

## English Language Learners (ELL) Being Direct and Persuasive: Arguing Successfully in an Essay

There are certain writing expectations to which students at Canadian universities are generally expected to adhere. Some of these written discourse conventions may seem complicated or unnecessary to students who are new to writing academic papers in Canada. This handout will give you some pointers on writing in the way that is preferred by the North American academic community. This handout refers specifically to writing essays such as critical reviews or research papers. When writing reflections or creative pieces, being direct and concise is not always as important.

### Directness

North American writing tends to be very linear and straightforward, which may differ from the style of writing with which you are comfortable.

- Get to the “point” at the start of the essay or paragraph, and then bring in extra information as you go:
  - Make sure you state the main idea first, and then support it with your information.
  - Creating an outline before you start your essay will help you organize better, and will make the whole process easier! Worksheets are available from Learning Skills and Development.

### *Basic Format Tips for Most Formal Essays:*

1. Your introductory paragraph should introduce your claim (thesis) and your main points (how you will support your argument).
2. Each of the body paragraphs should start with a topic sentence that gives the paragraph focus and contain only supporting details related to the topic sentence.
  - For more information, see our handout “Elements of an Academic Paragraph.”
3. Your concluding paragraph should sum up your argument.

### *Sample Outline:*

1. Thesis or Main Argument:
2. Main Points (*what you want to argue or say to support your thesis*):
  - a. Main Point 1:
  - b. Main Point 2:
  - c. Main Point 3:
    - These main points will be the focus of each of your paragraphs.
3. Conclusion (*restate main argument*):

## **Persuasiveness**

If you have an idea or topic that you want to argue in your essay, you will be most persuasive if all the ideas in your essay relate to the thesis.

- Use your introductory paragraph as a “road map” for your essay:
  - Introduce the idea you will be covering in a few sentences, and then move right in to your argument by stating your thesis, followed by the main points you will cover.
  - Incorporate evidence from valid and reliable sources to support the points you are making.
- Use clear and precise language, even if you are covering uncomfortable or taboo subjects:
  - Refer to your essay outline to see if there are sentences you can remove that do not relate or contribute to the point you are making.
  - See if there are ways you can make your sentences shorter without eliminating meaning.
  - Avoid vague words and common expressions.

While writing in such a direct manner may not come naturally to you, professors and other academic readers will view your essay as lean and efficient.

### *Examples:*

- Wordy: “It seems to me that the answer to the question before us is that we should often be considerate of the ideological beliefs of those whose learned opinions are significantly disparate from ours.”
- Concise: “We should be considerate of others’ beliefs, even though the ideologies may be different from our own.”

### *Practice:*

Try to make this sentence more concise:

- Almost every day of the week there are a variety of different people on this specific radio station who have separate and varying ideas about the ways that the government and the Prime Minister and the Parliament should organize and implement the rules of the country of Canada.