How can I improve my essay and get a better grade?

First, check what you’re saying: the flow of the argument. Then check how you’re saying it: sentence structure, grammar and punctuation.
1 Check *what* you’ve written

What am I trying to say?

Am I answering the question?

Don’t worry about *how* you’re saying it yet . . .
How do I check the structure?

• Have I answered the question?
• Have I answered all parts of the question?
• Have I covered everything in my plan?
• Does my introduction match the body of essay?
• Are the sections in the best order?
• Does the essay flow well?
• Any repetition or irrelevant bits?
• Word count OK?
• Have I written a strong conclusion?
Check paragraph structure

• Has each one got a good topic sentence?
• Does every paragraph have Point, Evidence, Explanation?
• Short paragraph? Have I covered the point properly?
• Long paragraph? Are there two points here?
2 Check *how* you’ve written it

- Anything unclear? ➔ rewrite
- Any really long sentences? ➔ divide
- Any informal language? ➔ change
- Any ‘padding’ words? ➔ lose
- Grammar, punctuation, spelling ➔ correct
- Names and terms used consistently? ➔ check
Layout check

• Have I formatted the essay correctly?
• Italics for book titles etc
• Are my quotes, citations and references properly laid out? Check Skills Hub.

When you’re done, print out and read your essay again.
Writing

• Creating
• Including
• Presenting
• Recording
• Closely involved
• Immediate product
• Messy

Editing

• Critiquing
• Adding & removing
• Improving
• Reviewing
• Being objective
• Refined product
• Tidying up

http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/editing
4 Proofreading checklist

Ideally, leave your essay for at least a day before proofreading and print it out to proofread.

• Use the spell check on your computer – also use Oxford English Dictionary – online
• Use Word grammar check with caution
• Check for words spelt correctly but wrong meaning, eg ‘were’ instead of ‘where’
• Make sure you’ve used terms/names consistently
• Double-check punctuation, e.g. apostrophes
• Double-check formatting, e.g. quotes
Troubleshooting

There are ten questions you might ask yourself:

1. Put yourself in the position of the reader of your essay. As the reader of the essay, do you understand it and do you find it persuasive?

2. Does the essay look logical and well organised? Is there a paragraph shape to the essay, or is it just a jumbled mixture of very short and very long paragraphs?

3. Is there a logical step-by-step advance in your essay?

4. Does the essay set up the issue efficiently and effectively?

5. Does each paragraph arrive somewhere?

6. Does each paragraph advance the argument?

7. Is the essay written in grammatical and properly punctuated sentences?

8. Does each sentence connect logically with the sentence that precedes and the sentence that follows it?

9. Would the essay benefit from cutting words and/or polishing and refining the expression of your ideas?

10. Does the essay conform to the conventions of presentation that are taken as standard in your subject or in the department where you are studying?