include in the text. Some examples of such material have already been given in the discussion of the Main Body above. As a further example, if you use a Questionnaire in your research, although you will discus the design of this data-gathering instrument within the Main Body of your Dissertation, you might include the whole instrument (exactly as you used it with your informants) in an Appendix. Similarly, you might base your research project on semi-structured interviews, and you might include the interview schedule as an Appendix. When in doubt, think about what your reader needs as the bare minimum to be able to fully understand what you are talking about.

There is no right or wrong answer about what belongs in the Main Body, what belongs in an Appendix, and what can be safely referred to but not included at all. Your Supervisor can give advice about this. But in general, Appendices should be used with some restraint. As a rule of thumb, they will not exceed a quarter of the total text page-length. You should refer to appendices in sequence as Appendix A (or 1), B (or 2), etc. Any appendix should be referred to somewhere in the text of your dissertation, otherwise you may reconsider the necessity of including such an Appendix. Only material which enhances the reader's understanding should be included. Remember that it is the quality and academic rigour of your work, which is being assessed, not the quantity!

4) LANGUAGE, PRESENTATION, AND COHERENCE

4.1 Language and presentation

a) General comments

All the academic submissions made during your programme have been preparatory for the submission of the Dissertation. Through those earlier submissions, you have learned the importance of submitting works which have been word-processed, spell-checked, proof-read, well-written, and well presented. You must make sure that you apply all of this learning to your Dissertation - it is a great pity if all your effort is undermined by poor presentation. As a longer piece of work than you have previously submitted, remember that it will take more time than expected to ensure that all of the above presentational operations have been carried out. Make sure you leave enough time for this and make sure also that you carry them out when you have a clear head and not in a frantic last-minute panic the day of submission!

N.B. Poor language and presentation will cost you marks!

b) Specific language matters

There is a great deal of variety about the style in which different Dissertations are written. Some texts will be written in the 3rd person, in the passive voice, and the past

tense (with the exception of the Abstract). Others might adopt a more personalised, active style in keeping with the researcher's situatedness in the things being researched. Consultation with your Supervisor is strongly recommended here, as appropriate style is largely dependent on the conventions of the programme and department in which you write. What is also essential is that your style is appropriate throughout and does not leap between contrasting styles without good reasons for doing so.

The tenses you will use will vary also in different parts of your Dissertation. For example, some parts of your Introduction may be in the present and some in the future. Equally, some writers write about the works in the literature which have current relevance in the present tense whereas others prefer to write the Literature Review in the past tense. What is commonly agreed, however, is that you report your research methods and findings in the past tense.

c) Specific presentational matters

Your research project should be:

- word-processed (with the exception perhaps of some documents in the Appendices);
- double line-spaced in general (with the exception of the Abstract, References, and Appendices);
- presented on single-sided, white, A4 paper;
- set out with a 40mm left hand margin to allow for binding and with all other margins no less than 15mm.
- referenced consistently using an approved referencing system;
- approximately 12,000 words in length for the main text (i.e. excepting the Appendices, Contents Page, Title Page, Acknowledgements, References, or Illustrations).

4.2 Overall Coherence

All academic works need to coherent in presentation, content, and argumentation and this is especially key for longer works such as Research-based Dissertations. Therefore, you must take an overview of the entire project, and assess how convincingly it all comes together as a whole. You need to not only check the individual component parts of the project, taken section by section, but also the overall effect. Checking for such coherence takes more time than you might think. Also, you are not really in a position to make a systematic job of checking this until you have drafts of the whole text, i.e. quite late in the process. Make sure to allow sufficient time for this important operation in between completing the first draft of the whole work and submitting the final draft.