

## Activity Type

Writing Exercises:  
previewing a model essay structure, identifying essay features, creating a basic outline, writing an essay, peer feedback

## Focus

Discussion essay structure

## Aim

To be introduced to discussion essay structure and attempt a discussion essay writing practice.

## Preparation

Make one copy of the four-page worksheet for each student.

## Level

Upper-intermediate (B2)

## Time

90 minutes

## Introduction

In this discussion essays worksheet, students are introduced to discussion essay structure and attempt a discussion essay writing practice.

## Procedure

Give each student a copy of the four-page worksheet.

First, students read a brief description of discussion essays and preview an outline of an example discussion essay structure.

Next, students read a discussion essay and underline and label the parts of the essay that show the essay structure.

Exercise A - Answer key

- 1 a. General statement: in recent years, with advances in communication technology, people now have the ability to live in smaller towns and still participate in the global economy.
- 1 b. Stating the issue: many are questioning the value of living in a large city and are considering a move to the countryside.
- 1 c. Thesis statement: This essay will discuss the advantages and drawbacks of living in large cities and small towns and end with a personal recommendation.
- 2 a. Arguments for (big city):
  1. access to quality education and health care
  2. the opportunity to mix with a wider and more diverse set of people
  3. the benefit of vast entertainment options
- 2 b. Arguments against (big city):
  1. lack of clean and fresh air
  2. traffic congestion
- 2 a. Arguments for (small town):
  1. more tight-knit communities
  2. a healthier environment
  3. the cost of living is usually cheaper
- 2 b. Arguments against (small town):
  1. you have less privacy
  2. employment opportunities can be limited

(continued on the next page)

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## Procedure continued

3 a. Restating the thesis statement: large cities and small towns both have a number of benefits and drawbacks

3 b. Summarise the main arguments: Large cities are better for those who prioritize health care and education, and seek diversity and entertainment, but not so for those who prioritize clean air and easy commutes. Small towns appeal more to those who like a sense of community, a healthy lifestyle, and cheaper living but not so for those who enjoy their privacy and have serious career ambitions.

3 c. Opinion and recommendation: neither larger cities nor small towns are inherently better ... it is recommended that you consider your current life circumstances and personal priorities before deciding whether to go big or small.

Explain to the students that it is possible to take a neutral stance after weighing up all the arguments as in this example. If the topic is more controversial, they are more likely to take a more one-sided stance.

After that, students read a discussion essay question and create a basic outline to assist them in writing a structured discussion essay.

Students then write a complete essay using a list of suggestions to help ensure they include the important essay features.

When the students have completed their essays, they swap papers with another student. Students then read their partner's essay and use a provided checklist to give constructive feedback, adding other feedback as necessary.

One of the more useful essay types to be familiar with is the discussion essay as it is commonly encountered in language tests and academic English courses. This type of essay asks you to examine both sides of an issue and end by stating on which side of the argument you stand. It is important that the discussion is balanced, meaning that both sides need equal consideration. This characteristic distinguishes discussion essays from persuasive essays that typically only focus on one side of the issue.

## Discussion Essay Structure:

### 1. Introduction

- a. General Statement (introduces the subject of the essay)
- b. Stating the issue (introduces the specific issue or question being discussed)
- c. Thesis statement (introduces the purpose and structure of the essay)

### 2. Main Body

- a. Arguments for (present the evidence for the positive side of the issue from strongest to weakest. Usually one or two paragraphs)
- b. Arguments against (present the evidence for the negative side of the issue from strongest to weakest. Usually one or two paragraphs)

### 3. Conclusion

- a. Restating the thesis statement (not repeated in the exact words)
- b. Summarize the main arguments (can be covered in one or two sentences)
- c. Opinion and Recommendation (express your stance on the issue and suggest the best action to take based on the evidence presented)

## **A. Read the example discussion essay below and underline and label the parts of the essay that show the essay structure. For example, label the general statement as 1a.**

Over the past century, increasing numbers of people have migrated to larger cities to take advantage of the economic opportunities they provide. <sup>1a</sup> However, in recent years, with advances in communication technology, people now have the ability to live in smaller towns and still participate in the global economy. With this new choice, many are questioning the value of living in a large city and are considering a move to the countryside. This essay will discuss the advantages and drawbacks of living in large cities and small towns and end with a personal recommendation.

Large cities have a number of advantages over small towns. Perhaps the most important of these is access to quality education and health care. It is no secret that the best schools and hospitals are usually found in larger cities. People living in large cities also have the opportunity to mix with a wider and more diverse set of people, meaning they are exposed to a mix of cultures, and ways of doing things. Finally, people in big cities have the benefit of vast entertainment options such as major sporting and cultural events.

Despite their advantages, big cities have some major drawbacks. Perhaps the greatest of these is a lack of clean and fresh air. Pollution from cars and a lack of green open spaces means that air quality can often be unhealthy. Another challenge of living in a large city is traffic congestion. This often results in people living on the fringes of the city spending hours commuting to work or school each day.

While small towns can appear a little sleepy and less exciting, they do have some appealing aspects. Perhaps one of the best advantages is that small towns have more tight-knit communities meaning that everyone knows each other and helps and looks out for one another. Additionally, living in a small town provides a healthier environment as air quality is much better, and people have easier access to natural spaces for recreation. Finally, the cost of living is usually cheaper as the demand for housing is less so home prices and rents are far cheaper.

Although small towns can seem idyllic, there are some obvious drawbacks. While the closer-knit nature of small towns can provide a sense of security, they also mean you have less privacy. People get to know your business and you can easily become the topic of gossip and scandal if you are not careful. Moreover, employment opportunities can be limited. Most small towns have a small economic base meaning the types of jobs available tend not to be the high-paying professional types typical of large cities.

In conclusion, large cities and small towns both have a number of benefits and drawbacks. Large cities are better for those who prioritize health care and education, and seek diversity and entertainment, but not so for those who prioritize clean air and easy commutes. Small towns appeal more to those who like a sense of community, a healthy lifestyle, and cheaper living but not so for those who enjoy their privacy and have serious career ambitions. It is clear that neither larger cities nor small towns are inherently better. They both have their own unique advantages and disadvantages so deciding where to live comes down to your own preferences and priorities. Thus, it is recommended that you consider your current life circumstances and personal priorities before deciding whether to go big or small.

**B. Create a brief essay outline for the essay question below.**

Q: It is now possible for students to get an English language degree in their home country. This has led many to question the need to study abroad. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of studying for an English language degree in your home country versus the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad. End by giving your own opinion and a recommendation.

Thesis Statement: .....

Studying Abroad

Arguments for: .....

Arguments against: .....

Studying in your Home Country

Arguments for: .....

Arguments against: .....

**C. On the next page, write an essay that addresses the essay question above. Use the suggestions below to help you write an effective essay.**

1. Include a clear thesis statement
2. Make the arguments for both sides equal and balanced
3. Conclude with a repetition of the thesis statement
4. Conclude with a summary of the main arguments and a recommendation



