

**Essay** = a group of paragraphs written about a single topic and a central main idea

**1. Label the three parts of this essay. What does the reader learn from each?**

**Changing English: the African American Influence**

If you ask average Americans where their language comes from, they will probably say 'England'. However, English vocabulary has also been influenced by other countries and groups of people. Some words are borrowed from other languages, such as *typhoon*, which originally came from the Chinese word, 'tai-fung', meaning 'big wind'. *Skunk*, the name of a small, smelly, black-and-white animal, came to English from a Native American language. African Americans, too, have both contributed new words to English and changed the meanings of some existing words.

African Americans, many of whose ancestors were brought to the States as slaves hundreds of years ago, have introduced a number of words to English from languages that they spoke in their native countries. The common English word *OK* is used around the world today, but it was not always part of English vocabulary. One theory is that slaves in America used a phrase in their own language that sounded like *OK* to mean 'all right'. Americans heard the phrase and started using it. Today, almost everyone in the world uses *OK* to mean 'all right'. Another good example of a 'new' word is the word *jazz*. African American musicians living in the United States began playing jazz music in the city of New Orleans, and they used the word *jass* or *jazz* to describe the music and certain kinds of dancing. No one is sure where the word originally came from, but as jazz music became more and more popular, the word *jazz* became a common English word.

The meanings of words sometimes change over time. The word *cool* is a good example. *Cool* has been used in English for a long time to describe a temperature that is 'not warm but not too cold' or to describe a person who is 'calm or unemotional'. However, an additional meaning was given to the word *cool* in the past 100 years. Just like the word *jazz*, African American musicians used the word *cool* to describe the music they were playing. For them, *cool* meant 'good'. As jazz music and other forms of music played by African American musicians became popular, more and more people started to use the word *cool* in conversation. Today, it is still a commonly used word, especially by younger people, to mean 'good' or 'great'. A word with the opposite meaning of *cool* is *square*. Square is, of course, a shape, but it also is used to describe a person who is not cool. This may be because a person who is too old-fashioned and not flexible is like a shape with four straight sides and four corners.

English owes some of its interesting and colourful vocabulary to African Americans. Existing ethnic groups in the United States as well as new immigrants will surely continue to bring new words to English and give fresh meanings to existing words. Who knows what the 'cool' words of tomorrow will be?

**The structure of an essay**

Part 1 – introduction: explains the topic with general ideas, gives the main idea in the thesis statement

Part 2 – main body: supports/explains the thesis statement (may be one or more paragraphs)

Part 3 – conclusion: summarizes/restates the thesis and the supporting idea of the essay

**A thesis statement** = a sentence that tells the main idea of the whole essay, usually near the end of the first paragraph

- gives the author's opinion or states an important idea about the topic
- should not be a sentence that only gives a fact about the topic
- should not state two sides of an argument equally

**2. Underline the thesis statement in this introductory paragraph.**

*Taoism is an ancient philosophy from Asia that places great importance on the natural world. Taoists believe that spirit can be found in every person or thing, living or non-living. For the Taoist, even a mountain or a stone contains spirit. Lao Tsu, a Taoist writer and philosopher, said, 'People follow earth. Earth follows heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. The Tao follows what is natural'. For thousands of years in China and other Asian countries, gardens have been an important way to create a place where people can feel the spirit of the natural world. Creating a Taoist garden is an art. No two Taoist gardens are exactly alike, but all Taoist gardens include four essential elements: water, mountains, buildings and bridges.*

**3. Which statements are strong thesis statements?**

- a. .... The top government official in my country is the prime minister.
- b. .... Some people prefer digital cameras, while others like traditional cameras.
- c. .... India became an independent country in 1947.
- d. .... To be a successful student, good study habits are more important than intelligence.
- e. .... There are several advantages of owning a car, but there are also many disadvantages.
- f. .... Half of the families in my country own a house.
- g. .... Using public transport would be one of the best ways to solve the traffic and pollution problems in cities around the world.
- h. .... While travelling, staying in a hotel offers more comfort, but sleeping in a tent is less expensive.
- i. .... Classical music concerts are very popular in my country.
- j. .... In order to create a successful advertisement, it is necessary to consider three issues: who should be targeted, where the advert should be placed, and what type of advert should be made.

**4. Write two more sentences, adding an explanation or reason to each opinion.**

- a) I hardly ever read a newspaper.
- b) The government should ban cars from the city centre.