

Essay

Essays are a tool that allows students to express their understanding of a topic in their own words. Whether written as in-class assignments, as homework or as test questions, essays require students to demonstrate critical thinking, writing and analysis skills.

An essay is a written composition where you express a specific idea and then support it with facts, statements, analysis and explanations. The basic format for an essay is known as the five paragraph essay; but an essay may have as many paragraphs as needed. A five paragraph essay contains five paragraphs.

Essays are brief, non-fiction compositions that describe, clarify, argue, or analyze a subject. Components of an essay include an [introduction](#), body, and [conclusion](#).

Components of an Essay

Introduction

The introduction is the first paragraph of the essay. It introduces the reader to the idea that the essay will address. It is also intended to capture the reader's attention and interest. The first sentence of the introduction paragraph should be as captivating and interesting as possible. The sentences that follow should clarify your opening statement. Conclude the introduction paragraph with your thesis statement.

Body

The body of your essay is where you explain, describe or argue the topic you've chosen. Each of the main ideas you included in your outline or diagram will become of the body paragraphs. If you wrote down four main ideas in your outline or diagram, then you'll have four body paragraphs.

Each paragraph will address one main idea that supports the thesis statement. The first paragraph of the body should put forth your strongest argument to support your thesis. Start the paragraph out by stating the supporting idea. Then follow up with additional sentences that contain supporting information, facts, evidence or examples – as shown in your diagram or outline. The concluding sentence should sum up what you've discussed in the paragraph.

The second body paragraph will follow the same format as the first body paragraph. This paragraph should put forth your second strongest argument supporting your thesis statement. Likewise, the third and fourth body paragraphs like the first and second, will contain your third and fourth strongest arguments supporting your thesis statement. Again, the last sentence of both the third and fourth paragraphs should sum up what you've discussed in each paragraph and indicate to the reader that the paragraph contains the final supporting argument.

Conclusion

The final paragraph of the essay provides the conclusion. This paragraph should restate your thesis statement using slightly different wording than employed in your introduction. The paragraph should summarize the arguments presented in the body of the essay. The last sentence in the conclusion paragraph should communicate that your essay has come to an end. Your concluding paragraph should communicate to the reader that you're confident that you've proven the idea as set forth in your thesis statement.

Essay Tips: 7 Tips on Writing an Effective Essay

Following this process is the easiest way to draft a successful essay, whatever its purpose might be.

According to Kathy Livingston's *Guide to Writing a Basic Essay*, there are seven steps to writing a successful essay:

1. Pick a topic.

You may have your topic assigned, or you may be given free reign to write on the subject of your choice. If you are given the topic, you should think about the type of paper that you want to produce. Should it be a general overview of the subject or a specific analysis? Narrow your focus if necessary.

If you have not been assigned a topic, you have a little more work to do. However, this opportunity also gives you the advantage to choose a subject that is interesting or relevant to you. First, define your purpose. Is your essay to inform or persuade?

Once you have determined the purpose, you will need to do some research on topics that you find intriguing. Think about your life. What is it that interests you?

Finally, evaluate your options. If your goal is to educate, choose a subject that you have already studied. If your goal is to persuade, choose a subject that you are passionate about. Whatever the mission of the essay, make sure that you are interested in your topic.

2. Prepare an outline or diagram of your ideas.

In order to write a successful essay, you must organize your thoughts. By taking what's already in your head and putting it to paper, you are able to see connections and links between ideas

more clearly. This structure serves as a foundation for your paper. Use either an outline or a diagram to jot down your ideas and organize them.

To create a diagram, write your topic in the middle of your page. Draw three to five lines branching off from this topic and write down your main ideas at the ends of these lines. Draw more lines off these main ideas and include any thoughts you may have on these ideas.

If you prefer to create an outline, write your topic at the top of the page. From there, begin to list your main ideas, leaving space under each one. In this space, make sure to list other smaller ideas that relate to each main idea. Doing this will allow you to see connections and will help you to write a more organized essay.

3. Write your thesis statement.

Now that you have chosen a topic and sorted your ideas into relevant categories, you must create a thesis statement. Your thesis statement tells the reader the point of your essay. Look at your outline or diagram. What are the main ideas?

Your thesis statement will have two parts. The first part states the topic, and the second part states the point of the essay. For instance, if you were writing about Bill Clinton and his impact on the United States, an appropriate thesis statement would be, “Bill Clinton has impacted the future of our country through his two consecutive terms as United States President.”

Another example of a thesis statement is this one for the “Winning Characteristics” Scholarship essay: “During my high school career, I have exhibited several of the “Winning Characteristics,” including Communication Skills, Leadership Skills and Organization Skills, through my involvement in Student Government, National Honor Society, and a part-time job at Macy’s Department Store.”

4. Write the body.

The body of your essay argues, explains or describes your topic. Each main idea that you wrote in your diagram or outline will become a separate section within the body of your essay.

Each body paragraph will have the same basic structure. Begin by writing one of your main ideas as the introductory sentence. Next, write each of your supporting ideas in sentence format, but leave three or four lines in between each point to come back and give detailed examples to back up your position. Fill in these spaces with relative information that will help link smaller ideas together.

5. Write the introduction.

Now that you have developed your thesis and the overall body of your essay, you must write an introduction. The introduction should attract the reader's attention and show the focus of your essay.

Begin with an attention grabber. You can use shocking information, dialogue, a story, a quote, or a simple summary of your topic. Whichever angle you choose, make sure that it ties in with your thesis statement, which will be included as the last sentence of your introduction.

6. Write the conclusion.

The conclusion brings closure of the topic and sums up your overall ideas while providing a final perspective on your topic. Your conclusion should consist of three to five strong sentences. Simply review your main points and provide reinforcement of your thesis.

7. Add the finishing touches.

After writing your conclusion, you might think that you have completed your essay. Wrong. Before you consider this a finished work, you must pay attention to all the small details.

Check the order of your paragraphs. Your strongest points should be the first and last paragraphs within the body, with the others falling in the middle. Also, make sure that your paragraph order makes sense. If your essay is describing a process, such as how to make a great chocolate cake, make sure that your paragraphs fall in the correct order.

Review the instructions for your essay, if applicable. Many teachers and scholarship forms follow different formats, and you must double check instructions to ensure that your essay is in the desired format.

Finally, review what you have written. Reread your paper and check to see if it makes sense. Make sure that sentence flow is smooth and add phrases to help connect thoughts or ideas. Check your essay for grammar and spelling mistakes. Congratulations! You have just written a great essay.

Planning essays

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Introduction

A good essay plan makes the most of your essay material by helping you to organize the content of the essay before you begin writing. This guide shows you the key steps in preparing and planning an essay effectively.

Using essay plans

Being organized before you begin writing your essay will make the writing process quicker and easier. Good preparation and planning gives you a clear overview of your material so you can see the best way to organize your points. This guide presents four main steps to planning your essay:

1. planning ahead;
2. analyzing the question;
3. selecting material;
4. organizing your material

Why an essay?

Essay writing gives you a chance to:

1. explore a specific subject area in depth;
2. select relevant material;

3. explain theories and concepts;
4. evaluate arguments;
5. express and support your own views and opinions.

Before you begin

Check your university or department's guidelines. There may be information about:

1. how long the essay should be;
2. what the deadline is;
3. relevant assessment criteria;
4. Requirements for presentation, referencing and bibliographies.

Planning ahead

Choose your title as soon as possible. The availability of journals, books and other resources may affect your choice of title. Plan ahead to ensure you can use the resources you need in time.

Make an action plan or 'to do list' for:

1. finding relevant resources;
2. reading and making notes from articles on short loan;
3. obtaining items through inter-library loan;
4. Using computer facilities.

Analyzing the question

Before you can begin to select material for your essay, you need to make sure that you understand the exact requirements of the question. The following method of title analysis encourages you to break the question down into clearly identifiable elements so that you can accurately see what the question requires.

Selecting the Material

Use your analysis of the question as a focus for the selection of materials. Begin with the basic reading:

1. lecture notes;
2. handouts;
3. Relevant chapters in core texts.

When you understand the basics you can then select more detailed and specific texts. This may be in the form of journal articles or texts referred to by your lecturer. You can also follow up useful references in handouts or core texts to widen your reading.

1. Be selective and identify relevant material for your essay.
2. Use the essay question as a focus for note taking.
3. Be sure to record only information that is directly relevant to your essay question. This will save you time and make your notes easier to organize in an essay plan.

Organizing your material

All essays need a structure that is logical and coherent. An essay plan gives you a quick way of trying out different structures. One way of making an essay plan is to list your main points in keywords and phrases and organize them under main headings. This gives you an overview of your points so you can decide which should be included and what the most logical sequence is for them.

Find your Preferred Style

Experiment with different styles of planning essays and use the method that you find most useful. Make as many essay plans as you need to find the best sequence for your material. By separating the planning stage from the writing stage you will be better able to write an essay that is well organized and clearly expressed.

Summary

1. Make an action plan or 'to do list' as early as possible.
2. Analyze the essay question before you begin making notes.
3. Be selective in your reading.
4. Record only information that is directly relevant to your essay question.
5. Use essay plans to create a clear and logical sequence for your material before you begin to write.

Types of Essay

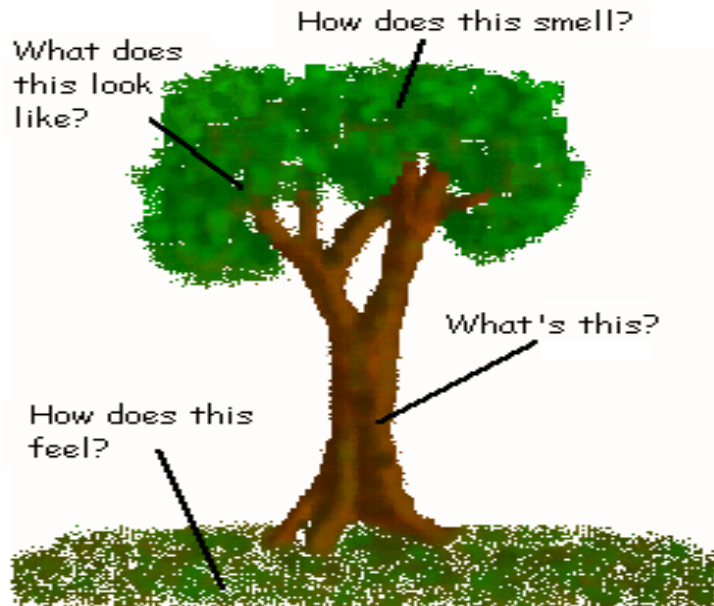
An *essay* is a short piece of writing that discusses, describes or analyzes one topic. It can discuss a subject directly or indirectly, seriously or humorously. It can describe personal opinions, or just report information. An essay can be written from any perspective, but essays are most commonly written in the first person (*I*), or third person (subjects that can be substituted with the *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they* pronouns).

There are many different kinds of essays. The following six are some of the most common ones:

Descriptive essays

The aim of descriptive essays is to provide a vivid picture of a person, location, object, event, or debate. It will offer details that will enable the reader to imagine the item described.

The descriptive essay provides details about how something looks feels, tastes, smells, makes one feel, or sounds. It can also describe what something is, or how something happened. These essays generally use a lot of sensory details. The essay could be a list-like description that provides point by point details. Or, it could function as a story, keeping the reader interested in the plot and theme of the event described. A writer might describe a person, place, object, or even memory of special significance. However, this type of essay is not description for description's sake. The descriptive essay strives to communicate a deeper meaning through the description. This kind of essay is mostly expressive writing – it usually involves all the five senses and encourages to add a lot of details.



Examples: A descriptive essay could describe . . .

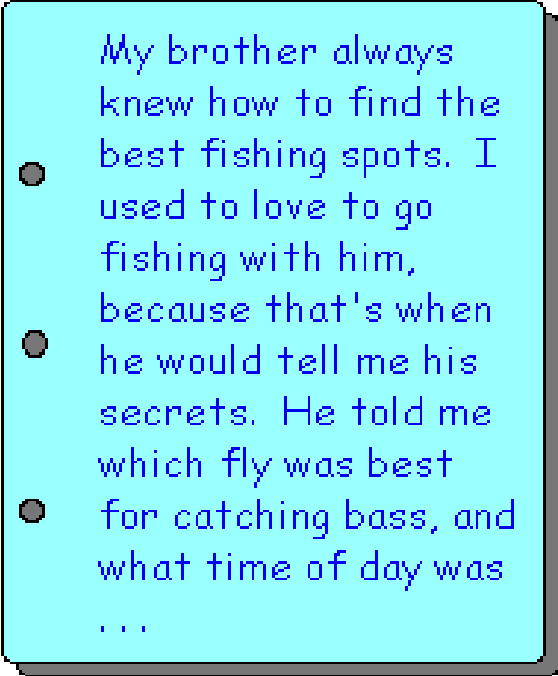
- * a tree in my backyard;
- * a visit to the children's ward of a hospital;

Narrative Essays:

In a narrative essay, the writer tells a story about a real-life experience. While telling a story may sound easy to do, the narrative essay challenges students to think and write about themselves.

When writing a narrative essay, writers should try to involve the reader by making the story as vivid as possible. The fact that narrative essays are usually written in the first person helps engage the reader. "I" sentences give readers a feeling of being part of the story. A well-crafted narrative essay will also build towards drawing a conclusion or making a personal statement.

The narrative essay tells a story. It can also be called a "short story." Generally the narrative essay is conversational in style, and tells of a personal experience.



My brother always knew how to find the best fishing spots. I used to love to go fishing with him, because that's when he would tell me his secrets. He told me which fly was best for catching bass, and what time of day was ...

Examples: A narrative essay could tell of . . .

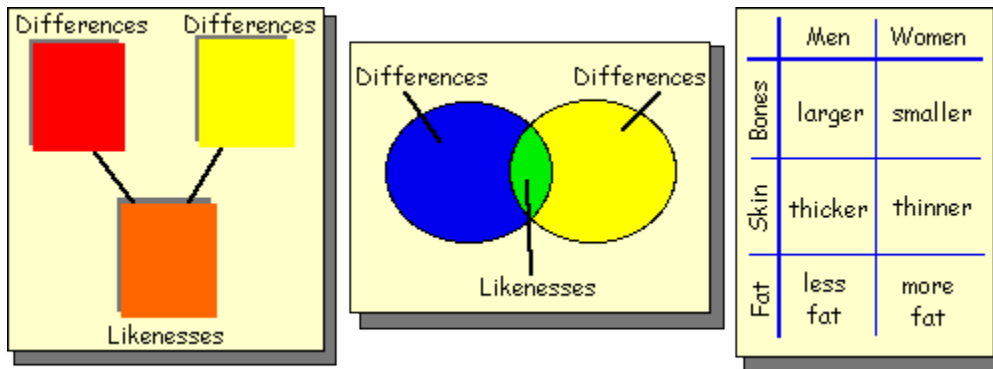
- * My brother's and my fishing trips;
- * A boring trip to the grocery store;

Compare and contrast essays

The aim of a compare and contrast essay is to develop the relationship between two or more things. The compare/contrast essay discusses the similarities and differences between two things, people, concepts, places, etc. The essay could be an unbiased discussion, or an attempt to convince the reader of the benefits of one thing, person, or concept. It could also be written simply to entertain the reader, or to arrive at an insight into human nature. The essay could discuss both similarities and differences, or it could just focus on one or the other. A *comparison essay* usually discusses the similarities between two things, while the *contrast essay* discusses the differences.

Examples: A compare/contrast essay may discuss . . .

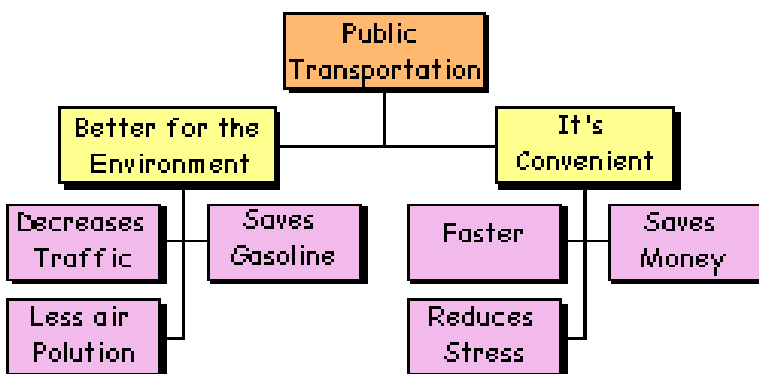
- * The likenesses and differences between two places, like New York City and Los Angeles;
- * The similarities and differences between two religions, like Christianity and Islam;



Argumentative essays

These types of essays, also known as persuasive essays, make a specific claim about a topic and then provide evidence and arguments to support the claim. The claim set forth in argumentative (persuasive) essays may be an opinion, an evaluation, an interpretation, cause-effect statement or a policy proposal. The purpose of argumentative essays is to convince or persuade the reader that a claim is valid. An argumentative essay is one that attempts to persuade the reader to the writer's point of view. The writer can either be serious or funny, but always tries to convince the reader of the validity of his or her opinion.

Why you should use public transportation:



Examples: An argumentative essay may persuade a reader that . . .

- * He or she should use public transportation instead of driving.
- * Cats are better than dogs.

- **Persuasive essays**

- In a persuasive essay, the writer tries to persuade the reader to accept an idea or agree with an opinion. The writer's purpose is to convince the reader that her or his point of view is a reasonable one. The persuasive essay should be written in a style that grabs and holds the reader's attention, and the writer's opinion should be backed up by strong supporting details.
- The goal of the persuasive essay is to convince the reader to accept the writer's point of view or recommendation. The writer must build a case using facts and logic, as well as examples, expert opinion, and sound reasoning.
- This is a type of essay involving discussion. Instead of giving informative facts and general view, your task here is to persuade your readers to accept your ideas. Writing this essay, you can manipulate readers' emotions, but your only tools must be facts and logic, not emotional pressure.

Expository Essays

- An expository essay is a specific kind of essay that involves investigating an idea, evaluating the evidence, presenting the idea, and supporting the presentation with an argument. Expository essays are usually written through comparison and contrast, definition, example, and the analysis of cause and effect.