

Steps in Writing the Essay

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Choosing the topic.

Before you start writing your essay you should decide what you are going to discuss in your paper. It does not matter whether you have several topics to choose from or have your own, the topic should have something to excite your interest.

This way you will make the writing process pleasant and enjoyable. For a start you may acquaint yourself with several readings to find out if the topic is interesting and to see the amount of the material available on this subject.

The scope of the topic is one of the most widespread problems for every student who starts writing an essay paper. Many students regard such general words as "love", "hate", or "peace" and "world" as topics. So, as the result they compose a vague essay imbedded with platitudes and generalities, of no interest both to the reader and the tutor.

Once you have come up with some general idea, you should narrow the subject. It will you reduce the time spent on writing your paper as well as enormously improve its quality.

First, you should think how you can narrow your topic, make it more specific, divide it one several smaller topics. For example, if you would like to write an article on "cats", you might ask several questions on this topic, such as:

The cats

Should I describe some specific specimen of cats, or the description of cats in general would be sufficient?

What type of cats I would like to write about? Abyssinian? Oriental? Siberian?

What qualities of cats should be investigated and what types of their behavior should be accessed?

Second, there is a contradiction: though the topic should be limited, do not overdo it.

An extremely narrowed topic can not make effective and efficient presentation.

Your topic may be organized as the following:

The subject investigated: The cats.

The specific topic of the investigation:

Problems with the basic health care for cats.

Brainstorming.

Brainstorming is an effective and efficient activity to generate new ideas, thoughts that eventually lead to the solutions of several problems at a time. Brainstorming can be performed in groups or you can do it on you own. Start brainstorming session, when you are refreshed and relaxed to produce ingenious, original and creative ideas. Sit at the table and write down as many ideas on this subject as possible - do not be afraid to sound silly, write everything that occurs to you.

The next step is to bind your ideas and to assemble them into several topics, which require more careful investigation. Then jettison all other ideas, especially strange or irrelevant ones. Once you have finished this process you will see that you have come up with the idea which can serve as the starting point for the essay.

The following is more detailed process:

1. Come up with the existing problem that should be investigated. For many people, the problem has some negative meaning. But here, you should present some facts that should be explored; it does not mean that they have to be negative ones. For example: "The efficiency of Basic Health Care for Cats".
2. Present it clearly, so that every person who reads it- understands what you intend to say.
3. Discover as many solutions and answers to the problem as possible. Do not be too shy -

you should write down all solutions you have thought of, even if they seem bizarre to you.

4. Select several (approximately five or six) ideas you like best. Set several criteria that give the best answer to the problem. Criteria may start with the word "must" or "should".

5. Score every idea (from one to five for example), depending on how well it corresponds to the criterion. Once all ideas have been scored, sum up the points.

The idea with the highest score is actually the best one. Nevertheless, keep notes of all the ideas, because even the best idea might not be workable in the future.

If you still can not find the right topic, consult your tutor, he/she might be able to help you.

Doing research.

For most students the word "research" means surfing the Internet in search of any relevant to their topic data. Such approach does not work for good academic writing. First, because the internet does not control the quality of information appearing on your screen. Second (more important), in most cases the search engine will not lead you to the right type of information. So, how can you make the best of your research? Read the following tips that will help you to research efficiently. The research process involves four steps:

1. Find background information of your subject. Once you've defined the topic of your writing, use references from the list of the recommended literature to spot background information of your subject. First do some preliminary reading of general reference material, like an encyclopedia, dictionary, or other reference source.

2. Plan and search. Where can I find information on my topic?

In books or government documents (use the library catalogue to find out what books and documents are available)

In periodicals (look up an article index to know what articles have been published.)

On the Internet.

This stage suggests processing a lot of information and finding the material pertinent to your subject. So you will have to do extensive reading of the sources you come across. Not to be tired and bored by looking through tons of information use the formula of SQ3R: Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review.

Survey - find the relevant sources of information. When you evaluate this or that book or article, pay attention to: date of publication (you are not writing memoirs), contents and index page; preface, first and last paragraphs.

Question- before starting to read, ask yourself what you expect to find out from this book(article). It will systematize your reading as you proceed.

Read quickly The purpose of your reading is to find the vivid and powerful arguments to support your idea in the shortest possible time. Using the following reading techniques you will get the most of the material you have read:

Skimming the contents you get its general idea.

Scanning allows you find the material you need.

Doing search reading you concentrate on the meaning of the specific terms.

Perusing the text you should note down the information you are going to use in your essay.

Reading may turn out to be a tiring and monotonous pastime for you. To refresh your mind take regular breaks off. Your reading should be conscious. Make sure you understand every idea presented in the book (article).

As you are researching compile a working bibliography (running list of the material you read), later it will serve as a basis for your list of Works Cited.

3. Evaluate the information you have found. The quality of your paper depends on the sources you have used for it. That is why you should be able to differentiate between the authoritative and trivial information. All the sources of information are divided into two large categories: online or printed materials. As you evaluate the sources, mind the following:

Magazines and newspapers are meant for general public rather than for academic purposes. Do not support a significant argument or idea of your essay only with a fact originated from the magazines as the data here is often invalid and subjective.

Journal articles usually focus on research and experiment results and discuss latest innovations in science as well as controversial issues in science. Moreover they are peer-reviewed and carefully edited. Such approach guarantees reliability and objectiveness of the information you are going to include into your essay.

The Internet gives a more superficial look at the problem than the printed editions, without the deep insight into the problem as in the printed academic sources. But using organized subject directories, particularly those assembled by professors and academic librarians you can come across useful information. Subject directories are built by hand and usually contain only links screened for quality and value.

4. Identify and include the most vivid and convincing facts and evidence into your writing. Do not fail to note down the source of every quote you are going to include in your essay when you are still exploring the information.

Essay outline.

The outline of the essay is the body of your paper. It can be presented either in the form of diagram or in the point form. The point form gives you opportunity to evaluate the order of presentation of the main ideas, to attest the logic of your presentation and to spot down

gaps or facts that are irrelevant for your assignment.

The typical outline should comprise:

The statement of your thesis.

The most important points of your argument

Sub-points of your topic.

The evidence for each topic of the argument.

For example in our case with the topic: "The Basic Health Care for cats"½- we discuss if the medicine prescribed for humans might help in the treatment of cats.

Once you have completed the investigation of your topic and have conducted all necessary research you have discovered that it is not possible to come up with a definite answer to this question. Your thesis might be that "It is not possible to estimate the benefit of the human medicine for cats since very few evidence is available".

Essay introduction.

Some people can not apprehend the aim of the introduction. They claim it is not worth writing something you intend to describe later on in your paper. Yes, it is an open secret that a work of fiction does not have any introduction telling what is going to happen in the main part of the book. But an essay is not fiction.

It is a detailed study of some facts or ideas that should be explored. Since all major parts of the essay are built on the thesis, it is indispensable for the researcher to acquaint the reader with the thesis and reveal its significance and its relevance and meaning.

The introduction should be grabbing and impressive to induce the reader to read further on. If the introduction is dull and mediocre the reader will not proceed.

Present your introduction in a clear, precise and interesting way. Convince your reader that your essay is worth reading.

Thesis statement.

All papers that highlight controversial issues should comprise a thesis: a statement that serves as the premise in the argument. Once you have come up with the topic, the thesis should reveal your point of view on the subject and the problem. Your point of view should

be supported with reliable evidence. In the process of developing the thesis, timing is one of the most crucial factors- so develop your thesis at the very beginning of the essay writing process.

The thesis should guide in the course of writing; certainly you will acquire new information and ideas as you go along but the thesis should serve you as one of the starting points.

To formulate the thesis you should reconsider it several times and make some preliminary readings and participate in the discussion of the problem. It is necessary to ask several questions on the problem and prepare several answers. Concentrate on the central issue, cynosure of the investigated problem. Thesis is your answer to the main question.

Once you have formulated the thesis, convert it into a brief statement. The thesis statement is put into the essay introduction and it should reveal your point of view on the matter, or position you intend to support in your paper. A well-formulated thesis is vital for your assignment - it is the central part of your essay - all other parts of the essays are built on the basis of a strong thesis.

A good thesis should neither be very long nor too short. One of the most widespread mistakes that the students make in organizing their essays is the simplification of the thesis (making statement that is well-known, banal or obvious).

For example:

The topic: "The Basic healthcare for cats". The oversimplification of the thesis: "Basic healthcare for cats is vital for these animals".

The thesis that is too broad:

"Basic health care for cats should comprise several services". (The writer might wind up with the enumeration of the health care services that should be provided, thus making the paper boring to read).

More perfected thesis:

"There is controversy as to whether human medicines are effective in treatment of cats".

Body.

Essay body is the main part of your writing where you present your thoughts and evidence. Each body paragraph introduces a new idea, for example if you have developed five ideas in your thesis you should present five paragraphs in the body. You may begin by writing down one of your main ideas in the form of a sentence. Consider you start research on the following topic: "The Current Political Situation in Canada" you may start with the sentence:

"The coming elections will undoubtedly come up with the new faces".

Your paragraph should include supporting evidence to back up your ideas. In the body of your essay you should show that you have examined, researched your topic and that your arguments are reasonable and reliable.

Each paragraph should have an identical structure:

Open it with a topic sentence bringing in the main idea of the paragraph.

Write down the supporting points for the idea. They will make your thoughts and assertions as much convincing as possible.

You may include some conclusive or summary sentence, though it is not obligatory.

Conclusion.

Conclusion is the final part that summarizes your main points. It is the final part that summarizes your main points. You should not face any difficulties in this part, especially if you have had clear understanding of your thesis all way through. If you experience some difficulties in summing up your main points, then apparently you have not developed your thesis.

Your final part, conclusion, should correspond to your first part-introduction. The main idea should be restated again (it should not be repeated or paraphrased in the same words). The conclusion should emphasize the issue of your discourse. Pay close attention to the main idea presented in the introduction. If the main idea has been changed or modified during the process of writing the essay, then you should reformulate your thesis in the introduction.

You may open your summary by reminding your thesis to the reader. First, you must look trough the different components of your essay. Then emphasize your thesis and convince your reader that you have made true and right assertions. In the introduction you have acquainted your reader with your idea, you should restate it, bearing in mind that the reader has already read the main part of the paper. You should not repeat the introduction too closely - you must remember the reader has already got your idea. Since the paragraph is conclusive you should present your thesis in its conclusive and most compelling form.

One of the best ways to present the effective conclusion is to explain how people can apply your solution to the bigger picture. The conclusion imbedded with platitudes and generalities may weaken the final part of your essay.

This conclusion of the essay "The Efficiency of the US Aid to AIDS in Africa" is an example how the thesis can be improved:

"Rather than use the AIDS epidemic as an opportunity to redress the under financing of

African health services, USAID would seem to be pursuing its long-desired program goal of population control. The agency is insisting on the nature of AIDS as an STD, the heterosexual transmission of AIDS in Africa, and the importance of condom use to prevent HIV transmission. Of course condoms also prevent conception. Although USAID projects a 30 to 50 percent increase in child mortality as a result of the epidemic, it expects the population growth rate to decline by only 1 percent, because total fertility is so high in Africa (Harris 1990). USAID concludes, "Not only is this not the time to diminish family planning efforts, but instead such efforts could be redoubled . . ." (Merritt, Lyerly, and Thomas 1988: 127)"

The broadening of your conclusion does not mean that you should present there some new facts and materials you have not mentioned before. Your conclusion is your last say. So, develop a strong conclusion to make a lasting impression on the reader.

Editing and Proofreading.

"Writing is rewriting" D. Murray

Behind well-chosen words and cohesive structure of every elegant essay there are hours of conscientious and thoughtful editing. Editing is what differs good from poor writing and transforms a good essay into an excellent one.

Editing helps you to have a fresh and objective look at your essay and do away with its weak points.

Editing is a careful process of going through your essay paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, word by word.

Proofreading and editing can seem an undertaking but if properly-organized they will turn out to be a simple task.

Take a break between writing and proofreading. You should have a clear mind and enough time to do a quality editing of your draft.

Follow these ten steps to conduct an effective editing:

1. Start editing your essay with the spellchecker and grammar checker option on your computer.
2. The next stage aims to check on the content of your writing. Print out the copy of your essay and edit it manually. Read the thesis and see if it:

is clear and easy to grasp?

reflects the content of the essay? If not, rewrite it.

3. Then go on to editing the introduction. Make sure that it is concise and adequately

developed. It should be not just a statement of your intentions and opinion.

4. Check if each paragraph contains relevant information and is free of meaningless sentences. There should be transition sentences linking the paragraphs. Otherwise your writing will look jerky without a clear transition from one point into the next. Try reading backwards, a sentence at a time. You will be able to focus on the sentences, rather than on the content of your essay. Refine your sentences and make them smooth and clear. Get rid of too long sentences. Pay attention to the rhythm of your writing: vary sentence lengths and patterns.

5. The conclusion is the last thing the professors read and the first thing they remember. So make sure it is consistent with the structure of the essay and refers to the thesis statement.

6. Once you have edited the content of your essay, manually check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors, as computer checkers sometimes cannot guarantee the absence of errors in your writing. Proofread for one type of error at a time. If commas are your weak point, look through your paper checking only that problem. Then proofread again for the next most frequent problem. Be especially attentive when checking your references. Make sure all the cited and paraphrased material is properly referenced.

7. Read your essay aloud. It will help you to see the difference between what you intended to write and what you actually wrote.

8. Ask somebody to read through your paper and offer suggestions for polishing it.

9. Use a word processor to perform one last spell and grammar check. If time permits, read through it once more before submitting it.

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