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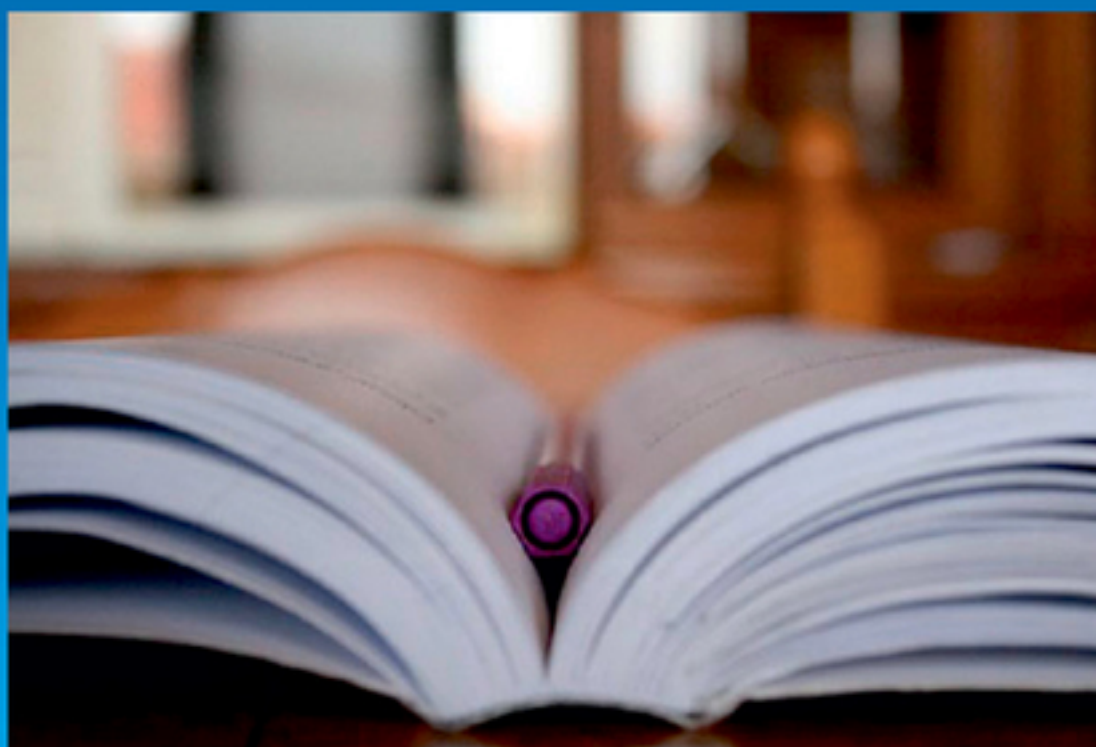
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HOW TO WRITE ESSAYS (ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES)

Учебное пособие



Александра Ковалева

**How to write essays (English
for Academic Purposes)**

«БИБКОМ»

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Данное учебное пособие разработано для студентов всех направлений подготовки Института радиоэлектроники и информационных технологий - РтФ, имеющих в учебных планах дисциплину «Иностранный язык для научных целей». Учебное пособие содержит практические советы по выбору темы научного исследования, методы исследования и общие правила оформления отчетной документации. Задания к каждому разделу помогут приобрести практические навыки исследовательской деятельности с использованием аутентичных источников. Глоссарий дает возможность разобраться в терминологии пособия.

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Содержание

ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ	5
MAIN STEPS OF THE WRITING PROCESS	6
STAGE 1	8
Pre-Writing: Choosing and Narrowing a Topic, Analising Concepts	8
Pre-Writing: Brainstorming, 'Pattern Notes', Mapping	13
Pre-Writing: Using the Right Ability	16
STAGE 2	18
Research	18
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	25

Александра Ковалева

How to write essays (English for Academic Purposes)

ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ

Стандарты последнего поколения для высшего образования имеют новый взгляд на основные требования к результатам образования в высшей школе. Эти требования продиктованы современным состоянием общества.

Современные выпускники вузов должны обладать определенными общекультурными и профессиональными компетенциями.

Исследовательская деятельность помогает студентам и магистрам приобрести профессиональные компетенции, а иностранный язык расширяет круг профессионального общения.

Данное учебное пособие разработано для студентов и магистров всех направлений подготовки Института радиоэлектроники и информационных технологий – РтФ, имеющих в учебных планах дисциплину «Иностранный язык для научных целей».

Учебное пособие содержит практические советы по выбору темы научного исследования, методы исследования и общие правила оформления отчетной документации. Задания к каждому разделу дают студентам и магистрам практические навыки исследовательской деятельности с использованием аутентичных источников. Глоссарий дает возможность разобраться в терминологии пособия.

Пособие составлено на основе публикаций британских и американских изданий последних лет.

Пособие состоит из 17 глав. Каждый раздел посвящен определенному этапу исследовательской деятельности: выбор темы, поиск и отбор материала, формирование структуры исследовательской работы, написание основных глав, редактирование, оформление.

В целом, пособие охватывает широкий спектр различных видов деятельности студентов: различные виды чтения, реферирование, письмо.

MAIN STEPS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

For any essay to achieve high marks it's essential to go through five distinct stages:

1. Interpretation of the question
2. Research
3. Planning
4. Writing
5. Revision

If you omit any of these or just rush them, certain familiar problems will emerge in your writing: irrelevance, weak structure, insufficient evidence and examples to support your arguments, lack of fluency between paragraphs, inconsistent arguments, and many others.

It's also as important to separate each stage, so that you leave, say, at least a day between each of them. Of course, it may not always be possible for you to do this. You may have a number of competing obligations that leave you only a few days to complete the essay. On these occasions the skills you'll learn in this book to manage your time will help you cope more effectively. They will also help you organise your time so that with most pieces of work you can in fact find sufficient time between each stage. Not only does this allow you to return to your ideas fresh, so that you're able to see which of them needs to be edited out, but you will also find that your ideas and arguments have developed in the meantime.

Ideas are organic. Hardly ever are they the complete and finished article the moment you grasp them, like products on a supermarket shelf. They grow and develop over time. So, for example, returning to your plan after a day or two, you will almost inevitably discover new ideas, new evidence and new ways of developing your arguments. You're also likely to see a more sensible and logical way of ordering your ideas.

And the same goes for all the other stages. Each time you return to your work after leaving it to lie unattended for a while, you will find your subconscious has worked on the ideas, restructuring them, answering questions that you weren't sure of, and critically evaluating the arguments you've read in your texts.

But, be reassured, this is not an endless, confusing process, in which your ideas are thrown up in the air each time you return to your work. Within a short time, after revising your plan a couple of times, you will realise that it's ready and you can begin writing. The same is true of your interpretation of the question, your research and the revision of your work. You will know when enough is enough. It may take three or four essays before you feel confident about your judgement, and during these you will have to rely on your tutor's judgement, but it will come.

1. *These words are important for understanding the writing process. Match each word with the correct definition.*

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| a. step | 1. to check a piece of writing for errors |
| b. topic | 2. a group of related sentences |
| c. gather | 3. one thing in a series of things you do |
| d. organise | 4. subject; what the piece of writing is about |
| e. paragraph | 5. to change or correct a piece of writing |
| f. essay | 6. a short piece of writing, at least paragraphs long |
| g. proofread | 7. to arrange in a clear, logic way |
| h. edit | 8. to find and collect together |

STAGE 1

Pre-Writing: Choosing and Narrowing a Topic, Analysing Concepts

Before you begin writing, you decide what you are going to write about. Then you plan what you are going to write. The process is called pre-writing.

Selecting a topic is possibly the most difficult part of doing research. Is it too big? Is it too narrow? Will I be able to find enough on it? Start by choosing a topic that you like or are curious about. You're going to be working on it for quite a while, so try and find one that's interesting and that you can reasonably cover in the time and space available.

The Reference shelves behind our Reference Desks are filled with books that can help you focus your topic. These books are good places to start your research when you know little about a topic, when you need an overview of a subject, or when you want a quick summary of basic ideas. They are also useful for discovering the names of important people, and can familiarize you with the vocabulary of the field. Encyclopedia articles are often followed by carefully selected bibliographies or lists of references to other works, useful items to have as you begin looking for additional information.

Though you should work on something you are interested in, you need to keep it in mind who your readers are and what their interests might be. The topic should be interesting, significant, important and comprehensive to the readers. You need to consider what your readers already know about your topic, their academic levels, what their beliefs are, etc.

Your research paper needs to be competing and answer all the questions you started with. You need to understand what other questions your readers may have, whether you have discussed all questions or hypotheses you have raised at the beginning of the paper.

There are many research papers that are very ambitious. They try to explain a big topic and since there are limitations on the length of the paper, they cover a broad topic only superficially. That is, the paper does not thoroughly answer questions it raised, and the readers may be left unsatisfied.

On the other hand, a good paper handles a small topic that is interesting, important and significant for both the writer/researcher and reader and covers it thoroughly. Then the readers will be convinced and satisfied.

All papers, not only those for classes but also intended for publication in journals, have the limitations on their length. You keep your paper within these limitations.

Your topic has to be small enough for the length of the paper. It is very important to choose limited topic so you can cover every aspect in depth rather than large topic that you can only deal with shallowly. Your paper has to be complete, that is, you have to be able to discuss all important points and show your conclusion, otherwise your reader will not be satisfied with your argument.

Often, and for the best of motives, our problems in essay writing begin the very moment we are given the question. Anxious to get on with the work and not fall behind, we skip the interpretation stage and launch straight into our research. As a result, we read sources and take notes without a clear idea of what's relevant, beyond some very general idea of the subject of the essay. Then finally, after hours of toil, tired and frustrated, and no clearer about what we're doing, we're left with a pile of irrelevant, unusable notes. Yet, just an hour or two interpreting the question would not only have saved us this wasted time, but would have given us a clear idea of what the question is getting at and a better understanding of what the examiner is looking for in our work. And even more, it would have given us the opportunity to get our own ideas and insights involved at an early stage. Without this our work can seem routine and predictable: at best just the re-cycling of the ideas that dominate the subject.

So, what should you be looking for when you interpret a question? All essay questions tell you two things: the structure your essay should adopt for you to deal relevantly with all the issues it raises; and the range of abilities the examiner is expecting to see you use in answering the question. There are times in the research of every essay when you find yourself collecting material that is interesting and so closely argued that you find it difficult not to take notes from all of it, particularly when it's relevant to the wider implications of the topic. But if it's not relevant to the problems raised in this essay, ditch it! File it away for other essays, by all means, but don't let it tempt you in this essay. Otherwise it will lose focus and the reader will fail to understand what you're doing and why.

With these warnings in mind it's essential to pin down two things: how many parts there are to the question and what weight you will need to give to each part. With many questions these structural problems can be solved by analysing the key concepts used in the question.

Indeed, in most, if you fail to do this, the examiners will deduct marks: they will expect to see you show that you can analyse difficult abstract concepts and allow this to influence, if not determine, the structure of the essay.

For example, markers for the University of London are told to award the highest marks (70 – 100 %) to those students who “note subtlety, complexity and possible disagreements, [which they].. will discuss”, while only average marks (40 – 60 %) are to be awarded to the student who adopts a “More relaxed application” of the question, and who “follows [an] obvious line.. [and] uncritically accepts the terms of the question”.

Similarly, in the Department of Sociology at the University of Harvard students are told:

Papers will be graded on the basis of the completeness and clarity of your analysis and the persuasiveness of your recommendations. As always, we will be appreciative of well-organised and well-written papers.

The same emphasis can be found at the University of Oxford, where examiners look for a good analytical ability, to distinguish first class and upper second class scripts from the rest. In the marking criteria it's only in these two grades that any mention is made of analytical ability, with those failing to display it more likely to end up with lower seconds and below. A first class script should show:

analytical and argumentative power, a good command of facts, evidence or arguments relevant to the questions, and an ability to organise the answer with clarity, insight and sensitivity.

An upper second class script also displays these qualities, but ‘less consistently’ or ‘to a lesser degree’ than a first class script.

To give you an idea of what this means in terms of actual questions, listed below is a selection of essay questions from different departments at different universities around the world. You will see that the answer to each of them hinges upon the same ‘clarity, insight and sensitivity’ that we can bring to the analysis of the key concepts in the question.

Some of them, as you can see, incorporate the concept in an assertion or opinion, which is not always obvious. Others present it in a statement of incontrovertible fact, which you must analyse before you can evaluate it to see whether it is consistent with the facts or just subjective opinion.

Alternatively the concept could be presented in the form of a generalization. Indeed, this is, in fact, exactly what concepts are: they are universal classifications that we develop from our observation of individual instances of something. Concepts like “love”, “honour”, “beauty” are universal classifications of the certain emotions, acts and desires that we experience or see other experience.

So it is important to identify the opinion, the statement or generalization and let the examiners know that you have done so. In the following questions key concepts are underlined.

• Do the narrators of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* speak with the same kind of irony?

(The English Novel, University of Harvard).

- Are there any good reasons for supposing that historical explanation is, in principle, different from scientific explanation?

(History, University of Kent at Canterbury).

- Did the years 1603-4 witness a crisis in the history of English Protestantism?

(History, University of Kent at Canterbury).

- Consider Duncan Kennedy's claim that people who favour casting the law in the form of rules are individualists while people who favour the use of standards are altruists. Do you agree that the debate between rules and standards reflects that sort of deep difference in general moral outlook?

(Law, University of Cornell).

- Hobbes insists that covenants extorted by force oblige. (Sovereignty by acquisition is a good example.) Is his argument consistent with his theory? What problems does his insistence pose for his theory? In your answer, be sure to address Hobbes's account of obligation, in particular the obligation to obey the sovereign.

(Philosophy, University of Harvard).

- 'Authority amounts to no more than the possession of power.' Discuss.

(Philosophy, University of Maryland).

- Is there any important sense in which all men are equal? If so, what is it?

(Politics, University of Maryland).

- Is democracy always compatible with individual freedom? (Politics, University of York).

- Are concepts of anomie and subculture still of value in the explanation of criminality?

(Sociology, University of Oxford).

As you can see, no matter what the subject, the analysis of the important concepts is the main focus when we come to interpret questions like these. They may be couched subtly in everyday language, like 'unacceptable inequalities', 'oblige', or 'efficient levels', or they may stand out like beacons warning the unwary not to ignore them, like 'Paretian Optimum', and 'anomie and subculture'. Historians, for example, are fond of using concepts like 'revolution' and 'crisis': seemingly inoffensive and untroubling words. But then, look at the British Industrial Revolution and you find yourself wondering, was this a revolution or just accelerated evolution? Indeed, what is a revolution?

Is it all a question of the speed of change? In which case, the Industrial Revolution was more an evolution than a revolution, spread as it was over seventy to a hundred years. Or is it more to do with the scale of change? If this is the case, then there's little doubt that it was a revolution, what with the mechanisation of labour, factory production, the growth of cities and the development of mechanized transport.

Much the same could be argued for a concept like 'crisis'. Again it appears to be inoffensive and untroubling; that is until you ask yourself, what do we really mean by the word? It comes from the Greek, *Krisis*, meaning a decisive moment or turning point. So are we really justified in arguing that the years 1634 were not only a time of serious challenge to Protestantism, but also a decisive turning point in its history? Whatever your answer, you now have a structure emerging: on the one hand you can argue that it was a time of serious challenge to Protestantism, but on the other you might question whether it really was a genuine turning point in its history.

The same analysis of concepts and arguments can be found in just about every subject. In politics there are concepts like freedom, ideology, equality, authority, power, political obligation, influence, legitimacy, democracy and many more. Do we really harbour not a single fear of ambiguity when we use such a large and important concept like freedom, or was Donovan Leitch right when he admitted in the sixties that, 'Freedom is a word I rarely use without thinking'? What do we mean by legitimacy and how does it differ from legality? And when we use the word 'democracy' do we mean direct or indirect democracy, representative or responsible, totalitarian or liberal, third world or communist?

In literature what do we mean by concepts like tragedy, comedy, irony, and satire? Indeed, it's not unusual to find universities devoting complete courses to unravelling the implications of these and others like them: concepts like class, political obligation, punishment, revolution, authority and so on. In the following course outline, the concepts of punishment and obligation, and the distinction between law and morality, are central concerns that run throughout the course.

Entitled 'Moral Reasoning – Reasoning In and About the Law', it is part of the programme at the University of Harvard: How is law related to morality? How is it distinct? Do we have an obligation to obey the law? What, if anything, justifies the imposition of legal punishment? These issues, and related issues dealing with the analysis and justification of legal practices, will be examined using the writings of philosophers, judges, and legal theorists.

Take just about any course at any university and you will see the same: that many of the challenges we face are questions about concepts. For example, the Philosophy Department of the University of Southampton describes its Philosophy of Science course in the following terms:

This course examines concepts of evidence, justification, probability and truth, in relation to scientific explanation, causality, laws of nature, theory and fact; the distinctions between science and pseudo-science, as well as between science and metaphor, are among the topics explored. Examples illustrating the philosophical argument will be drawn from the histories of the physical, biological and social sciences.

Syllabuses like these indicate the importance of key concepts both in the courses you're studying, and in the essays you're expected to write. By analysing them you not only give your essay a relevant structure, but, equally important, you qualify for the highest marks on offer. If, at this stage, you don't acknowledge the significance of these concepts by analysing their implications, you will almost certainly fail to analyse them in your essay. This will indicate not only that you haven't seen the point of the question, but, more seriously, that you haven't yet developed that thoughtful, reflective ability to question some of the most important assumptions we make when we use language. It is as if you're saying to the examiner that you can see no reason why these concepts should raise any particular problem and, therefore, they deserve no special treatment.

2. Choose one topic from each of three groups. Narrow each of the three down to a research topic. Then think of three-five titles of paragraphs in the research paper. Compare with your partner.

Example:

Topic: Microsoft

Research topic: Microsoft products

Paragraph 1: Windows

Paragraph 2: Office

Paragraph 3: Business solutions

Paragraph 4: Developers & IT Pros

A.
People's needs
Health
Hobbies
Traveling
Communication

B.
Authority
Privacy
Democracy
Publicity
Country

C.
Multimedia
Gadgets
New Technologies
World Wide Web
Network

3. *Underline the key concept in the following questions for research.*

1. Discuss the management of health needs within a population group in the Primary Care setting.

(Nursing and Applied Clinical Studies, Canterbury Christ Church University).

2. What is bribery and can it be justified as an acceptable business practice?

(Business and Administration, University of Newcastle, Australia).

3. How do culture, race and ethnicity intersect in social work practice in multicultural society?

(Social Work, University of British Columbia, Canada).

4. “Geomorphology is a branch of geology rather than of geography”. Discuss.

(Geography, University of Oxford).

5. “Mill has made as naïve and artless a use of naturalistic fallacy as nobody could desire. “Good”, he tells us, “desirable”, and you can find out what is desirable by seeking to find out what is actually desired ... The fact is that “desirable” does not mean “able to be desired” as “visible” means “able to be seen”. G. E. Moore. Discuss.

(Philosophy, University of Kent).

6. In the light of a number of recent high profile complaints about invasion of privacy, critically assess whether the press should continue to be self-regulating.

(Journalism, University of Newcastle, Australia).

7. What are the assumptions of the revealed preference approach to life valuation?

(Biology, Stanford University).

8. “Free Trade leads to a Paretian Optimum”. “Free Trade leads to unacceptable inequalities”. Discuss.

(Economics, University of Oxford).

Pre-Writing: Brainstorming, ‘Pattern Notes’, Mapping

Brainstorming is a way of gathering ideas about a topic. Think of a storm: thousand of drops of rain, all coming down together. Now, imagine thousands of ideas “raining” down onto your paper! When you brainstorm, write down every idea that comes to you. Don’t worry now about whether the ideas are good or silly, useful or not. You can decide that later. Right now, it is important to gather as many ideas as possible.

It is important to stake your claim as early as possible, indeed as soon as you get the question. This involves two things: first, as we’ve seen, thinking through your analysis of the concepts and implications of the question, and second, writing down your own ideas on the question. It’s now time to turn to the second of these: brainstorming your own ideas. This means that you empty your mind on the subject, without the aid of books. As quickly as possible you track the flow of your ideas as you note what you know about the subject and what you think might be relevant to the question.

Brainstorming is just a part of the process of analysis. After all, they both involve your own ideas, which you get down on paper as quickly as you can without the aid of books. But they are, in fact, quite different, and if you allow yourself to merge the two, skimping on one, you will almost certainly have problems. In analysis you’re unwrapping what’s already there. It may be buried deep, but by a process of introspection, through which you examine the different ways you use a concept such as authority or advertisement, you come to see more clearly the contours of the concept, its essential characteristics.

In contrast, with brainstorming you are going beyond the concept: this is synthesis, rather than analysis. You are pulling together ideas, arguments and evidence that you think may have a bearing on the question’s implications that you have already revealed through your analysis. So, whereas analysis is a convergent activity, brainstorming is divergent, synthesising material from different sources. If you like, one activity is centripetal, the other centrifugal. Confuse the two and you’ll do neither well.

If you overlook this distinction and merge the two activities, you’re likely to struggle with two problems. First, if you abandon analysis too soon and embark on brainstorming, your focus will shift away from the implications of the question and the concepts it contains. Consequently, you’re likely to find that you don’t have the guidelines to direct your brainstorming into profitable areas. You will find a lot less material and much of what you do unearth you will no doubt discover later that you cannot use, because it’s irrelevant. On the other hand, if you analyse without brainstorming you’ll fail to arm yourself with your ideas and what you know about the topic. As a result, almost certainly two things will happen:

1. The authors you read for your research will dictate to you without your own ideas to protect you, it will be difficult, at times impossible, for you to resist the pull of their ideas and the persuasiveness of their arguments. As a result you’ll find yourself accepting the case they develop and the judgements they make without evaluating them sufficiently, even copying large sections of the text into your own notes.

2. And, equally serious, you will find it difficult to avoid including a great mass of material that is quite irrelevant to your purposes. All of this material may have been relevant to the author’s purposes when he or she wrote the book, but their purposes are rarely identical with yours. Nevertheless, having spent days amassing this large quantity of notes, it’s most unlikely that you’re going to find the detachment somewhere to decide that most of these notes are irrelevant to your essay and you’ve got to ditch them. You’re more likely to convince yourself that they can ‘be made’ relevant, and you end up including them in a long, discursive, shapeless essay, in which the examiner frequently feels lost in a mass of irrelevant material.

So, brainstorming should be seen as distinct from analysis. It needs to be done straight after you’ve completed your analysis, which in turn needs to be done as soon as you have decided upon the

question you're going to tackle. This will give your subconscious time to go away and riffle through your data banks for what it needs before you begin to set about your research.

If you don't make clear your own ideas and your interpretation of the implications of the question, your thinking is likely to be hijacked by the author and his or her intentions. If you don't ask your author clear questions you are not likely to get the clear, relevant answers you want.

Now that you've analysed the implications, use this to empty your mind on the question. Most of us are all too eager to convince ourselves that we know nothing about a subject and, therefore, we have no choice but to skip this stage and go straight into the books. But no matter what the subject, I have never found a group of students, despite all their declarations of ignorance and all their howls of protest, who were not able to put together a useful structure of ideas that would help them to decide as they read what's relevant to the essay and what's not. Once we tap into our own knowledge and experience, we can all come up with ideas and a standard by which to judge the author's point of view, which will liberate us from being poor helpless victims of what we read. We all have ideas and experience that allow us to negotiate with texts, evaluating the author's opinions, while we select what we want to use and discard the rest. Throughout this stage, although you're constantly checking your ideas for relevance, don't worry if your mind flows to unexpected areas and topics as the ideas come tumbling out. The important point is to get the ideas onto the page and to let the mind's natural creativity and self-organisation run its course, until you've emptied your mind. Later you can edit the ideas, discarding those that are not strictly relevant to the question.

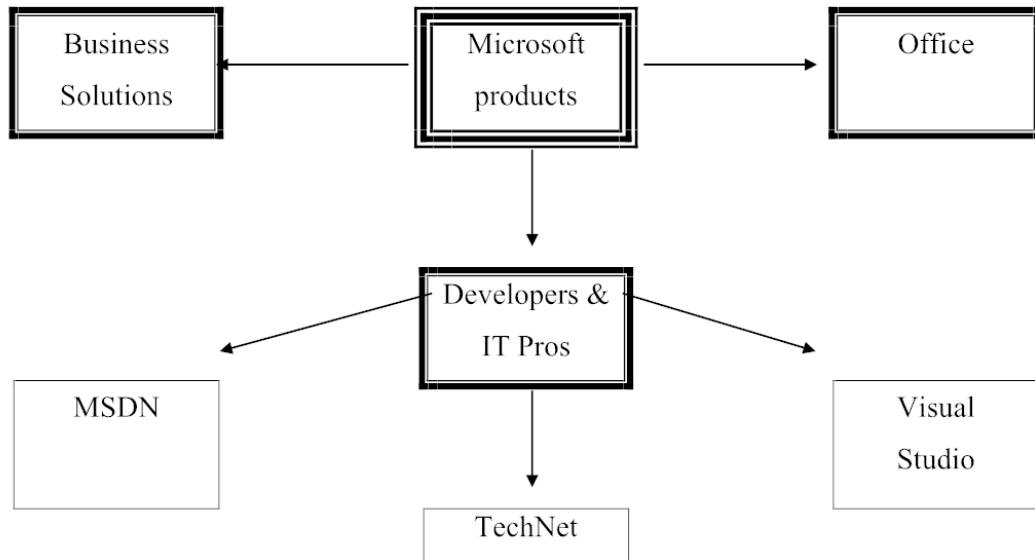
One of the most effective methods for the brainstorming stage is the method known as 'pattern notes'. Rather than starting at the top of the page and working down in a linear form in sentences or lists, you start from the centre with the title of the essay and branch out with your analysis of concepts or other ideas as they form in your mind.

The advantage of this method is that it allows you to be much more creative, because it leaves the mind as free as possible to analyse concepts, make connections and contrasts, and to pursue trains of thought. As you're restricted to using just single words or simple phrases, you're not trapped in the unnecessary task of constructing complete sentences. Most of us are familiar with the frustration of trying to catch the wealth of ideas the mind throws up, while at the same time struggling to write down the sentences they're entangled in. As a result we see exciting ideas come and go without ever being able to record them quickly enough.

The point is that the mind can work so much faster than we can write, so we need a system that can catch all the ideas it can throw up, and give us the freedom to put them into whatever order or form appears to be right. The conventional linear strategy of taking notes restricts us in both of these ways. Not only does it tie us down to constructing complete sentences, or at least meaningful phrases, which means we lose the ideas as we struggle to find the words, but even more important, we're forced to deal with the ideas in sequence, in one particular order, so that if any ideas come to us out of that sequence, we must discard them and hope we can pick them up later. Sadly, that hope is more often forlorn: when we try to recall the ideas, we just can't.

The same is true when we take linear notes from the books we read. Most of us find that once we've taken the notes we're trapped within the order in which the author has dealt with the ideas and we've noted them. It's not impossible, but it's difficult to escape from this. By contrast, pattern notes give us complete freedom over the final order of our ideas. It's probably best explained by comparing it to the instructions you might get from somebody if you were to ask them the way to a particular road. They would give you a linear list of instructions (e.g. 'First, go to the end of the road, then turn right. When you get to the traffic lights, etc.'). This forces you to follow identically the route they would take themselves. If you don't, you're lost. By contrast, pattern notes are like a copy of a map or the *A to Z* of a large city: you can see clearly the various routes you can take, so you can make your own choices.

So mapping is one of the affective ways to organize your ideas. To make a map use a whole sheet of paper, and write your topic in the middle, with a circle around it. Then put the next idea in a circle above or below your topic, and connect the circles with lines. The lines show that the two ideas are related.



4. Choose one topic from each of three groups. Brainstorm one of the topics (list as many ideas as you can in five minutes), make 'pattern notes' to the second topic (use any resources you can) and map the third topic. Share your notes with partners.

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|
| A. | B. | C. |
| People's needs | Authority | Multimedia |
| Health | Privacy | Gadgets |
| Hobbies | Democracy | New Technologies |
| Traveling | Publicity | World Wide Web |
| Communication | Country | Networks |

Pre-Writing: Using the Right Ability

So far we have seen how important it is to interpret the question carefully, because it tells us the structure our essay should adopt for us to deal relevantly with all the issues it raises. With this clear in our mind we can avoid taking masses of irrelevant notes, which are likely to find their way into our essays, making them irrelevant, shapeless and confusing.

There is one more important thing to take into account: the range of abilities we are expected to use. This is normally made clear through what is known as ‘instructional verbs’. Given below is a list of short definitions of those most frequently found in questions, which should help you avoid the common problems that arise when you overlook or misinterpret them.

Analyse – separate an argument, a theory, or a claim into its elements or component parts; to trace the causes of a particular event; to reveal the general principles underlying phenomena.

Compare – look for similarities and differences between two or more things, problems or arguments. Perhaps, although not always, reach a conclusion about which you think is preferable.

Contrast – set in opposition to each other two or more things, problems or arguments in order to identify clearly their differences and their individual characteristics.

Criticise – identify the weaknesses of certain theories, opinions or claims, and give your judgement about their merit. Support your judgements with a discussion of the evidence and the reasoning involved.

Define – outline the precise meaning of a word or phrase. In some cases it may be necessary or desirable to examine different possible, or often used, definitions.

Describe – give a detailed or graphic account, keeping to the facts or to the impressions that an event had upon you. In history this entails giving a narrative account of the events in the time sequence they occurred.

Discuss – investigate or examine by argument; sift through the arguments and the evidence used to support them, giving reasons for and against both sides; examine the implications. It means playing devil’s advocate by arguing not just for the side of the argument that you support, but for the side with which you may have little sympathy.

Evaluate – make an appraisal of the worth of something, an argument or a set of beliefs, in the light of their truth or usefulness. This does involve making your own value judgements, but not just naked opinion: they must be backed up by argument and justification.

Explain – make plain; interpret and account for the occurrence of a particular event by giving the causes. Unlike the verb ‘to describe’, this does not mean that it is sufficient to describe what happened by giving a narrative of the events. To explain an event is to give the reasons why it occurred, usually involving an analysis of the causes.

Illustrate – explain or clarify something by the use of diagrams, figures or concrete examples.

Interpret – reveal what you believe to be the meaning or significance of something; to make sense of something that might otherwise be unclear, or about which there may be more than one opinion. So usually this involves giving your own judgement.

Justify – show adequate grounds for a decision or a conclusion by supporting it with sufficient evidence and argument; answer the main objections that are likely to be made to it.

Outline – give the main features or the general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and emphasising its structure and arrangement.

Relate – this usually means one of two things. In some questions it means narrate a sequence of events – outline the story of a particular incident. Alternatively, it can mean show how certain things are connected or affect each other, or show to what extent they are alike.

Review – examine closely a subject or a case that has been put forward for a certain proposal or argument. Usually, although not always, this means concluding with your own judgement as to the

strength of the case. However, if it involves examining just a subject or a topic, and not an argument or a proposal, it will mean just examining in some detail all the aspects of the topic.

State – outline briefly and clearly the facts of the situation or a side of an argument. This doesn't call for argument or discussion, just the presentation of the facts or the arguments. Equally it doesn't call for a judgement from you, just reportage.

Summarise – give a clear and concise account of the principal points of a problem or an argument, omitting the details, evidence and examples that may have been given to support the argument or illustrate the problem.

Trace – outline the stages in the development of a particular issue or the history of a topic.

5. *Gather together as many research papers or articles you have ever read or touched upon for your course as you can, at least enough to give you a representative sample.*

For each paper, list the questions in three columns: those that ask for a descriptive and factual answer (the 'what', 'how' and 'describe' type of question); those that ask for an analytical answer (the 'outline', 'analyse', 'compare' and 'contrast' type of question); and those that ask you for a discussion of the issues (the 'criticise', 'evaluate' and 'discuss' type of question).

Once you've done this, calculate the percentage of each type of question on each paper.

STAGE 2

Research

We have now reached the point where we can confidently set about our research. We've interpreted the meaning and implications of the question, in the course of which we've analysed the key concepts involved. From there we've brainstormed the question using our interpretation as our key structure. As a result, we now know two things: what questions we want answered from our research; and what we already know about the topic.

There are three main key skills in research: reading, note-taking and organisation.

It's important to read purposefully: to be clear about why we're reading a particular passage so that we can select the most appropriate reading strategy. Many of us get into the habit of reading every passage word-for-word, regardless of our purpose in reading it, when in fact it might be more efficient to skim or scan it. Adopting a more flexible approach to our reading in this way frees up more of our time, so that we can read around our subject and take on board more ideas and information.

It also gives us more time to process the ideas. We will see how important this is if we are to avoid becoming just 'surface-level processors', reading passively without analysing and structuring what we read, or criticising and evaluating the arguments presented. We will examine the techniques involved in analysing a passage to extract its structure, so that we can recall the arguments, ideas and evidence more effectively. We will also learn the different ways we can improve our ability to criticise and evaluate the arguments we read. In this way we can become 'deep-level processors', actively processing what we read and generating more of our own ideas.

But before you hit the books, a warning! It's all too easy to pick up a pile of books that appear vaguely useful and browse among them. This might be enjoyable, and you might learn something, but it will hardly help you get your essay written. Now that you've interpreted the question and you've brainstormed the issues, you have a number of questions and topics you want to pursue. You are now in a position to ask clear questions as you read the books and the other materials you've decided to use in your research.

Nevertheless, before you begin you need to pin down exactly the sections of each book that are relevant to your research. Very few of the books you use will you read from cover to cover. With this in mind, you need to consult the contents and index pages in order to locate those pages that deal with the questions and issues you're interested in.

To ensure that you're able to do 'deep-level processing', it may be necessary to accept that you need to do two or three readings of the text, particularly if it is technical and closely argued.

Reading for comprehension

In your first reading you might aim just for the lower ability range, for comprehension, just to understand the author's arguments. It may be a subject you've never read about before, or it may include a number of unfamiliar technical terms that you need to think about carefully each time they are used.

Reading for analysis and structure

In the next reading you should be able to analyse the passage into sections and subsections, so that you can see how you're going to organise it in your notes. If the text is not too difficult you may be able to accomplish both of these tasks (comprehension and analysis) in one reading, but always err on the cautious side, don't rush it. Remember, now that you've identified just those few pages that you have to read, rather than the whole book, you can spend more time processing the ideas well.

Reading for criticism and evaluation

The third reading involves criticising and evaluating your authors' arguments. It's clear that in this and the second reading our processing is a lot more active. While in the second we're analysing the passage to take out the structure, in this, the third, we're maintaining a dialogue with the authors, through which we're able to criticise and evaluate their arguments. To help you in this, keep the following sorts of questions in mind as you read.

- Are the arguments consistent or are they contradictory?
- Are they relevant (i.e. do the authors use arguments they know you'll agree with, but which are not relevant to the point they're making)?
- Do they use the same words to mean different things at different stages of the argument (what's known as the fallacy of equivocation)?
- Are there underlying assumptions that they haven't justified?
- Can you detect bias in the argument?
- Do they favour one side of the argument, giving little attention to the side for which they seem to have least sympathy? For example, do they give only those reasons that support their case, omitting those that don't (the fallacy of special pleading)?
- Is the evidence they use relevant?
- Is it strong enough to support their arguments?
- Do they use untypical examples, which they know you will have to agree with, in order to support a difficult or extreme case (what's known as the fallacy of the straw man)?
- Do they draw conclusions from statistics and examples which can't adequately support them?

This sounds like a lot to remember, and it is, so don't try to carry this list along with you as you read. Just remind yourself of it before you begin to criticise and evaluate the text. Having done this two or three times you will find more and more of it sticks and you won't need reminding. Then, after you've finished the passage, go through the list again and check with what you can recall of the text. These are the sort of questions you will be asking in Stage 5 (Revision) about your own essay before you hand it in. So it's a good idea to develop your skills by practising on somebody else first.

One last caution – don't rush into this. You will have to give yourself some breathing space between the second reading and this final evaluative reading. Your mind will need sufficient time to process all the material, preferably overnight, in order for you to see the issues clearly and objectively. If you were to attempt to criticise and evaluate the author's ideas straight after reading them for the structure, your own ideas would be so assimilated into the author's, that you would be left with no room to criticise and assess them. You would probably find very little to disagree with the author about.

Many of the same issues resurface when we consider note-taking. As with reading, we will see that it's important not to tie ourselves to one strategy of note-taking irrespective of the job we have to do. We will see that for different forms of processing there are the most appropriate strategies of note-taking: linear notes for analysis and structure, and pattern notes for criticism and evaluation. Cultivating flexibility in our pattern of study helps us choose the most effective strategy and, as a result, get the most out of our intellectual abilities.

But our problems in note-taking don't end there. The best notes help us structure our own thoughts, so we can recall and use them quickly and accurately, particularly under timed conditions. In this lie many of the most common problems in note-taking, particularly the habit of taking too many notes that obscure the structure, making it difficult to recall. We will exam ways of avoiding this by creating clear uncluttered notes that help us recall even the most complex structures accurately. Given this, and the simple techniques of consolidating notes, we will see how revision for the exam can become a more manageable, less daunting task.

Finally, if our notes are going to help us recall the ideas, arguments and evidence we read, as well as help us to criticise and evaluate an author's arguments, they must be a reflection of our own thinking. We will examine the reasons why many students find it difficult to have ideas of their

own, when they read and take notes from their sources, and how this affects their concentration while they work.

As we've already discovered, our aim here is to identify and extract the hierarchy of ideas, a process which involves selecting and rejecting material according to its relevance and importance. Although by now this sounds obvious, it's surprising how many students neglect it or just do it badly. As with most study skills, few of us are ever shown how best to structure our thoughts on paper. Yet there are simple systems we can all learn. Some students never get beyond the list of isolated points, devoid of all structure. Or, worse still, they rely on the endless sequence of descriptive paragraphs, in which a structure hides buried beneath a plethora of words. This makes it difficult to process ideas even at the simplest level.

Without clear structures we struggle just to recall much more than unrelated scraps of information. As a result students do less well in exams than they could have expected, all because they haven't learnt the skills involved in organising and structuring their understanding.

They sit down to revision with a near hopeless task facing them – mounds of notes, without a structure in sight, beyond the loose list of points. This could be described as the parable of two mental filing systems. One student uses a large brown box, into which she throws all her scraps of paper without any systematic order. Then, when she's confronted with a question in the exam, she plunges her hand deep into the box in the despairing hope that she might find something useful. Sadly, all that she's likely to come up with is something that's, at best, trivial or marginally relevant, but which she's forced to make the most of, because it's all she's got.

On the other hand there is the student who files all of her ideas systematically into a mental filing cabinet, knowing that, when she's presented with a question, she can retrieve from her mind a structure of interlinked relevant arguments backed by quotations and evidence, from which she can develop her ideas confidently. And most of us are quite capable of doing this with considerable skill, if only we know how to.

Linear notes, perhaps, the most familiar and widely used note-taking strategy, because it adapts well to most needs. As we've already seen, at university the exams we prepare ourselves for are designed to assess more than just our comprehension, so notes in the form of a series of short descriptive paragraphs, and even the list, are of little real value. Exams at this level are concerned with a wider range of abilities, including our abilities to discuss, criticise and synthesise arguments and ideas from a variety of sources, to draw connections and contrasts, to evaluate and so on. To do all this requires a much more sophisticated and adaptable strategy that responds well to each new demand. It should promote our abilities, not stunt them by trapping us within a straitjacket.

Linear notes are particularly good at analytical tasks, recording the structure of arguments and passages. As you develop the structure, with each step or indentation you indicate a further breakdown of the argument into subsections. These in turn can be broken down into further subsections. In this way you can represent even the most complex argument in a structure that's quite easy to understand.

Equally important, with clearly defined keywords, highlighted in capital letters or in different colours, it's easy to recall the clusters of ideas and information that these keywords trigger of. In most cases it looks something like the following:

A Heading

1. *Sub-heading*

(a)

(b)

(c)

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

e. g.

(d)

2. *Sub-heading*

(a)

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

97

(b)

(c)

B Heading

1. *Sub-heading*

(a)

(b)

(i)

(ii)

(c)

(i)

(ii)

e. g.

d)

2. *Sub-heading*

3. *Sub-heading*

(a)

(b)

(c)

Needless to say, if we are to make all these successfully, we will have to make sure we organise our work in the most effective way. In the final chapters of this stage we will look at how to reorganise our retrieval system to tap into our own ideas and to pick up material wherever and whenever it appears. We will also examine the way we organize our time and the problems that can arise if we fail to do it effectively. Indeed, if we ignore either of these, we make it difficult for ourselves to get the most out of our abilities and to process our ideas well. Even though most of us routinely ignore it, organisation is the one aspect of our pattern of study that can produce almost immediate improvements in our work.

Here are a number of things you can do to make sure your structure works:

Keywords – choose sharp, memorable words to key off the points in your structure. In the notes on the Rise of Nazism the three main points are not difficult to remember, particularly with keywords, like ‘Humiliation’, ‘Ruins’ and the alliteration of ‘Weakness of Weimar’. But you need other words to key off the subsections, although you don’t need them for every step and every subsection in the notes.

Keying off the main points and the principal subsections will trigger off the rest. Don’t doubt yourself on this, it will – try it. So just choose sharp, memorable words for the principal subsections, words like ‘Treaty of Versailles’, ‘Allies’, ‘Weaken Germany’, ‘Revenge’, ‘Reparations’, ‘Economic slump’, ‘Middle class’, ‘Discontented’ and so on. They don’t have to be snappy and bright, just memorable.

Capitalisation – having chosen your keywords they must stand out, so you can see at a glance the structure of your notes. It’s no good having a structure if it can’t be seen beneath the undergrowth of words. Some people choose to put all their keywords into capitals.

Colour – if you don’t think this is sufficiently prominent, put your keywords in different colours. This doesn’t have to be too fussy – you’re not creating a piece of modern art – but it’s not

too much of a bureaucratic task to get into the habit of working with two pens of different colours, one for picking out the keywords and the other for the rest. You will be surprised just how well this works. It's not unusual to come across people who can still visualise accurately in their mind's eye pages of notes they took when they were studying for their school-leaving exams many years ago.

Gaps – if the structure is to stand out, your notes must not appear too crowded. To avoid this, leave plenty of gaps between your points. This also gives you the opportunity to add other related things as you come across them in your reading, although you need to do this in such a way as to avoid overcrowding.

Abbreviations – most of us use these, indeed we all tend to create our own personalised abbreviations for those words we seem to use most often. Even so, it's still surprising how many students look with openmouthed astonishment when you list the standard abbreviations, like the following:

Therefore _
Because _
Leads to A
Increase/decrease \neq O
Greater than/smaller than $><$
Would/should wld/shld
Would be, should be w/be, sh/be
Equivalent =
Not π
Parallel lll

Nevertheless, as your tutors have no doubt told you, although these abbreviations are indispensable in compiling clear, concise notes, they shouldn't find their way into the final draft of your essay.

If you've left sufficient time between reading the text the first time for comprehension, and then reading it for structure, you're more likely to have a clear, uncluttered set of notes free from all unnecessary material.

You'll certainly be free of that most time-consuming of activities, taking notes on notes, which many of us are forced to do because our notes are not concise enough in the first place.

Unfortunately, there are many students, even at university, who convince themselves that this is a valuable thing to do; that it's a way of learning their notes if they rewrite them more concisely. They seem to believe that by committing their notes to paper, they're committing them to their minds, whereas, in fact, they're doing anything but that.

Taking notes can be a pleasant substitute for thinking. It's something we can do on auto-pilot. In fact it can be one of the most relaxing parts of our pattern of study. While we are placing few demands on our mind, it can go off to consider more pleasant things, like the plans for the weekend, or reminiscences about last year's holiday.

This underlines the main problem in note-taking: most of us find it difficult to be brief. While we have our minds on auto-pilot we're able to convince ourselves that almost every point, however insignificant, is vitally important to our future understanding. Not surprisingly then, we end up omitting very little, obscuring the structure so that when we come to revision we have to start taking notes on our own notes.

But there's another reason that's more difficult to tackle. Most of us, at times, doubt our ability to remember details, so we allow ourselves to be seduced into recording things that 'might' be useful in the future.

Inevitably, this results in masses of notes that obscure the main structure, which, as we've seen, is the only means by which we can recall them in the first place.

To avoid this we need to remind ourselves constantly of two things: first, that almost certainly we have better memories than we think; and secondly, that we're not producing encyclopaedic accounts of the subject, in which we record every known fact. To be of any use, notes should be an accurate record of *our* understanding, of *our* thinking, not someone else's.

We can easily lose sight of this when we try to take notes while we're reading the text for the first time or straight after we've read it. We lose our objectivity: all we can see is the author's ideas and opinions, not our own. We need to give our minds time to digest the ideas and selforganise.

You will find that if you leave time between reading and noting, your mind will have created its own structures out of the ideas it has taken from the text. Then, after we've allowed our minds sufficient time to do this, we need to organise ourselves to tap into it, to get our own understanding down on paper, without using the text. Otherwise the author will hijack our thinking and we'll simply copy from the text without thought. Remember, you can always go back to check on details afterwards.

6. Read the following passage, first for comprehension, and then for analysis and structure. Leave it for a few hours, even a day or so, then go back to it to take out the structure in normal linear notes.

But remember, your aim is to take out the hierarchy of points, the main sections and the way they break down into subsections. Cut out as much unnecessary detail as you can. Where there are examples or explanations, and you think you might need reminding of them, briefly note them in one or two words to act as a trigger for your memory, and nothing more. Choose words or succinct phrases that you know will make the connections to the information you want.

Keep in mind that the most important part of this exercise is to have a clear, uncluttered model of the passage. You will not achieve this if you allow yourself to be tempted into noting unnecessary detail. Your mind will have self-organised in the interval between reading and noting, producing a very clear structure of the passage in your subconscious, so you must develop the skills to tap into this to get an accurate picture of it clearly and simply on paper.

You won't do this if you continually tell yourself that you must note this and this and this, otherwise you're bound to forget them. Don't make it difficult for your mind by doubting its capacity to remember details that don't need to be noted.

Ethics in Business

Over recent years we have seen an unprecedented growth in the numbers of students around the world taking courses in professional and business ethics. Research suggests that in the USA, UK and Canada alone there are at least three million students engaged in philosophy modules as part of their professional degree courses, most of which are in ethics.

More than half of the leading international business schools now feature courses dealing with ethics and corporate responsibility as part of their compulsory syllabuses, according to recent research by the World Resources Institute and the Aspen Institute. In their 'Beyond Grey Pinstripes', a biennial ranking of international business schools, the 91 accredited schools featured in their 2005 report offer 1,074 such courses. And the number of schools requiring students to take them as part of their Individual programmes rose from 34 % in 2001 to 54 % in 2005. Indeed, the top ten schools worldwide each offer around 50 courses.

At the London Business School, ranked by the Financial Times, as the best in Europe, all MBA students are required to take a course in business ethics and responsibility. De Montfort University in Leicester has recently set up an MSc in International Business and Corporate Social Responsibility. The Said Business School at the University of Oxford and the Achilles Group have recently announced the creation of 'The Oxford Achilles Working Group on Corporate Social Responsibility': an initiative designed to bring intelligent debate and practical recommendations to what they describe as an important but underdeveloped field of corporate life.

In the USA a number of business schools have set up specialist centres to meet the increasing demand for ethics-related courses. Georgetown University, for example, established a Business Ethics

Institute in 2000 to stimulate empirical and applied research into the issues involved. Boston College has established five distinct institutes, with themes ranging from corporate citizenship and responsible investment to work-life balance and ethical leadership.

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