

Sample Essay Question

“Discuss the factors that contribute to successful student academic performance at university”

SAMPLE ESSAY BODY PARAGRAPH

Cognitive ability may seem like an obvious factor related to academic success. Cognitive ability is usually understood in terms of previous academic performance and/or scores on various aptitude tests (Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002). Past studies have suggested that cognitive ability is indeed a major factor in predicting academic performance. For example, McKenzie and Schwiitzer (2001) claimed that upon entry to university, students with higher entry scores also tended to achieve higher academic grades. Similarly, a study by Burton and Dowling (2005) found that previous academic performance was a significant predictor of first year university performance. However, these findings have been debated, with other studies suggesting that this measure of success (in terms of grade point average or student attrition) has been overstated because some students who achieve high scores on aptitude tests perform badly or leave university, whilst others who do not score well are very successful (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004, Ransdell, 2001). This suggests that, while important, cognitive ability alone is not a major factor in achieving academic success.

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GOLDEN RULE 1

CLEARLY STATE THE TOPIC OF THE PARAGRAPH

Here we can see that the first sentence is introducing the reader to the *topic* of the paragraph, which in this case is how 'Cognitive Ability' impacts academic success.

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GOLDEN RULE 2

PROVIDE MORE SPECIFIC DETAIL ABOUT THE TOPIC

Here more context for the reader is provided about the topic. In this example, cognitive ability is defined so the reader can better grasp 'how' it relates to the topic.

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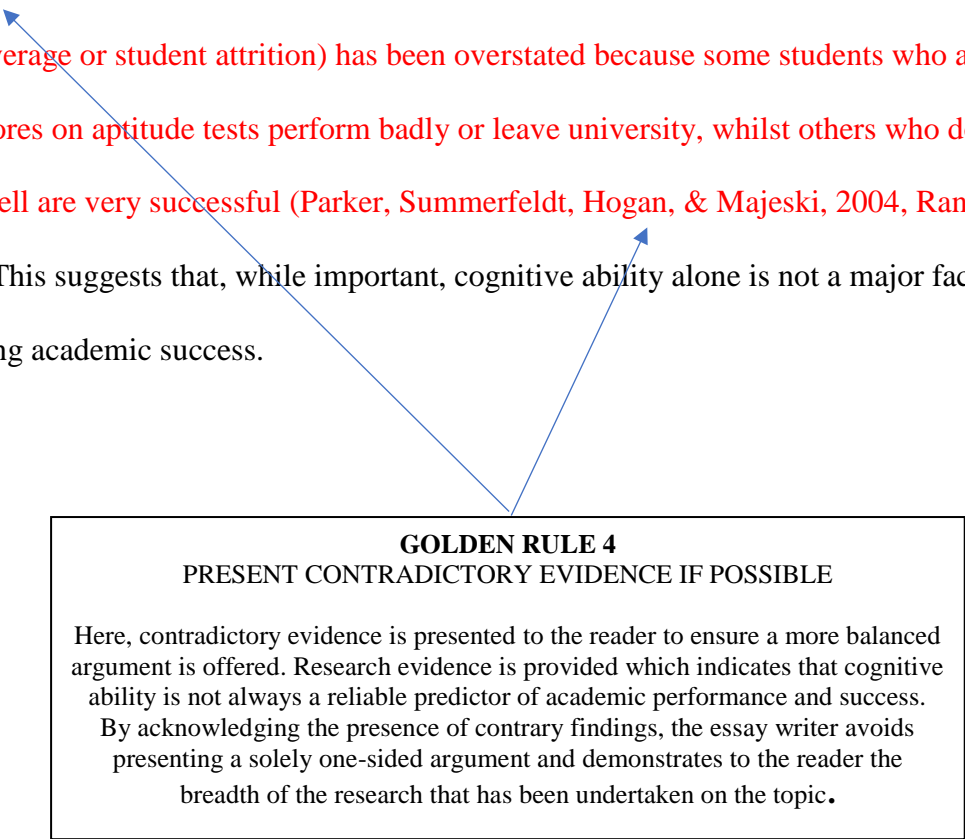
GOLDEN RULE 3

STATE YOUR TOPIC ARGUMENT AND JUSTIFY IT WITH EVIDENCE

These sentences describe what is being argued in relation to the topic of the paragraph. Here, it is being argued that cognitive ability predicts academic performance. Research evidence from scholarly literature is then presented to justify or back up this argument.

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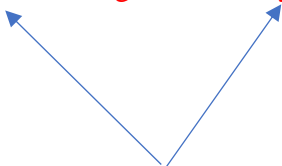
GOLDEN RULE 4

PRESENT CONTRADICTORY EVIDENCE IF POSSIBLE

Here, contradictory evidence is presented to the reader to ensure a more balanced argument is offered. Research evidence is provided which indicates that cognitive ability is not always a reliable predictor of academic performance and success.

By acknowledging the presence of contrary findings, the essay writer avoids presenting a solely one-sided argument and demonstrates to the reader the breadth of the research that has been undertaken on the topic.

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GOLDEN RULE 5
CLEARLY ARTICULATE YOUR 'SO WHAT' FACTOR

The final sentence provides that 'so what' factor to the reader by explaining how the topic relates to the thesis statement or overall argument of the essay. Here, it is highlighted that based on the evidence provided, cognitive ability (the topic of the paragraph) is an important predictor of academic success (the topic of the essay). It is also made clear however that while important, it is not the only factor shown to influence performance. This provides an opening to link this paragraph to the next one to ensure a smooth flow of ideas.

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Subsequently, there is an interest in non-cognitive factors that may contribute to academic success, with some studies focusing on various personality or behavioural traits or capacities.

GOLDEN RULE 6
MAKE THE LINK

Here we see that the first sentence of the next paragraph provides a smooth link between the previous paragraph and one that is to come. The previous paragraph ended by signposting to the reader that cognitive ability is not the only important factor in predicting academic success. The essay writer ensures a smooth link here by connecting this thread, starting the next paragraph stating that 'therefore there is research interest in the non-cognitive factors that influence success.' This clearly and smoothly leads into the topic of the current paragraph ensuring a cohesive flow and connection of ideas.