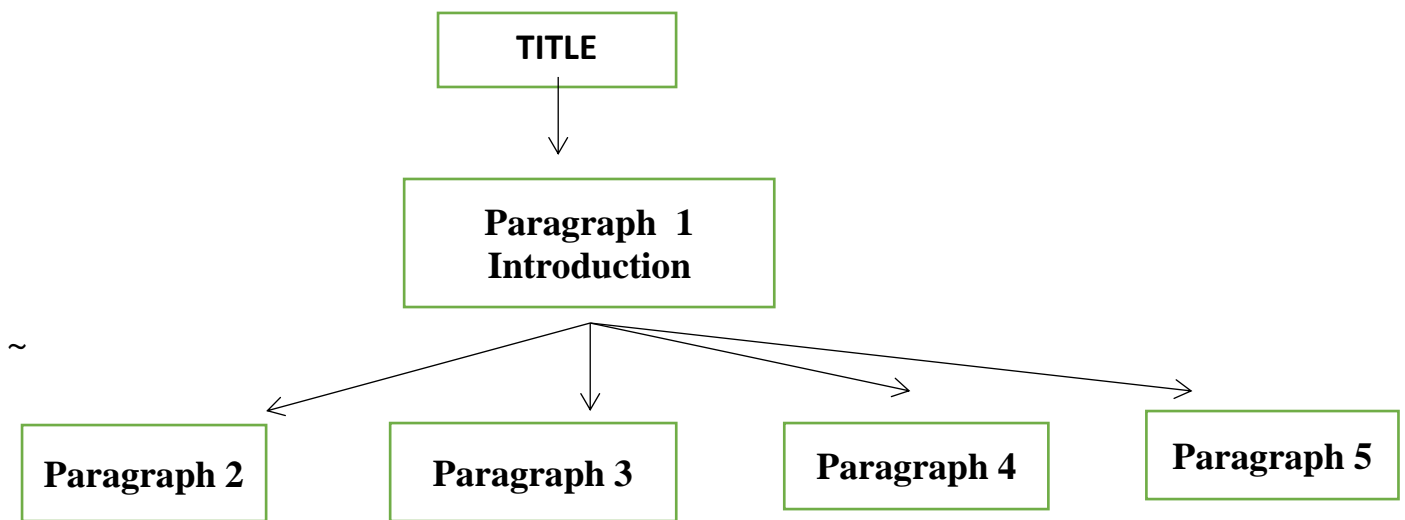


## 3.10 HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY

### 3.10.1 Golden rules

- Use the question to help you organize your answer.
- Check the general topic of the question, usually: a problem, a point of view or a statement with two opposing views.
- Check how many parts there are to the question.
- Make a brief plan. Use the focus points in the question.
- Plan to write about five paragraphs. Keep this plan in mind:



- Make very brief notes about what you are going to write for each paragraph - one idea for each paragraph is enough.
- Aim to write around 270 words.
- Work out how many lines 250 words are in your handwriting, e.g. if you write about ten words per line, then you will need to produce at least 25 lines.
- Spend no more than five minutes analysing the question and planning.

### 3.10.2 Analysing the essay questions and understanding the rubric

- Prepare for understanding the questions by looking at the various books available.
- Familiarize yourself with the basic structure of the essay question and the rubric.
- The essay question usually contains a statement which describes a general situation followed by specific points to write about.
- The general statement can present a problem, e.g. *Stress in modern life is increasing*. This may then be followed by questions like *What do you think are the main causes of this? What possible solutions can you suggest?*
- Your answer should then be organized around the main causes and then the solutions. In each you case you need to give reasons and support with examples. Remember that you also need to give your opinion.
- The organization of the question shows you the organization of your essay. Do not try to contradict it or to be overly clever.
- Try to analyse questions by concentrating first on the organizing or words (causes,

effects, solutions, etc) that are contained in the question.

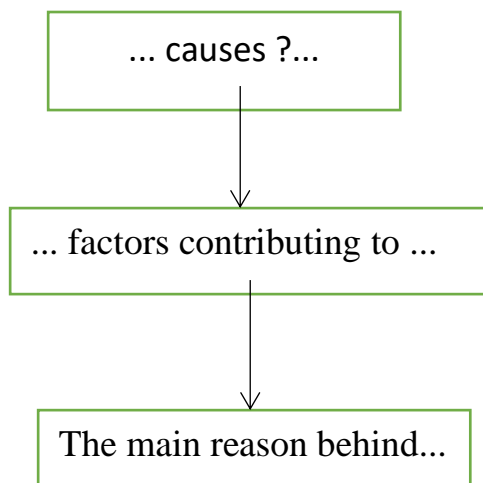
- Make lists of the common words used. Look at Reading, Matching sentences/phrases to paragraphs page 14 and compare the words used there.
- If you are asked to give your opinion about a point of view, the common instructions used are: To what extent do you agree (or disagree)? How far do you agree (or disagree)? What is your opinion? Note that these may be combined with questions about causes etc.
- Note that when you are asked just *To what extent do you agree?* It means that you can disagree!

### 3.10.3 How to write the introduction

- Keep the introduction short.
- Write no more than two or three sentences - about 30 words.
- Connect your introduction and title. Write a general statement relating to the topic. Then write a sentence which contains the parts of the questions you are asked about: ... *factors contributing to ... etc.*
- Where you can, use synonyms to rephrase the question.
- Cross out any notes in the plan you made.
- Ignore what other people are doing in the examination room .
- Remember that quality is better than quantity. Do not panic if other people are writing more than you .

### 3.10.4 How to write a paragraph

- Write in stages.
- To connect the paragraph to the introduction, write a statement with a focus word, e.g. *The main cause/factor is ...* Alternatively, you can just state the cause or begin to explain the situation.



- As a rough guide, write about 75/80 words for each paragraph - about 7/8 lines if you write 10 words per line.
- Mark this on the answer sheet and write towards this mark. Repeat this for the paragraphs.

- As you write, use a pencil, but try not to rub out corrections or changes, as this wastes a lot of time. You also stop the thread of your writing. Cross out any changes with one line. Write above if you have space. Only rub out the text you want to change if you don't have space to write above.

### 3.10.5 How to organize a paragraph

- Improve your organization and you will make fewer mistakes. You then have more time to concentrate on the grammar, vocabulary and spelling.
- Have an aim of how much you want to write for each paragraph.
- For 75/80 words, aim to write about four to seven sentences of varying length.
- Make sure each paragraph is connected with the previous one, as you are marked according to how you organize each paragraph.
- You only need to use a limited range of sentence/clause types to write effectively.
- These types of sentences/clauses fit together in common combinations. For example, what would you write after a *measure* sentence? You could write a *result* or a *reason* sentence.
- Think about how you can combine two or more within sentences and as separate sentences. Don't think about the grammar or vocabulary. Think about an idea and then what functions you would need to explain and support it.
- As you write a paragraph, it will tend to move from general to specific.

Here is a list of the most common types of sentences and clauses you can use to guide you as you write:

- focus statement	- contrast
- explanation	- additional information
- general example	- opinion
- specific example	- fact
- result	- improbability
- reason	- cause
- proposal	- effect
- advantage	- consequence
- possibility	- purpose/aim
- probability	
- measure	
- condition	

### 3.10.6 How to speed up your writing and make it more flexible

- Start your paragraph with a general statement and then support and explain it.
- Make sure that you do not write a series of general statements.
- When you start to write, develop your main idea by asking yourself questions to guide you. Use the list of functions above. For example:

- |                                  |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| - What is my focus statement?    | <i>The main measure is ...</i>    |
| - What do I mean by this?        | <i>By this I mean ...</i>         |
| - What is the result of this?    | <i>This will ...</i>              |
| - Can I give a specific result?  | <i>First of all, it will ...</i>  |
| - Can I give a general example?  | <i>For example at the moment,</i> |
| - Can I give a specific example? | <i>However, ... could ...</i>     |

How you combine them is up to you, as long as they make sense.

- Practise combining the functions in different ways.
- Widen the range of sentence types that you use. For example, think of sentences in pairs. Then think what would come after the second function in the pair and so on. Practise this until it becomes a fluid and automatic technique.
- The more organized you are in your writing, the more fluent and flexible you will be. So make sure you know and can use a wide range of connections and functions.
- The more organized you are, the fewer mistakes you will make. If you do not have to think about the organization of a question in the exam, you will be able to concentrate on avoiding repetition and expressing your ideas.
- Mark out the end of each paragraph before you write an essay and aim for that point. It helps you to focus your ideas and stops you from rambling.
- Revise efficiently: what you know about introductions; what common sentence functions you use; what common connecting words and phrases you know for *but*, *and*, *so*, etc. This will show you what you know and what you don't know. It will help you organize your thoughts and increase your confidence and hence your speed.
- Above all know yourself, your strengths and your limitations and your common mistakes. Then push your limitations and correct your mistakes.

### 3.10.7 Common mini sequences of functions

- As you become more confident you can build these sequences and as you write and learn to combine in whatever way suits you.
  - measure/result/reason; general example; specific example
  - condition (if/unless); result; real example
  - problem; cause; solution; reason; general and specific example
  - opinion; explanation; reason; general example; specific example; my opinion
- Try and think about these sequences without writing them down. Try to combine and recombine.
- Developing your flexibility helps develop the fluency in connecting text and prevents over-generalizing.
- The following checklists are only guidelines and can be adapted in many different ways. You can combine information in endless different ways.
- You can take parts from one checklist and add them to another.

<b>Checklist 1</b>	<b>Checklist 2</b>
statemen / focus explanation example reason example result conclusion	statemen / focus - specific measure result explanation by examples real example - example of what is already happening somewhere now hypothetical example - example of what you think could happen if the measure were adopted conclusion

<b>Checklist 3: Measure</b>	<b>Checklist 4: Cause/effect</b>
statemen / focus - specific measure general result / benefit specific result / benefit accompanying result reservation: <i>Having said that however, ...</i> additional evidence/reason general conclusion - <i>So ...</i> own conclusion - <i>Nevertheless ...</i>	statemen / focus - problem explanation by examples effect 1 effect 2 solution : real example - example of what is already happening somewhere now solution: hypothetical example - example of what you think could happen conclusion

### 3.10.8 How to express your opinion

- There are many ways to express your opinion. If you find it difficult, use the frame below to check and guide.
- Practise writing your own statements of opinion . Then practise supporting them. Use *reasons, results, explanation, contrast, effect, condition, etc.*
- Each time you write a sentence, qualify what you have said.

<b>Checklist 5:</b>
<b>Opinion</b>
state your opinion about a situation/problem explanation - general example: <i>Every year / In many countries ... , In the past ... , Now ... , etc.</i> specific example: <i>for example, etc.</i> specific example: <i>moreover. etc.</i> suggestion : <i>should/could ...</i> counterargument: <i>However. some people ...</i>

restate opinion: *Nevertheless, I feel ...*

### **Opinion expressions**

*I think/feel/ believe ...*

*Personally I feel ...*

*As far as I am concerned, ...*

*From my point of view, ...*

Don't overuse these. Make a statement of opinion .

#### 3.10.9 How to link your sentence

- Below are common words and phrases you know, but which you often forget to use when linking your writing. Check how they are used.
- Match the expressions below with the function checklist.
- While practising for the exam, try to use these expressions.
- Before you write and before the exam, read through the expressions again.
- Avoid overusing connecting words, especially too many addition words.
- Revision tip: On a blank sheet of paper, write addition, comparison, etc. at the top of the page and then list the words you remember.

##### 1. Addition

- Adverbs: *moreover, what is more, furthermore, further. in addition.(to that), additionally, likewise, similarly, besides, equally, as well as, also, on top of that*
- Conjunctions: *and, which/that/whose, etc. for explanation/adding additional information*

##### 2. Condition

- Conjunctions: *if, unless, whether. on condition that, provided that supposing, as/so, long as, otherwise*

##### 3. Examples

- Adverbs: *for example, for instance, such as, as, like*
- Expressions: *take ... for example, a (very) good example/the best example, in many countries/every year/now/in the past, etc.*

##### 4. Reason/Cause

- Conjunctions: *because, as, since, for*
- ing (present) ... *knowing I'd be late, ...*
- ed (past) ... *warned about the problem ...*

##### 5. Concession and contrast

- Adverbs: *however. nevertheless, though, even so, but, (and) yet*
- Conjunctions: *although, even though, though, while*
- Prepositions: *despite/in spite of (the fact that)*

##### 6. Result

- Adverbs: *as a result, as a consequence, consequently, accordingly, therefore, so, on that account, for that reason*
- Conjunctions: *and, so, so that, so + adjective that*
- Other forms: *-ing, which ... this will ...*

#### 1. Manner

- Conjunctions: *as, as if*

#### 2. Time

- Conjunctions: *as, as soon as, after, before, since, until, when, whenever*

#### 3. Purpose

- Adverbs: *so*
- Conjunctions: *so, so that, to, in order (not) to, in order that, so as (not) to*

#### 4. Making generalizations

- Adverbs: *generally speaking, overall, on the whole, in general, by and large*

#### 5. Conclusion

- Adverbs: *hence, thus, therefore, consequently*
- Explanation: *by this I mean, which, this*

- Practise making your own checklists.

### 3.10.10 General writing hints

Writing in English follows some basic principles:

- The basic pattern of an English sentence is: Subject / Verb / Object.
- The connecting and reference words generally come at the beginning of the sentences and/or clauses: words like *moreover / he / they / such / this / these / another measure is, etc.*
- English sentences are organized around the principle of old and new information. The reference words refer to the old information and the new idea in the sentence is generally at the end. For example: *An old man entered a shop. The shop had a wide range of food. The food...* Sometimes the structure is reversed for emphasis. Compare: *Another measure is educating the general public.* (old/new information) with: *Educating the general public is another measure.* (new/old information). The phrase: *There is / are*, is used to introduce new ideas: *There will be many implications if this policy is introduced.*
- Always check your work as you write. Look backwards as well as forwards.
- Remember what you bring to the writing when you do the exam. Your mind is not a blank sheet !

### 3.10.11 Checking your writing efficiently

- Read this section before and after you write and keep it in mind.

- Leave yourself 3-5 minutes to check your writing.
- Be aware of the mistakes you usually make and look out for these. It can make a difference of a score band!
- As it is difficult to check for all mistakes at one time, check for one type of mistake at a time.
- Check your spelling first. Scan the text backwards rather than forwards. Alternatively scan at random, jumping from one paragraph to another. You will see mistakes quicker as you are not engaging with meaning, but looking at word pictures. You may not spot all the mistakes, but you will get quite a few.
- Scan quickly the beginning of each sentence and the beginning of each paragraph. Check if the linking words, the reference words or synonyms you use are correct.
- Check the verbs - tense? singular/plural agreement? correct form of the verb ?
- Check that your connecting linking words are correct and that you have not repeated any of them .
- If you tend to make other mistakes, like misusing the articles, study them and look for them in particular.
- Practise so that you can do these all at the same time while going through the text from the beginning.

### 3.10.12 Best Answer

You must write about 250 words and this should be completed in approximately 40 minutes.

To write the perfect answer and get the highest score possible, you need to write quickly but also keep calm and focussed on writing your answer.

In all parts of the exam, you should try to show that you have a broad knowledge of English vocabulary, ensure that you write with correct spelling and avoid silly little grammar mistakes.

The essay type questions are usually asking about some general thing in society. The topic could be education, health, age, gender roles, the youth, the environment... basically anything.

Therefore, you cannot learn an amazing sentence that you can insert into an essay, as it is very unlikely that you will be able to use it in your specific question that you have on the day of your test.

However, there is a system to use that gives you a great balanced structure which will help you get a good mark for answering the question... which is after all the whole point of this task - answer the question! Lots of examinees do not actually do this, as they are trying to impress the examiner with big posh words and forget to focus on actually giving a point of view and supporting that opinion with good examples and clear thought.

Read and follow these steps to give your best answer:

- STEP 1: INTRODUCTION. Repeat the question in your own words. ...
- STEP 2: Support your opinion. Now that you have given your opinion, you need to back it up. ...
- STEP 3: Give the other side of the argument. ...



## STEP 4: Conclusion - Summarise your opinion.

### Step 1: introduction

- Repeat the question in your own words.
- In the essay introduction, you should start by repeating the question. This does NOT mean that you should COPY the question.
- You should say the question again, but using different words that mean the same thing (synonyms).
- For example, if your question was something like: *Some people believe that capital punishment should never be used. Others believe that it could be used for the most serious crimes. Discuss both views and give your opinion.*
- Then the opening sentence of your introduction should use synonyms to say the question again in your own words, for example: *It is a commonly held belief that the death penalty is a Draconian penalty and not appropriate in modern society. However, there is also an argument that the most despicable crimes should have this most severe of punishments.*
- Don't worry about the high level of the example sentences above. I am a native English speaker and I am an English teacher, so the sentences should be good, shouldn't they? But, from the example, you can see that it is possible to re-write the question using completely different vocabulary and still retain the original meaning and 'flavour' of the original question.
- Give your opinion
- As soon as you have restated the question, then give your opinion on the subject. This gives the examiner an overview of what is to come in your essay.

It is important to note that it does not matter what your opinion is! There is no right or wrong answer to an essay question. You do NOT have to try and think "What will the examiner think is the right answer here". The examiner is only interested in the level of your English. So just give your first instinct opinion and don't try to out-think yourself.

### Step 2: support your opinion

Now that you have given your opinion, you need to back it up. The best way to do this is to give examples.

You can begin this paragraph with phrases like:

*Personally, I believe that...*

*From my point of view...*

*I am convinced that...*

*In my opinion...*

*In my view...*

So, if your opinion was that you are against capital punishment, then as an example you could write about situations where people have been jailed for life for murder and then decades later they have been released as they were proven to be innocent. The relevant vocabulary here is "a miscarriage of justice".

Your argument would be that when a miscarriage of justice occurs, the prisoner would most likely have faced the death penalty and would have been killed even though

they were innocent.

Another example could be that many murders are committed in 'hot blood' and often as an 'act of passion'... This means that the murder was so angry about something that they were not thinking properly

Step 3: give the other side of the argument

In your next paragraph, you should look at the question from the opposite viewpoint to yours.

This shows the examiner that you have balance in your writing and it is a sign of a good essay.

You can start this paragraph with phrases such as:

*It can also be argued that...*

*Someone who held the opposing view would say that...*

*However, there is also another side to this discussion.*

*In contrast, some people hold the view that...*

Step 4: conclusion - summarise your opinion

To finish off your essay, you need to summarise your whole argument as a conclusion.

Essentially, this means that you give your opinion again that you stated in the introduction.

To prove to the examiner that you have a good command of English vocabulary you should try again to use synonyms and not just copy your previous sentence. Now, you can add your expanded arguments (from step 2) into your opinion.

A conclusion that weighs up the arguments already mentioned is a really good opportunity to use a conditional sentence.

*If capital punishment was reintroduced into society, I do not believe that it would act as a deterrent for heinous crimes. It is my strongly held belief that the death penalty would only result in future miscarriages of justice that serve no purpose in civilised society.*

### 3.10.13 Sample Topics

*You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.*

*Write about the following topic:*

***• It is generally believed that some people are born with certain talents, for instance for sport or music, and others are not. However, it is sometimes claimed that any child can be taught to become a good sports person or musician.***

***Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.***

Give reasons of your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

**• Some people believe that there should be fixed punishments for each type of crime. Others, however, argue that the circumstances of an individual crime, and the motivation for committing it, should always be taken into account when deciding on the punishment.**

***Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.***

**•As most people spend a major part of their adult life at work, job satisfaction is an important element of individual wellbeing.**

***What factors contribute to job satisfaction?***

***How realistic is the expectation of job satisfaction for all workers?***

**•Some people think that universities should provide graduates with the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace. Others think that the true function of a university should be to give access to knowledge for its own sake, regardless of whether the course is useful to an employer.**

***What, in your opinion, should be the main function of a university?***