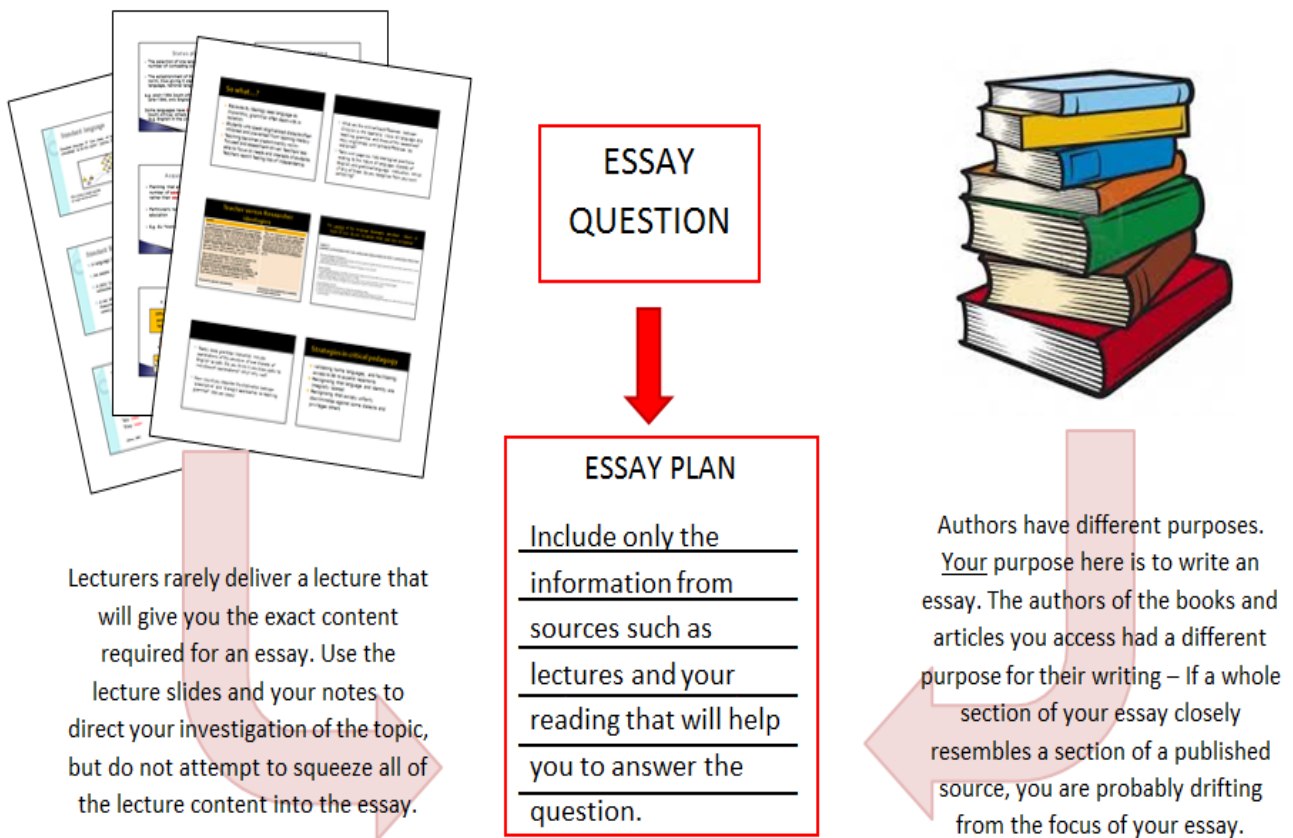


Staying focused on the question

1 Plan the essay around the question

Your essay should be driven by the question you have been set (rather than by everything you have learnt about the topic)

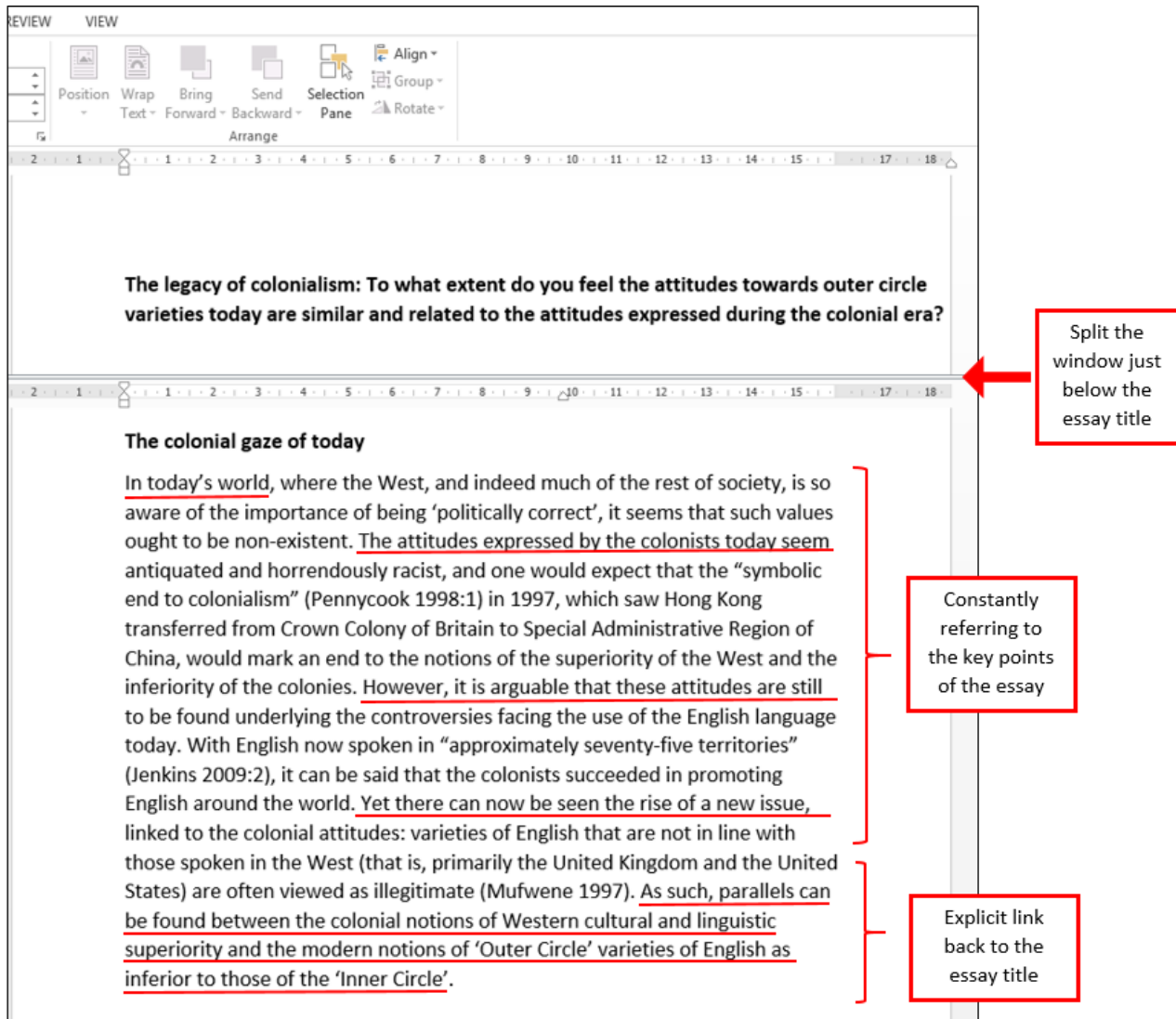


Use your lectures, seminars and research to help you develop a thorough understanding of the field, and to help you take a position on the central debates. When you write an essay, you will be able to draw on your expertise in the area, but you must make sure that you remain focused on the task that you have been asked to complete.

NEVER fall into the trap of simply writing down everything you have read!

2 Keep the essay title or aim in your mind as you write

One way to keep an essay on track is to keep the essay title visible to you as you write. If you are using a computer, you can do this by splitting the window, so that the title remains at the top of the window all the time.



As you type each sentence, each paragraph and each section, you should keep looking back at the title, and asking yourself "is this information helping me answer the question?"

HINT: You will find the 'split' function in the VIEW tab.

3 Itemise the contents of your essay.

Try to note down a brief summary of the key points made in the essay. You can do this either at the planning stage or after you have written a first draft. At the planning stage: Use three columns to plan your essay, as shown below.

When redrafting: Use your essay draft to fill in the same three columns, trying to justify what you have already done. Can you complete all three columns for every idea in the essay?

These two columns are usually easy to fill in. Just use bullet points to jot down your core information.

	Key idea	Supporting evidence	How does this idea help me to support my argument or achieve the aim I set out for my essay?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

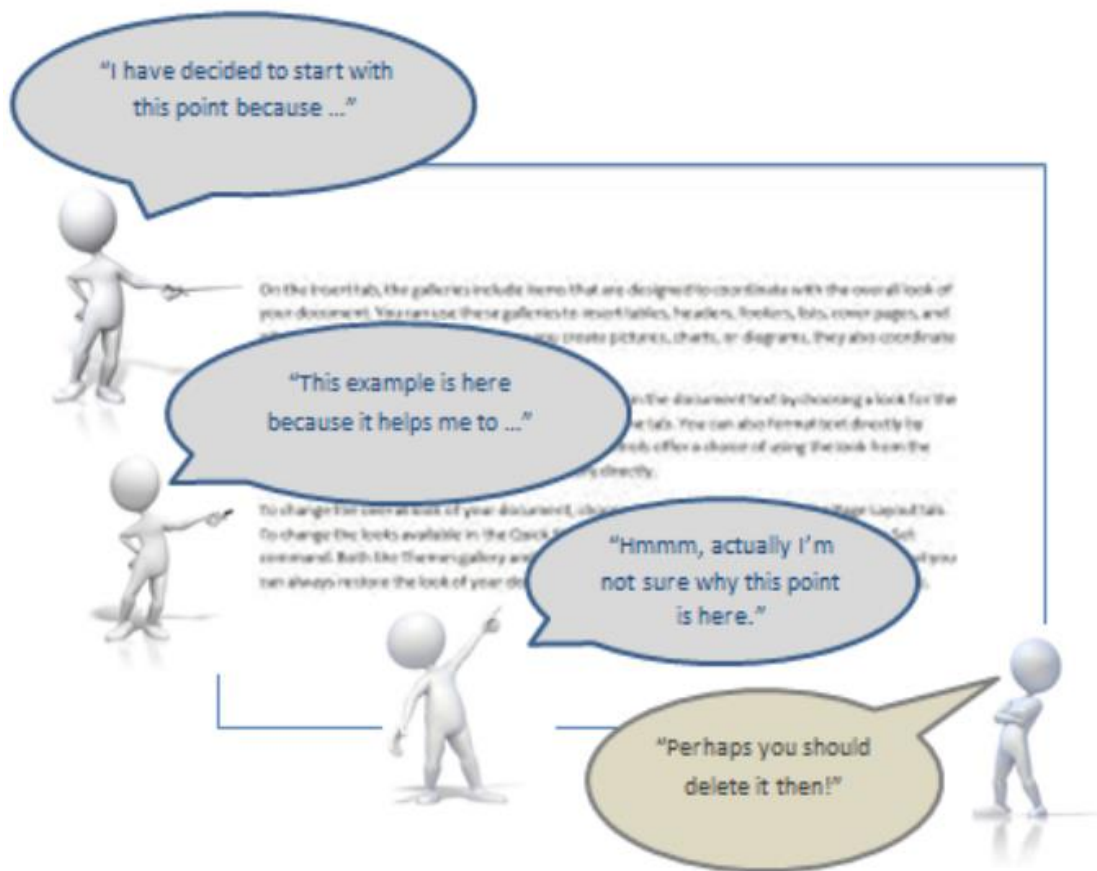
This is the hard part. For every single idea you include in your essay, can you complete the third column? Can you explain why you have included the idea? How is it helping you achieve your essay purpose?

If you cannot complete Column 3, it is quite likely that the information you have included in Columns 1 and 2 is not relevant. It might be interesting and you might be proud of yourself for doing all of that reading, BUT ... if it doesn't help you to achieve the purpose of your essay, then it doesn't belong!

4 Imagine defending your essay to your tutor before you submit it

Has a tutor ever commented that some parts of an essay were not relevant? Have you ever been told that an essay lost focus in places? Imagine a conversation with the tutor who will be marking your essay BEFORE they get a chance to read it:

Talk them through the essay, explaining why you have made the choices you have made ...



REMEMBER:

Writers make choices, and you are a writer. If you cannot defend the choices you have made, then your tutor has every right to question them too!