

For many students, it may be the first time, or some years, since you have written an essay. This task can be made less daunting by following a few simple guidelines.

1. Read the question

This sounds like common sense, but in their zeal to put pen to paper, some students fail to answer the question posed or follow the instructions given. Instead, they spend time writing an essay on the question they *think* was set. Following the instructions, such as maximum number of words or pages, is an integral part of writing your essay. Failure to follow instructions or answer the set question can mean getting a low mark, which could influence whether you pass or fail the course. Keep the question in front of you as you write and refer to it frequently in order to stay on track.

2. Plan your essay

All essays start with a blank screen or paper. Writing those first few words can be difficult but once you start to write it does get easier. To help get those first few words from your head to the page, split the essay into three parts: the beginning, the middle and the end. Just as you would break down your dog's training exercises into bite-size chunks, do the same with your essay. In note form, jot down your ideas. Don't restrict yourself at this point, feel free to write initial thoughts and opinions on the question in hand. Once you've got a rough draft, start to refine your arguments or points. Before submitting your work, read it through, and check that you have answered the question.

3. Balance

Ensure that your essay is well-balanced. Balance is all about recognising the big picture and reflecting both sides of the discussion. For example, if you are discussing the pros of a theory, method or opinion, you should also discuss the cons. Focusing solely on one side of the debate is to disregard alternative views. Rather than strengthening your point, this stance actually weakens it. Only by considering all aspects will you demonstrate good balance and so show that you are aware of other points of view.

4. References

This course is designed to encourage you to explore and research many aspects of canine behaviour. The more people you can talk to, the greater variety of books, papers and articles you can read and the more evidence you can gather to support your statements, the better your work will be. However, you should make it clear that the ideas are not all your own by referencing the contributions of others. This means that you need to make it obvious when you have quoted someone else's work, or information from a website.

For example, you might write in an essay: When looking at the differences between wolves and dogs, Ray Coppinger states: "*A basic change, a genetic change, has occurred.*" (Coppinger, R. 'Dogs – A Startling New Understanding', Crosskeys. 2004. p.39)

It is also important to add a bibliography to the end of your essays. This bibliography is simply a list of the books, websites and publications that you have read during the course of your research. The list should include the author's name, the title of the book, website, magazine, etc., the year it was published and, in the case of websites, the address.

Example bibliography

John Fisher, Think Dog, Blandford, 1990

Sarah Whitehead, Dogs Today, Pet Subjects Ltd., April 2003

APBC, Shock Collars - the shocking truth, <http://www.apbc.org.uk/ARTICLE2.htmns>)