There is no one right way to write. Different disciplines have different patterns of writing, but even in each discipline there are many variations. However, until you are experienced at writing in your discipline, it is important to understand the most common patterns. Here we are discussing essays.

The steps shown here can really assist to get on top of an essay writing task. We suggest taking each one in turn, starting at the first step and coming back to focus on the next. Otherwise it can seem too much to understand at once.

1. **Planning your Writing**
   - Before starting any writing task, it is important to know what type of academic writing is being requested. See the Academic Writing Types section.
   - Know the word limits of the task and plan your time. About 45% - 60% of the time you spend on a writing task should be at the planning, research and structuring stages before you even start the first draft. That means that about 35% - 40% is for the writing, drafting, editing and proofreading stages. So it’s important to start early.
   - Set out the time you are giving to this writing task and break up your jobs into the time available.

2. **Understanding the Question/Task**
   There are three important parts to understanding any question within your discipline subject:
   - **Direction Words**: These tell you how to approach the writing task, for example, *Discuss, Evaluate, Critically Analyse, Compare* and so on. See a list of Direction Words below for their meanings.
   - **Subject Words or Topic Words**: These tell you what the main subject is, for example, *economic growth, malaria cure, sustainable engineering*, and so on.
Focus or Limit Words: These provide a focus boundary or limit for your topic or subject words. For example, in Australia, two features of, within Victoria, during the 19th Century, over two decades, and so on.

ACTIVITY 1: Analysing the Question

Determine the direction, subject/topic and focus/limit words of the following question:

“Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community.”

ANSWER

(i) Direction Word: Discuss - present a subject and give points of view about it, your own and those of other writers. Give a range of information, evidence and opinion.

(ii) Topic Words: To identify the topic ask: “what” of the instruction word - Discuss what? = “some cultural issues”.

(iii) Focus/Limit Words: Narrow the focus of the question by placing the topic in some sort of framework; so which specific aspects of the topic need to be researched and discussed? For example:

Who is involved? “public health workers”

Where is the focus? “when practising in an Aboriginal community”

When? current information probably necessary

Direction Words: Direction or Instruction Word List and their Meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analyse</th>
<th>break subject into parts and show how they relate to each other and to other subjects.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argue</td>
<td>systematically support or reject a position by presenting evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>express your view or interpretation of a statement contained in the question. Support your view with argument and/or experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>express similarities between two or more objects, systems, ideas or arguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>demonstrate differences between two or more objects, systems, ideas or arguments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticise</td>
<td>make judgments, favourable and/or unfavourable, using fair argument and balanced evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>present a subject and give points of view about it, your own and those of other writers. Give a range of information, evidence and opinion. There may be argument and analysis but the main quality is the range of opinion canvassed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enumerate</td>
<td>present material in list of outline form, usually without comment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
describing how things develop. Your focus is on the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of an issue, not so much on evaluation or criticism.

| Illustrate | use figure, picture, diagram or concrete example to explain / clarify a problem. |
| Outline    | a systematic listing of information or argument giving main points and subordinate points in order, omitting details. |
| Review     | examine a subject critically, dealing with a number of explanations or theories; listing and relating a series of events that are being used as evidence for a theory. |
| Summarise  | give a brief statement or account that covers the main points in sequence; without critical comments. |

3. **Brainstorming**

Once you’ve understood the question, and before you do any research and reading, brainstorm the question: Note down what you already know about the topic and where some of the gaps in your knowledge are. This helps you generate ideas to eventually structure an initial outline to guide your research and reading stages.

To brainstorm you can write the topic words, direction words, and limit words across a sheet of paper and begin to fill in the sections. Or you can use visual mapping software and then generate ideas and questions by writing them around these words.

Use the Wh-Questions of what, where, when, why, how, who, which, to what extent to help you generate ideas. Connect the ideas and questions that you’ve generated using arrows.

**ACTIVITY: Brainstorming**

Brainstorm the question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community.”

Hint: For example, some starting questions could include:

What are public health workers currently taught about this? By whom?
What are the main cultural issues relevant to Aboriginal communities?
How are they different from issues in non-Aboriginal communities?
Which are the most important? Why?
Which Aboriginal communities will I concentrate on?

4. **Structuring an Outline**

This involves looking at your brainstorming ideas and words and finding a way to group, thematise and structure towards an initial outline.

- **Grouping**
  After you’ve brainstormed your question, look for common themes within the chaos! Ask yourself: what ideas seem to be related? Mark or colour-code them. Think of headings for these groups.
**ACTIVITY 2.4.1 Grouping**

Think of what to group from the earlier brainstorm activity for the question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>need for respect</th>
<th>forced interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>getting elders’ support</td>
<td>language difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protocol</td>
<td>status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barriers</td>
<td>Cultural Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic language differences</td>
<td>decision makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting permission</td>
<td>cultural relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal Community</th>
<th>clear expression</th>
<th>what is “home”</th>
<th>how to ask questions</th>
<th>emergency considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coping with change</td>
<td>hierarchical structure</td>
<td>complexity of Aboriginal relationships</td>
<td>misinterpretation of words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ANSWER 2.4.1 |

Here are some possible groupings using grouped markings and colouring. Do they match yours?

*need for respect *forced interaction

#hierarchical structure

*getting elders’ support #language difficulties

*protocol *status *complexity of Aboriginal relationships

~barriers #basic language differences *getting permission ~decision makers
ACTIVITY 2.4.2 Thematising

From Activity 3 responses below, what possible themes can you create for the essay question for the question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community”.

*need for respect   *forced interaction
  #hierarchical structure

*getting elders’ support   #language difficulties

*protocol   *status   *complexity of Aboriginal relationships

~barriers   #basic language differences   *getting decision makers
permission ~clear expression   *what is “home”

~misinterpretation of words   ~clear expression   *what is “home”

~how to ask questions   *emergency considerations   #coping with change

**Theme 1**   Language Barriers
difficulties – misinterpretation of words
differences
barriers
how to modify questioning
clear expression

**Theme 2**   Support of Elders
establish who are decision makers
hierarchical structure
coping with change

**Theme 3**   Community Protocol
need for respect towards elders

ANSWER 2.4.2

Here are some possible themes for the essay question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community”. Do they match yours?

**Theme 1**   Language Barriers
- difficulties – misinterpretation of words
- differences
- barriers
- how to modify questioning
- clear expression

**Theme 2**   Support of Elders
- establish who are decision makers
- hierarchical structure
- coping with change

**Theme 3**   Community Protocol
- need for respect towards elders
Structuring
- Once you’ve brainstormed your question and thematised your ideas, you can create a draft outline structure to guide your reading and writing.

- Organise the material under each theme into a logical order. Group the ideas under headings and subheadings. You can change this later if you need to. Later, each theme/heading/subheading can be addressed in a number of paragraphs, or discussed in one paragraph depending on the amount of information.

- There are various ways to structure your ideas and this will depend on the question. For example, you can list your ideas by:
  
  a. Order of importance or priority (e.g. most significant or important factor/issue to least significant or important one...)
  b. Logical order or causality (e.g. A causes/leads to B causes/leads to C...)
  c. Chronological order by time or stages (e.g. Phase 1, Phase 2 ..., or 1920s, 1930s, 1940s...)
  d. Comparison/Contrast to look at the similarities and differences
  e. Global to specific or vice versa (e.g. big picture to small picture, hospital system to patient, ...)
  f. Conceptual/Abstract to concrete specific application examples (e.g. Evidence-based teaching theory to specific impact on research practices and outcomes in a classroom, ...)

ACTIVITY 2.4.3 Structuring

From the thematised response below for the essay question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community”, outline a possible essay structure for this question.

- **Theme 1** Language Barriers
  difficulties – misinterpretation of words
  differences
  barriers
  how to modify questioning
  clear expression

- **Theme 2** Support of Elders
  establish who are decision makers
  hierarchical structure
  coping with change

- **Theme 3** Community Protocol
  need for respect towards elders
no forced interaction
work to get elders’ support
be aware of status groups
always ask for permission
attitude towards property/“home” boundaries

ANSWER 2.4.3

Here is a possible draft structure outline for the question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community”. How similar or different is it to yours? There are infinite ways to arrange an essay or an argument.

1.0 Introduction
• Background and context
• Definitions
• Thesis statement/themes
• Main point: 3 areas essential when entering an Aboriginal community
• Themes: support of community elders, protocol & language barriers
• Outline of essay

2.0 Theme 1. Support of Community Elders
i) Structure (sub-heading = point being made to illustrate theme 1)
• hierarchical
  supporting detail (including any references)
• dependent on status in community
  supporting detail (including any references)
ii) Strategy for change (sub-heading = point being made to illustrate theme 1)
• seek permission (etc)

3.0 Theme 2. Community Protocol
i) Seeking permission
• attitude to boundaries
ii) Relationships
• complex
iii) Strategy for change
• acknowledge/respect elders
• be aware of status groups
• do not force interaction

4.0 Theme 3. Language Barriers
i) Lead to misunderstandings
• do not force interaction
• be aware of status groups
  example: different questioning
ii) Awareness necessary
5.0 Conclusion
   i) Summarise the argument
   ii) Outline further research needed

5. Researching and Reading
   • Get a librarian's assistance and use your subject outline for key references to guide and
     focus your reading. See the LibSkills for getting started on your assignment research.
   • Read the journal abstracts if the titles look relevant.
   • Scan/skim read the relevant articles and note the reference and page number.
   • Take notes to suit your purpose to expand on your draft outline.

ACTIVITY 2.5 Researching and Reading

What additional search words and synonyms might you use to research the databases for relevant
materials for the question: “Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of
when practising in an Aboriginal community.”

ANSWER 2.5

Have a number of synonyms for each keyword in your question to give greater access to all the
databases. For example, some possible synonyms for this question include:

   Health care worker – medical practitioners, community nurses, social workers, ...
   Aboriginal community – remote / outback communities, outstations, ...
   Cultural issues – protocols, traditions, interpersonal relationships, ...

6. Refining your Outline
   • Expand on your initial outline by adding further headings and subheadings based on your
     research and reading.
   • Use a more detailed numbering system to deal with the greater depth and detail you’ve
     gained (e.g. 1.0, 1.1, 1.1.1, etc.).
   • You may decide to reorder some of your sections in light of your reading.
   • Get feedback from your tutor/lecturer/demonstrator on your refined outline as this has
     the basic structure and detail of your writing.

7. Writing your 1st Draft
   • Write the substance and detail of towards a 1st draft by expanding your refined outline.
• Write your introduction last or you can write a draft introduction to guide your writing at the start. Introductions are a special type of paragraph similar to funnel shape (general to specific). See the Types of Paragraph section for examples.

• Write the conclusion last.

• Concentrate on grouping your ideas into paragraphs that are structured and linked appropriately. See the Academic Phrase Bank for functional listing of academic writing and linking expressions.

• After planning the essay to the point of a detailed outline, you then develop the three essential structural elements – the introductory paragraph, the body paragraph and the concluding paragraph.

a. An introduction needs 4 essential elements:

1. Introduce the topic
2. Provide background or context (why is it important?)
3. Thesis statement or main point of essay
4. Sub-topics or themes to be addressed sequentially in the body of the essay

• A brief definition may belong in the introduction, but a more detailed one belongs in the first paragraph after the introduction.

• Keep all information relatively general, that is no detailed evidence or statistics belong in the introduction.

• See this Introduction Paragraph example below, where the main argument is underlined and the above sentence functions are labelled:

| Question: Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community. |
| Sample Introduction Paragraph |
| 1. Any person entering a new culture must be aware that there will be differences regarding how that community operates. 2. The health care worker needs to take time to get to know the people individually and make an effort to learn the customs and language as any newcomer would. Entering an Aboriginal community is no different. 3. Three areas are particularly important when learning how to interact successfully with an aboriginal community. 4. Working through the elders, following community protocol and an awareness of language, all need to be considered, with the awareness that there may be minor differences in customs between communities. |

b. The Body Paragraphs – Essential Elements
• Every paragraph should include a “topic sentence” that introduces its focus, and then develop logically. This means that each sentence should clearly relate to the one before it. There are various ways you can indicate how your sentences relate to each other:
  ✓ Numbering: first, second, third...
  ✓ Connecting words: therefore, however, moreover, for example, on the other hand...
  ✓ Picking up an idea from the previous sentence (by repeating it, or using a synonym for it, or a pronoun such as this/that, or he/she/it/they) and adding something to it.

• To summarise, each body paragraph develops or expands the original thesis statement in a logical manner using evidence to prove/illustrate the specific point being made and has the following essential elements.

1. A Topic Sentence – establishes the topic of the paragraph and one aspect of that topic.
2. Supporting Sentences – provide the evidence and examples to support or illustrate the topic sentence.
3. A Concluding Sentence – may restate initial point made, lead into next point, relate paragraph to overall argument or make a final statement.
4. Connectives = words, phrases and sentences to link ideas together. See the Academic Phrase Bank form the University of Manchester University for an extensive list of phrases.

• See this labelled example of a Body Paragraph for our example essay question.

Question: Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community.

Sample Body Paragraph

1. Equally, it is essential for health care workers to understand something of the protocol of an Aboriginal community. Two main aspects of this culture are important to keep in mind. Firstly, a health care worker should always seek permission before entering an Aboriginal community, unless it is an explainable emergency. Secondly, they consider their entire communal area to be their home, and to enter without permission would be akin to entering a person’s house without an invitation (O’Brien and Pjooij 1995: 2). Very complex relationships exist between members of a community. It is important to acknowledge and respect these and not ask Aboriginal people to interact with each other when it is inappropriate to do so; for example, when introducing educational health care programs, never ask younger members of the community to teach older members. It is considered very rude towards the elders, makes the younger members uncomfortable and can lead to mutual lack of cooperation (Davidson 1995: 34). Each community has its own customs and it is important for the health care worker to become aware of the practices particular to that community.

C. The Conclusion Paragraph – Essential Elements

Concluding paragraphs sum up your argument and provide an opening for any future issues/research or possibilities. Conclusion paragraphs have three essential elements:

1. Paraphrase the main argument of the essay.
2. **Summarise and paraphrase** the sub-topics addressed.

3. **Make a final strong comment on the topic. Remember:**
   - never add any new evidence
   - avoid detailed information as the conclusion is a more general statement.

See the following labelled sample concluding paragraphs from a first year Public Health essay for our example essay question.

**Question: Discuss some cultural issues public health workers should be aware of when practising in an Aboriginal community.**

1. **In conclusion,** there are three key strategies that health care workers should apply when working in Aboriginal communities. 2. They should seek to work through the elders, respect community traditions and, most importantly, be aware of, and seek to overcome, the major language and cultural barriers. 2. It is only by employing these strategies that health care workers can hope to be successful in their work with and for Aboriginal people. 3. Then, and only then, can health care workers contribute to the improvement of Aboriginal health.