Coherence — a point to keep in mind

An essay that is well organised and has good paragraphs can still be ineffective if it lacks coherence i.e. lacks words and phrases that show the connections between ideas:

- within a paragraph
- between paragraphs
- between sections

These links give your essay unity.

Transition signals are invisible when they are well used but obviously absent when not.

Checking that you have used appropriate transition signals is a vital part of doing your final proof reading and editing.

Last but not least - Titles

Effective titles provide an edge to your essay. However, it takes time to develop a clear, engaging title that captures what your essay is about. If you want a title that is catchy and informative, try the following.

- Develop a provisional title by playing around with the order of the key words of your essay.
- Change it as you get clearer about your main argument
- Make your final decision when you have completed your essay.

Tip

Although the Introduction is the first section of an essay, it's best to write the final version after you have written the Body and the Conclusion. Then your thesis statement and the scope of your essay are more likely to accurately reflect what you have written about in your essay.
Organising ideas

Having analysed the assignment question and done some reading and research, it’s time to develop a provisional thesis statement and to think about how to organise your ideas.

A well thought out structure is central to a successful essay.

A common way to structure academic essays is shown below.

The Body consists of separate paragraphs which together make up the argument of your essay.

The order of your paragraphs can increase or decrease the strength of your argument.

Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence. Develop the idea in the rest of the paragraph by elaborating on the idea and using referenced explanations and examples.

The ideas in each paragraph should follow on from those expressed in the previous one.

Check that each main idea is directly relevant to your thesis statement (and to the question you are answering).

Introduction
- Make a general statement about the topic
- Provide background information
- State the position you will argue for—thesis statement
- Mention the points you will cover in your essay—scope of essay

Body—developing your argument
- Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence
- Develop each main idea by making e.g. comparisons and contrasts, using referenced explanations, examples, definitions etc.
- Conclude by summarising or linking to ideas to the idea being discussed in the next paragraph

Conclusion
- Restate your position/thesis statement
- Sum up the main points made in each paragraph
- Finish with a strong statement about the wider context

As the diagram indicates it’s good idea to begin the Introduction with a general statement and finish it with a more specific focus. In contrast, begin the Conclusion with a specific focus e.g. a restatement of your thesis and conclude with a statement of general relevance or applicability.