



Psychology: writing essays

Writing the introduction

Introductions are essential for most of your assignments and are usually about 10% of the full word count. The introduction usually:

- begins with a general statement about the topic;
- defines important terms, or provides background information where necessary (and may or may not use references to do so);
- sums up in one or two statements the overall purpose or your position related to the task;
- specifies the scope of your assignment, i.e. what limits have been set regarding the aspects/ issues/factors covered in the body, and;
- outlines the structure of your assignment, i.e. what main points have been included in the body and what order they are in.

Tips: You might find it easier to draft the introduction **after** you have written the body of your assignment, because you should have a clearer idea of what your arguments are. If you write your introduction **before** you have written the body of your assignment, make sure you go back and check that it introduces the arguments you present in the body.

Example of an introduction

With reference to personality theories, discuss what is known about the effects of a person’s early interpersonal environment (EIE) on their development of personality.

Scientific studies on personality have in recent decades provided insight into areas previously considered inexplicable. A particular research area is that of Early Interpersonal Environment (EIE) and its effects on personality development. EIE can be referred to as any context in which a young child regularly engages with others. Individuals could include not only those considered as family, but others such as peers and staff within the school system (Costa, Benoit, & Ollendick, 2010). To explain the influence which EIE may have on personality, this paper will refer to psychodynamic theories, psychosocial stages of development and behaviourist theories, and provide examples to illustrate. Furthermore, empirical studies will be used to demonstrate that while these theories afford some insight into the effects of EIE on personality development, there are a number of inconsistencies which require further examination.

Essay topic/title

In Psychology, you may be expected to write the essay topic as a title or create your own (Check the task requirements)

General statement

about the broad topic

Key issues related to the

topic and definitions (if appropriate)

Scope or limits of the

assignment (main points and order they are presented in the body)

Position (overall

argument) in response to the essay topic

NOTE 1: The order of scope/position can be interchangeable depending on what reads more logically. Proofread to check the flow/sequencing of your ideas in the introduction.

NOTE 2: The purpose of an introduction is usually to let the reader know what will be presented in the body. Use references sparingly in the introduction, and more so in the body where you develop and support your ideas.

Writing body paragraphs (approx. 80% of total word count)

Each paragraph in an essay should contain one idea or cover one aspect relevant to the topic. Notice how the example paragraph below has a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

Example of a body paragraph

One particular model of psychodynamic theory suggests that personality growth is scaffolded across 3 developmental stages: the Id, Ego and Superego. The Id refers to basic human instincts and is related to satisfying fundamental needs and desires (Ellis, Abrams & Abrams, 2009). An example of this is when a newborn cries to signal hunger or discomfort. The Id is therefore connected to The second developmental stage, the Ego, is when a child begins engaging with the physical world (Ellis, Abrams, & Abrams, 2009). Burton, Westen, and Kowalski (2006) state “the ego is the structure that must somehow balance desire, reality and morality and it is responsible for cognition, problem solving and emotions” (pp. 422-23). This suggests that when toddlers interact with the outside world, they The final element, the Superego, involves much more complex thought processes as its role is to distinguish between right and wrong (Brenner, 2002). While all three elements are important, the Superego is a particularly crucial aspect of EIE and its influence on personality development, as it relates to the growth of core beliefs and values.

Topic sentence

- introduces the idea / focus of the paragraph

Support / development

- Develops the idea presented in the topic sentence
- Includes evidence (facts, examples or expert ideas) to support
- Includes your voice to show how/why the evidence is relevant to your argument / essay topic

Concluding sentence

- Sums up the idea / focus in line with your argument / essay topic

NOTE: Sometimes in the discipline of Psychology you may be asked to use headings and sub-headings in your essay. Check the task requirements and ask your tutor before doing so.

Writing the conclusion

The conclusion which is about 10% of your total word count, should summarise and tie together the main points you have presented in the body of your essay. It usually:

- restates the purpose or your position;
- evaluates how and to what extent the evidence you presented supported your ideas;
- concludes with a statement that shows your position or thoughts on the overall topic, and
- only includes ideas that were developed and supported in the body.

Depending on the type of assignment you are writing, or your lecturer’s expectations, you might also indicate other aspects to be considered and/or suggest what may happen in the future.

Example of conclusion

In conclusion, the theories related to personality development include Psychodynamic Theory, Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development and the Behaviourist Theories of Pavlov and Skinner. These key theories provide explanations on how EIE can impact personality growth during early childhood. According to Psychodynamic Theory, the Id, Ego and Superego create human behaviour, whereas through Erikson’s model, it is suggested that personality develops during a series of Psychosocial Stages in which interpersonal relationships are crucial. Lastly, Behaviourist Theories focus on how EIE controls human behaviour through conditioning, and in turn contributes to personality. While these theories provide insight, studies indicate that there are a number of factors which have yet to be understood. These include X, Y and Z. Further research is required in the field of Psychology to better explain these factors and how they may contribute to EIE and personality formation.

Restate position

Summarise / evaluate ideas presented in body

Conclusive statement

The reference list

The reference list includes the full bibliographic details of all sources cited in your essay. In Psychology, you are required to use APA style referencing conventions. It is recommended that you refer to the official APA style guide (ask your tutor about what this is and which edition you are required to refer to). Below is an example of what an APA style reference list might look like:

Formatting tips:

Order alphabetically

according to the first author's surname listed in each reference

Include a **hanging indent** from the second line onwards for each reference

Include **full bibliographic details** (author, year of publications, title and further publication details)

Different types of source have specific formatting requirements - **Check your format** (e.g. spacing, use of punctuation, capitalisation, font style, etc.) by referring to the APA style guide

References

- Brenner, C. (2002). Conflict, compromise formation, and structural theory. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 71(3), 397-417.
- Burton, L., Westen, D., & Kowalski, R. M. (2006) *Psychology: Australian and New Zealand edition*. Milton, Qld: John Wiley & Sons.
- Costa, N. M., Benoit, K. E., & Ollendick, T. H. (2010). Interpersonal Issues in treating children and adolescents: Theory, research, assessment, and therapeutic interventions. In L.M. Horowitz & S. Strack (Eds). *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychology* (pp. 493 – 507). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Ellis, A., Abrams, M., & Abrams, L. D. (2009). *Personality theories: Critical perspectives*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

List your references under the heading **References**