Essay writing

This is the most common form of writing at university. Textbooks and resources have tried to organize essays into types (in brackets below: narrative, descriptive, etc) to help students. There may be differences in how different books or teachers describe or name types of essays.

Reason to write

At university, you may write essays to tell a story (narrative), to describe something (descriptive), to research, explain and argue about an idea (exposition/argument), to explain the reasons why something happened or the possible effects of doing something (cause and effect) or to look at the similar and different points of things (compare and contrast.) Also, language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL iBT use essays to measure student language level.

Situation

University essays are written :

- As assignments, which are often typed and in a set format (see essay for details),
- In exams, where they are hand-written in a certain amount of time, and
- You may also need to write them for reports if you study abroad.

Text:

1. Organization

- Write your name, student number and the date at the top on the right-hand side
- Write a title that is related to the topic or question. (Just "Essay" or "Homework" are no good!) *Note: You usually do not need titles in exams.*
- Organize into clear indented paragraphs
- First paragraph: Write an introduction. Outline the topic why you are writing or what your main point is and give a short summary of how the essay will be organized.
- Main or body paragraphs: Organize them clearly and give good examples or support to make your argument stronger.
- Final paragraph; Write a conclusion that summarizes your main points and ideas. Do not introduce new ideas.
- Write how many words there are in the essay at the end.

2. Grammar

- Check your grammar and write words, sentences and phrases out in full (for example, write "do not", not "don't")
- In most types of essays, try not to say "I" as it makes your argument weaker.

3. Vocabulary

- In university essays, use formal written vocabulary. (For example, the word "get" is usually spoken English and does not sound good in university essays.)

John Smith

123456

April 1, 202X

Example 2: How to submit an assignment in Intensive A

Welcome to the English Department's Intensive A course. This essay is about how we want you to submit your essays. Please read and check you understand it all.

First of all, all typed work should be submitted in the font Times New Roman, the font size should be 12, line spacing should be 1.5 and all margins 2.5cm. You should have your name and student number in the top right hand side (like John Smith, 123456 above), and you must put the number of words in your assignment on the bottom right hand side (as below – use the word counter.) In addition, don't forget to have a clear and appropriate title.

Your paragraphing should be clear and use either indents (like this sheet) or be in block form (see pages 3 and 4) depending on what your teacher requires. You may also be asked to list sources at the end of your essay. Each teacher has slightly different requirements, so make sure you listen when they outline what they want, and ask if you are not sure about anything.

The last thing you should do is to save the essay file. When you do, include your name, student number, kumi and the basic essay title like this (for this essay):

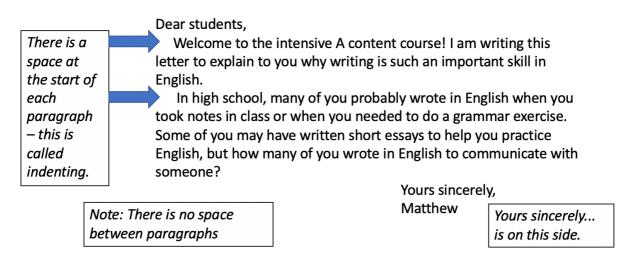"JohnSmith_123456_E4_EssayFormatting.*doc*"

You must not copy from the internet or from a friend – even one sentence. Copying is called plagiarism. If it is appropriate to the course content, teachers may teach you how to use and acknowledge anything that you want to quote from a source properly.

We hope that this is clear. If you do not understand or have any questions at all, please ask your teacher anytime. Good luck and good writing!
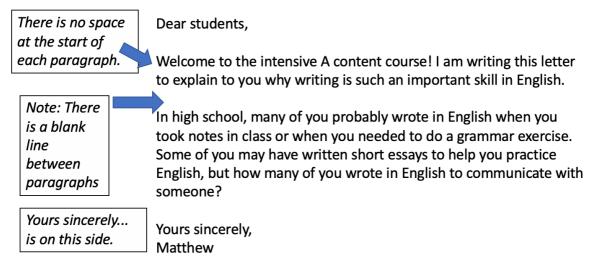
(283 words)

Different methods of formatting your writing

Put simply, there are two ways you might need to organize your writing. Most teachers at university will ask for this style of formatting (shown using a letter):

There is a space at the start of each paragraph – this is called indenting.

Dear students,
    Welcome to the intensive A content course! I am writing this letter to explain to you why writing is such an important skill in English.
    In high school, many of you probably wrote in English when you took notes in class or when you needed to do a grammar exercise. Some of you may have written short essays to help you practice English, but how many of you wrote in English to communicate with someone?

Yours sincerely,
Matthew

Note: There is no space between paragraphs

Yours sincerely... is on this side.

However, there is another kind of formatting called "block format" which is used for business letters and e-mail and also business reports and things like online newspapers. Depending on the content you are studying, some teachers may ask for this style instead:

There is no space at the start of each paragraph.

Dear students,

Welcome to the intensive A content course! I am writing this letter to explain to you why writing is such an important skill in English.

Note: There is a blank line between paragraphs

In high school, many of you probably wrote in English when you took notes in class or when you needed to do a grammar exercise. Some of you may have written short essays to help you practice English, but how many of you wrote in English to communicate with someone?

Yours sincerely... is on this side.

Yours sincerely,
Matthew

If you are asked to write an essay in block format, you can see how it will look on the next page:

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April 1, 202X

How to write a good essay (Block format)

Each and every one of your teachers all through university will have a different idea of what they want you to do. However, there are some basics to essay writing that are good to know.

The first and most important is make sure you understand and focus on what you are supposed to write about. Students very often only quickly read instructions for an essay or questions in an exam, and then write about something quite different.

Once you know what you are going to write about, it is a good idea to try and write a brief outline of your ideas. With no clear plan it is very easy for your writing to become disorganized.

If it is an assignment and not an exam essay, write a draft (a rough version), check it carefully for simple mistakes, structure and if it answers the question (this is called proofreading), and then give it to a friend to proofread it again for you. Finally, put it into the correct format.

What makes a great essay? An essay that answers the question, has a clear structure, a good introduction and conclusion, and looks good. Good presentation can get better marks for an essay. Good luck and happy writing!

(206 words)

John Smith

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April 1, 202X

How to submit an assignment in Intensive A with quotes and references

When you write an essay, often you will do research for the essay which could include reading books, reading a webpage, watching a movie or listening to music. At university, it is very important that you write most of your essays in your own words and that you show clearly where your ideas come from if you are using other people's work.

There are basically two ways you can show where your ideas come from in your essay. The first way is by using exactly the same words as the original, in which case, you should put the original words in inverted commas (""), like this: When I was in high school, my mother always told me "Clean up your room!" The second way is by writing what the original text says in your own words. For example; When I was a high school student, my mother often told me to make my room look nice.

In the sentence about what my mother said about cleaning my room we know that 1. my mother said it and 2. she said it often while I was a high school student. In academic writing, you always need to show where your ideas come from and, if you can, when they were written or said. You need to do this inside the essay as well as at the end of the essay. There are many systems for this and they can be complicated, but here is a basic system to start.

Inside the essay, you need to show who said something and when they said it. If you use a direct quotation ("") then you should give a page number as well. For example, Cottrell (2013) states, "In academic writing, it is essential to acknowledge, or 'cite' the sources and ideas of information." (p. 179) Here is another example where the original text has been changed into my own words: Cottrell (2013) says it is important to show where your ideas come from in academic essays.

On a webpage, there will often be a "posted" date, so that is the date it was written, but sometimes it is difficult to know when something was written, and there are also often no page numbers. In that case, you would write: Tanaka (n.d.) said, "Writing essays can be fun." (Here, 'n.d' means 'no date'.)

At the end of the essay, you need to give some more detail about where the information comes from. This is your list of references. Basically, you need to list all your sources in alphabetical order (by author's family name) and give author's name, date of posting/publication, title and publisher (with the place it was published) or URL. Have a look at the references below to see a few examples of how to do it.

In conclusion, this is a very simple introduction to how to show where your ideas and information comes from in essays. If you study abroad or take lecture courses in English at Sandai, you will need to know how to do this. However, as stated above, there are many systems and so you need to make sure you check what system your teacher wants. Whatever situation you are in, you want to impress people by how much you have researched and how intelligent you are. As Katy Perry said in her song *Firework*, "You're a firework… Make 'em go 'Oh, oh, oh.'" which means make your reader think "Wow!" when they read your essay.

(578 words)

<h3 style="text-align:center">References</h3>

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The Study Skills Handbook, 4th edition*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.

Perry, K. & Dean, E. (2010) *Firework*. Teenage Dream (CD) Los Angeles: Capital Records

Tanaka, S. (n.d.) Writing essays. Retrieved from www.writingessays/blog.com

<u>Reference: How to use a quote or refer to someone else's writing</u>

In academic writing it is important you show where your ideas came from, in other words what your sources are. You can **<u>refer to a source</u>** (say where the information or idea comes from) by one of three methods: quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing.

- To quote from something = use the same words and put them in "inverted commas"
- To paraphrase something = rewrite the information or ideas into your own words (often useful when the original text or language is complicated or, in some ways, unclear)
- To summarize something = say the key points or main idea(s) in your own words

Here is a practical example. This is a paragraph from page 22 of an *imaginary* (= *not real*) book published in 2017 by John Jones called Pets:

Dogs are nice. I love them. I have always had pet dogs, even when I was a baby. I think dogs are the best type of pet because they are so loving and faithful. If anyone asks me what kind of pet they should get, I always recommend a dog.

<u>Examples of use in writing</u>. *The part that is from the book is in text like* this *(not italics):*

- <u>Quotation</u>: *John says*, "Dogs are nice." *and I agree with him. Just like John's, my family…*
- <u>Paraphrase</u>: John says that he likes dogs a lot *and I agree with him. My family…*
- <u>Summarize</u>: John talked about his pet dogs and why they are important to him. *I like them a lot too.*

(Note: you would usually use summarizing for a longer text – this is just a simple example.)

Paraphrasing and summarizing are useful to show that you have researched the topic and that you understand the area or background. You can also use them to compare what different sources say.

The above examples use the writer's first name and are thus more casual. In academic writing, which is more formal, you use the family name of the writer(s) and, when you refer to a source, you need to (1) show where it comes from in your writing and (2) give the details about the source at the end of your writing.[1] Put simply, you need to show who wrote it, what it was, where you found it or where it comes from and when it was published.

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[1] Teachers will talk about referring to a source (refer being the verb) or reference (noun). Reference can also be used as a verb. Another word for referring to a source is to cite (verb) or citation (noun.)

There are many different ways to do this (for example, the APA, MLA and Harvard systems) and different courses or subjects use different styles. In the intensive A classes, we basically use the APA style. (Note: in other classes, teachers may ask you to use a different style. Always check what your teacher expects.)

A Quick APA Guide (See the APA handout for more detail)

Here is an example essay paragraph which quotes directly and paraphrases other sources:

> John (2017) argues that dogs are the best kind of pets. He talks of his own experience of having dogs and also the good points of the character of dogs. However, Tanaka (n.d.) disagrees, and states simply, "Cats are nicer." A popular blog also agrees with Tanaka, and argues that the intelligence of cats is far greater than dogs. (We All Think Cats are Best, 2018)

Note: 'n.d.' means 'no date' because the webpage didn't have the date, and "We All Think Cats are Best" is the title of a webpage because the webpage didn't say the author's name.

Here are what the references for the paragraph above would look like at the end of the essay:

> **References**
>
> Jones, J. (2017) *Pets*. Kyoto: World Publishing.
>
> Tanaka, T. (n.d.) Cats are great. Retrieved from http://www.thisisnotarealURL/blog.com
>
> We All Think Cats are Best. (2018). Retrieved from http://www.lovecats/blog/catsarebest.html

Note: the references are in alphabetical (abc…) order, based on the author's family name.

Here is how the structure works: