

Jazyková kompetence I Session II

Essay Writing: The Basics

What does a good essay need?

An academic essay aims to persuade readers of an idea based on evidence.

- An academic essay should answer a question or task.
- It should have a thesis statement (answer to the question) and an argument.
- It should try to present or discuss something: develop a thesis via a set of closely related points by reasoning and evidence.
- An academic essay should include relevant examples, supporting evidence and information from academic texts or credible sources.

I. Introduction

An essay introduction offers the reader an overview of the whole essay. It usually includes the following: a *statement* or 'hook' to gain the reader's interest; *contextualizing material* providing relevant background information; the *topic* and *focus* of the essay; the *rationale*, or reason, for writing the essay; an indication of the essay's *organisation*. It may also be necessary to define any central concepts. The introduction moves from general to specific information. By the end, the reader should be clear about what the essay is going to focus on, why and how. This specific information is typically expressed in the *thesis statement*.

Task 1

Identifying features of an introduction

Read the essay title and introduction below. Identify each feature (a-e) that the introduction contains.

- a) rationale
- b) thesis statement
- c) contextualizing material
- d) a statement to gain the reader's interest
- e) a basic definition

Title: *'The world order is changing rapidly as powerful countries become less powerful and other countries emerge.'* To what extent do you agree with this statement?

'The times they are changing'. So sang Bob Dylan in the early 1960s, and what may have been true then certainly seems true today. The two most powerful countries in the half-century following World War II were the USA and the Soviet Union. Other powerful countries included old colonial powers such as the UK and France. More recently, and particularly since the new millennium, international attention has focused on quite different countries, including the emerging economies of China and India. The term 'emerging economies' illustrates that power is not simply political but also economic. It is important to investigate the idea that some countries are becoming less powerful, and others are becoming more powerful, because international organisations like the United Nations need to respond to changing needs. This essay examines firstly what makes a country powerful, then focuses on the position of the USA and emerging countries, and finally assesses the extent to which certain countries are becoming less powerful and the world order is changing.

II. Main body

1. Transitions

Task A) What are these transitions used for?

- a) therefore, thus, consequently, as a consequence, as a result, hence
- b) in addition, also, finally, moreover, furthermore
- c) however, on the other hand, whereas, while, yet, but, despite, in spite of, although, nevertheless
- d) first, next/ finally, firstly, secondly, thirdly/ initially, subsequently, ultimately
- e) in this case, for example, for instance, to illustrate, to demonstrate
- f) in brief, in conclusion, finally, in summary, in a nutshell, to sum up, that is to say, all in all, as a result, in short

- 1. To introduce an opposite idea or show exception
- 2. To introduce an example
- 3. To indicate a result/ cause of something
- 4. To logically divide an idea
- 5. To summarise and conclude
- 6. To introduce an additional idea

(<http://academichelp.net/general-writing-tips/essentials/common-transitions.html>)

Task B) Complete the gaps with these phrases, there is one phrase you will not need:

furthermore for example despite in particular as well as all in all also therefore

Argumentative Essay: The Importance of Sports

Participation in sports is extremely important, and should be encouraged much more. Children and young people _____ need to do sport so that they develop good habits that they can continue into adulthood. The main benefits of sport are improved health and fitness, and the development of social and communication skills.

With more than a third of adults in the USA being classed as obese, and many more being overweight, it has never been more important to participate in sports. People that do sport on a regular basis are burning more calories than those that don't, and are _____ less likely to end up overweight. Being a healthy weight means that you will be less likely to die young and suffer from heart disease, strokes, high blood pressure, diabetes and a range of other conditions, and if you already eat well, it can give you an extra calorie allowance so you can treat yourself without feeling guilty about it.

_____ improving cardiovascular health and fitness, exercising is also good for the musculoskeletal system, making muscles more supple and toned, and improving the strength of bones and joints. People who do sports will be stronger and more able to lift and carry heavy things, which is also always useful, and they are less likely to become really weak and frail as they get older because their bodies are strong. _____, doing sports can improve mental health as well as physical health, with exercise being helpful for people with depression and a range of other mental health issues, because it releases good chemicals into our brains. It _____ makes people feel better about their bodies, which can make them happier, and reduces the risk of eating disorders and crash dieting, as people make more sensible, healthy changes to their lifestyle.

Sports also allow people to develop personally. Social and communication skills can be learned and developed through sport. Teamwork, _____, is naturally learned through participating in team sports and games. Communication skills can really be honed, as they are at the centre of any team's

success, and a lack of them leads to failure. Many people will also develop leadership skills through sport, often discovering abilities that they never knew they even had.

Many people's self-esteem improves through sport as they discover things that they are good at and improve their body. Participating in any competitive sport also improves our ability to handle pressure and still perform well, as well as teaching us how to win and lose graciously. _____, the fact that playing sport is good for us is completely undeniable, because it helps our minds and bodies, and ultimately means that we will be living longer, happier lives.

(<http://www.scholaradvisor.com/essay-examples/argumentative-essay-importance-of-sports/>)

2. Passive voice

In academic writing the passive is often used to maintain the focus on the topic of the essay or article. Using the passive sounds more natural when the focus is on the action, idea, or event being described, rather than who or what carries it out. Compare:

Active: We often refer to poorer countries as 'developing countries'.

Passive: Poorer countries are often referred to as 'developing countries'.

Task: Rewrite the sentences using the verb phrases in italics in the passive:

1. *We can illustrate* the idea by the situation of local club managers.
2. Many people *think of* professional sport as an attractive domain.
3. *We can find examples* of gender inequality in many sports.
4. You *should note* that vegetarian diet does not necessarily mean healthy diet.
5. They *should take into account* social conditions as well as the economic situation.
6. They *have discovered* a new anti-inflammatory drug.
7. Researchers *developed* a new technique for data processing.
8. Researchers *are developing* a new technique for data processing.

3. Countable and uncountable nouns

Countable nouns can be "counted", they have a singular and plural form.

For example:

a student – two students. Many, few, a few, those, these students. The students are interns.

Uncountable nouns have only one form. This means you cannot make them plural by adding -s, because they only have a singular form. It also means that they do not take **a/an** or a number in front of them.

For example:

music – some music, a piece of music, a little, little music, much music, this, that music. Music is connected to mathematics.

Some uncountable nouns are countable in Czech and so they will cause special difficulty. Here are some of the most common ones:

*Absence Advice Equipment Evidence Experience Information
Knowledge Money News Permission Research*

Please notice also that some words in English form **irregular plural**, for example
a phenomenon – phenomena,
an analysis – analyses,
hypothesis – hypotheses,
a means – means,
a species – species, etc.

Some nouns end in –s but are uncountable and take a singular verb, for example:
Gymnastics is difficult. Maths is a compulsory subject.

Task A) Study the following examples and notice the use of nouns, either uncountable or irregular.

Some people have the perception that scientific knowledge equates to 'the truth'.
This information has many implications in the field of neurology.
Advice regarding foot care should be provided to reduce disease progression.
We are worried about the child's lack of progress in learning.
There are many ways of teaching coaches to deal with problem behaviour.
Recent research shows that babies in the womb can be influenced by music.
Can you give us any more evidence? This evidence is not very reliable.
The Internet is an effective means for finding qualified job applicants.
These phenomena occur during early foetal development.
It was a series about a hospital.
The news is very hopeful.
They believe that much of our unhappiness as a species can be seen in the increasing rates of many psychological disorders.
(sentences adapted from British Academic Written English Corpus)

Task B) Choose the correct form of the verb.

1. Our knowledge of the subject is/ are limited.
2. The new research is /are based on reliable data.
3. The money is /are insufficient.
4. Results of the investigation is / are surprising.
5. Advice for parents is / are needed.
6. First-hand experience in a hospital is / are invaluable (extremely useful).
7. The phenomena she studied is / are very complex.
8. The analyses is / are very detailed.
9. This species is / are threatened with extinction.
10. Athletics is / are slightly more popular than physics.

4. Vocabulary

Task A) Complete the two thesis statements with one of the verbs below:

consider discuss describe examine explain focus on look at suggest

1. Firstly, I the social and economic reasons why it is important to teach traditional subjects at university.
2. This essay the importance of science, medicine, and technology in today's globalised economy.

Task B) Explain the difference between the sentences in each pair.

1. Graig's article supports Park's theory. Greig's article challenges Park's theory.
2. Describe the new tax regulations. Discuss the new tax regulations.
3. Lodhi provides new data. Lodhi considers new data.
4. Titova conducted four sets of experiments. Titova examined four sets of experiments.
5. Lee established why such changes occur. Lee investigated why such changes occur.
6. Okaz assumed that the data were reliable. Okaz proved that the data were reliable.

(McCarthy, M.; O'Dell, F. *Academic Vocabulary In Use*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.)

5. Writing

Write an introduction, including a thesis statement. Use the checklist of questions to evaluate it.

1. Does the introduction include sufficient contextualizing material?
2. Is the content directly relevant to the essay title?
3. Have you included a rationale, or reason for writing the essay?
4. Does the thesis statement add something new?
5. Is the organisation, topic and focus of your essay clear to the reader by the end of the introduction?

(Chazal E.; McCarter, S. *Oxford EAP*. Oxford University Press, 2012.)