

Ten things you need to write a good essay.

1. **Something to write about:** You may have been given an essay title but if not, you will have to devise one. This part of writing your essay is extremely important. You will need to come up with a question that is specific and one that allows you to make an argument. It is important to bear in mind the length of the essay. A question for a 2,000 word essay is likely to be different to that of a dissertation of 20,000 words. It is very common for students to select a question that is too general and therefore impossible to answer in the space given. To avoid this, keep your question specific. Ways of doing this include limiting the scope of your question to a geographical location e.g. Nigeria rather than West Africa or time, e.g. between 1910 and 1930 rather than during the Twentieth Century or a specific group e.g. primary school netball teams.
2. **Resources:** You may have a really fantastic idea for your essay but if you are unable to access suitable resources then you need to choose something else. This is particularly important when you have a limited time period in order complete the work. You need resources that you can locate quickly and easily. Relying on inter-loan library books is not a good idea if you have only a few weeks in which to complete your work. Your academic liaison librarian will be able to advise you on how to locate resources.
3. **Not too many resources.** Keep your resources manageable and relevant to the essay that you are writing. The best essays are not the ones littered with facts and detail but are instead the ones that maintain the reader's interest and have a clear and persuasive argument.
4. **A plan.** When time is limited such as in an exam or when you have a short deadline it can be tempting just to start writing without a plan. Don't, a few minutes writing a plan can save a whole load of time later. It's like heading off down the motorway without knowing which junction to get off at. Before you know it you've driven 70 miles more than you should have. Being clear about what your question is and how you intend to address it is crucial both to time management and to producing a decent essay.
5. **Adequate time.** It's very easy to underestimate how long it takes to write an essay. Very few good ones are written in a couple of days. Although your time is limited if you have to re-submit work, you can still help the situation by not leaving everything to the last minute. Also remember that good essays are usually the product of a couple of draft versions. Correcting mistakes and re-drafting material takes time.
6. **Structure.** Essays need to have an introduction, a middle (the argument) and a conclusion. They should also have a reference list. Within that structure there should be paragraphs that logically follow on from each other. Each paragraph should contain no more than one new piece of information.



7. **References.** Make sure that you cite your information and that in your reference list you refer to all of the material that you have used for your essay. If you have consulted additional resources that you have not cited in your work, you may include these in a bibliography at the end of your assignment.
8. **Page numbers.** Make sure you insert these and any other formatting device that you have been asked to include e.g. if you are required to have your lines double spaced, make sure that they are.
9. **The correct amount of words.** If the requirement is that you write 2,000 words that's what you need to do, a few words short or over won't matter but no tutor is going to be impressed with a 10,000 word essay when all they asked for was 2,000. Likewise 1300 instead of 2,000 isn't going to get you the grade that you need either.
10. **Proof-reading.** Always proof-read your work and check for spelling and grammatical mistakes. Reading it out loud often makes the detection of mistakes easier. Also, invest in, and use a dictionary. Computer spell-checkers, whilst convenient, are notorious for missing spelling mistakes.



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