



Essay purpose

Presenting an argument

The purpose of an essay is to present a coherent argument in response to a stimulus or question, and to persuade the reader that your position is credible (i.e. believable and reasonable).

In other words, you're given a question or task description (see [Analysing the assignment question](#) (PDF, 72 kB) and [Common task words](#) (PDF, 107 kB) and you need to think about the task, research the topic, decide on your position, and then convince the reader by presenting a reasoned response supported by evidence from the research you have done.

A one-way argument

Unlike a spoken argument, where two speakers might argue back and forth presenting their various points and pieces of evidence, an essay is, in a sense, a one-way argument. Your reader doesn't have the opportunity to ask you to clarify your points, nor to present their own points against yours.

Because the reader can't ask for clarification, you have a responsibility to present your argument clearly. Because the reader can't argue back face-to-face, you have the opportunity to anticipate their possible counter-arguments and address them in your essay.

A dialogue

Although your essay is a one-way argument as far as your reader is concerned, your marker will still be looking to see whether you have tried to enter into a dialogue with the ideas of other scholars. They want to see that you have understood the important arguments going on in the discipline, that you can relate to these appropriately, and that you can express your own voice on the topic (Brick, 2011, p. 148).

Description and analysis

Most essays will require you to do some description of the way things are or were, and some analysis of why things happened, how they could be done better, how different factors relate to each other, etc.

In [Analysing the assignment question](#) (PDF, 72kB) you can find out more about descriptive and analytical writing and what they involve.

References

Brick, J. (2011). *Academic Culture: A student's guide to studying at university*. South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan Publishers.