Structuring an Academic Essay

Writing an essay with a clear structure helps you to:

- Make all your ideas clear.
- Discuss similar ideas together.
- Avoid including irrelevant or tangential information.
- Avoid repeating information you have already covered.

All academic essays have a similar basic structure. They begin with an introduction, contain main ideas in the body, and end with a conclusion.

**Introductions** begin with general statements and end with a specific **thesis statement**. The thesis statement, which comes at the end of the introduction, has two parts. First, it includes a ‘summary’ sentence that gives the overall purpose of the essay (e.g. ‘This essay will discuss/examine/consider…’). It then includes several sentences which describe the main ideas of the essay and the order in which they will appear (e.g. ‘First the essay will explore… Then/Secondly it will… Finally/Lastly it will…’).

The **body** of an essay is organised into main ideas (usually three to four). Essays must discuss one main idea at a time. When moving on to a new main idea within the body of the essay, use signal phrases such as ‘first’, ‘secondly’, ‘next’ or ‘finally’, along with the key words of the next main idea. These **topic sentences** make it clear to the reader that the essay is moving from one idea to another.

**Conclusions** begin by restating the specific thesis statement and then continue with more general information such as a summary of the essay’s main points, some general recommendations, or ideas for future research.
Creating a structure for your essay

• First, **identify your main ideas**. You may need to do a certain amount of research in order to decide what ideas your essay will cover, although your assignment brief may also give some clues. (Hint: do not necessarily start by writing your introduction!)

• Once you decide on your main ideas, you will need to do **detailed research** in each area you have chosen, using academic sources.

• Then, look at **one main idea at a time** and **organise the information** you have found on each idea.

• Next, you are ready to **write the body** of your essay. Make sure to use topic sentences when introducing a new main idea.

• Finally, write your **introduction** including your thesis statement, and write your **conclusion**, reiterating your thesis statement and main ideas.