

Seven ways to make your essay Better.

1. Motivate your essay. From *The Craft of Research*: “

Once you have a question that holds your interest, you must pose a tougher one about it: So what? Beyond your own interest in its answer, why would others think it a question worth asking? You might not be able to answer that So what? question early on, but it’s one you have to start thinking about, because it forces you to look beyond your own interests to consider how your work might strike others.

Unlike what you may have been previously told, it is fine to use “I” in the essay.

2. Don’t have redundant discussions. If you are handling (or more) texts, then explain why it is helpful or useful to discuss the second one. There is nothing to be gained by saying that one text has a theme and another also shares that theme. Instead, use the second text to show how another text can cast a different (or better) perspective on the question at hand.

3. Consider how your essay’s last paragraph might actually be a better first paragraph. Sometimes authors feel that it helps to have a dramatic finish by a last minute revelation. Usually this doesn’t work effectively, and it would be better to tell the reader as soon as possible what it is that you’ll be deciding.

4. Avoid the “5 paragraph essay. A common pre-university essay structure is to make a claim provide 3 illustrations of this and then repeat the initial claim. Now this structure prevents you from using the essay as a persuasive development of your ideas. The 5-paragraph structure (which may involve more than five paragraphs, of course) has nowhere to go once it has begun, and will always have difficulty in reaching the first-class degree level.

5. If including a block (long) quotation, then analyse the passage. Otherwise, paraphrase.

Few readers actually read block quotations. They have a purpose if the author is spending time making several interpretive claims about the passage. But if its purpose is simply to back up a claim, it’s better simply to trust the reader trusts you and paraphrase it, in order to be more concise.

6. Use secondary elaborations to build up longer essays. If you can “answer” your initial question, then put that answer back with a question mark. Use your arguments recursively to string together multiple sections.

Additionally – it is often helpful to have subsections with their own headings!

7. Look at the last line of each paragraph and the first line of the next to see if the transitions are present and make sense.