

GUIDE TO STRUCTURING A LEVEL ESSAYS

Planning your answer

The key to an excellent essay is all in the planning; it will only come out well in the writing if you know exactly what you are going to argue and the order in which you are going to introduce evidence and points. So, it is crucial that you make yourself a good plan!

Essentially, all the AQA essay questions ask you to argue 'for or against' a hypothesis. Your job, therefore, is to find evidence from your course for both sides of the argument i.e. both 'for' and 'against' the hypothesis. You absolutely must have evidence for both sides – not just one side. The evidence goes down on your plan, divided into 'for' and 'against' the hypothesis. Whichever side you end with more evidence for, or more convincing evidence for, that is the side you will conclude is most persuasive.

So, always make yourself a quick table with for and against, add in **factors**/points/evidence, even key names, terms, events. Look at your table and decide if you are for or against. You are going to be analysing each side and saying why you support one and disagree with the other.

ALSO LOOK FOR LINKS – DOES YOUR ARGUMENT LINK TO THE OTHER FACTORS BEING ANALYSED. IS IT THE UNDERLINING FACTOR FOR EVERYTHING? (if this applies to the question)

Introduction

You will need a short, clear introduction that references the question and states your line of argument.

A nice, clear format where the examiner can see exactly what you are arguing, exactly what evidence you are using/**factors** to be analysed, and exactly what you have concluded. Importantly, you do this at the start of the essay!

AND THEN STICK TO THAT ARGUMENT – DON'T CHANGE IT HAVE WAY THROUGH!

Your conclusion should match your introduction!

Main Part of the essay

Be clear. Be concise. Get to the point quickly. Give evidence to back up your points. Reach a judgement at the end of paragraph that links to your overall argument.

THINK FACTORS – analyse the main factors or if applicable think themes:

For example: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, POLITICAL, MILITARY, MERCANTILIST, PROGRESSIVE IMPERIALISM

Setting out your argument

Options for structure:

- Reasons for / reasons against
- Opposing view and challenged with your view
- Your view from the start and then challenging other views

The Conclusion

You must conclude in line with the most persuasive and convincing evidence you have included in your plan. This sounds really obvious, but I have lost count of how many A-level history essays I have marked that argue effectively for one point of view, but then conclude in favour of the other side. The most common reason for this happening is that the student has moved off their plan when writing up the essay. Follow your plan!

At the end of the essay your conclusion should sum up all the main points of argument and then should reach a judgement. Don't sit on the fence, no matter how tempting it is. You need to make a judgement. The conclusion should mirror your introduction and the main points of argument in the body of the essay, so the work ends up as a coherent, clear argument from introduction to conclusion.