There are three stages to completing an essay: researching, writing, and editing. For some, these three stages are done progressively, one after another. Other people prefer to write and edit while also doing research. You should use whatever process works best for you. We suggest the first, step-by-step process. With this process, writing an essay occurs over a three-week period. Note: It does not take the entire three weeks but is written over the course of three weeks. Stretching the three stages over three weeks allows you to complete all the other regularly-scheduled work and not get behind.

**Week #1: Research**

- Researching for an essay is the most time-consuming process. It should take you 10-15 hours of research time to write a 2,000-3,000 word essay.
- **Step 1**: Make sure you understand the question. Ask your tutor for clarification if it’s not entirely clear.
- **Step 2**: Gather 2-4 books from the recommended reading list and begin by reading what they have to say on the topic. You might want to compare and contrast the authors and their perspectives on the topic. Spend 3-4 hours getting a general sense of the topic.
- **Step 3**: Force yourself to create a thesis. The number-one time-wasting mistake students make is delaying the formation of a thesis (answer to the question). Your thesis will direct your research and will be shaped by your research. But a thesis can’t be shaped by research if it doesn’t already exist.
- **Step 4**: Based on that thesis, create a method, i.e. how you’re going to prove the thesis. Then draft an outline (see ‘Structuring an Essay’). Like your thesis, this outline/plan will direct your research and will be shaped by your research.
- **Step 5**: Do 7-12 hours of research based on that plan. Now when you do research, you are looking for specific topics/issues/ideas according to your method, rather than reading widely and taking notes on seemingly everything (most of which you never use). And as you do this research, you might discover that one or two of your sub-points should be replaced with something else. Go ahead and replace them. This is how research shapes a plan.
- At the end of the ‘Research’ stage, you should have notes organised according to the topics you have designed in the method. Your notes should reflect the shape the essay will take in its final form.
Week #2: Writing

- There are two stages of writing during week two.
- **Stage One:** Write your first draft. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar too much at this stage, but focus on making sure each paragraph has one main point, and that each paragraph transitions smoothly from the previous paragraph and to the next paragraph. Writing this draft should take you 3-5 hours.
- **Stage Two:** Either rewrite entirely the first draft or spend time editing the first draft. In this stage you might add, replace, or remove entire paragraphs from the first draft. You might rearrange paragraphs/ideas. You want to make sure that your ideas are coming through clearly, that the logical structure of the essay flows well, that your transition sentences work well, etc. Creating this second draft should take you 2-3 hours.

Week #3: Editing

- In week three you will edit the second draft of the essay. There are two stages in week three.
- **Stage One:** Edit the second draft *primarily* for transitions/signposts, main ideas, grammar, and citations/references. At this stage you want to make sure that your sources are properly documented and formatted appropriately, that your sentences makes sense, and that your paragraphs flow from one to the next. This should take you 2-3 hours, depending.
  - Note: Try to do this at least three days after you complete the second draft. Creating space between the times you work on the essay allows you to return to it with fresh eyes.
- **Stage Two:** The day before submitting the essay, do a final check for grammar, spelling, punctuation, citation formatting, etc. If necessary, check online for rules on using commas, semi-colons, etc.

Then submit your essay with total confidence that you’ve done your best work!