

## **Anthropology Stage One Skills Session**

### **“Essay Writing”**

Week 6

Many people tell themselves: “I’ll just do some reading this week, get all the ideas in my head, and I’ll write up the essay next week.” This is usually a mistake: the ideas only become clear *by writing*, so it is better to write as you go along. The first thought you commit to paper (or laptop) is rarely going to be your *best* thought.

#### **When should you begin writing?**

##### Prewriting

Three weeks before the due date. This involves reading and researching, analysing the question, and performing ‘data dumps’ (see below). Allow your brain to marinate the ideas.

##### Writing

Two weeks before the due date. Write the first and second drafts.

##### Rewriting

One week before the due date. Proof-read, check that you have your bibliography correct, etc.

#### **How do you outline what the essay will be about?**

Use bullet points and answer this question for each section of the essay: what is going to be the “take-home” message of each paragraph? Instead of focusing on “how do I construct my sentences”, focus on “how will I organise my ideas”.

#### **What is a good way to begin writing?**

Don’t put it off until you “know the area well”. Try a 20 minute “free write” or “data dump”. Get the ideas out, leave them, then rework them. During exams, people often find that they can write hundreds of words in just half an hour – because they’re under pressure. Try applying the same pressure to yourself, in small doses: “I’m going to write 250 words in the next 20 minutes. It doesn’t matter whether the words are any good; it doesn’t matter if the sentences are a bit garbled; it doesn’t matter if the referencing is correct. I’m just going to write 250 words in 20 minutes.” You can edit afterwards.

Figure out how many words you’re going to devote to each section of the essay. For instance, a

1500-word essay might be divided as follows:

Intro = 225

Body = 350 x 3

Conclusion = 225

Useful tip: *don't begin by writing the introduction and proceeding all the way through the essay*. You'll be cutting down options for where the essay is going to go.

### **How do I link the paragraphs?**

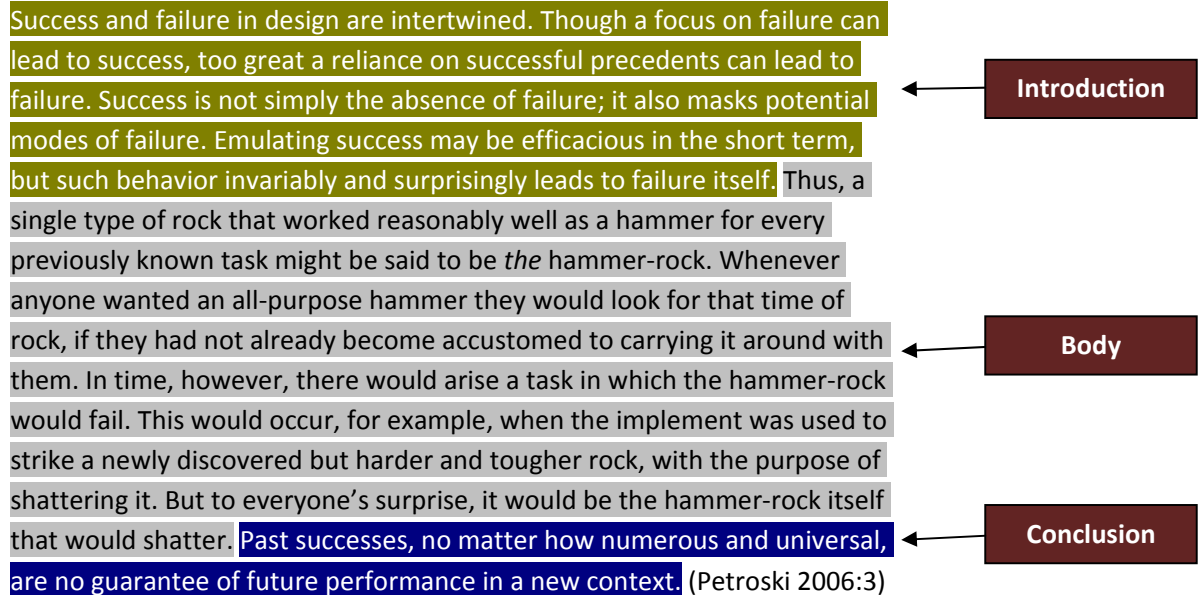
Use simple signposts. If the next paragraph is continuing on the same path as the previous paragraph, you might use words such as “in addition”, “furthermore”, and so on. If you're going in another direction, you might use “however”, “in contrast”, etc. When you return to the main thread, you might signal this by saying “nonetheless” or “nevertheless”. The first sentence of each paragraph should include clear signposts, so it's best to keep that first sentence fairly short.

### **How do you structure the introduction?**

Use a “funnel” shape. Begin with something general, then move into the specifics. The middle of the introduction is where you assure the marker that you're going to address the *focus* of the topic (ie: are you going to get to the heart of the question?).

## How do you structure each paragraph?

Think of each paragraph as a mini-essay – it will always have a mini-intro, body, and conclusion. Notice the following paragraph from Petroski (2006:3).



The first section makes it clear what this paragraph is going to be about. The rest of the “introduction” makes some general statements. The body provides evidence with a concrete, specific example. Finally, the conclusion “zooms out” again. It basically says: “here is the more general relevance/importance/significance of the example I’ve just discussed”.

(Another thing worth noting about this paragraph: Petroski conveys all the ideas with simple, direct sentences. Sometimes you may need to use specific jargon – but your reader will always appreciate *clear* sentences more than long, confused or garbled sentences. At the very least, try to keep your sentences simple in the introduction and conclusion: don’t get bogged down in lots of details for these parts of the essay.)

## Proof-reading

- Sometimes it’s a good idea to proof-read *backwards*: read the last sentence, then the sentence before that, and so on. When you do this, you won’t become distracted by the *meaning* of what you’ve written: you’ll find it easier to focus on other aspects such as spelling and grammar.
- Use your class-mates – make a deal with somebody to proof-read your own work.
- Look for whether you’ve obsessively used one type of sentence repeatedly. (For instance, does every second or third sentence begin with “For instance”? If so, experiment with different types of sentences.)