



# The essay that answers the question that was set.

An essay is not a place to show everything you know. It is an argument built to a stated purpose, marked against stated outcomes. This document shows how the marking works, how one paragraph is built, and it includes a complete short model answer with a marker's annotation of every paragraph.

## 1 Why essays are marked the way they are

An essay mark is not a reward for effort or for length. It is a judgement of how well the work meets the outcomes the module has already published. Biggs, Tang and Kennedy call this *constructive alignment*: the outcomes state what you should be able to do, and the assessment is built to find out whether you can do it (Biggs, Tang & Kennedy, 2022). What the outcomes ask for is what the marker is looking for.

That has a practical consequence. If the outcome says "evaluate", a summary of the reading will not earn the marks however accurate it is: evaluation means weighing evidence and reaching a defended judgement. If it says "apply", an abstract discussion without examples will fall short.

Source Biggs, J., Tang, C., & Kennedy, G. (2022; ©2023). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (5th ed.). Open University Press / McGraw-Hill Education.

## 2 The anatomy of one paragraph

Toulmin's account of practical argument has three moving parts, and they map cleanly onto a paragraph of academic writing: a **claim** (what you are asserting), the **grounds** (the evidence for it), and a **warrant** (the reasoning that shows why the grounds support the claim) (Toulmin, 1958). A paragraph with grounds but no warrant is the commonest weakness in an undergraduate essay.

### ONE PARAGRAPH, THREE MOVES

**Claim.** A credible inflation target does most of its work through expectations rather than through the interest rate itself. **Grounds.** Where expectations are anchored, wage and price setters respond to the announcement before any policy meeting. **Warrant.** Because expectations, not just current rates, drive future prices, a target that is believed is more powerful than one that is merely published — so credibility, not the size of the target, is what should be judged.

## 3 A twenty-minute planning routine

### 1 Underline the command word and the limit

"Discuss", "compare", "evaluate", and any word count or source limit. These decide the shape.

### 2 Write the outcomes in your own words

What must this essay demonstrate to satisfy them? Two lines at most.

### 3 Draft the thesis in one sentence

Your position plus the reason. If you cannot finish it, you have no thesis yet.

### 4 List three or four claims

Each becomes a body paragraph. One claim per paragraph; no paragraph carries two.

### 5 Attach evidence to each claim

Name the source, example or figure you will use — before you write.

### 6 Plan the counter-argument

Say what the strongest objection is and where you will answer it. This is what "discuss" rewards.

### WHAT THE TWENTY MINUTES BUYS YOU

- **A fixed centre of gravity.** Every paragraph is checked against the thesis before it is kept.
- **No empty paragraphs.** If a claim has no evidence, you find out now, not at 2 a.m.

## 4 The thesis statement, written to a formula

A workable formula: *Although* [the counter-position], *this essay argues that* [your position], *because* [reason one] *and* [reason two].

### WEAK — TOO VAGUE TO MARK

"Inflation targeting is a good framework for small open economies like Zambia because it keeps prices stable."

No concession and no comparison, and a reason any framework could claim: the marker cannot tell what the position defends.

### STRONG — ARGUABLE AND CONFINED

"Although inflation targeting has anchored expectations in several emerging economies, it is not the best framework for Zambia, because a copper-dependent fiscal position and high exchange-rate pass-through mean the central bank cannot control the shocks that drive measured inflation."



## 5 The centrepiece — a complete model answer

Question: *Using examples from Zambia, discuss whether inflation targeting is the best framework for a small open economy.* Specimen answer, APA in-text style throughout. Read it, then read the marker's annotation below it.

- 1 Small open economies are price-takers in world markets and are therefore exposed to shocks they do not control: shifts in the terms of trade, movements in global interest rates and swings in commodity prices. Inflation targeting — a framework in which the central bank commits to a published numerical inflation goal and sets policy to meet it — has been widely adopted on the argument that a clear target anchors expectations. Whether it is the best framework for such an economy, however, depends on conditions that Zambia only partly satisfies. This essay argues that inflation targeting is a workable discipline for Zambia, but not an outright best framework: its success depends on exchange-rate flexibility, fiscal restraint and the quality of the inflation data, and it performs poorly when those supports are absent.
- 2 The framework rests on a chain of reasoning. If the central bank can credibly commit to a target, households and firms will form their expectations around it, and wages and prices will settle more predictably. Lower and more stable inflation then supports investment and long-run growth.
- 3 Zambia's own record offers some support. In periods when inflation has been held in single digits, the kwacha has been steadier, real interest rates have been positive, and firms have planned over longer horizons. When inflation has accelerated, the currency has weakened and the cost of imported inputs has risen sharply. On this reading a credible target could break the expectation of continuous depreciation and give the private sector a firmer basis for contracts.
- 4 The complications are equally clear. Zambia is a copper exporter, so the terms of trade and the fiscal position move together with the metal price; a monetary framework cannot offset a large fiscal deficit. A target met only by very high interest rates may draw in short-term capital, strengthen the currency and hurt non-mining exports. Because a large share of consumption is imported, exchange-rate pass-through is high, so a depreciation the central bank did not cause can push measured inflation above the target.
- 5 Any verdict must also attend to how the result is measured. Inflation is an estimate derived from a price index and, like any measured quantity, it carries an uncertainty that should be reported rather than suppressed (JCGM, 2008), and comparisons across years are only as firm as the definitions behind them (BIPM, 2019).
- 6 None of this shows that the alternatives are better. Exchange-rate targeting would import foreign inflation and surrender control of domestic interest rates, and a money-supply rule is unreliable when the demand for money shifts. The real choice is therefore not between inflation targeting and a perfect substitute, but between it and a weaker form of the same discipline.
- 7 Inflation targeting is therefore not the best framework for a small open economy in the abstract, but it is the most defensible one available to Zambia provided it is supported by fiscal discipline and exchange-rate flexibility. Its value lies less in the number it names than in the constraints it imposes: it obliges the authorities to state an objective, explain deviations and accept judgement on the result. A framework that makes failure visible serves a small open economy better than one that conceals it.

**REFERENCES** Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM). (2019). *The International System of Units (SI)* (9th ed.). BIPM.  
JCGM. (2008). *Evaluation of measurement data — Guide to the expression of uncertainty in measurement (GUM)*. JCGM/BIPM.

## 6 The same essay, read by a marker

| Paragraph | What it does                                                  | Marker's note                                                                                                                 |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ¶1        | Defines the terms, then states a thesis with a qualification. | A confined position is easier to defend than a sweeping one. The concession ("workable... but not best") is signposted early. |
| ¶2        | Sets out the framework's own theory before judging it.        | Shows the mechanism rather than asserting a verdict. Needed before any evaluation.                                            |
| ¶3        | The case in favour, using Zambian examples.                   | Examples carry the paragraph. Could be strengthened by naming the period, not just describing it.                             |
| ¶4        | The case against; the strongest objections.                   | Meets "discuss" properly - weighs both sides instead of listing.                                                              |
| ¶5        | A methodological caveat, with two real citations.             | Marks are awarded for this level of care. One source per claim; style consistent.                                             |
| ¶6        | Counters the alternatives, not just the topic.                | Avoids the false choice that weakens most answers to this question.                                                           |
| ¶7        | Restates the judgement and its conditions.                    | Answers the exact question. No new material in a conclusion.                                                                  |

**NOTE** The essay is about 620 words. It cites only sources that exist. Where a claim rests on general knowledge and no source is available, it is stated plainly and left uncited rather than supported by an invented reference.



## 7 Ten things that quietly cost marks

- **Answering a different question.** A good essay on the wrong topic scores as the wrong topic.
- **No thesis.** Topic sentences that only announce a subject, not a position.
- **Claim without warrant.** Evidence dropped in with no reasoning linking it to the point.
- **One side only.** "Discuss" and "evaluate" require the counter-argument.
- **Quote dumps.** Long verbatim passages with no comment of your own.
- **Orphan citations.** A source cited in text but missing from the list, or the reverse.
- **Mixed referencing styles.** A different format in every third entry.
- **Padding.** Restating the introduction in the conclusion to reach the word count.
- **Over-length.** Material that pushes past the limit, or under-length brevity.
- **Presentation faults.** No thesis contrast, inconsistent spelling, unformatted headings.

## 8 Word count and the three editing passes

Treat the limit as a rule, not a target to exceed. Most modules allow a small tolerance — often ten per cent either way — and that tolerance is general university practice, so confirm your own module's figure. Count the body text only, unless you are told otherwise, and state the count.

| If you are... | Do this, not this                                                  |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Over          | Cut a whole example or a whole paragraph, not a word per sentence. |
| Under         | Add a counter-argument with evidence, not adjectives.              |

### PASS 1 — STRUCTURE

Does every paragraph serve the thesis? Is the argument in the order it must be read? Read only the first sentence of each paragraph.

### PASS 2 — EVIDENCE

Does every claim have grounds and a warrant? Is every source in text also in the list? Is any source cited but not actually read?

### PASS 3 — LANGUAGE

One idea per sentence. Consistent British spelling. No contractions, no filler. Read it aloud.

## 9 Referencing inside an essay

Choose one method and apply it without exception — in the text, in the list, and in every entry. The reason is not decoration: a marker must be able to trace every claim to a source. The University of Zambia's postgraduate regulations state the principle directly for dissertations:

"One of the following methods should be used for the referencing and citation of published work in the dissertation or thesis"

University of Zambia, Regulations and Guidelines for Postgraduate Studies (2024)

The same principle — one method, applied consistently — is what examiners normally expect of any piece of written work. Note that "Harvard" is not one fixed system: institutions publish their own variant, so follow the variant you are told to use rather than a version remembered from elsewhere.

**SOURCES** University of Zambia (2024), *Regulations and Guidelines for Postgraduate Studies* (Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies). University of Leeds, *Leeds Harvard introduction* — "The University uses a variation of the Harvard referencing style called Leeds Harvard."

## 10 The submission checklist

- ✓ The question is answered, not just the topic addressed.
- ✓ One referencing method, used consistently in text and list.
- ✓ The thesis appears in the introduction and is visible throughout.
- ✓ Word count stated and within the limit.
- ✓ Every claim has evidence and a stated warrant.
- ✓ Name, module code, title and page numbers present.

### AN HONEST CLOSING NOTE

No essay structure guarantees a mark. Constructive alignment explains what the marker is looking for; Toulmin's paragraph shows how to build an argument a reader can follow. Both make the marking easier to do fairly — neither makes a weak answer strong. The structure earns you nothing on its own; it only ensures that the thinking you did is visible.