

The Essay



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An essay is an **argument on paper**. You express an opinion and then try to prove that it is valid.

Your statement of opinion must be arguable; that is, someone must **theoretically be able to disagree** with you.

Your opinion is not a fact, but you will use facts to support it. These can be gained by reading a *primary source*, which is your text book or the work of literature that is your topic, and *secondary sources*: other reference books, articles, books of literary criticism and sources of information or ideas. There are many different types of essay, with different purposes. Essays can **entertain, instruct, persuade, analyze** and **inform**. A personal essay emphasizes personal opinion, and creativity over structure and may use informal language; a formal essay emphasizes structure and may use informal language; a formal essay emphasizes logical development of ideas with formal structure and objective language. Be clear, before you start, about the type of essay you are being asked to write. Essay writing is valuable as an exercise in logical thinking and organization. An essay must have **a visible structure** and must develop and support **ideas in a well-ordered progression**. There are different possible structures in essay writing. In the early years of high school, the **inverted pyramid** or funnel structure is most widely taught. It provides a clear model to enable you to express your ideas effectively and easily. It is the form that is demonstrated in the manual. It is important that you master this first. Then, as you progress through the senior grades, your teacher will introduce other, more complex forms such as the comparative essay, and other organizational possibilities.

Writing an Essay Getting Started:

Decide on a thesis. This is the opinion/point of view you have about the topic. This is what you are going to prove in your essay. Write your thesis in one sentence. Examples:

Subject: Egypt

Topic: Egyptian Customs, Burial of the dead

Thesis: The Egyptian burial customs were influenced by the Nile River

Subject: Hemingway

Topic: his philosophy of life, attitude to death

Thesis: Hemingway's attitude towards death differs in *The Sun Also Rises* from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Subject: Television

Topic: Violence on Television

Thesis: Violence is a dangerous ingredient of childrens' television. **Making an Outline:** If possible, imagine your reader is going to argue with your thesis. Write down all the points that would support your thesis, and all the points that would prove the opposite. When you are finished, weigh watch point to see if it indeed proves your thesis, and persuades your reader to accept your point of view. Look at the number of relevant points you have pro and con. You may have to revise your thesis at this point.



Expand Your Outline

Once you have decided on a thesis which you can support, make an outline that will show you an OVERVIEW of your essay. This should **include your thesis** and the **arguments you are going to use** to prove it. You will need **one good argument for each body paragraph**. For this reason, a three argument essay can be called a five-paragraph essay, ie. introduction, three body paragraphs, conclusion. A four argument essay would be a six-paragraph essay etc.

Write the Body of Your Essay

Use expository paragraphs. Start with a topic sentence that states the first argument to support your thesis. Avoid saying "the first topic is...". Give three or more examples and explain how they support your argument. Use quotations or references to further prove that your opinion has some basis. Sum up the examples or explain how this paragraph supports your thesis in a concluding sentence. Repeat this structure for the remaining body paragraphs, tying in each paragraph to the one before with a hook or connecting reference. Organize your body paragraphs in the following order for maximum impact:

1. the second strongest argument
2. the weakest argument
3. the strongest argument

Works Consulted

Include a bibliography of all reference materials consulted, whether or not you referred to them in your essay.

Introduction

General Statement

"Thesis"

Body

Conclusion *

"Thesis"

General Statement

* = Use transitional words for each paragraph.