



Writing skills

Introduction

This guide covers the following areas:

- How does writing help my learning?
- What are the features of academic writing?
- Writing as a process.
- What is the style of academic writing?

How does writing help my learning?

Producing a written assignment (essay, report, research proposal, or dissertation) provides evidence of a variety of abilities:

- Research skills
- Weighing arguments
- Organising your thoughts in a logical manner
- Critical thinking
- Ability to be selective

Writing challenges you to synthesise a variety of ideas in a clear way. The process makes you check your understanding so that you convey your argument to your reader in a clear way. These are skills which you will find useful in other contexts throughout your life – be it writing reports at work, putting together research proposals or applying for funding grants for a charity you volunteer for.

What are the features of academic writing? (Newcastle University, 2015)

- Clearly structured according to the type of assignment you need to submit.
- Presents an argument which shows a logical line of reasoning so that your readers can understand your conclusions.
- Uses source materials as evidence, together with examples and case studies to develop your arguments and justify opinions.
- Critically analyses these source materials by comparing, contrasting and evaluating them.
- Is explicit so that the purpose, meaning and evidence is clear.

The writing process (adapted from Plymouth University, 2011)

Producing an effective piece of academic writing usual takes a number of steps.

1. Start by making sure you **understand what you need to do**.

Analyse the task you have been set – one method is the **TAP model** (Fig. 1).

- First, identify the **Topic** – what the main theme is;
- Second, the **Action(s)** – what you have to do;
- Finally, the **Parameters** – the scope or confines of the task

If you are still not clear, contact your tutor before you start work on your assignment.

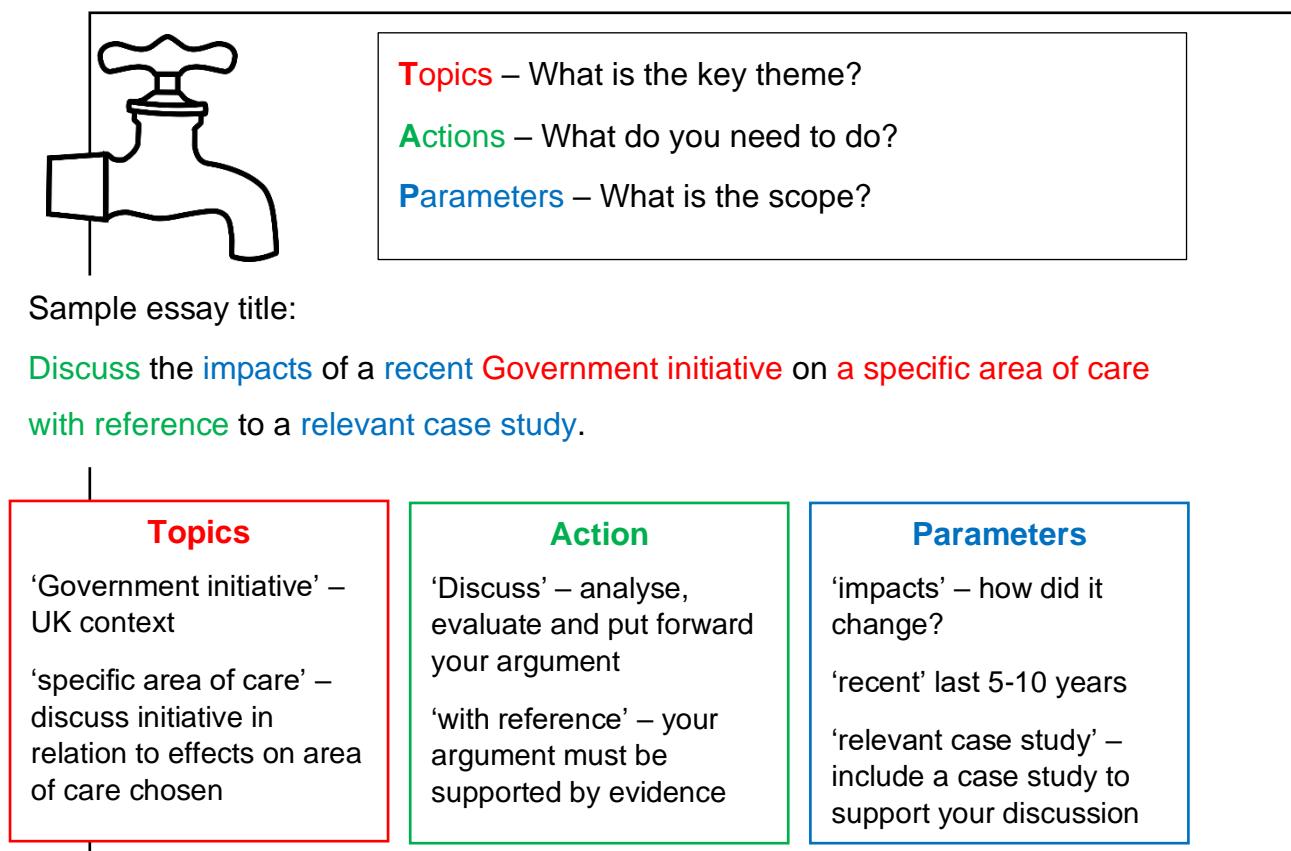


Figure 1: The TAP model (Adapted from - Plymouth University, 2011).

2. **Make an outline plan** to help you keep focused and organised.

- First, brainstorm your ideas for the assignment. You could use a mind map to help note down your thoughts.

- Second, plan your schedule. Note when the assignment is due and work backwards planning your time allowing for research, drafting, editing and proofreading.

3. **Do your research.** Make notes from the resources you need. Keep a careful track of the sources that you use so that your citations and references are accurate.

4. **Write your first draft.** At this stage of writing you are just trying to get your ideas and arguments clear to yourself.

To help structure your argument, you can use a framework for each paragraph such as '**Claim > Justify > Support > Implications**', (Mitchell and Riddle, 2000, cited in Plymouth University, 2011; see Figure 2).

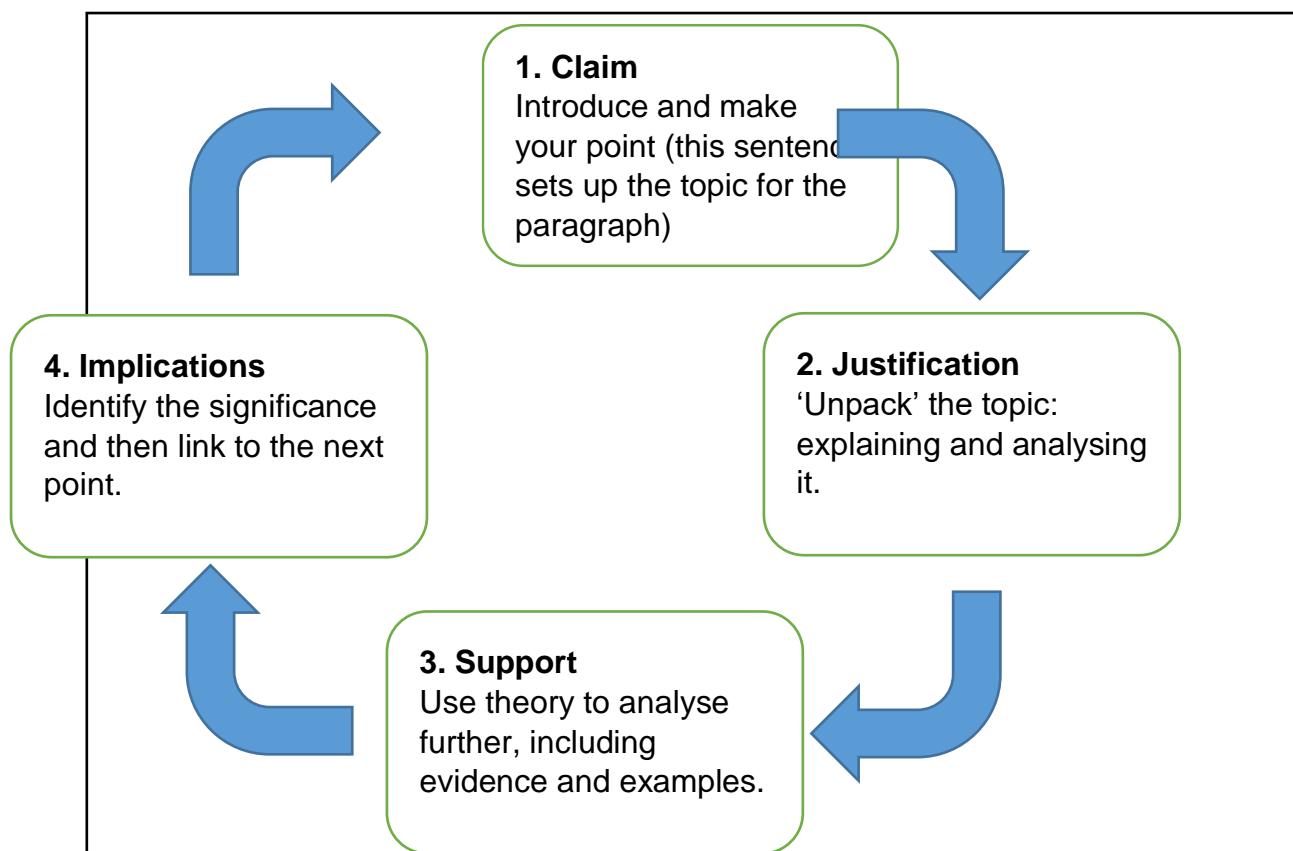


Figure 2: Framework for structuring paragraphs (Adapted from Plymouth University, 2011)

5. **Re work your draft.** Now you need to think about your reader so that your argument will be clear to another person.

6. **Edit and proofread** your final draft. Finish the assignment.

What is Academic Writing Style? (Adapted from Cottrell, 2008)

- **Use formal English**

Avoid slang and colloquialisms. Do not use contractions e.g. don't, can't.

- **Aim for clarity**

Check that your sentences are not too long and complicated that they are hard to follow.

Also, do not use long words for the sake of it.

- **Be impersonal**

Avoid using personal pronouns (I, we, you).

- **Be objective**

Avoid using subjective words such as – nice, wonderful, usual or natural. Your reader may have a different understanding of them.

- **Be cautious**

Academic writing tends to use a cautious tone, this shows an awareness that nothing is completely certain.

- **Be concise**

When proofreading, edit out unnecessary words

- **Be precise**

Avoid being vague.

More advice from the Academic Skills Team

For further study skills advice, please enrol on our Moodle page:

<https://moodle.city.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=38922>

To make an appointment for one-to-one study skills support, please complete this form:

<https://city.tfaforms.net/4723090> or email skills@city.ac.uk

References

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