



THE ESSAY

What It Is

The essay is a short piece of writing that expresses organized thoughts through direct statements. Although essays may vary in length, the average student essay is about 500 words long, or about two pages.

Types of Essays

There are many types of essays such as expository, argumentative and descriptive essays. However, the simplest way to describe the types is to divide them into two large categories: the personal essay and the formal essay.

In the personal essay, the writer's feelings are revealed to the reader. In the formal essay, the writer tries to convince the reader with the use of factual statements organized in a logical manner. Student essays are usually of the formal type, although an instructor may also ask for a personal point of view.

Choosing a Subject

If the instructor has not assigned a specific subject and purpose, begin by going to the library and looking at the library hand-out called, "Suggested Topics for Term Papers, Speeches and Panels." Or, think about your own interests, or about a subject you would like to know better. Look at encyclopedias, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature and Editorial Research Reports. All of these works are located in the Reference Center.

Once you have decided upon a general subject, begin to narrow it down so that it can be adequately discussed in 500 words. Ask yourself questions about the subject so that you can decide what specific point of view you are going to take. Learning how to limit the general subject is one of the most important tasks in writing the essay.

Thesis. Topic Sentence or Central Idea

The thesis or topic sentence is the central idea or focus of the essay. It tells the reader what point you are going to make in the essay about the subject you have chosen for consideration. The thesis must always be a complete, grammatical sentence which is specific brief and suggestive of the organization to be followed in the essay.

Example: The unleashed presence of dogs on streets and sidewalks is a danger and nuisance to pedestrians, automobiles and property owners.

The thesis sentence should appear in the beginning or introductory paragraph of the essay. It lets the reader know what to expect in the rest of the essay.

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Sources of Information

It is important to recognize that in order to write an essay, you must have something to say. Much of what you write can come from your own knowledge and experience. However, you must check your information to be sure it is correct. In addition, you might want to find out more about your subject. Use all of the library's resources such as books, reference materials, magazines and pamphlets in order to supplement your own ideas. Ask for help from the librarian in the Reference Center if you are not sure about how and where to look.

Outlining

Ask for the library hand-out on outlining. It is not necessary to make a formal outline of your subject unless it is required by your instructor. However, it is vitally important to have a plan before you begin to write. Jot down ideas as you read and think about your topic. Arrange these ideas in some logical order. Decide your starting point and think about the ending. Take out facts that have no relation to your thesis. Writing the essay will be simpler with a rough outline before you.

Organization of the Essay

Paragraph 1: Introduction, 50- 75 words.

Introduce your subject through a general statement. Give any background to the topic. Make the reader feel that what you are going to say will be of importance and interest to him. State your thesis sentence and be sure that it allows you to discuss three aspects of your subject.

Paragraph 2: First developmental paragraph, 150 words.

Begin this paragraph by stating the first aspect of the topic mentioned in the introductory paragraph. Use detailed facts to support your ideas and opinions. Give specific examples in developing your supporting evidence.

Paragraph 3: Second developmental paragraph, 150 words.

Begin this paragraph by stating the second aspect of your topic that you will treat in the paragraph. As mentioned above, give clear supporting examples to prove your ideas and opinions.

Paragraph 4: Third developmental paragraph, 150 words.

Begin this paragraph by stating the third aspect of the topic mentioned in the introductory paragraph. As mentioned in Paragraph 2, be sure that your supporting details are clear and factual.

Paragraph 5: Conclusion, 50- 75 words.

Summarize and conclude your essay. Point out that you have proven your thesis statement by elaborating on each of the three aspects of your subject.

Transition Words

Probably the easiest, and most abused, method of pulling together thoughts is through the use of transition words. They direct the reader from the thought of one sentence to that of another. Here are some of the most commonly used transition words:

*therefore,
as a result,
consequently,
in other words,
thus,*

*then,
for example,
namely,
on the other hand,
nevertheless,*

*on the contrary,
but
or
finally,
moreover,*

*similarly,
furthermore,
for instance,
accordingly,
to sum up*

Remember, use transition words sparingly as overuse of these words weakens the writing.