

# GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL ESSAY WRITING

In the AQA A level Biology SYNOPTIC exam papers you are required to write ONE essay which is worth 25 marks.

*Here are some guidelines for writing these essays.  
Try to use them when you are practising your essay writing.*

**CHOOSE** which question you will answer – carefully.

**READ** the question – very carefully - every word.

Make sure that you have understood it and can answer it. Make sure that you answer the question that is actually written on the question paper and not a similar one.

e.g. “Write an essay on membranes in cells” **does not mean** “Write everything you know about cells.”

**PLAN** what you are going to write.

Write out your plan, listing the main areas you intend to cover. Check that you have covered all the relevant areas. Is everything you intend to include relevant? Just because it is factually correct does not automatically mean that it is a correct answer!

e.g. In an essay on “Aerobic respiration” references to lactic acid and ethanol are irrelevant.

**WRITE** everything in 25 minutes (= 2 sides)? If you can't, you have included unnecessary material!

**MAKE** your plan legible: if you do not want the examiner to read it, cross it through, **but if you cannot finish your essay in time**, indicate to the examiner that s/he should look at the plan, **and do not cross it out**.

**DO:**

***Read the essay question first, and make the plan.*** Then, as you do the rest of the paper, you can add to the plan as ideas pop into your head.

***Give A level standard detail***

e.g. in an essay on photosynthesis you would need to write about the light dependent and light independent reactions.

***Make sure that your essay is balanced.***

e.g. In an essay on “The structure and manufacture of proteins” you should write about protein synthesis as well as protein structure. If you are writing about the recycling of nutrients, remember the carbon and water cycles as well as the nitrogen cycle

***Write an introduction*** – perhaps defining the terms used in the essay title or outlining what you are intending to write.

***Write a conclusion*** – if you can think of nothing else summarise what you have written.

***Remember that plants exist!***

e.g. in an essay on gas exchange write about gas exchange in plants as well as mammals

***Remember that there are other animals besides mammals.***

e.g. in an essay on nutrition in animals remember saprobionts and parasites.

***Use examples*** wherever you can. Make sure they are appropriate.

***Write legibly***, ensuring that your grammar, punctuation and spelling are correct.

No, **No**, **NO**, NO, **NO**'s!

**DO NOT** *spend more than 25 minutes* on the essay

**DO NOT** *use diagrams* unless they convey more information than you can give in writing, this is unlikely, the examiners are looking for good prose accounts.

**DO NOT** *waste time* by repeating a diagram in words.

**DO NOT** *use side headings, lists, notes*

(if **really** pressed for time, this is an OK way to get the main points down and to get **some** credit)

**DO NOT** *include irrelevant material* – you will lose marks.