

Writing an essay/report

Before starting, clarify the requirements with the teacher

- What kind of sources should be used?
- Can you quote from sources and if so how much?
- What citing or referencing system is required?
- Etc.

First step: understanding the assignment

- Ex: "There is no universally agreed definition of sustainable development. Discuss, with examples, how the diversity of interpretations of the concept can be seen as both adding to and undermining its usefulness."
- First underline the key phrases you need to interpret the assignment
- What does the assessor want? The question starts with a strong statement and encourages the writer to address both sides of the argument

Showing both sides of the argument –critical thinking

- "What was the original definition of sustainable development?"
- "Who came up with it?"
- "How has it developed since?"
- "How has it been interpreted, modified and criticized, and by whom?"

Second step: write down your initial thoughts

- What do you already know about the topic?
 - What questions do you have?
 - What do you need to look up?
 - What are the challenges?
 - What will be your next steps?
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- This will help clear your mind and structure your thoughts
 - It can show that you know more about the topic than you thought

Introduction – possible features

- **Answers the "Why should I care?" question:** Why is the topic important? This can be done with examples, statistics, quotations etc. It should grab the reader's attention
- **Moving from wider to narrower context:** situates the assignment within the context of the discipline, sub-discipline and then moves on to the specific topic. Defines key terms. For example even expressions such as climate change or global warming don't necessarily have standard definitions. You might want to give reasons why you use a specific definition, rejecting others
- **State your intention, what you want to do:** question to be answered, aim, hypotheses to be tested (if there is a thesis statement it should be here)

Tip: An introduction doesn't always need to be written first

- It can help set your direction to write it first
- You can also write it last, once you have fully finished your assignment
- You can also write a first draft of your introduction and revise it when you are done

Body – possible features

- You use evidence and reasoning to convince the reader of the strength of your argument
- You have to choose relevant evidence and decide how to present it --> evaluate alternatives, weigh conflicting evidence, make judgements based on evidence and reasoning
- Contains key words and phrases to show the reader the direction of the argument, location within the argument (or both). These are also called signposts, transitions, connectives or connectors
- They connect parts of an argument, setting each in the context of the whole
- They often appear at or near the beginning of sentences or paragraphs

Role of connectors 1

- **Introduce a line of reasoning** - ex: at the outset, first, first and foremost, initially, it is apparent, the first point, to begin
- **Reinforce a line of reasoning** - ex: again, also, as well as, besides, equally, furthermore, in addition, in the same manner likewise, moreover, similarly, such as, what is more
- **They qualify a previous argument** - ex: There are exceptions, This does not always apply
- **They introduce alternatives** – ex: alternatively, although, by contrast, conversely, however, nonetheless, not withstanding, on the one hand, on the other hand, others argue

Role of connectors 2

- **They show consequences or an evolution** - ex: as a result, on balance, consequently, hence, therefore, this indicates, this suggests, thus
- **They show the drawing of conclusions:** concluding, in conclusion, in summary, it is apparent, therefore, thus

Conclusion – possible features

- It is short – summarises the most important point of the assignment in an interesting way
- It weighs up the evidence and reasoning presented in the body of the assignment and makes a concluding statement – highlights the main points of evidence and reasoning
- Normally does not introduce new material
- Can include implications and make recommendations
- Refers back to the introduction and shows that all aims have been met (if not, the conclusion will explain why)