

Step 2: Planning and Scaffolding an Essay

Once you are confident you fully understand your essay question, it is important to plan your essay. Your plan should clearly outline what you want to say in each paragraph of your essay. This will help you stay on track!

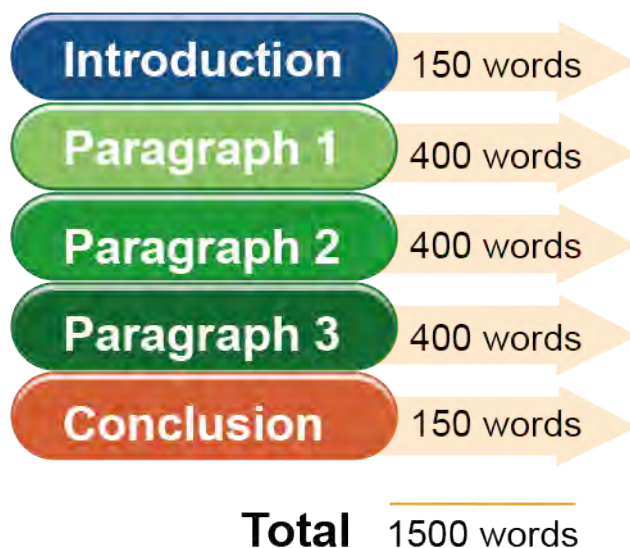
Before You Start:

- Consider the “direction word” in the question, and what it is asking you to do
- Consider the “scope” of the question, and how it will guide your research and response
- Highlight the “content” words of the question, so your plan doesn’t go off topic
- Rewrite the question in your own words to help you understand what it is asking you to do
- List all the aspects of the topic that the question is asking you to cover (e.g. ‘In this essay, I have to include...’)

Planning Strategies

- Read through all relevant course notes to give yourself a good overview of the essay topic
- Highlight the key points in your readings that are important for your essay
- Write out the key points on a blank page (or on the table provided) and comment on their relevance to your essay topic
- Create a mind map of interesting or relevant ideas that you come across in relation to the essay topic
- Think about the central aim of your essay, and how the evidence you have collected could be used to support and develop your discussion

The Basic Essay Structure



The 10% rule:

When planning your essay, don’t forget to think about your word limit, as this will give you an idea about how much you should write about each topic.

As a general rule, the introduction and conclusion of an essay should each take up 10% of the word limit.

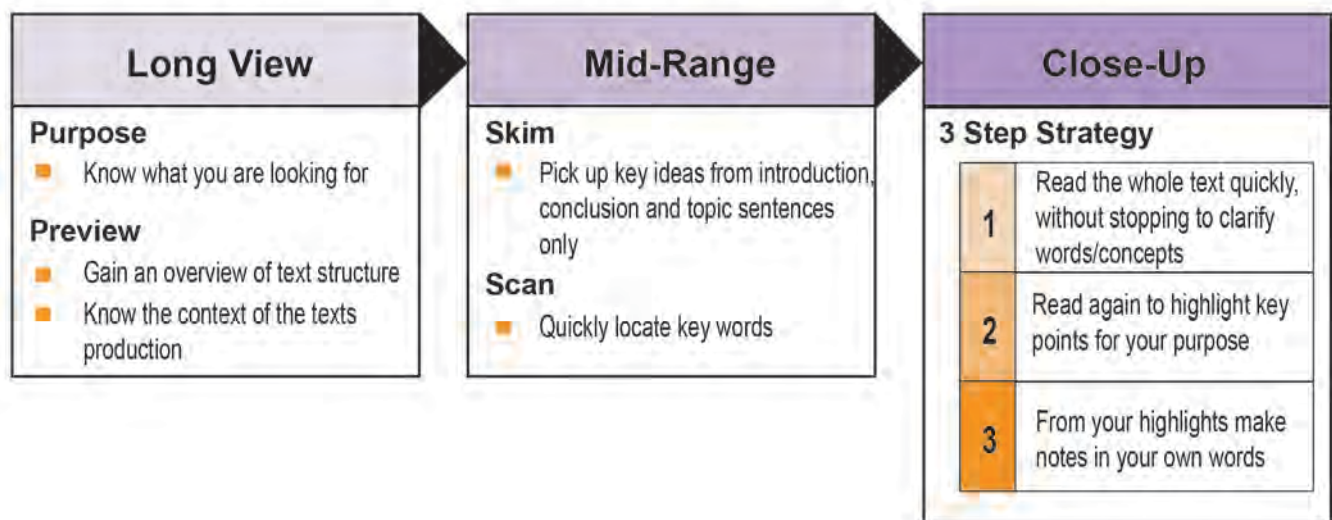
This means: A 1500 word essay allows you to write approximately three 400 word paragraphs, or four 300 word paragraphs – each of which should deal with a separate (but relatable) issue.

Effective Reading

Reading academic materials can be frustrating, because the content and language is often quite complex. For this reason, it's difficult to make sense of this material by attempting to read it once through from beginning to end.

Effective, critical reading involves many steps – but carrying out these steps will ensure you a) don't waste time reading vast amount of material that won't be useful b) have a thorough understanding of the material you **do** need. Ultimately, while it sounds like a long process, effective reading can actually be quicker, and certainly more beneficial, than simply reading an article from start to finish.

The three part process



What to look for during each stage:

Long View

Preview

- Read titles, prefaces, tables of contents
- Acknowledge time-frames, seminal authors, recurrent themes

These steps are useful for:

- Identifying text types and structure
- Narrowing research
- Selecting appropriate sources of evidence

Mid-Range

Skim

- Headings, bold print, graphics
- First and last sentences of paragraphs

Scan

- Specific information
- Key/relevant topic words

These steps are useful for:

- Eliminating some texts as not so useful
- Getting familiar with a text
- Work out which parts to read, and which not
- Finding information quickly

Close Readings

Close Reading 1

- Relax, stop worrying about it – just enjoy it
- DON'T HIGHLIGHT or UNDERLINE
- You won't understand it all – that's OK!
- You are orientating yourself to this writer's voice and territory
- Notice overall how the material is organised
- (for words you don't understand, circle them and just move on)

Close Reading 2

- Read with **your** purpose in mind:
 - to comprehend all main ideas about a topic
 - **OR** to understand the author's perspective as a whole
 - **OR** to extract key points relevant to your assignment task
- Identify the line of argument (*i.e. what is the sequence of ideas that support the one overall idea?*)
- *Find the meaning of those circled words (if the context has not clarified them by now)*
- **Highlight** key points, make margin notes

Close Reading 3

- Review your highlights and mark-ups to make notes in your own words
- Make dot points:
 - Try to write phrases, not just sentences
 - Put authors' main argument into your own words
 - Relate argument to topic/essay focus
 - Use the **Reading Summary** table (page 3) to summarise your reading and link it to your discussion

Reading:	
Summary:	
Key ideas	Relevance to question

Essay Scaffold

Intro/Thesis

Body: Topic evidence, link

Conclusion