

Tips on Writing an Expository Essay

The purpose of the expository essay is to explain a topic in a logical and straightforward manner. Without bells and whistles, expository essays present a fair and balanced analysis of a subject based on facts—with no references to the writer’s opinions or emotions.

A typical expository writing prompt will use the words “explain” or “define,” such as in, “Write an essay explaining how the computer has changed the lives of students.” Notice there is no instruction to form an opinion or argument on whether or not computers have changed students’ lives. The prompt asks the writer to “explain,” plain and simple. However, that doesn’t mean expository essay writing is easy.

The Five-Step Writing Process for Expository Essays

Expository writing is a life skill. More than any other type of writing, expository writing is a daily requirement of most careers. Understanding and following the proven steps of the writing process helps all writers, including students, master the expository essay.

Expository Essay Structure

Usually, the expository essay is composed of five paragraphs. The introductory paragraph contains the thesis or main idea. The next three paragraphs, or body of the essay, provide details in support of the thesis. The concluding paragraph restates the main idea and ties together the major points of essay.

Here are expository essay tips for each part of the essay structure and writing process:

1. Prewriting for the Expository Essay

In the prewriting phase of writing an expository essay, students should take time to brainstorm about the topic and main idea. Next, do research and take notes. Create an outline showing the information to be presented in each paragraph, organized in a logical sequence.

2. Drafting the Expository Essay

When creating the initial draft of an expository essay, consider the following suggestions:

- The most important sentence in the introductory paragraph is the topic sentence, which states **the thesis** or main idea of the essay. The thesis should be clearly stated without giving an opinion or taking a position. A good thesis is well defined, with a manageable scope that can be adequately addressed within a five-paragraph essay.
- **Each of the three body paragraphs should cover a separate point that develops the essay's thesis.** The sentences of each paragraph should offer facts and examples in support of the paragraph's topic.
- **The concluding paragraph should reinforce the thesis and the main supporting ideas. Do not introduce new material in the conclusion.**
- Since an expository essay discusses an event, situation, or the views of others, and not a personal experience, students should write in the third person ("he," "she," or "it"), and avoid "I" or "you" sentences.

3. Revising the Expository Essay

In the revision phase, students review, modify, and reorganize their work with the goal of making it the best it can be. Keep these considerations in mind:

- Does the essay give an unbiased analysis that unfolds logically, using relevant facts and examples?
- Has the information been clearly and effectively communicated to the reader?
- Watch out for "paragraph sprawl," which occurs when the writer loses focus and veers from the topic by introducing unnecessary details.
- Is the sentence structure varied? Is the word choice precise?
- Do the transitions between sentences and paragraphs help the reader's understanding?
- Does the concluding paragraph communicate the value and meaning of the thesis and key supporting ideas?

If the essay is still missing the mark, take another look at the topic sentence. A solid thesis statement leads to a solid essay. Once the thesis works, the rest of the essay falls into place more easily.

4. Editing the Expository Essay

Next, proofread and correct errors in grammar and mechanics, and edit to improve style and clarity. While an expository essay should be clear and concise, it can also be lively and engaging. Having a friend read the essay helps writers edit with a fresh perspective.

5. Publishing the Expository Essay

Sharing an expository essay with the rest of the class can be both exciting and intimidating. Remember, there isn't a writer on earth who isn't sensitive about his or her own work. The important thing is to learn from the experience and use the feedback to make the next essay better.

Essay Variations

Essay writing is a huge part of a education today. Most students must learn to write various kinds of essays during their academic careers, including different types of expository essay writing:

- **Definition essays** explain the meaning of a word, term, or concept. The topic can be a concrete subject such as an animal or tree, or it can be an abstract term, such as freedom or love. This type of essay should discuss the word's denotation (literal or dictionary definition), as well as its connotation or the associations that a word usually brings to mind.
- **Classification essays** break down a broad subject or idea into categories and groups. The writer organizes the essay by starting with the most general category and then defines and gives examples of each specific classification.
- **Compare and contrast essays** describe the similarities and differences between two or more people, places, or things. Comparison tells how things are alike and contrast shows how they are different.
- **Cause and effect essays** explain how things affect each other and depend on each other. The writer identifies a clear relationship between

two subjects, focusing on why things happen (causes) and/or what happens as a result (effects).

- **“How to” essays**, sometimes called **process essays**, explain a procedure, step-by-step process, or how to do something with the goal of instructing the reader.