



Australian
National
University

Essay Writing Strategies

ANU Academic Skills



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National
University

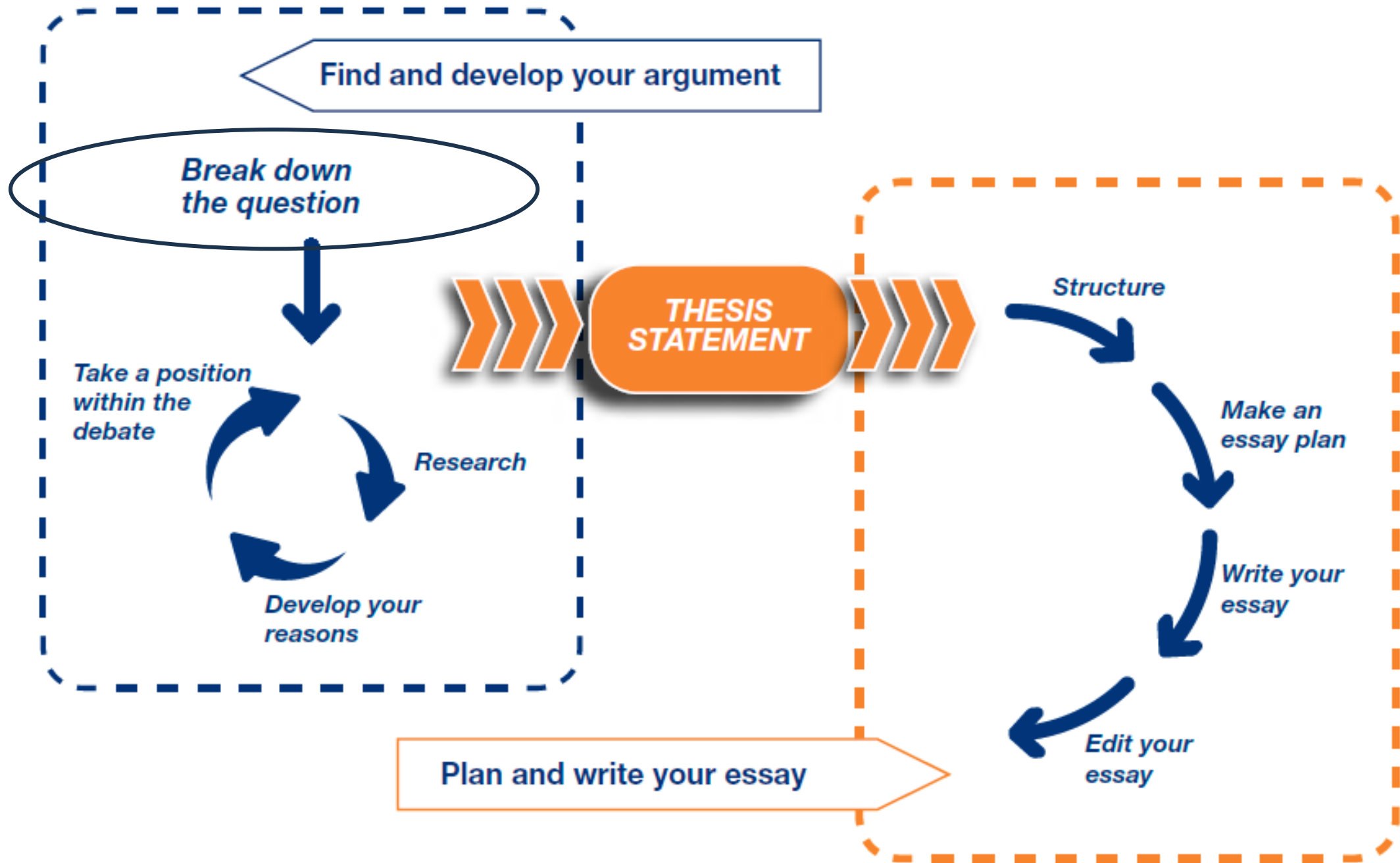
We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose traditional lands we meet today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and pay our respect to elders past and present.

We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to this city and the ANU.

Writing Process

Discussion

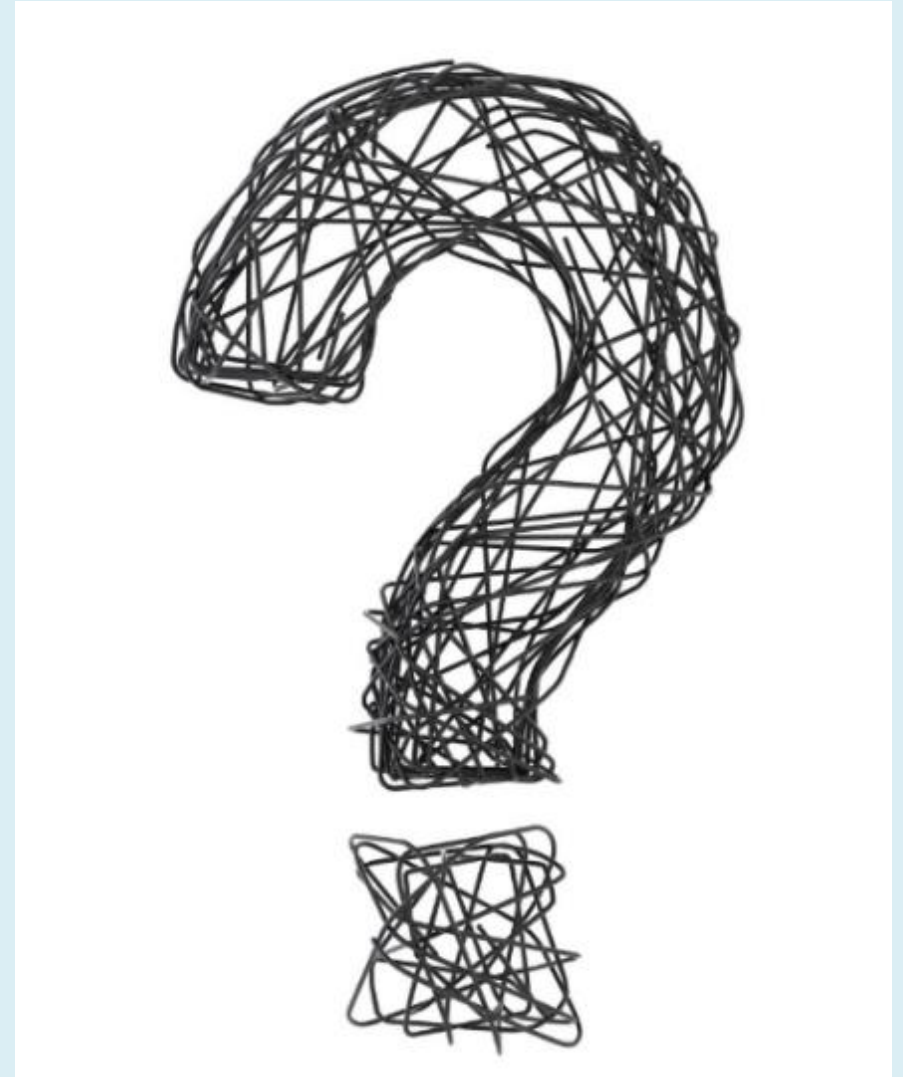
1. How do you think writing at uni will be different to your previous experiences?
2. What's your current essay writing process, and how do you think that will have to change to meet uni expectations?



Find your argument

Break down the question

- Understand the question
- break it down
- What are you asking to weigh in on?
- What positions could you take?



In Victoria, Indigenous Australians who plead guilty to some offences can choose to be sentenced by the Koori Court rather than the Magistrates Court. The purpose of these Koori Courts is to make the legal system less alienating and more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

Is there a place for programs such as the Koori Court in the Australian legal system? Should there be courts for other groups in our society?



KOORI COURT

What are some of the positions could you take? What do you need to find out to answer this question?

What are some positions you could take?

- There is a place for the Koori Court and other specialist courts.
- There is not a place for the Koori Court or other specialist courts.
- There is a place for the Koori Court but not other specialist courts.
- In most cases there is a place for the Koori Court, but in some limited instances this specialised court, and others like it, do not belong in the Australian legal system.

What do you need to find out to answer this question?

-What is the Koori Court?

-How is it different to the Magistrates Court?

-In what ways is the current legal system alienating to Aboriginal Australians?

-How does the Koori Court attempt to address this?

-What do detractors say about the Koori Court? Why isn't it widely accepted?

What makes a position strong?

- Well-reasoned
- Backed by evidence
- Takes a stance, e.g.:



There is a place for the Koori Court but it should not be extended to other groups.

Always, always argue...

Questions may include many different words:

- Discuss, explore, analyse, describe
- Evaluate this claim, to what extent?
- Critically review, compare and contrast
- Identify issues and provide points for and/or against.

⇒ All imply *taking a position and arguing for it*

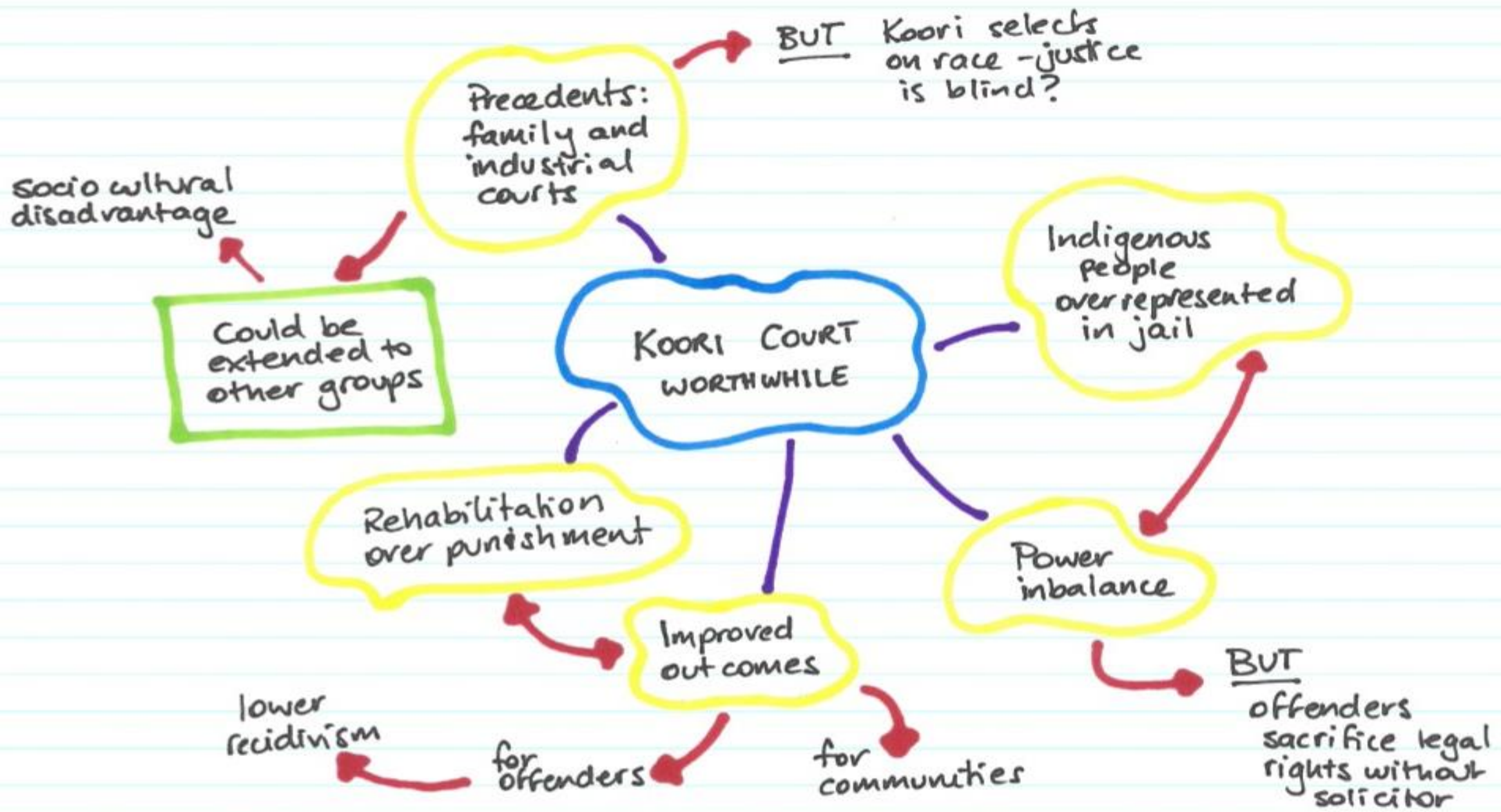
Understand the debate

Pros?



Cons?

KOORI COURT

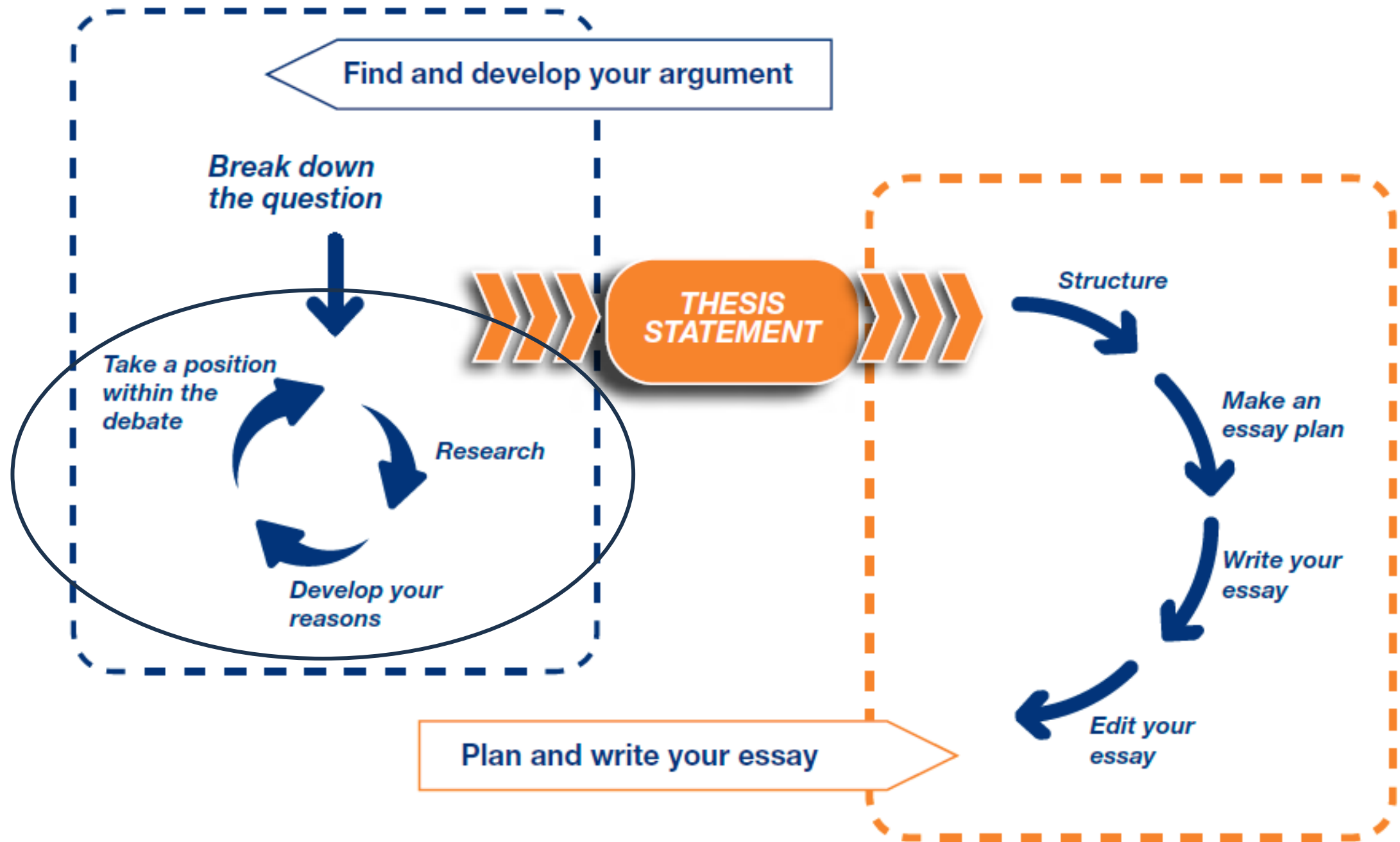


Arguments for:

- Urgent need to address Indigenous Australians' disadvantage
- KC addresses power imbalance between legal system and Indigenous Australians
- KC provides improved outcomes for both the offenders and the community
 - Lower recidivism
 - Involvement of Elders more effective
 - Deals with underlying problems through rehabilitation
 - Greater acceptance by the Aboriginal community

Arguments against:

- The sacrifice of rights by offenders further disadvantages Indigenous Australians
 - Role of the offender's solicitor is marginalised
 - Move from formal processes may threaten the impartiality of outcomes
- KC undermines 'justice is blind' and all people are equal
 - Other special courts are potentially open to all
 - Court is not the place to address inequality



Develop your argument

How to develop your argument

- Weigh up all the points of view
- Decide your position
- Write a **thesis statement**



Thesis statement

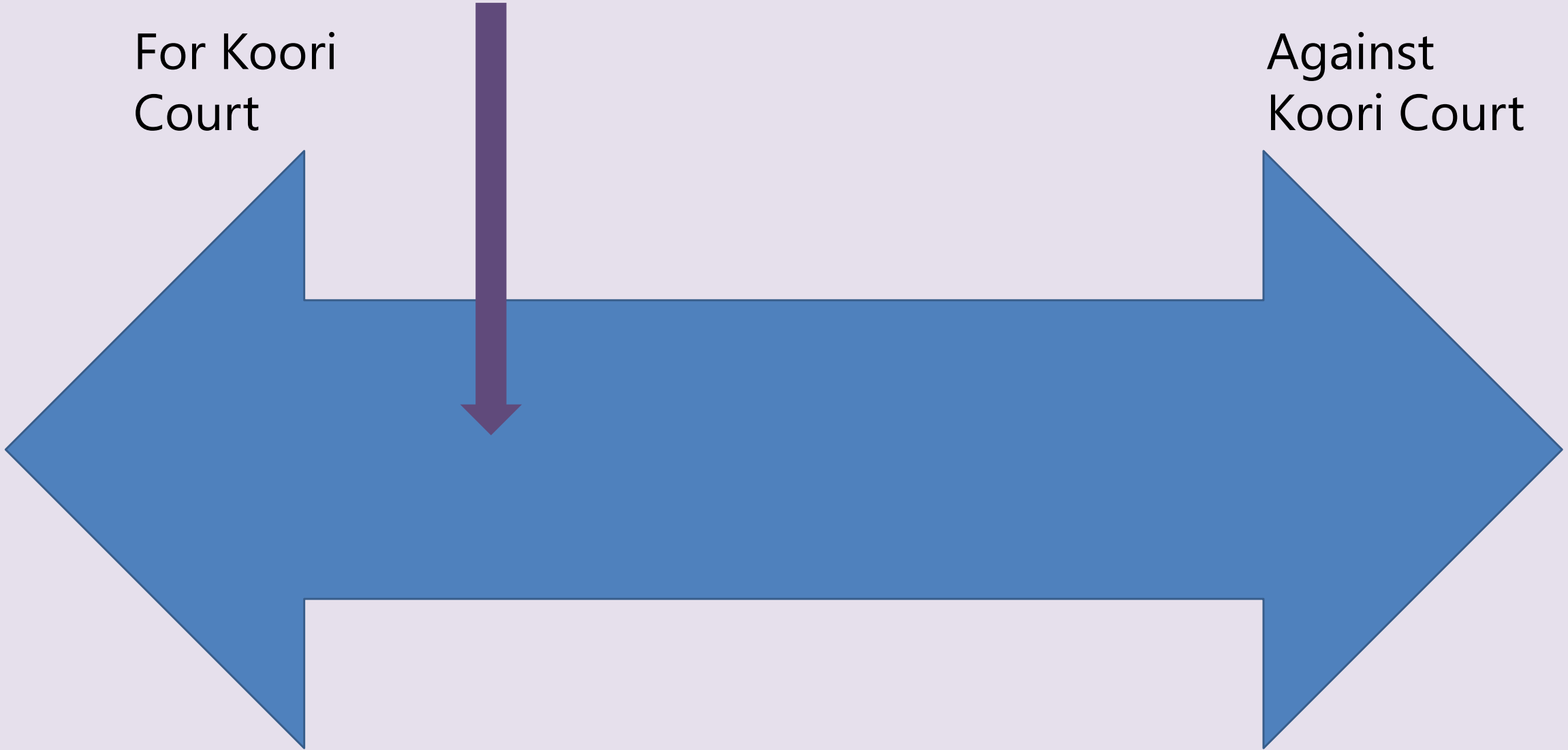
- a **concise summary** of your position and its supporting arguments.
- Every essay **must** have one
- 1-3 sentences
- Often signals the counterarguments and rebuttals

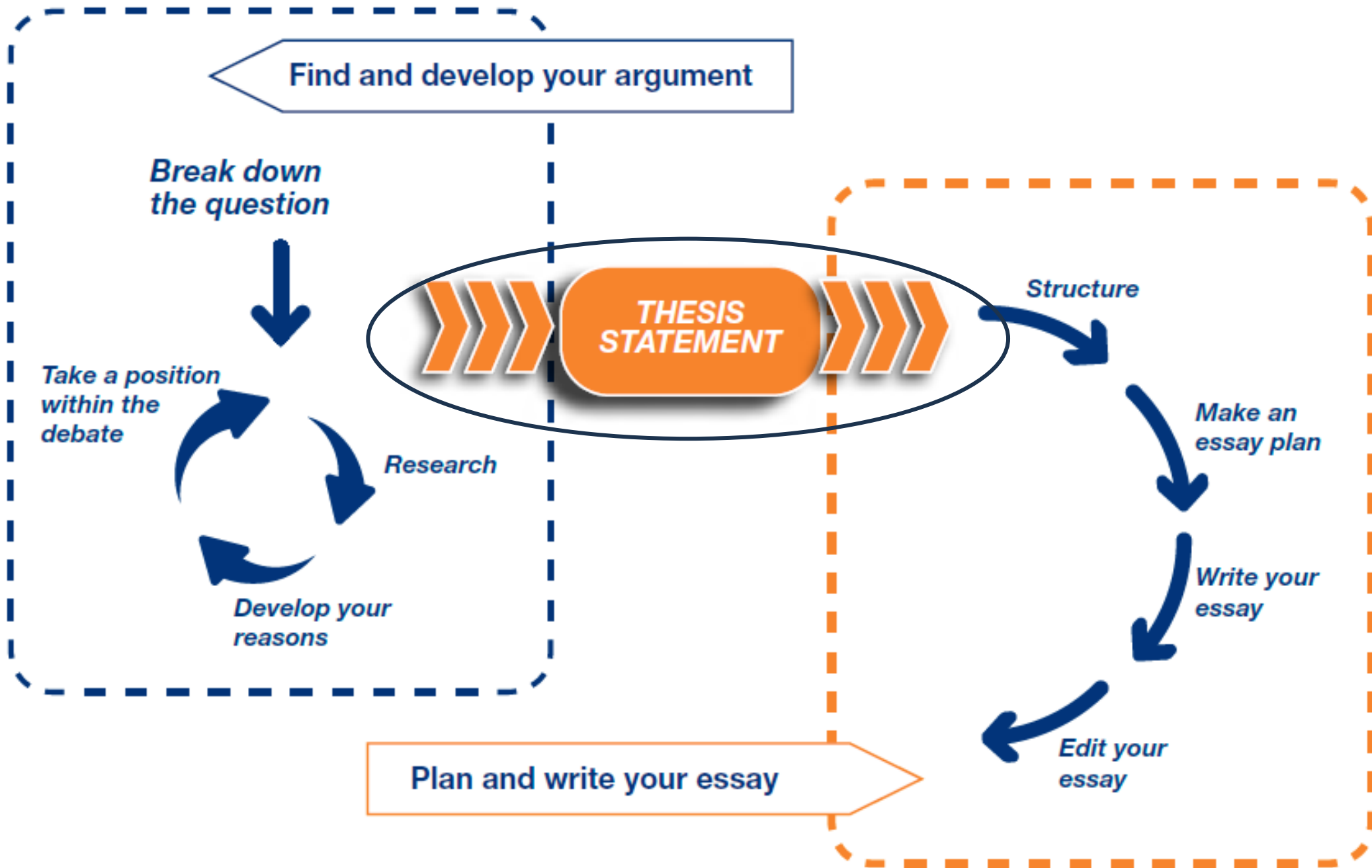
Koori Court thesis statement

There is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are **the most disadvantaged group** and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. There are numerous **precedents for special courts** in Australia which addresses the argument for special pleading. Although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide a model for the broader Australian legal system.

For Koori
Court

Against
Koori Court





Plan

Discussion

Do you use essay plans? How extensive are they? Do you think they work well for you, or you might change your approach?

Planning and focus

You can't have a plan without an argument.

You can't have a focused argument without a plan.



“Outlining is writing, not a prelude to ‘real writing.’ Writers who complain about ‘writer’s block’ are writers who don’t outline. After trying to write blindly, they feel frustrated and complain about how hard it is to generate words. No surprise—you can’t write an article [essay, report, critical review, etc.] if you don’t know what to write. (Silvia 2007:79)

What do you think of this rough essay plan?

Intro: Koori Court

Point 1: Specialist courts in the Australian legal system

Point 2: Indigenous and non Indigenous offenders

Point 3: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Australian Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home Report

There is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are the **most disadvantaged** group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. There are numerous **precedents for special courts** in Australia which addresses the argument for special pleading. Although the Koori Court has its **limitations**, its **successes** provide a model for the broader Australian legal system.

Main points:

Indigenous people are disadvantaged and this must be addressed

Other specialist courts already exist, providing precedent for the Koori Court model

Despite limitations, the Koori Court provides better outcomes for offenders and a model for good legal practice

There is no place for programs such as the Koori Court as **justice should be independent of race**; all people should be equal before the law. Other specialist courts, such as the Family Court, are potentially open to all and do not select on inherent characteristics such as race or sex. **The courts are not the place to address inequality**; instead, measures that look at the underlying causes are needed.

Main points:

Justice should be independent of race

Other specialist courts do not select on inherent characteristics

Courts are not the place to address inequality; it is better done by examining the underlying causes

Work out your structure:
How many words?
How many points? What order?
How many paragraphs per point?

1500 word essay:
150 words for Intro
150 words for Conclusion
1200 words for the body
paragraphs = 6-9 paragraphs

How will you distribute those paragraphs? What kind of weight do each of your main points need?

Introduction

- Broad introduction to the context
- Indication of debate or issue
- Your argument
- Signposting of the logical structure of your argument

Point 1 –

Only if needed →

- Sub point 1
- Sub point 2
- Sub point 3

Point 2 –

- Sub point 1
- Sub point 2
- Sub point 3

Point 3 –

- Sub point 1
- Sub point 2
- Sub point 3

Point 4 –

- Sub point 1
- Sub point 2
- Sub point 3

Conclusion

- Summarise the main points/findings from the essay and reemphasise the argument in the light of these points.
- Indication of the implications of your argument (but don't introduce new ideas).

The more specific
planning, the
better!

[ANU Academic Skills Essay
Writing Booklet](#)

THE KOORI COURT

Essay plan

The following plan is for a 1500 word essay divided into nine paragraphs.

The first section makes the argument that the legal system needs to adapt to overcome disadvantage. The second section goes on to argue that this has worked with other specialist courts and does not undermine the Australian legal system, despite some counter examples. The third section highlights the improved outcomes from the Koori Court, and then acknowledges that there are limitations that have to be carefully managed. Finally, the essay concludes by saying that the Koori Court model should be extended to other groups.

Notice how counterarguments and sources are included in this essay plan.

Introduction

| | |
|---------|--|
| Para. 1 | Includes the thesis statement: <i>There is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. There are numerous precedents for special courts in Australia which addresses the argument for special pleading. Although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide a model for the broader Australian legal system.</i> |
|---------|--|

Body

| | |
|------------------|---|
| SECTION 1 | Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance |
| Para. 2 | Australia's first people are one of the most disadvantaged in the country <i>Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Bringing them Home report</i> |
| Para. 3 | Need to address the power imbalance between the legal system and Indigenous Australians <i>Reports listed above; Smith and Crowe (2012)</i> |
| SECTION 2 | Other specialist courts already exist and do not undermine the justice system |
| Para. 4 | Other specialist courts provide precedent for the Koori Court model <i>Family Court: jurisdiction on basis of kin relations Industrial Relations Commission: on basis of common interest</i> |
| Para. 5 | Even though Koori Court selects on race, it does not undermine the impartiality of justice as the legal system already discriminates <i>Legal system discriminates against low education and income</i> |
| SECTION 3 | The Koori Court of Victoria has limitations but provides better outcomes for offenders |
| Para. 6 | Provides better outcomes as it addresses underlying problems <i>Lower rates of recidivism Shaming offenders by Elders is more effective than prison Encourages the offender to deal with underlying problems through rehabilitation Greater acceptance by the Aboriginal community</i> |
| Para. 7 | Constant review is needed to ensure that offenders are not disenfranchised <i>Limit the marginalisation of the offender's solicitor Be careful that the move from formal processes does not threaten impartiality of outcomes</i> |
| SECTION 4 | Extending the Koori Court model can improve justice for all Australians |
| Para. 8 | It can be extended to other disadvantaged groups who are suffering from imbalance of power <i>For example, other groups facing social or cultural disadvantage</i> |

Conclusion

| | |
|---------|-------------------|
| Para. 9 | Wrap up the essay |
|---------|-------------------|

Check your plan:

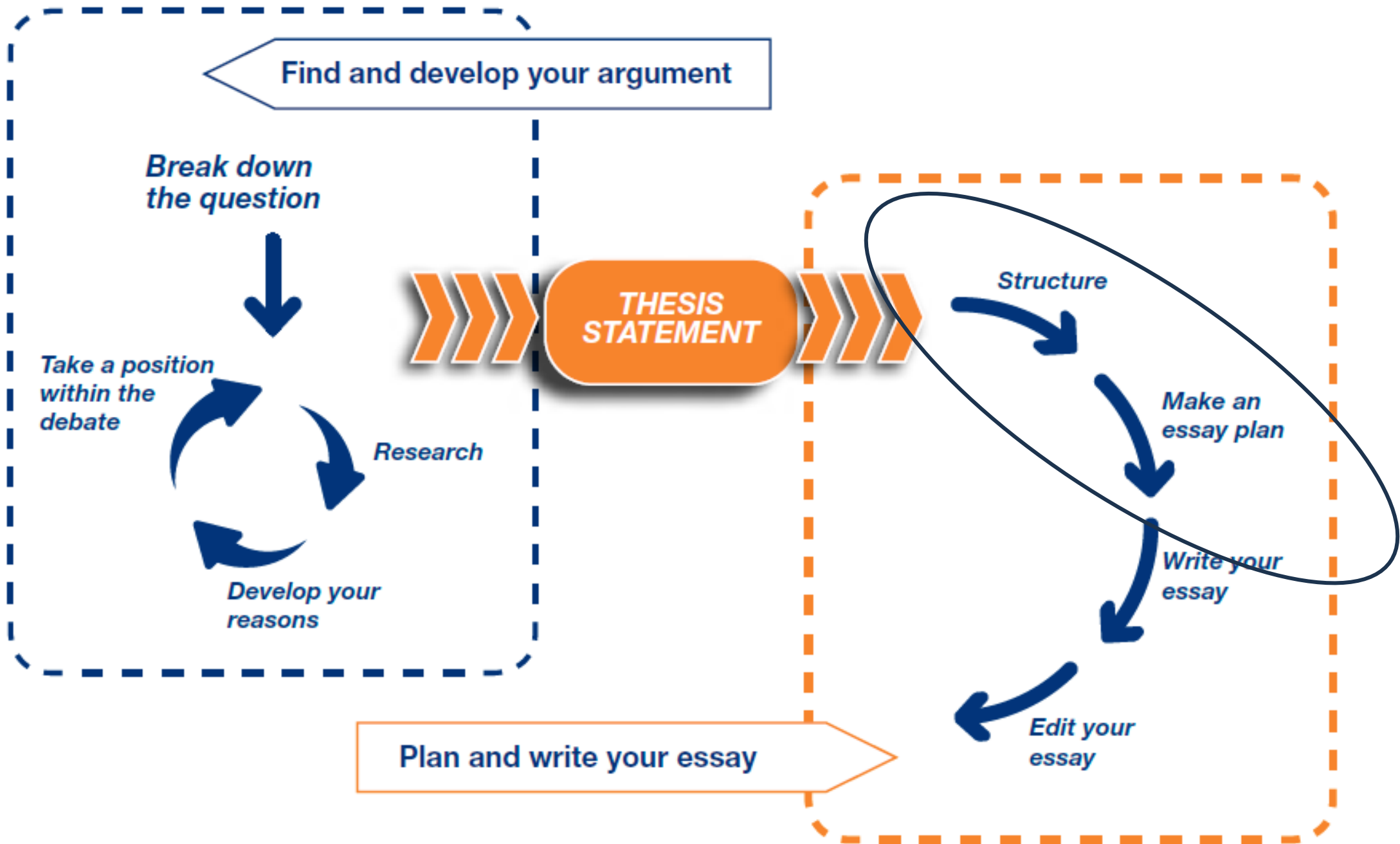
Is it argumentative?

Is it persuasive?

Are your reasons clearly connected to your thesis statement?

Does the plan only consist of factual information?

If you gave it to someone else, would it be easy to understand your reasons and how they connect to your argument?



Find and develop your argument

Break down the question

Take a position within the debate

Research

Develop your reasons

THESIS STATEMENT

Structure

Make an essay plan

Write your essay

Edit your essay

Plan and write your essay

Write

Discussion

What were the conventions of writing an essay in your previous experiences, and how do you think academic writing conventions at the uni level might be different?

INTRODUCTION

Background / context
Issue / problem or debate
Thesis statement
Signpost key reasons

LINE OF ARGUMENT

BODY PARAGRAPHS

Topic sentence
Supporting evidence / analysis
Concluding / linking sentence

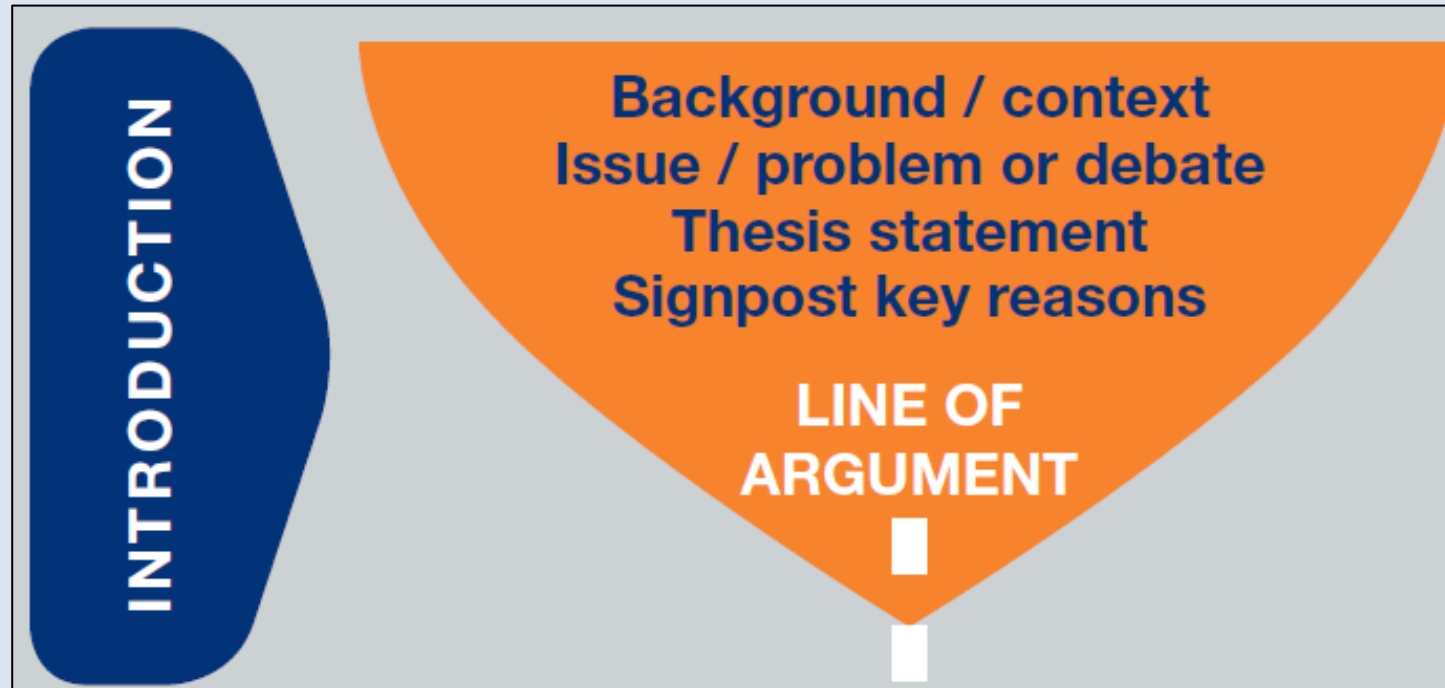
Topic sentence
Supporting evidence / analysis
Concluding / linking sentence

Topic sentence
Supporting evidence / analysis
Concluding / linking sentence

CONCLUSION

Summary of position
and key reasons
Implications or 'so what?'

Introduction: 10% of the word count



The Koori Court is a Victorian initiative that seeks more appropriate legal processes and outcomes for Indigenous people. Poor legal outcomes are reflected in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the Australian prison system. The Koori Court redresses this imbalance through a more culturally sensitive approach to sentencing.

Context

The Koori Court's model appears to some to undermine Australia's universal justice system (see Kahler 2012).

Debate

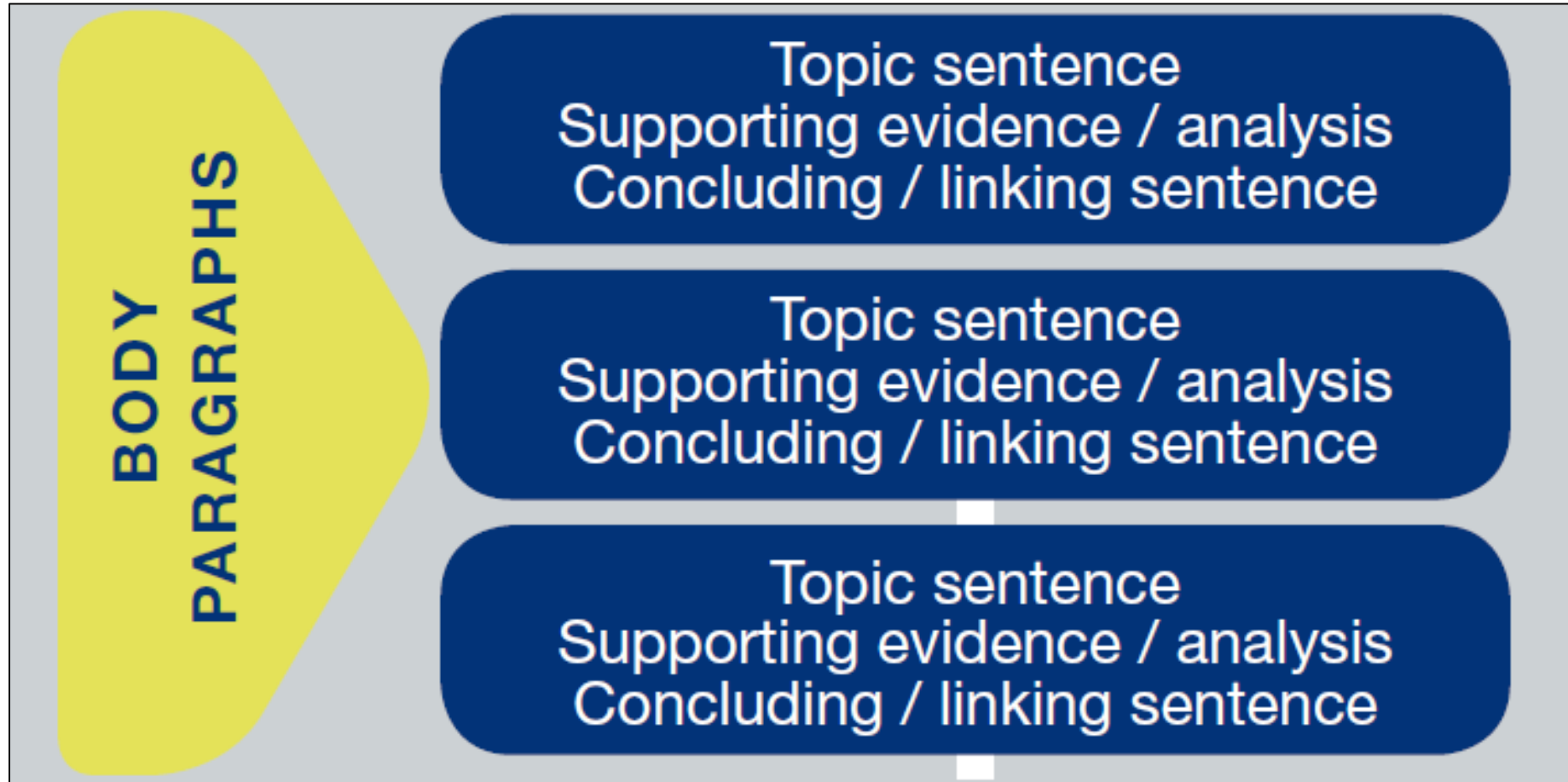
However, there is a place for such programs because, while creating a separate court appears culturally divisive, Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance. Numerous precedents for special courts exist which addresses the argument for special pleading.

Reasons

Although the Koori Court has its limitations, its successes provide a model for the broader legal system.

Thesis statement

Body Paragraphs



Paragraph Structure

- A paragraph addresses **one** main theme/idea
- 150 – 200 words typically
- Contains
 1. **Topic sentence:** main idea and argument
 2. Analysis and evidence
 3. Concluding and linking sentence





Topic Sentences

- not just factual
- states a reason in relation to your thesis statement

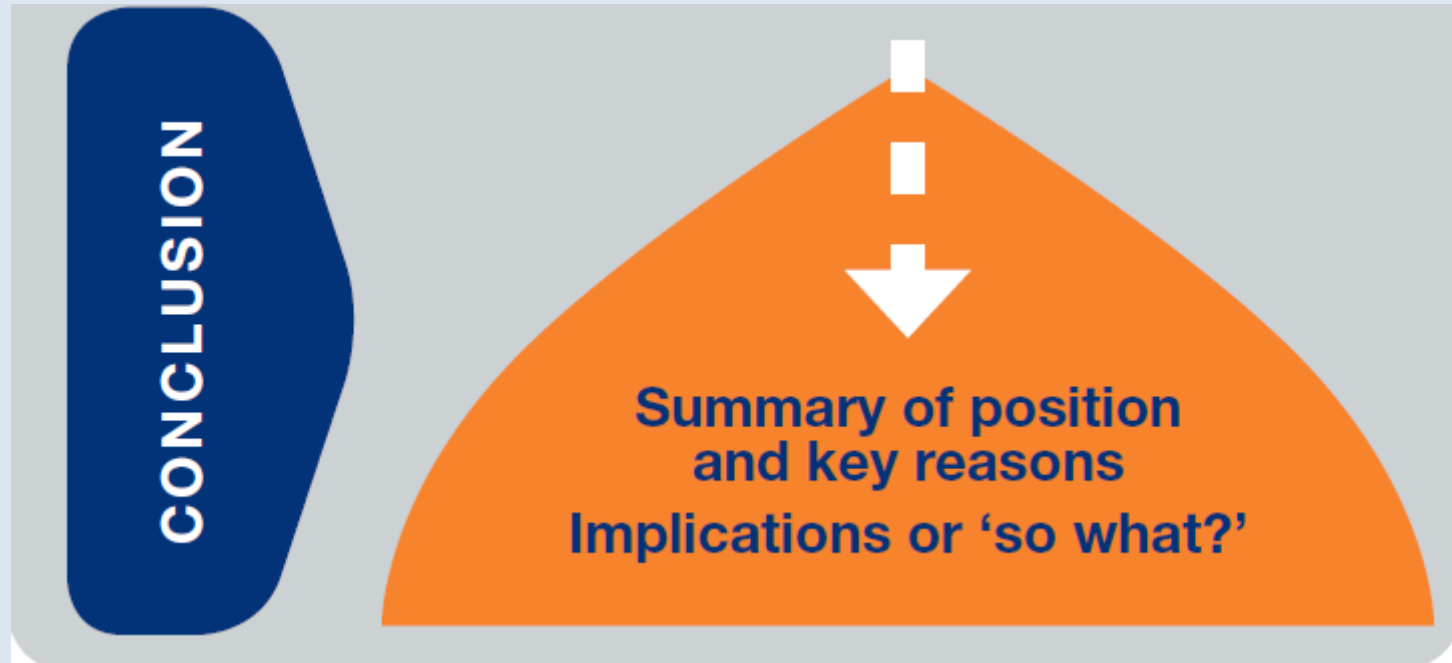
Bad example: Indigenous Australians are over-represented in the prison system.

Good example: Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group and there is an urgent need to address this imbalance.

Supporting evidence / analysis

- Study our online resources on **Using Sources** to learn more about integrating evidence and analysis into your body paragraphs.

Conclusion: 10% of the word count



Your writing process

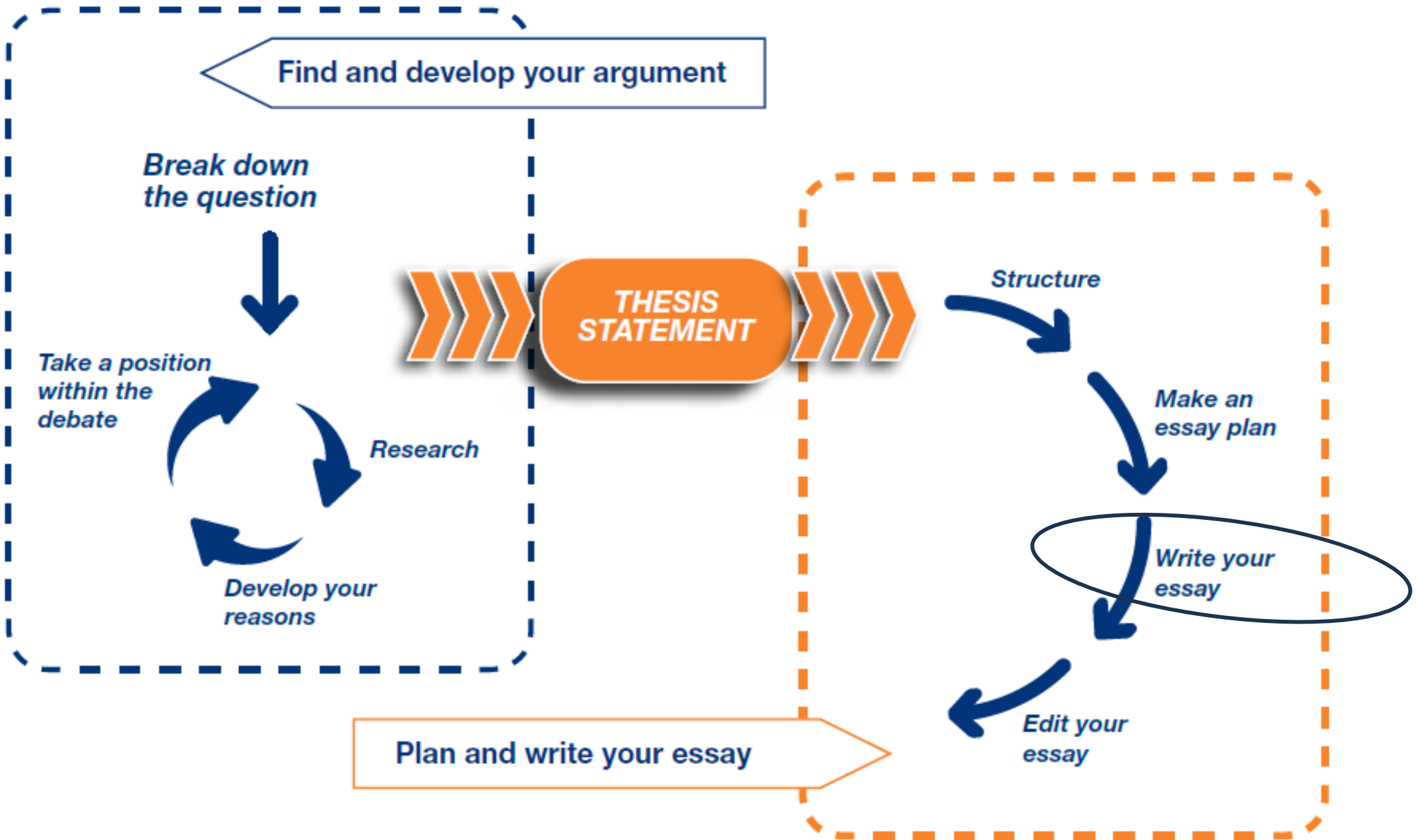
Develop

what works for you?

Reflect

what can change?





Polish and edit

Discussion

What does your typical editing process look like when you are preparing to submit your essay? How do you think this will have to change for university?

ARGUMENT

Is your thesis statement clear?
Does it take a position and outline your supporting argument?
Does it answer the essay question?
Are your key reasons signposted in the introduction?
Are they summarised in the conclusion?

STRUCTURE

Is your argument sustained through the essay body?
Do your topic sentences contribute to your argument?
Are your paragraphs in a logical order?
Does the order of your reasons in the introduction match the order of your paragraphs in the body?

PARAGRAPHING

Does each paragraph have a topic sentence and one main idea?
Do your paragraphs have too much evidence and analysis? If so, should they be split?
Are your quotations accurate?
Is the evidence you use correctly cited?

EXPRESSION

Do your sentences flow together?
Are there any long sentences that could be shortened?
Are there any redundant phrases or areas of repetition that could be cut?
Have you used synonyms to create variety in your writing?
Have you eliminated spelling and grammatical errors?
Is the essay formatted according to the course requirements?

Individual consults to support your academic writing and research skills



LEARNING ADVISERS

- Boost your research and academic writing skills
- Receive expert, individualised feedback to improve your writing
- 45 minute booked consults on Zoom
- Written feedback also available
- Available Mon-Fri throughout the year 9am-6pm



WRITING COACHES

- Check in to see your assignment is on the right track
- Receive individualised feedback to improve your writing
- 30 minute booked consults on Zoom
- Written feedback also available
- Available Mon-Fri during semester 10am-4pm



PEER WRITERS

- Ask a quick question
- Receive immediate feedback from a fellow student on assignments, exams, revision, time management and more
- 10-15 minute drop-ins
- At Chifley Library or via Zoom
- Available Mon-Fri during semester 12-2pm



DIGITAL LITERACY TRAINERS

- Receive support for your thesis and journal article formatting, EndNote reference management and subject-specialist research consultations
- 30 or 60 minute booked consults on Zoom
- Available Mon-Fri throughout the year 9am-6pm