



TIP

How to Write a Good Essay (Advanced)

Learn the basics on how to write an essay, or dig deeper for tips on different ways to craft a stronger, more memorable piece.

TIP

How to Write an Essay

The key to writing a great essay is time. It takes time and thought to craft an essay. Everyone has a different way of working and you should find the rhythm that works best for you. For example, some people are early-birds and do their best thinking first thing in the day, while others are night-owls who focus better when everyone else has gone to bed. Once you know how you work it's much easier to plan the time needed to do the job well.

It is a good idea to set some time aside for three days. You don't need to reserve the whole day, just a couple of hours each day should do. This gives you time to "sleep on it" and be confident in what you are writing.

When you are assigned a topic for an essay, it can be very specific or quite broad. If the essay is about a specific subject, for example "Write an essay on the imagery in John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*," then your first task is to read the story. Read it a couple of times to make sure you understand it.

The first time you read something, your brain is trying to figure out what will happen next. If you read it a second time, since you know how the story will end your brain is free to pay more attention to details and how the story is structured. And if you have time to read it a third time, even better! The same is true for watching a movie, seeing a play or just about any other experience. The knowledge you get from spending that extra time makes writing far easier.

For broad topics, like "What Did You Do This Summer" try to think of a theme that brings together a few stories or events. If you can't think of one at the start, don't worry! We have a plan for that.

Day 1

For most people, the hardest part of writing an essay is knowing what to say, not finding the words to say it. So the process begins with thinking and planning out what you need or want to say.

There are two different ways to approach writing an essay.

Method A

You can come up with a thesis sentence (what you want to say) and look for arguments or points that support your main idea. Then do research to find evidence that proves your points. Many people prefer this method because it is deductive. You have an idea and you look for the points to prove or support it.

Method B

But sometimes, a clear point or position can be hard to find. The other way to approach writing an essay is to start with what you know, and build an argument up from it.

To begin, sit down and start to take notes. This is the process of getting things out of your head and down on paper. Don't worry if each thought makes sense or is important, just spill out everything you can think of that pertains to the subject you need to write about. Your notes don't have to be complete sentences, just enough for you to remember what you are thinking about.

After an hour or so writing out your notes take a short break. Give your brain a chance to rest.

The next task is to organize your notes (and thoughts) into an outline. So what is the structure of your outline? How will you arrange your thoughts?

The Structure

Most essays follow the same structure. A typical essay is composed of five sections:

- 1 Introduction (Main point)**
- 2 Supporting Point #1**
- 3 Supporting Point #2**
- 4 Supporting Point #3**
- 5 Conclusion**

Looking at your notes, does a main point emerge? Is there something interesting about the topic that you want to explore more deeply? Sometimes an overarching topic is very clear and easy to find in your notes or your thoughts. But sometimes it isn't. What do you do then? Don't panic! This is quite common.

Look through your notes carefully. Can you group some of your notes or thoughts together? You don't have to include everything you've thought or written down, you are just looking for two or three notes that fit together. Now, looking at them as a group, what is the thought that unites them? For each group of notes try to identify a point, a thought that brings them together. Then look at the different points you have. Can you find a unifying thought that those points support? This unifying thought is your thesis statement! Now organizing your essay will be easy.

In either case, your goal for the end of Day 1 is to have a strong outline:

Paragraph 1	Main point (Introduction)
Paragraph 2	Supporting Point #1 a. example, or proof point b. example, or proof point c. example, or proof point

Paragraph 3 Supporting Point #2
a. example, or proof point
b. example, or proof point
c. example, or proof point

Paragraph 4 Supporting Point #3
a. example, or proof point
b. example, or proof point
c. example, or proof point

Paragraph 5 Conclusion

Day 2

Now it's time to start writing. Let's look at the sections of the essay more closely.

The Introduction

The job of the Introduction is to tell the reader what they are going to be reading about. Start with a sentence that clearly states what you are trying to say - the over-arching point you are trying to make. This is your thesis statement. Then write a couple of sentences that sketch out the three points you will be making that support your thesis statement. Now write a sentence to lead the reader from this overview toward the specific ideas of the next paragraph. In other words, set up the next paragraph.

Supporting Point #1

Make your supporting point. Then provide evidence for your claim. If you are using Method A, you might have to do some research to find the evidence that supports your point. If you are using Method B, then those notes or thoughts which led you to this idea could be your supporting evidence.

Supporting Point #2 & #3

These paragraphs have the same structure as Supporting Point #1: Make your point and prove it.

Some people like to structure their essay by making their strongest point first, while others like to build their argument by saving the strongest point for Supporting Point #3. You can move your Supporting Point paragraphs around to find which order you like best.

Once you have your points in the order you like, read through your essay. It is probably a little jumpy as you move from one point to the next. Use the last sentence of each paragraph to set up the next paragraph, to lead the reader from one point to the next.

Conclusion

A good Conclusion summarizes your argument and states why it is important. A great Conclusion summarizes your argument, states why it is important, and then adds another thought, or question, that gives the reader something more to think about.

That's it! There's your rough draft. So what's up with Day 3?

Day 3

Day 3 is all about refinement. Does your argument make sense and flow smoothly? Are there any points that are fuzzy or unclear? Would a different word choice make a sentence easier to understand? Is everything spelled correctly?

Print out your essay and get a red pen; it's time to mark things up. Printing out your work may seem unnecessary, but any professional writer will tell you - you see things on paper that you don't see on screen. Plus, the act of making changes or writing notes, thoughts or comments to yourself takes a little time when you do it by hand. And that is time for your brain to come up with better ideas. Try it. You'll be surprised by what a difference it can make.

Now you have a rough draft. Read through it carefully. Are you convinced? Since you've had some time to think about it, are there any better points you can make that make your argument stronger? Is your evidence for your points believable?

Once you have read through your draft a couple of times and are satisfied with all your changes, be sure to check it thoroughly for typos, missed punctuation or any other small mistakes that will distract the reader. Check until you are certain everything is exactly the way you want it to be then print out your final draft.

Congratulations! You have just taken the time to craft a good essay!