

## **Essay Tools and Techniques**

### ***Narrative Essay and Prompts***

When you write a narrative essay, you are telling a story. Narrative essays are told from a defined point of view, often the author's, so there is feeling as well as specific and often sensory details provided to get the reader involved in the elements and sequence of the story. The verbs are vivid and precise. The narrative essay makes a point and that point is often defined in the opening sentence, but can also be found as the last sentence in the opening paragraph. (For test taking purposes, it can be wise to put it first so that the person grading does not miss it.)

Since a narrative relies on personal experiences, it often is in the form of a story. When the writer uses this technique, he or she must be sure to include all the conventions of storytelling: plot, character, setting, climax, and ending. It is usually filled with details that are carefully selected to explain, support, or embellish the story. All of the details relate to the main point the writer is attempting to make.

To summarize, the narrative essay

- is told from a particular point of view
- makes and supports a point
- is filled with precise detail
- uses vivid verbs and modifiers
- uses conflict and sequence as does any story
- may use dialogue

### ***Expository Essay and Prompts***

Expository essays require that the writer give information, explain the topic or define something. To accomplish that, they are best developed by the use of facts and statistical information, cause and effect relationships, or examples. Since they are factual, they are written without emotion and usually written in the third person. That means that the use of the pronoun "I" is not usually found within the essay.

Expository essays also have a distinct format.

- The thesis statement must be defined and narrow enough to be supported within the essay.
- Each supporting paragraph must have a distinct controlling topic and all other sentences must factually relate directly to it. The transition words or phrases are important as they help the reader follow along and reinforce the logic.

- Finally, the conclusion paragraph should originally restate the thesis and the main supporting ideas. Finish with a statement that reinforces your position in a meaningful and memorable way.
- Never introduce new material in the conclusion.

### *Persuasive Essay and Prompts*

Persuasive writing attempts to convince the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by the writer is valid. To accomplish this, the writer must develop a limited topic which is well defined and debatable, that is has more than one side. It is important that the author understand other sides of the position so that the strongest information to counter the others can be presented. In the essay, only one side of the issue is presented.

Like all kinds of five paragraph essays, there is a specific format to be followed.

- The topic sentence cannot be a fact as facts cannot be debated. It should be a statement of position. That position must be clear and direct. This statement directs the readers to follow along with your logic towards the specific stated conclusion that you want them to support. Do not make it personal so do not use personal pronouns. Make it definitive.
- Then, in the same introductory paragraph, state the three best reasons that you have to support your position as the remainder of the opening paragraph. These reasons become the topics of each of the three supporting paragraphs. Again, be sure they are able to be supported with additional separate facts.
- In the body of the essay, the writer uses specific evidence, examples, and statistics and not broad generalizations or personal opinions to persuade the reader that the stated position is a valid one. Each topic sentence for the support paragraphs have been introduced in the beginning paragraph. Each additional sentence must closely relate to the topic and the sentence that came before it. This way, the logic of the argument is easy to follow.
- Be sure to use adequate transitions between paragraphs as they make it easy for the reader to follow the logic of the presentation.
- As one closes the essay, it is most important to clearly redefine the topic and restate the most compelling evidence cited in original form. Remember, this is the last chance to remind the reader and convince him/her to accept the writer's position.
- Do not introduce new material in the conclusion.

## **Tips and Techniques for Learning to Write the Five Paragraph Essay**

Writing a good five-paragraph essay requires that one master the format. What is required for writing a good five-paragraph essay is the same as for any good writing, but that the five-paragraph format needs to be exact. Through practice, proficiency is achieved. Through practice using a good planning pattern, the process becomes a second nature thinking skill. Remember that the practice is not drill as the product is ever changing. Mistakes will be made, but good evaluation, especially self-evaluation will see that the mistakes are not repeated. Since writing is communication, always remember that the goal is to become clear, concise, and unified so that the reader can follow along and appreciate the writer's point of view and train of thought. The five-paragraph essay is a great tool for learning and communicating at all levels

### **The Introductory Paragraph**

Before you begin to use the suggestions here, I assume that you have read through and understand the full essay process. If not, take the time now to do so. Be sure and look up some of the links presented as they present core knowledge. When you are finish, come back and begin to look through these suggestions. Only when you have an understanding of the process and product, will this section make sense.

First and foremost, do not try to write a whole five-paragraph essay the first time you try. Divide the learning experience into sections and practice each section individually until you feel you are successful. Build gradually adding a section at a time. Go step-by-step through the introduction, supporting paragraphs, and conclusion until the process becomes second nature. After a while, you will recognize what is good and what is not. I learned that most pointedly while teaching fifth and sixth grade students.

Start with learning to write the introductory paragraph. It is the most important as you are grabbing the reader's attention by informing him or her of the main points of your essay. Spend a lot of time learning to write this well. A poor impression often "turns off" the reader and/or evaluator. That leads to a less than appropriately appreciated essay or a lesser grade. You have to grab the reader's attention with interest and clarity. That is not an easy task.

When you are learning to write the essay, think small. Practice writing just introductory paragraphs. Choose a topic about which you know quite a bit. Jot it down. Do some brainstorming to determine which the three best supporting ideas are. Write them down too. Now go back and think about the point that you are trying to make. How can you word the first sentence to clearly and concisely tell that to the reader? Try to do that in the active voice as it is much stronger that way. Jot down the new sentence. Now do the same thing for each of the three supporting ideas. Be sure that they are well written and explain a facet of the topic that you want to develop. Once you have that, there is just one more thing to write. It is the transition sentence that will connect these thoughts to your supporting paragraphs. Remember that you are developing one sentence at a time.

When you are finished, take a second to look back over that paragraph. Be sure that you have made it exciting to the reader. Usually, if you are honest, if it is not exciting or interesting to you, it will not be so to the reader. Be sure that you are not using dull similar sentence structure. Be sure that the ideas flow easily one from the other. The reader needs to see that there is connection. Unless you are writing a personal narrative, try not to use the pronoun "I." Most people do not know you so there is little authority given to your opinions. Make any corrections. When you are pleased, share it with someone whose writing you respect. Get their impressions. They are important. Writing is communication with an audience. Once that audience is defined, you need to learn what is important to that audience, not just to yourself. Then and only then will you be successful.

Do not give up with just one try. Write on many topics, just writing the introductory paragraph. You will find that the process of following the format and thinking through and good introduction becomes easier with practice. That is only true if you go through some good pre-thinking, and evaluation so do not skip that part.

Put the introductory paragraphs that you have written aside and perhaps they can be developed later. Even if you do not later use them, they can be looked at in the future and compared with the type of writing you are doing now. It is nice to see a pattern of progress.

### **Supporting Paragraphs**

Use this technique of writing one paragraph at a time for writing supporting paragraphs. You can use some of the practice introductions that have been written earlier as "starters" if you wish.

Remember, that in writing a supporting paragraph that you are using the three supporting ideas from the introductory paragraph as the topics of each of your supporting paragraphs. Do not change the idea or the order. The reader is expecting you to follow the road map that you presented in the first paragraph.

Once again, practice developing just one of those supporting ideas. Be sure that you brainstorm to find the best facts and examples to support and explain your topic sentence. Be sure not to put in just anything about the general topic. Put in only those details that really enhance and develop the idea you presented. Then, when you are finished brainstorming and have written down your ideas, you can go back and think about the best structure for each of those sentences. Be sure that the first sentence is to the point and concise. Think about each and write them down in paragraph form. When finished, go back and make sure that they are really explaining and giving examples specifically about the topic sentence. The tendency is to wander a bit off topic. Be careful not to let that happen to you.

As you end each supporting paragraph, the writer needs to think about how to make a good transition between this paragraph and the next. Will it best be done at the end of the paragraph or at the beginning of the next? You must provide a transition from one

paragraph to the other so that the reader sees that there is closure and can anticipate what is coming next. It can be simply done or can be more elaborate. It is up to you. If you are not sure how to accomplish this, go back to the previous pages and check out some of the suggestions. I would run off one page and keep it with you when you are learning to write until you get the "hang" of transitioning.

Practice writing one supporting paragraph and evaluating, revising, and editing it. As with the introductory paragraph, this process and format becomes easier to follow as you practice. Do it many times, remembering that pre-thinking and planning do not just apply to the paragraph, but to structuring each and every sentence. If you feel comfortable, have someone else look over the paragraph and critique it for you. It can be a valuable tool in evaluation.

Do that for many of the introductory paragraphs that you wrote and saved earlier. Note the development and the increasing completeness of thought. It is great to view your own successful development. You will be surprised how success breeds more and greater success in writing practice. You will come to appreciate the fact that the process becomes easier and faster when you put lots of effort into pre-thinking both the topic and the sentence structure. Good jobs do not have to take a long time to complete.

When you feel confident, develop two supporting paragraphs in a row. See how they fit together. When you are successful, and then try developing all three at the same time. Be careful to include those important transitions from one supporting topic to the next. Be sure that the ideas flow easily from one paragraph to the next. Check to see that the writing does not appear choppy by using dull and similar sentence structure.

Double check to see that you are using active voice for strength in writing. If you do all of those things, you will be amazed at how good and closely unified and developed your ideas can be. Remember, it does not happen over night. Practice and evaluate. Revise and reread. Progress is your most important product. It usually does not come without a lot of effort.

### **The Ending or Summary Paragraph**

This is a difficult paragraph to write effectively. It sounds easy. All you have to do for most essays is to restate the opening paragraph. That often becomes the difficulty. The writer tends to use the same words and almost just rewrite the first paragraph with a transition that goes something like "Now you can see ..."

The introductory paragraph becomes a strong guide for writing the conclusion or summary paragraph. It is in conclusion paragraph that you, the writer, must remind the reader of the most important ideas that you have presented. If you just restated them as you did in the introduction, they may lack the strength to refocus the reader. You need to restate those ideas in a somewhat original manner. Why? You do that because you cannot assume that the reader logically followed your logic or even agrees with it. You cannot assume that they even accepted your thesis, especially in a persuasive essay. You must summarize effectively and with some degree of authority and originally as the last effort

to convince them that this is well written and has value. Remember that these are the last thoughts that you will leave with the reader. Make them the best that you can.

Once again, use those introductory paragraphs that you wrote earlier as tools for writing practice. You want to say just about the same thing in a forceful way. Practice writing a summary for each one. Both of the paragraphs must be good. They both must grab and hold the reader's attention. But the last paragraph must convince the reader that you did the job well. You are reminding them of that.

After you have practice writing conclusions for a while, sometimes you find that you develop a style that is good and can be repeated. You may find different types of writing (expository, persuasive, and narrative) often have different good patterns for ending them. It is not necessary, but it can happen. After you have written three or four of each, see if that might not be true. It might just make future writing a little easier if it happens.