***University of* *M'sila Department of English***

***Second Year LMD Students Written* *Expression Courses.Teacher: Berkani***

**UNIT TWO .LESSON TWO: ESSAY WRITING ( THE BASICS)**

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.

* **Construct an initial plan**

Your starting point for an essay is your initial response to the topic or question. This response is based on what you already know. However, this is only the starting point. You then need to research, question your response and find some answers.

***Draw up an initial essay plan:***

• Work out your initial thoughts and ideas about the topic and write a preliminary essay plan to help guide your research.

• An essay plan can help you work out how you will answer the question and which information you will use. Essay plans also help with structuring an essay. As you begin to write and research your plan will probably change.

**2. Researching the topic**

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.

* **Reading for the essay**

Start reading early so you have plenty of time to familiarise yourself with the topic and develop your ideas. When you look at your readings more closely, remember to read with a purpose. Ask yourself:

• *What do I already know about the topic?* Start with what you know. If a topic is unfamiliar, do some introductory reading. See your lecture notes and course readings for help.

• *What do I need to read to be able to answer the essay question?*

• *Is this material useful to my topic/argument?*

• *Can I use this material to support my answer?*

* **Make notes from the readings**

It’s important to take/ make notes from what you read. Your notes will be the basis of your essay.

*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.

**3.** **Organising your ideas**

Begin organising your research and ideas into an answer

* **Essay plans**

After you’ve researched and your ideas are more developed, write a second essay plan. It will help you work out how to answer the question and how the essay will be structured. After you do some research and note-making, draw up a second plan:

• Decide on a possible answer to the question (in terms of the research you have done)

• Decide on the information you will use to answer the question.

• Look through your notes and choose examples to provide evidence to support your answer

• Decide which points you will discuss, and in which order

• Write all this down in point form and this will be your essay plan

**4. Writing the essay**

* **Drafting**

Write a first draft to try out the structure and framework of your essay. A draft essay will help you work out **how** you will answer the question and **which** evidence and examples you will use, and **how** your argument will be structured. Once you have a draft, you can work on writing well. Your first draft will not be your final essay; think of it as raw material you will refine through editing and redrafting.

* **Structure**

Structure your essay to communicate your ideas and answer the question. All essays should include the following structure:

**1. Introduction**

The introduction moves from *general to specific*. This is where you:

• open with a short orientation (introduce the topic area(s) with a general, broad opening sentence (s)

• answer the question with a thesis statement

• provide a summary or ‘road map’ of your essay (keep it brief, but mention all the main ideas).

**2. Body**

The body of your essay consists of paragraphs. Each is a building block in the construction of your argument. The body is where you:

• answer the question by developing a discussion.

• show your knowledge and grasp of material you have read.

• offer exposition and evidence to develop your argument.

• use relevant examples and authoritative quotes.

If your question has more than one part, structure the body into sections that deal with each part of the question.

**3. Conclusion**

The conclusion moves from *specific to general*. It should:

• restate your answer to the question

• re-summarise the main points and

• include a final, broad statement (about possible implications, future directions for research, to qualify the conclusion etc). However, *never* introduce new information or ideas in the conclusion. Its purpose is to round off your essay by summing up.

**5. Referencing the essay**

All academic essays *must contain references*. Referencing guards against plagiarism,a serious academic offence.Make sure you are familiar with the referencing style your Faculty or School requires; many will have guides specifying thesystem they prefer. Often Schools/Faculties don’t mind which system you use as long as it is consistent. If this is the case, use the system you are most comfortable with.

**6. Editing the essay**

Most essays are dramatically improved by careful editing. If possible, put your essay aside for a few days before you begin to edit. This gives you time to think further about your answer and arguments and return to your work with a fresh perspective*.* Don’t panic if/ when you find faults in your essay, this is part of theprocess. If you find that you need more information, or your argumenthas holes in it, keep calm and concentrate on fixing the problem.Once you have a well-organised and fairly complete draft:

• 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.

**7.Questions to ask yourself**

* Have I answered the question as directly and comprehensively as possible?
* Does the argument make sense? Is it balanced and well researched?
* Is the evidence relevant to and supportive of my argument?
* Have I used a consistent citation style? Have I referenced all my quotes and paraphrases?
* If there were any special instructions or guidelines for this assignment, have I followed them?
* Have I remained within the set word limit?

Prepared by The Learning Centre, The University of New South Wales © 2012.