

THE COLLEGE STUDENT'S GUIDE TO WRITING FIVE TYPES OF ESSAYS

(Information obtained from *Successful College Writing* 2nd ed. by Kathleen T. McWhorter)

Narrative Essay

What is it?

A narrative essay achieves a certain purpose through telling a story, which makes it interesting to the reader and also results in getting some point across. For example, you might write a story about meeting someone special to you. The purpose may be to tell how meeting this person affected your decision to attend college or to entertain the reader with a funny story about that person. The purposes of writing narratives include the following: to create a sense of shared history, to provide entertainment, to offer instruction, and to provide insight. Some examples of narrative essay topics include a special person, event, or place. After choosing a topic, you should determine the main point you want to make about that topic and then concentrate on that throughout the rest of the paper.

Guidelines for writing a narrative essay:

- 4 Make a specific point. Determine what the purpose of your essay is. State that point in your thesis statement, or controlling idea, and build upon it throughout the essay by using examples, stories, and other details that all relate back to the main idea.
- 4 Involve readers in the story and create a visual picture by using dialogue and physical description, which is achieved through telling events that happened and presenting problems that arose. Also include specific descriptive details so that the reader can easily picture the scene in each of the events.
- 4 Sequence events. Often this is done chronologically (the order in which events happened), but using flashbacks (writing the story from one point in time but then talking briefly about something that happened in the past) and foreshadowing (briefly talking about something that will happen in the future) can make the story more interesting.
- 4 Decide which point of view, first-person (from the author's point of view, using "I") or third-person (using "he," "she," "them," etc. instead of "I"), works best for your essay, and tell the story from that viewpoint.

Descriptive Essay

What is it?

A descriptive essay tells about a certain topic or story, using details to appeal to the five senses. It gives readers the ability to vividly imagine the situation or scene and feel as if they are experiencing it firsthand. To write a descriptive essay, you could choose a person, place, event, object, or experience and describe it thoroughly using many sensory details.

Guidelines for writing a descriptive essay:

- 4 Use sensory details. Appeal to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

- 4 Use active verbs (in which the subject is doing the acting instead of being acted upon by something or someone else, such as “Cindy hit the ball.” instead of “The ball was hit by Cindy.”). Also, use a variety of sentence types, such as a simple sentence (“Tom went to the store.”), compound sentence (“Tom went to the store, and he bought a loaf of bread.”), complex sentence (“While Tom was at the store, he bought a loaf of bread.”), or compound-complex sentence (“While Tom was at the store, he bought a loaf of bread, but he forgot to buy a gallon of milk.”).
- 4 Avoid vague language, such as “pretty,” “really,” “a lot,” and “very.”
- 4 Create a dominant impression (overall attitude, mood, or feeling about the subject), such as causing the readers to sympathize with you about a sad event that happened or to agree with you strongly on a certain controversial topic. Choose the details and descriptions that will help accomplish this impression.
- 4 Use comparisons. In order to help make the descriptions even more vivid to the reader, use similes (such as “His emotional state was like a roller coaster.”), metaphors (such as “Her smile was a ray of sunlight in the dark sea of unfamiliar faces.”), personification (giving human characteristics to an object, such as “The wind howled in my ears and beckoned me to walk further into the forest.”), and analogies (brief stories that relate to the topic). Determine the method of organization that works best for your essay: spatial (top to bottom, inside to outside, near to far), chronological (the order in which events happened), least-to-most, or most-to-least.

Comparison and/or Contrast Essay

What is it?

A comparison and/or contrast essay tells about two or more main subjects by pointing out similarities and/or differences. One way to write this type of essay would be to choose two or more objects, people, places, events, experiences, or ideas and compare and/or contrast them according to a few specific points.

Guidelines for writing a comparison and/or contrast essay:

- 4 Have a clear purpose and a main point (to express ideas, to inform, to persuade, etc.).
Make sure your subjects have something specific on which you can base your comparison and/or contrast.
- 4 Decide the order that best suits your essay. The two main ways you can choose to organize a comparison and/or contrast essay are point-by-point organization and subject-by-subject organization.
 - point-by-point: switching back and forth between the subjects,
comparing/contrasting them according to several main points
 - subject-by-subject: writing about all the main points of one subject and then
writing about all the main points of another subject, and so
on, referring back to the other subject(s) in a
comparing/contrasting way
- 4 In your thesis statement, or controlling idea, include the subjects; identify whether you will be talking about similarities, differences, or both; and state your main point.
- 4 Have a sufficient number of significant characteristics and details (which are the various points you use to compare and/or contrast the subjects), and give an equal amount to all

sides.

Cause and Effect Essay (also called causal analysis)

What is it?

A cause and effect essay analyzes what causes certain things to happen or why things are a certain way, the results brought about by certain events, or both. For example, you may want to write an essay about an event that happened and then tell how it affected your life. This would tell the cause (the event) and the effect (how it affected your life). To begin writing a cause and effect essay, you may want to first decide on a topic, such as an event or a person, and then decide what you will tell about that topic, such as what happened to make that specific event take place or what made the person have a certain attitude or personality. You could also tell about a specific topic and what effects it had on future events.

Guidelines for writing a cause and effect essay:

- 4 Decide whether you will focus on causes, effects, or both.
- 4 There can be multiple causes of one effect. (For example, because you saved your money, shopped around for the best deal, and saw an ad in a newspaper, you were able to buy the car of your dreams.) There can also be one cause of multiple effects. (For example, your decision to stay out late one night may have caused you to miss an important phone call, forget to study for a test, and made you tired the next day.) There can also be a chain of events in which each effect turns out to be the cause of another effect. (For example, one event may have affected your decision to travel to Europe, which affected your decision to study a foreign language, which helped you get a job as a travel agent.)
- 4 Have a clear purpose (to tell information, to persuade readers, or both). This purpose is achieved through a main idea, which should be included in the thesis statement, or controlling idea.
- 4 Choose a logical organization. For example, you may want to use chronological (the order in which events happened), most-to-least (such as most effective to least effective or most difficult to least difficult), least-to-most (such as least costly to most costly or least obvious to most obvious), or order of importance (such as a belief that is most important to you, then a belief that is a little less important, and so on).
- 4 Explain cause and/or effect fully, using details to support your explanations.

Argumentative Essay

What is it?

An argumentative essay makes a claim and then gives examples and evidence to prove that point. You can begin writing an argumentative essay by deciding on a certain topic, such as something about a belief, idea, or controversial issue. Then, do research to obtain detailed information. The information can be statistics, stories, examples, observances, and other facts. Use the information throughout the essay to argue your point and convince the reader.

Guidelines for writing an argumentative essay:

- 4 Choose a narrow issue.
- 4 Tell your reader what you believe about the issue very clearly and specifically in your thesis statement, or controlling idea.
- 4 Be aware of your audience and anticipate the reader's views. This means that if you know your readers will most likely not believe a certain statement because it goes against traditional beliefs or their personal viewpoints, make sure you give solid evidence to back it up.
- 4 Use convincing details as evidence to support your claim. These should be from believable and reliable sources. For example, if you're stating something that has to do with human health, quote a doctor who knows about that topic, or if you are talking about a trend in society, include statistics from a well-known organization.
- 4 Choose the most appropriate way of arguing your point (inductive or deductive).
inductive=start with stating all the evidence and then move on to one conclusion
deductive=start with one basic statement of belief and move on to the supporting points of evidence
- 4 Acknowledge opposing viewpoints to prove you have thought about the topic thoroughly yet still find that your point is correct.

Classification or Division Essay

What is it?

A classification or division essay presents several topics by organizing them in a clearly defined pattern.

A classification essay takes several topics that are related in some way and sorts them into groups or categories according to certain characteristics. Some examples of this type of paper would be three objects, people, or places that are each described separately, but they are also categorized and presented in such a way so that the connection among them is clear to the reader.

A division essay begins with one topic and divides it out into several parts in order to take a closer, more detailed look at it. To write a division essay, you could choose a topic about a person, place, object, or event and then divide it into several aspects that analyze the topic from different points.

Guidelines for writing a classification or division essay:

- 4 Decide either how to classify the topics or into what parts to divide the topics, according to whatever works best for your audience and is both exclusive (meaning that it strictly allows only certain information into each category) and comprehensive (meaning that all information is included somewhere, in one category or another) so that no topics overlap or are left out.
- 4 Make each category clear and understandable to the reader by using descriptions of the categories and topics and by including details.
- 4 Make sure the thesis statement, or controlling idea, tells what the main subject of the paper is; it may also mention the method you will use to classify or divide.