

Top 5 Tips for Structuring an Essay that Responds to a "Why" Question

The word "why" is popularly used in essay questions so that students can demonstrate their knowledge, reasoning and understanding of a particular subject. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines "why" in this context as being "used in questions to ask the reason for or purpose of something".¹

Asking a student "why" allows them to demonstrate a more advanced knowledge of their subject matter, for example by analysing the processes involved in a chemical reaction, rather than just writing a list of reasons. It's easy to get into a mess trying to order your thoughts onto paper, so this essay strives to give you the top five tips on structuring an essay that attempts to respond to a "why" question.

Tip 1

Start your essay with an introductory paragraph setting out how you intend to answer the question. You may want to include a bit of background as to why the question has been asked, and place it in a wider context. For example, if your essay is addressing reasons as to why sea levels are rising, you may wish to give some detail on why this is an issue (e.g. it is a threat to humanity, particularly in low-lying coastal areas such as Bangladesh and the Maldives), and some statistics outlining by how much sea levels are rising.

Tip 2

Within your introduction you may also wish to address the definition of any difficult terms and what you believe the question is seeking to clarify. It is also a good idea to give a brief outline of how you plan to structure your answer.

Tip 3

Once you have completed your introduction, it is time to move onto the main section of your essay. This is where you are going to explain and evaluate possible reasons that may help answer the question. Remember to use a new paragraph when introducing each new factor, as it will help bring clarity to your essay, for you and your intended audience.

Tip 4

For each main body paragraph giving a possible reason, remember to start the paragraph by detailing the reason and then go on to outline any arguments and examples explaining why this factor may be strong or weak.

Tip 5

Your essay should finish with a concluding paragraph which summarises what has been covered. You may wish your conclusion to draw attention perhaps to one or two of the stronger or more surprising reasons outlined in the main body of your essay.

So, to round up, a good essay structure should start with an introduction setting out the issues

surrounding the question in a broader context and to explain what you believe the essay is seeking to clarify. You should then allocate a separate paragraph for each possible reason that addresses the question, before finishing with a concluding summary of your essay.

Bibliography

1. Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Retrieved March 3, 2016, from Oxford Learner's Dictionaries:
http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/why_1?q=why

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