The Essay: the parts

Essay · Template · Handout

An essay that reaches the top band usually has the parts below, in roughly this order. Each part does one job the rubric asks for. The word counts are a guide to proportion, not a rule.

Part	What it says	How	Words
Introduction	How you read the title, what the key term means in your essay, your answer, and the route.	Write it last. Give a working definition, not a dictionary one, and show what it includes and excludes. State the thesis as a conditional: *when* or *to what extent*, and *why*. No warm-up.	150
First area of knowledge: claim	What the answer depends on in this area.	One sentence that names the deciding factor and ties it to the title's words.	30
Paired cases	One case where the method worked and one where it failed, and what separates them.	Real cases with names, dates and sources. Keep the story short and spend at least half the paragraph on analysis. Name the variable that explains the difference, and the detail that proves it.	250
The other side	The strongest objection to your claim, and why your claim survives or how it has to change.	Take it from a real thinker, in its strongest form. Answer it with an argument or a case, not with a definition. If it wins in part, narrow your claim.	170
Answer for this area	Your answer to the title for this area of knowledge.	In the title's own words, with the condition attached.	50
Second area of knowledge	The same four parts: claim, paired cases, the other side, answer.	Ask whether the same variable decides the answer here, or a different one. Use a different opponent.	450
Comparison	How the two areas differ or agree, and why.	Explain where the difference comes from. Similarities count as much as differences.	70
Decision	Which reading of the title is right, and under what conditions.	Answer with something other than "both," "balance" or "it depends." A conditional answer is a decision.	80
Implications	What follows if you are right: for the knower, the discipline, public disputes. What your answer costs.	A full paragraph that begins, in effect, *If this is right, then…*, and argues the point rather than stating it.	170
Conclusion	Your answer to the title, and how far the strongest objection limits it.	In the title's own words. No new examples, no apology.	120

Before you write: the plan

Bring this to your plan meeting, on one page:

- **The title, word for word,** and the key term with your working definition.
- **An example that would come out the other way** under your definition. If there is none, the definition has already decided the answer.
- **Your thesis** in one or two sentences. It should read naturally straight after the title.
- **For each area of knowledge:** the two cases, the variable that separates them, and the strongest real opponent.

How the parts hold together

- **The key term means the same thing** from the introduction to the conclusion.
- **Read the first sentence of each paragraph in order.** On their own, they should answer the title.
- **Link the parts by their logic** (*because*, *but only if*, *this fails when*), not by listing (*Moreover*, *Another point is*).
- **Every example decides something** that another example would not. If you could swap it for a similar case without changing the paragraph, it is decoration.
- **Every fact is checked,** every source is in the references, and *suggests* stands where you cannot write *proves*.

The parts give the essay its shape. The mark comes from what fills them: a precise reading of the title, real cases that are analysed, an objection taken seriously, and a decision.