



THE ESSAY

What is it

The essay is a short written assignment analyzing, defining, describing or discussing a single topic. Essays vary in length, depending on instructors' requirements, and are generally around 500 words or two pages.

Types of Essays

There are two main types of essays: the *personal essay* and the *formal essay*. A personal essay is also known as a *narrative essay*, as it tells of the author's personal experience.

There are several types of formal essays. A **descriptive essay** provides details on a topic: what it is, how it looks, feels, smells, sounds, or tastes. A **definition essay** tries to define a specific term or an abstract concept. A **comparison essay** analyzes the similarities between two (or more) things; a **contrast essay** analyzes the differences. A **cause and effect essay** explores why or how a particular event happened, and how it affected the events that resulted from it. A **process essay** provides a step-by-step description of how something is done. An **argumentative essay**, also known as a **persuasive essay**, is an opinion piece, generally written *for* or *against* a controversial issue, and is usually written to persuade the reader to side with the author's point of view. A **critical essay** provides analysis and interpretations of someone else's work.

Choosing a Subject

Follow your instructor's suggestions but try to interest yourself as well. Try to pick a topic that will be treated in available reference sources (unless writing a personal or narrative essay). Refer to the Library handout on [Project Ideas](#) if you don't know where to begin.

Thesis, Topic Sentence or Central Idea

The thesis statement generally appears in the first paragraph of the essay and focuses the readers attention to the central idea and purpose of the essay. Here are some examples:

(1) Personal (Narrative) Essay:

I spent all of last summer in Tahiti, where I learned all about swimming, snorkeling and fishing.

(2) Formal Essay:

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

Outlining

While you are generally not required to turn in an outline with your essay, organizing your thoughts in an outline form will help structure your ideas into your essay. Check the Library handout on [How to make an Outline](#) for additional help.



Transition Words

If you need help tying ideas together into a coherent essay, try some of the following 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...* Use these transition words sparingly as overuse of these words weaken the writing.

10 Basic Steps in Writing the Essay

1. Choose a subject and limit it to a specific topic.
2. Do some general background reading on your subject in the library.
3. Center your focus with a clear and specific Thesis Statement.
4. Organize your ideas in a logical sequence and form a rough outline including introduction, body, and conclusion.
 - Introductory paragraph should include your Thesis Statement.
 - Each paragraph in the body of your essay should begin with a "topic sentence" telling the reader what to expect in the paragraph.
 - Summarize your essay in the concluding (last) paragraph.
5. Using the library and the assistance of a librarian, do additional research on your topic if necessary (a personal essay will not require the same amount or type of research a formal essay requires).
6. Read carefully and take good notes. As you go, list where you obtained your information.
7. Write (or type) the first draft and revise it carefully. Keep track of authors' names and page numbers where you found your information.
8. If you need help transitioning from one idea to another, use transition words to tie your paragraphs into a coherent essay.
9. Prepare a list of bibliographic citations (using assigned citation style guide, such as MLA or APA). Authors cited within your report must be listed at the end of the report as "References" or "Works Cited List."
10. Remember to use the "spell checker" if you are typing your report in a word processing software, such as Microsoft Word or WordPad.