



**NEDBANK AND OLD MUTUAL
BUDGET SPEECH COMPETITION**



ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME TO STUDENTS

ESSAY WRITING MANUAL

**This manual was specially commissioned by the sponsors of the
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1. Objective

The objective of this manual is to provide assistance with writing a successful academic essay.

2. Introduction

Either write something worth reading; or do something worth writing.

Benjamin Franklin

If you know the steps towards writing a successful essay and understand what to do to make the essay interesting, creative and reader-friendly, the exercise can be easy and rewarding.

Follow the steps outlined in this manual to ensure that the quality of your essay is high, it has adhered to basic technical details and it is an academically excellent product. If you want a positive response from your reader, then you must consider the salient points of a good essay, namely, structure, style, logical arguments, current and contemporary information, well researched and correct language usage. This manual would address these points.

3. Writing an academic essay

3.6 What are the steps to writing an academic essay?

- Research the topic/question;
- Brainstorm the topic to get original ideas (your view is important!);
- Analyse the arguments;
- Define your main point or 'theme';
- Create a structure or outline;
- Write an introduction;
- Write the paragraphs;
- Write the conclusion;
- Complete the references; and
- Check your language.

3.7 Who are my readers?

Your readers are academics and experts in the field. They are therefore aware of contemporary information and current knowledge of the topic. Keep this in mind as you have to convince them that your essay is well researched and you understand the topic.

You must also bear in mind what the adjudicators are looking for in your essay. The webpage, www.budgetspeechcompetiton.co.za, would provide you with this information.

3.8 Why is my idea important here and now?

- You need to contribute sound arguments and innovative/new information on the topic; and
- You have to be convinced that your argument is important and that there is a need in you to share your ideas.

3.9 What makes a winning academic essay?

- You must have a central argument or theme;
- It must answer the key question;
- Do not write any information that does not answer this question, i.e. do not include any irrelevant information;
- It must be well-researched;
- Provide evidence of sources that you have consulted;
- The argument must be logical. If your essay is well structured, the argument would flow in a logical manner;

- The essay must be evidence-based. Your opinions are important, however, you must substantiate your points with evidence; and
- Provide relevant examples to strengthen your essay;

3.4 How do I start with my essay?

- Understand the question/topic;
- Check the meaning of the key words e.g. debate, describe, evaluate, discuss, etc.;
- You must know **exactly** what you need to do in the essay;
- Read widely on the topic;
- Do an internet search and a literature search in the library on the key words;
- Write! Write the ideas that come to you as you explore and discover the topic. Even if you are not sure if it answers the question, write the information down; and
- Collect data. Remember the most current information would appear in the media and journals.

3.10 How do I make my essay engaging and interesting?

- Write with passion. If you are not convinced that your essay has something interesting to offer the reader, you cannot convince anyone else!
- Have information that is unique and different. If it is boring, or if the reader has read it somewhere else, the reader would be disinterested; and
- Have a purpose for the essay. There must be something that you want to convey to the reader.

4. Academic Research

4.1 What is academic research?

- Academic research includes the use of information and ideas from books, journals, the internet and other secondary sources.
- You can also include primary sources e.g. an interview with an economist or the Minister of Finance.
- A well-researched essay would use a variety of sources, quote interesting information to substantiate the arguments and debate (discuss, interrogate, agree/disagree) with the information.

4.2 Why must I do research?

- It provides a good knowledge base for the topic;
- You include the most recent information;
- It adds credibility to your argument;
- It strengthens your essay; and
- It adds an academic slant to your essay.

4.4 What is not academic research?

- Summaries of books or articles;
- Relying on sources for the whole essay without personal input on the topic;
- Essays that are merely paraphrases of other peoples' arguments;
- Long quotations from different sources;
- Only using internet sources (it's a sign of limited research and reading!);
- Using a single text as a source; and
- Not reading critically, i.e. re-writing from the sources without engaging with the information.

4.4 How do I use sources in my essay?

4.4.1 Summarise

- Condense a main idea of an article or book;
- You must first understand what you read!
- Be concise;
- All information must be relevant to the question; and
- Be careful of '*Interesting*' information that is totally irrelevant to the question!

4.4.2 Quote

- Use quotation marks for direct quotes;

- Is the quote relevant to your argument? If not, do not include it;
- Quotes must be short;
- Take a little from a lot! Quote briefly from a variety of sources; and
- Can you paraphrase the idea? If yes, do not use the quote.

4.4.3 Paraphrase

- Recast an idea in your own words;
- Paraphrasing is better than quoting; and
- Most of the information in your essay should be paraphrased from sources.

4.5 Hints to remember with research

- Can the reader differentiate between your voice and the voice of your sources?
- Your essay would be confusing or contradictory if your voice gets mixed up with the different viewpoints of your sources.
- If you use someone else's idea or information, you must give them credit in the essay (see the section on referencing);
- You should respond or react to information and not just copy it;
- Don't only choose information that supports your argument. A good essayist also provides information that contradicts their argument. It gives you an opportunity to say why you disagree with the information!
- Use current information. If your essay leans on outdated information, the reader would not be impressed with you; and
- Use the thoughts and ideas of great thinkers in the field e.g. the country's top economists or academics.

5. The hypothesis

5.1 What is the hypothesis?

e.g. **A paradigm shift in fiscal policy would result in increased growth and development.**

- It is an intelligent guess of what you think the answer is to the key question in your essay;
- Your hypothesis is your **best** idea for your answer;
- It is a clear assertion around which you write your essay;
- You sum up your main points in a concise sentence;
- It is impossible to write a good essay without a hypothesis that drives the essay;
- The hypothesis is the foundation of your essay and it provides a clear focus in the essay; and
- The hypothesis lets your reader know where you are going and why.

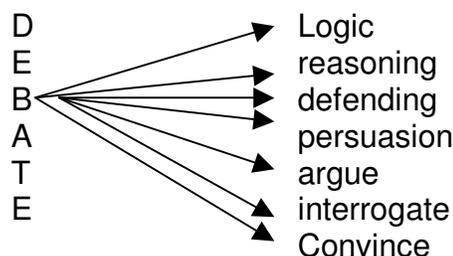
5.2 Why is the hypothesis important?

- It emphasizes the central point that you want in the essay;
- It guides you in choosing your examples to substantiate your points;
- It helps you to think about the validity of your points; and
- It assists you to keep the reader convinced of your argument and to remain interested in your idea.

5.3 How do I structure the hypothesis?

- Know what your **claim** is. It is the key point in your essay;
- Give reasons for your claim;
- Provide evidence that your claim is true;
- Be logical as you link your **hypothesis** (what you think the answer is), your **claim** (why you think the answer should be that) and your **evidence** (content and research) to substantiate your claim.
- If you are sufficiently confident and convinced that your evidence supports your claim, then you can accept your hypothesis. You must be convinced of your claim!
- You should not start your essay with a hypothesis and then provide evidence that contradicts your hypothesis. Your essay will not be convincing.

6. Structuring and articulating the debate



6.1 What is a debate in an essay?

- When you debate a point in an essay, you use logic and reasoning;
- You decide on a core value and you argue why your core value should be accepted;
- It is an interactive exercise where you take a strong position on something (claim), and present an argument to defend that position;
- The two important factors in a debate are **logical argument** and **persuasion**; and
- You have to convince your reader that your claim is true.

6.2 How do I debate?

- Take sides on the topic and defend your stance;
- You need to form judgments based on your facts;
- Use sources in an intelligent manner;
- Interrogate your sources i.e. engage with the points raised by the authors e.g. agreeing or disagreeing;
- Don't simply recycle information from your sources without a robust discussion and linking with your hypothesis;
- Strengthen your argument by providing as much evidence and information as possible to counter the other side;
- Try to find faulty reasoning in the opposing arguments to strengthen your case;
- Provide counterexamples to strengthen your argument e.g. The sources may refer to Europe and you provide examples from Brazil or India to illustrate differences within developing countries; and
- Win your argument through logical presentation that leads to a convincing conclusion.

6.3 Why must I debate?

- It adds credibility to your argument;

- You don't rely only on opinions, but provide convincing evidence from your sources;
- Some essays have an **advocacy** approach where the argument advocates something very strongly e.g. ***The economic policy of a country should be monetarist.*** In this kind of essay you have to challenge your reader to accept your theory and argument by advocating very strongly what you believe. You do this by debating your points and countering the opposing views; and
- It shows the reader that you are thinking **critically**.

6.4 How do I think critically in my essay?

- Collect opinions and arguments from both sides (your standpoint and those that contradict you);
- Analyse the arguments and draw out implications from these statements;
- Examine the statements for contradictions;
- Evaluate the arguments;
- Locate the opposing claims to your own claim;
- Choose information that is relevant to your central issue, although they may oppose your standpoint;
- Support and justify your claim; and
- Draw conclusions and form a judgment.

6.5 How do I evaluate an argument?

- Question what the statement means.
- How did the person come to that conclusion?
- Why do you believe that your argument is right?
- What evidence do you have to substantiate your argument?
- What happens if you are wrong?
- Are there sources that disagree with you?
- Do you understand why they disagree with you?
- Why is your argument significant?
- Is your argument valid and true?

7. Concluding the essay

The conclusion is an integral part of the essay. It looks back on the points you have raised and reinforces, but does not repeat the main idea. It must create a feeling of closure of the argument, an ending to the debate.

7.1 What should I be careful of?

- End gracefully, never abruptly;
- End with a quick wrap-up sentence, a memorable thought, an interesting twist of logic, point to the future or have a call to action;
- Is there something that the reader can take away after reading?
- The conclusion must fit naturally with the essay;
- Don't introduce new information;
- Keep it short;
- Don't summarise your essay in the conclusion!

7.2 Questions to ask myself:

- Have I reviewed the key claim/main point of my essay?
- Have I briefly described my concluding feeling about the topic?
- Did I leave the reader with something to think about?
- How has the reader's mind been changed by following the logic of my argument and evidence?
- Did I connect back with the introduction?

8. Language editing

8.1 How can I ensure a smooth flow in my sentences?

- Add words to connect your sentences (see 8.2).
- Make sure that the paragraph is connected with a central point.
- Make sure that each sentence makes sense!
- Does each paragraph link with the topic?
- Revise the essay extensively. Write at least 3 drafts before you go to the final essay.

8.2 What transition words can help to link my sentences and paragraphs?

- However;
- Even though;
- On the other hand;
- Nevertheless;
- Therefore;
- Thus;
- As a result of;
- Consequently;
- In addition to;
- Furthermore; etc.

8.3 How do I do the final editing?

- Run a spelling and grammar check in your computer;
- Make sure each sentence has a subject;
- Make sure the subject and verb agrees with each other;
- Is the verb tenses of the essay consistent e.g. past tense;
- Be careful of mixing American and British spelling;
- Does the introduction and a conclusion link with each other?
- Does each paragraph follow the proper format?
- Is there any repetition?
- Have I replaced vagueness and ambiguities?
- Are there any emotional statements?
- Is the essay easy to understand?

8.4 Before I submit the essay, did I do the following?

- Read the essay many times;
- Get someone else to review my essay; and
- Encourage impartial criticism of my essay.

9. Referencing

Correct referencing in the essay and acknowledging the sources you used at the end of the essay is an important part of the technical detail. More importantly, we reference to avoid plagiarism!!

9.1 What do I include in my list of references?

- All the sources consulted;
- Only sources cited in the essay; and
- Information from tables, graphs or charts must be cited.

9.2 How do I reference correctly and consistently?

- Use the more widely known Harvard Method;
- Arrange sources alphabetically (author's name); and
- Don't number the sources in the reference section.

9.3 What should I be careful of?

- References cited in the essay, but not included in the bibliography;
- Incorrect spelling of authors, titles and publishers;
- No indication of editor/s in edited texts;
- Omission of subtitles of books, journal titles and journal articles;
- Confusion with italicization of books and titles of journals;
- Underlining instead of italicizing titles; and
- Date of downloading of internet citations omitted.

9.4 How do I use footnotes?

- Use a small raised number in the essay to signal a footnote;
- Indicate the full reference (as indicated in the examples below) at the foot of the page in which the source is cited;
- When you refer to a source for the second time, shorten the note by using only the author's surname and page number in the footnote (e.g. Singh, 321). Avoid the Latin *ibid.* ('in the same place'); and
- For web-pages, indicate the date you accessed the information.

(NB. It is not necessary to use footnotes in an essay. You can simply cite the reference in the essay and list it fully in the bibliography)

9.5 Examples of references

9.5.1 In the essay.

(Peters 2000:14) oraccording to Peters (2000:14)

9.5.2 In the Bibliography

a. Books

Stone, R. 1997. *The science of beadwork*. New York: Oxford.

b. Chapter in Book (with an editor, where each chapter has been written by a different author.

Chetty, K. 2001. The place of values in a world of facts. In Arries, C. (Ed). *The nature of knowledge*. London: Prentice-Hall: 124-139.

c. Journals

Johnson, S. 2006. Towards a Keynesian model of economics. *Economics Today*. 19:33-39, September.

d. Government Gazette

South Africa. Department of Trade and Industries. 2005. *The DOHA Agreement*. Pretoria: Government Gazette, 385 (18164): 1-96, July 28.

e. Internet

Stamp, G. 1997. Domains of Work. Review of Hoebeke's *Making Work Systems Better – A Practitioner's Reflections*.
www.bioss.mwebhosting.net/Phase 1. (6 Dec 2005)

www.dit.gov.za. opening the door to EU trade. (7 February 2006)

f. Interviews

Manual, T. 2006. Interview with the researcher on 4 March 2006, Cape Town.

g. Legislation promulgated by Parliament

South Africa. 1982. *Atomic Energy Act, No 92 of 1982*. Pretoria: Government Printer

h. Legislation promulgated by a government department

South Africa. Department of Finance. 2005. *Draft Policy on Value Added Tax*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

i. Newspaper article

Pop, C.A. 2003. Should privatization prosper? SAA in the year 2002. *Mail and Guardian*: 15, March 11.

- j. **Thesis**
Lombard, A. 2006. Economics of Teacher Education.
Unpublished MEd thesis, University of Cape Town.