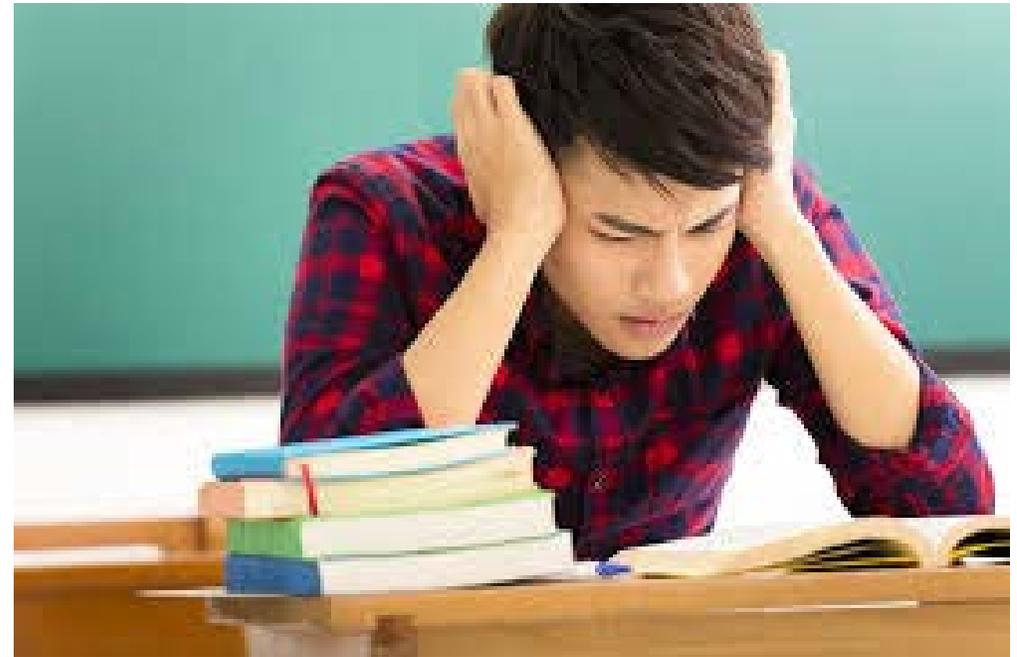




How to write an essay

NAC English faculty approach to
teaching essay writing

It's time to write an essay...



What is an essay?

- An extended response to a set question.
- Contains the student's point of view on the topic and evidence to support this stance.
- Consists of a series of paragraphs.
- Requires a line of argument or *thesis*.



**KEEP
CALM
AND
WRITE
THE ESSAY**

General essay structure

- **INTRODUCTION**

- Provides an overview of the student's interpretation/response to the question
- In English, students identify the key text/s that they will refer to in the essay

- **BODY**

- A series of paragraphs that provide evidence for the student's thesis and *develops* the interpretation of the question

- **CONCLUSION**

- Sums up the student's response
- Contains no new information

Body paragraph structure

- PEEL (or PEAL) paragraphs
- P = **point** (topic sentence)
- E = **explain**
- E/A = **evidence** and **analysis**
- L = **link** back to the question (the thesis/response to the question and the point established in the topic sentence)

Note: the 'E's can be interchangeable in different subjects

Planning a body paragraph: ALARM style grids

IDEA/INSIGHT:

(in an essay, this becomes the POINT/EXPLAIN part of the paragraph)

EVENT

(what actually happened in the text – the key event)

QUOTES

(textual detail)

TECHNIQUES

(name them)

EFFECT

(depending on the demands of the question and the Year level, you may see terms such as:

- *Analyse*
- *Interpret*
- *Meaning*

Link to the question...

(should also connect to the main point of the paragraph – this is how you build a line of argument)

An example of this scaffold from a year 7
English task

IDEA 1: DEATH

Babbitt encourages readers to think about the cycle of life and death. The Tuck's experience of everlasting life makes us think about what it would be like to live forever. The Tucks demonstrate different attitudes to everlasting life. However, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of life's natural cycles.

(Read your notes to get more ideas about the IDEAS of life and death and life's natural cycles).

EVENT IN THE NOVEL	QUOTES	TECHNIQUE/S	EFFECT
Babbitt's prologue sets the scene and the main ideas in the novel.	"The first week of August hangs at the very top of summer, the top of the live-long year, like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in its turning." (p. 3)	SIMILE WHEEL MOTIF	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Evokes the moment a seat is at the highest point of a Ferris wheel.- Suggests that the cycle of life is paused at this point – like the Tucks.- Represents the middle of the year and encourages readers to think about time passing.
Mae shares her experiences and feelings about everlasting life with Winnie.	"...we figured it would be bad if everyone knowed about that spring...that water – it stops you right where you are...you'd never grow up, not ever."	DIALOGUE SECOND PERSON 'YOU'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- presents Mae's attitude to death and everlasting life – she firmly believes that they need to keep people away from the spring.- makes Winnie and the reader put themselves in Mae's position and think about what it would be like to 'never grow up' and therefore never die.
Angus Tuck discusses the nature of life and death with Winnie as they rowed around pond. Angus explains why Winnie needs to keep the spring a secret.	"The water dimpled, and bright rings spread noiselessly and vanished. ... Winnie, looking down, saw hosts of tiny insects skittering and skating on the surface."	VERBS – 'SKITTERING' AND 'SKATING' SYMBOLISM DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- emphasise the movement of the insects and shows that the pond is full of life.- The pond, due to its part in the water cycle, is a symbol of the cycle of life.- "dimples" and "bright rings" created by the busy bugs and the feeding fish vividly evoke the scenery.

Planning a
body
paragraph:
linear plans
using the
peel
structure

Point	<i>the TOPIC SENTENCE</i> <i>Students write a POINT in response to the question</i> <i>Provides the focus for the paragraph</i>
Explain	<i>Students explain their topic sentence in more detail to establish their interpretation of the issues and specific focus area.</i> <i>They may also include some extra aspects of the question (if it is a complex question)</i>
Evidence/Analysis	<i>This is the largest section of the paragraph</i> <i>Students discuss specific textual evidence that proves the point made in the topic sentence</i> <i>In English, the ANALYSIS involves the composer's choices in language forms, features and structures (can be referred to as the 'techniques')</i> <i>This discussion should elaborate on the idea and develop the argument, showing the student's knowledge and understanding of the text</i> <i>It must be relevant to the set question!</i>
Link	<i>This sentence connects the ideas back to the question and the central thesis.</i>

Example from a year 10 plan for a Macbeth
essay

IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE:

- There is no set 'number' of quotes or techniques in an essay
- Students need to demonstrate detailed knowledge of the text
- Students are encouraged to integrate quotes and techniques into their writing and avoid statements such as 'in the quote...'
- Students are also encouraged to select key words and phrases from the selected quotes and weave them into their own sentences

An Example of 'integrated' analytical writing

Colour imagery in the opening lines creates the autumnal setting of the 'yellow wood', symbolising not just the time of year but also the ageing speaker, whilst the extended metaphor of 'two roads diverged' represents the decisions that we all must make. Frost's inversion emphasises the speaker's sense of regret that "sorry [he] could not travel both and be one traveller". It may appear that one path holds greater "claim" to the speaker's passage – Frost's simple imagery of the path as "grassy and wanted wear" implies that it is indeed the road less travelled and therefore a symbol of individuality and non-conformity in life. However, the speaker quickly reveals that "the passing there had worn them really about the same", which suggests that, despite some superficial differences, the options before the speaker were essentially equal.

PEEL – recap

THIS IS AN OUTLINE FOR ONE PARAGRAPH – remember that a paragraph *can* have more than ONE idea/insight. The first step is to plan your whole response and make decisions about how you will organise your argument. The development of ideas and argument within a paragraph MUST be logical.

- **The first sentence – STATE IT**
- **(P) P = Point** you are making in the paragraph (topic sentence/thesis)
- Contains the point or argument that you intend to make in the paragraph
- Essentially you make a thesis statement that you can back up using examples in this paragraph.
- Like the overall thesis statement for the essay, this sentence needs to contain an argument that helps you to show you have **understood and responded to the question posed**.
- Developing these topic sentences/thesis statements is often difficult – you need to develop different statements for individual questions.
- You must be prepared to re-work your assessment task thesis statements for individual questions.
- **The next sentence/few sentences – EXPAND IT**
- **(E) E = Explanation** of the topic sentence/thesis
- Explains in greater detail the point you are making and how it relates to the question.
- This is where you are expected to expand on your topic sentence and thus develop the argument you are trying to make..
- **Once you have set up your argument, it is time to prove it**

- **(E) E = Evidence/Examples** and **(A) A = Analysis** to support your point
- This is where you draw in examples from your texts to support the statement you have made.
- How exactly you word these next few sentences depends on the essay question, but in general, it's best to start with a statement that says something like "This is evident in (text A) where ——" and then you describe the example before giving quotes and/or techniques to support this.
- There is no golden number of examples you will need to give to support your thesis statement—it is sometimes better to have one completely relevant example rather than three not-so relevant ones.
- **The final sentence of your perfect body paragraph – TIE IT BACK TOGETHER**
- **(L) L = Link** your argument back to thesis

Essay writing tips

- Use paragraphs – clearly (take a new line or indent)
- avoid first person – ‘I’
- Proof-read carefully – watch punctuation, spelling, grammar, sentence structure
- Avoid abbreviations (unless in a quote)
- Underline the titles of texts
- Avoid writing ‘in the quote’
- Use inverted commas to indicate a quote “*Quote*”
- You can break up a quote –use part of a quote and make it part of your own sentence.
- Quotes are used for supporting ideas, describing events, characters AND for illustrating techniques. Quotes can do these things at once. A quote can do more than one thing!
- Avoid overly long quotes – sometimes you can take out key words or phrases.

- ‘However’ is followed by a comma – eg: However, Lee also reveals that
- Use the apostrophe to show ownership – eg: Lee’s characterisation of Atticus...
- Try to find alternatives for these words – “USES” / “SHOWS”. Look at the word bank provided which lists alternatives. Make these words an essential part of your essay writing skills.
- Do not start sentences with ‘And’, ‘But’, ‘Then’ and be careful of ‘When’ – quite often students who use this word are lapsing into retelling rather than discussing and analysing.
- Write in paragraphs of a reasonable length. Really short paragraphs are simplistic and don’t help with the flow of your discussion. Failure to use paragraphs is distracting. Try to leave a line between paragraphs if you’re prone to forgetting to indent them!

How to edit and reflect on essay writing

- Students, be prepared to:
 - Plan (use an appropriate scaffold to organise your ideas and evidence)
 - Draft
 - Edit
 - Redraft
 - And ask for help! (show your teacher a draft)
- Parents can help by reading essay drafts and asking these questions:
 - Does it make sense? Are the sentences and paragraphs clear in their communication of information and ideas?
 - Does the essay offer an argument in response to the question? Can you see the words from the question in each paragraph, particularly in the topic sentence and linking sentence?
 - Does the essay show knowledge of the text/s? Are there quotes? Textual detail? Techniques? (if required)
 - Is there a clear introduction, body and conclusion? (Often this will form 5 distinct paragraphs)
 - You could use different coloured highlighters to indicate each aspect of the essay.

Words to use instead of 'shows'

REPRESENTS	DISCUSSES	EXAMINES
CONVEYS	EXPRESSES	PORTRAYS
STATES	SUGGESTS	EMPHASISES
ILLUSTRATES	HIGHLIGHTS	REINFORCES
ENFORCES	ELUCIDATES	DEMONSTRATES
INDICATES	EXPLAINS	DEPICTS
COMMUNICATES	INFERS	FOCUSES

REVEALS	PRESENTS	ESTABLISHES
SUBSTANTIATES	VALIDATES	REFLECTS
EXPOSES	CHALLENGES	REFUTES
REFLECTS	CLARIFIES	SIGNIFIES
QUESTIONS	INDICATES	MIRRORS
DISCLOSES	ENCOURAGES	ASSERTS
CLARIFIES	HEIGHTENS	INTENSIFIES