

# WRITING AN ESSAY

*From the Writing Instructors at the Academic Support Center*

## **WRITING AN ESSAY IS A 3-STEP PROCESS:**

### **STEP 1: PREWRITING: THINKING CLEARLY AND PLANNING THOROUGHLY**

Writing is not a matter of recording already developed thoughts; it is a process of figuring out what you THINK. It is a process of DISCOVERY.

- a. Be sure you UNDERSTAND THE SUBJECT AND LIMIT IT
- b. Have a clear sense of PURPOSE (to inform? To explain? To persuade?) and AUDIENCE (who will read it?)
- c. Generate ideas: listing, mapping, clustering, or freewriting. Choose the method that works best for you. Include main ideas and **DETAILS**.
- d. Organize the ideas in a logical order, grouping them into categories. This will result in **COHERENCY**.
- e. Write a TENTATIVE THESIS STATEMENT that includes ALL the selected ideas. This will result in **UNITY**.

### **STEP 2: WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT OF THE ESSAY: THINKING AND WRITING**

The essay has 3 parts: the INTRODUCTION, the BODY, and the CONCLUSION. The essay's main point or **THESIS** is supported by subpoints, which become the TOPIC SENTENCES of the body's paragraphs.

**INTRODUCTION:** The first paragraph is the introduction. It must engage the interest of the reader AND establish the point of the essay which will lead logically to the THESIS STATEMENT, the last sentence of the introduction.

Options for beginning your essay include: general background material, a relevant quotation or narrative story, rhetorical questions, or an explanation why the topic is worth writing about. Try to hook the reader.

**BODY:** Each paragraph in the body of the essay EXPLAINS, SUPPORTS, and DEVELOPS the thesis statement. Each paragraph in the essay has its own topic sentence which states the paragraph's main idea AND which makes a point mentioned in the thesis. Topic sentences must be supported by DETAILS, EXAMPLES, and EXPLANATIONS which often result from asking the five JOURNALIST'S QUESTIONS.

**CONCLUSION:** The concluding paragraph should remind the reader of the main point of the essay—its THESIS STATEMENT. Key points of the essay may be briefly summarized here, and a connection to the Introduction will reinforce the coherency and unity of the essay. Avoid introducing any ideas not in the thesis; however, since the essay evolves as you draft it, a new idea may have been discovered as you developed your main point. In this case, be sure to REVISE the thesis statement to include it. Strive to conclude the essay with thought-provoking impact.

### **STEP 3: REVISING: RETHINKING AND REWRITING**

Revising the essay is all-important and involves the essay in its entirety-- global revision-- as well as reviewing each sentence.

#### **GLOBAL REVISION:**

- Check for **unity**. Be sure the thesis and topic sentences all lead to the same main point. Be sure each paragraph makes one clear sub-point. Be sure the conclusion unifies the essay. Be sure all text is relevant to the thesis. If needed, clarify and strengthen the thesis.
- Check to be sure there is adequate **support** for your main idea. If needed, add DETAILS AND EXAMPLES.
- Check the essay for **coherency**. Be sure the paragraphs arranged in the most effective and logical order. Add transitions, if needed.
- Be sure the essay is interesting enough to engage the readers and to motivate them to keep reading.

#### **SENTENCE REVISION:**

- Edit each sentence for clarity, effectiveness, and variety. Eliminate unnecessary words. Be sure the vocabulary is appropriate for the audience and purpose.
- Correct any grammar or punctuation errors.

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## THE THESIS STATEMENT

- The thesis statement is the MOST IMPORTANT SENTENCE in the entire essay.
- It is a CLEAR, concise, and specific sentence stating the main idea of the essay and covers ALL subpoints to be discussed. AVOID being VAGUE.
- It must be a sentence—it cannot be a fragment or a question.
- It must be REQUIRE PROOF or further development; it cannot be a fact.
- It should NOT contain phrases such as “I think...”; state it assertively.
- It should not be too BROAD, too NARROW, or ANNOUNCE itself.
- It is desirable to LIST the SUBPOINTS that will be developed in the BODY of the paper in the thesis creating a mini-outline of the essay. List them in the order they will be developed.

The initial thesis statement used in the draft will probably be revised to include any new relevant ideas discovered in the writing of the essay. The revised thesis statement is the measure of relevancy for EVERY sentence; delete any sentences or ideas that are not included in the revised thesis.

## VARIOUS TYPES OF, AND PURPOSES FOR, ESSAYS

It is important to determine the kind of essay you will write; what is its purpose? There are a variety of patterns to use when drafting the essay, depending its purpose:

**DESCRIPTIVE:** MANY specific DETAILS are needed for an essay of this type. Sensory details that appeal to the readers' senses make the scene alive. Should the reader be surprised? Afraid? Astounded? The description could include sensory details of SIGHT, SOUND, SMELL, TASTE, and TOUCH that relate to the main idea of the essay. Decide on a pattern of ORDER of details, such as top-to-bottom, outside-to-inside, near-to-far, etc.

**NARRATIVE:** This type of essay tells a story. There MUST be a REASON for telling the story, and that becomes the main idea. Divide the essay into clear stages, such as “before, during and after.”

**ARGUMENT OR PERSUASIVE:** Choose a topic that you have a strong opinion about. Be sure to take a STRONG STAND in your thesis statement—make a point about how to solve or eliminate an issue. Use the reasons for your opinion as a way of ordering the subpoints in the body of the essay.

**EXPLANATORY:** There are various ways to explain something, including the following types of essays:

- **PROCESS ESSAY-** This type is used to explain how to do something. It is patterned in time order, as recipes are, for example. Be sure to include the main point in telling the readers how to do it. Explain each step clearly and use details.
- **COMPARISON AND CONTRAST-** Be sure the thesis makes a statement about the comparison—the essay must do more than just list the similarities or difference between two things. For most essays, use a subpoint-by-subpoint pattern of organizing the body of the paper.
- **CAUSE AND EFFECT-** Choose EITHER causes or effect. Organize the body of paper according to importance of each cause or effect.
- **CLASSIFICATION-** Be sure to state the reason for the classification in the thesis. There must be a BASIS for the classification. Organize the body according to each of the categories (there must be more than two).
- **DEFINITION-** Explain the term beyond the dictionary definition, and clearly state the reason for defining the term. Include in the thesis statement the CATEGORY or CLASS the term fits into and the specific traits that make the term different from all others in that category.