

# ESSAY CHECKLIST

You can use this essay checklist to help you ensure that you have covered all the fundamental elements required for writing a discursive essay at university.

## Introduction

Does your introduction...

- Have a clear introduction that references the original assignment brief/essay question?
- Explain to your reader what the topic of the assignment is and *why* this topic matters? It is important that you 'set up the stakes' in your introduction. This will help entice your reader and give you a position from which to build your arguments. For example, if you are writing about the importance of care planning in nurses, you may wish to including in your introduction a brief explanation regarding why care planning exists and what could go wrong if a care plan is inaccurate.
- Explain to your reader *how* your essay will tackle its topic? Are you 'analysing'? Reflecting? 'Arguing'?

- Have a thesis statement? A thesis statement is usually one or two sentences that explain the overall goal of the assignment. For example, 'The essay will discuss the various key stages of early childhood development, making specific reference to both Vygotsky and Piaget. It will then apply these theories to a group of early years learners in order to evaluate their effectiveness in measuring development.' This thesis statement not only tells the reader what to expect from the assignment but also gives you, the writer, a loose structure to follow.

Remember, your introduction should be a brief summary of the main points and arguments in your assignment. Academic writing does not like surprises; an introduction should serve as a promise to the reader: this is what this essay will cover, why it is important, and how it will be organised.



## Main body

Does your main body...

- Follow a logical structure? Different assignment questions will lend themselves to different structures, but it is generally safe to assume that a discursive essay (a 'standard' academic essay) will work best with a General-to-Specific structure. This means that the assignment should begin with the information that is easiest to understand (usually the background) before going onto more more complex arguments.

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- Flow logically? In order to make an assignment 'flow', it is best to think about grouping information thematically. For example, if you are writing about the history of 'kitchen-sink' drama, you might want to begin by looking at what came before. This would be your background. Then, the next theme could relate to how this new type of drama arose from the culture of the time/what it sought to achieve. You might then look at the successes and failures of the genre -perhaps this theme might need breaking down into smaller, more specific sub-themes? Following a General-to-Specific pattern, you should be able to summarise each paragraph as a basic theme, and these themes should build logically towards your conclusion. Can you do that with your essay, or do you have gaps in logic (gaps in theme)? If so, you need to redraft!
- Make good use of linking words and phrases? Using linkers is one of the best ways to increase the flow and readability of your work. Linkers can range from the very simple, such as *however, nevertheless, therefore, additionally...* to more complex sentence structures, such as *not only... but also..., However, despite x, y is..., One of the core issues regarding..., While X states that... it is also true that... There are a number of linking words and phrases that can be used in academic writing.*

*Manchester Phrasebank, created by the University of Manchester, is an excellent recourse of good quality academic linkers. You can check out Manchester Phrasebank by visiting this URL:*

*<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>*

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## Conclusions

Does your conclusion...

- Recap the main arguments given in your essay? There should be no new information or arguments in your conclusion. The purpose of the conclusion is to summarise the main ideas and arguments you have already given in the main body of your assignment.
- Relate logically to the points you have raised? For example, if you have included multiple arguments explaining that a certain position is flawed, it would not make sense if your essay then concludes by stating that the position has merit or validity.
- Give recommendations? Not all conclusions need to do, but in some cases it may be appropriate. This is especially true if your assignment brief was to explore or discuss the effectiveness of a certain approach, theory, or methodology.
- Get to the point? Conclusions shouldn't need to be overly long - after all, you will have made all your arguments in the main body of your assignment. A conclusion is designed to pull those arguments together and reiterate your final position. In this sense, conclusions should be (to some extent) obvious to the reader. A well-argued essay will naturally lead the reader to predict the conclusion as the writer will have written persuasively throughout. If the conclusion comes as a surprise, this may indicate that you haven't made your arguments clear enough in the main body.

