

*Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.*

— Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

## How to Write an Expository Essay

Expository essays are often assigned in academic settings. In an expository essay you need to consider an idea, investigate the idea, explain the idea, and then make an argument. While it may seem overwhelming, writing an expository essay is easy if you take it one step at a time.

### Part 1 of 4: Planning Your Essay

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Define your purpose for writing. Think about why you are writing an expository essay. Jot down some of the reasons why you are writing an expository essay and what you hope to do with your completed essay.

- If you are writing an expository essay for an assignment, read the assignment guidelines. Ask your instructor if anything seems unclear.

2 Consider your audience. Think about who will be reading your expository essay. Consider the needs and expectations of your readers before you begin writing. Jot down some of the things that you will need to keep in mind about your readers as you write your expository essay.

- If you are writing your essay for a class assignment, consider what your instructor will expect you to include in your essay.

3 Generate ideas for your expository essay. Before you begin writing your essay, you should take some time to flesh out your ideas and get some things down on paper. Invention activities like listing, freewriting, clustering, and questioning can help you to develop ideas for your expository essay.

- Try listing. List all your ideas for your expository essay. Then look over the list you have made and group similar ideas together. Expand those lists by adding more ideas or by using another prewriting activity.
- Try freewriting. Write nonstop for about 10 minutes. Write whatever comes to mind and don't edit yourself. After you finish writing, review what you have written. Highlight or underline the most useful information for your expository essay. Repeat the freewriting exercise using the passages you underlined as a starting point. You can repeat this exercise many times to continue to refine and develop your ideas.
- Try clustering. Write a brief explanation of the subject of your expository essay on the center of a piece of paper and circle it. Then draw three or more lines extending from the circle. Write a corresponding idea at the end of each of these lines. Continue developing your cluster until you have explored as many connections as you can.
- Try questioning. On a piece of paper, write out "Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?" Space the questions about two or three lines apart on the paper so that you can write your answers on these lines. Respond to each question in as much detail as you can.

- 4 Make an outline. Once you have gotten some of your ideas on paper, you may want to organize those ideas into an outline before you begin drafting your essay. You can Write an Essay Outline to plan out your whole essay, develop more ideas, and figure out if you have forgotten anything.
- 5 Find appropriate sources. See your assignment guidelines or ask your instructor if you have questions about what types of sources are appropriate for this assignment. Books, articles from scholarly journals, magazine articles, newspaper articles, and trustworthy websites are some sources that you might consider using.
- 6 Evaluate your sources to determine their credibility before you decide to use them. There are several things that you will need to consider in order to determine whether or not a source is trustworthy.
  - Identify the author and his or her credentials. Think about what qualifies this person to write about their subject. If the source has no author or the author does not have adequate credentials, then this source may not be trustworthy.
  - Check for citations to see if this author has researched the topic well enough. If the author has provided few or no sources, then this source may not be trustworthy.
  - Look for bias. Think about whether or not this author has presented an objective, well-reasoned account of the topic. If the author seems biased, then this source may not be trustworthy.
  - Consider the publication date to see if this source presents the most up to date information on the subject.
  - Cross-check some of the information in the source. If you are still concerned about a source, cross check some of its information against a trustworthy source.
- 7 Read your sources well. Make sure that you understand what the author is saying. Take time to look up words and concepts that you do not understand. Otherwise, you might end up misreading and misusing your sources.
- 8 Take notes while you read your sources. Highlight and underline significant passages so that you can come back to them. As you read, take note of significant information in your sources by jotting the information down in a notebook.
  - Show when you have quoted a source word for word by putting it into quotation marks. Include information about the source such as the author's name, article title or book title, and page number.
  - Write down the publishing information of each source. You will need this information for your "References," "Bibliography," or "Works Cited" pages. Format this page according to your instructor's guidelines.
- 9 Develop your tentative thesis. Effective thesis statements express the main focus of a paper and state an arguable claim. A thesis should not be more than one sentence in length.
  - Make sure your thesis is arguable. Do not state facts or matters of taste. For example, "George Washington was the first president of the United States," is not a good thesis because it states a fact. Likewise, "Die Hard is a great movie," is not a good thesis because it expresses a matter of taste.
  - Make sure your thesis provides enough detail. In other words, avoid just saying that something is "good" or "effective." Instead, say what makes something "good" or

"effective.

#### Part 2 of 4: Introducing Your Essay

- 1 Begin with an engaging sentence that gets right into your topic. Your introduction should immediately begin discussing your topic. Think about what you will discuss in your essay to help you determine what you should include in your introduction. Keep in mind that your introduction should identify the main idea of your expository essay and act as a preview to your essay.
- 2 Provide context. Provide enough background information or context to guide your readers through your essay. Think about what your readers will need to know to understand the rest of your essay. Provide this information in your first paragraph.
  - If you are writing about a book, provide the name of the work, the author, and a brief summary of the plot.
  - If you are writing about a specific day in history, summarize the day's events. Then, explain how it fits into a broader historical scope.
  - If you are writing about a person, name the person and provide a brief biography.
  - Keep in mind that your context should lead up to your thesis statement. Explain everything your reader needs to know to understand what your topic is about. Then narrow it down until you reach the topic itself.
- 3 Provide your thesis statement. Your thesis statement should be a single sentence that expresses your main argument.

#### Part 3 of 4: Expressing Your Main Points

- 1 Determine how many paragraphs to include. The most common length for an expository essay is five-paragraphs, but an expository essay can be longer than that. Refer to your assignment guidelines or ask your instructor if you are unsure about the required length of your paper.
  - A five-paragraph essay should include three body paragraphs. Each body paragraph should discuss a piece of supporting evidence that supports your thesis.
  - Even if your essay is longer than five paragraphs, the same principles still apply. Each paragraph should discuss a piece of supporting evidence.
- 2 Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence. The topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph. It should introduce one piece of supporting evidence that supports your thesis.
  - For example, if you are writing an expository essay about the use of dogs in the US Marine Corps during WWII, your main ideas and topic sentences could be something like:
    - "Dogs played an active role in Marine Corps missions in the Pacific."
    - "The Doberman Pinscher was the official dog of the US Marine Corps during WWII, but all breeds were eligible to train as war dogs."
    - "War dogs were even eligible to receive military awards for their service."
- 3 Elaborate on your supporting evidence. After you have stated your topic sentence, provide specific evidence from your research to support it. Offer a new piece of evidence for every body paragraph in your essay.
  - Most of your evidence should be in the form of cited quotes, paraphrases, and

- summaries from your research.
  - Your evidence could also come from interviews, anecdotes, or personal experience.
  - Try to provide at least two to three pieces of evidence to support each of your claims.
  - For example, if a paragraph starts with, "War dogs were even eligible to receive military awards for their service," the supporting evidence might be a list of dogs who got awards and the awards they were given.
- 4 Analyze the significance of each piece of evidence. Explain how the evidence you have provided in that paragraph connects to your thesis. Write a sentence or two for each piece of evidence. Consider what your readers will need to know as you explain these connections.
- 5 Conclude and transition into your next paragraph. Each paragraph should transition into the next. The conclusion of each body paragraph should sum up your main point while showing how it works with your next point.
  - For example, imagine that you want to connect two paragraphs that begin with these sentences: "The Doberman Pinscher was the official dog of the US Marine Corps during WWII, but all breeds could train as war dogs." And, "War dogs were, in fact, eligible to receive military awards for their service." Your concluding sentence would need to combine the idea of dog breeds with the idea of dogs receiving military awards.
    - You could write, "Even though Dobermans were the most common breed used in WWII, they were not the only breed, and were not the only dogs recognized for their help."

#### **Part 4 of 4: Concluding Your Essay**

- 1 Restate and rephrase your thesis. The first sentence of your concluding paragraph should restate your thesis. But you should not just restate your thesis. You should also say what the evidence you have provided has added to your thesis.
  - For example, if your original thesis was, "Dogs used by the United States Marine Corps during WWII played a significant role in the Pacific theater," then your restated thesis might be something like, "Dogs of all breeds and sizes had an important and honored role to play in WWII, especially in the Pacific theater."
    - Note that the second sentence repeats the information provided in your original thesis. It just says it in a new way while also hinting at the information you included in the body of the essay.
- 2 Summarize and review your main ideas. Take one sentence to summarize each main piece of supporting evidence, as presented in your essay's body. You should not introduce any new information in your conclusion. Revisit your most compelling claims and discuss how they all support your main point.
- 3 Offer a final thought or call to action. Use your last sentence to make a final statement about your topic. This last part of your final paragraph is your opportunity to say what should happen next. You can offer a solution or ask a new question about your topic.
  - Explain how the topic affects the reader
  - Explain how your narrow topic applies to a broader theme or observation
  - Call the reader to action or further exploration on the topic
  - Present new questions that your essay introduced