THE TOK Essay

All the details



IB formal assessment

In TOK

Assessment component	Weighing
IA: Exhibition (10 marks): students are required to create an exhibition that explores how TOK manifests in the world around us. This component is internally assessed by the teacher and externally moderated by the IB at the end of the course.	⅓ (33%)
External assessment: TOK essay on a prescribed title (10 marks): Students are required to write an essay in response to one of six prescribed titles that are issued by the IB for each examination session. It is marked by IB examinaers	⅔ (67%)

Essay Essentials

Preparation for writing an essay



1. Title must be used “exactly as given”
2. Standard 12 size font—double spaced
3. Sources must be acknowledged
4. Maximum word count is 1600* words.
5. It is a “formal, sustained piece of writing”

Exemplar A

Examiner’s comments

The word count includes the main body of the essay including quotations. It does not include the title or references (whether given in footnotes, endnotes or in-text) and/or bibliography.

rubric

Teacher Intervention

1

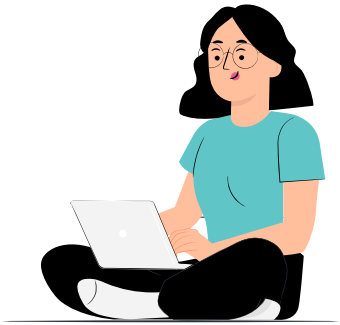


IB Guide

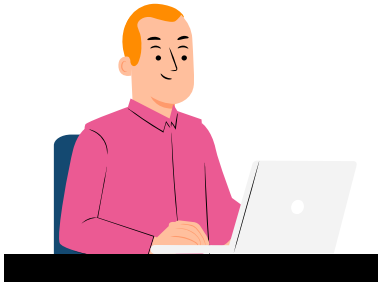
The TOK essay must be the student's own work. However, the teacher plays an important role in supporting the student during the planning and writing of their essay. Teachers are expected to explain the requirements of the task and ensure that students are familiar with the assessment instrument, provide clarifications in response to students' questions, monitor students' progress, and check the authenticity of the student work.

Three mandated formal interactions between the student and teacher are recorded on the Planning and Progress Form

2



3



What to do?

1. Discuss the list of prescribed titles with the student.

2. Discuss the student's initial exploration of their selected title

3. Comment on one draft of the student's essay.

Practice

Dissect the following questions

3. Labels are a necessity in the organization of knowledge, but they also constrain our understanding." Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.

4. "Statistics conceal as much as they reveal." Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.



2. Within areas of knowledge, how can we differentiate between change and progress? Answer with reference to two areas of knowledge.

5. "Areas of knowledge are most useful in combination with each other." Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

1. "Accepting knowledge claims always involves an element of trust." Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

6. "Avoiding bias seems a commendable goal, but this fails to recognize the positive role that bias can play in the pursuit of knowledge." Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.

TO WHAT EXTENT?: TOK Essay satirical poem



Evaluate—
To what extent,
And consider—
Under what circumstances
And on what grounds—
You would agree
To explore this distinction,
And to critically evaluate
The effectiveness of this strategy?

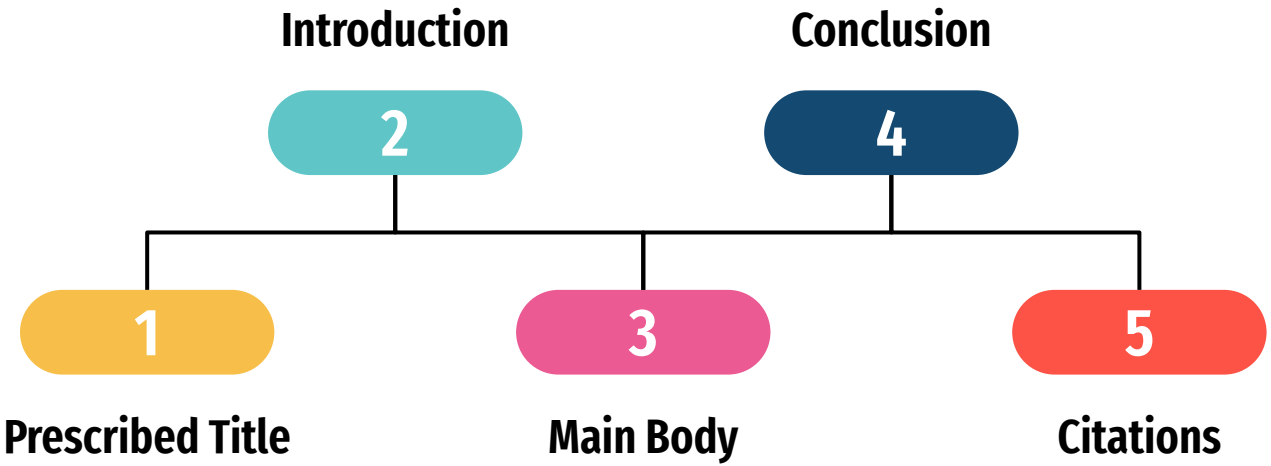
Explore—
And develop your answer,
By asking yourself—
Why might this be problematic,
And is this really the case?
Is it an asset
Or an obstacle to our understanding?

Which is more important?
And does it matter?

Discuss—
With reference to two Areas of Knowledge.

TOK ESSAY FORMAT

Skeletal Format for the Essay



INTRODUCTION

Take the time to get the opening sentence just right.

Next delve into the meaning of the key terms in the prompt, using the precise wording and avoiding the cliche of dictionary definitions.

A “yes and no” approach will almost certainly be the better way to go.

At bottom all TOK prescribed Essay titles are invite “to-what-extent?” exploration.

In your introduction, state in advance the two Areas of Knowledge of your essay, even if they have been imposed in the prompt.

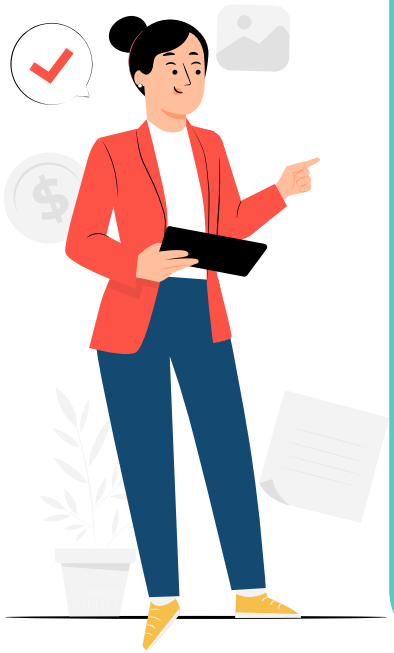


INTRODUCTION

Your introduction should begin with a ‘hook’ to engage the reader, offer your interpretation of the key words or ideas from the title (don’t just copy a definition out of a dictionary – give your take on what the title means), outline the scope of the essay. Get your introduction right, and you will have set up the foundations for a great essay. If you rush it, or not view it with the importance it really requires, you’ll struggle to develop clear ideas in the main body of the essay.



2024 Prescribed Questions



1. Is subjectivity overly celebrated in the arts but unfairly condemned in history? Discuss with reference to the arts and history.

2. How can we reconcile the opposing demands for specialization and generalization in the production of knowledge? Discuss with reference to mathematics and one other area of knowledge.

3. Nothing is more exciting than fresh ideas, so why are areas of knowledge often so slow to adopt them? Discuss with reference to the human sciences and one other area of knowledge.

4. Do we underestimate the challenges of taking knowledge out of its original context and transferring it to a different context? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

5. Do we need custodians of knowledge? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

6. Are we too quick to assume that the most recent evidence is inevitably the strongest? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

Practice

Introduction Writing

Title

The prompt must be used verbatim – “exactly as given.”

1

Practice

Look at the rubric one more time

2



3

Example

Is there any solid justification for regarding knowledge in the natural sciences more highly than another area of knowledge? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

Rubric

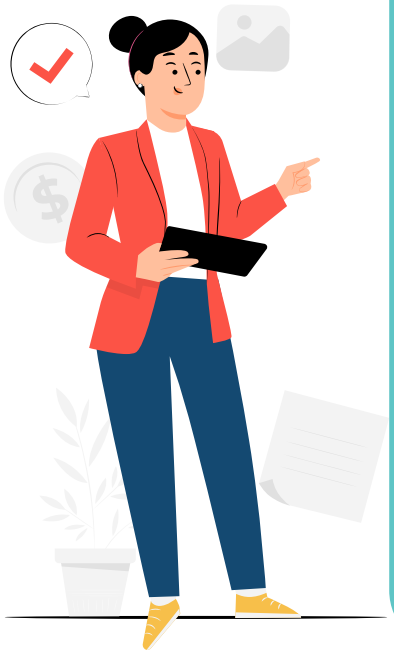
Samples

For the same prescribed title



1. **Student Work A**
   Essay + Comments
2. **Student Work B**
   Essay + Comments
3. **Student Work C**
   Essay + Comments

Practice Prescribed Questions



1. Is replicability necessary in the production of knowledge? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

2. For artists and natural scientists, which is more important: what can be explained or what cannot be explained? Discuss with reference to the arts and the natural sciences.

3. Does it matter if our acquisition of knowledge happens in “bubbles” where some information and voices are excluded? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

4. Do you agree that it is “astonishing that so little knowledge can give us so much power” (Bertrand Russell)? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

5. Are visual representations always helpful in the communication of knowledge? Discuss with reference to the human sciences and mathematics.

6. To what extent is the knowledge we produce determined by the methodologies we use? Discuss with reference to history and one other area of knowledge.

Steps to write an essay infographics

Introduction

The Sun is the star at the center of the Solar System

1



Body 1

Mercury is the smallest planet in the Solar System

2



Body 2

Venus is terribly hot, even hotter than Mercury

3



Body 3

Saturn is a gas giant and has several rings

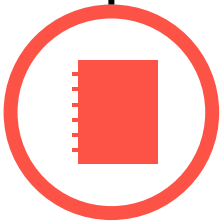
4



Conclusion

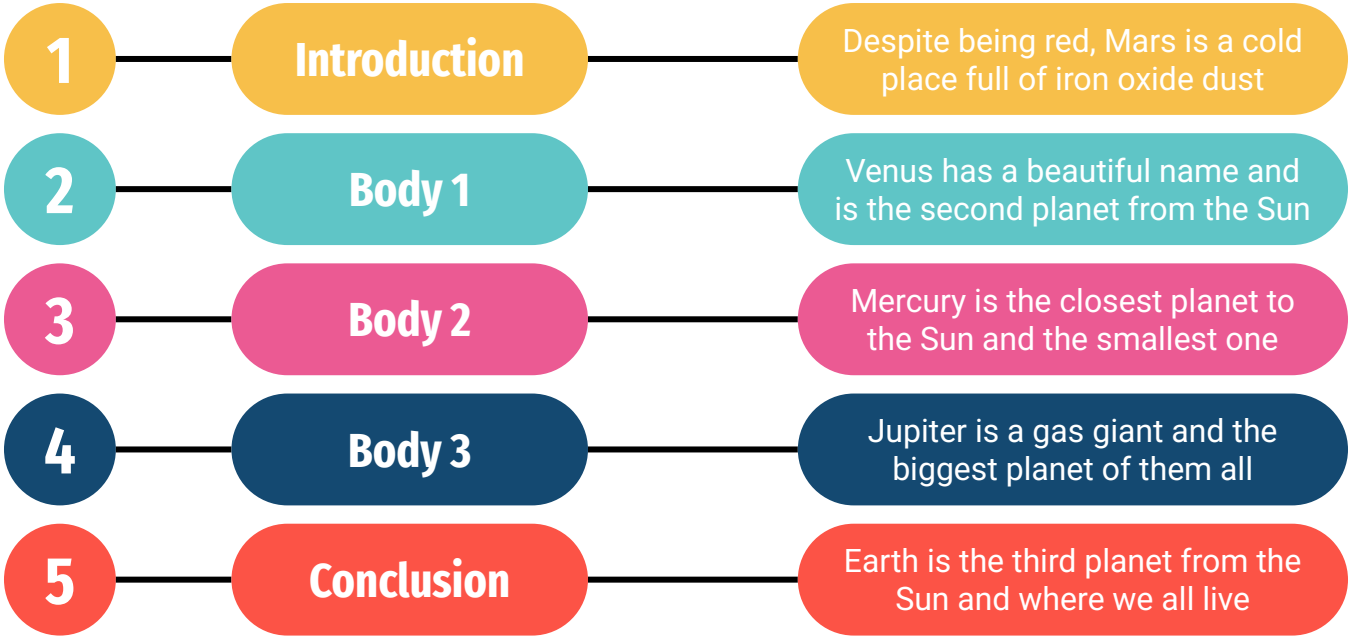
Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place

5



Steps to write an essay infographics

Essay writing process



Steps to write an essay infographics

Essay parts 1. Stages of preparation



Define your essay topic

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one in the Solar System

Come up with a thesis

Earth is the third planet from the Sun and the only one that harbors life

Do your research and gather sources

Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun. Venus is hot

Create an essay outline

Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun. It's also an ice giant, so it’s very cold

Steps to write an essay infographics

Essay parts 3. Stages of revision



1

Return to your thesis

Mars is actually a cold place. It's full of iron oxide dust

2

Tie together your main points

Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun

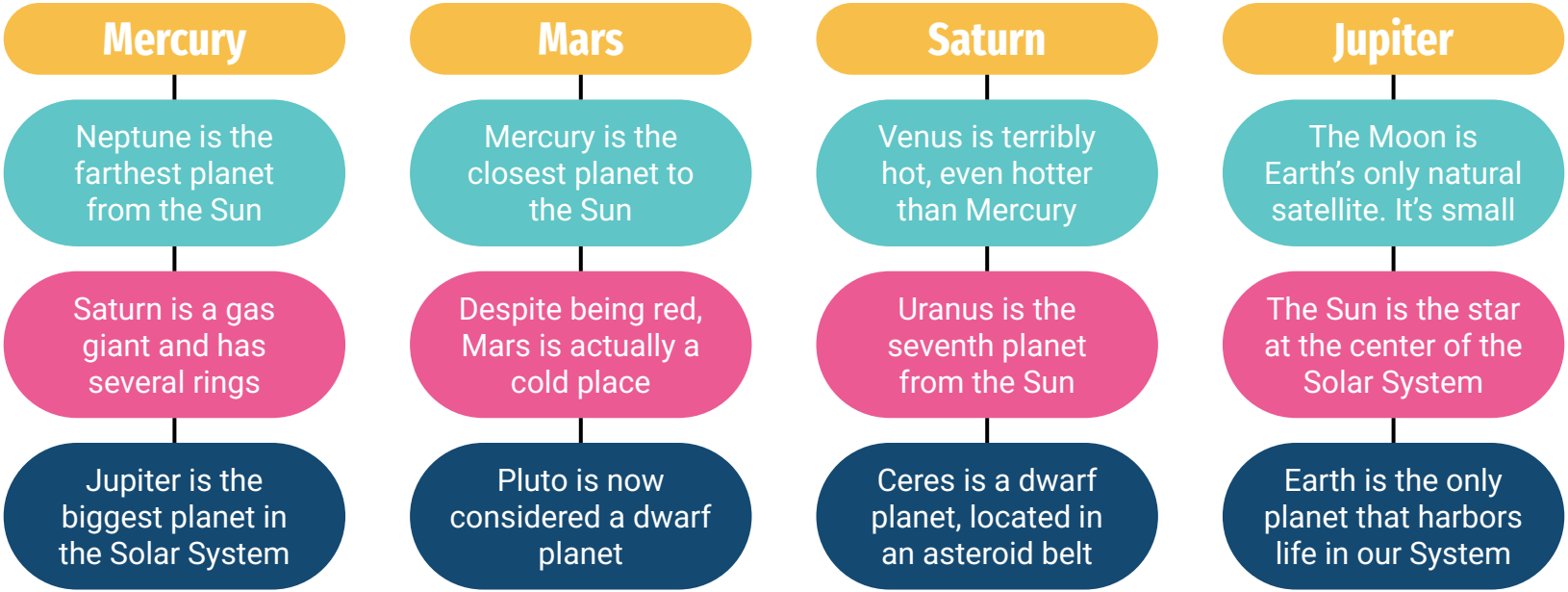
3

Show yours arguments

Jupiter is a gas giant and the biggest planet in the Solar System

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Types of essays 2. Scientific essay



Steps to write an essay infographics

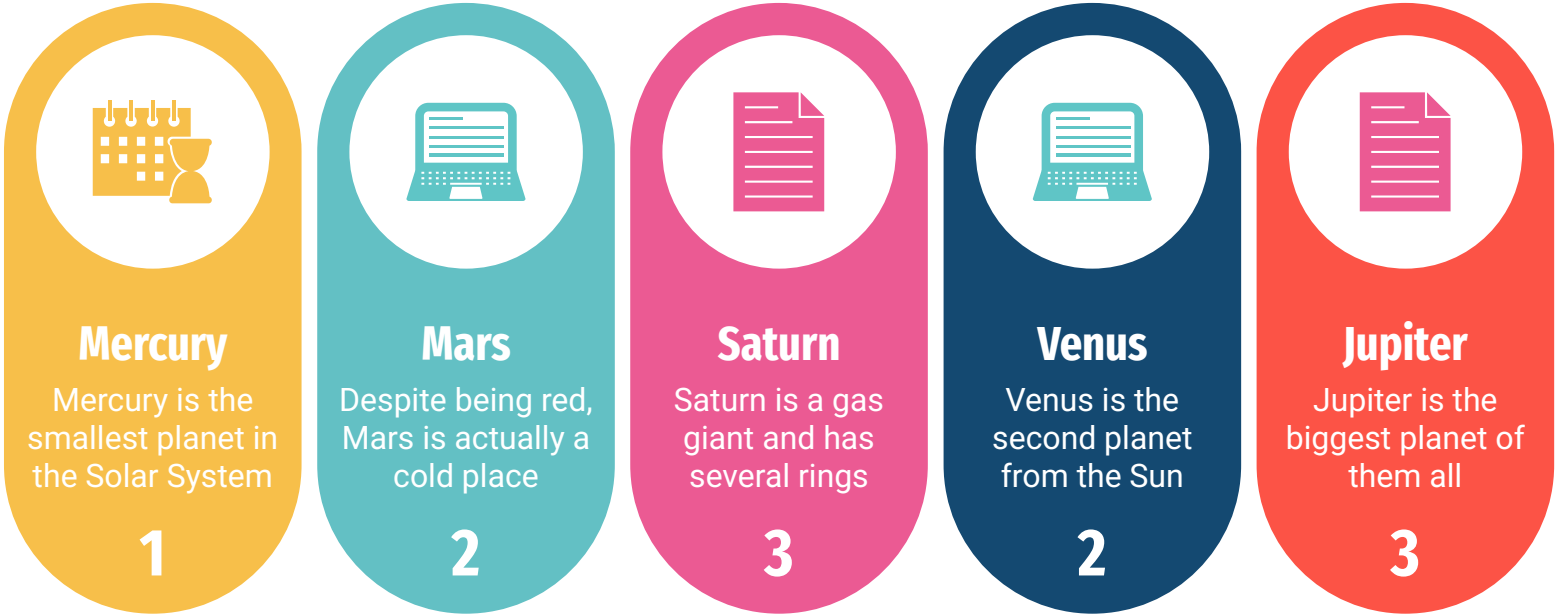
Types of essays 3. Critical essay



Saturn	Jupiter	Earth	Venus
2 h	6 h	8 h	4 h
Saturn is a gas giant with several rings	Jupiter is the biggest planet of them all	Earth is the third planet from the Sun	It’s terribly hot, even hotter than Mercury

Steps to write an essay infographics

Types of essays 4. Argumentative essay



Steps to write an essay infographics

Essay checklist

- [x] Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one in the entire Solar System
- [ ] Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun. It’s terribly hot, even hotter than Mercury
- [x] Earth is the third planet from the Sun and the only one that harbors life in the Solar System
- [ ] Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place. It's full of iron oxide dust, which gives the planet its reddish cast
- [ ] Jupiter is a gas giant and the biggest planet in the Solar System. It's the fourth-brightest object in the night sky
- [x] Ceres is a dwarf planet and it’s located in the main asteroid belt
- [x] Saturn is a gas giant and has several rings. It's composed mostly of hydrogen and helium
- [x] Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun. It's also the fourth-largest object by diameter in the Solar System
- [x] Pluto is now considered a dwarf planet because it’s tiny. It’s also very cold

Steps to write an essay infographics

What do you need to know about an essay?



What is an essay?

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one in the entire Solar System

What is the structure of an essay?

Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place full of iron oxide dust

What is a thesis statement?

Jupiter is a gas giant and it’s also the biggest planet in the entire Solar System

What is a topic sentence?

Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun. It’s hot there

Steps to write an essay infographics

Steps for writing the introduction



1. **Draw the reader's attention** — Venus is terribly hot, even hotter than Mercury
2. **Provide background on your topic** — Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place
3. **Present the thesis statement** — Saturn is a gas giant and has several rings
4. **Map the structure** — Earth is the third planet from the Sun

Steps to write an essay infographics

Steps you need to check

Earth is the only planet that harbors life in our System

Mercury is the smallest planet in the Solar System

Saturn is a gas giant and has several rings

Jupiter is the biggest planet in the Solar System



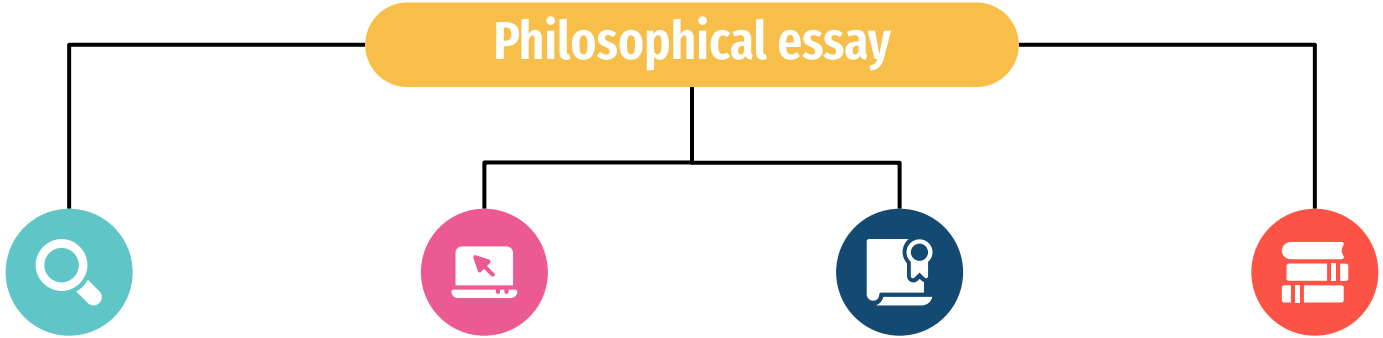
Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place

Venus is terribly hot, even hotter than Mercury

Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun

Ceres is located in the main asteroid belt

Steps to write an essay infographics



Saturn

- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here

The Moon

- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here

The Sun

- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here

Neptune

- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here
- you can list the characteristics here

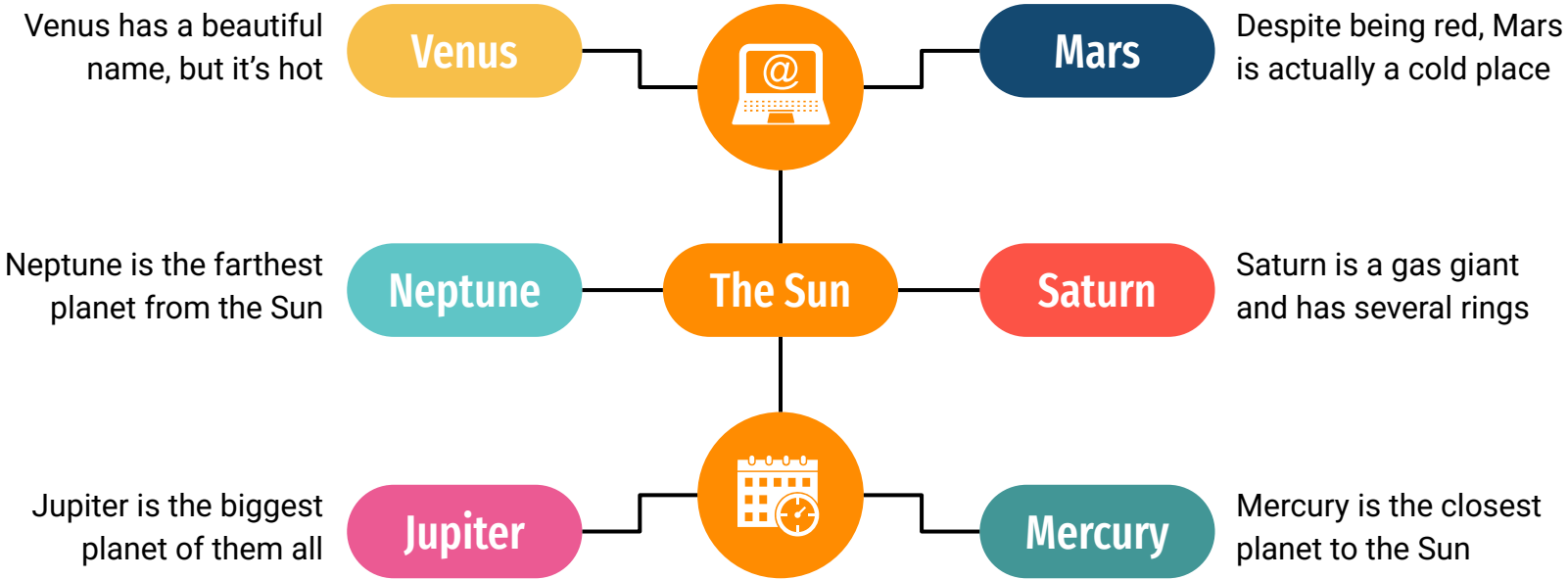
Steps to write an essay infographics

Preparation for writing an essay

Understand your assignment	Define a topic	Do your research	Come up with a thesis	Create an outline
Ceres is a dwarf planet located in an asteroid belt	Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun	Saturn is a gas giant and has several rings	Venus is the second planet from the Sun	Jupiter is the biggest planet in the Solar System
Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun	Pluto is now considered a dwarf planet	Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place	Earth is the beautiful planet where we all live	The Sun is the star at the center of the Solar System

Steps to write an essay infographics

You can start with a mind map



Steps to write an essay infographics

Distribute your time

Neptune
Neptune is very far from the Sun

15%

Mars
Mars is a cold place

25%

Earth
Earth is the planet with life

10%



15%

Mercury
Mercury is the smallest planet

20%

Saturn
Saturn is a planet with rings

15%

Venus
Venus has a beautiful name

Follow the link in the graph to modify its data and then paste the new one here. **For more info, click here**

Steps to write an essay infographics

Investigation process



Mercury: 2 h

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one in the Solar System

Venus: 6 h

Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun

Earth: 1 h

Earth is the third planet from the Sun and the only one that harbors life

Mars: 10 h

Mars is full of iron oxide dust, which gives the planet its reddish cast

Steps to write an essay infographics

Preparation for writing an essay

Mercury

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one

Jupiter

Jupiter is a gas giant and the biggest planet in the Solar System

Mars

Despite being red, Mars is actually a cold place full of iron oxide dust



Steps to write an essay infographics

Essay length guidelines

Type of essay	Average word count range	Essay content
High school essay	300–1000 words	Jupiter is a gas giant and the biggest planet in the Solar System
College admission essay	200–650 words	Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one
Undergraduate college essay	1500–5000 words	The Sun is the star at the center of the Solar System
Graduate school admission essay	500–1000 words	Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun
Graduate school essay	2500–6000 words	Mars is actually a cold place. It's full of iron oxide dust

Steps to write an essay infographics

Writing the main body

Mercury

Mercury is a small planet

50%

Jupiter

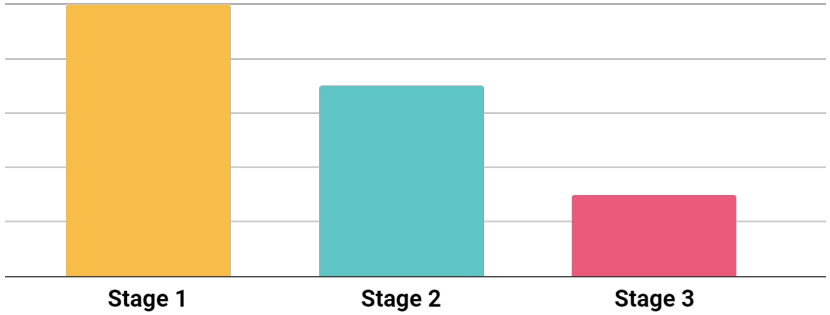
Jupiter is a very big planet

35%

Mars

Mars is actually a cold place

15%



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Steps to write an essay infographics

Paragraph structure

Earth

Earth is the amazing planet where we all live

Venus

Venus is terribly hot, even hotter than Mercury



Mercury

Mercury is the smallest planet in the Solar System

Jupiter

Jupiter is the biggest planet in the Solar System

Steps to write an essay infographics

Check your conclusion

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one in the Solar System. This planet's name has nothing to do with the liquid metal

1 Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun

2 Saturn is a gas giant with several rings

3 Jupiter is the biggest planet of them all



Steps to write an essay infographics

Essay writing process



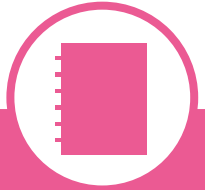
1. Preparation

- Write this step here
- Write this step here
- Write this step here
- Write this step here



2. Writing

- Write this step here
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- Write this step here



3. Revision

- Write this step here
- Write this step here
- Write this step here
- Write this step here

Steps to write an essay infographics

You can start with a mind map

