# Structuring Your Essay by Dr Jo Cormac [Video Transcript]

**Edited and Re-recorded by Anna Shirley**

This is a short video on structuring your essays.

When you are given an essay title, it can be tempting to start writing straight away. However, this usually results in waffle that is difficult to follow. It is, therefore, important to think about the structure before you start writing.

Often there will be a number of possible ways you could structure an essay. But generally, it is best to structure your work around themes, ideas, or topics. This helps you to analyse the issue, that is take it apart and see how the parts are related. Occasionally, it may be necessary to use another structure, such as chronological, but most of the time a thematic structure will help you to achieve the best marks.

A mind map of your main ideas can help. Have a look at the skills hub video on Mind Mapping for advice. But, what do you do once you’ve finished your mind map?

The ideas from your mind map will make up the body of the essay. Firstly, you need to decide on whether you can group any of your ideas together. Let’s take this essay title as an example: ‘Society today is totally different from society in 1900. Discuss’. There are a number of different aspects we could put on our mind map that you could focus on, but some are related. For example, you could put transport with technology. Health is also affected by advances in technology so I’m also going to put health with technology.

Often your essay topic will be broad and there will be a number of possible ways to answer it. Decide what to focus on and justify your choices. At this stage, delete anything on the mind map that you don’t want to cover in the essay. In this case, I’m going to delete leisure because I think some of the other topics have a greater impact on society.

Finally, you need to decide on your order. If there’s something you think is particularly important, or that relates to everything else, that should go first. I think social class is related to all of the other topics so I’m going to start with that.

Now see if any of the other ideas are related. If so, put them in an order that will enable you to flow from one to the other. Education reforms might offer new opportunities for people from different classes and therefore impact on social mobility, so I think I can move from social class to education. Education reform might also influence developments in technology so I can then link to technology.

Now we’ve got the body of our essay sketched out, we need to frame it with an introduction and conclusion.

The introduction has two main jobs. Firstly, it should set the scene for some of the ideas that you are going to explore. Secondly, it should specifically signpost the sections of your essay. So, in this case, you would write that this essay is going to focus on changes in social class, education and technology. You also need to justify why you have chosen to focus on these aspects at the expense of others.

Then, of course, we need a conclusion. You don’t need to repeat everything: simply sum up your main points. You’ll probably have a point relating to each of the main sections. Finally, step back from what you’ve written and sum everything up in a broad conclusion. Think about the wider implications of what you’ve found.

Then you have your essay plan.

Need any more help?

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Thank you.