

Developing the Essayist

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Abstract:

Developing excellent essay writers involves two basic elements—understanding the structure of an essay, and writing for a purpose. By definition an “essay” should express an opinion, but often students are not sure how to construct a thesis or articulate an opinion, especially if it is a content-based assignment. These two elements can be clearly presented, and through a pathway based on increasing complexity, refined for students of varying levels of aptitude and writing experience.

Overview of Presentation:

The topic-based paragraph is the building block of the essay, and should be taught first:

- Teacher dictates length of ¶ by requiring a certain # of details (facts or comments).
- Topic-Clincher Rule: The topic & clincher sentences must repeat/reflect 2-3 key words.
- Refining the paragraph model by moving from “just details” to the TRIAC model.

Steps for writing a *Basic or Expanded Descriptive (or expository) essay*:

1. Determine length; length dictates structure & number of topics
2. List possible topics
3. Choose topics; (topics should be related, selected for a purpose—shown in Part Two)
4. Outline and write body (topic) paragraphs
5. Write the conclusion paragraph
 - a. Restate topics (3-5)
 - b. Make a point: What is the most _____ * thing & why
*(important, significant, valuable, notable, useful, etc.)
6. Write the introduction paragraph
 - a. Get the attention of the reader
 - b. Give background information
 - c. State topics (3-5)
 - (d.) Thesis=point made in conclusion

Steps for writing a *Super-Essay*

1. Determine length (12-16 ¶= two sections, 17-24 ¶=three sections)
2. Divide subject into two areas (practical/ethical, causes/effects, etc.)
3. List and choose topics for each section
4. Make master outline, plan & write body paragraphs
5. Connect sections with sub-conclusions & sub-introductions
6. Write super-conclusion & super-introduction

Variations on Models: Basic Essay with Expanded Topics

1. Important or long topics may need two paragraphs
2. Division of one topic into sub-topics should be clear (i.e. if topic is “taxation,” sub-topics could be “direct taxation” & “indirect taxation”)

Argumentative Essay (sometimes termed Persuasive)

1. Introduction states “thesis” (opinion)
2. Topics support thesis, conclusion restates opinion

True Persuasive Essay

1. Introduction asks a question (conceals opinion)
2. Topics strategically chosen to lead reader (Con--Pro)
3. Conclusion argues opinion (discredit Con, reaffirm Pro)

Part Two - The Purpose

A. Difference between an "Essay" and a "Report"

1. Report = Facts
2. Essay = Opinion

B. Forcing an opinion in the conclusion.

1. The power of the word "most"
2. The need for "why"
3. Start young; opinions can't really be "incorrect"

C. Progression by subject type:

REPORT = FACTS

Stage I

Animals
States
Countries

Topics

Related

Stage II

Things
People
Events

Selected

Stage III

Literary Analysis
Personal Response
Critique

*To
Support
Thesis*

Stage IV

Issues (Persuasive)

Strategic!

ESSAY = OPINION

D. Documentation

1. Can be taught in steps, not all at once.
2. Several "right" ways - most important is following the style guide.
3. Teaching sequence:
 - Step One: Bibliography (books looked at)
 - Step Two: Integrated Quotation (< 3 lines)
 - Step Three: Inset Quotation (3 lines or more)
 - Step Four: Footnotes
 - Step Five: Paraphrase
 - Step Six: Informational Footnote
 - Step Seven: "Works Cited" vs. "Bibliography"
 - Step Eight: APA, MLA, etc.

E. Most important: Integration with relevant content, interests, goals.