

HOW TO WRITE DISTINCTION ESSAYS EVERY TIME

Step 1: Analyse the Question

There are generally two types of essays: argumentative essays and explanatory essays.

In an argumentative essay, you are expected to put forward an academic argument in answer to the essay question and support your argument with academic sources (references).

In an explanatory essay, you are expected to explain or describe a process or topic in answer to an essay question and support your argument with academic sources (references).

Regardless of the type of essay you are writing, it is very important that you understand what is being asked of you before you begin researching and writing your essay.

If you are given a question:

You must be sure that you understand all parts of the question and what the question is asking you to do. You must be able to recognise the 'task words' in the question, which tell you what you have to do (for example, 'discuss', 'compare', 'analyse' or 'argue') and the 'key words' in the question, which tell you what you are being asked to write about (for example, Critical Thinking or the roles of registered nurses).

If you have to write your own question:

If you are writing an argumentative essay and you need to write your own question, you must write a question that invites (or allows) you to make an argument. For example, a question that would invite an argument would be 'Is Critical Thinking relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse?' Questions on the same subject that would not invite an argument, but rather an explanatory essay, would be 'What are two definitions of Critical Thinking?' or 'Describe two definitions of Critical Thinking'.

If you do not understand the question, what should you do?

First, check your course information booklet or course website for more information on the assessment. Check your lecture notes, textbook, other course information and recommended readings to see if this information helps you to understand what is being asked of you. If you still do not understand the question, ask your tutor or lecturer for help straight away. If you cannot understand the question, then you will have significant problems trying to answer it. This needs to be addressed immediately, before you begin your research and writing.

This information relates to only the first step of academic essay writing. Please ensure that you read the remainder of the articles in the 6-part series How to Write Distinction Essays Every Time. Don't forget that the final stage is to have your essay professionally edited by one of our [academic editors](#) to ensure it is presented in the best possible way. Essay editing can help to improve your grades significantly! You can read more information about our essay editing service [here](#).

Step 2: Draft the Essay Plan

- Have you ever borrowed some books to start your research and realised you did not know where to begin?
- Have you ever spent time reading a great deal of information that in the end was irrelevant to the essay or assignment you were working on?
- Have you ever started to write your essay and realised you had too much information on one topic, and not enough information on another topic?

If you write the first draft of your essay plan before you begin your research, you will be organised and prepared, and you will save time.

You must write the first draft of your essay plan before you start your research. This will give your research direction and ultimately make it easier for you to write your essay. Having a plan will let you know what you need to research and how much research you need on each topic or subject that you will be writing about.

You will base this first draft of your essay plan on your essay question, and your current knowledge of your subject. You will not often be asked to write an essay on a topic you know nothing about, since you will already be studying the subject and will normally have had one or more lectures or tutorials on the topic.

It is acceptable if your essay plan is rough or vague at this point, or if you do not have a great deal of detail. You will develop your essay plan (expanding it and including more detail) and possibly even change it as you go through the research process.

Introductions and conclusions

As you can see from the example essay plan below, an introduction and a conclusion will normally be approximately ten per cent of the word count of the entire essay. (This is a general guide and does not apply to essays longer than 5,000 words).

In order to be considered a true introduction, your first paragraph must do two things:

1. Answer the essay question in a clear statement (this is called your thesis statement)
2. Introduce the main points your essay will make to support your argument

You cannot discuss any major points or topics in your essay if you have not introduced them in your introduction. In addition, you must discuss all your main points or topics in the order that you introduce them in your introduction. This helps to maintain the flow and structure of your essay.

Similarly, in order to be considered a true conclusion, your last paragraph must do two things:

1. Restate the answer to the essay question (i.e. restate your thesis statement)
2. Sum up the main points your essay has made to support your argument

Remember, a conclusion cannot contain any new information.

What does a first draft of an essay plan look like?

The first draft of your essay plan will show you what main topics you will discuss in your essay, how the essay will be structured, and roughly how many words you will spend on each part.

If your essay question was 'Is Critical Thinking relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse?' and you had to write 1,500 words, then your essay plan might look like this:

Essay question: 'Is Critical Thinking relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse?'

Essay length: 1,500 words

Introduction (150 words)

1. Thesis statement: Through an examination of the evidence, it is clear that Critical Thinking is highly relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse for a number of reasons.
2. Introduce main points or topics to be discussed: accuracy of diagnoses, patient outcomes, prevent and solve problems, communication

Topic 1: Accuracy of diagnoses (300 words)

Topic 2: Patient outcomes (300 words)

Topic 3: Prevent and solve problems (300 words)

Topic 4: Communication (300 words)

Conclusion (150 words)

1. Concluding statement: Thus, it can be seen that the concept of Critical Thinking is invaluable and highly relevant to Registered Nurses.
2. Sum up main points or topics that have been discussed: accuracy of diagnoses, patient outcomes, prevent and solve problems, communication

(Please note that this sample essay plan is intended only to serve as a guide for how to develop and write an essay plan, and should not be used as an essay plan by students writing an essay on this topic.)

Body of the essay and topic sentences

You can find out how many words you will write in the body of your essay by taking away the number you will spend on your introduction and conclusion from the total amount. How you divide the number of words in the body of your essay between your main topics will depend on how important each topic is to your argument. How long you spend writing about each topic should reflect the importance of each topic. If all of your topics were of equal importance, you would write roughly the same amount of words on each. If one topic were more important, you would write about it first and spend longer discussing it. If one topic were less important, you would write about it last and write fewer words on it.

Using topic sentences at the beginning of each new paragraph is essential to ensure that your essay is well organised and well structured. It also ensures that the essay flows logically and reads well. (This is something that your essay editor can check for you when you submit your document for editing.) A topic sentence must do two things:

1. Introduce the new topic about to be discussed
2. Show how this new topic helps to answer the essay question or support your argument in answering the essay question

If your essay question were 'Is Critical Thinking relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse?' and you were about to discuss the topic 'accuracy of diagnoses', then your topic sentence might sound like this: 'Another way in which Critical Thinking is highly relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse is in ensuring accuracy of diagnoses'. This sentence clearly demonstrates to the reader that you are about to discuss 'accuracy of diagnoses' and you are doing so because it is another way that Critical Thinking is relevant to Registered Nurses, which is what your essay is arguing.

The information in this article is relevant to the second step of writing an academic essay. However, there are five other steps. Please ensure you read all of the articles in the series [How to Write Distinction Essays Every Time](#). When you have completed following the steps and have written your essay, remember to submit it to one of our [academic editors](#) for professional editing. Academic [essay editing](#) helps students to improve their grades.

Step 3: Conduct the Research

Part One: Organising your Research using a Research Document

Do you ever have any of these problems?

- Have you ever started to write an essay and found that you were staring at a blank screen and a flashing cursor? Did you feel like you were starting from scratch?
- Have you ever started writing an essay and found that you could not remember some of the information you had read? Or tried to put in a reference and could not find the page number of the quotation you were using?
- Is your research usually scattered all over the place, in the form of books, photocopied pages, bookmarked websites and some notes? Do you find it hard to create an essay out of disorganised research?
- If you answered yes to any of these questions, then learning how to create and use a research document can help! If you organise and record your research properly, you should never have any of these problems again.

How can you organise your research?

Your research should be organised so that the transition from doing your research to writing your essay is simple. The best way to do this is to organise your research so that it matches the organisation of the essay. In Step 2 of writing an academic essay, you would have written a rough essay plan before you began your research. This essay plan is the guide you need to use to organise your research.

Copy and paste this essay plan into a Word document. All your research for this essay will be recorded in this one document. Use each of the dot points from your essay plan (topics you are planning to discuss) as a heading in your research document. When you do your research, you will organise it in the order that the information will appear in your essay. Doing this means you will be organising your research by theme or topic, not by source.

This means that you will not simply record all the information from one source together and then go on to type up the information from your next source underneath it. If you do things that way, you would need to go back and re-organise your research later, into the correct order for your essay. That would be a waste of your time.

Why should you record your research (instead of just reading or taking a few notes)?

If you do not record your research properly, you can spend hours, days or weeks doing research, and then when you start to write your essay you will find that you have to go back and re-do things, like search for page numbers or correct quotations. You must record your research in a way that makes essay writing easier for you. It should be accurate, include all the information you need, and give you a chance to record your own ideas and thoughts on the material you are reading as you go along. Do not leave this until the end.

Instead of just taking notes when researching, a better and more efficient way to research is to critically arrange and organise material by typing out all the important information you find. You do not need to type out everything, just the critical, relevant and important information for your essay. Then you can add your own notes. (Make sure you use punctuation marks so that you can differentiate between quotations and your own thoughts and ideas.)

There are a few important reasons for why it is better to type out sources word-for-word in your research rather than only take notes.

1. You will not have to remember everything you have read; all the important material will already be written down.
2. When you begin writing your essay, you will have all the information you need to make accurate direct quotations.
3. You will not make the mistake of writing something in your essay that you think you have thought of yourself, but is in fact something you are remembering from a source word-for-word.
4. You will still have the opportunity to write your own notes about the sources as you go along, and develop your own ideas. However, you will do this in a way that makes it clear what information is from a source, and what information has come from your own ideas.

How should you record your research?

You must record the following information from your sources:

1. Reference (bibliographic) information about the source you are using
2. The subject or topic of each paragraph you type out (to help organise your ideas)
3. The exact wording of the source (using punctuation marks to show you are quoting)
4. The page number(s) of the information you are typing up
5. Your own ideas and thoughts about the material you are reading

While you are doing all this, you can be working on your reference list (bibliography) at the same time. Each time you begin reading a source, type up all reference information into your reference list straight away. One good way of setting out your research is as follows:

The topic/subject of the paragraph

'The exact wording of the source/paragraph that you are typing up goes here, using punctuation marks so you can see that you are quoting' (Put the reference information here, the way you would in an in-text reference: Surname, Year, page number. Or put it in a footnote if you will be using footnotes in your essay).

[Your notes and ideas go here. Your own words go in square brackets and do not have punctuation marks, so you can easily see differentiate between your own words and words from the source.]

For example:

The importance of women fighting in the Spanish Civil War

'The combat role played by militia women signified a change in gender roles that was occurring in the Republican zone as a result both of the war and of the social revolution. Part of the significance of the *miliciana* phenomenon also lies in its uniqueness in Spanish history' (Lines, 2009, p. 168).

[This is very interesting information since some authors argue that gender roles didn't change during the social revolution and Spanish Civil War.]

How can you develop your essay plan while you are researching?

All the decisions about what will go into your essay and in what order are made at the research stage, not at the essay writing stage. This is a common mistake made by students who do not establish enough of a connection between the two stages.

At the beginning of your research, you started out with your rough essay plan as a basis for the headings in your research document. As you go along, you may add more headings or sub-headings to your research document. For example, you might find that there are three sub-topics under the first main topic that you wish to discuss, and so you will create sub-headings for them. The information under these sub-headings will eventually become paragraphs in your essay.

As you conduct your research, you must critically analyse the information that you find. Change your sections around in order of importance. Decide what information should be included and what should not. All these decisions should be made at the research stage, so that by the time you come to do your writing you know exactly what you will be writing about and in what order, down to each paragraph. You will have in front of you exactly what information needs to be used in each section and paragraph of your essay. This also means that you will never feel like you are starting from scratch or have nothing to go on when you begin writing your essay.

Part Two: Research Skills and Academic Sources

- Have you ever received feedback on an assessment telling you that the sources you used were not academic?
- Have you ever used Wikipedia or another non-academic source in your research?
- Do you find it confusing knowing what sources to use and what sources not to use?
- Do you have trouble knowing where to go to get the information you need for your research?

Being able to tell the difference between an academic source and a non-academic source, knowing where to find academic sources and deciding what sources are relevant to your research are important skills that you will develop during your tertiary studies. The aim of this guide is to point you in the right direction.

Books, monographs and textbooks

The first place you should go is the library, even if this means ordering in books from other libraries. For academics to have their books (and journal articles) published, they must go through a process called a peer-review. During this process, one or more other academics who are experts in the field will read and assess a book or article to decide if it is of publishable standard. This is why your

research will be of the highest quality if you use books, monographs, textbooks and journal articles written by academics for your research, because the work had to meet academic standards. There is no such process for publishing on the internet; anyone can write whatever he or she likes on any subject and publish it on the internet.

Journal articles and electronic databases

Your second stop after books, monographs and textbooks will be journal articles. Some of these will only be available in hardcopy from the library, but many will be available in their full-text versions through online electronic databases, such as JSTOR, ProQuest and Ingenta. (Access to these databases is obtained through your university's library website.)

When you search the electronic databases, make sure you modify your search so that you are only given results from peer-reviewed journals. This will ensure that the journal articles you find have gone through the process explained above to ensure that they are of a high standard. You can also search so that you only receive results for articles that are available in their full electronic versions.

Internet resources

As explained above, there is no way of ensuring the standard of information that is uploaded to the internet. Anyone can publish anything on the internet, thus websites are not the ideal place for you to go to get your information.

When you do use the internet and websites for your research, you need to be sure that you are consulting reputable sources. For example, websites published by governments, universities, the United Nations and national organisations like the Australian Practice Nurses Association will generally contain quality information. However, it is important to note that these sources are not considered academic sources if they have not been written by academics. Nonetheless, unless you have been specifically requested by your tutor or lecturer to use only sources written by academics, you can often find valuable information from these reputable websites that may assist you in your research. Just be careful that you know exactly who has published the information on the internet and be sure to record the exact URL and date and time you accessed the information, as you will need this information for your reference list.

A useful guide but not definitive: Where to go for more information

The above information is only a guide and ultimately where you find most of your sources will depend on what your essay topic is. For example, if you were writing a Sociology essay on an aspect of the media you would need to consult newspapers, television programmes and internet news websites.

If you are in doubt about what types of sources to use, check your course information booklet for more information about your particular assessment piece. Find out if there is a recommended reading list that you can begin with, and then use the sources listed in those readings to find further sources. If you are still not sure, check with your lecturer or tutor.

This guide is relevant to the third step in writing academic essays. There are six steps in total, so please ensure you read the remainder of the articles in the series *How to Write Distinction Essays Every Time*. Once you have completed writing your essay by following these six steps, it is strongly recommended that you hire one of our professional [essay editors](#) to edit your essay. [Essay editing](#) is another way you can ensure you receive the best grade possible.

Step 4: Finalise the Essay Plan

What should be finished before I start writing?

In Step 2 of the essay writing process, you would have drafted a rough essay plan before you began your research. During the research process (as explained in Step 3), you would have developed this plan further as you learned more information on your topic.

The first draft of your essay plan may have looked like this:

Introduction (150 words)

1. Thesis statement: Through an examination of the evidence, it is clear that Critical Thinking is highly relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse for a number of reasons.
2. Introduce main points or topics to be discussed: accuracy of diagnoses, patient outcomes, prevent and solve problems, communication

Topic 1: Accuracy of diagnoses (300 words)

Topic 2: Patient outcomes (300 words)

Topic 3: Prevent and solve problems (300 words)

Topic 4: Communication (300 words)

Conclusion (150 words)

1. Concluding statement: Thus, it can be seen that the concept of Critical Thinking is invaluable and highly relevant to Registered Nurses.
2. Sum up main points or topics that have been discussed: accuracy of diagnoses, patient outcomes, prevent and solve problems, communication

However, as you were collecting, organising and analysing information in your research document, you may have found that Topic 2: Patient outcomes and Topic 3: Prevent and solve problems were far more important than you thought. You might have decided that Topic 4: Communication is not something that should be discussed in the essay. Importantly, you would also have found out what information or points needed to be discussed under each of your topics. All of these changes would have affected your essay plan, and you would have made these changes to your essay plan (and the organisation of your research document) as you went along.

Once you have completed your research, and before you begin writing your first draft, you need to re-think your essay plan and write a final version based on what you discovered during your research. Your final essay plan will contain more detail than your first draft and be a very specific guide to how to write your essay. It might look like this:

Introduction (150 words)

1. Thesis statement: Through an examination of the evidence, it is clear that Critical Thinking is highly relevant to the role of a Registered Nurse for a number of reasons.
2. Introduce main points or topics to be discussed: patient outcomes, prevent and solve problems, accuracy of diagnoses

Topic 1: Patient outcomes (450 words)

- a. Assessment
- b. Planning of care
- c. Implementing care plan
- d. Evaluation of care and outcomes

Topic 2: Prevent and solve problems (450 words)

- a. Types of problems
- b. Prevention of problems
- c. Solving problems

Topic 3: Accuracy of diagnoses (300 words)

- a. Problems with inaccurate diagnoses
- b. How critical thinking allows improved diagnoses
- c. Benefits and outcomes of accurate diagnoses

Conclusion (150 words)

1. Concluding statement: Thus, it can be seen that the concept of Critical Thinking is invaluable and highly relevant to Registered Nurses.
2. Sum up main points or topics that have been discussed: patient outcomes, prevent and solve problems, accuracy of diagnoses

(Please note that this sample essay plan is intended only to serve as a guide for how to develop and write an essay plan, and should not be used as an essay plan by students writing an essay on this topic.)

Once you have completed the final draft of your essay plan, you are ready to begin writing the first draft of your essay. You might like to print out the essay plan and have it sitting next to you as you write. Depending on the length of your research document, you might print that or simply have it open on your computer. Your essay plan will let you know what information from your research document needs to be included in your essay as you write.

This guide relates to the fourth step in writing an academic essay. There are five other steps, so please ensure that you read each guide in the series How to Write Distinction Essays Every

Time. Once you have written your essay, we suggest that you use our professional essay editing service to improve your essay. Please read about [our editors](#) and our editing and proofreading services to ensure you obtain all the assistance you need.

Step 5: Draft Your Essay

Writing the first draft has never been so easy!

Now that you have completed your research in an organised way and have written a final draft of your essay plan, writing the first draft of your essay will be easier than it ever has been before. All of the following decisions about your essay have already been made:

1. What your answer to the essay question is
2. What main points you will discuss in order to support your argument
3. The order in which to discuss your main points
4. How long to spend discussing each main point
5. What information each paragraph will contain (i.e. what information you will use to discuss each of your main points)
6. What references you will use to support your argument

Thus, there is no reason for you to feel lost or stare at your computer screen not knowing what to write. If you are stuck for any reason, the best thing to do is to keep writing. You can always improve something once you have written it down. If you have not written anything, not much can be done until you do. Don't forget that our essay editors are here to help you to improve your essay through professional editing. You just need to write your first draft and submit it to us for editing.

When you write your first draft using your essay plan as a guide and including all the information you have organised in your research document, pay attention to the following things:

1. Make sure you choose the best examples from your research to use
2. Make sure you use topic sentences to link each new topic back to the question and ensure your essay flows well
3. Ensure that you write in a formal academic style
4. Ensure that you format your essay correctly, according to the guidelines for your particular course (for example, line spacing, font and page margins)
5. Make sure you include your in-text references or footnotes as you are writing; do not leave these until the end. Since you will be using information from your research document that provides you with the references to use, this should not be a problem

While of course you need to write your essay to the best of your ability, our professional academic editors, when editing your document, will check over these things for you and make corrections or suggestions for improvements if necessary. Our comprehensive editing service includes correcting and improving your formatting and referencing, as well as dealing with all issues related to language and style.

Academic Writing: Some general guidelines

- Have you ever been told that your writing style is not academic or that it is too informal?

- Have you ever felt unclear on how to write an academic essay?
- Are you unsure what rules to follow, what you can do and what you should not do?

This guide contains some general rules and guidelines for academic writing. You will develop your own writing style or 'voice' over time, and the more academic sources you read, the clearer it will become to you what academic writing is and how your essays should sound. However, it is important to learn certain academic conventions as soon as you can and this guide will help you to do that. If in doubt about any of these guidelines, always check with your tutor or lecturer as different disciplines and courses sometimes have different approaches or expectations. Ensuring that your essay is written in a formal academic style and tone is something that our [academic editors](#) can assist you with when you [submit your essay](#) to us for editing.

Formality

Academic writing needs to be formal and impersonal. This means that your writing should be clear, concise and professional. It needs to follow certain rules (such as those outlined below) in order to ensure that it meets academic standards.

Supported by evidence

The most significant difference between academic and non-academic writing is that academic writing puts forward arguments and ideas that are supported by evidence, most often in the form of citing other research or studies. Learning how to reference correctly is an important part of ensuring that your arguments and ideas are always supported by evidence. You must remember that you cannot make a claim or assertion in an academic essay without supporting it. Please see our [referencing guides](#) for examples of the most common referencing styles and information on how to use them correctly.

The use of the first person

Although there are exceptions, (for example, if you are discussing a field trip that you personally took in order to conduct research or interviews that you carried out), normally academic writing does not make use of the first person. This means you would not use 'I' in your essays. Therefore, instead of writing 'I will argue', you might write 'this essay will argue'. The first reason for this is that academic writing must be formal and impersonal.

Consider the difference between these two sentences:

1. 'In this essay, I will discuss the reasons why Critical Thinking is important to the role of Registered Nurses, including its role in improving the accuracy of diagnoses.'
2. 'Critical Thinking is important to the role of Registered Nurses because it improves the accuracy of diagnoses.'

Not only is the second sentence more formal because it does not make use of the personal 'I', but it is also more direct and thus sounds clearer, more concise, and more academic. Instead of stating that a point will be made, as in the first sentence, the second sentence simply makes the point directly.

The second reason why the use of the first person is discouraged is that it is often redundant (unnecessary). Consider the difference between these two sentences:

1. 'I believe that Critical Thinking is relevant to the role of Registered Nurses.'
2. 'Critical Thinking is relevant to the role of Registered Nurses.'

It is unnecessary to state 'I believe'. The reader knows that the statement is what the author believes, because the author is writing it in their essay. Further, which sentence sounds more convincing? The second sentence sounds more convincing because it is direct and straight to the point.

Correct grammar, spelling and punctuation are very important in academic writing. In order to write formally and to a high academic standard, your writing must be accurate. Writing an essay that contains correct grammar, spelling and punctuation can make a significant difference to your final grade. Accurate writing affects not only your marks for presentation. If your grammar and sentence structure is so unclear that your tutor or lecturer cannot understand the point you are trying to make, for example, you could lose marks overall. Handing in an essay that is well written, accurate and highly polished can improve your grades. In order to ensure that you are submitting work of the highest possible standard, it is strongly recommended that you have your work edited by a professional academic editor.

It is important to remember that you cannot rely on the spell-check or grammar-check on Microsoft Word. There are many reasons for this; for example, the spell-check will not detect your mistake if you type 'four' instead of 'for'. In addition, the grammar-check will often provide incorrect suggestions. This is because Microsoft Word is a computer programme and it cannot understand what you are trying to say. While it can be a useful tool, you must remember that it cannot substitute for checking your own work carefully or having it edited by an experienced essay editor.

There are a significant number of rules to follow when writing academic essays, assignments, theses or dissertations. In order to ensure that you have followed all those rules correctly, and in order to ensure that your writing is polished, clear and concise, and free of grammatical and other errors, it is recommended you hire a professional academic editor. This is the final step of academic essay writing, and it will be discussed in the next article.

Step 6: Professional Academic Editing

Once you have completed writing your essay, it is a great move to have it professionally edited by an academic editor. You have just spent a significant amount of time doing the best possible job on your essay or assignment, performing your research and writing up your results. After all this effort, it is important that your work is presented in the best possible way. Using a professional academic editor will ensure that your work is polished, well written, and presented correctly. If English is your second language, having your essay or assignment professionally edited is even more necessary. You do not want mistakes in your writing to confuse your markers or distract them from the important arguments you are making. This could lead to you receiving a grade lower than the grade you really deserve.

When selecting an academic editor, it is important to consider qualifications, experience and quality of service, as well as price. Always thoroughly research the editing company you plan to use to ensure that they are a reputable business and that their past clients have been happy with their service. Editex meets all of the requirements of a top-level academic editing business, and can attend to all of your editing needs. You can read testimonials from a selection of our very satisfied clients on the [testimonials](#) page and view examples of our editing work on the Editing Examples page.

Please note that some universities require students to obtain the permission of their tutor, lecturer or supervisor prior to having their work professionally edited. We recommend that students follow the policies of their universities. Elite Editing adheres to all university guidelines and policies. Our editing complies with the [Australian Standards for Editing Practice](#) and the '[Guidelines for Editing Research Theses](#)', which have been adopted by most Australian universities.