Write an essay

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Holly King-Mand is a writer, presenter and campaigner for literacy (the ability to read and write) who has inspired thousands of children to learn English. Holly helps children improve their writing skills and prepare for exams. Here she tackles how to write an essay...

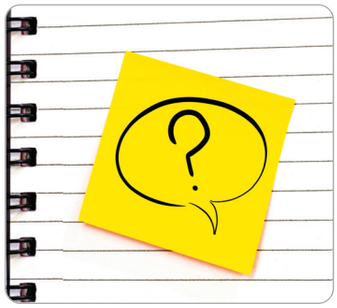
Writing essays is an unavoidable but fun part of studying lots of subjects, but what is an essay? Essays are an extended piece of writing that presents an argument or information on a topic. They can vary in purpose, style and type but they all involve questioning, assessing and discussing ideas or evidence.

An essay usually answers a question or a request to present ideas on a particular topic. For example, an essay question might ask what motivates a character in a book to act in a certain way, or ask the writer to explain how the Moon affects the tides. Writing an essay demonstrates that you understand a subject and can present your ideas clearly.

Essays are a big part of education.

HAVE A GOOD GO

The word "essay" comes from the French word essayer, which means to try or attempt.



Introduce your essay

A good introduction explains the facts that the reader needs to know first. It sums up what the essay will be about and what you are trying to prove or investigate. Be clear about your aims and always write in the third person (say "he", "she" or "they", rather than "me" or "I"). It's a good idea to begin your essay using the same words or style of language as the question, to show you are answering it directly.

Give it a structure

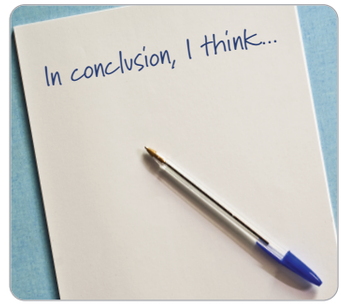
To help the reader follow your ideas, you need structure. Paragraphs (sections of writing that focus on one idea) can help. Start with a "topic sentence" that introduces what the paragraph is about. At the end, bring your topic to a close so the reader can move on to the next idea. You can use words such as "however" or "finally" or "furthermore" to start a new paragraph, which connects it to the previous one.

Include quotes and sources

If you used ideas from a book in your essay – or your essay is about a book – you can include snippets from it to support your points. These are quotes and have apostrophes or speech marks around them to show they are not your words. You should also share who said it. For example, "Dr Roberts says, 'Climate change is...'". At the end of the essay, you can list all the books that helped you.

Finish with a conclusion

In your final paragraph, you should conclude by summarising all your points to show how you have answered the essay question. You can even use the words from your title or essay question to bring the reader back to your main aim. You might begin this section with "In conclusion," and your tone should be confident. Here you can write in the first person ("I think...") and give your own opinion on the topic.



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