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## Essay Planning 2: From brainstorming to writing paragraphs

What is an academic paragraph?

An academic paragraph should consist of a main idea, supporting sentences and maybe an example if necessary.

<b>Main idea</b>	This is one of your main arguments/discussion points related to the topic and question. This is normally the first sentence of your paragraph.
<b>Supporting sentences</b>	Generally 1 or 2 sentences that explain what your main idea means.
<b>Example</b>	Sometimes it helps to write a sentence with a real example that adds detail to your supporting sentences.

Here is a clear example of an academic paragraph from one of my students. This was her second main paragraph of an essay discussing the arguments for and against keeping pets.

In addition, pets provide excellent social opportunities for both adults and children. They can improve our exercise routine depending on the type of pet we own. For instance, we can walk around the park or enter competitions with them. They also provide opportunities for us to meet new people and begin new hobbies.

**Comment [mIt1]:** Main idea = pets provide social opportunities. In addition = this is the second paragraph about positives

**Comment [mIt2]:** First supporting sentence = social opportunities means doing exercise

**Comment [mIt3]:** An example of exercise

**Comment [mIt4]:** Second supporting sentence = social opportunities means meeting new people and starting hobbies

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**Why do I need these 3 sentence structures?**

**The reason for following this structure is that it is easier for the reader (or IELTS examiner) to follow your ideas and argument.**

Sometimes when a student makes serious mistakes with their grammar or vocabulary the reader can't understand or even guess what the student is trying to say. If you use main idea, supporting and example sentences it may still be possible to understand your idea. And this also means you can still get important points for your [Content and Organisation scores](#).

**This paragraph structure is also necessary because your ideas need to be clear for the reader (or IELTS examiner).**

Your idea is in your head and of course it seems clear to you. Unfortunately we are not inside your head! So you need to explain carefully, and in sufficient detail, so that we know what you are thinking!

**How do I choose main ideas and supporting sentences?**

Let's take a look at my brainstorming notes from [Essay Planning 1: Brainstorming](#)

**Schools** should **concentrate more** on teaching **academic subjects** because they are of greater **benefit** for **children** in the **future**. **Less importance** should be given to **non-academic** subjects such as sports and music.

Do you agree or disagree?

This essay topic was provided by one of my students who took the IELTS exam in May 2010.

**What's my opinion?**

Disagree – both are important

The aim now is to decide which of the brainstorming notes are going to be useful for my essay.

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**Remember, when you brainstorm you write down all possible ideas. When you plan your essay you choose the best ideas that you feel strongest about.**

For this reason I have crossed out some of the original notes – these are good ideas but I don't feel I can write a lot about them.

As you look at your notes you need to start thinking about which can be used for main ideas and which for supporting ideas. I've re-organised some of my notes to make it easier for you to read. In the IELTS exam you don't need to do this. You can circle words, draw arrows and cross out things so that you can work quickly.

**A main idea is a theme or topic of a paragraph. Everything you write after this should relate to this topic.** When you look through your notes check to see if you can find a main idea. If you can't maybe you can group some supporting ideas together and then create a main idea.

I have highlighted my notes below according to how I think they can be used in an academic paragraph:

Main idea

Supporting ideas

Examples

## Academic

- **Traditional subjects** – route to university – then to future career (eg. Maths and sciences for engineering, medicine) develop learning skills such as critical reading, analysis, conclusions etc. **Process of learning** – reading, writing essays, analysing problems, finding solutions, reaching conclusions etc. Related to theory
- **Maths** – need basic knowledge for everyday calculations
- **Languages** – native language essential, others good for international business or travel
- ~~**Sciences** – understand how the world around you works~~
- ~~**History** – hate this subject! Not sure about benefit! Maybe help to solve future world problems?~~
- ~~**Geography** – like sciences and with globalisation useful for developing business with knowledge of location, culture, climate etc.~~

Some students will thrive in these subjects

## Non-Academic

- **More practical or vocational subjects** – now possible to enter university to study these specific subjects (eg. Sports for sports science or management) **Process of learning** – practical classes, finding solutions through practical application, 'hands-on', less reading or theory based work, project work focus on social skills
- **Sports** – develop team work, for health, link to social life in future, relaxing
- **Music** – good for auditory people, related to specific careers (eg. Opera singer, musician), link to social life in future, relaxing
- **Art** – related to specific jobs (design, fashion etc), link to future social networking, appreciation of design, colour, expression of emotion
- **Computer** – basic practical skills essential for social and business life
- **Cooking etc.** – practical skills for future, useful for those focusing on trades rather than university
- **Religious studies** – relate to own culture, country, community, provides a pathway for acceptable social behaviour

Some students will thrive in these subjects

Also brings balance to school day – need some lighter studies to help brain relax so it focuses on more challenging subjects.

So what do the paragraphs look like?

The focus of my essay is to disagree with the question statements. So I need to write paragraphs that show how I think children benefit from both academic and non-academic subjects.

For this reason I have written 2 paragraphs of similar length, one focusing on academic subjects and one on non-academic subjects.

One argument in favour of teaching academic subjects is that they are focused on the study of theories, and these subjects provide the appropriate learning that students require if they wish to study traditional subjects at university, and succeed in their career. These subjects, such as Maths and Science, help students develop critical thinking and analysis skills, so that they can find the solutions to problems and draw conclusions from their work. Some students will thrive in these subjects because they enjoy using theoretical approaches. As a result, they may go on to study similar theory-based subjects at university and ultimately graduate to become the engineers and doctors of the future.

Comment [mIt5]: Main idea

Comment [mIt6]: Example

Comment [mIt7]: Supporting ideas

Comment [mIt8]: Example

On the other hand, there is an argument that considers the study of more vocational subjects to be of benefit. These subjects focus on developing practical skills rather than discussing theories. Students studying such subjects may enjoy doing more project work, or have more opportunities to develop social skills. For example, students learn how to work as a team through sport. In addition, subjects such as Music and Art, are far more practical and relevant to those students who wish to become musicians or fashion designers after they leave school. The equal importance of these subjects is supported by the increasing number and popularity of vocational subjects now offered at universities.

Comment [mIt9]: Main idea

Comment [mIt10]: Supporting idea

Comment [mIt11]: Examples

Comment [mIt12]: Supporting idea

These 2 paragraphs consist of 222 words.

The remainder of your essay, therefore, will be taken up with the [introduction](#) and [conclusion](#) paragraph.

You will notice that not all of the notes that I highlighted have been used in these paragraphs. Once you start writing you may find that you don't have enough space or time to include everything. As long as you have provided the main idea, supporting ideas and an example (if necessary), and these relate to the essay question, then you have done your job.

**Don't ever feel you must write more because you have more notes.** It is far better to write a sufficient number of words using this process.

**Any extra time you have can be better used checking your writing and improving your sentence structures, vocabulary etc. You are more likely to improve your score this way as you can correct your mistakes.**

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