

ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION INFO SHEET

Prewriting: Essay plan (P: EP)

After having analysed an essay topic, many students are liable to go straight to the library and read broadly on the subject. They believe that this research is necessary before they start thinking and planning an essay. Such an approach can be a mistake however, with some students producing countless notes and then being unsure about how these notes can be converted into a piece of writing. Before you read too much it is a good idea to do as much thinking and planning as you can.

Learn about:

- developing a provisional plan
- developing an elaborated plan

See other **Info Sheets** about note making and elaborated plans

A provisional essay plan can be developed after analysing the question, using your own ideas and those from the first few readings. This plan helps guide the research phase. It will also assist you to take careful, useful notes and decide how many paragraphs your essay may have.

Provisional plan for an essay of 1500 words in length

First it is necessary to consider the word length you have been given and to consider the essay as a series of blocks. Each block is a paragraph that makes up your essay. Each paragraph is made up of about 250-300 words, except for the introduction and conclusion which are determined by the size of your essay. They are usually 10% of the total length of the essay.

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| Introduction Propose a thesis | 10% of the word length (150 words) You need to know your overall position on the topic. |
| Body paragraph 1: first main idea A. Supporting information a. Detail b. Detail c. Detail | 250-300 words- Develop a support argument for the thesis. Make a note of the first main idea you thought of after analysing the question: an idea that you came up with or one from the first few readings (often a set text). Later you may rearrange the ideas, remove it, or join it to a related idea. Make sure you keep your eye on the essay question. |
| Body paragraph 2: second main idea | 250-300 words- Make a note of another main idea. |
| Body Paragraph 3: third main idea | 250-300 words- Another main idea |
| Body Paragraph 4: fourth main idea | 250-300 words Another main idea |
| Conclusion | 10% of the word length (150 words) |

Sample provisional essay plan

Topic: Discuss the impact of tertiary study on mature aged students.

INTRODUCTION – approximately 10% of word length

- What you interpret tertiary studies and mature aged to mean
- A general (thesis) statement about type and size of the impact or effect of tertiary study on mature aged students
- A statement of intent to include an outline of the areas you will consider in assessing the impact e.g.: This essay will consider the financial, social and family implications of tertiary studies on mature aged students.

Body – approximately 80% of word length

Organise your body paragraphs to include a main idea which is then proven, developed or illustrated by support evidence.

Main idea 1 The impact of changed financial circumstances

Supporting information — *childcare costs*
 home budget constraints
 HECS
 Austudy

Main idea 2 Social implications

Supporting information — *loss of former peer group*
 fewer social opportunities outside university
 social events within the university

Main idea 3 Change in family circumstances

Supporting information — *fewer opportunities for family time*
 change in household duties
 more rigid family routine

Conclusion – approximately 10% of word length

- a re-statement of your conclusion about the type and size of the impact of tertiary studies on mature aged students
- a comment on consequences and implications for life after university.

Once this provisional plan is developed research can be done in a more targeted way, gaps in research can be identified and notes used efficiently. Using the provisional plan we can think about the order, expand on the original ideas and add quotes and paraphrased text to develop full paragraphs or a more elaborated plan.

More Info

Wikibooks have produced 'Writing better university essays: a guide to better essay writing'. The section "What goes in —What stays out?" covers planning
http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Writing_Better_University_Essays