

FOCUS BOX 1

GOOD AND BAD ESSAY INTRODUCTIONS

EXAMPLE OF AN ESSAY INTRODUCTION THAT IS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT (WRITTEN AT LEVEL 3)

Essay title: Describe the main impairments within autistic spectrum disorders and discuss how these might present difficulties across the lifespan.

“The autistic spectrum consists of varying disorders from those that cause little difficulty to the sufferer to those that make independent living possible. People who are classed as suffering from disorders within the autistic spectrum have a range of difficulties. These difficulties can cause many problems over the lifespan for the person with ASD (1) (2). The impairments and levels of impairment in individuals with ASD vary greatly and there is no hard and fast rule as to what the person will have difficulties with. This makes the subject difficult to confine within a word limit. (3) The explanation of impairments is brief and in no way comprehensive, the main impairments reported are described but there are many, many more that are not. (4) ASD is a broad spectrum of potential impairments that some sufferers find themselves with to some degree whereas others have differing levels of impairment and therefore each individual faces different challenges and difficulties in their life.” (5) (6)

1. An abbreviation (ASD) has been introduced without spelling out in full what it means.
2. This sentence is asserting a particular fact about people with autistic spectrum disorder without providing the evidence to back it up – this can be done by inserting an appropriate reference.
3. Mentioning the word limit of the essay makes it appear less scholarly – you should be getting over the impression that you are writing a scholarly research piece rather than worrying about how much you can write in an assessed essay.
4. This sentence highlights negative aspects of the essay (what is left out), rather than positive aspects of the essay (i.e. what is being covered).
5. The introduction as a whole gives the reader very little indication of what will be in the essay or how the essay will be structured.
6. The whole of the introduction has been very repetitive and the point being made (that people with autistic spectrum disorder differ in abilities and symptoms) could probably have been written in a couple of sentences.

EXAMPLE OF A WELL-WRITTEN ESSAY INTRODUCTION (WRITTEN AT LEVEL 3)

Essay title: Describe how bilateral deep brain stimulation of the sub-thalamic nucleus alters motor, cognitive, emotional and psychosocial functioning in Parkinson’s disease. By what brain mechanisms are these changes brought about?

“Parkinson’s disease (PD) (1) is one of the most common chronic progressive neurological disorders. It is characterised clinically by major motor symptoms such as tremor, rigidity, bradykinesia and postural instability (Jahanshahi & Marsden, 1998) (2). Bilateral deep brain

stimulation (DBS) (1) is a technique used in functional neurosurgery, which consists of delivering a neural brain structure continuous electrical stimulation through chronically implanted electrodes (3). Limitations of drug therapy, such as levodopa, in the long-term medical management of PD have led to increasing use of DBS in the internal globus pallidus (GPi) (1) and particularly of the subthalamic nucleus (STN) (1). This essay will describe how bilateral DBS of the STN alters motor, cognitive, emotional and psychological functioning in PD. The essay will then move on to clarify what brain mechanisms underlie the changes brought about in PD by bilateral STN DBS.” (4)

1. Abbreviations are introduced and explained at the first opportunity.
2. References are provided at a source of evidence for statements about the disorder.
3. Terms basic to the essay (e.g. deep brain stimulation) are described and explained as early as possible.
4. The introduction ends by very clearly describing the structure of the essay and how the essay topic will be tackled.

FOCUS BOX 2

EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY AND UNSCHOLARLY ESSAY WRITING

EXAMPLES OF UNSCHOLARLY WRITING

“I will now talk about how those impairments can cause problems in an individual suffering from autism during his or her whole life (1). Autistic children are very vulnerable and immature. As a result, they are very restricted regarding their actions, and their motivations are incoherent and ambiguous (2). Their contact and examination of reality is twisted (3). This is perhaps why their personality is withdrawn and why they are scared (4). Even when they take initiatives, they are not effective in changing reality because the way they perceive things is focussed on their “disorganized inner psychic processes” (5). They are outside the real world so it is difficult for a child or even as an adult suffering from autism to really understand what is going on.” (8)

“At the age of nineteen, autistic teenagers still have the same impairments as before (6). The only change is that, thanks to early interventions, they develop some of their capacities and can be more independent (2). Autistic young adults are still vulnerable and insecure because of their disabilities but their past experiences, and individual learning has given them some strength they did not have before (7). However, they still require teachers, professionals and parents help for everything. Their problem with social communication and social interaction might be an important problem for their future career. They might be scared or stressed to be in contact with others. (8)

1. It’s best not to write sentences in the first person, most tutors prefer you to write in the third person, so this sentence could be rephrased as “The next section will describe those impairments that can cause problems in an individual suffering from autism across his or her whole life”.
2. Statement of facts are made without any supporting evidence – references that would enable the reader to verify these facts would be expected.
3. Don’t use words and statements where the precise meaning is unclear – what is meant by their “reality being twisted”?
4. This is written as though it is a personal speculation. Personal speculations are fine, but they must be supported by good arguments and/or facts, this one isn’t.
5. The term “disorganised inner processes” is clearly taken as a quote from some other source, so the source needs to be acknowledged and referenced.
6. Try not to use vague sentences such as this that are unclear – simply using the word “before” at the end of the sentence begs the question of “before what?”
7. This is another vague sentence that uses terms that are imprecise and poorly defined. For example, what is meant by the term “strength”? This needs to be

unpacked more precisely to describe exactly how individual learning has helped young autistic adults.

8. Facts are provided without supporting references (texts or journals that will verify these facts), and assertions are made about the effects of certain experiences and interventions without any evidence being provided to support these assertions. This evidence should either describe relevant scientific studies or provide references that describe such studies.

EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY WRITING

“Salkovskis (1985) (1) provides an analysis of obsessional-compulsive problems from a cognitive-behavioural viewpoint. He proposes that OCD is a cognitive distortion in that the sufferer’s combination of intrusive thoughts and the ‘individual’s belief system’ result in ‘negative automatic thoughts’ (2) (Salkovskis, 1985) (1). He proposes that this way of thinking leads to a greater feeling of responsibility for potential harm to others, unless they can take action to ensure the negative thought does not actually happen and that they are blameless. Looking at OCD from this point of view, Salkovskis would argue that it is not the intrusive thought itself that results in the compulsions but the automatic thoughts that arise as a result of the intrusion (3). Evidence that supports the view of Salkovskis comes from a study by Salkovskis & Campbell (1993) (4). In this study they looked at intrusive thoughts that were relevant to the participants.. *(details of the study and its relevance to the argument)*.. Despite the fact that this study demonstrated a link between suppression of intrusive thoughts and obsessional thinking, there are a number of criticisms of Salkovski’s (1985) account (5) ... *(details of arguments and studies that provide evidence contrary to Salkovskis’ account)*.”

“Several studies indicate that bilateral DBS of the STN significantly improves all of the cardinal motor symptoms of advanced Parkinson’s Disease (PD) (Benazzouz, Ardouin, Hoffman & Benabid, 1998; Mackinnon & Webb, 2005). (6) Burchiel, Anderson, Favre & Hammerstad (1999) assessed the neurological condition of five patients with PD who underwent bilateral STN DBS and found that patents demonstrated approximately 40% improvement in Unified Parkinson’s Disease rating Scale motor scores (UPDRS-III) after 12 months DBS. Rigidity, tremor and bradykinesia were improved, as well as a reduction in levodopa-induced dyskinesias. In an objective examination of the clinical effects of STN DBS in advanced PD, Kumar et al. (1998) found it to improve the mean UPDRS motor scores by 57%, including improvement in the composite scores of akinesia (57%), rigidity (52%), tremor (82%) and gait and postural stability (49%). (7)”

1. Appropriate referencing of important theories and research providing supporting evidence.
2. A clear and succinct description of the theory being discussed using appropriate terminology.
3. A good example of how hypotheses can be derived from a theory, and so can be used to test the theory.

4. A description of research supporting the theory in sufficient detail for the reader to assess its contribution.
5. Discussion of material that may be inconsistent with the theory, and so provides a balanced overview of the topic.
6. Good use of relevant references, it is always good to also show that you are up-to-date with the material by providing recent references.
7. This example provides about the right amount of information to support the assertion made at the outset of the paragraph (i.e. that bilateral DBS of the STN significantly improves all of the cardinal motor symptoms of advanced Parkinson's Disease). It provides evidence from more than one study and gives sufficient detail to be convincing.

ACTIVITY BOX 1

Below is a list of end-of-year Level 3 essay titles in psychopathology. The essay has a word limit of 3000 words. Discuss with your fellow students how you would go about answering each essay title, what kinds of information you might want to include in each, and how you would construct your essay. Which essay title would you choose to answer and why? Next to each essay title are the *Psychopathology* chapters containing information relevant to answering the question.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Year 3

End-of year 3000 word assessed essay

Write an essay using ONE of the following essay titles

1. Often the clinical work of clinical psychologists is structured around four stages: assessment, formulation, intervention and evaluation. Describe what these four stages are and explain why they are each important. Support your arguments by giving examples of these four stages from at least two different areas of clinical psychology. (*Chapters 1,2 & 4*)
2. Describe the main ways in which childhood anxiety and depression is conceptualized and assessed? (*Chapter 15*)
3. Describe the possible consequences of life-threatening trauma on an individual. How might these effects be ameliorated? (*Chapters 5 and 13*)
4. Why might we perform a neuropsychological assessment with a person suspected of suffering with a dementing illness? What factors would inform test selection, the interpretation of results and the nature of the feedback provided to the referrer and to the client? (*Chapter 14*)
5. How can personality be 'disordered', and what might this mean in clinical practice? (*Chapter 11*)
6. How has society's response to people with learning disabilities changed over time? Consider this both in terms of the concept of learning disability and the types of service offered to this group of people. (*Chapter 16*)
7. Describe the main impairments within Autistic Spectrum Disorders and discuss how these might present difficulties across the lifespan, i.e. at age 6 years, at age 11 years, at age 19 years, at age 35 years. (*Chapter 16*)
8. Compare and contrast the methods and effectiveness of two treatments that are currently used with adult depression. (*Chapter 6*)