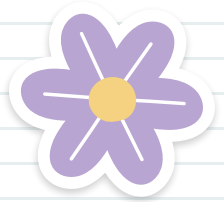


Improve your Essay Scores

Independent Learning Center
Seminar Fall 2022

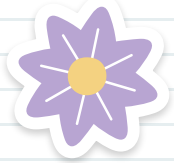


Warning!

**There is no magic formula to improve at any skill.
You can't take a pill, you can't learn in your sleep, and
you can't just hope it will happen.**

These ideas will only help if you practice them.

The Essay Grading Criteria (5 categories)



01

Answer the Question

On-topic or off-topic?
Deep or superficial?
Strong or weak examples?

02

Flow of Ideas

All ideas support the thesis?
Ideas connect logically?

03

Essay Organization

Correct sections?
Right length?
Useful transitions?

*



04

Grammar

Understandable?
Too simple?
Silly mistakes?

05

Vocabulary

Same words repeated or variety?
Right forms of words?



What we will look at today



01 Developing good subtopics and details

- Answer the question
- Flow of ideas

02 How to find your own mistakes

- Flow of ideas, Essay organization
- Grammar, Vocabulary

03 How to practice

- Everything



01

* *Developing good subtopics and details*

- A. Consider different perspectives
- B. Consider different time frames
- C. Break a large topic into smaller ones

○ *Try this right now...*

Why are energy drinks popular?

What are the first ideas that come to your mind?

Probably they are ideas from your own experience and point of view.

○
A. Consider different perspectives
by asking questions...

Why are energy drinks popular? 

Who? People other than students/teens 

Why/When? Different types of jobs/tasks

How? Marketing & advertising methods 

*
You may not use all the ideas you think of, but it's nice to have options!



Your first thoughts might create this outline

Thesis statement: Energy drinks are popular for two main reasons, which are that they help us stay awake and they give us more physical energy.

Body 1 topic: Help us stay awake

Subtopic 1: students need to study for exams

Detail: they spend all night at the library before an exam

Subtopic 2: students have projects to finish

Detail: they often postpone work to the last day

Body 2 topic: Give us more physical energy

Subtopic 1: students have bad sleep habits

Detail: they need energy to go to class

Subtopic 2: many students play sports

Detail: they want to perform well in matches

Adding more perspectives might create this one

Thesis statement: Energy drinks are popular for two main reasons, which are that they help us stay awake and they give us more physical energy.

Body 1 topic: Help us stay awake

Subtopic 1: students have a lot of mental work

Details: studying for exams, completing projects, staying awake in class

Subtopic 2: many people work long hours in important jobs

Details: bus drivers and emergency room doctors must stay alert and can't make mistakes

Body 2 topic: Give us more physical energy

Subtopic 1: professional sports are very competitive

Detail: players need to perform their best; especially older players might need help to keep up

Subtopic 2: some people earn money from video gaming

Detail: they need quick reflexes to win games and gain followers

B. Consider different time frames...

Opinion: Should zoos be banned? (YES)

Which of these reasons are short-term and which are long-term?

1. It is expensive to feed animals.
2. Animals' psychological health is bad in zoos.
3. There is no genetic variation in zoo baby-breeding programs.
4. There is not enough space for exercise.
5. Zoos teach children to think humans are more important than animals.
6. It is morally wrong to use animals for entertainment.

Opinion: Should zoos be banned? (YES)

short-term & long-term

1. It is expensive to feed animals.
2. Animals' psychological health is bad in zoos.
3. There is no genetic variation in zoo baby-breeding programs.
4. There is not enough space for exercise.
5. Zoos teach children to think humans are more important than animals.
6. It is morally wrong to use animals for entertainment.

You only need 2 short-term ideas and 2 long-term ideas for a complete essay.

Possible outline

Thesis statement: Zoos should all be closed due to the problems they create, which can be grouped as short-term and long-term problems.

Body 1 topic: Short-term problems

Subtopic 1: animals' psychology is damaged

Details: most zoos are not suitable environments; animals can be bored/aggressive

Subtopic 2: high maintenance costs

Details: in these days of financial crisis, keeping zoos open becomes too expensive. Cutting costs can cause the animals to suffer from hunger, dirty conditions, or lack of medical care.

Body 2 topic: Long-term problems

Subtopic 1: lack of genetic diversity

Detail: inbreeding causes health problems

Subtopic 2: teaching our children

Detail: if we want our children to

*Don't waste time writing full sentences in your outline! I only did this to show you the full idea. You might write it like "**cutting costs = hungry, dirty, no vet care.**" You also might write it in your native language, but include some English vocabulary.*

○ C. Break a larger topic into smaller ones...

How does our use of plastics affect the environment?

This is a very broad topic. You could break it down into smaller topics in a couple ways:

"Our use of plastics" → individual use, industrial use, commercial use

* "The environment" → water, air, soil, plant life, animal life

Possible outline

Thesis statement: The widespread use of plastic is having a dramatic effect on the environment, most predominantly on our air quality and the lives of animals.

Body 1 topic: effects on air quality

Subtopic 1: burning of plastics

Detail: plastic in the garbage is burned, releasing toxic gasses

Subtopic 2: microplastics in the air can be breathed in

Detail: tiny plastic particles can be inhaled, causing lung and breathing problems

Body 2 topic: effects on animal life

Subtopic 1: ocean animals

Detail: plastic products can be eaten or can trap animals (fish, birds, etc)

Subtopic 2: land animals

Detail: landfills interfere with habitats and feeding patterns

02

Finding your own mistakes

- A. Change to use your analytical brain
- B. Know yourself
- C. Develop a habit

Imagine yourself...

...writing a poem to someone you love.

...deciding which computer you should buy.

...planning a summer holiday with a friend.

...selecting the courses you will take next semester.

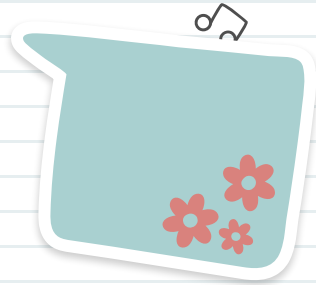


Do you agree? When doing these things, you are using your brain in different ways.

A. Change to use your analytical brain

When we are writing, we want to communicate.
We are focused on expressing our ideas well.
We are using our “artistic” brain.

All writers (even native speakers!) need to
check their writing. To do this well, change
your thinking style to use your analytical brain.
Practice helps!




B. Know yourself


After a semester of getting feedback from your teachers, you should be familiar with what types of mistakes you typically make.

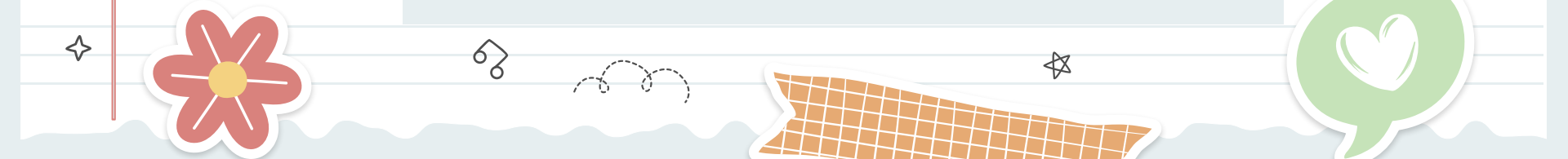
Make a list of the most important ones and memorize it to use in an exam.



For example:

- ❑ I need to check subject-verb agreement.
 - ❑ third person singular ("s"!) * 
 - ❑ no missing verbs (especially forms of "be")

 - ❑ I need to check singular-plural mistakes.
 - ❑ Eg. "Another countries" 
 - ❑ Eg. "this children"

 - ❑ I need to check I am using the right form of a word.
 - ❑ verb tense (choose vs chose)
 - ❑ word form (success vs succeed)
- 

C. Develop a habit

When you are checking for mistakes, do it sentence by sentence. Analyze each sentence and ask these types of questions (following your list):

- Where is my subject? Where is my main verb? Do they match?
- Anywhere I have "this" or "that", am I using it right?
- Is my main verb in the right tense?

You are not reading for meaning. You are checking the language rules that you have trouble with.



03

Practicing

Step-by-step

Follow these steps when you practice



Make several outlines

You should practice brainstorming and outlining MORE THAN actual writing. For example, create outlines for 3 topics and then choose one to write the full essay for. **This step can be done in your native language**

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Write your first draft

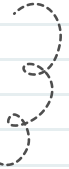
Do your first draft in EXAM STYLE. This means with no dictionaries and in maximum one hour. Do the best you can with what you know.

*



Improve your vocabulary

If you couldn't think of words you wanted, NOW LOOK THEM UP AND LEARN THEM. Using this process will help you remember them better.



Check your mistakes

Use your checklist and practice looking for mistakes.



Write a final draft

To feel a sense of accomplishment, write it all again and admire your work! You may want to try different sentence structures to make your ideas clearer.



But I can't outline, write, and check all in one hour!

Yes you can, if you practice. You want to write the easy parts faster so that you can spend more time on the more complex ideas and have 5 minutes for checking.

1. You should be able to write **thesis statements, topic sentences,** and **conclusion sentences** very quickly. You should know some standard structures for these so you don't have to spend much time on them. You can find these in your writing course materials.
2. You should be able to easily remember what part of the essay you are working on and what part is coming next. In this way, you can easily **use the right connectors and transition phrases**. For this, you should **know essay format well**.
3. You should have all your ideas, including your details and examples, organized (written anywhere on your paper in any way that helps you) before you write. **You don't want to stop writing to think of ideas.**

Let's review... For each section we covered, think of one new idea you got or a new thing you learned.



01 *Developing good subtopics and details*

02 *How to find your own mistakes*

03 *How to practice*



Some extra outlining practice ideas

What are the effects of requiring school uniforms?

Think of 5 different groups of people affected by this situation.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What are the effects of requiring school uniforms?

The people who might be affected:

- Students without a lot of money
- Students who want to express their creativity
- Parents of school-aged children
- The people who own school uniform businesses
- The people who create the rules
- The teachers who have to enforce the rules

Which people are affected IN A GOOD WAY?

Which people are affected IN A BAD WAY?

○ What are the effects of requiring school uniforms?

Body 1: People who are POSITIVELY affected

Subtopic 1: Students without much money

Details: No embarrassment about clothes at school; equal for everyone

Subtopic 2: People who sell uniforms

Details: They can earn a living; students need new uniforms each year as they grow.

Body 2: People who are NEGATIVELY affected

Subtopic 1: Students who want to express their creativity

Details: Clothes are an important way for teens to show their style and beliefs

Subtopic 2: Teachers

Details: They shouldn't have to enforce these rules. They are caught between students and administration.



○ Consider different time frames...

Opinion: Should zoos be banned? (NO)

For a complete essay, you need two short-term reasons and two long-term reasons.

Complete this outline for effects of our plastic use on the environment

Thesis statement: The widespread use of plastic in the world is having a dramatic effect on the environment. Both individual and commercial plastic use are causing environmental harm.

Body 1 topic: Individual use

Subtopic 1:

Details:

Subtopic 2:

Details:

Body 2 topic: Commercial use

Subtopic 1:

Detail:

Subtopic 2:

Detail:

