

THE ESSAY

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At school you probably have been taught that an essay consists of minimum five paragraphs: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. However, we should ask ourselves the questions: What is an essay? What do we try to do in an essay? In Prep School you are given a topic by your teacher to write about; in academic writing your teachers ask you to prove a point, collect sufficient data to prove a point, or demonstrate that you have comprehended a text they have assigned. In all cases, the writing process is the same: the amount of evidence that goes into your paper or the length of the paper may change, but the stages you follow in the writing process are more or less the same. You have to have a thesis to prove, you have to have sufficient evidence and you have to make a conclusion.

Thesis statements

A thesis statement is the sentence that

- tells your reader the subject of your paper
- states the controlling idea of your paper, i.e. it makes an assertion about the subject
- predicts the logical order of discussion you will follow in your paper

In other words, the thesis statement is the anchor of your essay: with a good thesis statement your reader does not have to wait until he finishes reading all of your essay to learn what kind of a claim you are making, what your stance is, or how you are going to prove your viewpoint.

1. An effective thesis should be a declarative sentence, never an open ended question. If you just ask a question, the reader will have no idea what you are trying to illustrate.

Not a thesis statement: What are the disadvantages of living in a big city?

2. A good thesis should be restricted and focused. It should not be too general or too comprehensive. If it is too comprehensive, you may not be able to prove it all in one essay.

Too general: Computers have advantages and disadvantages.

This thesis is too general. How are you going to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of computers in one essay? There are technical and economic issues, social effects, time and financial considerations, etc.

3. A thesis statement should not make an announcement. It should make a claim.

Announcement: In this essay I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living on your own.

Revised thesis statement: When considered generally, living on your own is much better than living with your family.

4. A thesis statement should not make a claim that cannot be proved by logical analysis.

Moral judgment of the writer: Only evil and wicked young people choose to live on their own.

Such a statement expresses the moral judgment of the writer and cannot be proved in any factual or logical way.

Although it is a recommended practice to state your thesis in the introduction part of your essay, you will see that some writers choose not to state their thesis at the beginning of their writing but to come up with a conclusion after they discuss the issue thoroughly. Such a practice may be adopted for stylistic purposes.

Introductions

Why is the introduction important?

Your introduction is the part that invites your reader to read your essay:

- it tells your reader what it is about,
- it sets the tone for your essay. In other words, it tells the reader whether your essay will be light, humorous, serious, controversial, etc.
- it shows your reader how your essay will develop. That is to say, there must not be big surprises in the development of your essay
- it helps the reader to make a transition from the conditions he is in to the content of your essay
- it is where the reader decides whether to read your essay or not. In other words, they may put your essay down if they feel that it is going to be extremely boring (your instructors excluded because they have to read your essays whether they are extremely boring or not, they have to correct and evaluate your essays anyway)

Some tips for writing good introductions

- Think about the question: most of the time you are assigned a topic to write about. Think about the question: your answer to the question will be your thesis. How you prove it will be your development. Your thesis should be stated in the introduction paragraph.
- You may find it difficult to write an introduction at the beginning. Sometimes you may only write a tentative introduction, continue with the development, then come back and write the introduction last.
- Pay attention to your first sentence. This is the sentence your reader (your instructor and the exam marker too) reads first. You should make a good impression, and should be careful not to make too many mistakes. If you start your essay with a sentence full of grammar, spelling or vocabulary mistakes, you cannot expect to make a good first impression.
- Avoid making announcements: Do not start with opening sentences such as "In this essay I will discuss ..."
- Avoid making "Dawn of man" introductions. That is, whatever topic you are assigned, you should not start with sentences such as "Since the beginning of history", "Since the beginning of humanity",

"Since the industrial revolution", etc. These kinds of statements make only very broad generalizations, and you cannot start everything with the industrial revolution! It also indicates that you do not really have much to say about the topic!

Since the beginning of humanity young people have had problems with their families.

- Avoid using clichés. Clichés mean that you do not have anything new to say.
- Avoid filler introductions: When you do not have much to say about a topic, you list a couple of sentences one after the other, just to fill the introductory space. If the writer had something effective to say, he would have said it. However, in this example, he is just filling space.

Many young people choose to live on their own. The number of people living on their own is increasing. Many people in the cities prefer to do this. There are reasons for this phenomenon. There are also some results.

Strategies for writing good introductions

There is a number of strategies for starting your essays. Sometimes more than one method can be used to start your essay.

1. The funnel method

In this method, the first sentence is broad and general. It introduces your thesis, and each following sentence is narrower and more focused. Finally, it narrows down to your thesis. The important thing in this approach is that your funnel should not be too large, because you never will be able to narrow down. For example, if you start with the beginning of human history to write about young people living on their own, it will take you ages to narrow down. Therefore, your funnel must be appropriately narrow at the beginning.

Example paragraph 1:

"Animals have been used in medical research for a long time. In recent years animal rights organizations have started a controversy whether it is ethical or not to use animals for the benefits of medical progress. They believe that animals are equal to humans and that they have equal rights with human beings. In my opinion, animals as things, have some rights, but humans with their more developed brains are superior to them, therefore if **there is no other alternative, animals may be used in medical research.**" (Ezgi Ozer, Adv 2003)

Example paragraph 2:

"In life, people pass through different phases. They are born into a family, and then they grow up and reach puberty. After puberty, they are considered adults. At this time, the social burden on people become heavier, and new responsibilities are added to a person's burden. Graduating from a good university, finding a job, getting married and having children are some of these expectations. Most people consider these expectations, especially having children, reasonable and see them as sources of happiness . However, **it is my opinion that children are far away from being the ultimate bliss in our lives; on the contrary, they bring about more responsibilities and restrictions.**"

2. Defining a word or phrase

Sometimes defining a term or a phrase that will be used throughout the essay is a good strategy. However, it should not be a dictionary definition since anyone can consult a dictionary. The definition you offer should match your thesis, or the claims you will be making in the essay.

Example paragraph :

"The term "violence in the family" refers to male violence against females. It means that men are generally rude to women both physically and psychologically. Concerning this issue, a study has been conducted by Family Research Institute in five different geographic regions of Turkey on married women about husband violence against wives. The results of this survey indicate that two independent variables seem to be related to approval of violence." (Derya Aslan, Adv 2004)

3. Asking questions

Using questions to attract the attention of your readers is another useful strategy. Then, your essay proceeds to answer the questions you have posed in the introduction.

Example paragraph 1:

"Turkish governments have been trying to join the European Union for years. Despite all the difficult tasks that have to be achieved in order to join the EU, Turkish governments are persistent. Turkish citizens seem to agree with their governments, too. **Why are we insisting on becoming a member of the union then?** It is probably because of the

differences between the happiness levels of Turkish and EU citizens." (Gokhan Remzi Yavuz, Adv 2003)

Example paragraph 2:

"Who can imagine a world without music? Just as we – the humans- appeared, music emerged as one of our important needs too. It is obvious that music has filled our lives very effectively in that now it is impossible to eradicate it out of our lives. **Who can claim the opposite?** When we are born, the first thing we hear is the lullabies of our mothers. Then, as time passes, we continue to listen to music much more. Of course, we don't listen to lullabies any more, but we choose a particular type of music that influences us. Why we listen to music and like the type of the music we like is not a simple phenomenon, on the contrary, the reasons are much more complex." (Beste Kalender, Adv 2003)

4. Turn about

This strategy involves starting with the idea, belief or opinion that is opposite of your own claim or thesis. You first present the opposite party's opinion, the turn about with a **"but or however"**, and present your own point of view. This strategy is especially useful in argumentation.

Example paragraph:

"Reproduction is something that is in the nature of human beings. Giving birth to children, bringing them up and when they get older looking forward to them having children are all built in wishes and expectations of almost everybody. **But in a limited environment, humans cannot keep expanding their population.** There must be some ways to control the population." (Gamze Gumuslu, Adv 2003)

5. Using an anecdote

Using a short anecdote is another way to start your essay. If you have a relevant anecdote ready, using it in the introduction will make your essay more interesting and attract the attention of your reader.

Example paragraph:

"In a myth it is told that once humans did not have gender. They were neither male nor female. One day they made one of the gods angry and he punished them. He separated them into two parts: male and female. Also he put them away from each other to make them look for their partners all over the world.

For centuries and centuries it went on like that, people searching for the missing part of the puzzle, their missing half .” (Ozge Uraz, Adv 2003)

6. Using quotations

Using quotations in the introduction is another effective way to start your essay. If you have the right quotation that matches your thesis or summarizes what you want to say, it adds flavor to your essay. In the essay below, the author has found a quotation that expresses the exact idea she wants to discuss, and she builds the whole paragraph around the quotation.

Example paragraph 1:

“Music is maybe the first invention of humankind in which he was firstly inspired by the nature and then completed with his own emotions and senses. By then, music became the most indispensable friend of human kind, but why is it so fundamental?

“Music was invented to confirm human loneliness”, says Lawrence Durrell. Although they live in a society and are labeled “social animal” by some philosophers, humans are in fact alone. They have an inner world which they could hardly express to others or they could even hardly identify themselves. Music helps people understand themselves, melodies make them wander in their own world and discover the lonely parts of their souls. People who can understand or identify themselves are no more alone in the world. They find a friend which will never let them down, and never will leave them, or a friend from their “inner” world. (Sinem Kavak, Adv 2003)

The body

The body of your essay is minimum two-three paragraphs long, and supports /illustrates / explains the thesis with the help of evidence, details, facts and examples. How you organize your thoughts in a logical order may depend on your topic and thesis. There are various ways of treating a topic: the essay may be organized in order of importance, in chronological order, or spatial order. It can also be a description, narration, comparison and contrast, cause and /or effect, definition, process, classification or argumentation essay. An essay can be written in one of those methods, or it can be a combination of two or more types. It all depends on the purpose of the essay.

For more information on essay types, see [Essay Types](#).

Conclusions

If you have written an effective introduction, and logically developed your essay, the flow of ideas naturally leads to your conclusion. A good conclusion should round up your arguments and reach a final conclusion. There are a number of ways you can conclude your essay.

1. Review its major ideas

This is the simplest way to finish an essay. You go over your essay, restate the main idea in the conclusion.

"Music is a great way to relax and be happy in daily life. It is also very useful for musicians and composers to express their feelings. This is one of the reasons which make music universal; it has nothing to do with age, race or religion. Anyone who wants to listen to music, listens to music and anyone who wants to do music does music." (Aysegul Dogan, Adv 2003)

"As you can see, music makes our lives better. It increases the things we share both with ourselves and with others. It helps our loneliness to get smaller and smaller because sharing is the only way to get rid of our loneliness. That is why music is so important in our lives." (Sinem Kavak, Adv 2004)

2. Restate the thesis

Sometimes, conclusions can restate the thesis of the essay. This is done using different words to avoid monotony. In the essay below, the author restates the thesis idea in the conclusion paragraph.

Introduction:

"For a long time there has been a controversy between animal rights supporters and scientists about whether it is right to use animals in experimental research. Also, it is very debatable whether using animals for such research results in finding a cure for diseases. **From my point of view, if there are no other alternatives, and if it is possible that this will contribute to science, animals may be used for experimental research.**"

Conclusion:

"All in all, it can be said that using animals for medical research is ethical as long as it contributes to scientific development and helps scientists find ways to improve

human health. And this practice is only acceptable on the condition that necessary pains are taken and animals are treated humanely." (Ayse Ipek, Adv 2004)

3. Make predictions based on the material in the body of the essay

"Regardless of what you think, whether you think cell phones are a positive improvement or a serious threat; they are becoming a part of modern life. **It seems that stationary phones will gradually decrease in number because of the rivalry of mobile phones.** You may think they limit your personal freedom because of accessibility, or you may feel safe with the help of your cell phone. It is a personal choice whether to buy a cell phone or not and maybe it is a matter of personality too. However, it is going to get more and more difficult to resist the spread of the cell phone." (Muzaffer Sisli, Adv 2003)

4. Use questions and quotations

Using questions and quotations in the conclusion can be a good way to bring your essay to a close. If you can find a quotation that fits your position, the conclusion will sound interesting.

There are other ways of ending an essay, of course. Whichever method you use, make sure that you reach a conclusion at the end of your essay.

- Never bring up new ideas or start new discussions in the conclusion.
- Do not let your essay finish weakly with a weak conclusion section. A good essay deserves a good conclusion.
- Make sure that your conclusion is consistent with the arguments in your essay. Sometimes you may get carried away and end up concluding the opposite of your thesis, especially if you do not plan well. Do not let such inconsistency happen.

Written by Zeliha Gulcat, Sept 2004
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