

# Writing skills



**WRITING SKILLS Introduction** In this section, we are going to look at writing as an important skill in the communication process. Principally, we shall define writing and its importance in communication, discuss the paragraph as a key component in writing, then how to plan your essay and finally discuss the various types of essays that you will need to use in your writing.

**Objectives of the topic** At the end of this topic, you should be able to: a) Define writing and explain its importance in communication b) Discuss the characteristics of a paragraph as an important component of writing c) Plan an academic essay d) Identify and explain the various types of essays e) Demonstrate understanding of referencing and documentation techniques in academic writing

**Definition and importance of writing** Writing is expression of language in form of symbols (letters, words and sentences) on a surface. The primary purpose of writing is communication. Writing is a life-long skill that when used clearly can help you express ideas convincingly to others and can determine your success at the university and professional life.

Writing takes different forms. It may be in the form of a single paragraph, an essay, a short paper, a report, a letter, a memo e. t. c. Whatever the form of writing, effective writing involves the proper use of words, sentences, punctuations and paragraphs to pass across messages. In most of the writing you will engage in at the university, the paragraph constitutes a very important building block.

**Writing Skills Page 1 Paragraph Writing** Paragraphs are important building blocks in the writing of essays. A paragraph usually contains one main idea captured in a sentence, with about four to eight supporting sentences which expand the main idea by giving explanation, details and/or examples to support the main idea of the paragraph. The length of a paragraph may vary from one form of writing to another or by the

idea one is expounding on. A paragraph can be part of a longer piece of writing, as it is in an essay, or it can stand alone as in an exam answer. Writing a paragraph is not a natural skill, but learned skill. A paragraph is unified by a single main idea. There is no one correct structure of writing a paragraph, however, a useful structure to have in mind is that it should have three main components, namely: a) Topic/thesis Sentence: this is the first sentence and it expresses the main idea that unifies the paragraph. b) Supporting Sentences: these sentences present details, facts and examples that expand on or illustrate the main idea. c) Concluding Sentence: this sums up the paragraph's main idea or what has been said. Alternatively, it draws a logical conclusion from the main idea. A good paragraph therefore must reveal its main idea in a prominent statement called topic/thesis sentence. The prominent idea is usually presented at the beginning of the paragraph such that other statements that follow support the main idea. A paragraph must convey thoughts that are connected together by logical associations and signal words, that is, there must be a clear connection between the sentences which constitute a paragraph. Signal words or transitional phrases that indicate connection between sentences include connectors of various kinds, such as: a) Connectors of sequence: afterward, as soon as, before, first, second..., finally, later, next etc, as well as, firstly, next, then, finally, so thus, as a result, because, therefore, for example, for instance, in contrast, on the other hand etc. b) Connectors of addition: also, and, another, besides, furthermore, moreover, likewise etc Writing Skills Page 2 c) Connectors of contrast: but, even if, even so, however, despite, instead, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand etc d) Connectors of result: as a result, consequently, accordingly, therefore, hence, thus etc e) Connectors of

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illustration: for example, for instance, for this reason, that is etc. A good paragraph must match real division of your ideas, that is, a paragraph must be about one idea such that the start of new paragraph should signal a shift to a new idea. Essay writing constitutes an important writing skill at the university level, where most of the research and term papers, as well as exam questions are written in essay form. Essay writing An essay is a piece of writing on a single subject, issue or event with more than one paragraph, which is meant to communicate something. The length of an essay varies, where short ones may be 300 to 600 words long, constituting of four or five paragraphs. The paragraphs of an essay should be logically connected using transitional words and phrases as those connecting sentences within the paragraph as outlined above. An essay has three necessary parts: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. a) The introduction states the main point or thesis of the essay and may be a single or just a few paragraphs. b) The body supports by showing, explaining, proving the main point or advancing an argument. It generally has at least three paragraphs, each containing facts and details that develop the main point. c) The conclusion reminds the reader of the main point by summarizing and reinforcing the support in the body paragraphs, or it may make an observation based on that support and present the writer's last thoughts on the subject. Planning the essay The following six methods/stages can help you order your material in readiness for essay writing: Stage 1: Write down your purpose Writing Skills Page 3 It is a good idea to write down (in a sentence or two) exactly what you are trying to achieve through your essay. This helps you organize your material around this purpose without straying away from the point. Stage 2: Assemble the information Using notes on paper, index cards or <https://assignbuster.com/writing-skills/>

notes on your PC, jot down all the ideas or points you may want to make. At this stage, you need to select only the essential, relevant information. Ask questions like; Is this really relevant to my message? Does my audience really need to have this information in order to understand my message? Will this information help me achieve my purpose? Stage 3: Group the information At this stage, you should consider your list and look for links between the bits of information. Rewrite your notes in clear notes, preferably under clear headings. These could become the paragraphs or sections of your completed message. Remember all paragraphs should carry one main idea. All other material in the paragraph will be supporting evidence — examples, elaboration, illustrations etc. Stage 4: Put the information into logical sequence This stage requires you to put the groups of information (still only in note-form) into some sort of sensible order. You can employ any of the following methods to order your material: a) Chronological order — it is sometimes called historical order and is perhaps the most common method. It presents the material in the order in which it occurred or occurs in time. b) Spatial (or place) order — facts are presented on a geographical basis — from place to place: from north to south, top to bottom, left to right, high to low, in and out, up and down or near to far. This method is effective for describing machinery, buildings, furniture, or geographical location. Writing Skills Page 4 c) Order of importance — this presents material either in descending order of importance (deductive order): starting with the most important point to gain the reader's attention; or in ascending order (inductive order): starting with the least important point. d) Ascending order of complexity — simpler ideas first, followed by increasingly difficult or complex material. e) Descending order of familiarity — moving ' from the

known to the unknown'. f) Cause and effect — put simply it means, “ because of this, then that”. That is, “ because this happened, that happened”. g) Topical — this requires that you deal with the material on a topic-by-topic basis. This is especially useful when there appears to be no real link between the chunks of material you have. Stage 5: Produce a skeleton outline This involves the production of a clear plan, which becomes increasingly easier by working through the previous four stages carefully. An outline makes the job of writing and presenting your work easier. Stage 6: Write the first draft Now you are ready to start writing. At this stage, do not worry about style and words. Just place the different chunks of information in their place: introduction, the main body and the conclusion. Stage 7: Edit the rough draft and write the final draft This stage requires you to put yourself in the shoes of your receiver. Read the rough draft through their eyes, checking for ambiguities, errors, awkward expressions, lack of signpost words (first, second, finally, in addition, on the other hand etc), which are essential to guide your reader along the route of your ideas. Above all, aim for a concise, easily understood style. Editing checklist I. Vary the length of the sentences but keep them on the shorter side: 18-22 words should be the average Writing Skills Page 5 II. III. IV. V. VI. Paragraphs should have only one main idea Use words that the reader will understand — avoid unnecessary jargon Avoid unbusiness-like colloquialisms such as “ to cut the long story short” Omit unnecessary words for example, “ serious” in “ serious crisis” Use the shorter rather than the longer word or phrase, for example, “ start” rather than “ commence” VII. Avoid hackneyed expressions ( clichés such as “ please find enclosed”, “ if I can be of further assistance”, “ please do not hesitate to contact me”) VIII. IX. X. XI. Avoid needless repetitions of words

and phrases — find alternatives wherever possible Use sincere words — do not overstate or exaggerate Use positive words rather than negative word if possible Use the active rather than the passive voice Writing Skills Page 6