



# Setting yourself up for **SUCCESS**

**Study skill strategies and  
academic writing**

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# Welcome to Victoria University of Wellington

Welcome to the next stage in your personal development. Like other transitional times in your life, this will also be full of excitement and maybe some trepidation.

For some of you it may be the first time you're living away from your family and friends. You will make new friendships here and they will become your family away from your own. Some of you may have grown up in Wellington all or most of your lives. Make sure you still make new connections with others. Some of you may have come to university after deciding on a new career path. You bring with you a wealth of experience.

In the first few weeks of university you might find yourself getting lost. You may even start asking yourself 'Why am I here?' It may feel like you're the only one feeling like this. We can assure you that it's not. If it starts feeling that way, make sure you talk to somebody about it.

There's a lot of information you're getting in the first few weeks. Successful learning involves wanting to learn, needing to learn, learning by doing, learning from feedback and making sense of what is being learned. Come and talk to one of us at Student Learning, and we can help you develop skills to enhance your university experience.

## The Student Learning team

### Meet the staff



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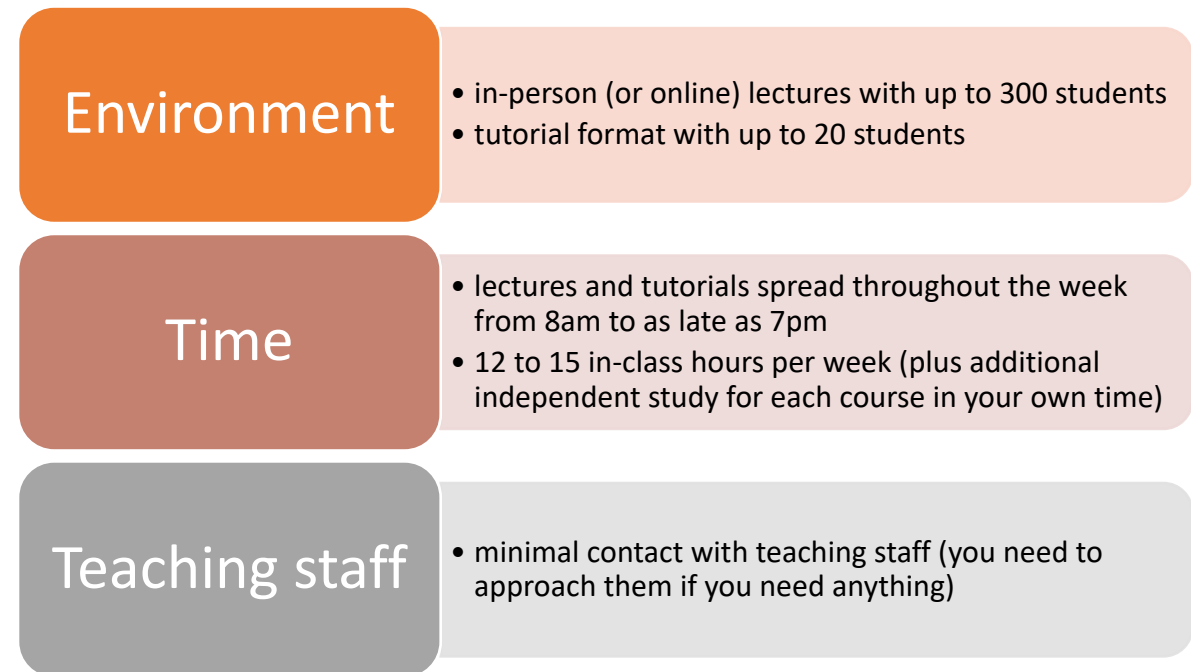


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# University vs School

## Independent learning environment

University is different to school in several ways:



## Independent learning style

A different learning environment means different learning styles:

- Lectures are just the beginning. You need to read, research, discuss and revise material outside class times
- You should spend two hours studying independently for every one hour of lecture time. This adds up to between 36-45 hours a week for most first year students
- No-one checks up or reminds you of due dates. You need to keep track of assessment deadlines and lecture and tutorial times and locations

# Success factors

## Motivation

Motivation will help keep you on track. Understanding why you're at university can be one of the things that motivates. Understanding your long-term goals, both career and personal, can also be motivational.

## Focus

Focus will also help you with keeping on track. To focus it is important to minimise distractions. For your best focus you need to know what works for you in terms of where, when and how you study.

### Where



Where do you feel you do your most productive work? This could be at home, at the library, at a café or any other place you feel comfortable at.

### When



What time of day do you feel the most energised? Once you understand when this is, guard this time against distractions. You can do other tasks outside of this time. Develop a study routine based on this. Remember that the best study routine is one that you would actually do. For example, if you schedule a block of 5 hours of studying after dinner, you might feel defeated before you even start!

### How



Increase the pleasantness of the experiences so that you are most likely to enjoy the experience. This includes studying with music or not. Setting goals for each study session will also help increase your focus.

## Self-reliance

You need to develop self-reliance. This doesn't mean you are going it alone. There are people here to support you, but you will need to make that move yourself. Learning to ask when you're not sure will help you both academically and personally. For example you may want some financial advice or career counselling. Learn what services are available at University and take advantage of them.

## Your turn

Take some time to answer these questions:

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Why am I at university?

---

Where do I work best?

---

What time of the day do I feel energised?

---

Do I study better in silence?  
(if yes, do I have strategies in place to minimise noise?)

---

Do I study better with some background noise?  
(if yes, what kind of background noise?)

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Do I study better with music while studying?  
(if yes, have I compiled a study playlist?)

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# Essential skills

Once you have sussed out the success factors above, it's time to work on two essential skills: note-taking, reading skills (including critical thinking and researching) and remembering what you've learnt.

## Note taking

There are many different methods of note-taking. This is a summary from **How to Take Better Notes** from the **College Info Geek**. Find one that works for you and personalise it so that it fits your purpose.

### The Outline method

This is the most common notetaking style that you probably already do now. You use headings and bullet points while you are following a lecture and write as you go.

### The Cornell method

This method is like the outline method, but has the addition of cues and summaries which would help you to review your notes later. Here's what it looks like (from the College Info Geek):

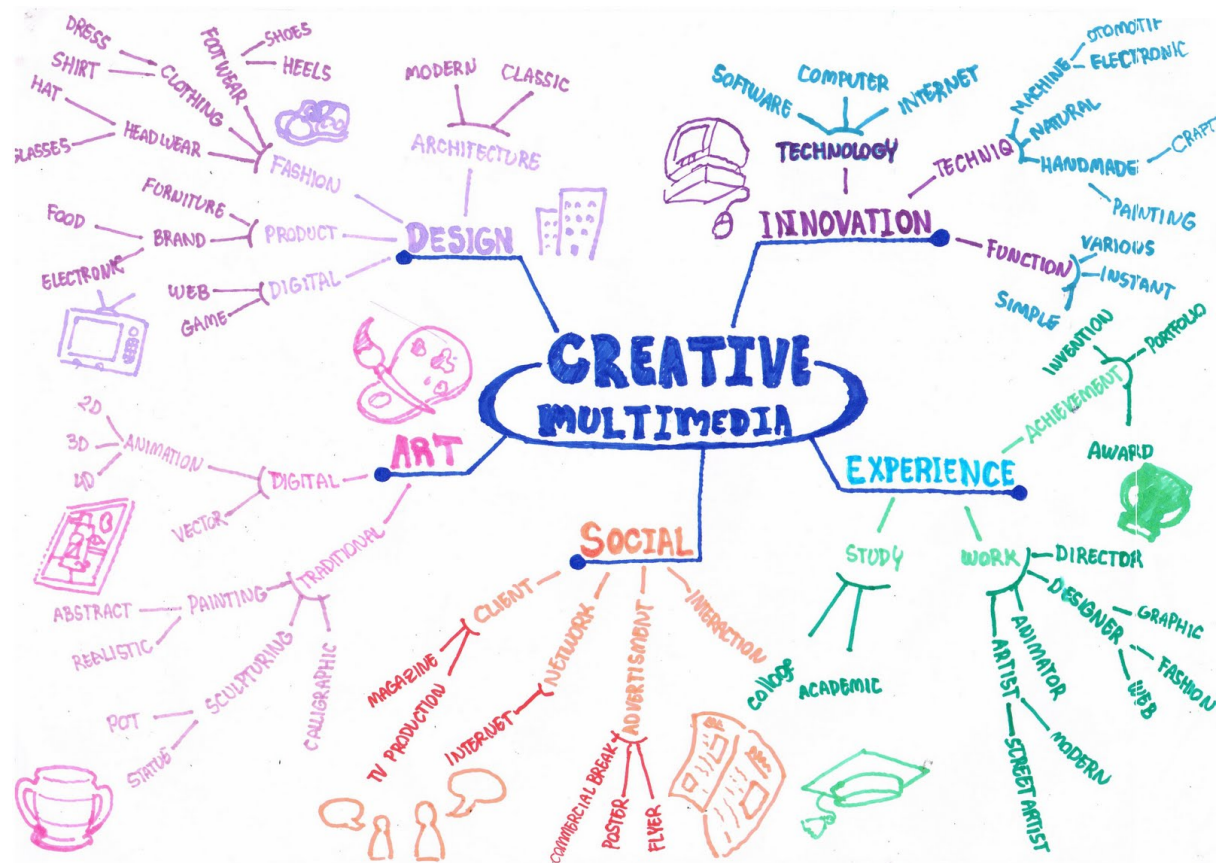
CUES:	NOTES:
<input type="radio"/>	Mordor
who rules Mordor?	1. Government A. ruled by Sauron B. Has a tower
Who lives there?	2. People A. has orcs B. Has Trolls C. Has Nazgul
<input type="radio"/>	
Can you visit?	3. Accessibility A. cannot simply be walked into.
	<b>SUMMARY:</b>
<input type="radio"/>	Mordor is ruled by Sauron, is populated by orcs, trolls, and Nazgul, and cannot simply be walked into.



## Mindmap

Mindmaps are useful to see the relationship between topics and ideas, or to go in depth with one idea.

One of the key things about mindmaps is using colours. Here's an example of one:

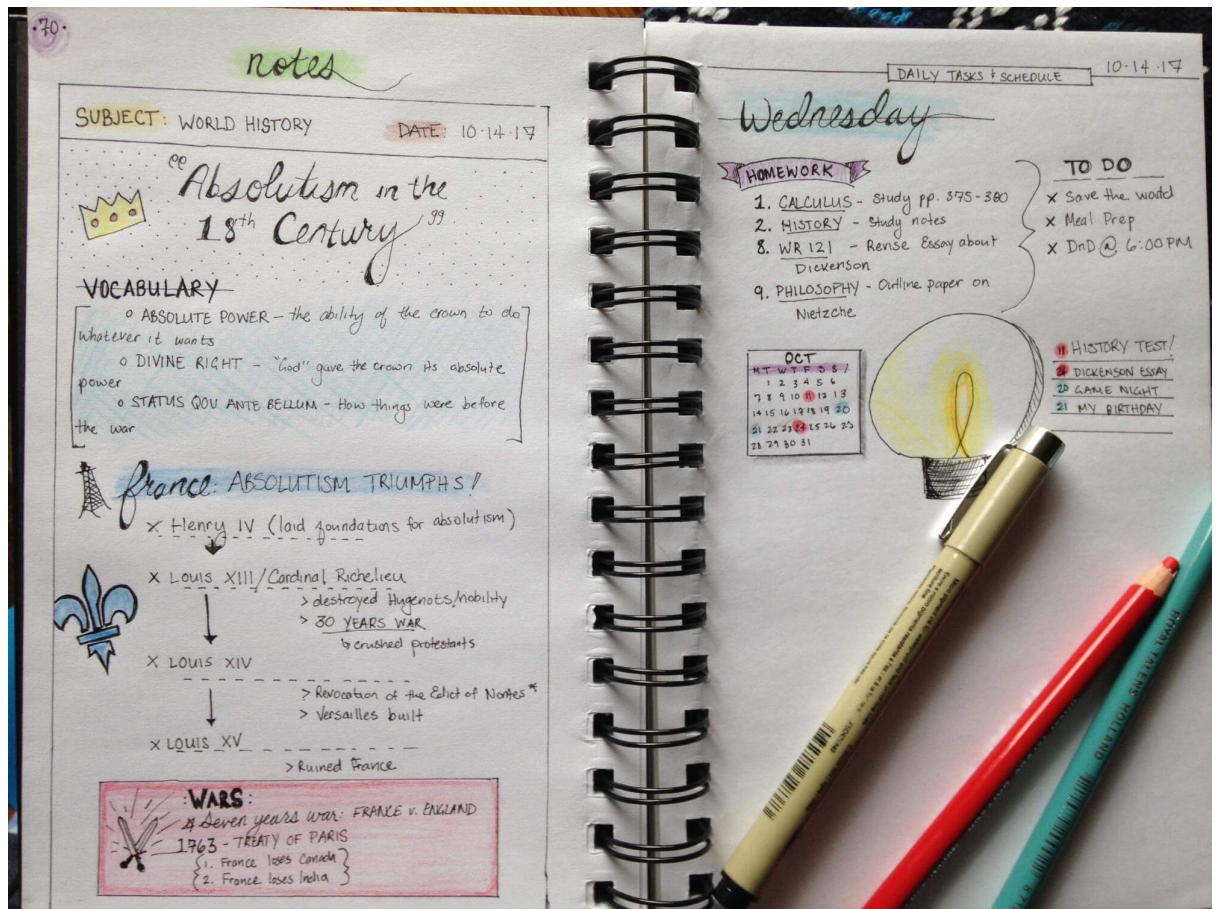


## Writing on slides

Most lectures will be using slides for their lectures. Some of them will have the slides available for you to download. This method of notetaking simply means you print the slides and take notes directly on them as you are following the lecture.

## Bullet journal

This is an aesthetic style that incorporates text, colour and doodles and can be useful if you are a visual learner.



(From **College Info Geek**. *How to take better notes*.)

<https://collegeinfogeek.com/how-to-take-notes-in-college/>)



## Reading

You already know how to read, now it's time to take it to the next level. At university you need to develop not only reading skills, but also critical thinking skills and researching skills.

### Read with a purpose

When you're reading fiction you would usually start at the beginning and read your way to the end. You may change your strategy a bit when you're reading a magazine. You might skim the articles for one that interests you, then you would read the article from start to end. However, when you're reading academic material, the first thing to do is ask yourself why are you reading it. Doing this will start you thinking of what you already know about the topic and also what you want to find by reading the piece.

### Critical thinking

You will be reading a lot of different type of text at university from journal articles to websites. You need to develop critical thinking skills to think about the content, link it to other ideas and give different examples.

## Remembering

While you're studying, you want to be able to remember more things so that you don't have to spend a lot of time near exam or test time to revise.

### Common myth: Re-reading helps you remember things better

While it may be useful to re-read something to increase your understanding, it will not help you remember things better. If you need to remember facts or dates, the best strategy is to test yourself often. You can do this by creating a set of flashcards to test yourself while you are reviewing your learning. You can also add reviewing sessions in your study routine so that you can use spaced repetition to help embed ideas in your memory.

# Academic Writing

At university, you will be expected to complete different types of assignments. You may be asked to write reports, literature reviews or blogs but the academic essay is the most common form of written assessment.

Writing is developmental. New skills are learnt with practice over time. You learn — and think— through writing, and the more conscious you are of what you are doing as you write, the better you will write and learn (Creme & Lea, 2003, p. 179). Knowledge of key writing techniques and strategies will also help you identify what academics are looking for when they mark your assignments.

## Reference

Creme, P., & Lea, M.R. (2003). *Writing at university: A guide for students*. Open University Press.

## Your turn

Take some time to reflect:

---

### Where do you write?

(Do you like to write with pen and paper first? Or straight on the computer?)

---

### How do you write?

(Do you start with a plan first? Or do you free write first?)

---

# Essay Writing Process

## Step 1: Getting started

Motivate yourself to start thinking about the essay.

- How much time do you have (include this in your study routine).
- How much of your final grade depends on it?

## Step 2: Understand what you have to do

What do you need to write about?

- Is there a list of questions to choose from? Decide on one early.
- Check key words and definitions

## Step 3: Plan your response and start writing

Start brainstorming ideas to answer the essay question

- Create a basic structure for your essay
- Decide how many points you wish to make and in what order
- Start adding content to the structure
- Make note of areas where you need to do more research and reading

## Step 4: Gather supporting evidence

What evidence do you need to support your ideas?

- Use your reading list
- Talk to your subject librarian if you need help finding more resources
- Review your lecture notes
- Take detailed notes of your reading so that you can appropriately acknowledge your sources
- Explore other possibilities if needed

## Step 5: Continue writing

As you read and do more research, continue to add to your writing that you have started in Step 3. Keep checking on clarity, structure, tone and accuracy

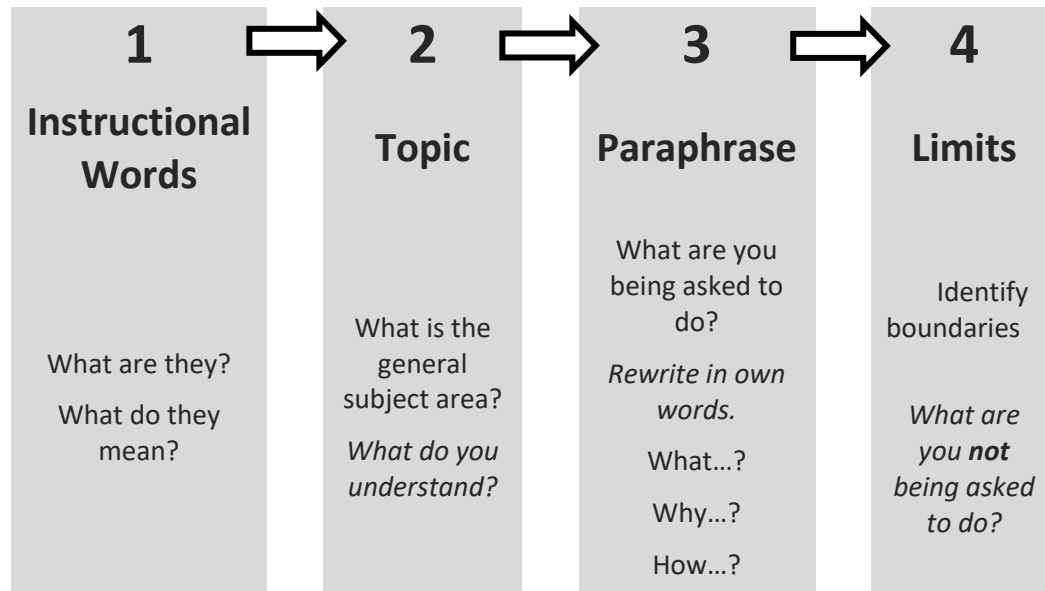
- Does it answer the question?

## Step 6: Polish and proofread

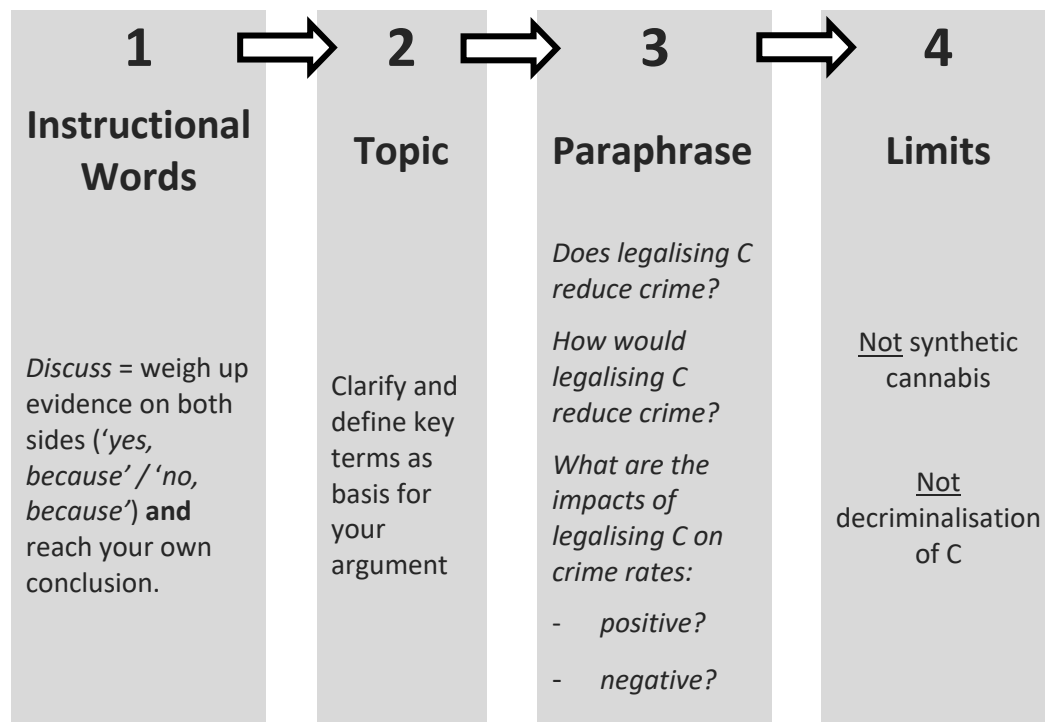
Check for spelling, punctuation, grammar, correct format, correct references, and that it is within the limits set.

# Analysing the Question

This is a crucial first step. It sets the parameters for your essay or assignment and gives you direction to get you started. There are different ways to analyse the essay question. The Four Step Approach is one way.



Example: Legalising cannabis reduces crime: Discuss



# Structure of an Essay

## Introduction

(10% of total words)

- Gains the reader's attention
- Provides brief background material about the meaning, context and significance of the topic. Includes definitions of keywords if necessary.
- Identifies the 'gap', problem or issue outlined in the question. Gives the reader some understanding of the order in which the ideas in the essay will be presented.
- Clearly identifies the author's point of view in a thesis statement.

## The body of the essay

(100–200 words per paragraph)

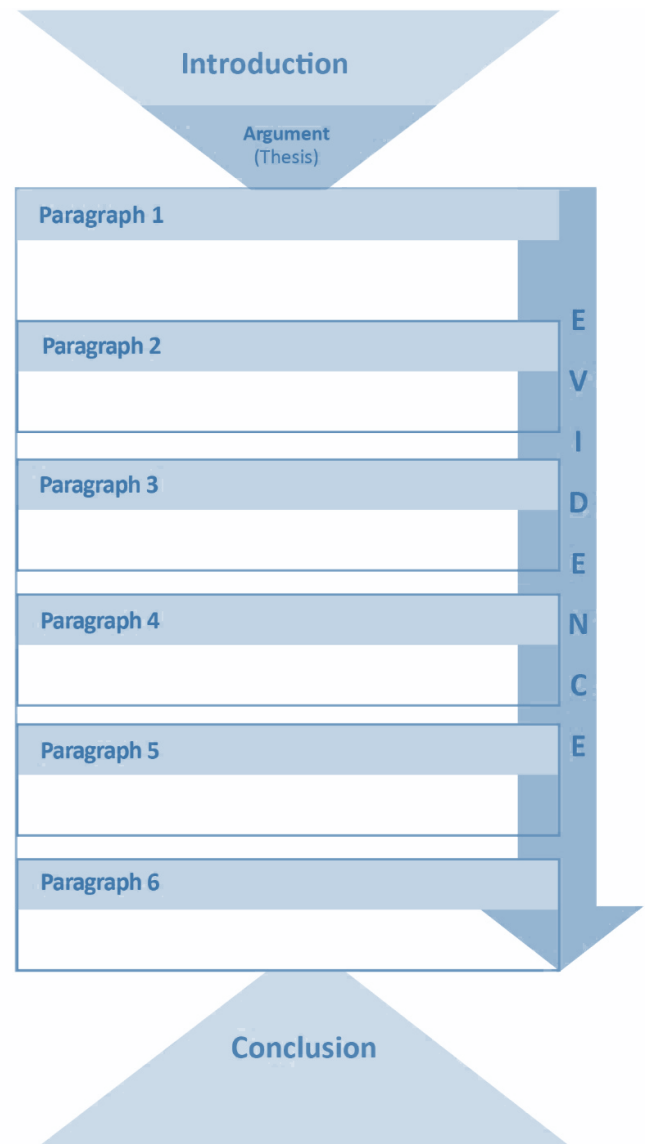
- Your argument is developed through paragraphs. Each paragraph should contain only one main idea, as stated by the topic sentence.
- Each paragraph supports the main idea by explaining the issue, and providing evidence – e.g. quotes, statistics, facts, examples, case studies.
- Link the paragraphs together.
- The number of paragraphs will depend on the essay length.

For essay flow, make sure paragraphs follow a logical sequence which matches that promised in the introduction.

## The conclusion

(10% of total words)

- Sum up your main points and tie these back to the thesis statement.
- Avoid adding new material or using quotes.
- Possibly comment or make recommendations for further discussion of topic.
- Include your reference list or bibliography.





# Academic Integrity

Academic integrity means you should always treat others honestly, fairly, and with respect. This applies to both staff and students. Plagiarism (stealing other people's ideas) is dishonest. It's a form of cheating and it goes against our ethical standards. One way to show academic integrity is by citing your sources.

## When to cite

Anything that you have read somewhere or heard somewhere needs to be cited. Citing is acknowledging the author or source of information in your writing. When you get information or ideas from your research you must always acknowledge the source of information.

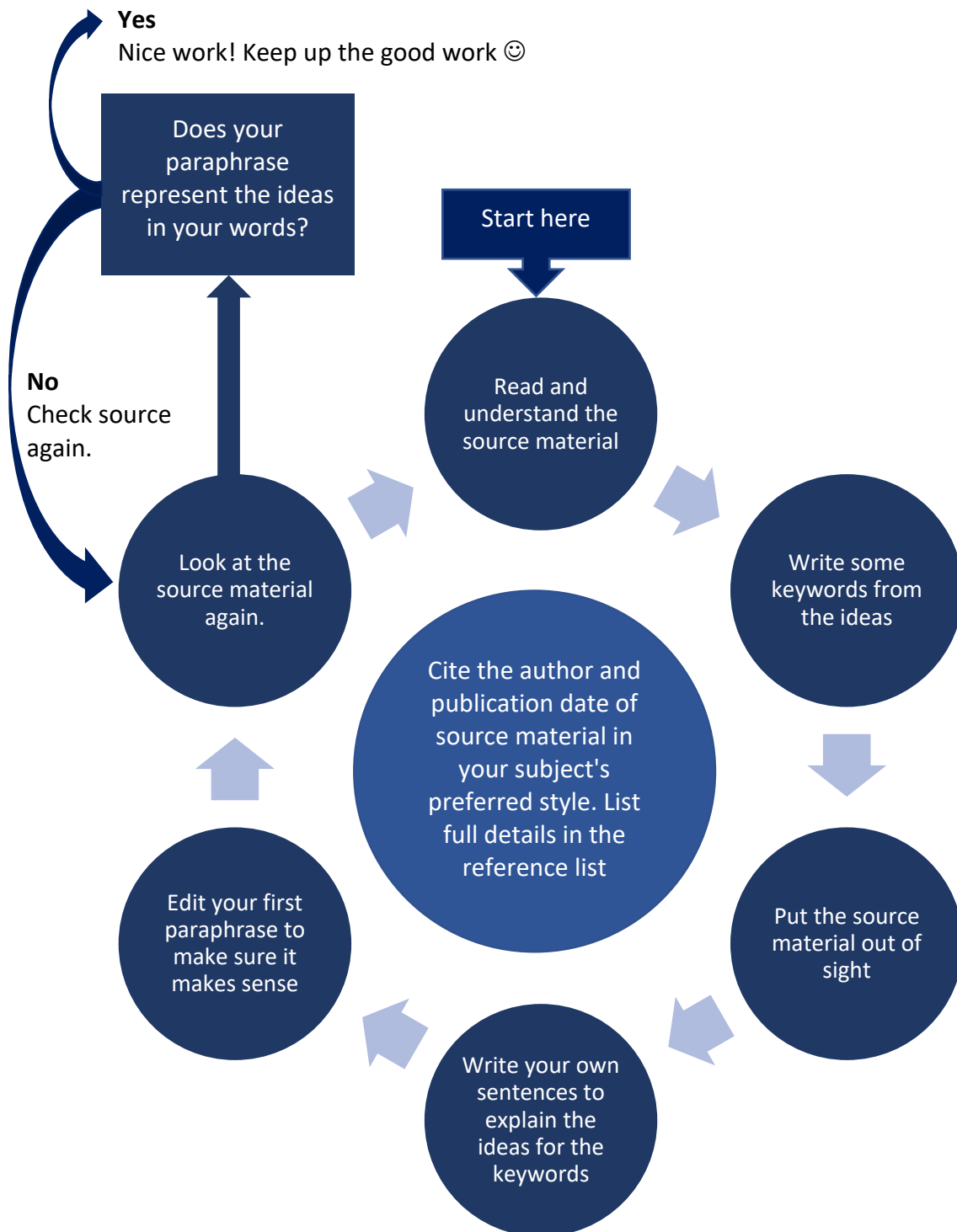
Look through the following scenarios and see if you can recognise when you need to cite.

	True	False
1. You only need to put reference details at the end of the essay.		
2. You should use lots of quotes ("...") to back up your own argument.		
3. If there is no information about the author, you don't need to cite the source.		
4. Among your notes you find material that is perfect for your essay...but you've forgotten where it came from. Unless you can find the source, you cannot use it.		
5. Acknowledging all sources of borrowed information by formatting citations and reference list entries correctly enhances the quality of your written work.		

(Adapted from Harris, Robert A. (2001). *The Plagiarism Handbook*. Pyczak Publishing)

# Effective Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing shows that you understand an idea, and helps you integrate this idea into your paragraph. **It's important to use your own words to reflect the idea in the original source material.** If you use too many words or grammar patterns from the original source material, you could be in danger of plagiarism.




# Essay Structure:

## making your argument clear for readers

*Identify the elements of an academic essay:*

### INTRODUCTION:

e.g. Broad opening statement



Definition of issue

Thesis statement:

Part 1 of essay

Part 2 of essay

### BODY PARAGRAPHS:

**Part 1:** General topic

Topic sentence 1

Supporting evidence

Topic sentence 2

Supporting evidence

### Japan and the USA – Different but Alike.

The culture of a place is an integral part of its society, whether that place is a remote Indian village in Brazil or a highly industrialised city in Western Europe. The culture of Japan fascinates Americans because, at first glance, it seems so different. Everything that characterises the United States – newness, racial heterogeneity, vast territory, informality, and an ethic of individualism – is absent in Japan. There one finds an ancient and homogenous society, an ethic that emphasises the importance of groups, and a tradition of formal behaviour governing every aspect of daily living, from drinking tea to saying hello. On the surface, Japanese and American societies seem totally opposite, but in reality, they share a number of common characteristics.

One of the most obvious differences is the people. Japan is a homogenous society of one nationality and a few underrepresented minority groups, such as the ethnic Chinese and Koreans (Wilson & Smart, 2002). However, all areas of government and society are controlled by the Japanese majority. In contrast, although the United States is a country with originally European roots, its liberal immigration policies have resulted in its becoming a heterogeneous society of many ethnicities – Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Latinos (American Immigration Department, 2005). All are represented in all areas of American society, including business, education, and politics.

Other areas of difference involve issues of group interaction and sense of space. Whereas Americans pride themselves on individualism and informality, Japanese value groups and formality. Americans admire and reward a person who rises above the crowd; in contrast, a Japanese proverb says, “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down” (Kashigawa, 1995, p. 104). In addition, while Americans’ sense of size and scale developed out of the vastness of the North American continent, Japanese genius lies in the diminutive and miniature. For example, America builds aeroplanes, while Japan produces transistors.

**BODY PARAGRAPHS:****Part Two:**

General topic

Topic sentence 3

Supporting evidence

Topic sentence 4

Supporting evidence

Topic sentence 5

Supporting evidence

In spite of these differences, however, these two apparently opposite cultures share several important experiences. Both, for example, have transplanted cultures. As Southern points out in *East Meets West* (2003, p. 26), each nation has a 'mother' society – China for Japan and Great Britain for the United States -- that has influenced the daughter in countless ways: language, religion, art, literature, social customs, and ways of thinking. Japan, of course, has had more time than the United States to work out its unique interpretation of the older Chinese culture, but both countries reflect their cultural ancestry.

Both societies, moreover, have developed the art of business and commerce, of buying and selling, of advertising and mass-producing, to the highest levels. Few sights are more reassuring to Americans than the tens of thousands of bustling stores seen in Japan, especially the beautiful, well-stocked department stores. To American eyes, they seem just like Macy's or Neiman Marcus at home (Southern, 2003). In addition, both Japan and America are consumer societies. The people of both countries love to shop and are enthusiastic consumers of convenience products and fast foods. Vending machines selling everything from fresh flowers to hot coffee are as common in Japan as they are in America, and fast-food noodle shops are as common in Japan as McDonald's restaurants are in America.

A final similarity is that both Japanese and American societies have always emphasised the importance of work, and both are paying penalties for their commitment to it: increasing stress and weakening family bonds. Americans, especially those in business and in the professions, regularly put in twelve or more hours a day at their business (Atkins, 2004), just as many Japanese executives do (Southern, 2003). Also, while the normal Japanese workweek is six days, many Americans who want to get ahead also voluntarily work on Saturday and/or Sunday in addition to their normal five-day working week.

**CONCLUSION:**

Summary of thesis statement

Summary of paragraph topics:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

General concluding statement, placing discussion in a wider context

**You might also like to use a different coloured pen to highlight all the 'signposts' (key words, links, etc.) that make the argument clear for the reader.**

Japan and America: different, yet alike. Although the two societies differ in many areas such as racial heterogeneity versus racial homogeneity, and individualism versus group cooperation, they share a number of common experiences in terms of cultural heritage, attitudes towards consumerism, and increasing pressures of work. Both differences and similarities contribute toward the mutual interest the two countries have in each other. It will be interesting to see where this reciprocal fascination leads in the future.

**References**

American Immigration Department. (2005). *America's immigration story*.  
<http://www.us-immigration.org>

Atkins, K.C. (2004). The American way: Fastrack to business success. *Business Review*, 25 (2): 87-93.

Kashigawa, Y. (1995). *Japanese proverbs*. Shinkansen Press.

Southern, P. (2003). *East meets west: Social & cultural change in twentieth-century Asia*. Oxford University Press.




Wilson, A. & Smart, G.W. (2002). *Studies in international demography*. Kingston Press.

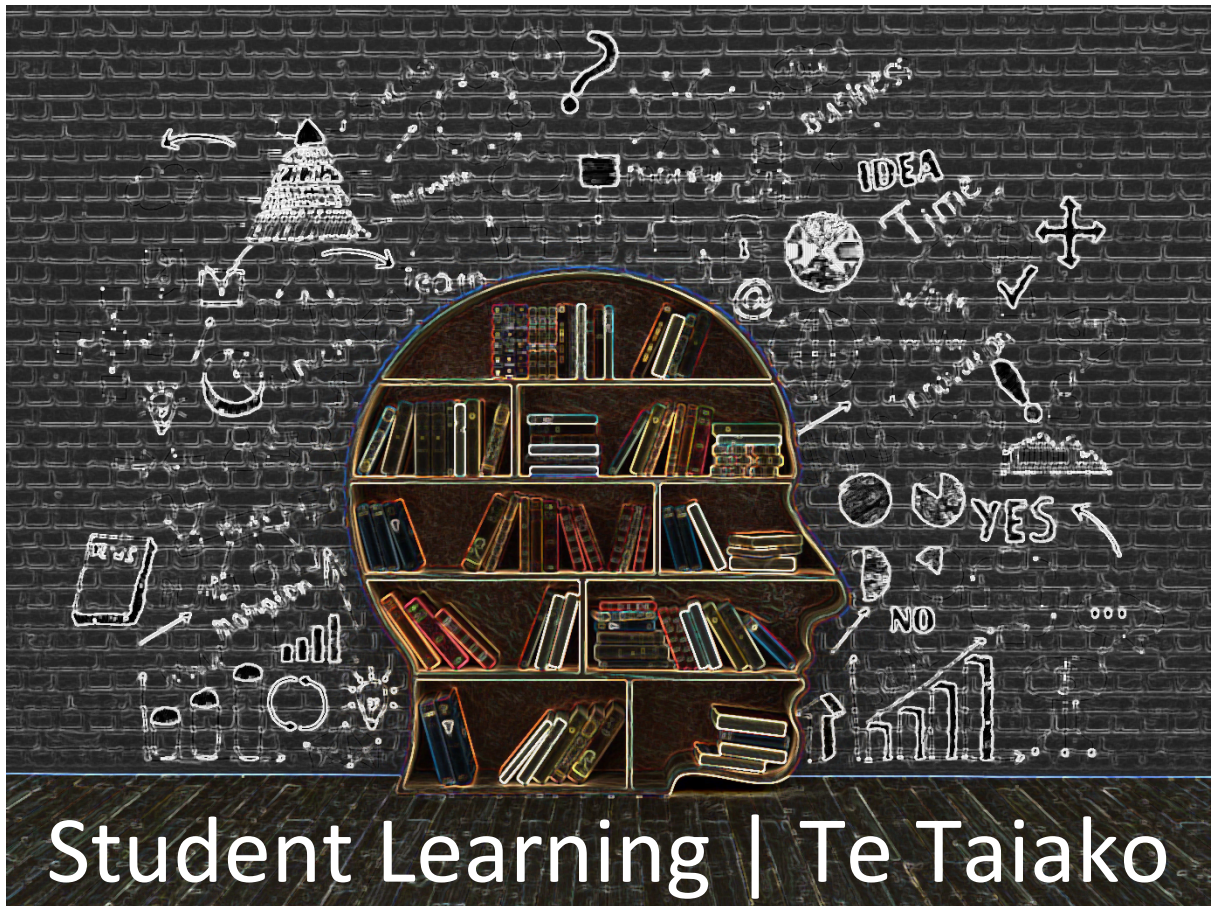
**(Essay adapted from Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1999). *Writing academic English*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Longman, p.141)**



# Editing Checklist

Make sure you read your work carefully before handing in. This checklist will also help you identify areas to work on.

<b>First, examine the whole:</b>		✓
	I have answered every part of the question	
	I have answered the question explicitly	
	I emphasise key words from the question in the intro, conclusion and body	
	My argument is strong and clear	
	My assignment is well-organised	
	My work makes sense	
	My assignment fits the word limit	
<b>Next, focus on each section:</b>		✓
	My assignment is well-balanced in terms of the attention given to each part	
	The different sections are easily recognisable	
	The transitions between sections are smooth	
<b>Then, focus on individual paragraphs:</b>		✓
	Each paragraph is on one topic	
	The main point is clear	
	Sentences are in the right order	
	Paragraph breaks are in the right place	
	Transitions between paragraphs are smooth	
	Every paragraph contributes to answering the question	
<b>Finally, examine each sentence:</b>		✓
	Each sentence is complete	
	Each subject and verb agree	
	The tenses are consistent	
	The meaning is clear	
	The grammar is correct	
	Every word is spelled correctly	
	All sources are used correctly	
	Referencing details are correctly cited	
	I've included my list of references	



# Student Learning | Te Taiako

Make an appointment with a Learning Adviser at any stage during the essay-writing process, to discuss your studies.

## If you want to know more about...

- |                 |                           |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| ⇒ Plagiarism    | ⇒ Learning strategies     |
| ⇒ Referencing   | ⇒ Maths and Statistics    |
| ⇒ Essay writing | ⇒ PASS                    |
| ⇒ Exam skills   | ⇒ Postgraduate support    |
| ⇒ Grammar       | ⇒ One-to-one appointments |
| ⇒ Note taking   | ⇒ Workshops               |
| ⇒ Reading       |                           |

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