

Student Article

A foundation for writing your first academic essay

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There is a feeling of frustration when trying to recall a word, which seems to be close, but unreachable. It seems to happen much more often when it comes to using a second language, in this case, English, especially for academic purposes. One way to deal with this situation is to try to rephrase the whole sentence. Another option is to write the word using simple language and after, use a thesaurus to find a suitably academic synonym. However, there are nuances with nearly every word in the language, so they do not always collocate well and keep the same meaning when put together. Thus, it is not always the most ideal approach. This article will discuss the process of writing an essay and it will focus on how to start writing especially when it is a new experience for a student.

Firstly, this essay will take an in-depth look at the academic writing process in English. The main problem, from the perspective of Russian students, is that we do not write essays at school. We typically write compositions after finishing reading a book, such as the following based on the title "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky:

"What pushed Raskolnikov to kill the old pawnbroker?" Do not worry, this happens right at the beginning of the book, so it is not a spoiler...

Creativity is not expected at school, whereas a good essay in university in the U.K is a combination of one's own thoughts and prior research. Exploring resources for arguments and finding examples for an essay is another thing Russian students are not normally asked to do. All the information and ideas are provided by the teacher. Students are merely expected to show that they have listened. On the contrary, when writing an essay at university in the U.K, every student is expected to provide evidence that they have understood and interacted with information.

Personally, I have two states of mind when I am writing, whether it is in Russian or English. Either I have no idea what I want to say, or my thoughts are too fast for my fingers. Thus, I either agonize over every word and achieve nothing, or turn the paper into messy

ungrammatical notes, which can be understood only by me and needs a general edit. Neither of these situations is very helpful for writing the first couple of essays. This is why, from my observation, many undergraduate students have difficulties writing essays in English.

With experience, it becomes easier to put all thoughts together. As far as I am concerned, the first stage is to unpick the title. Then, you need to make a plan with bullet points and spend some time reading in order to find support and evidence for arguments. The next step is to connect all your ideas and concepts, so your thoughts eventually appear to flow logically. Essentially, this makes it easier for the reader to follow.

Some students find it difficult to start with an introduction, while others struggle to write a conclusion. Thus, it is better to begin with the part you find easiest to start with because you know what you want to say, and use this as a base to develop other thoughts. When your brain has warmed up, writing becomes less intimidating than when you are sitting in front of a blank page. However, it is important to remember that writing an academic essay does not work in the same way as creative writing when the only constraint is imagination; there are a number of conventions and guidelines to make writing truly academic by which I mean developing a clear argument that the reader will be able to follow easily.

The conclusion to be reached can be that the most important aim of a foundation course is to teach us the basic principles of writing an essay and developing our voice. This is because during the first year of university, all students are treated equally, regardless of their nationality and mother tongue. After the preparation in the foundation year, international students should have learned to adjust to the U.K's higher education writing requirements, and may even have an advantage over the native speakers. I am in the process of writing my first academic essay, which is the hardest task for me at this point and I hope I will deal with it the best way I can.

The only way to proceed in writing an essay is to put some words on paper. This can be a problem not only with essay writing, but also with any creative and evaluative pieces of work. Every writer is afraid of being imperfect and that is probably the reason why it is so difficult to make a start. One solution could be simply to write down ideas as they come, and worry about the language later, after finishing the draft. Basically, there is no other way of writing something other than starting.

Another issue for many students is thinking about the word limit; this can simply prevent thoughts developing naturally. On the one hand, it may seem easier to reduce the word count

by editing i.e. replacing longer phrases with shorter synonymous language which take less space and by deleting sentences with the repetitive ideas. On the other hand, if an essay is coherently written, every phrase and sentence is connected to the next and the previous ones, so replacing phrases or getting rid of sentences can break the flow. Thankfully, this problem can be solved upon further editing of the first draft.

In conclusion, writing is quite simply a matter of concentration and putting yourself in a writing mood. If this is achieved, there is nothing to stop you from writing the best work you have ever done. Good luck with your writing, both creative and academic, and remember – at university there is always an essay that you should be working on, so you need to work on making it an enjoyable pursuit.

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