

# Legal Studies – Basic Essay Structure

## 1. Introduction

The introduction to your essay is an important paragraph. It is the first thing the reader sees. A good introduction should

1. Introduce the reader to the general topic
2. Identify the focus or purpose of the essay
3. Outline the scope, that is, the points to be covered

Your introduction (and the conclusion) just frames the essay, and should not do any of the real work of explaining, justifying or arguing which is all done by the body of the essay.

When writing your introduction, first, organize your thoughts and create an outline. Once you are ready to write your introduction, keep a few simple points in mind. Be brief and to the point. An introduction is usually one paragraph. Have at least three sentences but no more than six. You want your introduction to be just that, an introduction. It should start your essay off with a bang. Grab their attention, explain what your essay will be about, and then get into the essay. You may want to try to come up with an interesting first sentence to immediately grab the reader's attention, it could be a quote. Some students define key terms in the introduction, however lengthy definitions may be better dealt with in the body of the essay.

An introduction containing these features might look like this:

Essay on alternate family arrangements:

**In contemporary Australia there exists a wide variety of family structures. Traditionally however, the law has mainly recognised the nuclear family and has been slow to recognise other family arrangements, particularly same-sex couples. As a consequence, not all families receive equal recognition under the law. To improve justice for all people, there has been a gradual movement towards equality for all family units, regardless of their composition.**

## 2. Body

The body of an essay is where you develop your essay. This occurs in a series of paragraphs with each paragraph logically flowing to the next. Thus:

- a good use of topic sentences and
- correct paragraph structure are important.

The first sentence (topic sentence) of each paragraph **introduces the paragraph** and should inform the reader of the point you are making and how this paragraph relates to the question. In fact, if the reader were to scan your topic sentences, they should be able to obtain a sketch of the entire essay. This sketch should show the **logical progression of the points** you are making. Absence of topic sentences leaves the reader wondering what you are trying to say and why, ultimately confusing the reader.

A topic sentence expresses the main idea of a paragraph. What usually follows a topic sentence are a number of supporting sentences that develop the main idea with specific details.

## Effective paragraphs have three important qualities

- **Unity** – where they focus on one main idea.
- **Development** – the idea is elaborated on in the paragraph.
- **Coherence** – everything in the paragraph relates to and expands on the point you are making.

In addition to a topic sentence and supporting sentences, paragraphs often have a concluding sentence. The **topic sentence introduces the paragraph**, and the **concluding sentence summarises it**. However, this concluding sentence **is not** essential. What is important is that the **transition** from one paragraph to the next is logical and flows smoothly.

Suggestion

<b>T</b>	<b>Topic sentence</b> – introduces the main focus, subject of the paragraph, defines
<b>E</b>	<b>Explanation</b> – elaborate on the main point - provide relevant factual information
<b>E</b>	<b>Evidence</b> – provide case, legislation media report, quote etc
<b>E</b>	<b>Evaluation</b> – make a judgement about effectiveness by refining to relevant criteria
<b>S</b>	<b>Sum up</b> and lead into next paragraph

The conclusion is also an important paragraph in your essay. It is usually one paragraph in length and should reflect what you said you were going to do in your introduction. The conclusion

- summarises what you've said in your essay and
- reaffirms your thesis

Do not introduce new material. Most students begin their concluding paragraph with a transition signal, such as, 'In conclusion' or 'In summary'.

Also never use the first person – “I think, believe” or “It is my opinion” etc. Be objective.

## HOW DO YOU MAKE YOUR PARAGRAPHS FLOW?

Sometimes writing sounds jerky or disjointed when read. You can make your paragraph more flowing by using linking words and phrases such as: also, as well as, firstly, next, then, finally, so, thus, as a result, because, therefore, for example, for instance, in contrast, on the other hand. Avoid too much repetition.

## THE LEGAL STUDIES RUBRIC

### In your answer you will be assessed on how well you:

- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant legal information and issues
- Illustrate your answer with examples from one or more of the following: legislation, documents, treaties, cases, media reports
- Communicate using legal terminology and concepts relevant to domestic or international law
- Present a sustained, logical and well-structured answer to the question

Questions often require students to:

- 1. Analyse** – Identify components and the relationship between them; draw and relate implications
- 2. Assess** – Make a judgement of value, quality, outcomes, results or size
- 3. Evaluate** – Make a judgement based on criteria; determine the value of  
This is often in relation to effectiveness of the legal system or some aspect of the legal system.

## General hints on how to approach essay and Short Answer Questions

### 1. Read the question properly

Read the question and understand what you are being asked to do.

Analyse the question.

- What are the key words?
- What is the topic of your essay?
- What is the focus of your essay?
- What are you required to do in your essay?

Many students fail to write good answers to essay and short answer questions because they **do not read the question carefully** and/or **do not answer all parts of the question**. Taking time to understand question is worth marks to a student.

### 2. Plan your answer

It is essential that you **plan your answer** before you start writing. In this way you can make sure that you include all **relevant material** and that you give yourself **enough time** to answer all parts of the question. For short answer questions it is important to plan before you start writing so that you include enough information to **maximise marks**. This plan can be very simple eg sub-headings

### 3. Give relevant, factual information

Make sure the information you give is both **relevant** and **factually correct**; do not include information that has nothing to do with the question.

### 4. Use appropriate terminology

Include relevant and accurate legal terms when appropriate. Use of key terms from the themes of the Stage 6 Legal Studies Syllabus should also be used where relevant.

### 5. Include relevant legislation, media reports, cases, treaties, and/nor documents

This is a requirement of the rubric. Do not outline in detail but use only where relevant to support point that you are making.

### 6. Use objective, logical arguments

Try to set out your arguments in a step-by-step fashion. **Do not** be subjective or emotional about an issue. **Give both sides of the argument** and **use examples** to illustrate your arguments.

### 7. Write coherently

Try to write full sentences, but keep sentences **short and to the point**. In essays **do not** list points or use abbreviations unless you are really pressed for time. You can usually give more detailed and critical answers if you write in full sentences. Find some helpful words and phrases on the next page.

<p><b>To introduce a choice or alternative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Otherwise</li> <li>• Alternatively</li> <li>• Also</li> <li>• In the same way</li> <li>• Similarly</li> <li>• Likewise</li> <li>• Furthermore</li> </ul>	<p><b>To introduce an opposite idea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However</li> <li>• On the other hand</li> <li>• In contrast</li> <li>• Conversely</li> <li>• Nonetheless</li> <li>• On the contrary</li> <li>• Notwithstanding</li> </ul>
<p><b>To introduce an example</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As an example</li> <li>• For instance</li> <li>• To highlight this point</li> <li>• In the case of</li> </ul>	<p><b>To concede a point</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admittedly</li> <li>• After all</li> <li>• Also true however</li> </ul>
<p><b>To introduce an additional idea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moreover</li> <li>• In addition</li> <li>• Equally</li> <li>• Additionally</li> <li>• Furthermore</li> </ul>	<p><b>To introduce a conclusion or summary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In conclusion</li> <li>• In summary</li> <li>• To conclude</li> <li>• To summarise</li> <li>• Therefore</li> </ul>
<p><b>To indicate cause and effect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a result</li> <li>• Consequently</li> <li>• Accordingly</li> <li>• Hence</li> <li>• As a result</li> </ul>	<p><b>To indicate chronological order</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, second, ...</li> <li>• Next, last, finally</li> <li>• First of all</li> <li>• After that</li> <li>• Since then</li> </ul>
<p><b>To indicate order of importance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, second, ...</li> <li>• Above all</li> <li>• The most important</li> <li>• The most significant</li> <li>• In the first place</li> <li>• Primarily</li> <li>• Essentially</li> <li>• Principally</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other sentence starters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be seen that</li> <li>• Studies suggest</li> <li>• It tends to be the case</li> <li>• It would seem</li> <li>• This case indicates</li> <li>• As displayed in the case of ...</li> <li>• The role of ...</li> <li>• This demonstrates the ..</li> </ul>
<p><b>To indicate effectiveness:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effective</li> <li>• practical</li> <li>• successful</li> <li>• favourable</li> <li>• proactive</li> <li>• positive outcomes</li> <li>• improved access to</li> <li>• provides greater protection of individual rights</li> <li>• has led to a more equitable outcome</li> <li>• allows for a greater degree of enforceability</li> </ul>	<p><b>To indicate ineffectiveness:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ineffective</li> <li>• limited</li> <li>• unsuccessful problematic</li> <li>• questionable</li> <li>• futile</li> <li>• to no avail</li> <li>• reactive</li> <li>• marginally successful</li> <li>• denies adequate protection for the individual</li> <li>• has led to a less equitable outcome</li> </ul>

## Summary: How do I write a good legal studies essay???

1. Know what the question is asking!
2. Plan your answer well – use the syllabus as a guide
3. Know your work and know your syllabus!
4. Concentrate on the facts!
5. Include legislation, examples, case studies, media reports!
6. Use legal terminology and use it correctly!
7. Be sure your information is relevant to the question!
8. Write clearly and logically!
9. Use short sentences and short paragraphs!
10. Use correct punctuation!

