**Essays: The Basics – What You Need to Know**

Start broad

Narrow focus

Go broad again

Body

Conclusion

Introduction

-An essay consists of three main components:

* The introduction
* The body paragraph(s)
* The conclusion

Each of these has their own features, and things you must

know about them.

**The Introduction**

* An introduction introduces the essay, and tells the reader what they need to know and what the writer will be discussing in the essay.
* It needs a:
  + Hook
  + Context
  + Thesis statement

**But first, what’s a hook?**

* A hook is an opening statement that grabs the reader’s attention, and makes them want to read on.
* There are several ways to do this:
  + Question
  + Quote
  + Statistic
  + Anecdote

**What’s a Thesis?**

* A thesis statement is a short statement, usually one sentence, that summarizes the main point of claim of an essay, research paper, etc. and is developed, supported, and explained in the text by means of examples and evidence.

**How do I write my thesis? Just follow these steps!**

**Step 1: State Your Topic**

* Example topic: regulating children’s television use

**Step 2: State your opinion/main idea about this topic**

* This will form the heart of your thesis.
* An effective thesis statement will:
  + Express one major idea
  + Name the topic and assert something specific about it
  + Be a more specific statement than the topic statement before
  + Take a stance on an issue about which reasonable people might disagree
  + State your position on or opinion about the issue (without saying I believe or I think)
* Ex. Parents should regulate the amount of television their children watch

**Thesis Model 1: Sample**

* Parents should regulate the amount of television their children watch.

**\*Step 3: Give the strongest reason or assertion that supports you opinion/main idea.**

* Ex. It is not always intellectually stimulating.

**\*Step 4: Give another reason or assertion tht supports your main idea.**

* Ex. It inhibits social interaction

**\*Step 5: Give one more strong reason or assertion that supports your opinion/main idea.**

* Ex. It shortens attention spans.

\*These would all correspond to your three body paragraph topics!

**Thesis Model 2: Thesis with Reasons**

* Parents should regulate the amount of television their children watch because it shortens attention spans, inhibits social interaction, and is not always intellectually stimulating.

**Step 6: Include an opposing viewpoint to your main idea/opinion. (If Applicable)**

* This should be an argument for the opposing view that you admit has some merit, even if you do not agree with the overall viewpoint.
* Ex. Television can be educational

**Thesis Model 3: Thesis with Concession**

* Even though television can be educational, parents should regulate the amount of television their children watch.

**Step 7: Provide a possible title for your essay.**

* Ex. Touch that dial

**Thesis Model 4: Thesis with Concessions and Reasons**

* While television can be educational, parents should regulate the amount of television their children watch because it shortens their attention spans, it inhibits social interaction, and it is not always intellectually stimulating.

**The Body Paragraphs**

* The body paragraphs are where you support your thesis statement and lay out the main points of your essay.
* Often there are three of them, but not always.
* Each body paragraph needs:
  + A topic sentence (what are you writing about in this paragraph?)
  + Evidence (quotes, and paraphrases from your sources are your evidence)
  + Defense (don’t just drop the quotes in without explaining why they support your point)
  + Transition (take yourself into the next paragraph)
* \*\*Remember to organize your body paragraphs with your strongest arguments first, and then your next strongest, and so on.

**What is a topic sentence?**

* A topic sentence is a sentence that expresses the main idea of the paragraph in which it occurs.

**But wait, how do I use quotes in my essay?** **Here are some tips!**

1. **Selecting a Quote**

* Select a quote that backs up the argument you’re making.
  + The quote should act as evidence for what you want the reader to believe. This can include expert opinion, study results, or statistics. When you’re writing about literature, you can quote from the text to illustrate a point.
* Make sure the quote is something you can analyze.
  + Don’t just drop a quote into your paragraph and keep writing. You need to link the quote back to your own ideas. Without analysis, you can’t make your point to the reader.
  + If you can’t think of how to explain/link it, it’s better not to use it.
* Avoid using too many direct quotes in your paper.
  + If you use too many quotes, it will take away from your own ideas. It can undermine your argument.

1. **Incorporating a Short Quote**

* Incorporate short quotes\* into a sentence – include it directly into your paragraph along with your own words, and write a sentence that includes the quote to explain why you’re using it.
  + Ex. The imagery in the story mirrors what’s happening in Lia’s love life, as “The brown leaves symbolize the death of their relationship, while the green buds suggest new opportunities will soon unfold.”
* Use a lead in to introduce the quote – The lead in provides some context and lets the reader know you’re presenting evidence and support, and where that comes from.
  + Ex. Critic Alex Li says, “The frequent references to the color blue are used to suggest that the family is struggling to cope with the loss of their matriarch.”
* Provide commentary after a quote to explain how it supports your ideas – a quote won’t support your ideas unless you link back to your thesis. Write 1-3 sentences explaining the quote (what it means, why it supports, and how it supports)

\*A quote less than four (4) typed lines.

1. **Put quotation marks around a direct quote**

* Use quotation marks anytime you include someone else’s words in your own paper.
* This lets the reader know that you have borrowed from another writer.
* As long as you use quotation marks and cite the source where you got the material, you can use someone else’s ideas without plagiarizing.
* You need to use quotation marks even if you’re only quoting a few words.
* If you’re in doubt, it’s best to be cautious and use quotes.

1. **Using a Long Quote\***

* Introduce a long quote and then set it off in a block – Present these longer quotes in a block of text set off from the rest of your paragraph. Since it is in a block, you don’t have to use quotation marks.
* Write an introductory lead in to explain what the quote is about – The lead in sentence should explain what the reader should understand after reading the quote.
* Use a colon at the end of the lead in. (Example on next slide)
* Indent the block quote by pressing the tab key, so it’s clear that it is offset from the text.
* Again, make sure to provide commentary after a quote to explain how it supports your ideas. Your explanation should be longer than for a short quote.

\*any quote longer than four (4) typed lines.

**Block Quote Example**

In *The Things They Carried*, the items carried by the soldiers in the Vietnam war are used to both characterize them and burden the readers with the weight they are carrying:

The things they carried were largely determined by necessity. Among the necessities or near-necessities were P-38 can openers, pocket knives, heat tabs, wristwatches, dog tags, mosquito repellent, chewing gum, candy cigarettes, salt tablets, packets of Kool-Aid, lighters, matches, sewing kits, Military Payment Certificates, C rations, and two or three canteens of water. (O’Brien 2)

1. **Paraphrasing?**

* When writing an essay, you have to be careful not to use too many quotes, so sometimes you will have to paraphrase.
* Paraphrasing is when you restate someone else’s ideas in your own words.
* It can be a great way to incorporate evidence into your paper without using a direct quote every time.
* It can also be a great way to avoid using a long quote in your paper. If the exact wording isn’t needed, you can sum up the author’s ideas in 1-2 sentence. Although you don’t need to use quotes around a paraphrase, you do need to cite it.
  + When you use a paraphrase, you still need to provide commentary that links the paraphrased material back to your thesis and ideas.

1. **Other Things About Quotes**

* You can use an ellipsis (…) to omit word(s) from a direct quote. To do so you just put an ellipsis in place of the words.
  + Sometimes you want to shorten a quote to help your reader better understand why it supports your argument.
  + Or, you might want to cut out words that aren’t essential to the quotes meeting.
  + Ex. According to Li, “Rosa is the first sister to pick a rose because she’s … begun to move on after their mother’s death.”
* However, don’t eliminate words to change the meaning of the original text.
  + Do not change “Plants did not grow faster when exposed to poetry” to “plants did … grow faster when exposed to poetry.”

**The Conclusion**

* The conclusion is where you wrap everything you have talked about up.
* It is not *just* a summary of your essay.
* However, it shouldn’t include any new information.
* A conclusion needs:
  + A restatement of your thesis
  + End with a ‘mic drop’ or call to action

**Things to Note**

* Avoid using:
  + First (I, me, my, I think, etc) and Second (You, your) Person Pronouns.
  + Slang
  + Abbreviations (Can be used in some cases, but it must have been fully laid out first)
  + Contractions (don’t use don’t)
* Use formal language
* Use quotes to back up your argument
* Defend your usage of those quotes
* Anything else?

**Don’t forget to give your essay a title!**

* Titles are hard, but this is something that can be done at the end of the writing process.
* Like with the hook, you want to catch the reader’s attention, so you will want your title to be more than just “Essay” or “Topic Essay”, etc.
* Try combining a catchy phrase/quotation/clever hook with an informative phrase (includes details about content, organization, methods, etc.).
  + It’s a Frog Life: A Description of the Habitat, Lifespan, and Breeding Patterns of the Tree Frog.
  + Vice Versa
* You Try: (using the topic from the thesis examples)