

## essay --- not a big deal!!!!

An essay is a short work that treats a topic from an author's personal point of view, often taking into account subjective experiences and personal reflections upon them. Essays are usually brief works in prose, but works in verse are sometimes dubbed essays (e.g. Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *An Essay on Man* (1733-1734)). Many voluminous and famous works refer to themselves as essays (e.g. John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)).

Virtually anything may be the subject of an essay. Topics may include actual happenings, issues of human life, morality, ethics, religion and many others. An essay is, by definition, a work of non-fiction, and is often expository. The essay as literary genreThe word essay derives from the French essay ('attempt'), from the verb essayer, 'to try' or 'to attempt'. The first author to describe his works as essays was, unsurprisingly, French: Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). Inspired in particular by the works of Plutarch, a translation of whose *Oeuvres morales* [Moral works] into French had just been published by Jacques Amyot, Montaigne began to compose his essays in 1572; the first edition, entitled *Essais*, was published in two volumes in 1580. For the rest of his life he continued revising previously published essays and composing new ones.

Francis Bacon's essays, published in book form in 1597, 1612, and 1625, were the first works in English that described themselves as essays. Ben Jonson first used the word *essayist* in English in 1609, according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Notable essayists are legion. They include Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, Alamgir Hashmi, Joan Didion, Susan Sontag, Natalia Ginzburg, Sara Suleri, Annie Dillard, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walter Bagehot, George Orwell, John D'Agata, and E.B. White.

It is very difficult to define the genre of essay, but the following remarks by Aldous Huxley, regarded in his day as a leading practitioner of the genre, may be of interest:

"Like the novel, the essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything. By tradition, almost by definition, the essay is a short piece, and it is therefore impossible to give all things full play within the limits of a single essay. But a collection of essays can cover almost as much ground, and cover it almost as thoroughly, as can a long novel. Montaigne's *Third Book* is the equivalent, very nearly, of a good slice of the *Comédie Humaine*. Essays belong to a literary species whose extreme variability can be studied most effectively within a three-poled frame of reference. There is the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; there is the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and there is the pole of the abstract-universal. Most essayists are at home and at their best in the neighborhood of only one of the essay's three poles, or at the most only in the neighborhood of two of them. There are the predominantly personal essayists, who write fragments of reflective autobiography and who look at the world through the keyhole of anecdote and description. There are the predominantly objective essayists who do not speak directly of themselves, but turn their attention outward to some literary or scientific or political theme. ... And how splendid, how truly oracular are the utterances of the

great generalizers! ... The most richly satisfying essays are those which make the best not of one, not of two, but of all the three worlds in which it is possible for the essay to exist" (Collected Essays, "Preface").

The essay as a pedagogical tool In recent times, essays have become one of the chief tools by which colleges and universities judge the mastery and comprehension of material, and they are sometimes used as a part of the criteria by which the student body is selected as well. Academic essays are usually more formal than literary ones. They may still allow the presentation of the writer's own views, but this is done in a logically argued and detached manner (i.e.: the student is aware of, and tries to stand back from, their personal prejudices and 'common knowledge'). The argument of such essays often responds to the supporting evidence the author presents.

The five-paragraph essay

Main article: five paragraph essay

Many students' first exposure to the genre is the "hamburger essay": [1] a highly structured form requiring an introduction presenting the thesis statement; three body paragraphs, each of which presents an idea to support the thesis together with supporting evidence and quotations; and a conclusion, which restates the thesis and summarizes the supporting points. The short "five-paragraph essay" form is controversial in some educational thinking. It does allow the student writer to put additional structure in place, at a stage when the main concern is mastering more "tactical level" issues such as unified paragraphs, transitions, thesis statements, and so forth, but its simplistic structure severely limits the author's range of expression.

Other forms

Other common types of short essays used for academic purposes include but may not be limited to the following:

Argumentative essays

Cause & Effect essays

Compare & Contrast essays

Definition essays

Division/Classification essays

Example essays

Narrative essays

Process analysis

Longer academic essays (often with a word limit of between 2,000 to 4,000 words) are often more discursive. They sometimes begin with a short summary analysis of what has previously been written on a topic, which is often called a 'literature review'. Longer essays may also contain an introductory page in which words & phrases from the title are tightly defined. Most academic institutions will require that all substantial facts, quotations, and other supporting material used in an essay be referenced. Such references that appear throughout the text will refer to a bibliography at the end of the text. The reason for requiring references is that a teacher can then clearly distinguish between the original ideas and arguments of the student, and the secondary ideas and arguments the student has taken from their research and reading. Non-literary essays

Art  
In the visual arts, an essay is a preliminary drawing or sketch upon which a final painting or sculpture is based, made as a test of the work's composition (this meaning of the term, like several of those following, comes from the word essay's meaning of "attempt" or "trial").

Music

In the realm of music, composer Samuel Barber wrote a set of "Essays for Orchestra," relying on the form and content of the music to guide the listener's ear, rather than any extra-musical plot or story.

Film

Film can also be used to produce the more subjective reflective attitude characteristic of essays. Important essay film makers include Chris Marker, Guy Debord, Raoul Peck and Harun Farocki. One working definition of the essay film is "documentary laced with self-portrait." Theoretical approaches to this genre can be found in the works of Michel Beaujour, Raymond Bellour, Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin. Other filmmakers who have been active in the essay film are Orson Welles, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Hartmut Bitomski, Alexander Kluge, Jem Cohen, Jean-Luc Godard and Robert Kramer. Perhaps the original essay filmmaker was Dziga Vertov.

#### Photography

A photographic essay is an attempt to cover a topic by a series of photographs.

#### Philately

In philately, an essay is a prototype for a proposed stamp. In contrast, a proof is the prototype of an accepted stamp. Both essays and proofs are rare, as usually just a few are produced. They are not sold publicly, but handled by insiders or held in postal museums or collections. Possibly the first essay of a stamp not accepted is the Prince Consort Essay from 1850.

#### Numismatics

A numismatic essay is a coin prototype proposed for general sale or circulation

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