

Write On!:

Essay Writing Workshop 2006

Your Name: _____

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Thesis Statement

A thesis statement:

- tests your ideas by distilling them into a sentence or two
- better organizes and develops your argument
- provides your reader with a "guide" to your argument

In general, your thesis statement will accomplish these goals if you think of the thesis as the answer to the question your paper explores.

1. A strong thesis takes some sort of stand.

Remember that your thesis needs to show your conclusions about a subject. For example, if you are writing a paper for a class on fitness, you might be asked to choose a popular weight-loss product to evaluate. Here are two thesis statements:

There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.

This is a weak thesis. First, it fails to take a stand. Second, the phrase "negative and positive" aspects" are vague.

Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.

This is a strong thesis because it takes a stand.

2. A strong thesis justifies discussion.

Your thesis should indicate the point of the discussion. If your assignment is to write a paper on kinship systems, using your own family as an example, you might come up with either of these two thesis statements:

My family is an extended family.

This is a weak thesis because it states an observation. Your reader won't be able to tell the point of the statement, and will probably stop reading.

While most American families would view consanguineal marriage as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.

This is a strong thesis because it shows how your experience contradicts a widely accepted view. A good strategy for creating a strong thesis is to show that the topic is controversial. Readers will be interested in reading the rest of the essay to see how you support your point.

3. A strong thesis expresses one main idea.

Readers need to be able to see that your paper has one main point. If your thesis expresses more than one idea, then you might confuse your readers about the subject of your paper. For example:

Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.

This is a weak thesis statement because the reader can't decide whether the paper is about marketing on the Internet or web pages. To revise the thesis, the relationship between the two ideas needs to become clearer. One way to revise the thesis would be to write:

Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.

This is a strong thesis because it shows that the two ideas are related. Hint: a great many clear and engaging thesis statements contain words like "because," "since," "so," "although," "unless," and "however."

4. A strong thesis statement is specific.

A thesis statement should show exactly what your paper will be about, and will help you keep your paper to a manageable topic. For example, if you write a paper on hunger, you might say:

World hunger has many causes and effects.

This is a weak thesis statement for two major reasons. First, "world hunger" can't be discussed thoroughly in five or ten pages. Second, "many causes and effects" is vague. You should be able to identify specific causes and effects. A revised thesis might look like this:

Hunger persists in Appalachia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.

This is a strong thesis because it narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic and it also identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger.

The Bottom Line:

The thesis is the foundation upon which your entire essay rests. It must be clear, concise, coherent and yet expansive enough to permit a thorough investigation. Spend a good deal of time choosing each word and make sure your thesis states what your essay explores.

Introduction

The introduction should start with a general discussion of your subject and lead to a very specific statement of your main point, or thesis. Sometimes an essay begins with a "grabber," such as a challenging claim, or surprising story to catch a reader's attention. The thesis should tell in one (or at most two) sentence(s), what your overall point or argument is, and briefly, what your main body paragraphs will be about.

For example, in an essay about the importance of airbags in cars, the introduction might start with some information about car accidents and survival rates. It might also have a grabber about someone who survived a terrible accident because of an airbag. The thesis would briefly state the main reasons for recommending airbags, and each reason would be discussed in the main body of the essay.

The introduction should be designed to attract the reader's attention and give him/her an idea of the essay's focus.

1. Begin with an attention grabber. The attention grabber you use is up to you, but here are some ideas:
 - **Startling information**
This information must be true and verifiable, and it doesn't need to be totally new to your readers. It could simply be a pertinent fact that explicitly illustrates the point you wish to make.
If you use a piece of startling information, follow it with a sentence or two of elaboration.
 - **Anecdote**
An anecdote is a story that illustrates a point. Be sure your anecdote is short, to the point, and relevant to your topic. This can be a very effective opener for your essay, but use it carefully.
 - **Dialogue**
An appropriate dialogue does not have to identify the speakers, but the reader must understand the point you are trying to convey. Use only two or three exchanges between speakers to make your point.
Follow dialogue with a sentence or two of elaboration.
 - **Summary Information**
A few sentences explaining your topic in general terms can lead the reader gently to your thesis. Each sentence should become gradually more specific, until you reach your thesis.
2. If the attention grabber was only a sentence or two, add one or two more sentences that will lead the reader from your opening to your thesis statement.
3. Finish the paragraph with your thesis statement.

The Bottom Line:

Remember the old cliché: you only get one chance to make a first impression. Your introduction must accomplish two goals: 1. clearly state your essay's purpose and 2. engage the reader. Consider writing your introduction last.

Body

The body paragraphs will explain your essay's topic. Each of the main ideas that you listed in your outline will become a paragraph in your essay. If your outline contained three main ideas, you will usually have three body paragraphs. Start by writing down one of your main ideas, in sentence form.

If your essay topic is a new university in your hometown, one of your main ideas may be "population growth of town" you might say this:

The new university will cause a boom in the population of Ancaster.

Build on your paragraph by including each of the supporting ideas from your outline. In the body of the essay, all the preparation up to this point comes to fruition. The topic you have chosen must now be explained, described, or argued.

Each body paragraph will have the same basic structure: Point, Proof, Explanation (PPE)

1. **Point:** Start by writing down one of your main ideas, in sentence form. If your main idea is "reduces freeway congestion," you might say this: Public transportation reduces freeway congestion.
2. **Proof:** Next, write down each of your supporting points for that main idea, but leave four or five lines in between each point.
3. **Explanation:** In the space under each point, write down some elaboration for that point. Elaboration can be further description or explanation or discussion.

Supporting Point

Commuters appreciate the cost savings of taking public transportation rather than driving.

Elaboration

Less driving time means less maintenance expense, such as oil changes.

Of course, less driving time means savings on gasoline as well. In many cases, these savings amount to more than the cost of riding public transportation.

Each main body paragraph will focus on a single idea, reason, or example that supports your thesis. Each paragraph will have a clear topic sentence (a mini thesis that states the main idea of the paragraph). You should try to use details and specific examples to make your ideas clear and convincing.

The Bottom Line:

The body paragraphs flesh out your essay's thesis – always remember they are interconnected. Consider using alternative formatting and stylistic choices: subheadings, whole essay metaphors and rhetorical devices are just some examples.

Conclusion

The conclusion serves to give the reader closure, summing up the essay's points or providing a final viewpoint about the topic.

A conclusion should

- stress the importance of the thesis statement,
- give the essay a sense of completeness, and
- leave a final impression on the reader.

Suggestions

Answer the question "So What?"

- Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.

Synthesize, don't summarize

- Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.

Redirect your readers

- Give your reader something to think about, perhaps a way to use your paper in the "real" world. If your introduction went from general to specific, make your conclusion go from specific to general. Think globally.

Create a new meaning

- You don't have to give new information to create a new meaning. By demonstrating how your ideas work together, you can create a new picture. Often the sum of the paper is worth more than its parts.

Strategies

- **Echoing the introduction:** Echoing your introduction can be a good strategy if it is meant to bring the reader full-circle. If you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay was helpful in creating a new understanding.

Example

Introduction

From the parking lot, I could see the towers of the castle of the Magic Kingdom standing stately against the blue sky. To the right, the tall peak of The Matterhorn rose even higher. From the left, I could hear the jungle sounds of Adventureland. As I entered the gate, Main Street stretched before me with its quaint shops evoking an old-fashioned small town so charming it could never have existed. I was entranced. Disneyland may have been built for children, but it brings out the child in adults.

Conclusion

I thought I would spend a few hours at Disneyland, but here I was at 1:00 A.M., closing time, leaving the front gates with the now dark towers of the Magic Kingdom behind me. I could see tired children, toddling along and struggling to keep their eyes open as best they could. Others slept in their parents' arms as we waited for the parking lot tram that

would take us to our cars. My forty-year-old feet ached, and I felt a bit sad to think that in a couple of days I would be leaving California, my vacation over, to go back to my desk. But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.

- **Challenging the reader:** By issuing a challenge to your readers, you are helping them to redirect the information in the paper, and they may apply it to their own lives.

Example

Though serving on a jury is not only a civic responsibility but also an interesting experience, many people still view jury duty as a chore that interrupts their jobs and the routine of their daily lives. However, juries are part of America's attempt to be a free and just society. Thus, jury duty challenges us to be interested and responsible citizens.

- **Looking to the future:** Looking to the future can emphasize the importance of your paper or redirect the readers' thought process. It may help them apply the new information to their lives or see things more globally.

Example

Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. If higher-paying careers continue to attract the best and the brightest students, there will not only be a shortage of teachers, but the teachers available may not have the best qualifications. Our youth will suffer. And when youth suffers, the future suffers.

- **Posing questions:** Posing questions, either to your readers or in general, may help your readers gain a new perspective on the topic, which they may not have held before reading your conclusion. It may also bring your main ideas together to create a new meaning.

Example

Campaign advertisements should help us understand the candidate's qualifications and positions on the issues. Instead, most tell us what a boob or knave the opposing candidate is, or they present general images of the candidate as a family person or God-fearing Canadian. Do such advertisements contribute to creating an informed electorate or a people who choose political leaders the same way they choose soft drinks and soap?

The Bottom Line:

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of an essay to write, and many writers feel that they have nothing left to say after having written the paper. A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best. Your conclusion should be the best part of your paper.

5-paragraph Essay

Introductory paragraph

The introductory paragraph should also include the thesis statement, a kind of mini-outline for the essay. This is where the writer grabs the reader's attention. It tells the reader what the paper is about. The last sentence of this paragraph must also include a transitional "hook" which moves the reader to the first paragraph of the body of the essay.

Body - First paragraph

The first paragraph of the body should include the strongest argument, most significant example, cleverest illustration, or an obvious beginning point. The first sentence should contain the "reverse hook" which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the introductory paragraph. The subject for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This subject should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. The last sentence in this paragraph should include a transitional hook to tie into the second paragraph of the body.

Body - Second paragraph

The second paragraph of the body should include the second strongest argument, second most significant example, second cleverest illustration, or an obvious follow up the first paragraph in the body. The first sentence of this paragraph should contain the reverse hook, which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the first paragraph of the body. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. The last sentence in this paragraph should include a transitional hook to tie into the third paragraph of the body.

Body - Third paragraph

The third paragraph of the body should include the weakest argument, weakest example, weakest illustration, or an obvious follow up to the second paragraph in the body. The first sentence of this paragraph should contain the reverse hook, which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the second paragraph. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence. This topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. The last sentence in this paragraph should include a transitional concluding hook that signals the reader that this is the final major point being made in this essay. This hook also leads into the concluding paragraph.

Concluding paragraph

The fifth paragraph is the summary paragraph. It is important to restate the thesis and three supporting ideas in an original and powerful way as this is the last chance the writer has to convince the reader of the validity of the information presented.

This paragraph should include the following:

1. an allusion to the pattern used in the introductory paragraph,
2. a restatement of the thesis statement, using some of the original language or language that "echoes" the original language. (The restatement, however, must not be a duplicate thesis statement.)
3. a summary of the three main points from the body of the essay.
4. a final statement that gives the reader signals that the discussion has come to an end. (This final statement may be a "call to action" in a persuasive essay.)

The Bottom Line:

Pros:

- Most familiar style – easy to fit ideas into the framework
- Clear and concise organization
- Good for essays 1200 words or less

Cons:

- Can be deemed as boring or immature in later years
- Little opportunity for stylistic variety
- Too compact for essays exceeding 1500 words

Formatting Essays

MLA – Modern Languages Associations

The MLA Style Guide can be freely downloaded from
<http://fcinternet.hwdsb.on.ca/~ancasterweb/dept/506english/englishwelcome>

Margins

Leave 2.5 cm (one inch) margins on all four sides of the page.

Indentation

Indent the first word of a paragraph give spaces (one tab stop) from the left margin. Indent a block quotation ten spaces (two tabs) from the left margin as well. See below for instructions on indenting entries on the Works Cited page.

Spacing

Unless otherwise stated, most essays are double spaced. This does not include block quotations (single spaced).

Pagination

Number all pages of the essay, including the first page, consecutively. Do not number the title page. Number the Works Cited page. Number the pages in the upper right hand corner, 1.25 cm (one-half inch) from the top. All page numbers are preceded by the last name of the student, e.g.

Smith 3

Works Cited or Works Consulted or Works Cited and Consulted

This is a separate page appearing at the end of the essay. The *Works Cited* page must be correctly formatted. Margins and tab stops are consistent with those of the body of the essay. The page is numbered. The title is centred in the same size font as the rest of the text. There is no bold, underline, or italics used. Double-space uniformly throughout the page, both within and between entries; do not triple space between entries. The first line of each entry starts at the left margin; subsequent lines of the same entry are indented five spaces (one tab stop). Entries are ordered alphabetically according to the first letter of the entry, and they are not numbered. Each item of information in an entry – author, title, editor, publication information, etc. – is followed by a period and two spaces.

Appendix

An appendix, which contains detailed evidence to support the discussion of a report, follows the *Works Cited* page. Appendices always appear in the order in which they are first referred to in the report. Each appendix is assigned an identifying letter (e.g. appendix A). Two appendices cannot appear together on the same page.

Bottom Line:

Making changes to the required formatting is easy to notice when the teacher is marking dozens of paper. Follow the guidelines and see the teacher is word limits are an issue.

Improving Essays

The following sections deal with ways to improve your essay's style, flow, expression, mechanics and argument. However, please remember that your individual classroom teacher sets the expectations. The following ideas are suggestions only!

1. Organizing the Paragraph

Make sure that each sentence flows logically. The traditional way to do this when writing an essay is to use connecting words or phrases, often conjunctions (linking words) such as "although", "because", "so", "moreover", or "therefore". In this way, you build your logic and arguments. These connections come in simple and complex forms.

Simple connections

also, although, and, as, because, but, despite, first, however, if, next, now, second, then, therefore, third, until

Although we sometimes need words to show the logic and connection between sentences and paragraphs, many connecting words make your style more complex and academic than necessary.

Complex connections

accordingly, as you are aware, consequently, for this reason, furthermore, hence, in addition, inasmuch as, likewise, more specifically, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless

Use the connections to make sure your reader can follow the flow of information, ideas and arguments within sentences, from sentence to sentence and between paragraphs. But don't let too many connections creep into your writing and keep to the simple ones recommended.

2. Using Active Verbs

Using active verbs is essential if you want to write with a direct authoritative style. Instead of using the impersonal passive verbs and third person viewpoint, you should write with strong, active verbs. Almost every authority on writing encourages you to use active verbs.

Passive:

An improvement in quality has been made leading to the decision being taken to raise the standard test so a higher mark means the same success rate being accepted. (29 words)

Active:

As quality improved, the standard test rose, leading to a higher standard mark to gain the same acceptable success rate. (20 words)

Notice the passive example sounds academic but takes extra nine words to say the same information. It is no more objective than the alternative with active verbs. Although we naturally speak with active verbs, even when discussing academic subjects, the traditional academic writing style litters writing with unnecessary passive verbs. Any sentence can be either active or passive. It is your choice as the author.

Whatever the subject of the essay, you can write with active verbs to make your writing style more direct, clear and forceful. If there's one piece of advice on writing style you should follow, it's to use active verbs throughout your essays.

3. Titles and Title Pages

A title can have many purposes: provide the reader with insight into the topic, engage interest, spark curiosity, arouse, challenge, critique and/or entertain. Spend a few moments and choose an interesting title. One popular format is a whimsical or imaginative title followed by a more informative subtitle.

The Lone Tapestry:

An Examination of Shakespeare's Unconventional Uses of Isolation within Hamlet

Even if it's not a stated requirement, it's a good idea to have a title page on your essay. It looks good, and serves as identification should the essay be misplaced. A title page should include the essay's title (centred and large) and (in the lower, right hand corner) your name, the date, the teacher's name and the class code.

4. Proofreading

Proofreading is essential for quality essay writing. Unfortunately, many students opt not to proofread because of time limitations, misconceptions, other assignments or just plain laziness. Plan to proofread your work *at least* once before submission. The time you spend will be paid back in terms of improved understanding, style and grades.

Strategies:

- 1: Run a spell check
- 2: Print out a hard copy and read it out loud . Your eyes and ears will catch on paper what they overlook on a monitor.
- 3: Now make your corrections and print out another hard copy and examine it for thesis-based improvements: accuracy, organization and argument changes. Does your essay reflect and support your thesis? Make these changes.
- 4: Make those changes. Now print out and review your essay for stylistic changes - flow, voice, engagement and audience.
- 4: Print out a final hard copy and give it to a trusted proof reader. Discuss any changes they might suggest. Just because they suggest something doesn't mean you have to accept it!
- 5: Leave the essay alone for 2-4 days. Then read it over again with a fresh perspective. Distancing yourself will allow you to notice more improvements.

5. Stylistic Improvements

- Avoid Hyperbole – exaggeration – if you need to exaggerate, your evidence/research/position/thesis is not strong enough
- Avoid Libel – declaring or implying false statements
- Avoid Colloquialisms – informal language (except in informal essays)
- Avoid Using The Same Word Repeatedly – makes for boring writing
- Avoid Using “Empty” Words – ie. very, etc, it – be specific and clear
- Avoid Being Too Verbose – never use a word simply to sound better; use a word because it makes the idea, argument or statement clearer or more engaging – if you don’t know the word’s meaning don’t use the word!
- Contradiction and Argument - showing that you're aware of a conflicting viewpoint amongst sources is a good thing, and showing that you can deal with it within the essay is the mark of a good writer
- Extra Research – make sure your research is varied and scholarly
- Graphics and Tables – visuals and graphic organizers can enhance understanding
- Use of Humour, Puns, and Clever Twists – use to add flavour and colour but avoid overusing; as Gertrude says to Polonius: “More matter with less art.”
- Find Your Voice – even with formal writing you can express yourself through your word choices, sentence structure and punctuation
- I vs. We vs. One – First person (I) has become more accepted in formal writing (though not everyone agrees with this!!). However, “I” makes a personal connection between you and the subject matter (in the reader’s mind). If you want to distance yourself, use third person “one” (singular) or “we” (plural). “We” can work to get the reader to side with the author, but adds an emotional connection that can backfire if the reader remains hostile or unconvinced.

6. Citations / Quoting

Referencing other sources is important in ensuring your points are supported. Quality, professional, relevant citations also work to establish your argument’s authority and explain to the reader from where and whom you are receiving your information.

Quotations can be either in-essay or block. In-essay quotations are generally 3 lines of essay text or less whereas block quotations are 3 lines of essay text or more. Block quotations have each line indented, do not have quotation marks and are single spaced. Be wary of using block quotations too often as they eat up valuable essay space and can give that impression to the reader.

For any quotations, try to integrate the quotation into your writing.

Ie.: Hamlet’s wit can be seen when he says “a little more than kin, a little less than kind”.

7. Essay Time Breakdown (suggestion only)

<u>Topic/Questions</u>	<u>Research</u>	<u>Thesis</u>	<u>Outline</u>	<u>Rough Draft</u>	<u>Revision</u>
Understand it and Mind Map	Organizational log	Revise, revise, revise	Use Smart Ideas	Label criteria on research	Do not skip!!
5%	30%	20%	10%	20%	15%

Argumentative Essay

The function of an argumentative essay is to show that your assertion (opinion, theory, hypothesis) about some phenomenon or phenomena is correct or more truthful than others'. The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that if one simply has an opinion, one can argue it successfully, and these folks are always surprised when others don't agree with them because their logic seems so correct. Argumentative writing is the act of forming reasons, making inductions, drawing conclusions, and applying them to the case in discussion; the operation of inferring propositions, not known or admitted as true, from facts or principles known, admitted, or proved to be true. It clearly explains the process of your reasoning from the known or assumed to the unknown. Without doing this you do not have an argument, you have only an assertion, an essay that is just your unsubstantiated opinion.

Notice that you do not have to completely prove your point; you only have to convince reasonable readers that your argument or position has merit; i.e., that it is somehow more accurate and complete than competing arguments.

Argumentative essays are often organized in the following manner:

1. They begin with a statement of your assertion, its timeliness, significance, and relevance in relation to some phenomenon.
2. They review critically the literature about that phenomenon.
3. They illustrate how your assertion is "better" (simpler or more explanatory) than others, including improved (i.e., more reliable or valid) methods that you used to accumulate the data (case) to be explained.

When planning a persuasive essay, follow these steps

1. Choose your position. Which side of the issue or problem are you going to write about, and what solution will you offer? Know the purpose of your essay.
2. Analyze your audience. Decide if your audience agrees with you, is neutral, or disagrees with your position.
3. Research your topic. A persuasive essay must provide specific and convincing evidence. Often it is necessary to go beyond your own knowledge and experience. You might need to go to the library or interview people who are experts on your topic.
4. Structure your essay. Figure out what evidence you will include and in what order you will present the evidence. Remember to consider your purpose, your audience, and your topic.

The following criteria are essential to produce an effective argument

- Be well informed about your topic. To add to your knowledge of a topic, read thoroughly about it, using legitimate sources. Take notes.

- Test your thesis. Your thesis, i.e., argument, must have two sides. It must be debatable. If you can write down a thesis statement directly opposing your own, you will ensure that your own argument is debatable.
- Disprove the opposing argument. Understand the opposite viewpoint of your position and then counter it by providing contrasting evidence or by finding mistakes and inconsistencies in the logic of the opposing argument.
- Support your position with evidence. Remember that your evidence must appeal to reason.

The following are different ways to support your argument:

Facts - A powerful means of convincing, facts can come from your reading, observation, or personal experience.

Note: Do not confuse facts with truths. A "truth" is an idea believed by many people, but it cannot be proven.

Statistics - These can provide excellent support. Be sure your statistics come from responsible sources. Always cite your sources.

Quotes - Direct quotes from leading experts that support your position are invaluable.

Examples - Examples enhance your meaning and make your ideas concrete. They are the proof.

Finally revise and edit, and be sure to apply the critical process to your argument to be certain you have not committed any errors in reasoning or integrated any fallacies for which you would criticize some other writer.

Additionally, you will want to find out how your readers will object to your argument. Will they say that you have used imprecise concepts? Have you erred in collecting data? Your argument is only as strong as the objections to it. If you cannot refute or discount an objection, then you need to rethink and revise your position.

The Bottom Line:

An argumentative essay's strength lies in two areas: a clear thesis and varied evidence. The best way to test your essay is by having people who agree, disagree and are neutral about your topic read it. If they are convinced, then your essay is probably doing its job.

Comparison Essay

To write a comparison or contrast essay that is easy to follow, first decide what the similarities or differences are by writing lists on scrap paper. Which are more significant, the similarities or the differences? Plan to discuss the less significant first, followed by the more significant. It is much easier to discuss **ONLY** the similarities or **ONLY** the differences, but you can also do both.

Then for organizing your essay, choose one of the plans described below whichever best fits your list. Finally, and this is important, what main point (thesis) might you make in the essay about the two people/things being compared? Do not begin writing until you have a point that the similarities or differences you want to use help to prove. Your point should help shape the rest of what you say: For example, if you see that one of your similarities or differences is unrelated to the point, throw it out and think of one that is related. Or revise your point. Be sure this main point is clearly and prominently expressed somewhere in the essay.

Plan A: Use Plan A if you have many small similarities and/or differences. After your introduction, say everything you want to say about the first work or character, and then go on in the second half of the essay to say everything about the second work or character, comparing or contrasting each item in the second with the same item in the first. In this format, all the comparing or contrasting, except for the statement of your main point, which you may want to put in the beginning, goes on in the **SECOND HALF** of the piece.

Plan B: Use Plan B if you have only a few, larger similarities or differences. After your introduction, in the next paragraph discuss one similarity or difference in **BOTH** works or characters, and then move on in the next paragraph to the second similarity or difference in both, then the third, and so forth, until you're done. If you are doing both similarities and differences, juggle them on scrap paper so that in each part you put the less important first ("X and Y are both alike in their social positions . . ."), followed by the more important ("but X is much more aware of the dangers of his position than is Y"). In this format, the comparing or contrasting goes on in **EACH** of the middle parts.

The following outline may be helpful; however, do not be limited by it.

- I. Intro. with thesis
- II. 1st similarity
 - A. 1st work
 - B. 2nd work
- III. 2nd similarity
 - A. 1st work
 - B. 2nd work
- IV. 1st difference
 - A. 1st work
 - B. 2nd work
- V. 2nd difference

- A. 1st work
 - B. 2nd work
- VI. Conclusion

The Bottom Line:

Comparison essays can inform or persuade; make sure you know what you want to achieve before you write it. Basic comparison essays compare and contrast generally; advanced comparison essays compare and contrast using a specific focus or argument (contained within the thesis).

Literary Essay

- **Introduction:** Be brief; give some suggestion of the direction you intend to take in your essay. Indicate the aspects of the book you intend to deal with.
- **Paragraphing:** In your plan you should identify very clearly around six distinct points you intend to make and the specific parts of the text that you intend to examine in some detail. When writing your essay you should devote one or two paragraphs to each point. Try to make smooth links between paragraphs.
- **Evidence:** When you make a point - you must prove it. Just as a lawyer in court must produce evidence to support his case, so you must produce evidence to prove the comments you make about characters, relationships, themes, style etc. When you make a point, refer to the text. Give an example to support what you say. Better still, use a quote.

Quotes: Remember to lay out quotes correctly, depending on whether they are integrated or block quotations. It is important to lay out quotes correctly because it shows you are professional about what you are doing. Keep them short - no more than three or four lines each unless absolutely necessary.

- **Selection:** Avoid the trap of just re-telling the story. The important thing is to be selective in the way you use the text. Only refer to those parts of the book that help you to answer the question.
- **Answer the question:** it sounds obvious, but it's so easy to forget the question and go off at a tangent. When you have finished a paragraph read it through and ask yourself. "How does this contribute to answering the question?" If it doesn't, change it so that it does address the question directly.
- **Conclusion:** At the end, try to draw all the strands of your various points together. This should be the part of your essay, which answers the question most directly and forcefully.
- **Style:** Keep it formal. Try to avoid making it chatty. If you imagine you are a lawyer in court trying to prove your point of view about a book, that might help to set the right tone.
- **Be creative:** Remember you do not have to agree with other people's points of view about literature. If your ideas are original or different, so long as you develop them clearly, use evidence intelligently and argue persuasively, your point of view will be respected. We want literature to touch you personally and it will often affect different people in different ways. Be creative.

Novel essay

Theme, plot, setting, characters, style; fair divisions for any essay. Order and emphasis will depend on bias of question.

Drama essay

Theme, plot, setting, characters, technique.

If the question is about technique, talk about how it affects the others-one per paragraph.

Poetry essay

Theme, style, technique (include such aspects as alliteration, assonance, versification, rhyme, rhythm, where appropriate).

In General, Avoid the Swamp of Published Criticism

Do not try to sift through the many hundreds of pounds of critical inquiry about the scene or the play. Teachers are most interested in what you bring to the plays, not the ways in which you try to spew back your versions of what "experts" have written to get tenure or score points with other tweed-jacketed types. Honest confusion and honest mistaking are part of the learning process, so don't try to seek out some other "authority" for your proof.

The Bottom Line:

Always remember your purpose for writing a literary essay; do not just recount the plot or give character descriptions. You are not telling a story – you are analyzing one. Unless told otherwise, assume your reader has read the novel, play or poem you are writing about.

Expository Essay

The purpose of an expository essay is to present, completely and fairly, other people's views or to report about an event or a situation. Expository writing, or exposition, presents a subject in detail, apart from criticism, argument, or development; i.e., the writer elucidates a subject by analyzing it. Such writing is discourse designed to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand. Exposition usually proceeds by the orderly analysis of parts and the use of familiar illustrations or analogies.

Such an analysis requires

1. reading with understanding the ideas developed in an article by clearly stating another's thesis, outlining the facts used by the author to support that thesis, and the "values" underlying the ideas
2. putting what is read into a larger context by relating another's article or book to other work in the field
3. clearly and effectively communicating this information to a defined audience. In other words, you must write clearly and fully enough for your readers to know how you have arrived at your analyses and conclusions. They should never have to guess what you mean; give your readers everything they need to know to follow your reasoning

This practice is not "just for students." Accurate analysis is a fundamental professional activity in almost all careers. Like any other fundamental skill, it must be constantly practiced in order to maintain and improve it. Other goals, such as learning "time management" and note-taking, are also developed by this activity.

Do not be afraid to revise your essay! In fact, you will probably want to change it at least once; this is called "thinking through a 'problem'" or "learning."

The revisions will consist of the following:

1. finding the precise words to express your thoughts
2. correcting typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors
3. making sure that your paragraphs are "tight" and sequenced properly
4. making sure that the transition ("segue") from one major topic to another makes sense

Expository essays also have a distinct format.

The thesis statement must be defined and narrow enough to be supported within the essay.

- Each supporting paragraph must have a distinct controlling topic and all other sentences must factually relate directly to it. The transition words or phrases are important as they help the reader follow along and reinforce the logic.

- Finally, the conclusion paragraph should originally restate the thesis and the main supporting ideas. Finish with the statement that reinforces your position in a meaningful and memorable way.
- Never introduce new material in the conclusion.

The Bottom Line:

An expository essay's purpose is to explain something so that others can understand it. Make sure you know who your audience is before writing. A good test is to have someone unfamiliar with the topic read your essay – if they are still confused have them identify their questions and then decide whether the essay needs to be revised.

Informal Essay

The informal essay is written mainly for enjoyment. This is not to say that it cannot be informative or persuasive; however, it is less a formal statement than a relaxed expression of opinion, observation, humor or pleasure. A good informal essay has a relaxed style but retains a strong structure, though that structure may be less rigid than in a formal paper.

The informal essay tends to be more personal than the formal, even though both may express subjective opinions. In a formal essay the writer is a silent presence behind the words, while in an informal essay the writer is speaking directly to the reader in a conversational style. If you are writing informally, try to maintain a sense of your own personality. Do not worry about sounding academic, but avoid sloppiness.

Newspapers almost always contain informal essays. Paragraphs are short, as is normal in a newspaper with its narrow columns, and the tone is more conversational than would be appropriate for a formal essay. There is a clear statement of the thesis, the concrete illustrations in the body of the essay, and the way the conclusion leads to a more general statement of what is perhaps to come in the future.

The Bottom Line:

Informal essays are excellent places to explore stylistic variation, formatting changes and utilize rhetorical devices. Although written for enjoyment, always bear in mind who your audience will be (what a twelve year old finds enjoyable and what a forty year old finds enjoyable can be quite different!). A good test is to have someone read your essay and answer the question: "did you like it?"

Classification Essay

What is a Classification Essay?

In a classification essay, a writer organizes, or sorts, things into categories.

Three Steps to Effective Classification:

1. Sort things into useful categories.
2. Make sure all the categories follow a single organizing principle.
3. Give examples that fit into each category.

Finding Categories

This is a key step in writing a classification essay. To classify, or sort, things in a logical way, find the categories to put them into. For example, say you need to sort the stack of papers on your desk. Before you would put them in random piles, you would decide what useful categories might be: papers that can be thrown away; papers that need immediate action; papers to read; papers to pass on to other coworkers; or papers to file.

Thesis Statement of a Classification Essay

The thesis statement usually includes the topic and how it is classified. Sometimes the categories are named.

(topic)...(how classified)...(category) (category) (category)

Ex: *Tourists in Hawaii can enjoy three water sports: snorkeling, surfing, and sailing.*

How to Write an Effective Classification Essay

1. **Determine the categories.** Be thorough; don't leave out a critical category. For example, if you say water sports of Hawaii include snorkeling and sailing, but leave out surfing, your essay would be incomplete because surfing is Hawaii's most famous water sport. On the other hand, don't include too many categories, which will blur your classification. For example, if your topic is sports shoes, and your organizing principle is activity, you wouldn't include high heels with running and bowling shoes.
2. **Classify by a single principle.** Once you have categories, make sure that they fit into the same organizing principle. The organizing principle is how you sort the groups. Do not allow a different principle to pop up unexpectedly. For example, if your unifying principle is "tourist-oriented" water sports, don't use another unifying principle, such as "native water sports," which would have different categories: pearl diving, outrigger, or canoe racing.

3. **Support equally each category with examples.** In general, you should write the same quantity, i.e., give the same number of examples, for each category. The most important category, usually reserved for last, might require more elaboration.

Common Classification Transitions

- The first kind, the second kind, the third kind
- The first type, the second type, the third type
- The first group, the second group, the third group

Remember: In a classification essay, the writer organizes, or sorts, things into categories. There are three steps to remember when writing an effective classification essay: organize things into useful categories, use a single organizing principle, and give examples of things that fit into each category.

The Bottom Line:

Classification essays are usually for information only. This is not the place to add flair or creative style – it will confuse the reader and hide your message. A mind map is an excellent tool for organizing a classification essay.

Admission Essay

Essays are used to learn more about your reasons for applying to the course, university or company and your ability to benefit from and contribute to it. Your answers will let you state your case more fully than other sections of the application, and provide the evaluator with better insight about you and how you differ from the other applicants. In marginal cases, the essays are used to decide whether an applicant will be selected. The purpose of the admissions essay is to convey a sense of your unique character to the admissions committee. The essay also demonstrates your writing skills as well as your ability to organize your thoughts coherently.

Sample essay topics

There are hundreds of possible topics that you can be asked to write an essay on. Given below are some of the more common ones.

1. What events, activities or achievements have contributed to your own self-development?
2. Describe a situation in which you had significant responsibility and what you learned from it.
3. Describe your strengths and weaknesses in two areas: setting and achieving goals, and working with other people.
4. Your career aspirations and factors leading you to apply to this course at this time. Describe a challenge to which you have successfully responded. What did you learn about yourself as you responded to this challenge? Describe a challenge you anticipate facing in any aspect of college life. On the basis of what you learned from your earlier response, how do you expect to deal with this challenge?
5. Describe and evaluate one experience that significantly influenced your academic interests. The experience might be a high school course, a job, a relationship, or an extracurricular activity. Be sure to explain how this experience led to your setting the goals you now have for yourself, and why you think the academic program for which you are applying will help you to reach those goals.
6. Describe your educational, personal or career goals.
7. Role Model - If you could meet/be/have dinner with anyone in history, who would it be and why?
8. Past Experience - Describe an event that has had a great impact on you and why?
9. What was your most important activity/course in high school and why?
10. Forecast important issues in the next decade, century - nationally, globally.
11. Why do you want to study at this university?

List all your activities for the past four years. Include school activities; awards, honors, and offices held; community services; jobs; and travel. Record major travel experiences. Note your strongest impressions and how they affected you. If you loved the Grand Canyon, for example, write down three specific reasons why, aside from the grandeur and beauty that everyone loves. Describe an accomplishment that you had to struggle to achieve. Include what it was, how you tackled it, and how it changed you.

Think of one or two sayings that you've heard again and again around your house since childhood. How have they shaped your life? What personality traits do you value most in yourself? Choose a few and jot down examples of how each has helped you. Think of things that other people often say about you. Write about whether or not you agree with their assessments and how they make you feel.

Brainstorm "top ten" lists in a few selected categories: favorite books, plays, movies, sports, eras in history, famous people, etc. Review your list to see which items stand out and describe what they've added to your life. Describe "regular people" who have motivated you in different ways throughout your life. It could be someone you only met once, a third-grade teacher, or a family member or friend.

Starting your essay

The most common topic--particularly if only one essay is required--is the first, "tell us about yourself." Since this kind of essay has no specific focus, applicants sometimes have trouble deciding which part of their lives to write about. Beware of the chronological list of events that produces dull reading. Remember, also, to accent the positive rather than the negative side of an experience. If you write about the effect of a death, divorce, or illness on your life, tell about but don't dwell on your bad luck and disappointments.

Instead, emphasize what you have learned from the experience, and how coping with adversity has strengthened you as an individual.

1. Tie yourself to the college: Why are you interested in attending, and what can the institution do for you? Be specific. Go beyond "XYZ College will best allow me to realize my academic potential.
2. Read the directions carefully and follow them to the letter. In other words, if the essay is supposed to be 500 words or less, don't submit 1000 words.
3. Consider the unique features of the institution, e.g., a liberal arts college will be impressed with the variety of academic and personal interests you might have, while an art institute would be most interested in your creative abilities.
4. Be positive, upbeat and avoid the negatives, e.g. I am applying to your school because I won't be required to take physical education or a foreign language.
5. Emphasize what you have learned, e.g. provide more than a narration when recounting an experience.
6. Write about something you know, something only you could write.
7. Make certain you understand the question or the topic. Your essay should answer the question or speak directly to the given topic.
8. List all ideas. Be creative. Brainstorm without censoring.
9. Sort through ideas and prioritize. You cannot tell them everything, Be selective.
10. Choose information and ideas which are not reflected in other parts of your application. This is your chance to supplement your application with information you want them to know.
11. Be persuasive in showing the reader you are deserving of admission. Remember your audience.

The Bottom Line:

Hundreds or thousands of Admission Essays are read each year. They are read for what you say but also how you say it. Stick to the guidelines and proofread carefully.

Additional Resources

What follows below are a list of some excellent websites for additional information, examples and guidance for essay writing.

However, remember to check with your teacher for the specific expectations, formatting and requirements.

Websites:

Learning Resources: Essay Writing

<http://www.jcu.edu.au/studying/services/studyskills/essay/>

- good site for visual learners; includes a detailed set of diagrams and samples

General Essay Writing Tips from the University of Toronto

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/essay.html>

- good strategies and detailed links to specific essay sections

Writing an Essay in 10 Easy Steps

<http://www.aucegypt.edu/academic/writers/>

- a detailed, thorough breakdown of essay writing from start to finish

How to Write an Essay

<http://kimberlychapman.com/essay/essay.html>

- a wordy but thorough look at essay writing; lots of good and bad samples

Paradigm Essay Writing Assistant

<http://www.powa.org/>

- a thorough look at essay writing, especially specific styles

Ancaster High English Department Website

<http://fcinternet.hwdsb.on.ca/~ancasterweb/dept/506english/englishwelcome>

- contained a free copy of the MLA Style Guide