Chapter 2

Structuring and drafting

In Chapter 1, we looked at some strategies for thinking and planning before you start writing. We looked at how to analyse a question and identify its key words. We also looked at how to generate ideas to answer a question and how to organize your ideas into an essay outline.

In this chapter, you will learn how to develop your outline into a structured essay. Without well-structured paragraphs, you cannot write a coherent essay, so the first skill that we deal with in this chapter is how to write clear and logical paragraphs.

We then look at the general structure of an academic essay. We discuss how to write an effective introduction, main body, and conclusion. We also look at how to link paragraphs within the body of an essay.

Structuring paragraphs
Before you can think about turning your outline into an essay, you need to know how to write clear paragraphs, because these are the building blocks of an essay.

Paragraphs are groups of sentences that relate to one common idea. Each separate stage in an argument or description should be presented as a separate paragraph. A good paragraph has a sense of unity, and the ideas of the sentences in a paragraph should be related to each other. A new paragraph should be started whenever a new argument, topic or point of view is introduced.

In this section of the chapter, we first look at how to create paragraphs, and then discuss how to create unity within paragraphs.

**Topic sentences and supporting sentences**

The topic sentence in a paragraph gives the main idea of the paragraph. It is also normally the first sentence in a paragraph. The sentences that follow the topic sentence are called the supporting sentences. These sentences elaborate on, expand, explain and justify the idea in the topic sentence.

Example 2.1 below provides two paragraphs that each begin with a clear topic sentence (in italics). The topic sentence clearly tells the reader the main idea of the paragraph. Notice how the supporting sentences in each paragraph explain or elaborate on the main idea in the topic sentence. Notice also how the last sentence in each paragraph recaps the main idea in the topic sentence.

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**Example 2.1**

**Paragraph 1**

*Industrialization in the Pearl River Delta is a major cause of air pollution in Hong Kong.* In the last two decades, China’s manufacturing industries have expanded rapidly, and the Pearl River Delta (PRD) is now one of the country’s most important manufacturing centres. As industry in Southern China has
developed, the level of pollution created by emissions from factories has also increased significantly. Many of the factories in the PRD do not have adequate filtering systems, and therefore, they release a number of pollutants into the atmosphere. When winds are blowing from the west or northwest, these pollutants may be blown towards Hong Kong. As a result, emissions that are produced in Guangdong indirectly pollute the air of Hong Kong.

**Paragraph 2**

Some education experts argue that learning in one’s native language is absolutely essential. Educational psychologists claim that cognition (the process of acquiring new knowledge) is connected to language and communication. Specifically, they argue that we need to talk about a new idea to make sense of it. Furthermore, they suggest that in order to understand a new idea, we need to relate it to what we already know. If educational theorists are correct, it is logical that education should be conducted primarily in a student’s mother tongue. If a student tries to learn new concepts in a language that he or she has not yet fully mastered, his/her ability to discuss new ideas may be limited. Accordingly, education in a student’s mother tongue ensures that the student will have greater opportunity to explore new ideas by discussing them fully and confidently.

We can see in the examples above that the supporting sentences provide information that explains or elaborates on the main idea in each paragraph’s topic sentence. Sometimes, this information might include statistics or a quotation from a reference book. (We will look at how to describe statistics and give quotations in Chapter 3.)

For the moment, the most important thing to remember about supporting sentences is that they should contain information that supports (or agrees with) the topic sentence. They should not introduce entirely different ideas. When you want to introduce a new idea, you need to begin a new paragraph.

- Look at some paragraphs that you have written recently. Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence? Do the supporting sentences explain or give more information about the main idea in the topic sentence?
Organizing information in paragraphs

There are many possible ways of organizing the supporting sentences in a paragraph. Here are some suggestions:

1. If you are explaining how a situation developed over time, organize your ideas chronologically or historically. Use time phrases (e.g. 'Ten years ago', 'In the past', 'Some years later'); use the simple past verb tense; and use sequencing words ('Then', 'After this', 'Subsequently').

2. If you are explaining the steps in a process, organize sentences so that they describe the process in its logical sequence. Try to say what happens first, second, and so on. Use phrases such as 'As this occurs' or 'When this happens' to tell the reader that one step is closely connected to another step.

3. Organize your ideas according to their order of importance (i.e. present the most important ideas before the least important ones). Phrases such as 'The main issue', 'An important factor' and 'A key consideration' tell the reader that an idea is more important. Phrases such as 'Another contributing factor' or 'A further issue to consider' signal secondary or additional ideas.

4. Give general ideas before you provide details. Phrases such as 'In general', 'Overall', 'By and large', and 'On the whole' are often used to introduce general ideas. Words such as 'Specifically' or 'More precisely' can be used to introduce details.

5. If you need to compare and contrast two things in one paragraph, try to first make all the comparisons and then make all the contrasts. Jumping from a comparison to a contrast and then back to another comparison may confuse your reader.

6. If you are describing causes and effects, describe the causes before you describe the effects or consequences.

Let's look at how the ideas in the supporting sentences of Paragraphs 1 and 2 in Example 2.1 (pp. 26–27) are organized.
In Paragraph 1, the writer explains how a situation has developed, and then describes the consequences of this situation. The writer first describes the corresponding development of industrialization and air pollution in China. Notice the use of the time phrase ‘In the last two decades’ to give the situation some historical background. Notice, too, how the present perfect verb tense is used because both industrialization and the problem of air pollution continue to exist and increase. Finally, notice how the writer uses the phrase ‘As a result’ to tell us what happens when the winds blow in a certain direction. The cause (pollution in China + north/northwest winds) is given before the effect (greater air pollution in Hong Kong).

In the supporting sentences of Paragraph 2, the writer first gives his/her main supporting idea (i.e. cognition requires language and communication). This is then followed by some details that explain this idea. The writer then describes a cause and effect relationship (i.e. If we cannot speak about new ideas, we cannot really learn them). Notice how the writer uses the word ‘Accordingly’ (which means ‘therefore’ or ‘so’) at the end of the paragraph to re-emphasize his/her main point.

- Look at the paragraphs in the two sample essays at the end of this book. Notice how each of the paragraphs has a clear topic sentence.

- Look at some paragraphs that you have written recently. How have you organized your supporting sentences?

‘Signal’ words

Words in Paragraph 2 such as ‘Furthermore’ or ‘Accordingly’ are examples of signal words. Sometimes called discourse markers, these words indicate different relationships between the sentences in a paragraph.

Try to think of these words as signposts. When you drive into a place that you don’t know, you rely on signs. If these signs are confusing or suddenly disappear, you feel frustrated. Readers feel the same when a writer does not use clear signal words to guide them around a paragraph.
Here are some common signal words that are used in academic writing:

- Words that signal an **additional point**: moreover, in addition, and, also, additionally, furthermore, as well

- Words that signal an **effect or consequence**: as a result, thus, consequently, therefore, so

- Words that signal stages in a sequence: first, then, next, lastly, finally

- Words that signal an **example**: for example, for instance, such as

- Words that signal a conclusion or summary: in short, in conclusion, to summarize, to sum up

- Words that signal similarity: similarly, in the same way, likewise, equally

- Words that signal difference: however, in contrast, but, yet, nevertheless, though.

- Words that acknowledge an alternative or contrasting idea or opinion: while, although, despite, in spite of.
Example 2.2

Look at how the underlined signal words show relationships between ideas in the following paragraph about the benefits of studying overseas.

Overseas study is valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, studying abroad offers a range of educational, social and cultural benefits. For example, a student who is studying overseas is often immersed in another language and given an opportunity to develop fluency in it. One also learns to see things from new perspectives. In addition, one has every opportunity to become more independent, and interact on a daily basis with people from a variety of cultures. Another important consequence of studying overseas is that one gains new sensitivities. As a result, one returns home with new ideas, new friends and a greater internationalism.

You will see more examples of signal words in the two sample essays at the end of this book.

Pronouns and synonyms

Look at the following paragraph. It has a clear topic sentence, its ideas are developed logically, it uses signal words correctly, and it is grammatically accurate. However, it has a major problem. Can you identify what this is?

Industrialization in the Pearl River Delta is a major cause of air pollution in Hong Kong. In the last two decades, manufacturing in the Pearl River Delta has expanded rapidly, and the Pearl River Delta is now one of the country’s most important manufacturing centres. As manufacturing in the Pearl River Delta has developed, the level of pollution created by emissions from factories in the Pearl River Delta has also increased. Many of the factories in the Pearl River Delta do not have adequate filtering systems, and therefore, the factories in the Pearl River Delta release a number of pollutants into the atmosphere. When winds are blowing from the west or northwest, pollution from factories in the Pearl River Delta may be blown towards Hong Kong. As a result, emissions that are produced in the factories in the Pearl River Delta indirectly pollute the air of Hong Kong.
Did you get very tired of seeing the words ‘manufacturing’, ‘factories’ and ‘the Pearl River Delta’ repeated so many times? To avoid this kind of repetition, we need to use some substitutes for these words. We can use pronouns such as ‘here’, ‘there’, ‘they’, or ‘it’. Often in academic writing, the pronoun ‘this’ is used with a general noun such as ‘problem’, ‘situation’, ‘dilemma’, ‘solution’ or ‘condition’.

We can also reduce the amount of repetition by replacing the repeated words with synonyms (words that are different but have the same meaning). So for example, ‘Southern China’ can be used instead of ‘Pearl River Delta’, and ‘industrial estates’ can be substituted for ‘factories’. Now take a look at the paragraph after some pronouns and synonyms have been added to avoid repetition. Can you see an improvement?

Industrialization in the Pearl River Delta is a major cause of air pollution in Hong Kong. In the last two decades, manufacturing in Southern China has expanded rapidly, and it is now one of the country’s most important manufacturing centres. As industry in the region has developed, the level of pollution created by factory emissions from Southern China has also increased. Many of these factories do not have adequate filtering systems, and therefore, they release a number of pollutants into the atmosphere. When winds are blowing from the west or northwest, pollution from industrial estates in the Pearl River Delta may be blown towards Hong Kong. As a result, emissions that are produced by industries across the border indirectly pollute the air of Hong Kong.

**Adverbials**

Adverbials are another tool for logically connecting ideas in a paragraph. Adverbials are usually used at the beginning of a sentence to show the writer’s attitude or opinion about an idea. For example:

*Unfortunately,* air pollution in Hong Kong seems to be getting worse.

The following adverbials are often used at the beginning of a sentence and are followed by a comma:

- clearly, luckily, significantly, sadly, controversially, inevitably, most importantly, undoubtedly, without a doubt
The following group of adverbs may be used within a sentence (usually just before the verb) to express a writer's feeling of probability:

- apparently, certainly, definitely, possibly, probably

Once you have some understanding of how to structure and organize paragraphs, you are ready to organize paragraphs into an essay.

The structure of an academic essay

Like most written documents, an academic essay has three distinct parts:

- a beginning — the introduction
- a middle — the main body
- an end — the conclusion

This diagram represents the standard structure of an academic essay.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction (First paragraph)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paragraph 5 etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion (Final paragraph)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the three main parts of an essay has a particular function and its own special structure and style. Let's explore each part in some detail.

The introduction

The introduction of an essay is like the topic sentence of a paragraph. It provides a focus for the essay. It should also capture the reader's attention and indicate the overall organization of your essay.
Make sure that the introduction of your essay:

- introduces the *main topic* of the essay (that is, tells the reader what the essay is about)
- defines any *key terms*
- sets the context for your essay by giving some *background information* on the topic
- states your *main idea or argument*
- lists the *sub-topics* of the main idea that you will explore.

**Writing an effective introduction**

Below is an example of an introduction of an essay.

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**Example 2.3**

In order to avoid crashes like the one in 1997, some economists argue that stock markets must be regulated. Discuss.

The extent to which the stock market should be regulated is a controversial issue.1 Some economists claim that minimal regulation allows the market to become quickly over-inflated and that this inevitably leads to a crash in prices, as occurred in the stock markets of Asia in 1997. In contrast, other finance experts believe that the market should be allowed to regulate itself and bear any corrections, as they occur.2 This essay will argue that some degree of regulation is necessary.3 However, such regulation should find a balance between protecting investors' interests and promoting market development.4 This essay will also argue that regulation should be transparent and should not be controlled by a single interest group.

Let's look more closely at how this introduction has been organized:

1 The *general topic* of this essay is the regulation of the stock exchange. The first sentence introduces this general topic.
2 The second and third sentences give some background information on the general topic, and present contrasting attitudes to regulation.

3 The fourth sentence states the main idea of this essay (i.e. that the stock market should be regulated to some degree). Your introduction must contain a sentence that gives the main argument of the essay.

4 The last two sentences list the sub-topics or specific aspects of the main idea that will be discussed later in the essay (i.e. regulation needs to be balanced; regulation needs to transparent and fair).

When you write an introduction, you usually first give general or background information about a topic and then state your main idea or argument followed by sub-topics or specific aspects.

The main body

The main body of the essay explains and elaborates on your main argument. It also takes each of the sub-topics that are given in the introduction and explains them systematically. The body develops the essay's main argument by providing supporting ideas, evidence and examples. The body usually occupies 70 to 90 per cent of the essay's total length.

Make sure that the main body of your essay:

• discusses each of the main sub-topics in the same order in which they are given in the introduction.

• supports the points of each sub-topic with examples, case studies, figures, statistics or quotations.

• has well-structured paragraphs (each new idea should be presented in a new paragraph, and each paragraph must have a topic sentence).

Before you start drafting the paragraphs of the main body of your essay, think about what information you will include in each paragraph. You need to make sure that the main ideas in each paragraph follow a logical order. If they do not, now is the time to rearrange the order of paragraphs.
In the introduction in Example 2.3, the essay's main argument was expressed by the following sentence:

This essay will argue that some degree of regulation is necessary.

The author's main idea is that the stock market should be regulated to some extent. However, the author qualifies this argument by then saying that 'such regulation should find a balance between protecting investors' interests and promoting market development'. The writer concludes the essay's introduction by saying that 'regulation should be transparent and should not be controlled by a single interest group'.

The body of the essay that follows the introduction in Example 2.3 needs to develop the argument that some regulation of the stock exchange is important. For instance, it needs to:

- say why regulation is useful and give examples of the benefits of regulation
- explain what is meant by 'balanced' regulation, and explain how investors' interests can be protected and the market can be promoted
- discuss why the market's regulation needs to be transparent
- explain why one group shouldn't control the regulation
- give examples of regulation measures where control is shared by different groups and organizations
To support the main idea of the essay and the author’s opinion that the market should be regulated to some degree, each of the points should be developed into a separate paragraph in the main body.

The following example shows how the author has developed the ideas expressed in the introduction into a detailed outline for the main body. The author of this essay has written the topic sentences for each paragraph, and added some supporting sentences which can be developed later into more complete paragraphs. Note how the writer uses the underlined signal words to link ideas in each paragraph.

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**Example 2.4**

**Main body** (5 paragraphs in total)

Para 1: Some regulation of the stock exchange brings a number of benefits. *Firstly,* fair regulation of information channels gives all shareholders equal access to information on the issuing of new stocks. *Furthermore,* the prohibition of insider trading makes the process of issuing stocks more fair and open, and strengthens public confidence in the market. Another key benefit of regulation is that it can establish a better awareness of fair operations among the senior management of stock issuing companies. It also creates consistent and reliable communication channels between investors and listed companies.

Para 2: However, regulation needs to balance control of the market with investors’ interests and market development. In this context, ‘balanced’ regulation means that the restrictions on stock issues do not impede investors’ ability to buy and sell freely. Moreover, the market’s development should not be limited, and the amount of trading that it is permitted to handle should not be artificially controlled. For example, ...


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Para 3: Importantly, any regulation of the market needs to be completely transparent. For instance, details of controls and procedures need to be available to all investors, and these controls need to be administered impartially and consistently. An example of an impartial and transparent regulatory measure is ...

Para 4: Having discussed the need for transparent controls, I now wish to argue why regulatory measures should not be controlled by a single interest group ...

Para 5: Regulatory measures where control is shared by different groups and organizations have been established in a number of different markets. A good example of shared regulation is ...

Having expanded on and explained all the key points which support the essay’s main idea in the essay’s body, the writer is now ready to complete the essay by adding the final main part: its conclusion.

The conclusion

The conclusion is the final part of your essay. It brings together all the different parts of your argument and re-states your main idea or argument.

Make sure that the conclusion of your essay is either:
- a summary of the main ideas in your essay; or
- a paraphrase of the main arguments.

New ideas or materials are not usually given in the conclusion. Giving new ideas in the conclusion is distracting and makes the reader feel that you have not competently answered the question in the essay’s main body.

Writing an effective conclusion

Now, read the following conclusion of the essay that discussed regulation of the stock market.
Example 2.5

This essay has explored the controversial issue of stock market regulation. Having assessed the problems that have occurred when no regulation of the market is provided, this essay has concluded that some degree of regulation is needed. However, regulation should be transparent and should be in the best interests of investors and the development of the market.

Let's look more closely at how this conclusion has been organized:

1. The first sentence reminds the reader of the essay's general topic.
2. The second sentence paraphrases the main points that were discussed and re-states the main argument of the essay (i.e. that the stock market should be regulated to some degree).
3. The final sentence summarizes the ideas that supported the main argument (i.e. that regulation needs to be balanced, transparent and fair).

Do bear in mind that your own conclusion to a real essay is likely to be longer than the three sentences in Example 2.5. Nevertheless, when you write a conclusion, try to follow the structure of the above example: recap the topic and summarize the main points in the same sequence in which they were discussed in the body.

If you are writing a first draft of an essay, try to include all three main parts: introduction, main body and conclusion. An essay without an introduction is very confusing because the reader does not have a clear map of the writer’s main ideas and the points that will be discussed in the body. An essay without a conclusion is very frustrating to read because the essay seems unfinished.

After you have developed a clear outline for your essay, you may find it easier to start writing the main body and then later draft your introduction and conclusion. For many people, writing a clear, concise introduction is
difficult before completing the main body. There is nothing wrong with writing the introduction after you have drafted the paragraphs of the body. However, you must not overlook the introduction and the conclusion.

Look at the two sample essays at the end of this book, and notice how both essays have a clearly structured introduction, body, and conclusion.

**Structuring essays that report information**

Sometimes, you will be asked to write an essay that reports a business trend, offers alternative views on a problem, or summarizes key findings from other people’s research. These kinds of essays also use the three part structure that we have described earlier. The ‘golden rule’ is to always include the following:

- *An introduction* that introduces the topic; states the essay’s main finding or trend; and then lists the aspects of this that will be explored in more detail in the body.
- *A body* that systematically explains or explores each of the aspects (mentioned in the introduction) in well-structured paragraphs.
- *A conclusion* that recaps the main finding or trend.

**Logically organizing ideas in your essay**

We have seen that you need to draft an essay outline before you can develop paragraphs and write an essay. Your outline not only organizes your ideas, but also helps you to see which main supporting sub-topics you should mention in your introduction. Your outline should be a checklist that guides you as you develop these sub-topics into paragraphs in the main body.

As you draft paragraphs from your outline, remember that each sentence in the essay should contribute to explaining and supporting your main idea. The following diagram illustrates the process of organizing ideas in your essay.
The essay as a whole | All of the *paragraphs* in the essay should be organized logically and work together as a ‘whole’ to present a particular point of view.
---|---
Each paragraph | All of the *sentences* in each paragraph should be organized logically and support the one main idea.
---|---
Each sentence | All of the *words* should be well organized. Each sentence must express a complete thought or idea by itself.

Showing relationships between paragraphs

Earlier in this chapter, we looked at some examples of *signal words*. We saw how these words indicate different relationships *between* the sentences in a paragraph. For example:

- ‘furthermore’ and ‘moreover’ signal an *additional point*;
- ‘thus’ and ‘therefore’ signal an *effect* or a *consequence*;
- ‘however’ and ‘in contrast’ signal *differences*.

Signal words also link ideas *between* paragraphs. For example, the words ‘first(ly)’, ‘second(ly)’, ‘then’, ‘next’, ‘last(ly)’ and ‘finally’ can be used at the beginning of paragraphs to:

- Indicate the various steps in a process;
- sequence key sub-topics; or
- describe a series of events.

The words ‘to conclude’, ‘in conclusion’, ‘finally’, ‘to sum up’ and ‘in short’ are often used to mark the *conclusion* of an essay and tell the reader that you are ending your argument.
Example 2.6

Look at the following essay and note how the underlined signal words show different relationships between paragraphs.

The idea of going to a foreign country to study fills some people with delight; they cannot imagine anything more exciting or beneficial. Other people react in precisely the opposite way and are filled with dread and doubt at the idea. While we can perhaps sympathize with the latter group, on the whole there is no doubt that overseas study is a good thing.

The first main reason why overseas study is valuable is because it offers a range of educational, social and cultural benefits. Apart from pursuing their chosen subject, students are often immersed in another language and given an opportunity to develop fluency in it. Students studying abroad learn to see things from new perspectives and become more independent. They interact on a daily basis with people from a variety of cultures, and as a consequence, gain new sensitivities. A student who has lived and studied abroad returns home with new ideas, new friends and a greater internationalism.

On the other hand, none of this comes cheaply. One must be prepared to meet transport costs, tuition fees (which are often very high), and living expenses including accommodation charges. There is also an emotional cost which can be high: culture shock, a feeling of isolation and alienation, and occasionally acute attacks of homesickness. Not every day of one’s time away from home will be happy.

To sum up, studying overseas can be a painful experience, but an independent and resilient person can meet those challenges, and gain greatly in terms of being a more rounded and mature person. A student abroad also develops linguistic skills and attitudes which make it all worthwhile.

Please note that ‘on the other hand’ is often used incorrectly. It signals a strong contrast or opposition, similar to the contrast between ‘on the left’ / ‘on the right’ // ‘here’/’there’ // ‘black’/’white’. When you use it, check that there is a clear opposition, and that you are not using it to mean ‘in addition’ or ‘moreover’.
A checklist for organizing your essay

When organizing your essay, try to use the following checklist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before writing:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔ Think about how many points of view or issues you need to consider in this essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Determine the main idea in each paragraph.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After writing your first draft:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔ Make sure that your first paragraph clearly states your main argument or idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Check that all the important points have been covered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Make sure that the main point of each paragraph is clearly given in the topic sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Make sure that other sentences in each paragraph support the idea in the topic sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Check that ideas flow smoothly between paragraphs. Use signal words (firstly, secondly, in addition, in contrast, however, as a consequence) to show the relationships between ideas and paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Make sure that your conclusion clearly re-states your main argument or idea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

In this chapter, you first learned how to organize sentences into clear and logical paragraphs. You saw that a paragraph has one main idea, which should be clearly expressed in its topic sentence. The supporting sentences of a paragraph can be organized in a number of ways.
You also looked at how to organize sentences logically in a paragraph. ‘Signal words’ help you to join and organize sentences in a paragraph; pronouns and synonyms can prevent a paragraph from becoming repetitive; and adverbials help to show the writer’s attitude or opinion about an idea.

You then looked at the general structure of an academic essay. You saw that there are three main parts to an essay:

- an Introduction;
- a main body; and
- a conclusion.

You looked at how to structure each part effectively and you looked at how to link paragraphs within the body of an essay by using signal words.

You should now be able to write clear and logical paragraphs and structure an essay, with its three main parts. Having learned these important skills, you are now ready to add some sophisticated features of academic writing to your essay. These features are discussed in Chapter 3.