Get started and keep going
If you've made a plan (see Essay writing 1: Planning your essay), you will have a good idea of what you are going to include in your essay. That may not make it any easier to start writing!

You can either:

A) Start with your introduction. This can help you to get your ideas sorted, and give you a reason to stick with your plan.

B) Leave your introduction until you've written the whole essay, then go back and add it later. Instead start with the paragraph or section you feel most confident about and build up from there.

If you get stuck when writing your essay, it is often because you are not clear what your main ideas are yet. Take a step back and explain in simple terms what you are trying to get across. It often helps to explain your ideas to a friend, as putting things into words starts untangling your thoughts. Your friend can tell you the parts of your argument that they don't understand, and these are the points you need to clarify. (You can always do the same for them when they come to write their essay.)

If you know you take ages crafting each sentence, allow yourself to write a rough draft just to get all the ideas down. In this draft, type quickly without editing as you go along. Don’t worry about the exact choice of words at this stage; it is much easier to work out the phrasing when you have all the points on paper.

For more information....
See Essay writing 1. Planning your essay
See Essay writing 3. Develop your essay writing
See the Study Advice website for guides on Referencing, Proofreading and Academic writing.

Writing your essay

This guide is the second of three looking at essay writing at university. It includes advice on:

- Introductions and conclusions
- Writing the main body
- Getting started and keeping going

Writing introductions and conclusions
Introductions and conclusions are not just the bits tagged on to the ends of your essay. They form a conceptual framework which the reader will need to understand your arguments. Always keep your reader in mind when writing the beginning and ending to your essay:

- What do they need to know at the start so they become interested in reading your essay and can follow the rest of your argument?
- What do you want to leave them with as the main message of your essay at the end?

The best introductions and conclusions tell the reader exactly what they need to know to understand the main body of the essay.

Introductions
An introduction gives your reader a way in to your essay. It is like consulting the map before starting on a journey; it situates the journey in the surrounding landscape, and it identifies the main route.

You can think of an introduction as covering what / why / how:
1. **What** the question is about – explain your interpretation of the question and what it is asking you to do.

2. **Why** the question is important – put the question into context and identify the main issues that are raised by the question.

3. **How** you are going to answer it – let the reader know what you are going to cover in your essay in order to answer the question.

   If you want to narrow down a very open-ended question, tell your reader that you are doing this in your introduction. Explain briefly that you are aware of the many issues raised by the question, but that you are only going to focus on one or two in detail...and **why** you have chosen these particular aspects.

   **For example:**
   
   "To what extent do you agree that regional inequalities in the UK are persistent and widening?"

   **What the question is about**: The links between geographical location and distribution of resources and wealth in the UK.

   **Why this is important**: Because some regions in the UK are more prosperous and better resourced than others – Why is this? What causes the inequalities between regions?

   **How I am going to answer it**: Have to narrow down “regional” and also “inequalities” – so compare the unemployment rates, average salaries, and job opportunities in Oxfordshire and Lancashire as a case study.

### Conclusions

A conclusion is like looking at a photograph after coming back from the journey; it captures the essence of the journey and allows people to reflect on where they have been.

It should summarise the main points of your argument, relate these points back to the question, and show the answer you have reached. Think about what your reader knows now that they didn’t know at the beginning.

If your essay question asks you to come to a judgement, for example “To what extent...” or “How far do you agree...”, this is the place to clearly outline your reasoned judgement. It doesn’t have to be a straight agreement or disagreement, but it is better to have a well reasoned side to your argument, instead of trying to combine every viewpoint into a muddled whole.

It is good practice not to introduce any new information in a conclusion, as the reader is not expecting this. Sometimes it is appropriate to look forwards and speculate about future developments or trends. In many disciplines the speculative paragraph comes just before the conclusion.

Your conclusion should leave the reader with a clear picture of your main argument, and also leave them feeling positive about your ideas.

**Don’t end your conclusion with:**

- an apology, or a sentence that dwells on the incompleteness of your argument. For example avoid finishing with, “If I had more time, I would also have covered ....”. You may wish to raise some limitations in the conclusion, but do this in the middle of the concluding paragraph, and then end on a strong, positive sentence, such as “It has clearly been shown that...”

- a rhetorical question. You may believe that it leaves the reader thinking deeply about your argument. However, it just leaves the reader unsatisfied, as they expect you to come up with an answer to the question that you have raised.

### Writing the main body

In the main body of your essay, you will be developing the ideas and arguments you have outlined in your introduction. You need to integrate your own ideas with evidence from your reading and other research, and critical analysis. (See Essays 3: Develop your essay writing.)

It’s better to discuss fewer things in more depth. Organise your writing in three or four groups of related arguments to keep your overall argument coherent and under control.

Write in paragraphs and think of each one as a mini-essay with its own introductory sentence (what this paragraph is about) and concluding sentence (what was said in this paragraph).

Keep your essay question in front of you and keep in mind your end point - the main message that your essay is working towards.

Make it clear how your arguments and evidence relate to the essay title and be ruthless in discarding anything that isn’t relevant. Irrelevant information can actively lose you marks!