Structuring an essay

@UNIOF SUNLIB

Unless stated in the brief, you can stick to a simple essay structure, like:

INTRODUCTION

Outline for the reader what you are going to talk about, why, how, and in what order.

You can do this in three stages:
1. Introduce the general topic area
2. Explain why that topic is important or interesting
3. Detail the specific focus of your essay and indicate the themes you are going to explore

This should be around 10% of your total word count. For example, in a 2000-word essay, the introduction should be around 200 words.

MAIN BODY

Present your points, analyse and critically evaluate evidence, and develop your argument in this section.

- Your essay will be divided into sections/themes that address an aspect of the essay title or task; there are usually between 2 and 6 themes in an essay.
- Devote more word count to the most important themes, or strike a balance between all of them
- Each paragraph within a section will address one point
- Think about the structure of the main body. Move from general to specific points, strongest to weakest arguments, causes to consequences, important to less important or chronologically.
- You can use IDEA paragraphs to structure individual paragraphs:

I dentify your point in the first sentence
D etail your point, explaining and developing it for the reader
E vidence your point using the literature e.g. theories, research or guidelines or approaches
A nalyse this evidence, e.g. examining the implications or exploring limitations

CONCLUSIONS

Summarise your main points and link them back to the essay title or question.

You shouldn't really new material in this section.

As with the intro, it should be about 10% of your total word count.

REFERENCES

Details of the academic materials you have cited in your essay.

Your reference section should be alphabetical and in the appropriate format e.g. Harvard style.

This section is not included in your word count.