

## PLANNING YOUR ESSAY

### *Other Handouts:*

- Analysing an Essay Question
- Drafting Your Essay
- Alternative Essay Structures

### **Step 1: Determine what you think about the topic**

Once you have analysed the essay question and completed your research, you are ready to begin planning the structure of your *argument* and of your essay. These two things can be brought together in a good essay plan. Ask yourself:

- What is your *own point of view* on the topic?
- Is your point of view *informed by your research* – that is, can you produce
- credible sources that support your point of view?

Your ‘point of view’ will, in the essay, become your **thesis** or argument. A thesis must be defensible within the current debate on this topic.

### **Step 2: Write your thesis statement**

A thesis statement is one sentence that sums up your thesis/argument. It is your *main message* and often appears as the last sentence of the introduction. A well-written thesis statement will anchor your argument and the structure of your paper. You will need to work on your thesis statement until it is precise, concise and effective for its purpose. In this one sentence you should:

- name the key concept/s you will address in the essay,
- deliver your position on the topic, and
- state or imply the scope of the essay.

#### ***A thesis statement is:***

- a clear statement of your position on the topic
- a defensible claim
- a comment on the key concepts of the essay question
- an indication of the essay’s scope (it defines the limits of your argument)
- one complete sentence (that generally appears as the last sentence of your introduction, although there are variations on this model)

## Examples of helpful and unhelpful thesis statements:

*Essay Question: Discuss the possible effects of owning a pet on the health and wellbeing of elderly people.*

1. Pets are good for elderly people.

*This does make a statement, but it is too broad – does not frame the thesis in a context, or limit the scope of the essay. Are all pets good for all elderly people in all circumstances?*

2. Pet ownership sometimes helps elderly people to feel useful; however, they can also be expensive and a health hazard in themselves.

*A 'bifurcated' thesis statement that tries to argue two things, which makes it difficult to support. Also, it does not relate closely enough to the essay question (does not address the key concepts).*

3. Pet ownership can make a valuable contribution to the health and wellbeing of elderly people.

*This is a workable thesis statement. It addresses the question, offers scope for exploring a few main points, but does not pretend to be exhaustive. The writer can argue that there are some benefits. This thesis statement is defensible with logic, examples, and researched information.*

## Step 3: Write your supporting points

In a 1-2000 word essay, aim for *three to four supporting points* (ONE point per paragraph in the *body* of the essay). If these points are written in complete, clear statements (much like the thesis statement), they can also serve as **topic sentences** –the first sentence of each paragraph between the Introduction and Conclusion.

### **Tip!**

*In longer essays, a main point can be developed over two or more paragraphs, but appropriate links and topic sentences must be formed.*

## Essay Plan Example:

*Thesis statement:* Pet ownership can make a valuable contribution to the health and welfare of elderly people.

*Supporting points (topic sentences):*

- Pets provide an external focus to keep the owner actively engaged.
- The responsibilities of pet care provide a daily routine.
- The physicality of owning a pet is an aid to the owner's health.

## Checklist:

- The thesis statement addresses the key concepts in the essay question
- The thesis statement is clear and defensible
- The supporting points support/defend the thesis statement.