

GUIDE FOR WRITING AN ESSAY/TERM PAPER

Synopsis

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1. WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

Writing simply consists in putting on paper a thought, an opinion. Not all types of writing are appropriate in the world of academics, which we call essays.

An essay is a type of prose, which briefly analyzes, interprets or evaluates a topic. It is hence a literary genre just like poetry, fiction and drama. It must also be viewed as assignment students are accustomed to, and which consists of a prompt to develop in a certain number of paragraphs, usually five. Key differences between an essay and other forms of writings are:

- Essays use a formal tone. In your essay, you should stay away from humor, sarcasm, and colloquialism. Try to avoid irrelevant observations or facts. It is essential to understand a sharper contrast exists in Spanish (more than in English) between spoken language (informal) and written language. This may even compel an English speaker to consider Spanish styles to be impersonal or even pretentious.
- One writes for readers who, regardless of their intelligence. May not necessarily know a topic or issue.
- In fact, the fundamental purpose of an essay is to demonstrate knowledge of the subject. It is extremely important to address the issue of the prompt accurately.

The worth of an essay is assessed on the basis of three key criteria:

1. Well documented content
2. Appropriate and well organized logic
3. Correct use of the language

2. THE PRE-WRITING STAGE

It is a myth to believe professional writers complete their tasks in just one strike. The truth is that prior to reaching the stage of the finished product, writers must produce several drafts. Hence, it is normal for you also to make several attempts before your text becomes acceptable to readers because this is part of the process.

The recommended initial step is to jot down anything that comes to your mind without the use of a dictionary and away from a concern to do it right.

The actual initial steps of the process involve:

1. The elaboration of a web of ideas with no logical reasoning, sequence, or organization.
2. The drawing of an outline with a graphical focus on the central points of the essay
3. The writing of the first draft.

3. ORGANIZATION OF THE ESSAY

Each essay consists of three main components: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. Following are some details about them.

3.1. Introduction

This segment does three things for readers: indicating the purpose of the text, defining the topic, and pointing to the organization of the ideas. How is this achieved? Continue to read.

The first step is about clarifying the objective of the essay so that readers can be so focused they can be directed to ask themselves specific questions about the document, which would be a clear indication the introduction is perfect.

This focus may also become the object of the thesis of the text, to which clarifying strategies can play the essential role of support. Examples can be:

- Surprise: when the most salient element of the essay emerges suddenly.
- Confirmation: when the essay is based on facts already known, which would eventually ease up the understanding of the idea being presented.

- Contradiction: when the essay starts with a popular idea but quickly swerves towards a contrast that helps make the point.
- Suspense: when the gradual presentation of the idea makes readers remain in the expectative, readying them for more and more of the information.

The introduction, which should be limited to no more than two paragraphs (preferably just one fairly extended), would contain the following:

- A brief presentation or announcement of the topic
- The thesis topic, should provide clues about the direction and the logical sequence of the arguments.

Now, let's look at some thesis topics corresponding to concrete questions.

Question 1. Describe the main character of the poem The Cid.

Thesis 1. The Cid, main character of the poem, is characterized by his physical might, and his moral strength, which symbolize Christian father and spouse.

On the outset, this thesis sets the stage for a development lending itself to what would be the fundamental theme of the essay: physical might and moral strength.

Question 2. Compare the characters: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Thesis 2. In general, DQ and SP appear to be two characters evolving on two completely opposed poles: DQ represents the idealistic human being, while SP symbolizes the realistic one. Yet, in several instants of the novel, the roles are completely reversed.

Here, a simple compare/contrast strategy would be sufficient to depict or paint differences and similitude between surrealism and realism in mankind through a Venn diagram graphic.

IMPORANT NOTE: In essays intended for schools, the title is a very important component and can be just the topic or question related to the essay. In documents with different purposes, the same strategy based on the title can be used because it then serves as a guide or clarifying foundation for the reader. It is of a paramount importance to use such guides because they leave readers with the impression that the writer has them in mind and wants to communicate with them from the very beginning.

3.2. The Body

This is the area where readers received clarification or details announced in the introduction. Every aspect of the essay, which is highlighted in the introduction, must be the object of a separate paragraph in the body. There, writers display their organization skills and their mastery of logic science.

There are several strategies that can be used depending on the essay genre, which can be descriptive, narrative or expository. Let us consider some examples:

- Analytical Essay. This is about the description of components of an entity. This technique is particularly popular in literature. Thus, the analysis of a novel will look at the characters, the dialogue, the stand, and some other elements typical of an essay.
- Compare & Contrast Essay. It is used to emphasize differences and similitude between two groups.
- Definition Essay. Here, writers explain a concept unknown to readers. Ways to accomplish this can include: modeling a concept in a class context, illustration through concrete examples, or just semantics with the use of synonyms and antonyms.
- Classification Essay. While it is similar to an analysis, or differs from the latter in that it focuses more on various types of an entity, rather than on the components of a whole. For instance, an old and prevalent type of novel is the picaresque one where the protagonist has a series of episodic adventures in which he/she sees much of the world around him/her and comments satirically on such environment.
- Cause and effect Essay. This document attempts to underlie the origins and consequences of any reality or phenomenon.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Another common style is cause persuasive essay which tries to convince readers not with evidence but through emotions. In this case, one important resource is figurative language (images, metaphors, similes, and other rhetorical forms). While such styles are popular in advertisements and creative writing, they are not the object of this course and should not be used in academic essays.

3.3. The Conclusion

The conclusion is the last paragraph, which recapitulates broadly ideas presented in the thesis topic and the introduction.

In the conclusion, the formula of the introduction is inverted with a brief summary of the essay and a conclusive sentence that can catch the reader's attention on the cornerstone of the essay. This must be done in such a pragmatic way that it opens up a new, larger perspective for the reader.

4. THE POST-WRITING STAGE

A review with two fundamental steps must follow the writing of the first draft.

- First, one must assess whether the content and the organization of the essay truly convey the intended message to the reader and if there is cohesion between the sections.
- Secondly, a close focus must be directed to the elements of form (spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure).

It is important to compare errors committed between two essays. This helps to both avoid recurrence of the same mistakes and also improves one's overall writing skills.

5. POLISHING YOUR ESSAYS

With time and practice, you will build a style of your own. After all, after so much time and energy spent in crafting this product of yours, isn't worth making it permanent. To that end, here come some sound advice and suggestions:

- Read a great deal and read all styles; above all, manage to figure out what styles you like and which ones you would like to adopt.
- Practice your writing with a variety of styles.
- Read popular newspapers. Focus on vocabulary words and unknown figures of style. Build your own lexicon so that you can gradually keep recording new terms or words with a certain level of difficulty.
- Practice and write a lot. Write even at your leisure time. Keep a diary of key moments of your life or write about meaningful events although you do not plan to share your writings with others.
- Open up a correspondence in English with a friend, or participate in chat lines in this language.

6. LOGICAL REASONING

This is critical in an essay because it lets both your organizational skills and convincing powers transpire.

In order to master this, writers use inductive and deductive reasoning. In the former, one starts with concrete examples to formulate general statements. One advantage of these methods is that readers may also participate in the reasoning process and consequently understand better what is written. The latter inverts the process and begins with general statements to be proved gradually with concrete illustrations.

¿When is it recommended to use either method?

Actually, it all depends on the topic, the objective of the essay and the intended audience. If the reader is familiar with the issue at hand, manipulation of the information can prove appropriate through inductive reasoning. Otherwise, it might pay to first present a hypothesis (deductive reasoning) or a clear, understandable thesis topic and get thereafter on the task of proving the point.

IMPORTANT NOTE: In an essay, it is always recommended to avoid some logical discrepancies such *generalizations* (baseless comments), *vicious cycles* (attempts to develop a topic with the same terms with no details or clarifications), *illogic's* (irrelevant information with no connection with the announced premises).

7. TRANSITIONS

The role of transitions is vital in every essay or writing. They are the sentences or mostly words that allow readers to grasp your logic and follow the flow of your argument. Unquestionably, well-placed transitions take your readers softly and gently by the hand and shepherd them along. In the examples below (the list is fairly long), transitional words and phrases are classified by topic and meaning:

Addition (to add a detail)

In addition to, furthermore, moreover, besides, then, too, also, both-and, another, equally important, first, second, etc., again, further, last, finally, as well as, in the second place, next, likewise, in fact, as a result, consequently, in the same way, for example, for instance, however, thus, therefore, otherwise.

Time Organization
(to show sequence)

After, before, then, once, next, last, at last, first, second, etc. at first, formerly, rarely, usually, another, finally, soon, meanwhile, at the same time, during the morning, day, week, etc., most important, later, to begin with, afterwards, generally, in order to, subsequently, previously, in the meantime, eventually, concurrently, simultaneously.

Space Organization

(to show location or position)

At the left, at the right, in the center, on top, below, beneath, under, around, above, over, straight ahead, at the top, at the bottom, surrounding, opposite, at the rear, at the front, in front of, beside, behind, next to, nearby, in the distance, beyond, in the forefront, in the foreground, within sight, out of sight, across, under, nearer, adjacent, in the background.

Concession (to display a sense of compromise)

Although, at any rate, at least, still, thought, even though, granted that, while it may be true, in spite of, of course.

Emphasis

(to reinforce a detail)

Above all, indeed, truly, of course, certainly, surely, in fact, really, in truth, again, besides, also, furthermore, in addition.

Details (to be specific and to the point)

Specifically, especially, in particular, to explain, to list, to enumerate, in detail, namely, including.

Examples (to attract)

For example, for instance, to illustrate, thus, in other words, as an illustration, in particular.

Result (or consequence)

So that, thus, consequently, hence, accordingly, for this reason, therefore, so, because, since, due to, as a result, in other words, then.

Summary

(before a conclusion)

Therefore, finally, consequently, thus, in short, in conclusion, in brief, as a result, accordingly.

Suggestion (to propose)

For this purpose, to this end, with this in mind, with this purpose in mind, therefore.

Illustration (to clarify)

Thus, for example, for instance, namely, to illustrate, in other words, in particular, specifically, such as.

Contrast

(when comparing)

On the contrary, contrarily, notwithstanding, but, however, nevertheless, in spite of, in contrast, yet, on one hand, on the other hand, rather, or, nor, conversely, at the same time, while this may be true.

8. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

A research is simply a more sophisticated essay. About 10 pages are usually considered a minimum, and a lot of planning, investigating, and elaborating is required. Sometimes, it is informative, that is, it simply informs and presents valuable data. Or, it can be a true critique that analyzes and interprets information and even draws specific conclusions and makes recommendations in a convincing, authoritative fashion.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Many agree that an informative essay is acceptable in a class about civilizations and cultures but not in a literature class where the very purpose is to foster both analytical reading skills and a proven sense of critique as well.

9. HOW TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

It is an irony that nowadays, it can be difficult to access material in a library. Cyberspace is a modern recourse. While many types of information found through this medium are fairly worthy, many are not, and one has to be careful in the documentation process and take the time to go beyond even what can be found in an encyclopedia, for instance.

The bottom line is to carefully filter every piece of information one can come across. Among other things, ensure the name of the author; magazine or book is readily available. Details about the context the document were produced (a critique is also a plus) help to determine the true worth of the document...

Many magazines such as *Modern Language Notes* constitute an excellent source of information on the Internet. Many university libraries join hands with some sites like "Project Muse" to complete this continuum. Furthermore, many *electronic books* are also available for research or general reading.

As you get into the investigative phase of your research, you should write down titles of all resources available, starting from the general to the particular. There lies the difference between a broad **bibliography** and a list of **selected references**.

10. REFERENCING: MLA FORMAT

In the world of humanities and academics, there are several referencing styles? In literature, the Modern Language of America (MLA) format is very popular. A highly recommended reference textbook for this style is: Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 5th. ed. 1977. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999. In this section, we will look at some of the key details regarding the MLA format.

- While conducting your investigation, a good idea is to literally take notes and write down important citations, which you might want to use later.

- To copy someone else's ideas word by word is called plagiarism, and this is illegal. The correct way to use such as ideas is as follows, for example: "*La literatura llega a su madurez en España con Cervantes y Lope de Vega, a la vez que en Inglaterra lo hace con "Shakespeare" (Cantarino 197).*"
- However, although you mention an author's name at the end in a bibliography, in-text quotations must receive proper credits within the document also. For example, Mark Portman made a solid case about what authors and publishers can do to sell their literary products (2001).
- Finally, we must also be knowledgeable about correct way to list entries in a bibliography...

Basic acceptable routines are as follows:

(for books) Last Name, First Name. Underlined title. Place of publication:
publishing company, year of publication.

(for articles) Last Name, First Name. "Article". Title of the Magazine. Number
(year): page – page.

Example:

Shipley, George A. "A Case of Functional Obscurity: The Master
Tambourine- Painter of Lazarillo, Edition VI." Modern Language
Notes 97 (1982): 225-233.