

# The difference: between writing a statement and writing an essay.

When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'

*Humpty-Dumpty (Lewis Carroll)*

## Writing an Essay

**An essay is a structured piece of writing that deals with a particular subject.**

Essays are used to assess your understanding of specific ideas and your ability to explain these in your own words.

Essays are usually written in a discursive style, bringing together ideas, evidence and arguments to address a specific problem or question.

They follow a particular structure: you will set out your argument in the introduction, build and present your argument in the main body, and should end with your overall key message or argument in the conclusion.

Essays take time to complete. You will need to set aside time for the following stages of writing:

1. Thinking about the question.
2. Gathering information and ideas.
3. Organising your ideas.
4. Getting something on paper.
5. Writing a first draft.
6. Reviewing in light of feedback or reflection.
7. Producing a final draft.

**Basic principles of writing a sentence as a statement of something:**

### Declarative Sentence (statement)

Declarative sentences make a **statement**. They tell us something. They give us information, and they normally end with a full-stop/period.

The usual word order for the declarative sentence is:

- subject + verb...

|   | form                 | function                                    | example sentence (clause)      | final punctuation |
|---|----------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | <b>declarative</b>   | <b>statement:</b> It tells us something     | John likes Mary.               | .                 |
| 2 | <b>interrogative</b> | <b>question:</b> It asks us something       | Does Mary like John?           | ?                 |
| 3 | <b>imperative</b>    | <b>command:</b> It tells us to do something | Stop!<br>Close the door.       | ! or .            |
| 4 | <b>exclamative</b>   | <b>exclamation:</b> It expresses surprise   | What a funny story he told us! | !                 |

(form = structure / function = job)

Declarative sentences can be positive or negative. Look at these examples:

| positive                  | negative                        |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| I like coffee.            | I do not like coffee.           |
| We watched TV last night. | We did not watch TV last night. |

Declarative sentences are the most common type of sentence.

## Interrogative Sentence (question)

Interrogative sentences ask a **question**. They ask us something. They want information, and they always end with a question mark.

The usual word order for the interrogative sentence is:

- (*wh-word* +) auxiliary + subject + verb...

Interrogative sentences can be positive or negative. Look at these examples:

| positive            | negative               |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Do you like coffee? | Don't you like coffee? |
| Why did you go?     | Why didn't you go?     |

## Exclamative Sentence (exclamation)

Exclamative sentences express strong emotion/surprise—an **exclamation**—and they always end with an exclamation mark/point (!).

The usual word order for the exclamative sentence is:

- *What* (+ adjective) + noun + subject + verb
- *How* (+ adjective/adverb) + subject + verb

Look at these examples:

- What a liar he is!
- What an exciting movie it was!
- How he lied!
- How exciting the movie was!

[English sentence types](#)

## Writing a Statement

Writing a statement about oneself, one's opinion or one's decision-making on a particular subject is one of the most difficult types of text one will write, primarily because it is personal. This type of writing is fundamentally different to other sorts of academic writing such as research proposals, essays, or thesis.

As with all types of academic writing, a statement has a logical structure and development. It has a purpose to communicate why you understand and believe one's position and aspirations, what has influenced thought processes and why the course of action has been chosen.

## Answering the Question!

- Before starting to write a statement, the project brief and embedded instructions must be scrutinised.
- Carefully consider what is being asked and start the statement with a sentence that signals that the central question being asked, is being answered.
- Ensure that all the questions that are posed in the brief are answered and consider responses carefully before committing to paper and expanding text into areas that have not been asked for.
- Do not write anything that cannot be supported with a qualified argument in writing or an interview/tutorial.
- If there is a word limit then make sure this is adhered to and commit all writing to answer those questions.

## Attracting the Reader's Attention

When writing a statement, it is important to remember that numerous students are responding to the same brief. The person who reads each statement will have read dozens of others. A statement should be original, different, and interesting in order to stand out.

If a statement fails to catch the reader's attention, it may be due to one or more of the following problems:

- It starts with flattering comments about the subject, which the reader is already aware of.
- It provides an entire life history of an individual's experiences to date. The worst examples of this start from birth, - by the time you reach the important bit, the reader will have lost interest.
- It starts by explaining exactly how the writer heard about this subject - unless this information shows something important about the subject, leave it out.
- It begins by providing personal details that the reader already has on file.
- Although they do grab attention, the sort of least successful statements are those that use over-theatrical and silly introductions that are inappropriate for an academic environment. If the statement starts with 'I am really interested in, or 'Ever since I was a baby, gazing happily at the world...', it is likely that the reader will lose interest quickly. Qualification of statements with solid references supported by appropriate theory will grab attention.

## Capturing the reader's attention

### **weak:**

- Beware of generalisations. Broad brush statements can be applied to anything, e.g. 'Fine art is for everyone.' Be specific, e.g., Works like 'Angel of the North' by Anthony Gormley have had a significant impact on community, drawing tourists to visit and question the meaning and rationale for such a work that might not happen in the gallery space.
- Back up any specific features of your subject with robust references.
- Use language that is direct and clarifies the success of the subject being discussed. Beware of weak language and adjectives such as good, like, love etc.
- Not answering the question. Always start by answering the question outlined in the brief. Read the question carefully and ensure all elements are answered.

### **positive:**

- Grab the reader's attention with an alarming piece of referenced information.
- Reference something that is factual and that has been specifically experiential, thus moving from the general to the specific.
- Ensure the reader is aware of the link between academia and the real world and that the importance of the relationship between theoretical learning and practice is understood.
- Succinctly express links between experiences, understanding and subsequent next steps.

### **How to start off**

Ideally, start with an interesting fact or detail in response to the question that is interesting and intelligent. Try a more general truth or saying, then show how this applies to personal aspirations. Be prepared to quote professionals who have said or made something relevant. Keep references short, quote correctly, and make sure that the relevance to the point being made is clear. Don't quote for the sake of it.

Do give enough time to create a good initial paragraph. It is the first thing the audience will read, and first impressions are quickly formed. If first sentences are dull, irrelevant, eccentric or pompous, or worse still, full of grammatical or spelling mistakes, the audience will quickly form a negative impression which will be hard to dispel.

### **The Structure of a Statement of Purpose**

The word 'purpose' normally means 'what' you want to do, however, it has a secondary meaning, which is the quality of knowing 'that you want to do something'. Purpose in this sense means having a direction, and a statement must show a direction and know both where and how to best get there. This approach also applies to writing a project proposal, a task you will be charged with during unit 4.

A good statement will usually have the following structure:

#### **The Past**

How education, as well as any other work or study experience, has prepared the ground for future study.

#### **The Proposed Area of Study**

Should be shown to be a logical follow-on from studies/work to date and to prepare you for your future career.

#### **The Future Career**

Should be something for which the proposed course of study is valuable or essential and should have some logical connection to what went before.

This structure does not have to be followed and creativity can be applied to how this information is communicated, but the elements and the connection should be there and should be clear to the reader. Before starting to write, draw a clear structural plan, perhaps allowing a paragraph or so for each stage. The past will be much clearer and more detailed than the future due to experiential understanding but this area must not be neglected as it is central to realising ambitions beyond one's education in the traditional sense.

## How much detail to provide

### 1. Keep to the word limit

Universities often provide a word limit or a page limit as part of the brief. Many universities state a percentage tolerance as part of the academic standards policy. These rules must be upheld. Academics do a lot of reading, not only of statements but also of essays and thesis and some refuse to read and mark work that does not abide by the rules. Writing too much is never a way to make yourself popular. If a limit is given, their submissions must work within the academic tolerance set by the awarding body or institution. UAL are clear in the word count limits. These are different for the individual qualifications. Where FAD is concerned there is a 10% tolerance applied to being under or over the word count.

### 2. Set section word limits

If you have 750 words, have in mind how many you want to spend on each section of your statement. If you use 650 words describing your studies to date, you will have nothing left for the other sections. By setting yourself rough word limits for each part, you ensure that the statement is balanced.

### 3. Be selective

With any piece of writing where there is a word limit, there will be enough space to say everything about everything. This means, being selective! Gather all the necessary information, look at it and throw away the less important. It is important to remember- everyone is operating to the same limitations.

### 4. Use appropriate language

Demonstrate a good command of the English language: avoid slang, use vocabulary appropriate to the specialist field and write sentences of more than 5 words. Don't start looking for long words to impress with. If an ordinary word will do, don't go thesaurus hunting for a bigger one, not least because its context might be applied incorrectly. Avoid using words such as 'furthermore', 'moreover', 'additionally', 'nonetheless' and 'similarly' to start either new paragraphs or new sentences. These are overused in statement writing and have become a habitual default to starting a sentence to give the impression of a statement without the referenced content to support opinion.

### 5. Edit thoroughly

Re-read the first draft, go over it and check whether any phrases are wordy or clumsy. Try to re-express them clearly and succinctly. While it is good to use longer sentences sometimes avoid rambling waffle. If a sentence has more than 30 words, read it over and see if it would be better to split it into two. Practice reading the statement aloud as this can support the clarification of ideas and overall communication.

### Statement sentence structure:

'Subject' first followed by (something) about the subject of a sentence or an argument of a proposition.

E.g., The rule of thirds has been central to my developing understanding of.....

**Or**

Gormley's work..... transcends our understanding of space because of.....,this has been an important influence on how I engage with.....