

Chapter 7

The Structure of the Essay

This chapter will show you how the essay follows the same format as the paragraph. You will learn about the parts of the essay and investigate lots of examples written by student peers and professional writers. These examples will help you use the essay form in your writing.

Most of the writing you do in college will be in the format of an essay. The word “essay” comes from a French word meaning “to attempt or try.” The essay is an attempt at developing a main idea in a number of paragraphs. An essay can be four or five paragraphs long or it can be as long as an entire book. Although there is nothing special about the five-paragraph essay, short essays of from four to seven paragraphs are commonly used in college because they can be written in a class period.

Most beginning college writers dread the idea of having to write an essay. They fear that they won't have enough to say to fill up four or more paragraphs, and they worry that they won't know how to organize their writing. As you go through the lessons in this chapter, you will notice a number of differences between the student essays and the professional essays used as examples. The classic five-paragraph essay is a good learning tool, but in order to interest their audience and make their point, professional writers usually use shorter paragraphs and a less formal organization that lacks overt thesis statements and topic sentences. Writers and editors deliberately keep the paragraphs in newspaper and magazine articles short because the column format makes short paragraphs easier to