Essay Writing Strategies

ANU Library Academic Skills

Bhavani Kannan
We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose traditional lands we meet today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and pay our respect to elders past and present.

We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to this city and the ANU.
What is an Argument?

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Code: 2957 8675
Break down the question

• Understand the question
• break it down
• be aware: you will be required to take a position
In Victoria, Indigenous Australians who plead guilty to some offences can choose to be sentenced by the Koori Court rather than the Magistrates Court. The purpose of these Koori Courts is to make the legal system less alienating and more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

**Essay question:** Is there a place for programs such as the Koori Court in the Australian legal system? Should there be courts for other groups in our society?

What are some of the positions could you take?
Understand the debate

**Pros?**

**Cons?**

1) Where would you locate literature?

2) Share pros and cons of this topic at

[https://padlet.com/AcSkills/Essay](https://padlet.com/AcSkills/Essay)
Koori Court Worthwhile

BUT
Koori selects on race - justice is blind?

Rehabilitation over punishment

 usize

Ideigenous people overrepresented in jail

Power imbalance

BUT
offenders sacrifice legal rights without solicitor

Improved outcomes

for communities

Lower recidivism for offenders

Could be extended to other groups

Socio cultural disadvantage

Precedents: family and industrial courts
Arguments for:

• Urgent need to address Indigenous Australians’ disadvantage

• KC addresses power imbalance between legal system and Indigenous Australians

• KC provides improved outcomes for both the offenders and the community
  • Lower recidivism
  • Involvement of Elders more effective
  • Deals with underlying problems through rehabilitation
  • Greater acceptance by the Aboriginal community

Arguments against:

• The sacrifice of rights by offenders further disadvantages Indigenous Australians
  • Role of the offender’s solicitor is marginalised
  • Move from formal processes may threaten the impartiality of outcomes

• KC undermines ‘justice is blind’ and all people are equal
  • Other special courts are potentially open to all
  • Court is not the place to address inequality
What makes a position strong?

- Well-reasoned
- Backed by evidence
- Takes a stance, e.g.:

There is a place for the Koori Court but it should not be extended to other groups.
Always, always argue...

Questions may include many different words:

• Discuss, explore, analyse, describe
• Evaluate this claim, to what extent?
• Critically review, compare and contrast
• Identify issues and provide points for and/or against.

⇒ All imply *taking a position and arguing for it*
Develop your argument
How to develop your argument
• Weigh up all the points of view
• Decide your position
• Write a thesis statement
Thesis statement

• ...is a concise summary of your position and its supporting argument(s).

• Every essay **must** have a thesis statement.

• Should not be longer that two or three sentences.

• Often signals the counterarguments and rebuttals.
Koori Court thesis statement

There is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. There are numerous precedents for special courts in Australia which addresses the argument for special pleading. Although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide a model for the broader Australian legal system.
For Koori Court

Against Koori Court
Plan
Argument determines structure
Planning and focus

You can't have a plan without an argument.
You can't have a focused argument without a plan.
“Outlining is writing, not a prelude to ‘real writing.’ Writers who complain about ‘writer’s block’ are writers who don’t outline. After trying to write blindly, they feel frustrated and complain about how hard it is to generate words. No surprise—you can’t write an article [essay, report, critical review, etc.] if you don’t know what to write.” (Silvia 2007:79)
Essay Plan

Work out your structure:

How many words?

How many points? What order?

How many paragraphs per point?

Identify supporting evidence for each point, counter-points and rebuttals
There is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. There are numerous precedents for special courts in Australia which addresses the argument for special pleading. Although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide a model for the broader Australian legal system.

**Main points:**

- Indigenous people are disadvantaged and this must be addressed
- Other specialist courts already exist, providing precedent for the Koori Court model
- Despite limitations, the Koori Court provides better outcomes for offenders and a model for good legal practice
There is no place for programs such as the Koori Court as justice should be independent of race; all people should be equal before the law. Other specialist courts, such as the Family Court, are potentially open to all and do not select on inherent characteristics such as race or sex. The courts are not the place to address inequality; instead, measures that look at the underlying causes are needed.

Main points:

Justice should be independent of race
Other specialist courts do not select on inherent characteristics
Courts are not the place to address inequality; it is better done by examining the underlying causes
The more specific planning, the better!
Check your plan:

Your plan should consist of reasons, not topics.

**Bad plan example:**

**Intro:** Koori Court

**Point 1:** Specialist courts in the Australian legal system

**Point 2:** Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders

**Point 3:** Royal Commission into Aboriginal Australian Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home Report
Write
INTRODUCTION

- Background / context
- Issue / problem or debate
- Thesis statement
- Signpost key reasons

LINE OF ARGUMENT

BODY PARAGRAPHS

- Topic sentence
- Supporting evidence / analysis
- Concluding / linking sentence

CONCLUSION

- Summary of position and key reasons
- Implications or ‘so what?’
Introduction: 10% of the word count

- Background / context
- Issue / problem or debate
- Thesis statement
- Signpost key reasons

**LINE OF ARGUMENT**
The Koori Court is a Victorian initiative that seeks more appropriate legal processes and outcomes for Indigenous people. Poor legal outcomes are reflected in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the Australian prison system. The Koori Court redresses this imbalance through a more culturally sensitive approach to sentencing. The Koori Court’s model appears to some to undermine Australia’s universal justice system (see Kahler 2012). However, there is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. Numerous precedents for special courts exist which addresses the argument for special pleading. Although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide a model for the broader legal system.
Body Paragraphs

- Topic sentence
- Supporting evidence / analysis
- Concluding / linking sentence

- Topic sentence
- Supporting evidence / analysis
- Concluding / linking sentence

- Topic sentence
- Supporting evidence / analysis
- Concluding / linking sentence
Paragraph Structure

• A paragraph addresses **one** main theme/idea

• 150 – 200 words typically

• Contains

  1. **Topic sentence**: main idea and argument
  2. Analysis and evidence
  3. Concluding and linking sentence
Argument
Reasons
Evidence
Argument
Problem: no topic sentence
Topic Sentences

• not just factual
• states a reason in relation to your thesis statement

**Example:** Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance.

**Bad example:** Indigenous Australians are over-represented in the prison system.
Conclusion: 10% of the word count

Summary of position and key reasons
Implications or ‘so what?’
Your writing process

Develop
what works for you?

Reflect
what can change?
Polish and edit
How much time do you spend on editing and proofing?

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ARGUMENT

Is your thesis statement clear?
Does it take a position and outline your supporting argument?
Does it answer the essay question?
Are your key reasons signposted in the introduction?
Are they summarised in the conclusion?

STRUCTURE

Is your argument sustained through the essay body?
Do your topic sentences contribute to your argument?
Are your paragraphs in a logical order?
Does the order of your reasons in the introduction match the order of your paragraphs in the body?

PARAGRAPHERING

Does each paragraph have a topic sentence and one main idea?
Do your paragraphs have too much evidence and analysis? If so, should they be split?
Are your quotations accurate?
Is the evidence you use correctly cited?

EXPRESSION

Do your sentences flow together?
Are there any long sentences that could be shortened?
Are there any redundant phrases or areas of repetition that could be cut?
Have you used synonyms to create variety in your writing?
Have you eliminated spelling and grammatical errors?
Is the essay formatted according to the course requirements?
Find and develop your argument

Break down the question

Take a position within the debate

Research

Develop your reasons

Plan and write your essay

Structure

Make an essay plan

Write your essay

Edit your essay
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THANK YOU

Contact Us

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