

### **STEPS TO WRITING A PROPER ACADEMIC ESSAY**

**\*\*\*ALL ACADEMIC ESSAYS SHOULD BE AT LEAST FIVE PARAGRAPHS WITH AT THE VERY LEAST SEVEN SENTENCES PER PARAGRAPH\*\*\***

**YOUR GO-TO SOURCE FOR MLA FORMAT: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>**

#### **SECTION 1: MAKE SURE THAT THE STUDENT IS AWARE OF THE RULES OF FORMAL WRITING**

- A. No contractions
- B. No abbreviations unless the abbreviation is commonly known as a proper name (NASCAR, FBI, CIA)
- C. No slang of any kind
- D. Higher level vocabulary should be used
- E. Evidential quotes should be used when needed
- F. Numbers under 100 are written out, unless it is a decimal or percentage
- G. Write only in active voice (the subject is always performing)
  - 1. Active-Bob won the award. (Bob is actually doing something)
  - 2. Passive-The award was won by Bob. (The award is not doing anything)
- H. DO NOT USE FIRST PERSON (There should be no I, you, we, us, my, our, etc. unless it is part of a quote)

#### **SECTION 2: GETTING RID OF FIRST PERSON**

Avoiding first person can be a challenge for students, and it can be avoided easily with a little effort. Many students will ask, "Why can't I write in first person?" To answer this, use this analogy:

Let's pretend that the student is writing a paper that argues that there should be a bus bench at every bus stop in the United States. Let's say that the essay makes its way to another country like Brazil, and a student in that country reads the paper. Let's say that a Brazilian from a small village reads your paper and sees sentences like, "We should put a bus bench at every bus stop in the United States." If that person reads your paper, then they might say things like, "Why are they saying 'we?' I'm not American. Why should I have to worry whether the Americans have bus benches or not?" You have to go under the assumption that you do not know who is reading your essay. If you don't know that person, then you can't say words like "we," "us," and "I."

To avoid first person, students have two options:

- A. Condensing: Instead of saying "I think that there should be bus benches at every bus stop in the United States." Get rid of the "I think that" and just say "Bus benches should be at every bus stop in the United States."
- B. BE SPECIFIC: Instead of saying "We should put a bus bench at every bus stop in the United States" say "The Department of Transportation should..." or "The American public should..." Instead of saying "Putting bus benches at every bus stop is something we should do" say "Putting benches at every bus stop is something that the American people should do."

#### **SECTION 3: WRITING A GOOD SENTENCE**

All sentences should be as concise and complete as possible. Most students are under the impression that a complete sentence has a subject (the "who" or "what" of a sentence), a verb/predicate (the action performed by the "who" or "what"), and convey a complete thought.

<b>*Sentence*</b>	<b><i>The chemicals found in this compound tend to bond on the molecular level.</i></b>
<b>*Not a sentence*</b>	<b><i>Because she thought that I was going to the movies last night.</i></b>

A concise sentence conveys information with as few words as possible without the sentence losing its meaning.

**\*Concise\***

***The stolen getaway car turned the corner.***

**\*Not concise\***

***The getaway car, which was stolen, turned a corner.***

***\*DON'T LET STUDENTS GET AWAY WITH ADDING FLUFF TO TAKE UP SPACE\****

One way to avoid this is to assign papers that follow the 5x7+ standard (five paragraphs with seven or more sentences per paragraph). This essay is comprised of an introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Teachers must constantly remind them that the only thing you are grading as far as length is the number of paragraphs and number of sentences. Grading by number of pages leads to fluff.

**SECTION 4: THE GLORIOUS RULE OF THREE**

Before you take students any further, they must understand The Rule of Three. The Rule of Three is a concept that I use to explain how to approach the information that will be needed for a complete essay. The Rule of Three dictates that a writer needs three reasons for everything. They need three paragraphs to support their thesis statement. They need three sentences to support their topic sentences in their paragraphs. If they can't find three reasons to back up their topic sentence or three points to back up their thesis, then they need to explore their topic further or pick a new one.

**SECTION 5: THE INTRO PARAGRAPH**

**\*\*\*ALL INTRO PARAGRAPHS SHOULD BE COMPRISED OF THREE LEAD-IN SENTENCES, THE THESIS STATEMENT, AND AN ESSAY MAP (ALSO, THREE SENTENCES) \*\*\***

A. Lead-In sentences literally LEAD into the thesis statement.'

1. There are many different options for lead-in sentences, and many can be found online. Here are just a few. More can be found by entering "lead-in sentences" in Google.
  - a. Intriguing Statement: It would be strange for a psychiatrist to say, "Eat two chocolate bars a day." A statement like that is a sugar lover's dream. However, recent studies have confirmed that chocolate has a positive effect on depression and anxiety.
  - b. A description: With one eye blackened, one arm in a cast, and third-degree burns on both her legs, the pretty blonde two-year-old seeks corners of the room, refuses to speak, and shakes violently at the sound of loud noises. Tammy is not the victim of a natural disaster or a war. She is the helpless victim of her abusive parents.
  - c. An analogy or comparison: The Romans kept geese on their Capitol Hill to cackle alarm in the event of attack at night. Modern Americans, despite their technology, have hardly improved on that old system protection. According to the latest Safety Council report, almost any door with a standard lock can be opened easily with a common plastic credit card.

B. The Thesis Statement

1. The thesis statement is **ONE** sentence that reveals the topic and the tone of the paper. In argumentative papers, students must use an "Although/Because" thesis, which we will discuss later.
2. The biggest challenge that a student faces with the thesis statement is the avoidance of making it a flat-out announcement of the paper's topic. Therefore, students should avoid saying "This paper is about...", "Today, I am going to be discussing...", "The topic of my paper is...", etc.

POOR: The subject of my essay is my experience with a pet boa constrictor.

POOR: I'm going to discuss boa constrictors as pets.

BETTER: Boa constrictors do not make healthy indoor pets.

BETTER: My pet boa constrictor, Sir Pent, was a much better bodyguard than my dog, Fang.

### C. The Essay Map

1. This can be one of the most difficult parts of the introductory paragraph, so it may take some time and practice to get a student to feel confident enough to include an essay map.
2. The essay map is basically three sentences that follow the thesis and preview the body.
3. Explain to students that each sentence represents the three body paragraphs. The first sentence is one sentence that reveals the subject of the first body paragraph. The second sentence is one sentence that reveals the subject of the second body paragraph. The third sentence is one sentence that reveals the subject of the third body paragraph.

#### LEAD INS

#### EXAMPLE OF A BASIC INTRO PARAGRAPH:

("Art imitates life" is an old saying that has been reverberated throughout history. Artists of all mediums pour their daily life into their works. Authors are no exception to this cliché.) (Edgar Allan Poe is a writer whose life inspired many of his horrific stories.) (First, Poe's fear of being buried alive served as the inspiration for "The Oblong Box" and "The Fall of the House of Usher." Next, his experiences with tuberculosis throughout his life led him to write "The Masque of the Red Death." Finally, Poe's obsession with an incident at Castle Island led him to pen "The Cask of Amontillado.")

#### THESIS STATEMENT

#### ESSAY MAP

### SECTION 6: THE BODY

The body paragraphs are the meat of potatoes of an essay. This is where all the information for the essay will be found. The body is comprised of four things. First, the topic sentence is one sentence that explains the tone and subject of the paragraph. Next, there are three supporting sentences. Basically, these are three reasons why the topic sentence is true. Finally, there are elaboration/detail sentences. These sentences provide further details about the three supporting sentences. Elaboration sentences are a good chance for students to provide evidential quotes from expert sources. One method that is beneficial to the structure and construction of the body is a very simple (and unorthodox) outline. Teachers can require students to fill in the blanks in the following structure before composing their body paragraphs. After the blanks are filled, all the students have to do is rewrite the sentences in paragraph form (remember to tell them to indent the first sentence).

I. \_\_\_\_\_ (TOPIC SENTENCE)

A. \_\_\_\_\_

(FIRST REASON WHY YOUR TOPIC SENTENCE IS TRUE.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

(TELL SOMETHING MORE ABOUT THIS REASON)

B. \_\_\_\_\_

(SECOND REASON WHY YOUR TOPIC SENTENCE IS TRUE)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

(TELL SOMETHING MORE ABOUT THIS REASON)

C. \_\_\_\_\_

(THIRD REASON WHY YOUR TOPIC SENTENCE IS TRUE)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

(TELL SOMETHING MORE ABOUT THIS REASON)

### SECTION 7: EVIDENTIAL QUOTES

Neither students nor teachers are experts in EVERYTHING that will be covered in essays. Therefore, evidential quotes from legitimate expert sources are needed (and required by CCRS) to prove the information that the students are trying to convey. What are expert sources? Books, personal interviews, reference books, and reputable periodicals are the most typical sources. However, modern times have brought sources such as DVD's,

television show, films, CD-ROMs, websites, online journals, etc. Students must understand that any source they use must be a reputable source. For example, websites used as sources must be sponsored by a university, an academic organization, a reputable periodical, a credible expert, an academic association, a social association, etc. If students are unsure whether they are dealing with a reputable website, tell them to check with you. Teachers are the best judge of a reputable website. WIKIPEDIA MUST NEVER BE USED, AND STUDENTS SHOULD AVOID USING AN ENCYCLOPEDIA. However, students can use Wikipedia to explore the expert sources that they used to create a particular Wikipedia page.

It is a good policy to require ONE evidential quote per body paragraph. Encourage students to use quotes as one of their elaboration sentences. Explain to students that the purpose of the evidential quote is to prove their information. They are not experts in anything at this point in their lives. Therefore, they must go to experts to prove what they say, especially when it comes to statistics. They should know that the teacher should never have to say "Prove it" at any point in the essay. Quotes remedy this. There are many ways to present evidence from sources. At this level in their academic career, students should quote their source word-for-word and surround them in quotation marks. Next, the student should follow the quoted info with a parenthetical. A basic parenthetical consists of the author's last name and the page number in parentheses. If there is no author, then use the source title and page number. If it is a website entry, use the SHORT website address. The period is placed outside the parentheses at the end of the sentence.

#### EX. EVIDENTIAL QUOTES

In 2012, many Americans died from fatalities involving an intoxicated driver. "In 2012, over 300,000 Americans died from drunk driving fatalities" ([www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org)). Obviously, drunk driving is a major problem in the United States.

Poe's personal experiences with tuberculosis led him to write many stories inspired by these life events. "Poe's story *The Masque of Red Death* is often thought to not only be a reference to the Black Death, but also of the contemporary pandemic of tuberculosis" (Smith 27). This tale shows that even Poe knew that there was no escape from death.

#### SECTION 9: THE CONCLUSION

The conclusion can be challenging for many students. The old stand-by is to restate the thesis and essay map. By doing this, students are more likely to just copy their intro paragraph as the conclusion. Here are some questions that might simplify this part of the process for them. By answering one or more of these questions, students can create a proper conclusion for their essay.

1. Why is reading this essay or knowing this information important?
2. What will happen if I don't use the information in this essay?
3. How can I put this information to use in daily life?
4. (For argumentation essays) How can I get involved?

#### SECTION 10: TWO TYPES OF ACADEMIC ESSAYS

**EXPOSITORY ESSAY (INFORMATIVE):** The purpose of this essay is to simply provide information on a subject. However, there are several different ways to deliver this information.

- A. Development by Example: after the thesis is presented in your thesis, the body consists of three paragraph length examples on why your thesis is true.
  - A. My car is a rolling death trap. (Thesis)
    1. The windows don't work. (Body 1)
    2. The brakes are worn. (Body 2)
    3. Electrical fires are a constant occurrence. (Body 3)
- B. Comparison/Contrast: The writer first chooses two+ things to compare and contrast. For the amateur writer, two is sufficient. After the writer selects two things, then they must then pick out three aspects about these things to compare and contrast. Each body paragraph begins with a one sentence comparison, and then the student spends the rest of the body paragraph contrasting what they previous compared.

EX. Burger King vs. Five Guys

Both Burger King and Five Guys have hamburgers. However, Burger King's meat is previously frozen, and Five Guys never freezes its beef. Burger King cooks their burgers over an open flame. This is all done with an automated machine. Five Guys' employees cook their burgers on a griddle. Each burger is given personal attention throughout the cooking process. Burger King adds smoke flavoring to their beef mixture. This flavoring is added at a factory. At Five Guys, their hamburgers are all natural. This means that you are getting a hamburger that is a healthier than Burger King's manufactured patties.

- C. Process Analysis: This is a set of instructions. The students must be reminded that everything should be in correct chronological order, and the process needs to be as complete as possible. Therefore, it is wise for students (or teachers) to choose a process that can be covered in a five-paragraph essay. After the process is chosen, students must divide the instructions into three sections. These three sections represent the three body paragraphs.

EX. "How to prepare fresh fish"

Body 1: Cleaning (scaling, beheading, and gutting)

Body 2: Cooking (washing, seasoning, breading, frying)

Body 3: Serving (draining, portioning, garnishing)

**ARGUMENTATION ESSAY:** The purpose of this essay is to defend a personal view. The Rule of Three must be followed; however, the thesis and the body of this essay are much different from the expository essays. The student's opposition plays a very important role in the creation of this essay. Therefore, they not only have to be in touch with their own opinions on a subject, but they also must be familiar with those who oppose what they think. This aspect of the essay is first seen in the thesis. Students must create an "Although/Because" thesis, and it should follow this model:

**Although (your opposition and their opinion on the subject), (what you think about the subject), because (a general reason why your opinion should be accepted).**

EX. Although many students find uniforms to be unnecessary, school uniforms are a very beneficial aspect in a modern school, because it encourages proper behavior and negates social class.

The body paragraphs of this type of essay have a definitive format that should be followed. Each body paragraph should begin with a statement from the student's opposition. Next, the student should spend the rest of the paragraph proving the statement wrong.

EX. Students think that uniforms have no bearing on how an individual acts. However, there have been many studies that prove that uniforms promote positive behavior in students. "In 1999, The Uniform Institute found that problem students' behavior improved when uniforms were employed" (Floyd 76). The use of uniforms creates a universal standard throughout the school...

**SECTION 11: PLAGIARISM**

One word: **GOOGLE**

The advent of the internet has actually made it easier to find plagiarized papers. Students are too lazy to copy from a book, which makes it tricky for a teacher to find plagiarized papers. These days, they prefer to copy and paste from websites. Pick out a sentence that you think is plagiarized and put it in quotes in Google.

If this doesn't work, there are other methods that work. I like to scan their essays for higher level vocab that I know they don't know. I conference with them one-on-one and require them to define some of these higher level words. If they can't define them, then I ask why they are using these words and where they discovered these words. Usually, the student will end up telling on themselves or you find enough words to at least make them write the essay again.