

Writing essays

The language that we use for writing essays is often more formal than the language that we use in conversation. The next four pages give you help with the more formal type of language that is usually used in writing. They give words and phrases that will help you to write your ideas clearly and naturally, and in a way that is suitable for an essay.

An example essay

You could be asked to write many different types of essays in English during the course of your studies. These may include factual essays, descriptive essays or stories. You may also be asked to write letters, emails, reports or pages from a diary as writing exercises.

The phrases below all relate to the language you might want to use in a discursive essay (= an essay in which you are asked to discuss something). The title of the example essay is: *'Despite the increased availability of 'healthy' food and our greater knowledge of what makes a healthy diet, we are fatter and less healthy than ever before.'* Discuss.

Before you start

Make sure you understand what you are expected to do in writing the essay. If you do not understand some words, look them up in this dictionary. It might help for you to put the essay title into more simple language – the process of doing this will help you to be sure that you understand it. Another way of writing this essay title might be: *Although we know more about healthy food and healthy eating than ever before, we are fatter and less healthy than ever before.*

In a discursive essay, you will have to write about the things you agree or disagree with about the title of the essay, give your reasons for your opinions, and finally state what your conclusions (= your final opinions) are, based on the things you have discussed.

Saying what you agree with

You will first need to read the essay title carefully, and decide what you agree or disagree with about it or whether you think it is true. Use these words and phrases to say what you agree with or what you think is true about the statement:

Certainly ...

It is certainly true that ...

It is certainly the case (= true) that ...

Examples:

Certainly more people than ever before are overweight.

It is certainly the case that we know more about healthy eating than ever before.

Giving reasons for why you think something is true

Use these phrases to give reasons why you think something is true about the statement in the essay title:

Perhaps this is because ...

This could be because ...

This could/may/might be a result of ...

This could/may/might be due to ...

This may be attributable to ... (*formal*)

Examples:

Perhaps this is because people today eat the wrong kinds of food.

This could be due to the fact that people today eat the wrong sort of food.

Giving additional reasons

Use these words and phrases when you want to give another reason why you agree or disagree with the statement:

Another reason (for this) might be ...

It is also true/the case that ...

In addition ...

Furthermore ...

Moreover ...

Examples:

People often eat the wrong types of food.

Furthermore, they exercise less.

People often eat the wrong types of food and
in addition they exercise less.

Adding a more important reason

Use these phrases to add a reason that you think is more important than the one you have just given:

More importantly ...

More significantly ...

What is more ...

Examples:

People often eat the wrong types of food and
what is more, they exercise less.

People often eat the wrong types of food and
more importantly, they exercise less.

Saying what the result of something is:

Use these phrases when you have just given an example of a particular situation that exists and you now want to say what the effect of this is:

Thus ...

As a result ...

For this reason ...

Consequently ...

This has the effect of ...

Therefore ...

Examples:

People these days take less exercise.

As a result, they are overweight and less fit.

People these days take less exercise.

Consequently, they are overweight and less fit.

People these days take less exercise. **This has the effect of** making them overweight and less fit.

Giving a different opinion

When you write a discursive essay, you will probably want to mention more than one side of an argument. Use these words and phrases to write about fact or opinions that might not support or might be very different from those you have just mentioned:

However, ...

Nevertheless,/nonetheless, ...

On the other hand, ...

Even so ...

Yet (*formal*) ...

Examples:

*There is no doubt that people are getting fatter. **However**, we are not healthier in every way.*

*There is no doubt that people are getting fatter. **On the other hand**, we are not healthier in every way.*

*There is no doubt that people are getting fatter, but **even so** we are not healthier in every way.*

Making an argument stronger

Often you will want to add facts to further support an argument. Use these words and phrases to do this:

Indeed, ...

In fact/the fact is/in actual fact ...

*Actually ...

* Do not use this at the beginning of a sentence in formal writing.

Examples

People are not less healthy in every way.

Indeed, in some ways we are healthier.

People are not less healthy in every way.

In fact, in some ways we are healthier.

People are not less healthy in every way.

*In some ways we are **actually** healthier.*

Introducing facts to support your opinion

It makes your argument much stronger if you can use some proven facts or evidence to support your opinion. Use these phrases to mention research or other proof that supports your argument:

- Recent research shows/suggests...
- A recent report/survey showed...
- There is evidence to suggest that...
- The latest/ most recent figures suggest (that)...

Examples:

A recent report/survey showed that on average we are living ten years longer than our parents.

There is evidence to suggest that on average we are living longer than our parents.

Ending an essay

At the end of your essay you will want to state your conclusions (= your final opinions after you have considered all the facts). This usually involves summarizing the main arguments and facts that support your opinions. Use these phrases to write your conclusions:

- To conclude...
- To sum up...
- In summary...
- In conclusion...

Example:

To conclude/In summary, while we are in some respects less healthy, in many ways we are healthier than ever before.

Other useful phrases

Below are some other phrases that you may find useful in your essay writing:

Saying that something is generally true

Very often in a discursive essay you may want to say that something is true for most of the time or on most occasions, even though it may not be true in every case. Use these words and phrases to say that something is generally true:

- Generally/in general...
- Generally speaking...
- As a (general rule)...
- In most cases...
- On the whole...
- For the most part...

Example:

On the whole we are a fatter nation than we were fifty years ago.

Generally speaking we are a fatter nation than we were fifty years ago.

Writing about the present, the past and the future

a. The present

Use these words and phrases to say that something is true or something is happening at the present time:

- Today...
- Currently...
- Nowadays...
- These days...
- Recently...
- In this day and age...
- In recent years...
- In/over the past few years...

Examples:

Nowadays it is quite normal to snack between meals.

It is quite normal to snack between meals these days.

Over the past few years it has become quite normal to snack between meals.

b. The past

Use these words and phrases to write about what happened or was true in the past:

In the past ...

In previous years ...

Previously/formerly ...

At one time/once ...

Then/at that time ...

Examples:

In previous years food was eaten only at mealtimes.

At one time, food was only eaten at mealtimes.

Food was ***previously/formerly*** only eaten at mealtimes.

c. The future

Use these words and phrases to write about something that might happen or be true in the future:

In the future ...

One day/some day ...

The day will come when ..

In years to come ...

Examples:

One day/some day scientists may discover a cure for obesity.

Scientists may discover a cure for obesity ***in the future***.

In years to come scientists may discover a cure for obesity.

Giving your opinion

Use these words and phrases to write about what your opinion is:

I believe that...

It is my feeling that ...

It is my opinion that...

In my opinion/view ...

Example:

In my opinion/ view, far too much advertising of fast food is aimed at children.

It is my opinion that far too much advertising is aimed at children.

I believe that far too much advertising is

aimed at children.

Giving other people's opinions

Use these words and phrases to say what someone else's opinion is:

According to x ...

In x's opinion /view ...

Many/some people argue (that) ...

As x says/writes ...

As x argues/claims/explains/points out ...

Examples:

According to Ian Thompson, the fast-food industry is partly to blame.

As Ian Thompson points out, the fast-food industry is partly to blame.

Saying that something is certainly true

Use these words and phrases to say that you think something is definitely true:

Undoubtedly/without a doubt ...

Definitely/certainly ...

Undeniably ...

Unquestionably ...

Example:

Children today are ***unquestionably/ undoubtedly*** less active than their parents were as children.

Children today are ***definitely/certainly*** less active than their parents were as children.

Saying that something might not be true

Use these phrases to say that something might not be true:

It is not necessarily true (that) ...

It is not necessarily the case (that) ...

Not everyone agrees that ...

It seems unlikely that ...

It is not very likely (that) ...

Example:

It is not necessarily the case that fatter people are less healthy than thin people.

Not everyone agrees that fatter people are less healthy than thin people.