

# SECRET TIPS TO ESSAY WRITING

BY LIBRARY STUDENT PARTNER, ANGEL SUN



WARWICK  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK



*The main idea, elaboration, supporting examples...we all know the basic essay structure, but sometimes we struggle to execute these essay-writing theories and write a good one. **In her final year, Library Student Partner Angel shares some of her personal essay-writing tips and experiences.***

## Before writing

You may choose a topic that you are the most familiar with, but don't write the essay solely based on your prior knowledge and just find evidence to support your presumed argument. Never start writing before you have read wide-ranging existing academic articles and found sufficient evidence. It is because as university students, our knowledge on all topics is much more limited than we expect. You may need to change your arguments and essay structures after primary research. If you struggle to find enough supporting evidence, you may need to change either your argument or research method. For example, you can find more relevant sources and gradually expand your bibliography from the footnotes of one academic article.

Also, it is vital to show your engagement with existing scholarship in your essays. You need to critically analyse the strengths and limitations of the current

scholarship, and assess how your essays contribute to it. For example, your essays may provide more evidence and enrich any existing argument in that field of research, or challenge and overturn an argument that many scholars hold. It not only demonstrates your awareness of the existing scholarship, but also serves as your essay's foundation.

Next, you need to plan your essay. Most departments prohibit students from letting professors who mark their essays read their drafts, but you can submit your essay plan to them or explain it verbally. Ask your tutors to check if you are on the right track. It is a pivotal step to prevent any fatal structural mistakes.

## Editing your essays

After spending hours or days writing your essay, you may be so familiar with it that you cannot spot any errors. Instead, you will want to visually deceive your brain. You can try to change the font style, font

size, and layout of your writing. You will feel like you are reading a whole new essay, and you are more likely to catch any mistakes. Another idea is to print out your essay, changing the format completely can really help.

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While you cannot let the professors marking your essay read your draft, you can ask your personal tutors to do so. Kindly ask your personal tutors if they are available to skim through your writing and give you feedback. Although different professors have different expectations and marking schemes, personal tutors' scholarly and professional opinions are undoubtedly useful.

Another idea is to swap essays with friends on your course. Together you can

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pick up any grammatical errors each of you have made and help give advice on really strengthening your arguments in your work.

## **After getting your grades**

No matter how good or bad your grades are, it is paramount to know why you get such grades and how to improve. I have heard many people complaining about how vague and blank their assignment feedback on Tabula is. The feedback on Tabula does not reflect all the thoughts of your tutors. They can only highlight the key on the Tabula system because of limited space. Therefore, don't forget to schedule an in-person meeting with them.

Why do you need an in-person meeting? Firstly, communication is always more efficient and effective face-to-face. Secondly, in-person interaction surprisingly gives you a more profound insight into your essays' shortcomings. In my first year, one of my seminar tutors said the logical flow and some expressions in my essay were "strange". I was so perplexed; I had a meeting with him. During the meeting, he opened the Word document of my

essay and highlighted the inaccurate expressions one by one. He also directly underlined some transitional phrases between different paragraphs, explaining how the logical flow wasn't smooth enough. At last, he sent me that document with annotations. I compiled all the "strange" phrases in a single document to remind myself not to use them again. I would have never known exactly which phrases he was referring to if I had just relied on Tabula. Therefore, meet your tutors in person, and ask them as many questions as you need until you understand everything.

You can read your friends' essays and ask for advice in the 'essay clinic' session in your course's society as well if you struggle to write a quality essay.

And don't forget that the Library also has a range of online courses to help with essays, including "Introduction to Academic Writing" and "Finding Information: Researching for Assignments"!

*I hope that the tips above can help you score a better grade next time!*

## **Quick Tips**

### **Choose your topics: read and read**

Don't write the essay solely based on your prior knowledge and presumed argument. Try to read different existing academic articles, find out their common arguments, and analyse their strengths and limitations. It is important to respond to the existing scholarship in your arguments and research methods.

### **Plan your essay: look for help**

You can submit your essay plan to your seminar tutors or personal tutors before writing. Their feedback can help you prevent any fatal structural mistakes.

### **Edit your essay: change something**

If you find it difficult to spot any errors in your essay, try to change the font, style, and layout of your writing. You will feel like you are reading a new essay and can catch any mistakes more easily.

### **Improve your writing: meet your tutor**

The feedback on Tabula is usually vague because of limited space. Directly schedule a personal meeting with your tutors after receiving your feedback. You can then ask them as many questions as you need until you understand everything.

### **Further support**

Reading your friends' essays and joining the 'essay clinic' session of your course's society are helpful too. The library also offers you support through your studies with online courses on wellbeing and academic support.