



# Writing a good essay

Academic Skills Centre



# A good academic essay

- fully addresses the **question** which was asked;
- is based on **critical reading and thinking** of a wide range of academic resources;
- reflects depth of **knowledge** and **understanding** of the subject being studied;
- has a convincing **argument** supported by sufficient, appropriate **evidence**;
- contains good illustrative **examples**;
- follows a clear, logical **structure**;
- uses appropriate **referencing** where it is required;
- is **professionally presented**.



# 10 steps for writing an academic essay

1. Understand the assignment task
2. Research the topic and take effective notes
3. Establish a position
4. Develop a plan
5. Do the math
6. Draw up a detailed outline
7. Write effective paragraphs
8. Reference all your sources
9. Carefully edit your work
10. Check the marking criteria



# 1. Understand the assignment task

Consider the following question:

***In Australia, a person's social class impacts their life chances. Critically evaluate this statement.***



# 1. Understand the assignment task

Consider the following question:

***In Australia, a person's social class impacts their life chances. Critically evaluate this statement.***



# 1. Understand the assignment task

Consider the following question:

***In Australia, a person's social class impacts their life chances. Critically evaluate this statement.***



## 2. Research the topic and take effective notes

*In Australia, a person's social class impacts their life chances. Critically evaluate this statement.*

|                         | <b>Evidence</b>   | <b>Ref.</b>                          |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Evidence for</i>     | ▪ Poor areas are associated with higher unemployment        | Brown, 2008: 72                      |
|                         | ▪ Less opportunity for quality education                    | Stark, 2009:8                        |
|                         | ▪ Less tertiary ed. access                                  | Stark, 2009: 14                      |
|                         | ▪ Poorer healthcare services                                | Brown, 2008: 48<br>Touresse, 2007: 6 |
|                         | ▪ lower life expectancy                                     |                                      |
| <i>Evidence against</i> | ▪ many successful people have come from the lower class . . | Williams, 2010: 9                    |



Perhaps social class *impacts opportunities*, but it's not necessarily a determinant; social class can be overcome.....but how difficult is this.....?





What do you think  
about the topic?

While you plan...  
research...  
read...

### 3. Establish a position

- Make clear stance, that you defend with evidence and argument
- Constantly note your own thoughts in relation to what you are reading and the assignment task

**These *reactions* to what you engage with are the emergence of your own critical position**



### 3. Establish a position

Determine a thesis

**A thesis statement  
is one or two  
sentences  
summarising  
your position  
clearly**

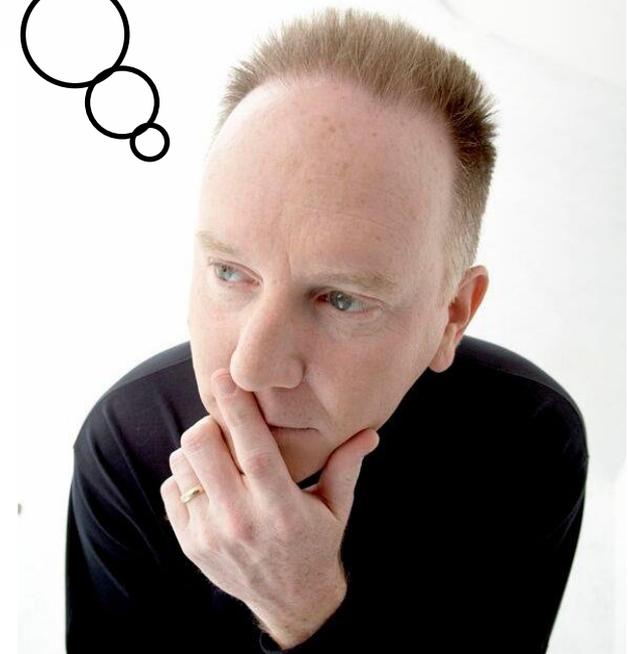
While social class cannot entirely determine the outcomes of a person's life in Australia, it does affect citizen's access to certain 'life-improving' services, such as education and healthcare.



**Don't think about  
order of  
ideas, yet.**

**Brainstorm as  
many  
facets of  
the  
problem  
as you  
can.**

**Also, think about  
what  
evidence  
and  
resources  
you'll need  
to support  
your  
argument.**





## 4. Develop a plan

- **Brainstorm**

List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper

- **Organise**

Group related ideas together

- **Order**

Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete

- **Label**

Create main and sub-headings

# 4. Develop a plan



## No: class does not affect life chances

- Individual cases (evidence anecdotal)
- Relies upon overcoming odds

***In Australia, a person's social class impacts their life chances. Critically evaluate this statement.***



## What is social class?

- Use Marx or Weber



## What are life chances?

- Education
- Better jobs?
- Employment in general
- Healthcare
- Mental Health?



## Yes: class affects life chances

Statistics re:

- Life expectancy
- Year 12 completions
  - Tertiary education
- Average income...?
  - Life quality (mental health, happiness, etc.)



## 5. Do the math

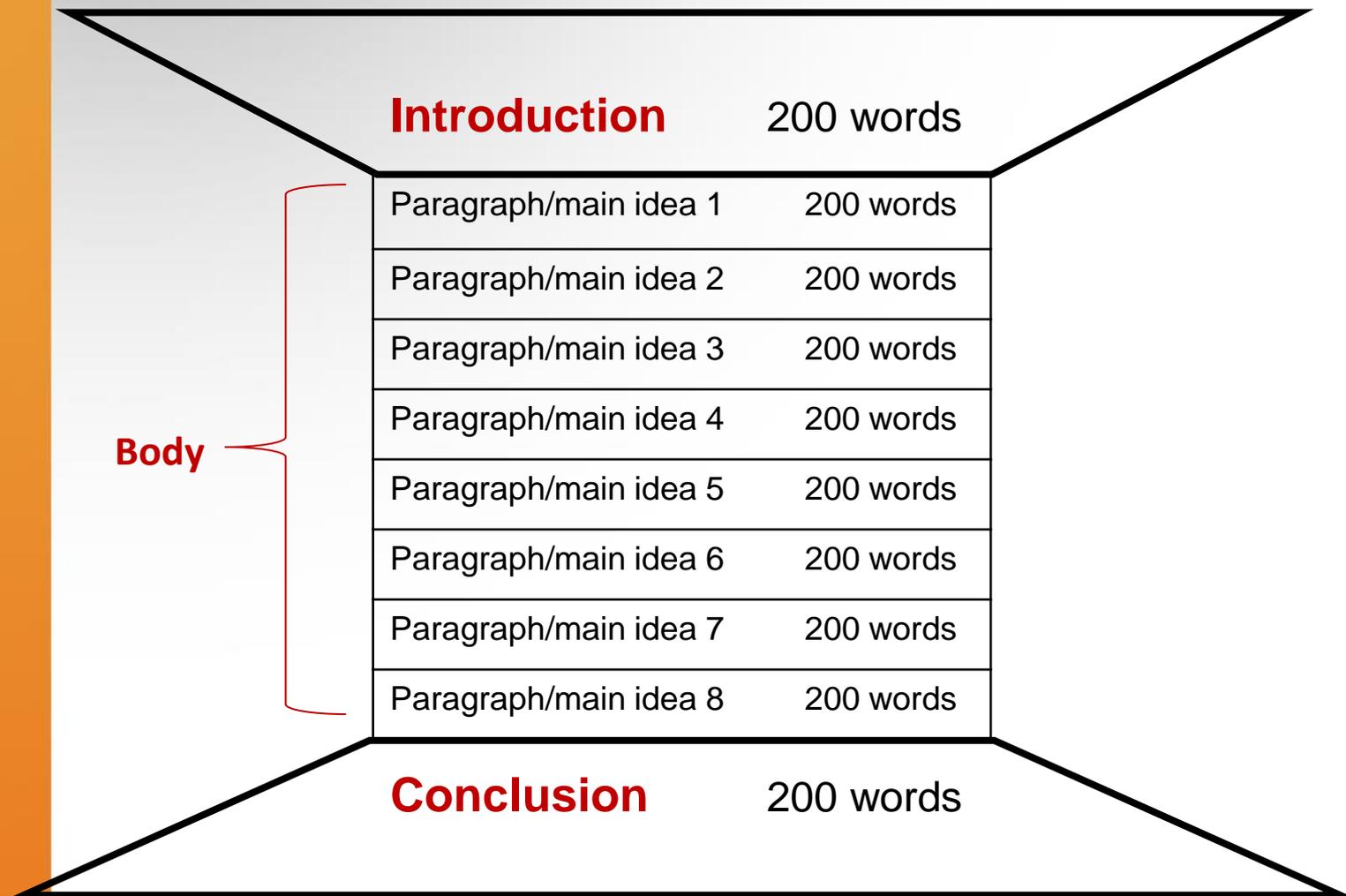
- Word limit: **2000**  
Words per paragraph: **200**
- Number of *academic* paragraphs = **10**
- Paragraph 1 = introduction  
Paragraph 10 = conclusion  
Therefore **8 = body paragraphs**

This means, I can make 8 points in order to explain the topic and 'prove' the thesis

**What are those points going to be?**



# Essay Structure



Total: 2,000 words





# Return to your plan

How can I divide the  
topics into paragraphs?





Your essay is a  
series of  
argumentative  
blocks

## 6. Draw up a detailed outline



1. *Introduction*
2. Define social class
3. Explain “life chances” and how they are defined
4. Discuss evidence that suggests social class has little bearing on life chances
5. Critique / evaluate that evidence
6. Discuss the effect of social class on education
7. Discuss the effect of social class on employment quantity and quality
8. Discuss the effect of social class on healthcare
9. Discuss the effect of social class on mental health/happiness/satisfaction
10. *Conclusion*





## 6. Draw up a detailed outline



### Paragraph 4

Discuss evidence that suggests social class has little bearing on life chances

- Individual cases of great success despite class position

(Pete & Firth, 2002; Taylor, Swanson & Rudd, 2007)

### Paragraph 5

Critique / evaluate that evidence

- Evidence is anecdotal and not representative
- Tales are used as an ideological tool to suggest that success is based entirely on individual effort (Althusser, 1991; Zizek, 2006)
- Relies on individuals overcoming great odds
- The fact that these individuals “defy the odds” suggests that for most, success like this is unattainable
- Statistics are a more effective way of measuring the impact of class on certain life chances (Dewey & Townsend, 2004)

### Paragraph 6

Discuss the effect of social class on education

- Educational resources are lacking in some schools ABS
- Other social and financial pressures compete with education (Dewey & Townsend, 2004; Taylor, Swanson & Rudd, 2007)
- School completion rates ABS
- University attendance rates ABS

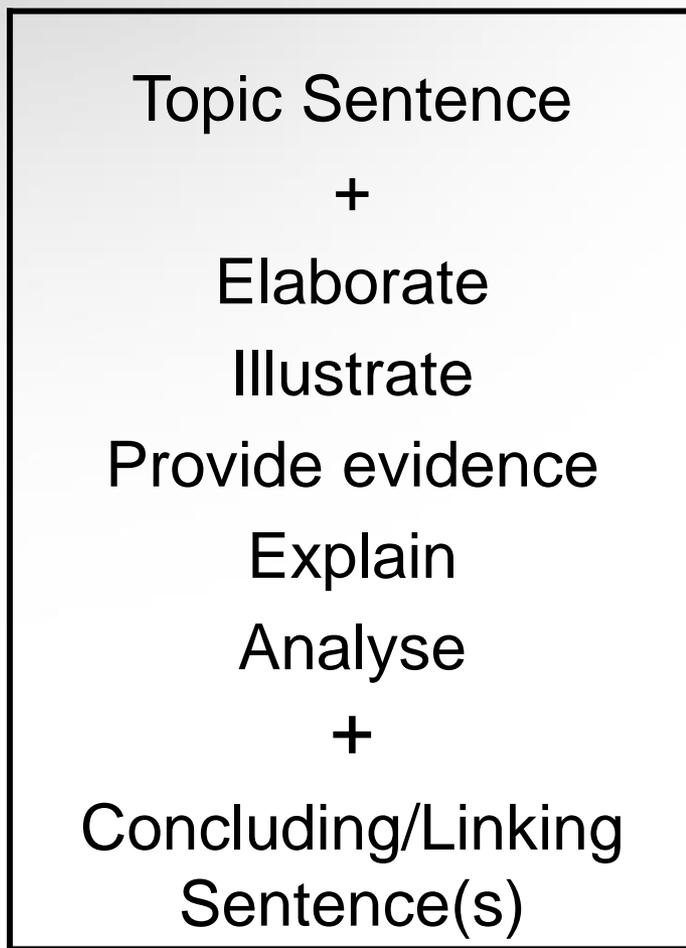


# A closer look at paragraphs

Introduce the main  
idea of the  
paragraph

Reference all ideas  
sourced from other  
texts

Clarify the  
relevance of the  
main point of the  
paragraph and link  
it back to overall  
topic and the next  
paragraph



Introduction

Body

Conclusion



# A sample paragraph



**Topic  
Sentence/s**

**Discussion of  
evidence**

**Clinching  
sentence**

Two key theories emerge as the most widely accepted and adapted in examining class inequalities: those by Karl Marx and Max Weber. Karl Marx was amongst the first to define social class in relation to the means of production. Marx's theories identified two distinct classes, the self-employed—or bourgeoisie, in Marxist terms—who owned their own business or some means of generating income from which they lived off, or the working class—proletariat—who work for a wage or salary (Western 2000, p.70). Max Weber's class analysis elaborates on this. Like Marx, Weber's social classes are defined according to employment, but of equal importance to Weber was a person's status and power. Differing from Marx's rigid two-class theory, Weber instead introduced the concept of social stratification. In this context, Marx's working and ruling classes simply form the two poles of Weber's wider social spectrum (Earle & Fopp 1999, p.131). This essay will utilise Weber's concept of social stratification to discuss the notion of social class.



## 7. Write effective paragraphs

A paragraph is a **miniature essay** that is self-contained and follows the principles of:

- **Unity** – each sentence in the paragraph relates to the topic sentence (only one main point).
- **Coherence** – all sentences in a paragraph connect together smoothly and logically.
- **Clear Order** - paragraphs should have an orderly arrangement of ideas that support the topic sentence.
- **Completeness** – the main point is fully illustrated and developed with sufficient evidence.



# The introduction

The introduction is roughly 10% of the total word count

- Provides background information to establish the context
  - Why is your analysis relevant?
  - Why should the reader keep reading?
- Defines important terms, central issue(s) and key concepts
- Introduces the main argument of the essay in the form of a thesis statement
  - What do you plan to discuss
  - What is your position?
- Indicates what approaches / analytical frameworks you will use to address the question (essay map)
  - How are you going to address the topic?



# The conclusion

- Is a logical ending to what has been previously been discussed.
- Summarizes and synthesizes the main points from the body
- Refers the reader back to the main argument or thesis from your introduction
- Clearly signals that the essay is finished and leaves a clear impression that the purpose of the essay has been achieved
- Recommends, predicts or provides a solution and makes a final statement about the topic and leaves the reader with something to think about

**The conclusion  
is roughly 10%  
of the total  
word count**



# The Essay Structure

Your essay is a  
series of  
argumentative  
blocks

1. *Introduction*
2. Define social class
3. Explain “life chances” and how they are defined
4. Discuss evidence that suggests social class has little bearing on life chances
5. Critique / evaluate that evidence
6. Discuss the effect of social class on education
7. Discuss the effect of social class on employment quantity and quality
8. Discuss the effect of social class on healthcare
9. Discuss the effect of social class on mental health/happiness/satisfaction
10. *Conclusion*





## 8. Reference all your sources

- Check the referencing style required
- Follow the appropriate referencing guide,  
<http://canberra.libguides.com/referencing>
- Use correct in-text references
- Compile a reference list



## 9. Carefully proofread your work

- Follow the required presentation format
- Check that your assignment follows a clear and logical structure
- Check your grammar, spelling and punctuation
- Check your in-text references match your reference list



# 10. Always check the marking criteria

## Introduction to Marketing sample marking criteria

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 5%  | Introduction  |
| 10% | Conclusion  |
| 10% | Presentation, style and layout and accuracy of sourcing, citation and referencing           |
| 25% | Uses a range of academic resources to illustrate issues in contemporary management          |
| 25% | Critically evaluates principal historical and current approaches to the study of management |
| 25% | Outlines the tasks and competencies required in the practice of management                  |



# A good academic essay

- fully addresses the **question** which was asked;
- is based on **critical reading and thinking** of a wide range of academic resources;
- reflects depth of **knowledge** and **understanding** of the subject being studied;
- has a convincing **argument** supported by sufficient, appropriate **evidence**;
- contains good illustrative **examples**;
- follows a clear, logical **structure**;
- uses appropriate **referencing** where it is required;
- is **professionally presented**.



To get more  
help visit  
the ASC



☎ | 02 6201 2205  
✉ | [asc@canberra.edu.au](mailto:asc@canberra.edu.au)  
✉ | Building 8, Library

**Workshops:** For details and registration,

<http://www.canberra.edu.au/library/research-gateway/research-skills-training>

**Individual consultations:** 30 minute consultations, Monday to Friday

**Drop-in Sessions:** 15 minute consultations

11:30 am-12:30 pm, 2:30 pm-3:30 pm: Library Building 8, Level B:  
1C34: 1:00 pm-2:00 pm Teaching and Learning Commons

**Faculty of ESTEM Drop in**

Thursday 1:00-2:00 pm: Student Resource Centre, Building 6B

**Online Tutoring Service: Smarthinking**

Access Smarthinking from LearnOnline (Moodle) site

**Online resources**

For more information visit,

<http://learnonline.canberra.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2101>