

LANG  
SKILLS



**Deafinitely English:**

Online materials for teachers of English  
as a Foreign Language for Deaf, deaf and  
hard of hearing students

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# Unit 5

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**Strategies for Essay Writing.**  
**Student's Booklet**



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## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

### What is this booklet about?

This booklet was created to help you work on your writing skills. The content is adapted to suit the educational needs of Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing (D/d/hh) students and it uses lots of culturally relevant examples.

This booklet contains:

- **short informative texts that will help you understand the topics;**
- **practical Activities for you to practise what was explained;**
- **handouts you will need to do some of the Activities.**

### Who is this booklet for?

The booklet was designed for D/d/hh university students who plan to study abroad and wish to improve their English before their visit. You can use it to improve your writing skills in English in general.

**Your English should be about B1 or B2 to use these materials.**

### How can this booklet help you?

The goal of this booklet is to help you write better, particularly the essays required in university education. Essays are a very common form of writing assignment in courses at higher education institutions, so it is important that you learn how to write them. In fact, writing involves many things such as knowledge of syntax and grammar, planning, composing, editing and revising, as well as referencing and quoting correctly.

This booklet includes useful tips and practical Activities to help you be a skilled essay writer.

Use this booklet to:

- **get a number of useful essay writing tips;**
- **learn more about the writing process for better-organized, easier writing;**
- **help you understand the major mistakes students make when writing essays and try to avoid them;**
- **understand when and how to reference and quote sources correctly.**

## 1.2. EFFECTIVE ESSAY WRITING: INTRODUCTION



Essays are a typical university assignment. This section gets you ready for essay writing. You will learn about the stages of writing essays in English. We will look at different ways of planning, things that can help you, how to understand essay titles, and important information about the stages of essay writing. 

### Types of essay

There is not just one type of essay that teachers will ask you to write. Make sure you know what type of essay you need to write before you start writing.

Some typical essays are:

- **Argumentative essay** – you want to prove to the reader that your opinion about something is correct. You give a lot of evidence.
- **Opinion essay** – you give your opinion about something.
- **Compare and contrast essay** – you analyse two things to see how similar or different they are.
- **Descriptive essay** – you describe something so that the reader can picture or imagine it.
- **Explanatory essay** – you want to inform, explain, or describe something, rather than argue or persuade somebody.
- and others...



## Activity 1

Read these five essay topics.

Write an **A** next to the ones that could be good topics for argumentative essays, a **D** next to those you think could be good topics for descriptive essays and an **O** for opinion essays.

1. **The first time I visited Gallaudet University**
2. **Deaf students should be mainstreamed rather than taught in Deaf schools**
3. **Why everyone should learn to sign**
4. **The ways I deal with procrastination**
5. **The influence of Instagram on modern teenagers**

**Hint:** It may be difficult to say if a topic is more suitable for an argumentative or an opinion essay. That is because some topics can be both. Whether the essay is argumentative or an opinion depends on the arguments and evidence you use.

**It is very important to read carefully the essay instructions. They tell you what to do.**

## Words used in essay instructions and their meanings

<b>Account for</b>	means give reasons for, explain
<b>Contrast</b>	means look for differences between things
<b>Criticize</b>	means look at good & bad, both sides
<b>Distinguish between</b>	means look for differences (also differentiate between)
<b>Illustrate</b>	means make it clear and obvious; you may need to use examples
<b>Compare</b>	means look for similarities between things
<b>Summarize</b>	means say the main ideas in a few words
<b>Justify</b>	means give an evidence

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There are at least **three steps** for essay writing – means three things you have to do. You will learn these three steps during the activities for this section.

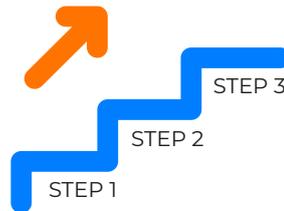
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## 1.3. ESSAY PREPARATION



### Planning your essay

There are several steps for essay writing – this means there are several things you have to do. You will learn these steps when doing the Activities for this section.



Let's look at your planning. So, *why* is it so important to plan and to brainstorm?

OK – planning will help you avoid writing a weak essay. One big weakness in a lot of essays is that they are not balanced: they are too much about one part, or go off the point, or waffle too much about one thing.

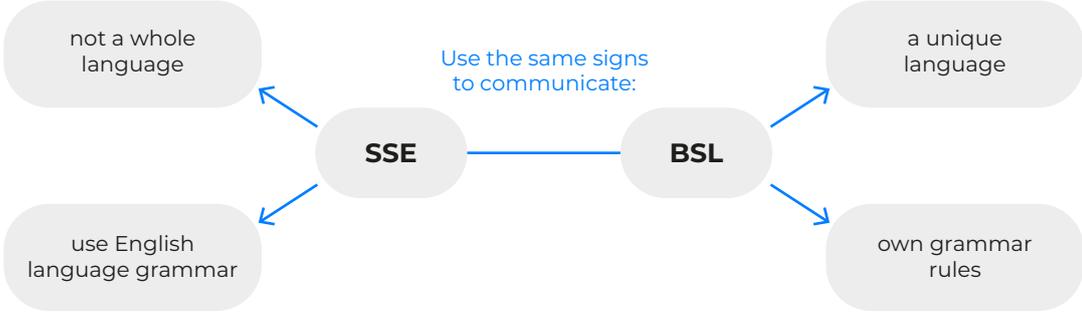
**Planning will help you to produce a balanced essay.**

The structure of an essay is important. Like a house – if the structure is bad, the house falls down! So your essay must have lots of points in it, be organised well, and must have an Introduction and a Conclusion. 👁

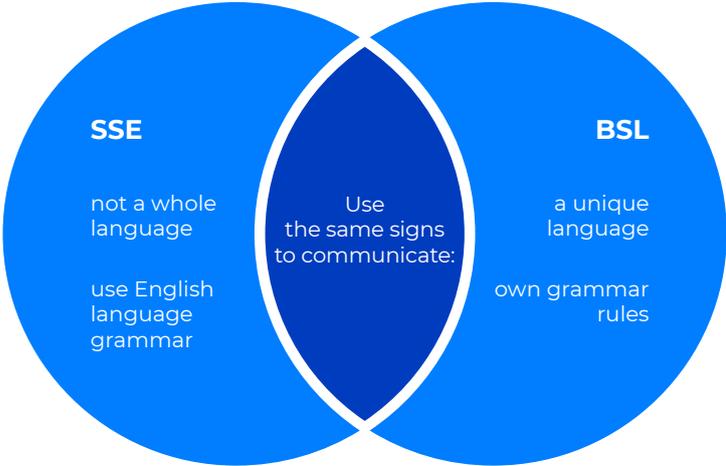
How do we plan an essay? Different people like to plan essays in different ways. The outline also depends on the type of essay you need to write.

For example, for a compare and contrast essay about Sign Supported English and BSL, you can use these methods:

**Concept maps – mind maps, etc.**



**Diagrams**



**Charts**

Different	Same	Different
<b>SSE</b> not a whole language uses English language grammar	use the same signs to communicate	<b>BSL</b> a unique language own grammatical rules

## Linear outline

### SSE:

- not a whole language
- uses English language grammar

### BSL:

- a unique language

### BOTH:

- use the same signs to communicate



## Activity 2

Choose an essay topic and create an outline plan for a 300-word essay

- **Find information: look for books and online resources**
- **Get organised**
- **Talk to others**
- **Use the outline plan you like best, e.g. a mind map, hamburger method, etc.**

**DO NOT „start writing“ – you are not ready to start writing yet!**

**Hint:** Your outline plan should contain headings for each section of your essay and a rough word count for each section.

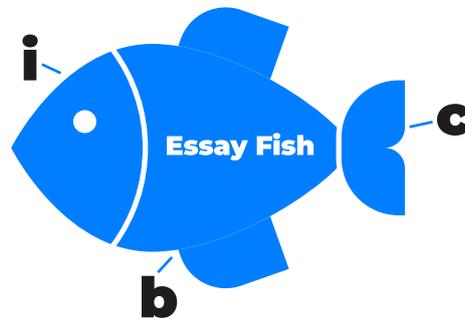
## 1.4. IMPROVING ESSAY STRUCTURE



This section helps you think about how to improve your essay structure. You will learn about the body of an essay in English. We'll consider the different elements of an essay and things that can help you understand the importance of essay structure. 👁️

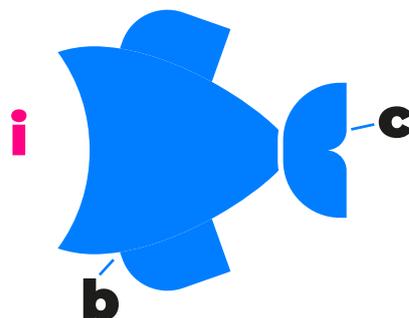
You can achieve an effective essay structure by paying attention to the following three parts of an essay:

- **Introduction**
- **Main body**
- **Conclusion**



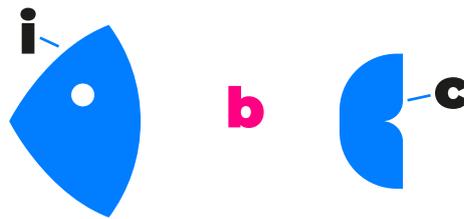
Think of an essay as being like a fish, with a head (introduction), with a body (main body), with a tail (conclusion).

### Introduction



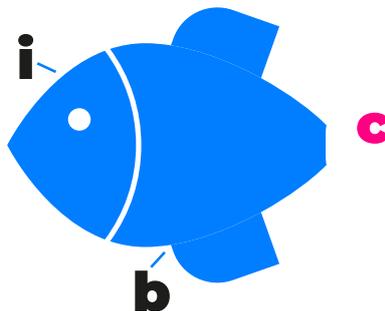
- This is the **beginning** of your essay.
- Show clearly that you know what the title/question is about and how you are going to respond.
- Tell what *areas* you will write about.
- What made you decide to write about these specific areas & aspects?

## Body



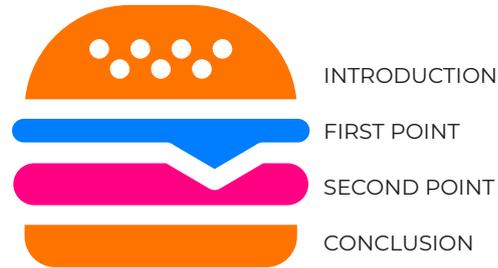
- This is the **main part** of your essay.
- Each paragraph should raise a new topic or issue.
- Support the points you make with references.
- Make the transitions from one paragraph to the next smooth and clear.

## Conclusion



- This is the last part of your essay – it is important. It must link to the rest, and give a final statement.
- Make a final conclusion from your points in the essay – what does it all mean? What are the **implications**?
- Don't be afraid to take sides, but you must deal effectively with a full range of arguments and views.

Another visualization method is the hamburger writing method. Use the layers to guide you. Put your notes next to the parts of the hamburger.



And remember, you can add more „filing“ if you need more paragraphs.

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Imagine you need to write an essay about Deaf culture in the Czech Republic. Using the hamburger diagram, we can start planning our essay like this:

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**Essay topic:** Analysis of Deaf culture in the Czech Republic

**Introduction:** Importance of Deaf culture

**Paragraph 1:** Czech Sign Language

**Paragraph 2:** Humour

**Paragraph 3:** Arts

**Conclusion:** Deaf culture in the Czech Republic today is vibrant.



### Activity 3

**A. Write a short paragraph about how a student can improve the structure of an essay.**

- begin with the importance of reading and understanding the question
- consider what the whole essay should contain overall
- refer to the importance of the word count

**B. Explain why an introduction is so important and what information it should contain.**

**C. Describe the main features of the body of an essay.**

**D. Explain why a conclusion is so important and what information it should contain.**

## 1.5. WRITING YOUR ESSAY



Now you are ready to write your essay. Let's do it.



### Activity 4

**Write your 300-word essay.**

Take your plan, plus any notes you have made from books and websites, plus any quotes you found in books – then what?

Put it all together and write your essay!

**Hint:** Stay organised, follow your plan structure, make sure your writing makes sense and keeps to the point, and stay on track!

## 1.6. EDIT YOUR ESSAY: HOW TO AVOID COMMON MISTAKES



This section helps you to improve the contents of your essay writing in English. You will learn about the various problems that can occur when writing essays, and how will learn to avoid making common mistakes.

This will lead to you to achieve the following:

1. You will have a clear idea about common mistakes in assignments.
2. You will be able to write more accurately and efficiently.

**Students frequently make mistakes in these areas when they write English essays and assignments:**

- Grammar, spelling and punctuation
- Addressing the questions in the essay instructions
- Essay formatting
- Conclusion
- Referencing and quoting

**Proper grammar saves lives.**

~~Let's eat Grandpa.~~

Let's eat, Grandpa.

### Common mistake #1: Grammar, spelling and punctuation

- Mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation that can be reduced by using spell-checking tools.

The use of (spell-checking) tools can help you avoid some grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes. You should use these tools to check your all your school assignments.

The most common spelling and grammar checkers are MS Word and

**Grammarly** but there are many others. If you're not sure how to set them correctly, you can find many instructional videos on YouTube.

**Spell-checkers are great, but not perfect.** For example, spell-checkers often cannot recognize when words like their, there or they're have been used incorrectly. Also, they don't recognize if the tense of a verb (past, present or future) is in the right form. This means your writing will not be completely error-free if you use spell-checkers, but they can help eliminate the biggest issues.



## Activity 5

### Do you use spell checking tools?

You'll find a practical task on text editing using the MS Word spell-checker in the e-learning course Online English for International Mobilities. There are also practical tips and hints for you.

**STUDY TIP no. 1: How to check spelling and grammar in your assignments (6 pages). Activity 1.3**

**Hint:** Ask yourself these questions:

- » Have you checked the text for grammar mistakes?
- » Have you used a spellchecker?
- » Have you checked the spelling and punctuation on your own?

## Common mistake #2: (Not) addressing the questions in the essay instructions

- **Giving answers that are not relevant to the questions.**
- **Giving made up answers.**

It is very important to read the instructions for each task carefully. It may be a good idea to use a highlighter to mark the key words.

Imagine that the instructions say this: Your task is to write an opinion essay. Choose between these topics:

- A. „One thing to improve foreign language education of Deaf students“**
- B. „One thing to improve foreign language education of hard of hearing students“**

In your essay, explain what you think needs to be improved, and how this change can benefit the students. Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.

This means you need to make sure you:

- **say clearly what „one thing“ you want to write about;**
- **explain how this change could in your opinion help the students;**
- **include your own experiences and observations.**

**Hint:** Before you submit your essay, ask yourself these questions:

- » Have you included all the points from the question in the assignment instructions?
- » Have you included relevant facts, examples, or personal experiences to support your point?
- » Is the evidence relevant to the topic?

## Common mistake #3: Essay formatting

- **Missing assignment title, course name & code – this information should be on every page (use the ‘Header’).**
- **Missing page numbers – they should be on every page (use the ‘Footer’).**
- **Little attention paid to the organisation of the text into paragraphs, to the fonts used, to spacing and alignment.**

Essay formatting and structure are very important. There are several things to care about:

- **Division of the text into paragraphs** – The text should be divided into clear paragraphs. You should have a separate paragraph for the introduction and the conclusion. The body of the essay is also divided into paragraphs. The number of paragraphs depends on the number of main ideas.
- **Font** – You can use a plain serif font, such as Times New Roman, or a sans serif font, e.g., Arial. The suggested sizes are 12 for the text and 14 for headings. Use just one font for the entire essay.
- **Title** – If your essay has a title, use it.
- **Spacing** – Essays should use at least 1.5 line spacing, and double spacing is often welcome.
- **Header** – You can insert your name there.
- **Page numbers** – It is nice to include numbers in texts that are longer than one page.
- **Indentation** – Typically, the first line of every paragraph should be indented, but make sure to ask what the teacher prefers.
- **Align** – We align texts to the left.

**Hint:** Look at your essay and think:

- » Is your text organised into clear paragraphs?
- » Is your name on it?
- » Have you chosen a suitable font? Do you use this font for the whole text?
- » Is the spacing the same in the whole essay?
- » Have you indented the first line of each paragraph?
- » How long is your essay? Is your writing too long/short?

### **Common mistake #4: Poor conclusion**

- **No conclusion**
- **Poor conclusion**
- **Strange conclusion**

Ending with a strong conclusion is very important. You basically sum up your arguments and send a clear message to the reader.



## Activity 6

Read these concluding paragraphs. Compare them. Which do you find more suitable?

### A.

To summarise my point, I agree that face masks play a part in controlling the spread of Covid-19; however, deaf people's communication needs should be considered as well. I believe that where this protection is necessary, see-through masks and see-through face shields should be freely available in healthcare and education settings.

### B.

I agree that face masks play an important part in stopping the Covid-19 pandemic but they cover the mouth and it is hard to communicate. For instance, those who lipread cannot do so. Also facial expressions cannot be seen. Face masks can be also unhygienic. For example, children cannot take proper care of their face masks. And then they can have breathing problems, because people often wear dirty masks. So see-through masks and see-through face shields are better.

**Hint:** Think of the use of expressions such as *To summarise, to conclude, in conclusion, etc.* Has the writer used them? Does the writer go to the point? Is the takeaway message clear for the reader?

**Hint:** Always make sure you:

- » Use some of the concluding phrases such as „in conclusion“, „finally“, or „all in all“.
- » Restate your thesis, but don't use the exact same words.
- » Don't introduce any new ideas.
- » Stick to the point.

## Common mistake #5: Referencing and quoting

### Quotations

When writing academic assignments you often need to make reference to or quote the work of other authors. A **quotation** is a line or a couple of lines copied directly from your source. Quotations match the original source word for word. For all quoted material you must include an **in-text citation**, and you must reference the source in the References section at the end of your essay.

Citing sources requires some practice. Students often make mistakes in this area, but you should try to avoid these mistakes because otherwise it may be plagiarism. So be careful.



### Activity 7

Think of the following:

#### A.

Do you have to cite when...

- you copy other person's text word-for-word into your essay?
- you summarize or paraphrase facts or ideas from a source?
- you include a graph or a chart from another source into your essay?

#### B.

And do you have to cite when...

- you say something that is generally known?
- you tell your opinion?
- you describe your own findings?

**Hint:** Any time you use someone else's work, you need to acknowledge the sources.

If you want to include in your essay an idea from a text you read, you may also summarize or rephrase the idea.

- **A paraphrase is retelling the same idea using your own words.**
- **A summary is a short version of the idea. You focus on the most important parts of a long passage.**

In both cases you must again cite the source using an in-text citation and then add the source to the References.



## Activity 8

Look at the source text and try to rephrase it **(A)** and summarise it **(B)**.

**A.**

‘It is important to realise, however, that many countries in the Southern hemisphere and elsewhere do not yet provide anywhere near universal Deaf education’ (Ladd, 2003: 43).

**B.**

‘As explained earlier, Deaf communities differ from other linguistic minorities in one crucial aspect – their language and culture can be transmitted down the generations only by the 5–10% with Deaf parents. For the other 90% of Deaf children, born to hearing parents, access to a sophisticated language and its traditions can only be gained by attending Deaf schools. As Chapter 2 describes, Deaf schools socialised newly entering Deaf children, enabling Deaf norms, values and traditions to develop and be passed down from generation to generation’ (Ladd, 2003: 43).

Source: Ladd, Paddy. 2003. *Understanding Deaf Culture*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

## Common mistake #6: Incorrect referencing

- **No reference**
- **Poor reference**
- **Poor information**

## Referencing

There are three major referencing styles used in academic writing:

- **Modern Language Association (MLA)**
- **American Psychological Association (APA)**
- **Chicago**

There are also several others. The differences among them are not big, but you should not mix these styles.

Compare the citations of the following book using these different styles:

### **Harvard**

Ladd, P., 2003. *Understanding Deaf Culture*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

### **APA**

Ladd, P. (2003). *Understanding deaf culture*. Multilingual Matters.

### **Chicago**

Ladd, Paddy. 2003. *Understanding Deaf Culture*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Poor referencing is a common mistake the students make in their assignments. You should always reference your sources and make sure you do it the right way. There are different referencing styles. Make sure you ask which style you are expected to use. Don't mix them.



## Activity 9

Do some quick research to explain the following question:

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What is the difference between a Bibliography and References?

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## Activity 10

Choose a couple of books from your library. Your task is to reference them correctly. Focus on:

- **The author(s), or editor(s)**
- **The title**
- **The edition other than the first (if applicable)**
- **The publisher's name.**
- **The place of publication**
- **The year of publication.**

Use one of the major referencing styles, MLA, APA or Chicago. To check your work, you can use one of the online referencing sites such as <https://www.citethisforme.com/>. You will find many similar sites on the internet.

**Hint:** Before you submit your essay, make sure of the following:

- » Cite your work and give credit. **Do not plagiarize.**
- » Use the referencing style assigned by your instructor.
- » Use citation software if you need.

## Finally, remember these things:

- **Check your work.**
- **Ask for advice.**
- **Follow the rules.**
- **Keep to the point.**
- **Show you are interested.**
- **Take responsibility for yourself and your work.**