

HOW TO GUIDE #1

WRITE A BETTER LAW ESSAY INTRODUCTION



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How to:

Write a Better Law Essay Introduction

On average, one undergraduate law research essay in fifty will have an excellent introduction. The standard of the other 49 papers will range from good to downright depressing. And - unfortunately for these students, the marker will begin judging them as non-HD students from their very first sentence. They will also have a mark range in mind by the time they finish reading the introduction. The paragraphs that follow will be hard-pressed to raise the student's mark above this range. Thus, it is imperative that you create a positive initial impression on your marker by opening your law essay with a strong introduction. This Guide provides key tips to help you achieve an excellent introduction.

Pretend you are an expert

Writing an excellent introduction is often an exercise in faking it till you make it. Even if you are not sure exactly what you have argued in your essay, it is important that you convey an aura of confidence. Make the marker think that you are an expert on the topic. Direct language and using a strong authorial voice is the key. For example, rather than: 'This essay will attempt to explore...' try: 'This essay will explore....' Rather than: 'I will attempt to show that....' try: 'This essay will prove....'

Be careful when giving background information

It is important to provide context for your essay topic in your introduction. However, you need to be careful that the depth of information you provide does not lead you into straying too far from the question. Try and give enough background information to situate your reader, without distracting them from your purpose – which is to provide a targeted response to the question. Depending on the length of your essay, up to 3 sentences of background information is usually sufficient. For example, if your question deals with the effectiveness of changes to a particular law, your background information could read something like: ‘In 2009, the [...] Act received a significant overhaul following the introduction of the [...] Amendment Act. The purpose of this Act was to [...] and resolve issues such as [...].’

Stay focussed on the question

It is important that your contextual information is related back to the question. If you have documented legislative developments in your introduction’s first 3 sentences, ask yourself: how is this relevant to the arguments you will be making in your essay? For example, if your essay question asks you to analyse whether a new legislative provision perpetuates gender inequality, the sentence after your background information could read: ‘This essay will critique these amendments from a feminist perspective and suggest that.....’ or alternatively: ‘This essay will explore the effect of these provisions upon contemporary power relations between men and women within Australian society...’ If you tie your context back to the question, the content of your introduction will progress appropriately.

Do more than paraphrase the question

Do not paraphrase the question in your introduction without providing further, specific information about the scope and breadth of your argument. Which laws will you examine? What reform proposals? How will this content inform your arguments? For example, if the question is ‘How effective is the current civil procedure rules in achieving substantive justice?’ your introduction should not simply state ‘The current civil procedures rules achieve substantive justice’ without further explanation. You need to also outline the civil procedure rules you will examine, define substantive justice or outline which aspect of this concept you will be looking at, and note your key examples. Also, if your response takes a narrow approach to the question (which is a good way to achieve depth in your analysis), make sure you flag this choice. Something like: ‘This essay will focus upon the introduction of case management in preference to other civil procedure reforms as it has arguably had the greatest impact upon...’ is sufficient.

Outline your essay structure

After outlining your arguments and their scope, it is desirable to provide a brief outline of your essay’s structure. This situates the marker, and strengthens the cohesiveness of your argument. This outline should be included as a separate standalone paragraph at the end of your introductory section. For example:

‘In section I, this essay will outline the evolution of case management in New South Wales. Section II will analyse the effectiveness of this reform and argue that [...]. In section III, reform options will be canvassed with reference to the American experience of’

Be upfront about your conclusion(s)

It is vital that your introduction ends with your conclusion(s). This conveys confidence and reminds the marker that your paper is on-track to answer the question. For example: 'This essay will ultimately conclude that the law of [...] fails to reflect community standards and should be amended in line with the Queensland approach of...'

If you are struggling to reduce your conclusions to one sentence, consider 'What is my direct response to the question?' If you still cannot come up with an answer, rethink whether your paper actually answers the question.



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