

ESSAYS: A REVIEW

An essay is an extended piece of writing in which an author explores a subject in some detail. Skilled essayists establish a purpose for writing, take time to reflect on their ideas, plan how to organize them clearly, and come up with some original insights to stimulate their audience.

Characteristics of an Essay:

The principles of writing the paragraph - **unity, coherence, and emphasis** - also apply to writing the essay.

The Introduction:

A good introduction arouses the interest of the audience, often through a strong or controversial statement, a provocative quotation, or some other technique.

The introduction states the main idea (thesis) of the essay. It also provides a preview of the ideas discussed in the body of the essay.

The Body:

A good thesis statement suggests the way the body of an essay will be developed.

The Conclusion:

Endings, like beginnings, should be short and to the point.

A brief summary that reviews the main points of the essay is appropriate in a long research essay, but should be avoided in short essays.

The ending should naturally grow out of what precedes it. It should not add new information, but can present the writer's final thoughts on the thesis.

Terms and Techniques:

Expository Essay: Communicates information about an event, process, issue, or topic. Its purpose is to expose and explain. A magazine article that tells about genetic engineering would be an example of an expository essay.

Narrative Essay: Tells the story of an event or experience. An autobiographical essay could be an example of a narrative essay.

Reflective Essay: Thoughtfully explores an idea, opinion, or insight about the world.

Descriptive Essay: Describes a person, place, event, object, or process. Many character sketches would fall into this category.

Persuasive Essay: Tries to win the reader over to an idea or point of view.

How To Write An Essay:

Writing an essay involves choosing a subject, developing a strong thesis statement, gathering evidence to support that statement, and organizing your thoughts into a logical outline of introduction, body, and conclusion.

You should begin your essay by grabbing your readers' attention and at the same time pointing them toward your main topic. Suppose, for example, you were to write an essay on the topic "Why people should not smoke." You might begin as follows:

While there are many arguments against smoking, the following three are the most important: it pollutes the environment, it is costly, and it is injurious to the health of the smoker.

By listing the three arguments to be developed, you are less likely to stray from your subject or introduce irrelevant ideas.

The body of your essay needs to be carefully planned. The simplest approach is to use one paragraph per sub-topic. In the essay about smoking, for example, each body paragraph would discuss one of the three arguments.

Your essay should end with a conclusion that repeats your thesis, summarizes your main points or arguments very briefly, and states a final message, suggestion, or insight where appropriate.

ESSAYS: ARGUMENT AND PERSUASION

Writers of argument and persuasion use facts, anecdotes, and descriptions to convince the reader of the truth of a thesis. Any topic for which more than one answer or position is possible is suitable for argument or persuasion. You can find such issues by reading the editorial pages of newspapers, watching television, or listening to the radio.

Argument and persuasion are important components of many forms of communication, such as opinion pieces, essays, editorials, letters to the editor, advertisements, speeches and debates.

Characteristics of Argument/Persuasion:

Argumentative writing often begins by clearly stating the point of view of the writer. This statement is the thesis of the argument, or leads directly into the thesis, and should be as specific as possible. For example, "Building more bike paths would reduce air pollution in our city" is a stronger thesis statement than "There aren't enough bike paths."

Argumentative writing can persuade by appealing to the reader's intellect through reason and logic. Facts and evidence are usually presented to support the argument.

Sometimes an issue that affects the writer personally is argued through relevant anecdotes.

Persuasion goes one step further than argument by encouraging the reader to alter his or her attitude or behaviour. Persuasive writing often makes an appeal to the reader's feelings.

Terms and Techniques:

Thesis: A statement that presents the writer's point of view clearly and concisely. It is usually placed at the beginning of the piece of writing.

Anecdote: A personal story that a writer uses to reinforce a point.

Logic: Clear reasoning used to create a sound, sensible argument.

Evidence: Facts, examples, statistics, and other information used to support an argument.

Faulty Reasoning: Flawed thinking that fails to prove the writer's point.

How to Write Argument/Persuasion:

- Introduce the thesis statement, clearly stating your assertion or position. You might include a preview of why you hold this belief.

Place the topic in some context; provide some background to the issue.

Provide accurate, relevant, and complete evidence. Consider using facts, statistics, reasons, and/or examples to support your position. During pre-drafting, you may have to do research, conduct interviews, distribute a questionnaire to collect data, and so on.

Try to avoid faulty reasoning since most readers will be able to tell when the evidence you include does not prove your point. The most common errors are described in the chart below.

Anticipate and disprove any contradictory arguments that might arise. Tone is important here. Your aim is not to “bash” the opposing position, but rather to help your reader see the fairness, the logic, the reasonableness of your position.

Restate your position in your conclusion. If your purpose is to persuade, you might include an appeal to your readers’ emotions and/or a call for action.

Good argument and persuasion must be well reasoned and well expressed.