Micro-essays

A micro-essay states, in a very short compass, a person’s thesis, what reasons are given to support the thesis, and how those reasons support the thesis. So you need to ask, upon listening to someone’s presentation, or reading an essay, article, or book,

- What conclusions are drawn about the issues or problems under discussion?
- What arguments are presented for these conclusions?
- How do these arguments support the conclusions drawn?

Your aim is to understand the conclusion and structure of another’s arguments and, by expressing them in your own words, internalize them and so make them your own.

Micro-essays are exercises in clarity and economy of expression. So a micro-essay must fit on one side of an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper without font or margin abuse. Single-spacing is permitted.

Micro-essays are also exercises in summarizing and writing. As summaries, they must be accurate, complete, and concise in capturing the conclusion and arguments of the presentation or reading. As compositions, they must be so organized that a reader who fails to understand a sentence or phrase will be able to continue and grasp the whole. The spelling and grammar must be correct. Otherwise someone reading your essay will need to stop to double check to be sure of what is being said. Anything that slows down a reader makes comprehension more difficult and is an impediment to clarity.

Sketch out your essay only after you can answer the questions above satisfactorily. Then write a full draft, checking to be sure that you have answered all the questions completely and that it all makes sense.

Then revise. Your aim is to compress your essay without losing anything essential to stating what is being said and what evidence and reasons are provided. So omit needless verbiage.

Rewrite what does not sound right. Reading your essay aloud will help at this stage. If something does not sound right to you, it needs reworking.