

Essay Writing Guide



The Whole Essay Writing Process
in Just 5 Simple Steps.

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Introduction

There's Much More to an Essay Than You Think

An essay is a concise literary composition used to present author's viewpoint. It is often a subjective view supported by solid argumentation. Its academic nature implies following specific guidelines and requirements which sometimes makes the writing process more challenging than it may seem to be. It's the reason why essay writing is so popular in academic circles.

The assignment of writing an essay should never be underestimated due to the multiple opportunities it gives the school, college and university professors. They can assess student's writing and analytical skills, ability to consolidate information and express his thoughts in a logical manner, knowledge of the topic and even his time management skills (meeting the set deadline). That is why students should pay their close attention to the structure of an essay, its style, and relevance of their arguments.

There are 4 types of essays:

- narrative;**
- descriptive;**
- persuasive;**
- expository.**

Each has its own essential characteristics, but the main requirements remain to be the same. An essay should be easy to comprehend, stay on topic and express author's own thoughts and ideas. A well-written essay introduces a clear message to a reader and supports it with enough amount of proofs – quotes from reputable sources, facts and testimonials.

Writing an essay is a true art. And no art has a detailed recipe for mastering it. But there's a common perception of what a good essay should look like and, therefore, there has to be an algorithm of the successful and effective essay writing process. This is one of such algorithms you can use to simplify this kind of assignment.

Step 1

Thorough preparation

The success of an essay depends on your meticulous preparation process as it will be the basis for your creative ideas and insightful conclusions. Some students often find themselves looking at a blank page for hours and not being able to start writing.

There's no need for such waste of time. Instead, it will be more effective to pass through several helpful checkpoints prior to the writing itself. Breaking down this process into manageable tasks you can cope with one at a time will help you to focus and plan everything carefully.

Analyzing the Topic

As a rule, an essay's title asks you to compare, evaluate, explore something. It provides you with important keywords describing the subject you have to pay attention to.

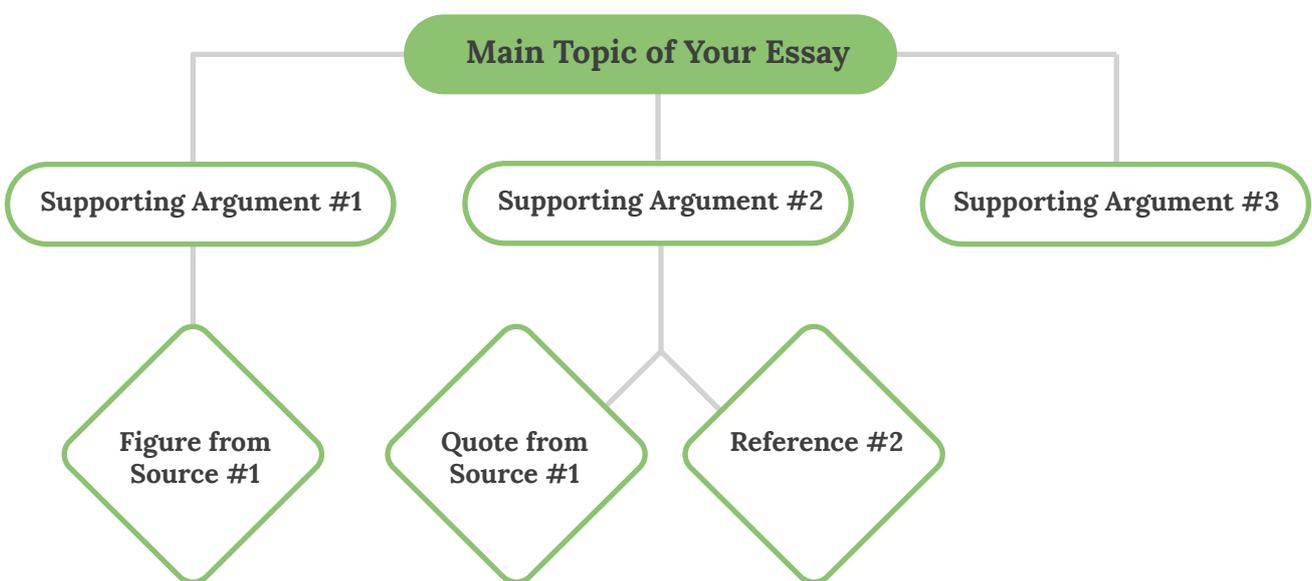
However, **one of the most common mistakes students make while writing an essay is staying off the topic.** Once they see a familiar term in the title or have some additional information slightly related to the topic, there's a high chance they'll write about it rather than something an essay title requires them to.

That's why it's very important to understand what your essay should be about. Find those keywords, make it clear for yourself which points you should cover. If the topic of your essay is too general you might need to narrow it down. Otherwise, you may end up discussing multiple issues related to the topic and lose the main idea of your essay. There's one more trick to make the topic of an essay more comprehensive. You can turn it into a question to better understand what is required of you. Remember that any essay title includes key components you should find to avoid writing about something you're not asked to.

In case you're still confused about the topic of your essay the best way to avoid disappointing results would be to ask your instructor for some help. Ask her/him for some clarifications about the terms or phrases you're puzzled about. It will be much easier to write a good essay when you are aware of the expectations of your instructor.

Brainstorming

Once you have a clear understanding of the assignment it's time to gather your thoughts together. The best approach to accumulating ideas and possible answers to the questions you should answer in your essay is brainstorming. There are no limitations to what you write and the way you write it. You can make a list of points or draw a small scheme of how you want to construct your essay. Later you'll be able to make notes where to add the supporting information from your sources:



The goal is to generate as many ideas as possible and reduce their number according to the relevance afterward. For example, if your task is to make a comparison you might want to divide your piece of paper in two parts and note down significant similarities and differences. Or if you're asked to pick a side and it's a difficult decision for you to make you could also write down pros and cons in two columns to simplify the process.

Brainstorming also helps to overcome writer' block. Sometimes when you see a title of an essay it seems like there's nothing you can write on this topic. You start to panic, get stressed and decide to postpone this assignment for later. This may lead to failing to meet the deadline and further frustration. Brainstorming can take the pressure away and get you into the writing mood.

Researching

Writing any kind of essay requires collecting additional information. In most of the cases, it's not enough to prove your viewpoint only by referring to your own experience and knowledge. Therefore, you have to look for reliable data in numerous sources to show your interest and involvement in the subject. But it doesn't mean that the more materials you read through the better grade you'll get. You have to choose only those containing relevant information to support your argumentation. You might also consider some of the opposing arguments to be able to include a counterargument in your essay and predict some of the possible objections of the readers holding a different point of view.

If you're planning to write on a contemporary subject be sure to gather up-to-date information. It's a good idea to read through the latest academic journals relevant to your topic, local publications and scientific researches and discoveries. Don't limit your research to the reading through your instructor's recommendation list and a couple of sources found on the web. For you to be able to argue your point of view you need to study the subject and look at it from different angles.

Don't get frustrated by the list of books, magazines, and newspapers you have to read. There's no need for reading each of them from the beginning to the end. Simply scan through them to identify the ones that can be really helpful.

Be careful to not turn your researching into one more kind of procrastination. The pursuit of relevant and insightful information can last forever and the deadline of your essay can't. You have to stop at some point and start consolidating the available data.

Making an Outline

Now you're ready to organize your thoughts and ideas into a proper outline. Some may think that this is a boring and unnecessary procedure because you already know what you're going to write about. However, making a detailed plan will help you to present your ideas in a clear and logical manner. Your task is not only to find convincing arguments for supporting your point but also to make it as easy as possible for a reader to follow your flow of thoughts.

After the brainstorming process, you'll probably have a general idea of what to write about. Now you need to group those you can use to make a specific point. Give names to these groups forming some kind of headings and subheadings. You can then categorize them according to the importance and relevance and decide how to structure them properly. Make sure every section of the outline is connected with the

previous one to avoid turning your essay into a list of unrelated arguments. Finding the right structure for your essay is a very significant part of your preparation process and you should pay close attention to it.

Making an outline is like making a rough sketch of a painting to fill it with bright and lively colors afterward. There has to be a solid basis you can build your argumentation on. Don't try to copy the order the information is given in your source materials because it will give an impression of lack of your interest on the topic and that you didn't work hard enough to craft a noteworthy essay.

Step 2

A Well-Known Structure and Secret Tips

It's no secret that an essay should have an introduction, main body, and conclusion. The greatest obstacle to your success is finding the best way to organize each of these parts according to the specifics of your topic. Every part of your essay should have a clear purpose. Which essay hooks will be appropriate for your introduction? How should you state your thesis? How to present your argumentation to a reader so that it would be easy to follow? What does it mean to have a powerful conclusion? You should know the answers to all of these questions before you start writing. Remember that your essay has to include your own analysis and paraphrasing the material from a book or using the wording of your instructor won't be enough.

The Goal of Introduction

It may be pretty difficult to write an introduction before the rest of your essay. Don't worry about that and don't spend hours on trying to make it flawless. It's much more efficient to come back to it later and make the necessary changes.

There's no universal rule of what to start your essay with. One writing technique can be perfect for this particular topic and completely inappropriate for the other one. However, every introduction should engage the interest of a reader and present him/her your topic.

In other words, there are two goals you have to reach writing a good introduction:

1. **To grab the attention of a reader.**
2. **To indicate the main focus of your essay.**

The first one can be achieved by using suitable essay hooks. Depending on the subject, you can use a quote from an expert (try to use fresh quotes whenever it's possible, especially if you're writing a science paper), a shocking fact (doesn't have to be new to a reader; a powerful reminder works great as well), up-to-date statistical data (works best in persuasive essays), an anecdote, a first person story. Make sure your attention grabber is relevant to the topic and consists of an accurate information.

Also, provide your reader with some background information on your topic. Don't assume him/her to be aware of its every aspect as you may have come across

something not everybody knows about during the research process. But you shouldn't fall into vague and long discussions but get to the point right away. They are better to be included in your body paragraphs.

The second goal is to indicate what you're going to argue. One of the successful techniques that are widely used for writing an academic essay is posing a question and then answering it with your thesis statement. As a rule, it's placed at the end of your introduction and indicates what you'll be writing about in the body part. Your thesis statement should have an arguable claim so that you could prove your point using supporting evidence. It doesn't matter if your thesis statement is one or three sentences long; the only thing to keep in mind when writing it is making it clear and comprehensive. Your outline will help you to decide what point to make.

The Goal of Main Body

This is the part where you develop your argument and provide evidence. You need to present a clear and coherent analysis of the topic and make sure you stick to a logical flow of information. Move from one key point to another and support each of them with quotations, facts, etc. In the result, you have to get a well-argued passage that can convince your reader and leave no doubts about your expertise on this topic.

In order to make it easier for a reader to follow your train of thoughts, you have to use topic sentences. They summarize the main points of each paragraph and give your reader an idea of the most important information in it. They also help to organize the written material according to your outline and combine together all of your arguments. Topic sentences are usually placed at the beginning of a paragraph and relate to the essay's thesis. They can come in a form of a question, opinion statement or complex sentence, but will always be some kind of transition between paragraphs.

The Goal of Conclusion

There's a belief that people tend to remember only the first and the last thing you tell them. Therefore, you have to try very hard to summarize your essay in a memorable and distinctive manner, yet not to be too original and leave a lot of loose ends. The goal of your conclusion is to leave a reader with the sense of closure and give him/her something to think about.

If you want to achieve this goal you may end your essay with a reference to the introductory paragraph. This way you'll demonstrate that you've answered all of the

introductory paragraph. This way you'll demonstrate that you've answered all of the questions raised in it. Another method for structuring your conclusion is by leading your reader to the new ideas and solutions. It doesn't mean you should include a new perspective to the argument you've already made, but make your readers think about this particular topic in a broader way and realize the possible implications of your analysis.

Try to avoid using such predictable and irritating phrases like “in conclusion” and “to sum up”. Your reader can see that this is the end of your essay and there's no need to state the obvious.

Sentences and Transitional Phrases

There are several more things you have to keep in mind while writing an essay. Your sentences shouldn't be too long and difficult to understand. The longer the sentence the higher the probability your reader won't be able to follow it. Avoid overusing adjectives and explanations for obvious things just for the sake of reaching the required amount of words. Also, it's a common practice for academic essays to avoid passive voice sentence structure. Try to express your thoughts using sentences in active voice as they get right to the point and minimize the risk of a reader's confusion.

An essay is often referred to as a conversation between a reader and a writer. If you'd like to make this conversation more coherent and easier to grasp you should use transitional phrases. They are a great tool for connecting paragraphs and guiding your reader from one argument to another. You may also use them for linking the sentences together, but don't overdo it. You don't want your essay to be full of cliché transitional phrases and lack constructive argumentation.

Transitional phrases may also be helpful for identifying the weak places of your essay which need some additional information. If you can't find the right words for connecting two paragraphs it may be a sign of such a place. Maybe, you need to include another evidence or supporting statement to make this transition smoother.

Step 3

Drafting and Editing

No one expects your first draft to be a masterpiece. You shouldn't mind the order you write in because you can rearrange everything according to your outline later. The most important thing is to get all of your thoughts on paper to have enough material to work with. No matter how many drafts you want to make, just make sure to meet your deadline. Practice shows that it's almost impossible to find even obvious errors right after you've finished writing. It's better to leave your essay and focus on another activity. Your brain needs some time to process the information, so you should come back to the writing process at least after 24 hours break. Ask someone else's opinion on it and analyze their feedback. Some of the comments you receive may be pretty valuable. You might also want to compare your essay to some of your previous works to make sure you didn't make the same mistakes.

The most significant question you have to ask yourself is whether you've managed to provide all the necessary arguments to support your thesis and make your point clear. Or, vice versa, maybe you've overloaded your essay with excessive data that doesn't belong to your reasoning.

While editing you should check the style of your essay and its consistency to avoid jargon phrases or colloquial language. Get rid of unnecessary words or sentences which don't help you in building your argument. Try to choose specific words to make your point, don't use generalization as it may lead your reader away from the main idea.

Using metaphors and analogies is a great way to make your essay more colorful and add a spark to it. However, you should avoid excessive use of this technique as it can be rather confusing for a reader and inappropriate for the tone of your essay. Extended metaphors are tricky to use because there's a high risk of making it impossible for a reader to understand what you want to say. Read carefully through your essay to spot these literary devices and eliminate the unreasonable ones.

You also don't want to overuse quotations in your essay. It may seem like you rely too much on someone else's opinion and don't express your own. Include only the quotes which paint a picture for your reader, bring colors to the text and are essential to your argumentation.

Step 4

Referencing and Citation styles

As you know, writing an academic essay requires you to do some research. It's impossible to write a noteworthy paper with convincing argumentation without using facts and expert opinions. It will give your instructor an idea of what books and journals you've read to get prepared for this assignment and demonstrate your profound interest in the topic. Once you've found the information you want to include in the essay you have to give a reference as soon as you mention it. It concerns not only direct quotes you use, but paraphrases as well. If you fail to do so, it will be considered a serious violation and you might get accused of plagiarism. Notice, that it's not enough to list all your sources in the bibliography. You have to indicate directly in the text every quote, paraphrase, fact, and summary that are not your own idea.

Be careful with paraphrasing. It's difficult to find new appropriate words for a phrase that you like and want to use. But changing just one word in it won't do you any good. Concentrate on the idea of a particular sentence or phrase and imagine you need to tell your friends about this information. Saying it with your own words can make it sound even more genuine for a reader than the original wording. Analyze the text and find the main idea expressed in a passage.

There are different citation styles:

- MLA;**
- APA;**
- Chicago;**
- Turabian;**
- Harvard;**
- MHRA systems.**

Every educational institution uses one of them and you need to specify which particular one you're required to use. If your instructor doesn't provide you with detailed guides to these systems you can easily find them online. There are some significant differences between these format styles and you should be very careful to follow the guidelines.

Step 5

Proofreading

Nothing can spoil the whole impression of your essay more than errors in spelling and grammar. It's such a pity to receive a low score because of your lack of attention after spending countless hours writing your essay. Check every comma and the spelling of every word you're not sure of to avoid this disappointing experience.

If you cannot remember all the grammar rules and are confused of where to put commas, hyphens, and semi-colons you can check your text with a free online editing tool. Almost all of them have free versions you can try out and then subscribe to if you find them helpful. They won't correct all of your mistakes, but at least you won't have any typos in your essay.

You can also find a lot of online resources with grammar tips and common errors students make. Read through a couple of them and maybe you'll be able to spot an error in your masterpiece.