

## LESSON TWO: Outlining/Drafting an Essay

An academic essay aims to persuade readers of an idea based on evidence. It should answer a question or a task

### Basic steps in writing an essay

#### 1. Starting the essay

Although there are some basic steps to writing an assignment, essay writing is not a linear process. You might work through the different stages a number of times in the course of writing an essay.

- **Start work early**

You can't write a successful essay unless you give yourself enough time to read, research, think, and write. Don't procrastinate or leave it until the last minute; start as early as possible.

- **Define the question and analyze the task**

Writing down everything you know about a topic is not enough to make a good academic essay. Analysing, then answering the essay's question or task is central.

- Be sure that you understand exactly what the question requires you to do.
- Identify the key words (like *discuss* or *analyze*) and clarify the approach you are required to take.

#### 2. Brainstorming:

Brainstorming is the first step to any writing assignment or activity you do. It is when you begin generating ideas, exploring those ideas, and developing what will become your topic, thesis, and, ultimately, your essay.

##### **Important Tips to Remember before you Begin:**

- First and foremost, don't panic! Brainstorming, like all aspects of writing, is a process. Allow yourself some time to sit and think about what you would like to see in your assignment.
- Write everything down. Even if it doesn't seem like it is important, it might lead you to a great idea later. Trust yourself and put it on paper.
- Remove distractions from your work area (cell phones, computers, mp3 players, etc.). This will help you focus on the task at hand.

### Brainstorming Strategies:

#### 1. Brain Dump

A "Brain Dump" is exactly what it sounds like. After reading your assignment, give yourself a few minutes to absorb it. Then, set a timer for five minutes and grab a pencil and paper. Start your timer, and don't stop writing until it goes off. Even if things that are unrelated to your paper cross your mind, write them down. The **purpose** of this exercise is to prevent you from over thinking. After your timer goes

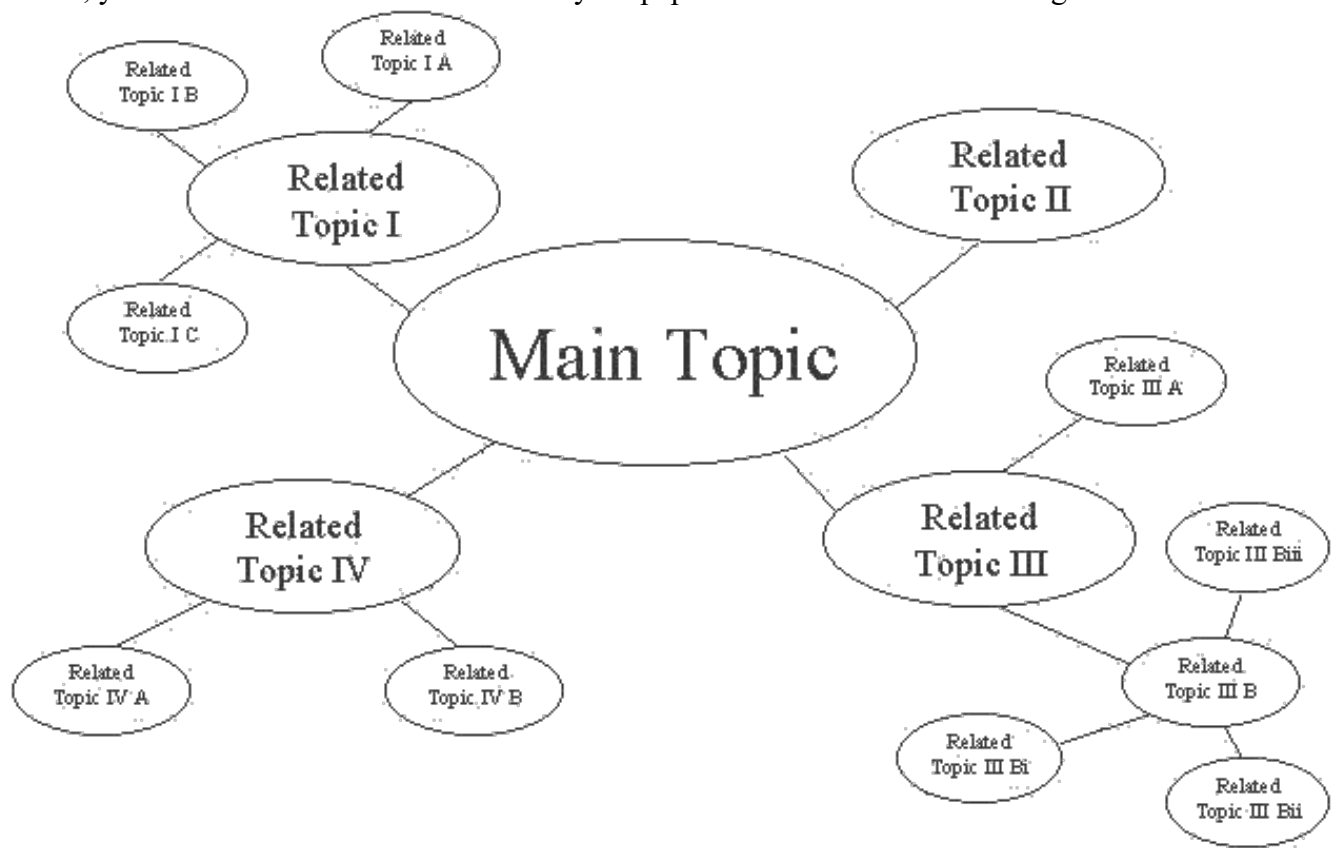
off, reflect on what you have. *Go through what's written and cross out anything that isn't relevant to your topic, then look at what is left.* Do you have some possible body paragraph topics? What about the start of a topic sentence or thesis? You can repeat this process numerous times and then, when you feel like you have enough information, you can consider starting to develop and outline.

## 2. Outline

You have probably seen an outline before,, but no matter what those outlines looked like, remember every outline is different and there is no right or wrong way to do one. However, if your professor has asked for a specific set-up to your outline, try to make sure you complete the outline following their guidelines.

## 3. Word Web

This strategy is a great resource if you find that you relate to things better by seeing the connections between them. Start with a word that either is your topic or relates to it, and write it in the inner circle. From that point, try to think of things (words, images, current events, ect.) that would relate to what you want to focus on. If one of your related points makes you think of additional ideas, you can add new bubbles and continue to explore the idea further. After you feel that you have exhausted your topic, look for similarities or differences in the ideas that you wrote down, interesting connections that you made, or unexpected ideas that you thought of that you could discuss in your paper. As you narrow down your thesis, you can use this exercise to examine your paper's sub-claims or counter-arguments as well.



### 3. Researching your essay:

Researching is the foundation of any essay. It is an important study skill in order to familiarize yourself with the subject matter so that your writing is well informed.

A feature of most academic writing is that it draws on the work of other writers and researchers. Therefore, reading and researching are vital to essay writing. Researching provides the knowledge and evidence that allows you to develop a thesis and argument to answer the essay question.

When investigating your topic, it is essential to bear in mind that you are not expected to know (and cannot know) all there is about the subject, nor should you try to cover everything in your essay. Target your research to what is relevant from the outset and always try to keep focused on the essay question and what it is asking you to do.

#### 3.1. Reading skills

Most of us spend hours reading texts that we need not have read. To avoid this you must read purposefully: you need to be clear why you're reading a particular text, what questions you need to answer, and what reading strategy is the most relevant for this purpose.

#### 3.2. Making notes

The key to good note-taking is to make the structure clear. The mind remembers structures, not lists nor paragraphs of continuous prose. So, keep it free and uncluttered. Don't convince yourself that unless you include this one fact you'll never remember it. You will. The structure will act as a net bringing to the surface of your mind more than you ever thought you could remember. But it has to be a good net - well constructed, with clear logical connections and free of all unnecessary material.

**Don't take notes during your first reading.** If you are reading photocopies, underline or highlight relevant information. You can return to it when you re-read and take notes.

**Always make notes with the question clearly in mind.** You must use evidence to support your argument, so look carefully for relevant information. This can include summaries or direct quotes from texts, useful examples, case studies or statistics.

**Make a note of any sources of information.** Copy down the bibliographic details of everything you read. Include author, date, title, publisher and place of publication. For journal articles, include volume and issue numbers. This will help with referencing.

### 4. Outlining the Essay

*An outline is a direct and clear map of your essay.* It shows what each paragraph will contain, in what order paragraphs will appear, and how all the points fit together as a whole. Most outlines use bullet points or numbers to arrange information and convey points. Outlining is a vital part of the essay planning process. It allows the writer to understand how he or she will connect all the information to support the thesis statement and the claims of the paper. It also provides the writer with a space to manipulate ideas easily without needing to write complete paragraphs.

Your outline can be done whenever you feel prepared to write your essay. For instance, you might feel confident with just several words in your outline. However, some people might need significantly more detailed outlines before feeling confident. Remember that the outline is used to develop your paper and help you understand how your thoughts and ideas relate before you write.

1. The first step to develop an outline is **establishing a working thesis statement**. After completing this step, you will have basic ideas for your body paragraphs. In addition, you should have already gathered the evidence you need to develop and support the claims in your paper.
2. Next, you have to define the topic sentences or main ideas you need to develop in each paragraph. Each idea should be expressed as a topic sentence.
3. Last, write a concluding sentence to sum up your main points or reiterate the thesis statement. Remember that your conclusion may change as you write your paper and process the specific information you have gathered into paragraphs. As this revision happens, you should change the conclusion section in your outline.

### **Basic five-paragraph outline frame ( Blank sample)**

**I. Introduction** (write the thesis statement).....  
.....

**II. Main idea** (write a topic sentence (Nr.one) supporting the thesis statement).....  
.....

A. Supporting detail / Example.....  
B. Supporting detail / Example .....  
C. Supporting detail/ Example .....

**III. Main idea** (write a topic sentence (Nr.two) supporting the thesis statement) .....  
A. Supporting detail / Example .....  
B. Supporting detail/ Example .....  
C. Supporting detail / Example .....

**IV. Main idea** (write a topic sentence (Nr.three) supporting the thesis statement)  
.....  
A. Supporting detail / Example .....  
B. Supporting detail / Example .....  
C. Supporting detail / Example .....

**V. Conclusion** (write a topic sentence based on the purpose of the paper or speech: summarize main points, reiterate thesis statement, offer a solution to a problem, or pose a question).....  
.....

## Sample Essay Outline

### • Introduction

- Hook
- Working thesis statement:  
“The thrill of pursuing happiness, the experiences along the way, and the knowledge that comes from trial and error provide people with more pleasure and satisfaction than the mere attainment of desires, despite the common perception that attainment is the final goal.”

### • Body paragraph one: The thrill of pursuing happiness

- **Topic sentence:** The thrill of pursuing happiness provides people with more pleasure and satisfaction than merely attaining desires.
  - **Supporting information:**
    - ♣ Small gains along the way
    - ♣ Setting and reaching minor goals
    - ♣ Many less important desires attained along the way
  - **Transition sentence:** In addition to the thrill of the chase, people enjoy the experiences that occur along the way.
- **Concluding sentence:** Yet, the thrill of pursuing happiness is not the only element to provide people with pleasure.

### • Body paragraph two: Experiences while pursuing happiness

- **Topic sentence:** The experiences gained from pursuing happiness provide people with more pleasure and satisfaction than merely attaining desires.

### • Body paragraph three: The knowledge that comes from trial and error

- **Topic sentence:** The knowledge that comes from trial and error provides people with more pleasure and satisfaction than merely attaining desires.

### • Conclusion

- **Synthesized point:** Because of the thrill of pursuing happiness, the experiences along the way, and the knowledge gained from trial and error, the attainment of goals is less satisfying than many believe.

**Prompts:** develop a thesis statement and an outline for one of the following prompts

- Challenges and failures are fundamental to achieving success.
- Describe a problem you’ve solved or a problem you’d like to solve.
- Learning More languages is beneficial on many levels.

## 5. Drafting an Essay:

Once you have collected your ideas and thought about how to organize them, you are ready to write a first draft. **A draft is a preliminary or tentative version of your essay.** Drafting is a process of putting your ideas into sentence and paragraph form. It provides an opportunity to try out your ideas and

see if and how they work together. Expect to write several drafts before you end up with one you are satisfied with.

When drafting your essay, you need to decide which method of organization you are going to use. Your argument and ideas can be organized following a **Least-to-most/ most-to-least method** where you start either with the least important idea and end up with the most important, or you could do the opposite. Your paragraphs could also follow a **chronological, spatial, or logical order**. In all cases, your essay should be organized in a certain order to maintain unity, clarity, and coherence.

**N.B.** While you write an essay, you don't have to start with the title and introduction and write straight through to the end. Some students prefer to write the body of the essay first and then the introduction and the conclusion. Others prefer to write an introduction as a way of getting started. Some students think of a title before they start writing; others find it easier to write the title when the essay is finished. Regardless of when you write them, the introduction, conclusion, and title are important components of a well-written essay.

## 6. Editing and Proofreading Your Essay:

Now that you have a first draft of your essay it is necessary to revise any possible mistakes or language and grammar issues. It is necessary to fix and proofread fragments, run-on sentences, dangling and misplaced modifiers, punctuation, and tense consistency.

- Check the overall structure of your essay; does it have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion?
- Make sure that each paragraph has a clear main point that relates to the argument. Make sure that the paragraphs are arranged in logical sequence.
- Revise sentences. Make sure the words you use mean what you think they mean. Check punctuation and spelling. A good dictionary is a useful tool.
- Check transition signals. Be sure that a reader can follow the sequence of ideas from sentence to sentence, and from paragraph to paragraph.

### - Revising Redundancy:

Redundancy occurs when you repeat information in your writing. Effective writing and concise writing are one in the same, so repeating yourself is both distracting and inefficient.

#### **Example:**

The job market is limited for uneducated candidates (*sentence one*). Individuals who have never attended school have fewer skills to offer to potential employers and, therefore, are granted fewer opportunities for employment (*sentence two*).

**The above excerpt contains two examples of redundancy.**

*The job market is limited (in sentence one) = fewer opportunities for employment (in sentence two)*  
*Uneducated candidates (in sentence one) = individuals who have never attended school (in sentence two)*

## How to Eliminate Redundancy?

As you can see below, deleting the second sentence eliminates the redundancy from the passage.

*The job market is limited for uneducated candidates. ~~Individuals who have never attended school have fewer skills to offer to potential employers and, therefore, are granted fewer opportunities for employment.~~*

Removing the entire sentence solves the redundancy problem. However, upon a closer look, *deleting the entire sentence creates a new problem*. We have completely lost the information about how having fewer skills to offer employers leads to fewer opportunities for work.

### **How do we eliminate the redundant phrases without losing important information?**

*The answer is to strain out the redundancy and keep the information you need. Then Rewrite the sentence preserving only the important information.*

When we put our passage through the strainer, we are able to preserve the important pieces of information and send the redundant portions down the drain. After we take the remaining words out of the strainer and dry them off, we are left with a concise and complete version of our passage:

*The job market is limited for uneducated candidates who have fewer skills to offer to potential employers.*

### **- Revising for clarity/Coherence:**

A complete sentence may not necessarily be a clear sentence. To achieve clarity, writers must consider the characters and their actions. Characters are people or concrete elements that initiate actions or trigger events, but they may also be abstract (e.g., happiness, freedom). Actions describe what characters do or what events they trigger.

#### **Compare the following sentences:**

- A) There is fear among students that there will be fewer class sections offered by the university.
- B) Students fear that the university will offer fewer class sections.

While sentence A is a complete sentence, it is not as clear and direct as sentence B. In sentence B, the characters (e.g., students and university) are the subjects of their clauses; their actions (e.g., fear and will offer) are the verbs.

*The cause of some businesses' bankruptcy is not knowing how to adapt well to this recession.*

**Revision:** *Some businesses are going bankrupt because they do not know how to adapt well to this recession.*