



***Enhanced Learning  
Educational Services***  
*“the study skills specialist”*

# IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS



**Writing is a skill that crosses most subjects. Having strong writing skills will help you save time and be more effective in your work.**

- You should read each point and **highlight the key phrases** in that point.
- Discuss with a friend or parent as you read through the handout.
- You may like to work through this over a number of sessions.



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*First Published 2016 by Enhanced Learning Educational Services  
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## **Enhanced Learning Educational Services Profile**

### Our Organisation:

Enhanced Learning Educational Services (ELES) is the leading provider of study skills resources in Australia. Since 2001 over 500,000 students across Australia have benefited from our study skills worksheets and workbooks. An Australian business based in Sydney, our clients extend throughout Australia and to international schools overseas. We are committed to helping all students improve their ability to learn and study by providing study skills seminars and resources on the topics students need.

### Our Mission:

To provide a worthwhile and effective service to teachers, students and parents, enhancing students' learning skills and abilities through dynamic programs, resources and strategies to unlock the power of the mind and enable greater success at school and in life.

### Our Commitment:

As part of ELES' commitment to education, 5% of all gross income is donated to charities that help and assist children.

## **For further information about ELES or our products or contact details:**

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# 1. IMPROVING YOUR GENERAL WRITING SKILLS

There are a number of different types of writing and they all require different types of skills but there are also general things you can do to improve your overall writing skills. Looking for key words, headings, and terms in bold or italics that refer to information you need.

- **WRITE AS OFTEN AS YOU CAN:** Make an effort to write regularly: newsy letters and emails to friends, letters to the editor, articles for school newspapers, a journal or just experimental different types of writing for different types of audiences.
- **READ AS OFTEN AS YOU CAN:** Read as often and as widely as you can from as many different sources as possible. Think about what you read from a writer's perspective. What were they trying to achieve, how did they try to do this and did it work?
- **EXAMINE DIFFERENT STYLES:** Look for unusual approaches to writing, different styles or structures and the variety of tones and rhythms used.
- **NOTICE DETAILS:** Start taking more notice of funny things that happen in life, things around you or little details about life. Good writers notice things and give detail about things that happen.
- **RE-READ:** Always re-read what you write looking to see if you have expressed yourself clearly after each revision.
- **EDIT:** Think of writing as a process, multiple drafts is a part of writing and it is OK to write and re-write.



- **TAKE SUGGESTIONS:** Be open to suggestions, criticism and feedback and don't take it personally!
- **SET UP A WRITING ROUTINE:** Write! Write on a regular basis, establish a routine and write regularly.
- **NOTE INTERESTING WORDS:** Take note of interesting, unusual or different words in your reading. Write a list of these words or tuck them away into memory so you can include them in your writing. Increasing your vocabulary gives you more tools to write with.



*a. Have you tried any of the techniques above for improving your writing skills?  
Have you tried any other techniques?*

## 2. UNDERSTANDING ESSAY QUESTIONS

- **READ THOROUGHLY:** Always read the question thoroughly to the end. Many students just focus on parts of the question and make assumptions about what the question is asking.
- **HIGHLIGHT:** Read the question with a highlighter in hand and highlight key words and important parts of the question.
- **KEY WORDS:** Look for the key words and think about what these mean.
- **TOPIC WORDS:** What are the 'topic' or 'directional' words in the question ie what is the question actually about?
- **GUIDELINES:** Are there guidelines that help you create boundaries in your writing, whether it be related to specific time periods or areas to discuss?
- **CLARIFY:** Do you need to clarify with your teacher what the question means?
- **DISCUSS:** If you get the opportunity, discussing the question with some friends can also be a good way to get the ideas flowing and to raise issues you may not have considered.



DISCUSS

*b. have you ever had any problems in understanding essay questions? Do you follow these steps when you are given an essay to help you understand the question?*

## 3. PLANNING ESSAYS

### A) BRAINSTORM IDEAS:

- So many students rush straight into writing without taking sufficient time to generate and organise their ideas. This is essential for all types of writing, not just essay writing.
- Don't discount the value of 'thinking' time. Once you are clear on what the essay is asking of you, take some time to really think about your views and ideas.



- It is a good idea to record thoughts as you have them. But also take the time to brainstorm your ideas and what content should be included.
- Record absolutely everything. You may think you will remember what you are thinking but thoughts are fleeting and need to be speared with a pen (or keyboard) and recorded!
- Don't make any judgements about your ideas at this stage, just let the ideas flow.
- Let initial ideas generate other ideas.
- It is OK to jump all over the place with your thoughts at this initial stage.



### B) COLLECT EVIDENCE:

- Your personal thoughts and ideas may not be enough though. You also may need evidence to support your views. The evidence could be in the form of:
- Supporting evidence from the texts you have been studying (eg a novel, poem, film on the topic).
- Information you have researched from experts on the topic.
- Facts or figures you can find on the topic.
- Wide reading on the topic or targeted reading your teacher has suggested.

### C) ORGANISE YOUR THOUGHTS AND RESEARCH:

*There are a number of ways to organise your thoughts:*



- If you are using a computer you can cut and paste your ideas together in an order that allows you to present a coherent argument.
- If you are using paper you might cut up all your ideas and rearrange them this way.
- Another option is to draw lines linking thoughts that belong together and then numbering ideas in the order you would discuss them.

*There are also a number of things to consider when organising your thoughts. Note: I find it is good to have the*

essay question written out on an index card so you can keep referring back to it over and over during the process of organising your thoughts.

- When organising your thoughts look for links between ideas.
- Examine the relationships and significance of ideas.
- Look for interesting contrasts, comparisons or patterns that may be emerging.
- Look for a logical flow within the thoughts you have collected so far.
- See if any of the ideas belong together or are a repeat of other ideas and can be merged.
- See if any of these ideas link into any others or stimulate new thoughts.
- Consider what you find interesting or surprising about the topic.
- Keep referring back to the question and make sure your ideas are answering the essay question.
- Look for a logical flow between your ideas, do they hang together in a convincing argument?



#### D) CLARIFY YOUR ARGUMENT OR THESIS:

- Before you begin to write the essay, you need to have worked through the above steps and arrived at a logical well thought out sequence of ideas that addresses the essay question and that can be supported with evidence.

- This is your central argument or thesis– almost like a narrative where you explain your thoughts to the reader and support your ideas throughout the essay.



- As the essay develops you may have to be flexible and make some changes to your argument or thesis but the aim is to have it as developed as possible right from the beginning.

- It is a good idea to see if you can explain your line of argument to someone verbally.
- It is also a great idea to try and express your answer to the question or your line of argument in a single sentence (see the 'thesis' statement section below).



*c. Do you take the time to brainstorm before you start writing your essay? Do you spend time organising your ideas and clarifying your thesis?*