

Discursive Essay Writing Toolkit

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 your 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 "ich denke, dass...", until your conclusion. We would recommend that you use impersonal phrases. You can also use the third person 'one' in German.

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 **"Heutzutage, gibt es viele Menschen, die glauben, dass der Klimawandel in unserer Vorstellung liegt."** Then, you may want to put in a phrase of doubt such as, ***"aber auf der anderen Seite, denken viele Leute, dass dieses Thema unglaublich wichtig ist."***

Creating a concrete first paragraph

When creating a first paragraph it's always important to start with a strong opening phrase like, ***"Am Anfang, gehen wir... diskutieren"***. After this, it is a very good idea to have some statistics from professionals at hand which you have pre-translated into Spanish. For example a statistic from NASA in a climate change essay would be invaluable. If you want, you could finish your paragraph by giving a slight introduction to the next paragraph with a phrase like, ***"Auf der anderen Seite, gibt es viele Leute, die glauben, dass..."***

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 paragraphs, you should alternate each paragraph so that you aren't writing two advantages paragraphs straight after each other. You should also try to keep your paragraphs a uniform size. You don't want to make it look like you don't really have anything to say for one opinion as you'll be penalized 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 ***"Es ist klar, dass beide Seiten starke Argumente haben, aber ich denke..."***

Good essay phrases

German	English
Zuerst müssen wir uns fragen	Firstly, we need to ask ourselves
Am Anfang	In the first place
Zuerst	Firstly
Es gibt zahlreiche + noun	There are numerous
Das kann jeder sehen	Anyone is able to see that
Es geht darum, ob	It is a question of whether
Man sollte betonen, dass...	One should emphasise that
Das würde einen dazu bringen, das zu denken	That would lead one to think that
Lassen Sie uns ansprechen, dass	Let's address that
Die Zahlen bestätigen, dass...	The figures attest that
Wir müssen den Punkt unterstreichen, dass...	We must underline the point that
Auf den ersten Blick	At first sight
In bezug auf...	In regards to/concerning
Bekanntlich	It is well known that...
Es gibt Menschen, die sagen...	There are those who say that
Jetzt müssen wir darauf bestehen...	Now we must insist on
Um das Thema zu veranschaulichen, dass	In order to illustrate the theme that
Man kann nicht leugnen, dass	One can't deny that
Folglich	As a result
Als Konsequenz	As a consequence

Good connectives

German	English
Jedoch	However
Nächster	Next
Dann	Then
Außerdem	Furthermore
Also	So
Nachdem ich das gesagt habe	Having said that
Aus diesem Grund	For that reason/therefore
Ich meine	I mean
Mit anderen Worten	In other words
Trotzdem	Nevertheless
Auf der einen Seite	On one hand, on the other hand
Auf der anderen Seite	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.

German	English
Um den heißen Brei herumreden	To beat around the bush
Da kannst du Gift darauf nehmen	You can bet your life on it
Zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen	To kill two birds with some stone
Eine Extrawurst verlangen	To ask for special treatment
Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof	It's all Greek to me
Klar wie Klobbrühe	Crystal clear

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 Spanish 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 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 Spanish and English sections, you'll find a part dedicated to essay writing which includes lots of good phrases.

This was produced by Language Learning Scotland Ltd. @languagelearningscotland.com

