

## **Tutorial Letter 301/3/2017: The Write Approach Part 1**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 31 Jul 2017 @ 7:03

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I urge all of you to read this very handy document for insight on how to write an essay at university level. The aim of the tutorial letter is to show you how to **plan** and **structure** your essay and how to **convey your ideas in writing** so that your argument is **convincing**.

The tutorial letter reminds you that:

- **writing takes time** (give yourself three weeks at least to plan and write your essay - don't do it the night before and expect a good mark);
- there are four stages to essay writing (**invention, organisation and planning, drafting and revision**).

### **Stage One: Invention**

This starts with **reading the prescribed text and forming an opinion** on it.

Before you can begin writing about something, you need to have an opinion and ideas. The ideas that you will have about your prescribed readings that will eventually appear in your essay have to come from what you already know. This means **how you have interpreted a book or poem**.

Once you have a basic idea or opinion, you can expand on it. Think about one of your prescribed texts, like "A Raisin in the Sun". What ideas do you have about the play? My opinion of it is that it is deep, that there is a lot going on under the surface and that at the heart, it is about believing in who you are and what you can achieve irrespective of skin colour. It's about family. My favourite character is Bennie because she is a young woman interested in growing and educating herself. This, of course, is a tiny fragment of what the play is really about but it is what I learnt most from reading it. This is my starting block. I can now use this information and look at external sources to verify my ideas or to give me other interpretations. I will be drawing from other people's knowledge to make my thinking more objective and well-rounded.

READ YOUR PRESCRIBED TEXTS WITH A HIGHLIGHTER OR PENCIL SO THAT YOU CAN MAKE NOTES AND UNDERLINE THE PASSAGES THAT SPEAK TO YOU THE MOST. This is very helpful when looking for quotes to use in essays.

### **Exercise on Stage One**

For the first writing exercise I would like you to pick one of the texts you are studying for this module and write a short paragraph on what your opinions are of it. You don't need to look at external sources. Just tell me what you thought, which characters you liked and if you could relate anything from the book to your own life.

This is the most basic way we engage with the texts. This is the first step to looking at something critically.

Even if you think that one of your prescribed texts was actually really boring and you hated all the characters, this is your opinions. Tell me why. For instance, I loved "Nervous Conditions". I read it very fast and enjoyed it. I wanted to know what was going to happen to Tambu. It was my favourite prescribed text for this module. "Seven Steps to Heaven", on the other hand, was more trouble to read. While I appreciate it as a work of literature, I couldn't easily identify with the characters and plot. I think I enjoyed "Nervous Conditions" more because the main character was a female that I could relate to. Tambu wants to better herself but is also a slave to tradition. She is growing up and questioning her beliefs and I think reading about this phase of awakening in someone's life is something that appeals to me.

### **Ted Talk on becoming a better writer**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 31 Jul 2017 @ 7:02

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<http://blog.ed.ted.com/2014/05/29/be-a-better-writer-in-15-minutes-4-ted-ed-lessons-on-grammar-and-word-choice/>

The above link includes videos that will help you with writing and grammar skills.

### **Tutorial Letter 301/3/2017: The Write Approach Part 2**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 31 Jul 2017 @ 7:04

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### **Stage Two: Planning**

Planning is **VERY IMPORTANT** when writing your essays. If you think about what you want to write beforehand, it makes for a more coherent and logical and well structured essay.

Jot down your ideas on a piece of paper before you start writing, even if it's random. You can then use those ideas to create an essay that flows smoothly.

There are two ways that you can sort out your ideas:

- **Clustering:** This involves putting similar ideas together. Draw large circles on a sheet of paper and take all the ideas you have created during the invention and research stage. In each of the large circles, fill in the ideas that belong together. This could go according to themes or main ideas. Each circle will contain the ideas for one paragraph of your essay. See page 8 of Tutorial Letter 301/3/2016 for an example of what clustering looks like.
- **Mind-maps:** On a sheet of paper, write the subject of your essay in a circle in the middle. Then draw lines coming out of the circle. On each line, write your main ideas and branching out from these lines, draw more lines with important points

related to the main idea. See page 10 of Tutorial Letter 301/3/2016 for an example of what a mind-map looks like.

### **Exercise on Stage Two**

You can plan paragraphs in the same way you plan essays: by organizing ideas so that they can flow smoothly.

Begin your paragraphs with a topic sentence to give your paragraph a main idea. The other sentences give minor ideas in a logical order that support your topic sentence.

Look at page 13 of Tutorial Letter 301/3/2016 for an example.

Then look at the question below. Pretend you are answering this question in an exam. What would you say in an introduction? Think of what your topic sentence might be. Share your answers.

**Read the statement below and answer the question that follows:**

**Although the theme of racial segregation is central to the plot of the play "A Raisin in the Sun", the way in which characters respond to the problems surrounding it are influenced by factors such as gender and class.**

**Do you agree? With detailed references to the play, comment on the validity of the statement.**

### **YouTube videos on academic writing**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 31 Jul 2017 @ 7:05

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Please have a look at the two videos below. These offer guidance on essay writing.

How to write a good essay: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liyFKUFCQno>

5 tips to improve your academic writing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgkRoYPLhts>

### **Approaching an essay question**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 14 Aug 2017 @ 10:00

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The first thing to do when studying English is **read your prescribed texts**. This may seem obvious but lots of students try to get away with just reading notes or watching movie versions. **Read the text!**

Use a highlighter as a bookmark. When something seems important during your reading, highlight it. I highlight entire pages, entire paragraphs, sometimes just one word on an entire page.

Look up words you don't understand. Work with your text so that you get the most out of it.

**When you look at your assignment topic for the first time, don't feel scared or overwhelmed.**

**The lecturers do not want you to fail** – they want you to do well but they need to teach you to think critically. Always have the outcomes of the unit in your mind and try to fulfil them while answering your essay question. Thinking about this will narrow your focus and help.

**So, you get your essay topic. This is what you do:**

**Read the question carefully** and **break down what the question wants you to do.**

Write down the question and start interrogating it. What does it want you to do? Agree or disagree? In this case there will be a statement that you need to analyse and decide, "Yes, I agree", or "No, I don't agree". Do you need to think creatively and come up with new ideas?

First write out the question. **It helps to look at things in your own handwriting.**

Writing an essay is about working with yourself and your own brain. **You get to decide what goes on the paper based on the question.** Do not let yourself down but not reading and preparing and researching.

**Writing an essay give you a chance to communicate your thoughts, and express your thoughts and personality.** It showcases your observation skills. Everyone is different so books mean different things to each of us and we all see things that happen in books differently, or we learn from books and grow and our opinions sometimes are challenged by what we learn. This adds to your knowledge and in your essay, you get to show off your knowledge.

**Re: Approaching an essay question**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 25 Oct 2017 @ 6:49

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Yes, do not use emotive language, try to avoid personal pronouns and avoid generalizations.

As a general rule, always avoid using the second person in an academic essay. ? One of the main rules of writing formal, academic papers is to avoid using the second person. The second person refers to the pronoun you. Formal papers should not address the reader directly. There are ways to avoid this. You could change the "you" to "people" or "one", or rearrange the sentence so you don't need to use the "you" at all.

You can use "I" but do this sparingly.

For example, let's imagine this is your essay question: "Would you consider *A Raisin in the Sun* to be a feminist play?"

1. INTRODUCTION: You would start off with a background of the play; who wrote it, when is it set, what is the basic plot. Then you would explain what feminism is and how this relates to the play. You could end with a thesis statement that says, "Therefore, I believe that the play does have a feminist perspective because Mama receives the cheque rather than a male character, Beneatha shows independence and knowing her own mind, and the women are often seen trying to break out of traditional gender roles."

**2. FIRST BODY PARAGRAPH WILL ALIGN WITH FIRST POINT IN THESIS**

STATEMENT: "First, Mama is the character in the play who receives the cheque. This puts her in a position of power over the male characters..." You will build on this using quotes and critical analysis to show how this makes the play a feminist one.

**3. SECOND BODY PARAGRAPH WILL ALIGN WITH SECOND POINT IN THESIS**

STATEMENT: "Adding to the feminist tone, Beneatha is a female who has ambitions, is independent and knows her own mind ..." You will build on this using quotes and critical analysis to show how this makes the play a feminist one.

**4. THIRD BODY PARAGRAPH WILL ALIGN WITH THIRD POINT IN THESIS**

STATEMENT: "Finally, the women in the play are seen rebelling against their traditional gender roles ..." You will build on this using quotes and critical analysis to show how this makes the play a feminist one.

5. CONCLUSION: Reiterate main points here. "Keeping in mind that Mama receives the cheque rather than a male character, Beneatha shows independence and knowing her own mind, and the women are often seen trying to break out of traditional gender roles, it is clear that the play can be analyzed from a feminist perspective."

**Critical Thinking**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 14 Aug 2017 @ 9:58

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Hi all,

Studying the humanities is supposed to help develop your critical thinking skills. I can see with many of you that this is not happening. I would like to spend some time looking at what critical thinking is, why it is important in a subject like English, and why the skill will make you a better essay writer.

Do not associate the word "critical" with something negative. It does not have a negative meaning in this instance. Critical thinking means to analyse and evaluate information to come to your own judgment or conclusion. It is a problem-solving skill.

When you are given an essay topic, you need to actively think about the question, engage with it and come up with an answer that is informed, well thought out and carefully constructed. You need to learn to think for yourself and back up your answers with intelligent information.

Critical reading refers to the process of making judgments and filtering material in effective, useful ways. When writing an essay, you must not simply relay facts. You must interrogate all the information or offer an interpretation. For your essay, you should not simply make an informed summary of a topic by means of primary and secondary sources. Instead, spend time investigating and evaluating sources with the intent to offer interpretations of the texts, and not unconscious regurgitations of those sources.

Here are a few links to read:

<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/critical/ct.php>

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-concept-and-definition-of-critical-thinking/411>

Watch these videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0yEAE5owWw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dItUGF8GdTw>

### **Re: Critical Thinking**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 25 Oct 2017 @ 6:54

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Yes, when you quote, for instance, explain what the quote means. Show how it relates to the prescribed text in a broader sense.

You must engage with your material to show original thinking. ADo not simply relaying facts. Interrogate any information or offer an interpretation. For your essay, you should not simply make an informed summary of a topic by means of primary and secondary sources. Instead, spend time investigating and evaluating sources with the intent to offer interpretations of the texts, and not unconscious regurgitations of those sources.

Critical reading refers to the process of making judgments and filtering material in effective, useful ways. Critical reading means you're aware that what you read is the result of one person's (or group's) view of the subject, and that person or group made choices about what he or she said and how he or she said it. Critical reading also means going through the steps necessary to make an informed judgment.

Have a look at this site which critically analyses some quotes from A Raisin in the Sun:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/raisin/quotes.html>

### **Essay structure**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 14 Aug 2017 @ 10:32

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Paragraphs give structure to a piece of writing. They are a way to organize your thoughts, and to give clarity to your ideas. Paragraphs tell readers where one area of discussion begins and ends.

In an essay, there are usually **three different types of paragraphs**:

1. The **introduction** sets up the essay topic. It contains the thesis statement and background information.
2. Then **body paragraphs** build the content of your essay. Your argument is usually explained in these. There can be many body paragraphs.
3. Lastly, the **conclusion** sums up the points.

For instance, let's say I was writing an essay on women in *Nervous Conditions*. In my introduction, I would explain what the who wrote the book, when it was published and what it is about. I will discuss who the women I will be examining are. Here, I would also define all concepts and provide background information on the topic. This could include keywords like feminism or patriarchy. I would end with a thesis statement that would explain what I will discuss in the rest of my essay, as seen above.

### **The thesis statement**

by [R BEHARI](#) - 23 Oct 2017 @ 16:04

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The thesis statement is a crucial part of an essay. The thesis statement needs to prepare readers for the content of your essay. This information should align with the topic sentences of your essay to provide a preview of your content to readers. Topic sentences are the first sentence of each paragraph. This sentence guides what the paragraph will be about.

The thesis statement shows the objective of the essay as a whole. The objective of the paper is the reason given for writing the paper. By stating your objective, you're telling the reader exactly what you're hoping to demonstrate, and exactly what they can hope to learn or be convinced of.

All writing, no matter what form it takes, has a primary topic. In a well-developed academic essay, this primary topic is usually expressed in a thesis statement. Typically, the thesis statement is the last sentence in your introductory paragraph.

The thesis statement should dictate what you discuss in your essay. Each point should align with a topic sentence so readers know exactly what is coming up in your content. Here is a thesis statement on symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald:

- As much as the symbol of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock in the novel represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams for the future, it also represents the past, as well as the power of money.

The statement tells the reader what issues will be discussed in the essay. This thesis gives the reader three specific points to read about, and the three body paragraphs will each

deal with one. For example, the first body paragraph would align with this as it would focus on Gatsby's hopes and dreams for the future.