Directions for
Narrative, Expository, and Descriptive Essays

The Parts of an Essay

An essay has the same elements as a well-written paragraph. A paragraph has a topic sentence; an essay has a thesis statement. A paragraph is developed with supporting statements; an essay has three paragraphs based on the thesis statement's supporting ideas. A paragraph has a concluding sentence; an essay has a concluding paragraph.

Introduction

An introduction does two things: it gets your reader's attention, and it presents the thesis statement. The thesis statement identifies the topic of the essay. Look at the introductions below:

Example 1

> If we were to place the body of every teenager who died in an alcohol-related accident in the last five years end to end, the line would circle the globe three times. Every year, hundreds of teenagers lose their lives because of drunk drivers. Driving drunk is a growing problem in our society, and the consequences are great.

Example 2

> Hundreds of teenagers lose their lives because of drunk drivers. It is a problem that affects students in every school in America. Driving drunk is a growing problem in our society because more and more teens are drinking and then driving without considering the serious consequences that could result from their actions. These consequences include financial burdens, sorrow caused to those losing loved ones, and the senseless reduction of our greatest natural resource: our young people.

Which introduction catches your interest and pulls you into the text? Hopefully, you will say that the first one does. By creating a shocking visual image, the writer gets your attention.

The Essay Body

The body is the muscle of your essay. There are three paragraphs in the body--one for each point. Each paragraph must have a topic sentence that supports the thesis statement in the introduction.

Conclusion

Conclusions serve the same purpose as concluding sentences. They put a nice finish on your work. The organization of your conclusion will vary according to the length and type of paper you are writing. If you are working on a long text, you may need to summarize your essay for the reader. If you write a persuasive piece, you may want the conclusion to leave your reader with questions to consider after reading your work. You may simply wrap up your thoughts.

Regardless of the organization, there are two things you must remember about conclusions. You need to restate your thesis in the conclusion. You need to keep the conclusion relevant to the rest of the work. Don't throw in thoughts or information that you haven't referred to or implied in the body of your work. Remember, you want your conclusion to finish your piece for the reader, not confuse the reader.

Transitions

In a paragraph, you move from one thought to another by using transitional words or phrases that direct your reader. In an essay, you use transitional words or phrases at the beginning of each paragraph to connect it to the rest of the essay. Sometimes, you may even write a transitional paragraph. Go to the end of these directions to view some transitional words.

Types of Essays

There are four basic types of essays. Each has a specific focus.

Descriptive: The purpose of a descriptive essay is to describe something. The object of definition can be a person, a place, a thing, or an idea.

Expository: The purpose of this type of essay is to explain something. It may have description, narration, and persuasion in it, but the main purpose of the essay is to explain.

Narrative: The purpose of a narrative essay is to tell a story. It will have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It may have description and exposition (explanation), but basically, it will tell a story.

Persuasive: The purpose of a persuasive essay is to convince the reader to agree with the writer. Many teachers insist that all writing is, to some extent, persuasive. This may be true, but in any writing designated "persuasive," the focus will be on making the reader see something the same way that the writer sees it, to share a point of view or conviction.

Let's look at some examples of types of essays.

Descriptive

To describe anything, you must observe it carefully and take notes. Use as many of your five senses as possible. What is missing? How does it change over a period of time? What did you discover after your observation?

Following the example below, list a general topic that you can develop by description. After the general topic, write your specific focus and slant. Then write a topic sentence.

Example

The weather (general topic), blizzard in Chicago (specific focus), paralyzing activities (slant)

Typical of our winter weather in Chicago, a recent blizzard paralyzed the city's normal activities. (topic sentence)

Expository (Explaining)

To explain anything, you must have accurate facts and either give your audience directions on how to do something, step by step, or explain to the audience the process by which something is/was created.

Following the example below, make a general topic that you can develop by exposition. It can be a "how to" topic or a "process" topic. Beside your topic, write your specific focus and slant. Then write a topic sentence.

"How to do it" Example

> Snacks (general topic), brownies (specific focus), yummy, easy (slant)
>
> Yummy snacks like brownies are easy to make (topic sentence). Then the writer explains how to make brownies, step by step.

Narrative

Narration is telling a story to illustrate a point. Some narratives are serious (like parables) and some are funny (like jokes). Narratives have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The narrative can be based on personal experience or that of someone else. To develop a paragraph by means of narration, you must decide upon a point you want to illustrate. Following the example below, write a general topic you can develop with narration. Beside the general topic, write your specific focus and slant. Then write a topic sentence.

Example

> An accident (general topic), car wreck (specific focus), drunk driver, near death (slant)
>
> My family was recently involved in a car wreck that almost killed the drunk driver who hit us. Then the writer narrates the story from beginning to end.

Persuasive

To convince another person to change an opinion or a course of action, you must make a good argument. This includes stating facts to back up your position, offering the testimony of experts, and being able to explain why people with other opinions are mistaken (without getting emotional about it). To develop a persuasive paragraph, think of controversial topics about which you have strong opinions. Following the example below, write a general topic. Beside the general topic, write your specific focus and slant. Then write a topic sentence.

Example

> Anorexia (general topic), effects on teenage body (specific focus), without nutritious food, stress, (slant)
>
> Without sufficient quantities of nutritious food, every cell and system in an anorexic teenager's body undergoes stress. Then the writer tells what happens to systems in an anorexic body.

Transitional Words

Authors sometimes provide readers with clues that help them follow the thought process in a reading selection. Words that show the relation of one sentence to another within a paragraph are called transitional expressions.

Transitional words can be organized into these nine categories:

- Further Information
- Directional Change
- Sequence and Order
- Explanation
- Emphasis
- Location and Setting
- Compare and Contrast
- Summary and Conclusion
- Time

Further Information

These words signal that additional information will be provided:

additionally
in addition
and
again
first of all
last of all
another
besides
moreover
other
too
also
for example
for instance
next
likewise
further
furthermore
finally
as well
along with
secondly
more
one reason
equally

Directional Change

These words signal a move back to an earlier idea or concept:

on the other hand
otherwise
nevertheless
in spite of
however
despite
although
in contrast
conversely
even though
still
though
rather
but
while
in the meantime

Sequence and Order

These words organize the information:

next
after
before
last
lastly
always
earlier
first
second
third
prior to
till
then
for one thing
now
later
in the first place
while
until
afterward
finally
immediately

Explanation or Clarification

These words provide further information:

in other words
specifically
similar to
that is
in the same way as
for instance
such as
for example
to illustrate

Emphasis

These words accentuate events, characters, and actions:

between
on
above
among
around
beneath
beside
under
to the left/right
in front of
outside
inside
opposite
alongside
next to
near
on top of
over
in back of
behind
away from
close to
middle
west
east
north
south
across
toward
adjacent
along
against
here
there

Location and Setting

These words provide directional clues:

between
on
above
among
around
beneath
beside
under
to the left or right
in front of
behind
outside
inside
opposite
alongside
next to
near
on top of
over
in back of
behind
beneath
away from
close to
middle
west
east
north
south
across
toward
adjacent
along
against
here
there
in the distance

Compare and Contrast

These words signal differences and similarities:

similar
similarly
also
like
likewise
in the same way
as
and
or
more than
different than
different from
opposite
though
less than
most
best
better
rather
in the same way
yet
on the other hand
nevertheless
nonetheless
conversely
in contrast

Summary and Conclusion

These words bring information together:

consequently
finally
in summary
therefore
hence
thus
in conclusion
in short
to sum up
as a result
due to
accordingly
last of all
in summation
in brief

Time

These words relate to a particular time period and relate the sequence of events:

tomorrow
today
yesterday
next week, month, year
last week, month, year
finally
soon
later
about
after
before
during
while
afterwards
first
second
third
then
meanwhile
subsequently
immediately
eventually

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