



## **A Guide to Writing an Academic Essay**

During your time at Bury College there may be a chance that you are asked to write an essay, particularly if you are studying English, a Social Science or Humanities.

An academic essay is usually a continuous piece of writing focusing on a particular issue, and usually aims to answer a question or title that has been posed.

### **What reasons are there for writing essays?**

Understanding the value of essay writing will help you to be more confident and positive about tackling it. Below are a few examples of why you may be asked to write an essay during your time at Bury College:

- To help you consolidate your understanding of the topic
- To encourage you to think and read widely and deeply
- To allow you to develop and organize your own ideas through writing
- To illustrate that you are able to express your thoughts clearly and logically
- To provide an opportunity for you to get feedback from a tutor.
- To help develop those skills that you will be required to use if going to study at university

The rest of this page shares some ways of maximising your chances of writing a good essay.

#### **1) Answer the Question**

This is the key. It sounds simple, but it is important to know what the question is actually asking. Once you have established what you are being asked, you should be able to pull out some key points, while rejecting others that are less relevant. These points will form the basis of your essay.

#### **2) Gathering information**

When you have identified the key elements of your argument, you need to locate information to support each aspect of your argument. Consider what you already know, what you need to know, and how you can find this information quickly and efficiently. Based on this you may need to undertake some independent research (you could always use one of the two libraries situated on campus! See our Be Here page for more information on our state-of-the-art facilities)

#### **3) Structuring and organising the content of your essay**

Having collected the information, you now need to write your essay but it is important to ensure your essay is structured in a clear and coherent way. It is a good idea to draw up outline plan of your essay noting the main ideas you want to develop. Your essay can then be structured as follows:

## **The Introduction**

This is the opening paragraph of an essay that serves to engage the reader's interest, provide a context for your argument and give an indication of how you intend to answer the question. An introduction the first thing to be read, but it is often helpful to write this last when you know the direction your answer has taken.

## **The Main body of the Essay**

When writing the main body of your essay, it may be helpful to bear these points in mind:

- Write a paragraph for each main point.
- Use the first sentence of the paragraph to state the main point or pose a question.
  - Support your ideas with examples and references from your wider reading. (Quotations from secondary literature may support your case, or contrast with it, enabling you to argue with or against the quoted idea or opinion)
- Develop arguments coherently and logically - your line of argument should be developed through several clear ideas.
- Relate one idea to another – don't simply produce a string of unconnected points.
  - Make sure your essay is balanced – don't spend too long on one idea or too little on another.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion of an essay should aim to summarise the main points in your essay in order to make some overall statement in response to the question. It is often helpful to indicate the development that has taken place throughout your essay. A simple way to find what you need to say in your conclusion is to ask yourself, 'What have I learned in writing this essay?'. Sometimes in academic writing it may be useful to identify lines of further investigation.

## **Revising and Redrafting**

We advise to not just write your essay and submit, but to make sure you read through it a number of times and take the time to check your spelling and grammar.

Also ask yourself the question of whether you have achieved what you set out to do – in other words, have you actually answered the question that was set?

If possible, try to leave your essay for a day or two once you have completed the first draft. This will make reviewing your written work easier as you will have had time to distance yourself from your first effort.