



How to Write a Great Essay

WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

- An **essay** is a relatively short written paper that analyzes, discusses, explains, evaluates or interprets a topic from a personal perspective
- Its purpose is to convey thoughts and ideas to the reader in a logical, thought-out manner

Format: Essays can vary in length (one page and up) • Essay must be typed in letter quality on white 16 or 20 lb paper • Margins should be consistently set as top = 2", left = 1.5", right = 1", and bottom = 1" • Double-space between headings and text • Do not use slang (unless you are making reference to a word or phrase); in this case, place the term within quotation marks

RESEARCH SOURCES

LOCATING PRIMARY SOURCES

- Lectures, speeches, written correspondence, in-person and telephone interviews, personal documents (e.g., diaries, letters, family histories), autobiographies, surveys, and experiments
- Seek experts in a given field
- Find names of leading experts in recent editions of periodicals and through mass media
- Seek contacts from course professors
- Search archives for additional information

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

Literature

Primary sources: Novels, short stories, diaries

Secondary sources: Reviews, biographies, journal articles

Business

Primary sources: Memos, technical reports, market research

Secondary sources: Business newspapers, journals, magazines

Science

Primary sources: Experiment data, observations, methods

Secondary sources: Scientific journals, books

Fine Arts

Primary sources: Music, sculpture, paintings

Secondary sources: Reviews, books, journals

Political Science & History

Primary sources: Speeches, agency reports, Congress reports

Secondary sources: Magazines, political journals, history books

Social Sciences

Primary sources: Case studies, scientific reports, interviews

Secondary sources: Documents, journals, books

LOCATING SECONDARY SOURCES

Library Card Catalogs

- Computerized indexes to books and periodicals according to subject

Books

- Bibliography provides additional sources of information

Trade Bibliographies

- Used primarily by librarians and booksellers (e.g., *Library Congress Catalog: Books, Subjects*)
- Provides recent titles that may not be found in other sources, as well as publisher, publication date, and place

Indexes

Bibliographical indexes: Provide bibliographies on a number of subjects (e.g., *Bibliographic Index: A Cumulative Bibliography of Bibliographies*)

Biographical indexes: Provide index of distinguished people (e.g., *Biography Index: A Quarterly Index to Biographical Material in Books and Magazines*)

Computerized databases: Found on computer disks and CD-ROM

Government publication indexes: Provide listings of federal, state, and county government documents (e.g., *Public Affairs Information Services Bulletin*)

Newspaper indexes: Provide lists to information in newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times Index*)

Periodical indexes: Provide lists, along with page numbers, of articles within journals and periodicals

Internet

- Use search engines to find recent information on a topic
- Some search for keywords, others search for categories of sites
- Ask for leads through on-line discussion groups
- Be aware that on-line material is often not peer-reviewed
- Many links exist to libraries and other reference sources

ESSAY APPROACHES

ANALYTICAL

- Involves an analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a synthesized conclusion
- Searches for causes and effects, as well as meanings and consequences
- Includes details, quotations, and paraphrases that support thesis (e.g., research report)

EXPLANATORY

- Involves a review or comparison
- Reflects the opinions and experiences of the reviewer (e.g., book review, art exhibit review)

ARGUMENTATIVE

- Involves a controversial opinion where the subject cannot be proven
- Written to persuade reader to take particular point of view
- You must take one side of argument but still present strong facts from other sides
- Includes documented evidence (e.g., details, statistics, examples) to support opinion

PLAGIARISM

- **Plagiarism** involves presenting original ideas of others as one's own ideas or work
- It is a serious offense and often results in a failed grade for the essay
- Avoid plagiarism by crediting sources of exact wordings, direct quotes, and summaries of original ideas (see **Documentation**)
- There is no need to credit common knowledge
- Never copy information word for word unless you provide proper credit

ESSAY SECTIONS

PRELIMINARIES

- A preliminary should include a title page, table of contents, list of illustrations, tables, glossary, abbreviations, and an abstract as required by the course instructor
- Do not paginate
- Place each main section so that it starts on a separate page
- Follow the instructor's directions if they require specific features

Title Page

- Include title of essay, course title & number, student name & number, and date
- Center information on page
- Use an appropriate font size and type
- Use upper and lowercase letters
- Do not underline the title or set it in quotation marks
- If the title exceeds one line in length, then double-space

Table of Contents

- List all headings followed by ellipses with page numbers right-justified
- List all titles
- Use exact capitalization, wording of titles, and numbering as found in paper

List of Illustrations

- List figure numbers of illustrations in Arabic numerals aligned flush left, and then followed by a period
- Begin caption two spaces after period
- Single-space within captions; double-space between captions

List of Tables

- List table numbers in Arabic numerals followed by a period
- Begin table title two spaces after period
- Indent runover lines three spaces
- Single-space within table titles
- Double-space between table titles

List of Abbreviations

- Prepare a list of abbreviations if they are not commonly understood
- Place abbreviations in alphabetical order, flush left, in abbreviated form
- Leave 2–4 spaces between the longest abbreviation and its long form
- Align other long forms at this point
- Single-space within abbreviations; double-space between abbreviations

Glossary of Terms

- Include a glossary if the essay contains technical or foreign words that might be unfamiliar to the reader
- Definitions may be brief, but they should be clear to the reader

Abstract

- May be required (if the course instructor requires one)
- An abstract summarizes the thesis and contents of the document
- Placed just before beginning of text

MAIN BODY

Text

- Includes tables, illustrations, graphics, etc.
- All text pages should be paginated in upper right-hand corner
- Center title on first page
- Do not use any other headings or subheadings, even for long papers (unless requested by course instructor)
- Double-space all text
- Divided into three main sections: introduction, body, and conclusion

Titles

- Underline titles of published publications that are mentioned in your essay (e.g., books, periodicals, long poems, movies)
- Place quotation marks around the titles of any unpublished documents and sections of published publications (e.g., chapters, short stories, periodical articles, radio and television programs)
- Do not underline or quote titles of editions (e.g., Modern Library Edition) or sacred scriptures (e.g., Bible)

Tables & Illustrations

- Place small tables and illustrations in text
- Place large tables and illustrations in the appendix
- Center tables and illustrations on the page
- Place close to reference (always after first mention)
- Explain significance of table or illustration in text
- Keep in-text tables and illustrations intact on one page
- When they are wider than 8.5", use a landscape setup or arrange the tables or illustrations on two facing pages
- When tables or illustrations are longer than 11", carry them over onto a second page (write "Continued" at the top of the next page)
- For tables, repeat column and row headings
- Leave three spaces between text and table or illustration
- Give Arabic number & title (e.g., *Table 1, Response by Community Members on Smog or Fig. 1: Smog from Local Industry*) placed one space above table
- When they are wider than page width, use landscape position or larger-sized paper and fold properly

Quotations

- Enclose direct short quotes from people and documents in double quotation marks
- Quoted material must appear exactly as found in source
- Include periods and commas within quotes
- Place colons and semi-colons outside quotes
- Place question and exclamation marks within quotation marks if they are part of the quote (and outside if not)
- Where original source has errors, place [sic] after the error
- Set off direct quotes found within quotations with single quotation marks
- For a third quotation within quotation, set off with double quotation marks
- Use indented block quotation without quotation marks for epigraphs, letters, lines of poetry or prose, and outlines
- Block quotation is used for more than two lines of a quotation
- Indent block quotation four spaces from left margin
- When quote is taken from beginning of paragraph, capitalize and indent an additional four spaces
- Indent following quoted paragraphs four spaces
- If a quotation requires block quotation, then avoid starting it within the text
- Direct quotes that are found within block quotations must be set off with double quotation marks
- Indicate omitted words with ellipses (...); leave one space between each point
- If words fall at end or beginning of sentence, then include a period
- Any portion of quote underlined or italicized by original author should be noted by [italics author] or by writer [italics mine] or a note
- No more than 20% of the essay should consist of direct quotes

Conclusion

- End text with a period
- Leave the rest of the page blank

ESSAY SECTIONS (CONT'D)

DOCUMENTATION

- References and notes that support document
- Use the style preferred by course director
- Use a consistent style throughout paper
- Paginate as part of text body

Sources Cited

- List of print and non-print (e.g., interviews, seminars) sources quoted or paraphrased in your essay

Bibliography

- Comprehensive list of all works related to subject
- A **selected bibliography** is a list of important works that have not necessarily been cited in the essay

Works Cited

- List of print sources (e.g., books, newspapers, journals) quoted or paraphrased in the essay
- Arrange by author's surname alphabetically
- When an author has more than one publication, alphabetize by title
- When source does not have an author, list alphabetically by organization or first letter of title
- Begin entries flush left; indent run-on lines five spaces and double-space between entries

References

- Comprehensive list of sources used during research but not quoted in essay

APPENDIX

- Collection of additional material that is not included in the body of the document (e.g., questionnaire results, published documents not readily available, case studies, notes on research method)
- Should be paginated
- It is always the last section of the essay
- Create a separate appendix for each category of materials
- For one appendix, use a simply descriptive title (e.g., Appendix)
- For more than one appendix, label each one in order (e.g., Appendix A, Appendix B) and provide a descriptive title for each one
- Include titles in table of contents
- Center appendix # and title in uppercase letters; use any spacing for each appendix
- Paginate photocopied documents using Arabic numerals in brackets placed in the upper right-hand corner of the page
- Use only letter-quality photocopies

RESEARCH METHODS

- Use recent, reliable sources of information on the main topic of your essay

PRIMARY RESEARCH

- Original research conducted by the researcher (e.g., interviews, statistical analysis, surveys, laboratory work)
- Provides immediate knowledge on subject
- Adds credibility to the paper

SECONDARY RESEARCH

- Research that examines published findings
- May support primary research

ESSAY STYLE

NUMBERS

- Use figures for percentages and decimals (e.g., *All told, 15% of respondents agreed.*)
- Write out percentage (except with statistics)
- Write out numbers that are less than 10 but use numerals for all others, including ordinals (e.g., *There were ten candidates on the third day. There were 21 candidates on the 23d day.*)
- Add **d**, not **nd** or **rd**, to ordinals that contain second and third (e.g., *The 32d and 33d participants said the same things.*)
- Write all round numbers that can be expressed in two words (e.g., *There are more than five million species in about one hundred museums.*) except when a series of numbers appears together (e.g., *There were 400 species of fish, 5,000 species of insects, and 100 species of mammals in the exhibit.*)
- Write out numbers at the beginning of sentence (e.g., *Fifty-five students rallied against the plan, while only 24 were for it.*)
- Write out stand-alone fractions, but use figures for fractions that include a whole number (e.g., *The glass was one-sixth inch thick. The frame was 7.5 inches square.*)
- Mark off thousands with commas (e.g., *11,355*)
- Do not add an apostrophe to pluralize a number (e.g., *There are fifteen DC9s on the runway.*)

DATES

- Use either *On May 2, 1990, the groundhog saw its shadow...* or *On 2 May 1990, the groundhog saw its shadow...*
- When only the month and year are used, omit the punctuation (e.g., *In May 1990 the groundhog saw its shadow.*)
- Spell out centuries (e.g., *the nineteenth century*)
- For decades, you can use either figures (e.g., *The Great Depression took place in the 1930s.*) or spell it out (e.g., *The Great Depression took place in the thirties.*)

ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.	anno Domini	fig.	figure
anon.	anonymous	ibid.	ibidem (in the same place)
app.	appendix	i.e.	id est (that is)
art.	article	illus.	illustrated by
b.	born	intro.	introduction
B.C.	before Christ	n. (nn.)	note, footnote (notes, footnotes)
B.C.E.	before the common era	n.d.	no date
bk.	book	n.p.	no publisher, no place
c.	copyright	no.	number
ca.	circa	n.s.	new series
C.E.	common era	o.s.	old series
ch.	chapter (legal references)	p. (pp.)	page (pages)
chap.	chapter	par.	paragraph
col.	column	proc.	proceedings
comp.	compiler	pseud.	pseudonym
dept.	department	pt.	part
d.	died	rev.	revised, revised by
diss.	dissertation	sec.	section
div.	division	[sic]	so, thus
doc.	document	v. (vv.)	verse (verses)
ed.	edition, editor	viz.	videlicet (namely)
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)	vol.	volume
enl.	enlarged	vs.	versus, against
et al	et alii (and others)		
etc.	et cetera (and so forth)		

DOCUMENTATION

FORMAT

- Center title on page
- Enter first line two lines below, flush left, and indent run-on lines five spaces; double-space between entries
- Many styles exist
- Follow style preferred by course director

ORDER OF INFORMATION FOR PUBLICATIONS

Note: Each item should be followed by a period

- Surname, followed by first name and initial, followed by other authors (e.g., Wilson, Edward O.)
- Chapter or article title (if required) in quotations (e.g., "The Creation of Ecosystems")
- Title of publication, underlined (e.g., The Diversity of Life)
- Editor or translator (e.g., Ed. Joseph Marsh; Trans. Sampson Forillon)
- Edition abbreviated (e.g., 2nd ed.)
- Volume abbreviated (e.g., 6 vols.)
- Place, publisher, and most recent date of publication (e.g., New York: Random, 1992)
- Page numbers (e.g., 10-15 or pp. 10-15)

ORDER OF INFORMATION FOR ELECTRONIC SOURCES

- Author's surname, followed by first name and initial, followed by other authors
- Title of document
- Title of complete work
- Version of file number
- Date published
- Protocol and address or directory

EXAMPLES

Book (one author): Zinsser, William. On Writing Well. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994.

Several books (same author): Wilson, Edward O. Biophilia. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992. - - -. The Diversity of Life. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992.

Book (author & editor or translator): Dickens, Charles. The Personal History of David Copperfield. Ed. Trevor Blount. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1966.

Book (2 or 3 authors): Wiig, Elisabeth H., and Eleanor Messing Semel. Language Disabilities in Children and Adolescents. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1976.

Book (more than 3 authors): Heilbroner, Robert L., et al. In the Name of Profit: Profiles in Corporate Irresponsibility. New York: Doubleday, 1972.

Periodical: Shacochis, Bob. "The Immaculate Invasion." Harper's. February (1995). (Vol. 289).

Chapter: Hardin, Garrett. "Generating the future", Chapter 12 of Living Within Limits. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Introduction, preface, foreword or afterword: Giroux, Robert. Introduction. The Complete Stories. By Flannery O'Connor. New York: Farrar, 1971. vii-xvii.

Government document: Ontario Legislative Assembly. Standing Committee on Social Development. Debates. 3rd Session, 32nd Parliament. Toronto, 1983.

Art Work: Munch, Edward. The Scream. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Letter (personal): Myles, Julia. Letter to the author. 28 Jun. 1999.

Letter (published): Williams, Veran. Letter to the editor. 23 Apr 1998. Wall Street Journal.

Interview: Osler, Mary. President XYZ Company. Interview. 24 Nov 97.

Public lecture: Smellie, John. "Ice and Fire – Desolution and Abundance." Lecture. Scott Polar Research Institute. 13 Feb 1999.

Report (bound): County of Santa Clara. Santa Jose – Santa Clara Bus Study. Santa Clara: 1969.

Report (if unbound): County of Santa Clara. "Santa Jose – Santa Clara Bus Study." Santa Clara 1969.

Film: PowWow at Duck Lake. Prod. John Kennedy and Barrie Howells. Dir. Bonnie Klein. National Film Board of Canada, 1968.

Computer software: Office 2000. Computer software. Microsoft Corp., January 1999. Microsoft, CD-ROM.

ENDNOTE & FOOTNOTES

DOCUMENTING ENDNOTES

- Reference to each citation is noted by consecutive numbers (e.g., 3)
- Place superscript numerals immediately following the text that it refers to, outside of quotation marks
- All endnotes should appear together, following text section, on a separate page entitled "Notes"
- Indent first line five spaces and subsequent lines flush left
- Double-space notes
- Numbers in Notes section may be in either superscript or normal font style
- List notes as they appear numerically within the text

DOCUMENTING FOOTNOTES

- Use footnotes only if they are required by course instructor
- Reference to citation is noted by ordered superscript number (e.g., 3)
- Footnotes are documented on bottom of corresponding page; indicate with same superscript note
- Leave at least three spaces between text and footnotes
- Indent the first line five spaces and single-space the subsequent lines; double-space between notes

Note: Many word processing computer programs allow you to include footnotes and endnotes in the document

AUTHOR & DATE DOCUMENTATION

- If the author is named in the text next to paraphrase or quotation, then place year in parentheses after name (e.g., *Mordechai (1976) said...*)
- If author is not named in text, then place name, year, and page numbers in parentheses after citation (e.g., ... (*Mordechai, 1976, pp. 156-159*))
- For two authors, name both of them (e.g., *Young & Small, 1998*)
- For three authors, name all in first citation (e.g., *Jones, Barker & Jules, 1992*) but afterward use (*Jones et al., 1992*)
- For four authors, use shortened version in all citations (e.g., *Pifer et al., 1995*)
- Use small letters to distinguish between two or more publications that were published in the same year (e.g., (*Brooks, 1989a*); (*Brooks 1989b*))
- For block quotations, introduce name and year, and end with page numbers

Example: Schumacher (1973) wrote the following:

As an illustration, let me take the case of Peru. The capital city, Lima, situated on the Pacific coast, had a population of 175,000 in the early 1920s, just fifty years ago. Its population is now approaching three million (70-71).