

# *French Discursive Essay Writing Toolkit*

## Introduction

In this Discursive Essay Toolkit you will find helpful hints and tips that will help you achieve the best mark in your discursive essay. We hope you find this guide extremely successful.

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### Background Higher Level

Both the Higher and Advanced Higher courses require you to write a discursive essay. At Higher level this is done in the classroom with two attempts (a first and second draft). Your title, known as the stimulus will be given in English and you will receive feedback on your first draft via the correction code. There is no time limit on the Higher essay and it should be between 200-250 words.

### Background Advanced Higher Level

The difference with the Advanced Higher level essay is that you will have to do this straight after completing the listening paper. This essay does not get marked with the correction code and you only have one attempt at writing it. This essay is also timed in with your listening paper, so you'll have about 50 minutes to write it. The stimulus at Advanced Higher is also given to you under the four headings of society, learning, employability and culture. You'll need to pick one of these pre-made titles to write your essay on. The number of words normally written at Advanced Higher is 250-300.

### Discursive vs Persuasive

When writing a discursive essay, you must remember that you're not taking sides as that would be considered a persuasive essay. Therefore, you should avoid using phrases such as **je pense que** or **à mon avis**, until your conclusion. We would recommend that you use impersonal phrases like **il ne faut pas oublier que**. You can also use the third person 'one' in French.

## Creating a structure

It's important not to get too bogged down by how to structure an essay, as the content is the important bit. For the majority of the essays that you'll ever be confronted with, you can use the simple structure of:

- Introduction - a simple rephrase of your title and a list of things that you'll speak about throughout your essay
- First paragraph - a list of advantages, try to add some statistics and facts
- Second paragraph - a list of disadvantages, again statistics and facts
- At advanced higher you may want to do a third and fourth paragraph if you feel that your first and second aren't enough. If you are going to do this, you could list a new set of arguments to back up the previous ones.
- Conclusion - Here you should give a summary of the essay, you shouldn't be adding any new information here. To round off the essay you can give your opinion.

## Creating a good introduction

To create a good introduction, you should firstly re-word the essay title and use a good opening phrase. For example if your essay title was Climate Change is an unimportant issue in today's society, you should re-phrase this into something like; ***Aujourd'hui, beaucoup de gens croient que le changement climatique est un pigment de notre imagination. Ensuite, vous voudrez peut-être mettre une expression de doute telle que, mais d'un autre côté, beaucoup pensent que c'est l'un des problèmes les plus importants auxquels le monde a été confronté***

### Creating a concrete first paragraph

When creating a first paragraph it's always important to start with a strong opening phrase like, **parlons d'abord de...** After this, it is a very good idea to have some statistics from professionals at hand which you have pre-translated into French. For example a statistic from NASA in a climate change essay would be invaluable. **Selon la NASA, la température moyenne de la surface de la planète a augmenté d'environ 0,9 centigrade depuis la fin des années 1800, un changement largement dû à l'augmentation du dioxyde de carbone et d'autres émissions anthropiques dans l'atmosphère.** If you want, you could finish your paragraph by giving a slight introduction to the next paragraph with a phrase like, **de l'autre côté du débat, certains diront que**

### Creating a confronting second paragraph

The second paragraph should replicate the first. Here you should give the other side of the debate on your chosen topic, a good idea would be to provide conflicting evidence or to give evidence that goes against what you have said in the first paragraph. Again, in this paragraph of your essay you should start with a different strong opening phrase followed by a fact or a statistic. If you choose to do third and fourth paragraph, you should alternate each paragraph so that you are not writing two advantages paragraphs straight after each other. You should also try to keep your paragraphs a uniform size. You do not want to make it look like you do not really have anything to say for one opinion as you will be penalised for doing this.

### Creating a strong conclusion

Your conclusion should only be a summary of points that you have previously given and no new information should be put here. The conclusion is also the only place that you should use any sort of personal language, in other words giving your own opinion on the subject matter. You should still try not to take sides until the very last sentence of your essay, a phrase that we would recommend is; **Il est clair que les deux parties ont des arguments solides, mais je pense que**

## Good essay phrases

French	English
Tout d'abord, nous devons nous demander	Firstly, we need to ask ourselves
En premier lieu	In the first place
Premièrement	Firstly
Il y a beaucoup de	There are numerous
Tout le monde peut voir que	Anyone is able to see that
Il faut souligner que	One should emphasise that
Il / elle vous ferait penser que	That would lead one to think that
Nous allons y remédier	Let's address that
Les chiffres attestent que	The figures attest that
Il faut souligner le point que	We must underline the point that
À première vue	At first sight
En ce qui concerne	In regards to/concerning
Ce qui compte c'est que	What is important is that
Il y a ceux qui disent que	There are those who say that
Il doit être inconcevable que + subjunctive	It has to be inconceivable that
Maintenant, nous devons insister sur	Now we must insist on
Pour illustrer le point que	In order to illustrate the theme that
On ne peut pas nier que	One can't deny that
Pour examiner la question plus en détail	To consider the matter in more detail
A cela s'ajoute un problème concernant	To this adding a problem regarding
Par conséquent	As a consequence

## Good connectives

French	English
Cependant	However
Alors	Next
Ensuite	Then
En outre	Furthermore
Donc	So
C'est dire que	That's to say that
Dit que	Having said that
Par conséquent / par conséquent	For that reason/therefore
En d'autres termes	In other words
Néanmoins	Nevertheless
Quand même	Nevertheless
D'un côté , d'un côté	On one hand, on the other hand
D'une part, d'autre part	On one side, on the other side

## Colloquial phrases

You must take care when using colloquial phrases, these can be good to add a bit of humour or for creating emphasis, but when used incorrectly they can be a large detractor to the overall feel of your essay. Therefore, the small selection below is what we would recommend you use. Moreover, you don't want to use too many colloquial phrases as this again detracts from the overall impression that your essay gives.

Spanish	English
Demander des poires à l'orme	To ask for the impossible
C'est une autre paire de manches	That's another kettle of fish
Ça vaut la peine	To be worthwhile
Cela n'a pas de sens	It doesn't make any sense
Faire d'une pierre deux coups	To kill two birds with one stone
Remuer ciel et terre	To move heaven and earth

## Hints and tips

- Try to go into your exam with a chunk of pre-learned content. Don't go overboard but taking a couple of good openers, connectives, statistics and a nice colloquial expression as these always leave a good impression on the marker
- You have to remember all of the simple grammar, yes it's nice to show off an imperfect subjunctive but if you make mistakes with gender and the present tense you'll be penalised heavily as these are skills you should already know from National 5
- When writing your essay try to think of things that you already know how to say, there is no point in trying to translate large chunks of English coming out of your head as 9 times out of 10 you'll make a mistake
- The dictionary is equally your best friend and your worst enemy depending on how you use it. At the back of Collins dictionaries, you'll find verb tables where you'll find the most common irregular verbs in French pre-conjugated for you. This is a great tool if you forget during the exam but don't start relying too heavily on it, as not all the verbs you need are here. Equally in your exam the dictionary should only be used to look up a word here and there or for double checking accents. It is not for you to create a whole paragraph of information out of. Also in the largest Collins dictionary in the middle between the French and English sections, you'll find a part dedicated to essay writing which includes lots of good phrases.
- Finally, it is important to remember that the subjunctive in French can be very hard to avoid once you put in a negative so brush up on this including the common irregulars



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