

What Is an Essay and How to Write an Essay

What is an essay?

First of all, let us consider what an essay is. In English literature, there are two broadly recognized types. There is the *formal essay*, which is a set composition that discusses a theme methodically, with more or less intellectual detachment, elaborating an argument or a description according to a clearly conceived plan. Such are the essays of Lord Macaulay or Thomas Huxley.

Next, there is the *literary or personal essay* which has been aptly defined by *Samuel Johnson* as an irregular undigested piece, '— a sort of informal dissertation on men and manners, personal and intimate, such the essays of Addison, Hunt, Lamb, Stevenson, or E.V. Lucas.

Students are best advised to make their essays a combination of both these types. It is good for the beginner to write the formal type; he should arrange his ideas according to a 'plan', he should have before him a clearly defined outline and then proceed to fill up or develop that outline. It is best also to write in the third person: that helps the attitude of intellectual detachment. His object should be not to air his personal views, but to establish a well-reasoned proposition. But as he develops confidence and gains experience, as he acquires greater mastery over language and thought, he should enliven his arguments with personal reactions and even digress into personal anecdotes. He can then become more intimate with his readers and can afford to be pleasant and humorous in his treatment of a subject. In other words, he should, at the beginning of his career in essay-writing, depend upon facts and ideas derived from external sources, and later try to enliven these with personal anecdotes and comments.

How to write an essay?

01# -The First Step

Therefore as a first step, *a good essayist must be a person of a wide range of information*. This is derived from personal observation as well as from a study of what he finds around him. A beginning must be made by using his eyes. An eager eye and a craving curiosity will enable him to pick up a variety of information. But there are raw materials – to be put into shape by an active mind. He has to have an alert active and assimilation mind. Not only must he be well-posted in facts, but he must be able to use them in the process of thinking out any particular subject.

That is the way study of books is all-important: they furnish the mind with knowledge of things. It is a good practice to read the daily newspapers thoroughly for they help one keep abreast of the times, as also provoke one; interesting a variety of topic but, of course, the substance of knowledge must be acquired from books to which one's attention must be constantly directed.

But the mere knowledge of facts and a store of information will not be of much help unless one can make use of them, as we have said, in the process of thinking. Facts only furnish a basis for one's thoughts. Therefore, to be able to think to develop one's ideas, to deduce conclusions from premises practice is also very necessary. The best way to do this is to take part in debates and discussions. The holding of seminars and symposia will be found to be stimulating discipline and will enable one to think clearly and express oneself with lucidity.

02# – The First Step

The second step is to acquire what is known as style. A good vocabulary is an asset. One must have the only command over words, but also their synonyms and antonyms. Here again, extensive reading of books will be found to be very helpful. Books should be read aloud so that the sound of words may be embedded in one's memory. The student who reads their essays carefully also acquires without much effort an adequate stock of serviceable words that will come in handy when he is composing his essays. It will help him to express his thoughts with precision and clarity – all-important qualities for a good essayist. If, after reading an essay, the student Likes a habit of writing it out in his own words, he will be surprised to find how words leap out of his memory and contain his thoughts.

Equally important is knowledge of the syntax or the rules of constructing sentences. For a student using a foreign language, a good knowledge of the grammar of that language is of course indispensable. Attention must be particularly fixed on the more important of these rules of syntax which must be thoroughly memorized a good stock of words of syntax must be thoroughly memorized a good stock of words and a grasp of the principles of sentence construction will ensure adequate ability to use a language.

03#- The Third Step

But a good essayist must aim to acquire excellence of style this again comes with constant practice in writing as well as familiarity with the masterpieces of literary style. At its best, the essay is the highest form of English prose and calls for the exercise of literary faculties like thought and imagination. The writings of the great essayists are not only fine models of language but show how these faculties are exercised. The student will do well studying the essays of Steele and Addison, Lamb and Hazlitt, Macaulay and Arnold, Aldous Huxley and E. M. Forester of original ideas, thoughtful

criticism, the logical and clear arrangement of matter as well as polished diction and felicitous expression. A good essayist has something (an idea) to say, not necessarily profound or pompous; he has also a good way (style) of saying it. Knowledge of the subject or ideas comes first. Ideas, if they are to produce any effect must be clothed or couched in good style. "What words, we use, and in what order we put them is the whole matter of style". (Hilaire Belloc). But since much depends on practice a few hints for guidance may be useful.

First, one must write down the points that occur to one readily. Next, these points must be arranged according to some systematic principle logically in reactive essays and chronologically in narrative ones. Having done this one must develop one's thoughts from point to point. New points might occur which have to be introduced at the proper places. Finally, the draft must be carefully revised in doing this the object must be to remove repetitions of words, phrases, and ideas, to avoid ambiguities of style, and to eliminate irrelevance as well as garrulity. The aim must constantly be not to write more than is necessary. Faults to be avoided: it is a natural temptation for us;

to introduce some high-sounding words or picturesque phrases to create an effect. This is harmful and must be severely checked. A temptation equally great is to lard one's essay with quotations.

This is not harmful if the quotations are apt. but they are not indispensable. Particularly one must not yield to the habit of twisting one's line of reasoning to fit in a particular quotation. If one's thoughts are clear enough, they will not need to be supported by the authoritative pronouncements of anyone, however great.

To sum up, to write a good essay, the writer must:

Consider carefully the limits of his subject, and what is wanted, and he must strictly confine himself within these limits.

He must think out the main topics that the subject demands, and frame an outline of the essay with the main topics or ideas arranged in proper order.

His treatment must be natural and simple: he must not introduce words, phrases, quotations, or illustrations simply because they seem good but because they need and are relevant to the subject matter.

In narrative essays, it is best to follow the chronological or time order. In reactive essays, follow the logical order or the order of thinking. Take care that each point arises out of the preceding. And each point must be up in the form of a paragraph. Begin the essay in a manner that arrests attention. It is good, to begin with, something personal – a reflection or an observation that comes out of your experience.

Never attempt to write on a subject of which you have little knowledge or about which your thoughts are vague and confused. A good essayist is always precise in his thoughts, and exact in his information.

The conclusion of an essay is as important as the commencement. It must be put in a way that satisfies the reader: it must sum up your personal feelings or thoughts.

Always make it a point to revise the whole essay after it is written to strike out what is unnecessary or irrelevant, besides correcting errors in spelling and grammar.