

Planning an essay

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Adapted from RFL's Alex Essay Writing Tool alexessaytool.com

1 ANALYSE THE TITLE

Identify: -

- the main topic
- instructions about perspective or approach to take
- Verbs that will tell you what you need to do e.g. evaluate, analyse, etc

Look up any words that you are not sure about.

2 GENERATE IDEAS

Mind map the topic before you start researching.

Write the topic in the centre of a blank piece of paper and record all the words, phrases, questions and ideas you have around it.

Identify key themes by grouping concepts or ideas together. An essay usually has between 2 and 6 key themes.

3 MAKE A PLAN

Think of these themes as subheadings. Within each theme record the key points you could make. Thinking in terms of points will help your writing be more critical and less descriptive.

When you begin your research, you can record evidence beneath the relevant theme/subheading too.

This plan will help you keep on track when researching and writing later.

Tip: plan using something that allows you to move themes around e.g. a Word document or flash card. Giving each theme a colour can be a useful visual aid too.

4 RESEARCH

Start with **wide reading**. Skim and scan resources to find evidence relating to your themes.

When you read something that is useful, make a note of the point you could make with it and the reference, against the theme.

Bookmark the source so you can return to the section easily. Colour coding can be useful here to stay organised, e.g. assigning highlighters and post it notes to correspond to each theme.

Once you have completed your wider reading you can look back at your plan and check for **balance**.

Ask questions like:

- Have you got sufficient evidence for all of your points and themes? Is one theme looking a little sparse?
- Do you have a good balance of resources or are you relying on one resource too much?
- Have you kept focused on the original question or have you strayed off topic?

Then begin your **close reading**.

Reread your sources critically. Apply the Plymouth model to help here; asking questions like what are the strengths and limitations of this research, is the reasoning sound, what assumptions does the author make?

You are aiming to analyse and evaluate your resources at this stage.

5 ORDER YOUR IDEAS

Convert your plan into a linear essay plan listing:

- the main topics/ themes
- points you will make in each paragraph
- supporting information and sources you will cite

Reorder this plan until you are satisfied that you have a logical, easy to follow structure.

6 DRAFT AND REVISE

Begin writing. Your first draft isn't going to be perfect and will require a number of revisions.

If possible put it away for a few days before revising.

When you edit each draft, consider structure, content, style. Don't forget to proofread your final draft before submission.