

Exercise walk-through

Discursive and argumentative essays ■ 8.1

eXercise

You must be able to

- tell a discursive task from an argumentative one
- plan the right number of paragraphs for each
- take a position without ignoring the other side

Method — Two kinds of essay

	Discursive	Argumentative
The task says	<i>Discuss both sides / What are your views?</i>	<i>Argue that... / Do you agree?</i>
Your job	present both sides fairly, then judge	make a case, answering objections
Balance	roughly equal	weighted to your side
Conclusion	a judgement that follows from both sides	a restated position, now supported

Both require you to deal with the opposing view. The difference is how much space it gets.

Method — Reading the task

“Every student should learn a second language, even if they do not want to.”

Write an essay giving your views.

Giving your views means a position is required. A pure list of arguments with no view at the end will not reach the top band.

Method — The plan that fits both

- 1 Introduction: the issue in one sentence, then your position
- 2 Argument for, developed
- 3 Second argument for, developed
- 4 The strongest counter-argument, stated fairly, then answered
- 5 Conclusion: your position, with the condition it depends on

Five paragraphs. Write the plan in two minutes before starting.

Method — Taking a position without overstating

The strongest conclusions name a condition:

A second language should stay compulsory, because students cannot predict what they will need — but schools should answer the objection by changing how the lessons work, not by dropping the requirement.

Practice 2.1 ■ 3 marks

For each task, say whether it is discursive or argumentative.

- (a) "Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living in a large city."
- (b) "Homework should be abolished. Do you agree?"
- (c) "What are your views on the amount of time young people spend online?"

Solution 2.1

Method: Two kinds of essay

Worked steps

(a) discursive **B1**. (b) argumentative **B1**. (c) discursive, though it also requires a view **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 3 marks

Write a five-line paragraph plan for: *"Schools should teach cooking to every student."*
Do you agree?

Solution 2.2

Method: Reading the task

Worked steps

Any five-line plan with one idea per line **B3**: an introduction stating a position; two developed arguments; a counter-argument; a conclusion.

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

Write a conclusion sentence that states a position and the condition it depends on, for the task in 2.2.

Solution 2.3

Method: The plan that fits both

Worked steps

Any conclusion stating a position and a condition **B2**, e.g. “Cooking should be taught to everyone, because it is one of the few skills every student will use every week — provided it replaces something of less value rather than being added to an already full timetable.”

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 8 marks

“Young people today have more freedom than any generation before them, and less real independence.” Write an essay giving your views. Write about 200 words.

Solution 3.1

Method: Reading the task

Worked steps

Content (4): a clear position, at least two developed arguments, a fairly stated counter-argument that is answered, and a conclusion that follows. Language (4): appropriate formal-neutral register, varied linking, accurate and varied sentences, roughly within the limit.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 2 marks

A student's essay gives four arguments for and none against, then concludes. Explain why this limits the mark even if every argument is well developed.

Solution 3.2

Method: Reading the task

Worked steps

The task requires engagement with the opposing view, and an essay with none has not fulfilled it **B1**. A reader cannot tell whether the writer considered and rejected the other side or simply did not think of it, so the argument is less persuasive and cannot reach the top content band **B1**.