Organising your thoughts into a coherent piece of writing is an important part of academic life, but many students find essay writing a daunting proposition. The task can appear less formidable if it is seen as a sequence of sub-tasks, the completion of one task leading to the next. Good organisation will save time and unnecessary stress, and lead to better essays.

All essays should have an introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction attracts the reader's attention and indicates the main points and structure of the essay. These main points are then developed in the body of the essay. A main point may take one or more paragraphs, depending on the length of the assignment. You should use linking words to connect your ideas and paragraphs. The conclusion draws your arguments together and leaves the reader with your final thoughts on the subject. (SLC leaflets on these areas are listed at the back of this leaflet.)

ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS
Essay requirements vary from subject to subject. Your topic course book should give details regarding the expected format and which referencing style is preferred, and often provides suggestions for how to approach the topic itself. If you are still not clear on what is required, check with your tutor.

SELECTING A TOPIC
Ask yourself what you will learn by choosing to write on a particular topic. Your interest, knowledge and background will influence your choice. You should also take into account how easily you can find resources on a particular topic. Jotting down ideas may help you to identify what you already know and what you need to find out.

ANALYSING THE TOPIC

• What exactly is being asked of you? Is it a description, a well-documented argument, a personal view or something else? Read all the information and suggestions your course book contains for that assignment – often lecturers go out of their way to provide the questions that they want covered in each section, which can form the outline of your essay.

• Select the key content words of the topic and look up the definitions.

• Identify the instruction words, such as compare, discuss or explain. They will help you to use your information. (See the glossary below for more examples.)

• How does the topic tie in with the course and the lecturer's expectations?

• What are the main points you want to make? List any other points that could be relevant. How do these points link together?

• From this analysis, make a plan with headings and sub-headings.

• Add some notes which can be built upon under each heading and sub-heading.

The above steps of analysis help focus you on the topic so that you begin your deeper research with an idea of what you are looking for.
**BE SELECTIVE IN YOUR READING**

- What evidence will you need to prove, illustrate or develop each point? If you go to your reading with appropriate questions in mind, your reading will be more **focused**.
- Begin your reading by gathering your references and spend 5-10 minutes investigating each. Look at the abstracts (if they exist), subheadings, diagrams, tables, graphs, the conclusions and the introductions. Decide which references will be most useful (i.e. which provide a broad view and which deal with specific issues). **Prioritise** your reading.
- Read with the topic in mind and skim material until you find relevant information, which you should then read more closely. Don’t waste time reading irrelevant material.
- Stop reading and noting when you find you are not reading anything useful, or when you realise that you are just putting off the final writing stage, as this will reduce your time allotted for writing.

**WRITE A DRAFT**

Write your notes up into full sentences. Make sure you have one controlling idea for each paragraph. Other sentences in that paragraph must relate to that controlling idea. Add examples where you can to support your ideas.

You should expect to go through several versions of an essay before you come to the final draft. Try to organise your time so you can leave the essay for a couple of days before you re-write a draft. That way you can see inconsistencies more easily.

**STYLE**

Academic writing should be formal. Normally you should avoid the personal pronoun 'I', but check this with your department. Your writing should be clear, and you must use in-text **references** to support your information.

**FORMATTING**

Make sure that you use the font size and margins suggested in your topic handbook. You should normally use double spacing and indicate the start of a new paragraph by either an indent or an extra line space. All pages should be numbered.

**DRAFTING**

You should expect to go through several versions of an essay before you come to the final draft. Try to organise your time so you can leave the essay for a couple of days before you re-write a draft. That way you can see inconsistencies more easily.

**PROOFREADING**

When you have finished the essay, read it through carefully and look for mistakes. Be aware of the sorts of errors you often make.
The following illustrations show how an essay may be structured and provide an example of an essay outline.

### General Essay Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction** | • About 10% of the essay. Start the introduction generally.  
• Narrow down your essay by the end of the introduction to indicate both what the essay will do and how it will be organised. This is called your thesis statement. |
| **Body**     | • About 80% of the essay.  
• Each paragraph should make a new point.  
• The number of paragraphs will depend on the length of your essay.  
• Linking words should be used between paragraphs to make the essay flow smoothly. |
| **Conclusion**  | • About 10% of the essay.  
• Start the conclusion with specific reference to your arguments.  
• End more generally. |

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### Example Essay Outline

**Introduction**

The concern for equity in regard to the treatment of boys and girls in school has been a key issue in Australia for the past 25 years...

**Thesis statement**

This essay, encompassing different school types and the roles of various stakeholders, argues for equal opportunities for boys and girls, to enable them to achieve their full potential within and following their school experience.

**Body**

**Historical perspective**

General gender differences  
• school experience  
• socio-economic status  
• assessment

Coeducational schools  
• self-esteem  
• subject choice

Single sex schools  
• subject choice  
• single sex classes in co-ed schools

**Conclusion**

In this brief survey of boys' and girls' education, it has been argued that . . .

A combination of differential treatment of boys and girls, particularly where segregation offers improved access to subject choice in the absence of intimidation, and concerted efforts to minimise sexism in schools, will work towards a situation in which education is fair for all students.

(Outline based on Miller, JC 1999, 'Differentiated educational provision', unpublished assignment in the topic UBEU Education Context, University of South Australia, Magill.)
GLOSSARY OF INSTRUCTIONAL WORDS

Account for: give reasons for
Give an account of: describe
To take into account: to consider, to think of
Analyse: divide into parts and describe each part; discuss a problem
Argue: systematically support or reject a position by presenting reasons and evidence for acceptance or rejection
Assess: decide how important something is and give your reasons
Assume: first accept that the following is true
Classify: arrange into groups or classes
Comment on: explain why something is important
Compare: describe the ways in which two things are alike
Concept: an important idea
Concise: short, brief
In the context of: referring to, inside the subject of
Contrast: describe the ways in which two things are different
Criteria: what standards you would expect; what questions you would expect to be answered
Critical: discuss, pointing out faults and disadvantages
Deduction: the conclusion or generalisation you come to after looking carefully at all the facts
Define: provide clear, concise, authoritative meanings
Discuss: give evidence to support the different sides of an argument and then propose which is the most convincing
Distinguish between: describe the differences between two (or more) things
Elaborate: ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is not enough. Answer fully with reasons and examples
To what extent is x true?: Discuss, explain in what ways x is true and in what ways x is not true.

USEFUL REFERENCES