

Anatomy of an Academic Essay

Part 1: The Skeleton

We are going to use the analogy of anatomy to help describe the structures of an academic text and how its elements work and join together. This should help you construct your essay. Each part will grow from the previous part, and be 'fleshed out' as it goes along.

Preface (The conception)

Before the start of any writing you need to bring it to life by setting yourself a number of questions that you would like to answer. There are six types of questions you can ask of your subject: **Why? What? How? Who? and When?** It is up to you to ask the right question so you gain informative and thoughtful answers.

A simple structure of any academic essay looks like this:

- An Introduction (The Head)
- 1. Section (The Body)
- 2. Section (The Body)
- 3. Section (The Body)
- A Conclusion (The legs)
- A Bibliography (The feet)

An Introduction (The Head)

The brain of the text and shows you have eyes and ears and a brain and tells the reader that you know what you are talking about. **It helps the reader understand why and how the essay was conceived and structured.**

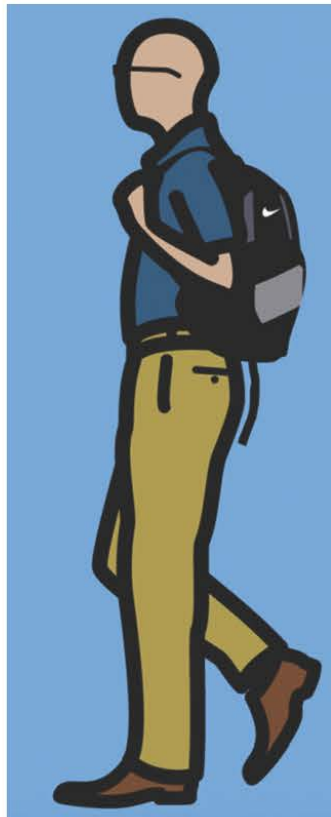
Sections can have titles to differentiate it from the other sections of the essay (The Body) Text and Images form the guts of the text and this is where you challenge what you have read and create your arguments. **You describe, analyse and situate, contextualise what it is you are investigating.**

A Conclusion (The Legs)

This is what makes the text run and be articulate and animated and makes it stand up to scrutiny. **It is where you can demonstrate what you have learnt.**

A Bibliography (The Feet)

This is what good academic writing always stands up on. Without a good grounding, which a bibliography gives to any academic piece of writing, the text will fall and collapse into naïve argumentation. It shows that you have gathered information and then been able to write from your experience of reading high quality texts. **It shows the amount and depth of your systematic research.**



Opie, J. (2014) *Academic 1* [Silkscreen on painted wooden board]. Available at: <http://www.julianopie.com/#!/artwork/> (Accessed: 15 June 2015).

Referencing images

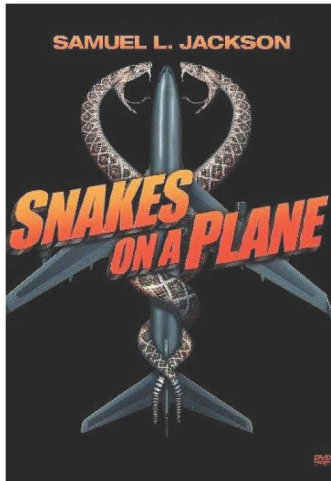
Gillian Rose, Professor of Cultural Geography at The Open University writes 'once you have found your images [...] you need to be able to *reference* them in as clear a manner as you would reference any other source material. (Rose 2012, p. 48).

For detailed guidance on setting out your image references visit: Citethemrightonline.com and login using your UAL username and password.

Referencing texts

See page 4 of this guide for an introduction to the Harvard Referencing system using Citethemrightonline.com

Snakes on a Plane (2006)
Directed by David R. Ellis [DVD]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema



Use **images** at this stage to help the reader understand more fully what it is you are talking about. They also allow you to save your words for the more important task of analysing and evaluating the research you have carried out.



Snakes on a Plane (2006)
Directed by David R. Ellis [DVD]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema

Place your images in the text at the point where you are discussing them, ensure you reference your images and place the caption next to the image as this example demonstrates. See note on page 6 for how to reference your images.

Part 2: The Head

In this analogy the head is the introduction, this page explains how and why it should be structured in this way.

Title

As Helen Sword the author of, *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012a) argues, "Snakes on a Plane" is an inviting title; "Aggressive Serpentine Behaviour in a Restrictive Aviation Environment" is not.' (Sword 2012b)

An Introduction should be structured like this

An Introduction should tell the reader **why** you have chosen to write about the subject you have spent so much time researching. It both tells us why you personally choose it and why you think it is important to you and your thinking about the subject. This is sometimes called the rationale and can be if you wish, a separate piece of writing.

Why?

Then you then should describe and explain to the reader **what** it is you have chosen. At this stage you need to decide how much detail you wish to go into about the subject. If you are going to have a chapter on the history of the subject then you can keep this brief. If this is where you situate your subject in its various contexts and histories then you can elaborate more at this point. Do not make it too long otherwise it should be in a section on its own after the introduction.

What?

You then tell the reader **how** you went about this study/research and the reasons why you chose these particular methods to investigate and explore your subject. Tell how it was systematic, as all research needs to be to have any validity. This is sometimes called the methodology section and if in a longer piece of writing might have its own section after the introduction. In this text you will have to explain why you chosen the three ways of analysing your chosen subject and how you think they will help you think more deeply about it and what it means.

How?

You need to let the reader know **who** helped you with the research for this text? Have you interviewed anybody about your subject? Who are the main authors who have written about your subject?

Who?

You need to tell the reader what is going to actually happen in the essay and **when** and why you have structure or ordered in this way. This will help the reader navigate through your essay and set them off on the right foot.

When?

Part 3: The Body Text

In this analogy the body is comprised of the sections, this page explains how and why it should be structured in this way.

After the title and the introduction comes the main body of your text. If you break it down into sections each one could answer a different question:

Each of these main sections will:
describe,
analyse and
situate
your subject.

Introduce each section to remind the reader what it is they are about to read and why you have written the section in the way you have. You can conclude each section with a summing up of the main points you have discussed and if possible evaluate them as to their worth to your overall arguments. It helps the reader to have (snappy) titles for each section.

Why is it important?

1

What is its history?

2

What contexts does it exist in?

3

Who has written about your subject?

4

Introducing authors

You need to tell the reader who the author is before you use their words or ideas. It demonstrates that you know who the author is, and why they may be important to your understanding of the subject. Therefore, the first time you mention them, state their first name and last name and if you mention them again, you can just use their last name.

Example:

The American artist and writer Joe Brainard (1975) wrote a memoir of growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. The American writer Paul Auster described *I Remember* as 'a masterpiece. . . one of the few totally original books I have ever read' (http://www.joebrainard.org/bio_main.htm, no date). In one of his entries, Brainard (1975, p. 43) wrote 'I remember wishing I knew then what I know now'.

The Reference List for this paragraph would include these two references:

Brainard, J. (1975) *I Remember*. New York: Granary Books.

Joe Brainard (no date) *Bio*. Available at: http://www.joebrainard.org/bio_main.htm (Accessed 16 September 2015).

Remember: for detailed guidance on setting out your Reference List and Bibliography visit Citethemrightonline.com and login using your UAL username and password.

Part 4: The Conclusion

Conclusions can mirror the introduction and help the reader understand clearly what it is you have tried to argue in the body of the text. It is the place where you can shine and show how much work you have done and how your thinking might have changed by doing the research for the essay.

Reference List

Holewa, R. (2004) 'Strategies for Writing a Conclusion' *LEO: Literacy Education Online*. Available at: <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html> (Accessed 5 March 2014).

Ingham, M. (2014) *Writing Design (Re-Writing Re-Design)* <https://writingdesignctslcc.wordpress.com/> (Accessed 9 November 2014).

Jacobi, T. (2014) 'Tips for writing a good conclusion' *Writing@CSU The Writing Studio*. Available at: http://writing.colostate.edu/files/classes/7998/File_B4A54838--FC40--1691--86BB6F50FA6B3141.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2014).

Rose, G. (2012) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. 3rd edn. London: Sage.

Sword, H. (2012a) *Stylish Academic Writing*. Harvard University Press: Harvard.

Sword, H. (2012b) 'Seven secrets of stylish academic writing' *The Conversation*. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/seven--secrets--of--stylish--academic--writing--7025> (Accessed 5 March 2014).

Visit citethemrightonline.com for guidance on how to format your reference list or bibliography.

Conclusions keep the essay running: According to Tips for writing a good conclusion (2014) "Like introductions, conclusions are important because they leave an impression. Since the conclusion is the last thing your audience reads, it may leave the most lasting impression. An effective conclusion should make readers glad that they read your essay." (Jacobi 2014)

Conclusions are strong muscular pieces of writing. "An effective conclusion will often: Push beyond the boundaries of the question or subject. Elaborate on the significance of your findings. Highlight the most important moments of your argument. Demonstrate the importance of a particular idea. Propel your reader to think about your subject in new ways" (Ibid)

"Strategies for writing effective conclusions: Give yourself time away from the text before you create the conclusion. Play the "So what?" game: Read back your text and questions to yourself and then ask, "So what?" Your answers will help you write a conclusion that emphasises the broader significance of your subject. Free write your conclusion in the form of a letter or email (to yourself or to a friend). Writing informally can help free your thinking and help you focus on the big picture. Think about what you have learned about the topic as you have gone through the process of creating the text." (Ibid)

"Ineffective conclusions: "So This Is What I Just Said" Simply summarising exactly what you already said without adding anything in terms of the significance of your subject or the big picture is easy, but also not very interesting. "We Shall Overcome" An overly emotional declaration is not very appropriate for an academic paper, and often falls into cliché." (Ibid)

So What?