

# Essay Writing for Beginners

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1

## Agenda

The essay writing process

- Step 1: Analysing the question
- Step 2: Reading and making notes
- Step 3: Making an essay plan
- Step 4: Drafting the essay
- Step 5: Referencing
- Step 6: Editing

2

## What is the Point of Essay Writing?

- revisit/revise different elements of the module/course and pull them together
- extend understanding by going beyond what is taught in class
- present an 'informed opinion'
- work within 'constraints'
  - time & word limit / commitment to view point
- learn how to present and express concepts and ideas in a clear and effective manner

3

## Step 1: Analysing the question/ title

- Check requirements (deadline, word limits)
- Deconstructing the question
  - Link to module syllabus, reading list, lecture slide
  - Link module's aims & learning outcomes
  - Brainstorm ideas
    - What do I know about this already?
    - What do I need to find out?
- Plan your research

4

Deconstructing the question

Discuss whether it is more difficult to become a 'man' for young people today than it was for their father's generation? (SA300-2007/8)

- **subject?:** masculinities/ young people/ identity/ transition
- **key instruction verb(s)?:** discuss  
examine by argument/ debate/ give reasons for & against
- **key aspect(s)?:** become a 'man', comparison
- **other significant words?:** father's generation

5

Discuss whether it is more difficult to become a 'man' for young people today than it was for their father's generation? (SA300-2007/8)

Questioning the question:

1. What is a 'man'? Today & 30-40 years ago? (qualities/ characteristics)
2. How does a boy become a 'man' today? (process)
3. How did their fathers become 'men'?
4. How has this changed since the 1970s? Why?
5. What are the consequences? For the individual? For society?
6. Which young people? All of them? Any specific group?
7. What are the links to Learning Outcomes?

6

Learning outcomes (SA300)

At the end of this module you should have:

- An understanding of the ways in which phenomena come to be labelled as social problems;  
**is this a social phenomenon or a problem?**
- An understanding of some of the key concepts used in social policy, such as need, equity, inequality, poverty, exclusion and diversity;
- An ability to critically evaluate the solutions to social problems that are suggested and adopted;  
**evaluate current policy**
- An awareness of the way in which social policy not only responds to such problems but actually helps to shape them;  
**Which social policy ? Helped solve or shape this 'problem'?**
- Developed skills in presentation and debate, both verbal and written;
- Developed problem solving skills and the ability to seek solutions to social problems and individual needs.

7

Understand Key Verbs

- Analyse
- Compare and contrast
- Discuss
- Evaluate
- Summarise
- To what extent ... and many more!

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

8

analyse   compare   contrast   criticise evaluate   relate   discuss		
1		Show how two or more things are different
2		Identify essential features of a subject and separate it into its component parts and examine how they relate to each other.
3		Investigate and examine a subject by argument. Give the pros and cons.
4		Show similarities and connections between two or more things
5		Show how two or more things are similar
6		Assess the worth, importance and usefulness of something using evidence to support your view.
7		Write about positive and negative aspects of a topic stating your judgement. Substantiate this with evidence.

analyse   compare   contrast   criticise evaluate   relate   discuss		
1	contrast	Show how two or more things are <b>different</b> .
2	analyse	Identify essential features of a subject and separate it into its component parts and examine how they relate to each other.
3	discuss	Investigate and examine a subject by argument. Give the <b>pros and cons</b> .
4	relate	Show <b>similarities and connections</b> between two or more things .
5	compare	Show how two or more things are <b>similar</b> .
6	evaluate	Assess the <b>worth</b> , importance and usefulness of something using evidence to support your view.
7	criticise	Write about <b>positive</b> and <b>negative aspects</b> of a topic stating your judgement. Substantiate this with <b>evidence</b> .

Planning your research

- Which questions do I need to find answers to?
  - theoretical or conceptual context
- What is my answer (likely to be)?
- What kind of evidence do I need to support my argument?
- What will I need to read?
- Who will I speak to?
- When will I do these things? <http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask>

Researching the Topic

Locating and choosing source  
(ideally start 3-4 weeks before deadline)

- Reading list
- Library catalogue (incl. Online)
- Subject Librarians
- Bibliographies
- Internet :
  - Dedicated database
  - Google scholar   versus   Wikipedia<http://scholar.google.co.uk>

### Selecting your source

- Good variety (types and angles)
  - But: use lecture notes for guidance only
- Reliability
  - known author/publisher
  - biased? does it matter?
  - length of bibliography
  - enough information to write up the reference
- Relevance
  - Will I really need this? To do what?

13

### Step 2: Reading

- Think before you read
- Skim text for key words  
(index, headings, captions...)
- Keep question(s) in mind while reading
- Take 'relevant' notes only
  - key quotations (exact wording/ page number)
  - data, stats & facts
  - ideas, insights, concepts, opinions ... (paraphrased or summarized in your own words)
- Record sources
  - full bibliographical details

More on  
avoiding plagiarism :  
[www.kent.ac.uk/ai](http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai)

14

### Step 3: Making the essay plan

Consider:

- Word limit
- Readership
- Possible line of reasoning
- Areas to be covered

15

### Generic Essay Plan

Introduction (5-10% of words)

Body decide on:

- possible line of reasoning
- number of paragraphs  
(about 250-300 words each)
- issues, ideas, examples to be included
- illustrations/photos to be included

Conclusion (5-10% of words)

References - list of your sources

16

Introduction

- Interpretation of the question/ title
- Explanation of key terms
- Presentation of background and context
- Links to module's themes/ topics
- Outline of main ideas  
e.g. *This essay will ...*

17

Violent video games can increase aggression and may be more harmful than violent television and movies because of the interactive nature of the games.  
Discuss this in relation to youth crime.

These days there appears to be a moral panic about youth culture. Older generations are more suspicious of children and hostile towards them, as they find it increasingly difficult to understand and integrate with the new technologically advanced youth of today. Today's youngsters are nothing like the well behaved children that their parents used to be, and are completely different from the children of 200 years ago. In this essay I am going to look at why people connect youth crime with violent video games, what positive and negative effects violent video games have on youth, and also why there are misconceptions about the two things. I am also going to investigate what impact the media has on the connection between violent games and youth crime.

18

Violent video games can increase aggression and may be more harmful than violent television and movies because of the interactive nature of the games. Discuss this in relation to youth crime.

There seems to be a common agreement that depiction of violence in the media has had a detrimental impact on young people's behaviour. A range of studies, however, suggest that it is video games rather than TV programmes or movies that may contribute to increasingly aggressive behaviour. XXX (2005) pointed out that the interactive nature of these games leads to a desensitisation on the part of the child or young person. Violent actions can be performed without any consequences to the perpetrator and are even rewarded. Gaming advocates (Gaming Revolution, 2008; PBS, 2009 and JJJ 2008) from the US and the UK, however, claim that violent games offer an outlet for aggression and thus ultimately reduce rather than increase youth crime. This essay aims to look at the different arguments in light of the PPP theory (FFF, 2000) and KKK's (2001) concept on media influence and contemporary culture. It will start with a theoretical discussion of JJJ, then focus on the case of RRR (2007) and discuss whether or not there is a definite relationship between violent crime and violent video games.

19

Paragraphing ... structures your thoughts and helps the reader

Plan your paragraphs

Each paragraph should contain:

**One clear idea/ topic sentence.**

e.g. *Becoming a man in the 1970s was straightforward.*

**Support sentences which add to the topic sentence**

- by explaining ideas raised
- by defining terms more fully
- by giving supporting details (evidence)

**Finish on a comment/ evaluation**

20

Paragraph structure:

Factors that influence teenagers to smoke are complex and numerous. They include socio-demographic characteristics, family background, school performance, and other social and environmental factors. Among these factors, some are predetermined, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Others can be affected through program implementation or policy initiatives Such as prohibition of cigarette sales to minors or education about the effects of smoking. In 1990, the 'California Youth Tobacco Survey' looked into the relationship between school performance, smoking, and attempts to quit smoking among teenagers<sup>1</sup>. It accepted that a student's school performance is inversely related to smoking status. That is, the better students do academically, the less likely they are to become smokers. School performance can be viewed as a broad indicator that reflects traits such as general educational commitment, motivation, competence in learning and value judgment, and academic success. It is therefore important to investigate in detail the issue of school performance in relation to smoking status.

topic sentence

more details

evidence

evaluation of evidence

comment & link

Source: Hu TIE, Lin Z and Kessler TE (1998) 'Teenage Smoking, Attempts to Quit and School Performance'. Am J Public Health 88 (5) 840

Conclusion

- Links to title and introduction
- Summary of main argument(s)
- Presentation of overall evaluation
- Your position
- Suggestions or recommendations
- NO NEW INFORMATION

22

What about this conclusion ?

At the end of the day, the effects of violent video games are generally comparable to the effects of violent film and television, so singling out video games as a source of aggression is a narrow minded approach to a largely misunderstood and inappropriately vilified new media. If we want our children to be less violent then we need to take responsible action on the real issues: - Parenting - Education - The unfortunately prevalent culture of war as a major foreign policy tool (providing us all with unlimited violence to fear and fantasize about). The more we ignore the real issues that have plagued us as a race for centuries and try to put the blame for our violent tendencies on yet another form of human expression, the closer we get to a real "game over."

23

Step 4: Drafting

- Start anywhere
- Write up individual paragraphs
- Revise, reconsider and rewrite what you have done
- Fill in any gaps and make connection

24

## Sign-posting

- e.g. "There are 3 main characteristics ..."  
"First, ..." "..., however, ..." "Consequently..."
- Explains what you are about to discuss.
- Links what you have said with what you are going to say.
- Helps your reader to follow the structure of your argument.

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

> paragraphs > signalling

25

## Step 5: Referencing

- To demonstrate your learning/ hard work
- To provide authority/credibility
- To indicate original source
- To avoid PLAGIARISM !
- Has to be accurate, no over- /understatement

26

## What to reference?

- Texts, ideas & concepts, images, audio-visual material, performance media/art, statistics/data, lectures, student work (incl. your own), designs, plans, interviews/questionnaires ...  
... anything you have used !
- Primary sources (play, film, novel, historical document, report, etc.)
- Secondary sources (review, analysis, critique evaluation ... of primary sources)

27

## Using sources

- **Quote:** repeat exact words (written or spoken)  
➢ *as evidence, illustration, can't possibly say it any better*
- **Summarise:** give shortened version of original (written or spoken)  
➢ *to give background information*
- **Paraphrase:** present original (written or spoken) in your own words  
➢ *when original idea is more important than original wording, to avoid direct quotes, to demonstrate your understanding of the issue*

28

## How to reference?

### in text

- form depends on the referencing style
- author date page number or footnotes<sup>1</sup> or number system

### after text

- Reference list or Bibliography
  - each source on a new line
- Consult your school's handbook or <http://www.kent.ac.uk/ai>

29

## Step 6: Editing

- Proof read your essay (after a gap of a day)
  - read it out aloud
  - be systematic
- Check :
  - Logic, coherence, relevance
  - Spelling/grammar/punctuation/syntax
  - Academic style (impartial, evaluative, accurate, concise, no clichés & colloquialisms)
  - Keep the personal in check (no emotive language)  
<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk>
  - Layout (the title/ margins/line spacing/ font types & size/page numbering/your details/cover sheet ...)
  - In-text citation - List of references

30

## Any Questions?

Get in touch: [A.Koch@kent.ac.uk](mailto:A.Koch@kent.ac.uk)

Slides will be available at  
<http://www.kent.ac.uk/learning>

Good luck !

31