

ESSAY WRITING (2): PLANNING & STRUCTURING YOUR ESSAYS

Why Write Essays

Look for the word 'essay' in the dictionary and you will find one meaning listed is 'to attempt'. An essay is an attempt by you to communicate your arguments or knowledge of a subject to the reader, usually your tutor. The mark awarded is a reflection, **not on your intellect generally**, but on your ability to communicate your ideas on the subject in question.

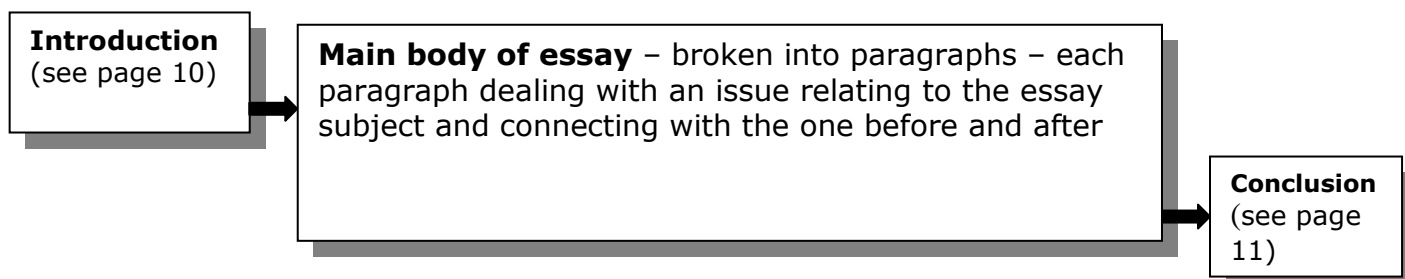
Many tutors – and students – believe essays help in four ways:

- They can be a good way to learn. The **process** of writing will help you clarify your thoughts on a subject or topic
- They show your tutors that you **understand key ideas** on any particular subject
- They are useful as a means of gaining **feedback** on your academic progress
- Essays are usually an important part of overall **assessment**.

Essay writing can therefore be viewed in a positive way. However, essays can cause be a source of anxiety to many students, particularly at the start of their academic careers. Many students feel vulnerable when they write and submit essays and feel their intellect generally is subject to official scrutiny. They have plenty of thoughts and ideas inside their heads – but how to get these out in a readable form? This is the challenge of essay writing.

ESSAY STRUCTURE

Good essays have a clear structure:



Sounds easy, doesn't it? However, many students have problems organising their ideas into a readable and well-structured form. If you are relatively new to essay writing you may find the following approach helpful. It is an attempt to formally **plan** and **structure** your ideas before you start.

The first thing to consider is:

WHAT TYPE OF ESSAY?

To begin the process of structuring your essay, first write the title of the essay in the box below.

What type of question is it?

DESCRIPTIVE	ANALYTICAL
<p>Descriptive essay questions test your knowledge and understanding of a subject and to present your ideas in a clear and organised way. They often contain KEY words, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe • State • Outline • Explain • Define • Show how • Demonstrate • Illustrate • Classify • Give an account of... 	<p>Analytical questions also test your knowledge of a subject – but they are more concerned with ability to get below the surface of a subject and to examine it from different perspectives. The KEY words include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss • Analyse • Contrast • Consider • Compare • Evaluate • Criticize • Evaluate • Interpret • Justify

Occasionally you will encounter combined questions involving both descriptive and analytical approaches. In this event, although you will need to address the descriptive part of the question in a thorough way, the greater emphasis in your essay should be on the analytical aspects of it.

THE ESSAY TITLE

What issues are raised by the title?

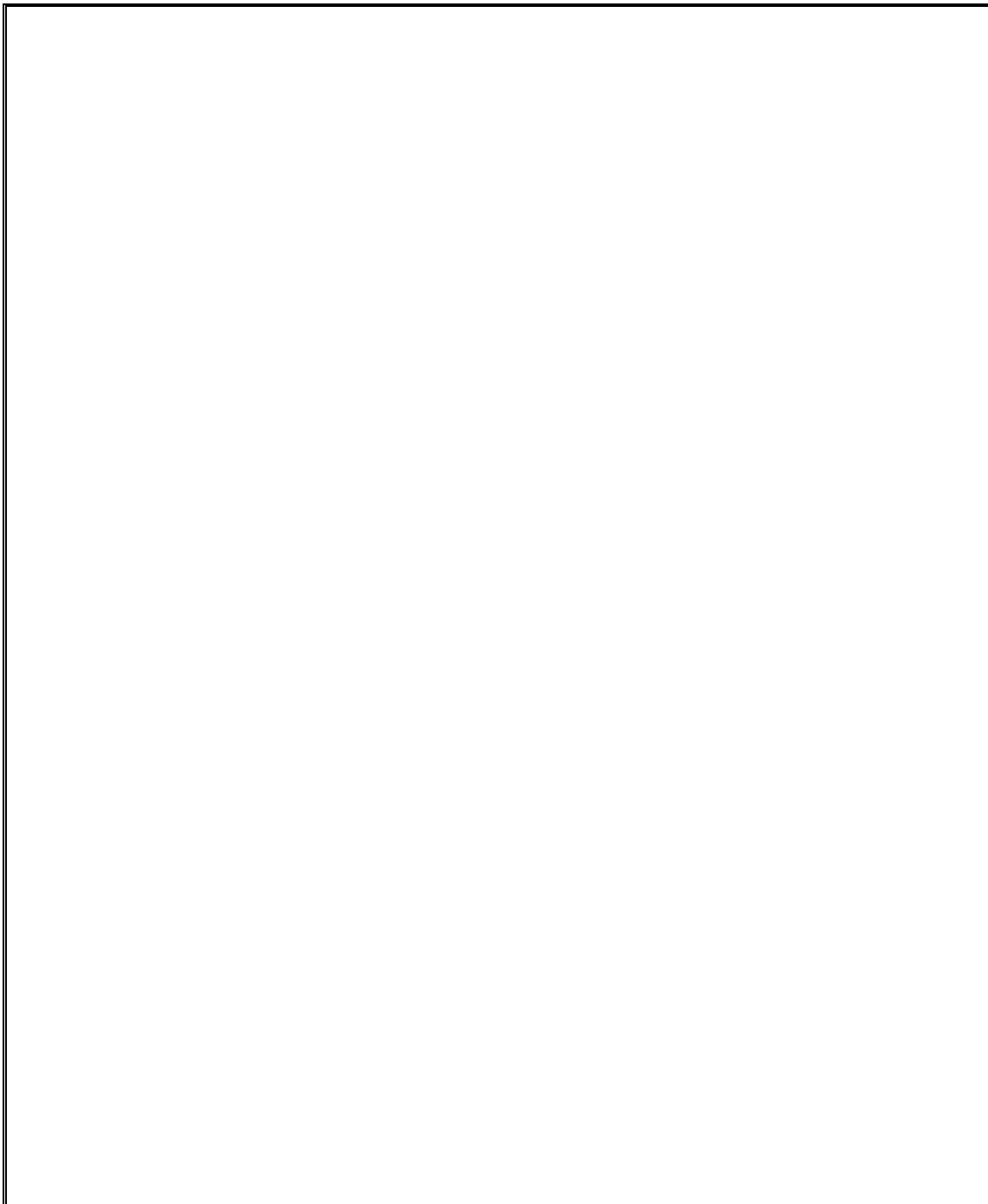
- You might, for example, pick out some key words in the title and think about the wider issues raised by them.
- You might want to clarify or question the ideas or assumptions behind the words used.
- You may want to challenge or explore the whole proposition of the question or title.

Before you start to write your essay, you need to **brainstorm all the issues that come up to the surface for you in the title**. Use the box below to brainstorm the issues that flow from the title.

THE ESSAY SUBJECT

Having clarified your response to the essay title, the next step involves brainstorming the essay **subject or topic**. This will involve you in starting to bring to the surface ideas, arguments, references, points of view, opinions etc. that occur to you.

You just need to jot these down as they occur to you. This stage of the process assumes, of course, you have done some reading on the subject in question! Use the space below for your brainstorming of the essay subject/topic.



WHAT'S YOUR POINT OF VIEW?

Having brainstormed the title and the subject, in some essays you will need to decide what is going to be your position, main argument, view or perspective in the essay. **This is particularly important in analytical essays** (see page 2). It is all too easy to write an essay that gives a range of perspectives but still leaves the reader puzzled as to **your** conclusions or position.

Your point of view is important – backed up with good evidence.

If the essay is implicitly or explicitly seeking you to take up a position, what is it going to be? What will be your overall point of view in this essay?

In the space below, write a 'mini-essay' in 50 words that neatly summarises your point of view for the essay.

FITTING YOUR IDEAS TOGETHER

The next stage of the process involves sorting out your ideas into a readable and coherent form. You should aim to make your ideas 'flow' and connect.

You will need to sub-divide your ideas into paragraphs.

Paragraphs

Normally, a paragraph should cover between a quarter and three-quarters of your page. The paragraph should contain one, or at the most, two **key idea** sentences. Other sentences in the paragraph will support this key idea. A common mistake in essay writing is to hop around from one unrelated idea to another in one paragraph. So, you need to decide on what main point you are going to make in each paragraph – and stick to this.

Example of a paragraph:

The advantages of distance learning for managers

Distance learning has a number of advantages for the busy manager. It can, almost always, give managers control of their learning. Unlike traditionally taught, face-to-face learners, distance learners are free to choose when and where they study. If managers are up to their necks in budget forecasts or resolving crises during one particular week, then, as long as they make up the time the next week, their study time does not have to suffer. Study can be fitted in and around the demands of a busy work schedule and, essentially, distance learners do not have to give up their jobs whilst they are studying. Unlike their counterparts who are taught face-to-face, distance-taught managers can usually relate what they study to their immediate work situation as they are learning. They can read about a management concept and then see if it makes sense at their place of work the very next day. Similarly, research in the workplace can be easily undertaken in support of course work and assignments, and constant exchanges of theory and practice are facilitated. Also, at the end of their studies, the distance-taught managers simply carry on working, whereas their colleagues who have been taught face-to-face may have to pick up the threads after a prolonged period of absence.

(taken from Giles, K. & Hedge, N. (1998) *The Manager's Good Study Guide*. P.57. The Open University.)

In the paragraph above the **key idea** sentence is the first one: *Distance learning has a number of advantages for the busy manager.*

The other sentences build on this key idea – which is about the advantages of distance learning for managers.

You can start to fit your ideas together – one idea per paragraph.

The boxes on the next pages will help you do this.

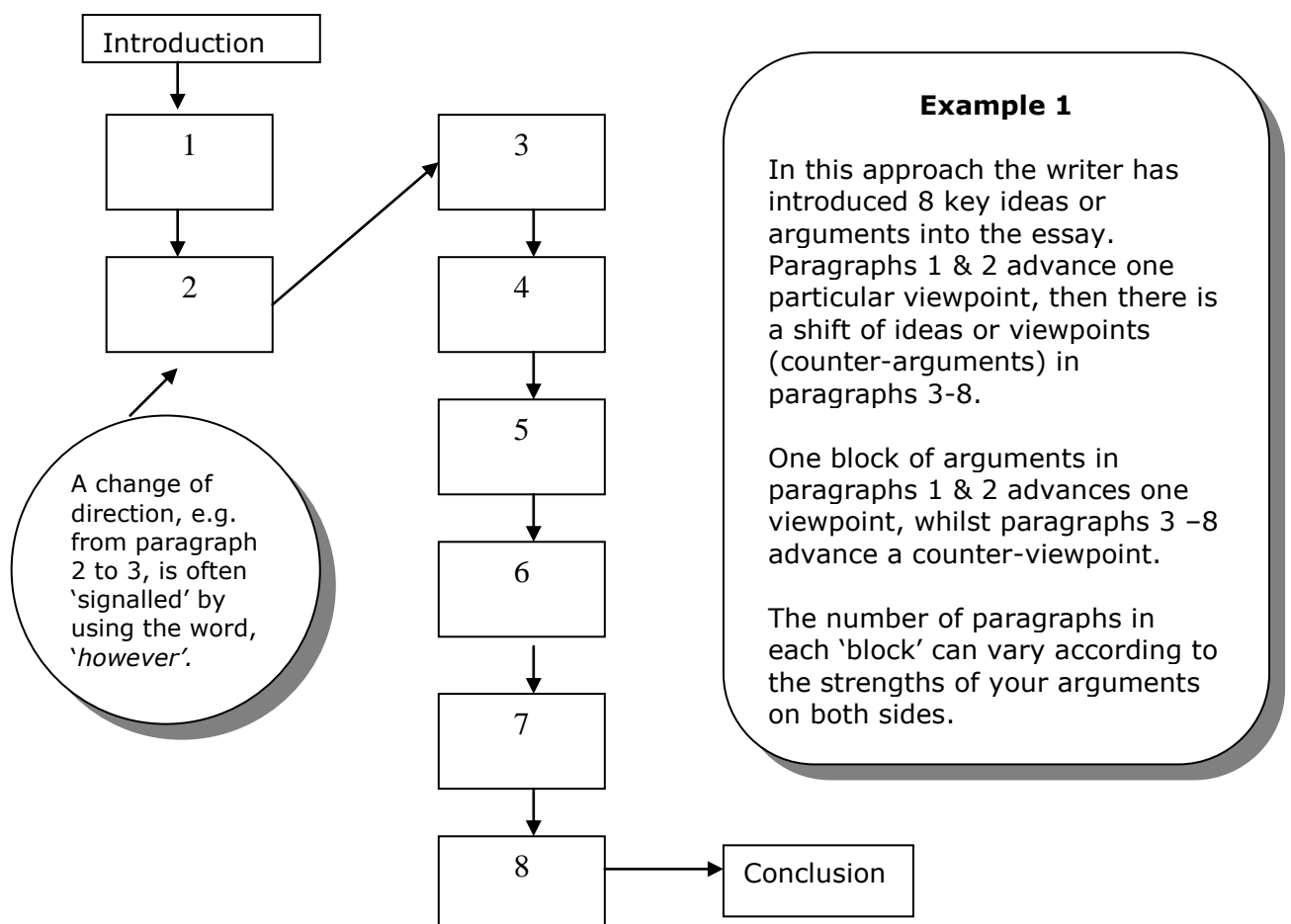
ONE PARAGRAPH = ONE TOPIC

- Think of the following boxes as representing the paragraphs in your essay. Look back at your brainstorming ideas around the essay subject or topic.
- Think about how you can unscramble these and arrange them into the boxes: **one box= one idea or topic only**. In each box write one main heading or brief sentence to summarize the point you wish to make. Use more boxes if you wish

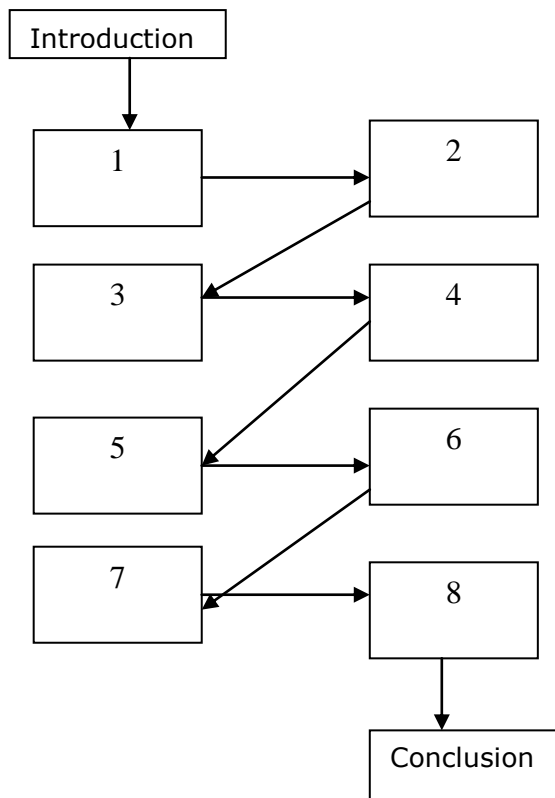
CONNECTING YOUR IDEAS

- The next stage is to try and arrange these paragraphs into a structure or sequence that 'flows', so that one paragraph (and key idea) connects logically with the next.
- You should now try and number the boxes 1, 2, 3 etc in the sequence you intend those ideas to appear in your essay.
- Your essay should build an argument with a clear beginning, middle and end. There should be a sense of progression: you introduce your subject, introduce your ideas, develop your ideas and reach a conclusion.

You should try and work out a sequence of ideas/paragraphs that is appropriate for the essay, but here are two examples of how to connect paragraphs into a logical sequence of ideas.



Another example on the next page.



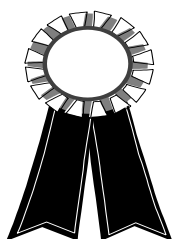
Example 2

This approach adopts a 'shuttlecock' approach to the essay. You start with one viewpoint (paragraph 1), but move to a counter-view (2). You then move back to your original position and develop this (3), and so on, back and forth, switching between one viewpoint/argument alternatively. However, it should also be clear to the reader where you are 'taking' the essay so that the points in your conclusion are not completely unexpected or surprising.

You have now worked out a structure to your essay. However, you need to plan a clear introduction to your essay, and one that sets the scene for the essay as a whole. You also need a conclusion that pulls your ideas together, or reminds the reader of the main point(s) made. See the next sections for advice on writing good introductions and conclusions to essays.

The '**good essay**' is where:

- You answer **the** question
- Your point of view is clear, coherent and consistent
- The essay is well-structured, with a beginning, middle and ending



INTRODUCTIONS TO ESSAYS

The opening paragraph, the introduction to the essay, is important for two main reasons:

- To gain the reader's attention
- To set yourself a purpose, clear direction and structure to the essay

TWO RELIABLE WAYS OF GETTING STARTED

1. The 'Tell-Them-What-You-Are-Going-to-Tell-Them' Approach

This essay will consider the Paradox of Intelligence, one of the nine paradoxes that Charles Handy outlined in 'The Empty Raincoat (1994). A central point that Handy makes in this book is the importance of encouraging a majority of adults to consider continuous learning throughout their lives. This may be an important and worthy aim, but is it feasible? To assess how realistic this argument is the essay is structured into three main parts. First, the distribution of academic qualifications and social class characteristics of adults in Britain today will be examined. The impact these social factors will be explored further in the second section, and in particular the issue as to why a majority of British adults appear reluctant to return to formal education or training will be reviewed. Finally, the issue of what might be done to encourage more adults to consider education and training as a relevant option in their lives will be discussed. A central point in this essay will be that UK government policy on financial support for adult learners needs to change in order to encourage more back to formal learning.

2. ...Or the 'Quote a Quote' Approach

Charles Handy, in 'The Empty Raincoat' (1994), argues that we need to "transform the whole of society into a permanent learning culture" (p.25). This essay will discuss how realistic a prospect this is in Britain today. It will be argued that, although attitudes to education are changing, there are still too many social, cultural and economic barriers for many adults to overcome before they would consider education or training as a serious option in their lives. The essay will examine how the social transformation, that Handy asserts is necessary, might be achieved.

CONCLUSIONS TO ESSAYS

The concluding paragraph will remind the reader of how your essay has answered the question.

You do not always **have** to have come to a definite position on one side or the other, as in the more descriptive style of essay you may have simply been required to summarise the main theories of a topic. But you need to show that your essay has highlighted the main issues on both sides in a clear and unambiguous way. **There also needs to be a sense that you have reached the end of the essay.**

Sentences you could use in your concluding paragraph to signal the end of the essay include:

- *In conclusion then, the main point is that...*
- *Finally, it can be argued that...*
- *The balance of the arguments suggest that...*
- *Despite the evidence to the contrary, it could be argued...*

(see an example on page 16; note the emphasis of finality in the last sentence.)

Quotations, if relevant to the topic, can also be an excellent way of ending an essay, as they can make the reader think.

A sample essay now follows.

SAMPLE ESSAY: 1,500 words

Title:

Evaluate the impact of the Internet on practices for recruitment and selection employed by firms.

(This sample essay has had paragraph numbers added to aid discussion. Essays would not normally have numbered paragraphs.)

1. The Internet has had a significant global impact on recruitment practices within organisations of all sizes. In the area of selection, advances have been slower, but there are, nevertheless, some interesting on-line selection initiatives. These include automated filtering of applications, initial psychological testing of applicants and networking systems for selecting developing job specifications and interviewing and selecting candidates. This essay will attempt to describe and evaluate the impact the Internet has had on both these two aspects of human resources management.
2. The Internet is a system of connecting computers around the world. Linked to this is the 'Intranet', which is a way organisations can communicate internally. The population connected to the Internet in 1999 totalled some 196 million people, predicted to rise to over 500 million by the end of 2003. By the start of 2000, the daily number of Emails sent exceeded – each day – the number sent in total for the whole of 1990 (*Globalisationguide 2003*).
3. The Internet has had a significant impact on the way both firms and job seekers seek each other out. In Britain in 2000, the Chartered Institute of Personnel estimated that 47 per cent of all employers were making use of the Internet for recruitment purposes (*Dale 2003*). In the USA the Association of Internet Recruiters estimated that 45 per cent of companies surveyed had filled one in five of their vacancies through on-line recruiting (*Charles 2000*). More than 75 per cent of Human Resources personnel in the USA are now making regular use of Internet job boards in addition to traditional recruitment methods of

newspaper advertising and links with employment agencies (*HR Focus 2001*).

4. The main ways that firms use the Internet include developing their own web sites, making use of recruitment agency websites, or using 'job boards': external websites that carry sometimes thousands of vacancies that job seekers can scan. Increasingly, external recruitment agencies are specialising in particular types of niche vacancies, or acting as career managers for job applicants and helping to both place the applicant in the right job and support that person during their career.
5. Job seekers too, use the Internet to contact prospective employers by placing their CVs or work résumés on to websites that employers can scan. A survey in the USA in 1999 suggested that 55 per cent of graduates had posted their résumé on to an online job service, and that three-quarters had used the Internet to search for jobs in specific geographic locations (*Monday, Noe and Premeaux 2002*). Some job seekers, with high demand skills, offer their labour in electronic 'talent auctions', with job negotiations, once a successful match has been made, facilitated by the Auction House representatives on behalf of the applicants.
6. The main advantages to employers of using the Internet for recruitment purposes are in the speed of operation, breadth of coverage, particularly if recruiting on a world-wide basis, and cost saving that can occur. Electronic advertising can quickly connect with job-seekers in many different places that might not otherwise be contacted by more conventional methods. Small to medium sized enterprises too, find that they can compete effectively electronically with larger companies and can begin to attract high-calibre recruits to their web-sites, which might not otherwise be the case with more traditional methods of recruitment. With regards to cost saving, it has been estimated that expenditure on newspaper advertising and 'headhunter' fees dropped in the USA by 20 per cent as Internet

expenditure increased (*Boehle 2000*). On-line recruiting, if it is used effectively, is also estimated to cut a week off the recruitment process (*Capelli 2001*). Large organisations, like L'Oréal and KPMG, use the Internet to recruit staff on both cost-saving grounds, and because they feel it increases their visibility and attracts high-calibre recruits. With KPMG, for example, the Human Resources staff were dealing with 35,000 paper applications a year, but decided to switch all their UK recruitment online from May 2001 to save time and printing costs (*Carter 2001*).

7. However, despite the obvious impact the Internet has made on the recruitment process, there are a number of concerns and drawbacks to using this medium. These include the issue of relevance of the medium, confidentiality, the large numbers of applications generated, and the problems that job seekers find in navigating websites and communicating electronically with employers.

8. The first question recruiters need to ask themselves is 'to what extent do members of the target recruitment group have access to the Internet?' Despite increasing use of the Internet, there are still considerable numbers of people, particularly older adults, who do not have access to a personal computer either at work or in their homes. It is estimated, for example, that more than half the adults in West Yorkshire currently do not use the Internet, and that 27 per cent of businesses in the region do not use computers (*LSC 2001*). It is clear that the Internet is a major source of recruiting administrative, IT related or senior and middle management staff from a wide geographical area. However, it is used less for recruiting at junior clerical or administrative levels, for manual and practical jobs, or for jobs in a specific locality. And even among the target groups, networking and personal contacts, or using trusted professional recruiters, tend to be the strategies most frequently currently mentioned as most effective for both job-seekers and employers (*Feldman and Klass 2002*).

9. The issue of confidentiality poses a number of concerns both to job-seekers and employers. In Britain, the Data Protection Act, 1998, stipulates that if a person's details are submitted for one purpose or job they should not be stored or used for any other purpose without the candidate's permission. However, recruitment agencies or employers may want to hold on to candidate's information for longer periods in case other opportunities arise. Whilst many candidates would not object to this, there are fears expressed by job-seekers about the commercial use employers or agencies might make of information supplied, or that the information sent electronically could be intercepted by third-parties (*Carter 2001*).

10. Other pitfalls of using the Internet include processing the large numbers of applications received electronically by large organisations and difficulty job-seekers have experienced in using some websites. These difficulties include locating jobs on some employer's websites, navigating sites, lack of specific and relevant job descriptions and difficulties in customising, formatting and downloading CVs to companies' specifications (*Feldman and Klass 2002*). Indeed, the problems of processing large numbers of electronic applications has encouraged employers to look at using the Internet more effectively for the selection stages of the recruitment process.

11. Automated filtering of applications received is becoming more common through the use of software designed to search CVs for key words or skills. There is in this a potential discrimination problem, as all candidates must be given an equal chance to apply, and electronic screening of applications must try and take into account the cultural and language differences of applicants. However, online screening has the potential to also reduce discrimination, as the emphasis can be placed less on academic qualifications and more on softer skills, such as team working, negotiating skills and leadership ability. Applicants may also be faced with initial screening by online verbal, numerical or other psychometric tests, although there is a potential here for fraud

by some candidates, who might ask a third party to take the tests on their behalf.

12. There are also interesting developments in the use of Internet for final selection stages of the recruitment process. Colleagues, separated by distance, can come together to establish job descriptions and selection criteria or view job candidates through video-conference or Internet communications, then communicate with each other by Email to give their respective opinions of them. A panel can interview candidates and the interview relayed to colleagues elsewhere electronically. These distant observers can send their questions or comments to candidates or pass their own observations of the interview. However, comments sent electronically can help to reduce discrimination or bias, because these can be recorded and stored, which may subsequently encourage a more sober and objective assessment of candidates (*Tullar and Kaiser 1999*).

13. It can be argued that, despite the increase in use of the Internet for recruitment and selection purposes, many Human Resources personnel are still cautious about its use or implementation (*Carter 2001*). The cost of making the proper investment into the electronic infrastructure is a key prohibiting factor, but another is in the feeling that the Internet should not replace the 'personal touch', particularly in the intermediate or final selection stages. Whilst the Internet can certainly assist in identifying potential candidates, it cannot tell a company how good they are, although, it can certainly facilitate the process of bringing a wide range of opinions of applicants to the final judgement. Whilst the recruitment side of the process is likely to expand and develop in the future, selection of candidates is likely to remain a much more personal affair and in the hands of people, rather than machines.

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Now go to the next page for a summary of how this sample essay is structured.

STRUCTURE OF SAMPLE ESSAY

Paragraph 1: Introduction: there is a clear introduction that informs the reader what the essay will attempt to do, (e.g. *'describe and evaluate the impact the Internet has had...'* etc.



Paragraph 2: Sets the context, e.g. describes the Internet and its rapid advance in recent years.



Paragraphs 3 to 5: Description: how Internet is currently used for recruitment purposes, e.g. by both employers & job-seekers



Paragraph 6: Advantages: outlines the main advantages to employers of using the Internet



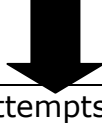
Paragraph 7: Signals a change of direction (note use of word *'However'* to alert the reader to this shift in perspective, and lists the issues to be discussed).



Paragraphs 8 to 10: Counter-discussion: looks at some of the drawbacks of using the Internet for recruitment purposes.



Paragraphs 11 & 12: Selection issues: use of Internet in the selection stage of recruitment: looks at some examples of this.



Paragraph 13: Conclusion: attempts to pull ideas together and reach a conclusion.

Further Reading

These are all the titles in booklets in the 'Effective Learning' series:

1. *Return to Part-time Study*
2. *Return to Full-time Study*
3. *The First Semester*
4. *Time Management*
5. *Accelerated Learning*
6. *20 Tips for Effective Learning*
7. *Six Steps to Effective Reading*
8. *Effective Note Making*
9. *Effective Writing*
10. *Essay Writing (1) stages of essay writing*
11. *Essay Writing (2) planning and structuring your essays*
12. *Essay Writing (3) finding your own voice in essays*
13. *Essay Writing (4) ten ways to liven your essays*
14. *References and Bibliographies*
15. *Report Writing*
16. *Pass Your Exams*
17. *Your Assignment Results – and how to improve them*
18. *Presentations*
19. *Group Work*
20. *Introduction to Research and Research Methods*
21. *Foundations of Good Research*
22. *Writing Your Management Project Report or Dissertation*

You can download any of these from the School of Management Homepages: **Resources– Effective Learning** link, or contact the Effective Learning Service, tel. 4320 (internal), Email: M.T.Sedgley@Bradford.ac.uk, or visit room 0.11 Yvette Jacobson Building at the School of Management.

In the School of Management and J.B. Priestley libraries, there is a study skills section at **D371.30281**

RECOMMENDED READING:

Cottrell, S. (2003) ***The Study Skills Handbook***, London: Palgrave. *(This book Contains lots of bite-sized chunks of advice and information presented in a lively and visually interesting way. This is an excellent general study skills guide for all undergraduate or postgraduate students).*

Giles, K. and Hedge, N. (1998) ***The Manager's Good Study Guide***, Milton Keynes: Open University Press. *(This is a study skills guide written for business studies students and contains advice and information presented in a clear, readable and subject-specific way).*

Also recommended:

- Marshall, L. and Rowland, F. (1998) ***A Guide to Learning Independently***, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Some Useful Internet Sites:

www.allenandunwin.com/estudy/reportwriting.asp

a website produced by Allen and Unwin publishers on writing for academic purposes, including report writing.

www.support4learning.org.uk/education/key_skills.htm *a good all-round site for study skills advice and information.*

www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/study.htm *for excellent advice and information on developing your communication skills, and particularly report and essay writing.*

www.bized.ac.uk/ *a study support site for business studies students.*

If you have any queries please contact Martin Sedgley, Effective Learning Advisor, University of Bradford School of Management.

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