

Module: Basic Essay Writing

RYSE Initiative

Section 1: What is an essay?

According to the dictionary, an “essay” is a short piece of writing focusing on a particular subject.

In the United States, many people write essays to show that they understand a subject in school. For example, a teacher might ask you to write an essay on a book you read for class.

Personal essays are also often needed to apply to higher education or even jobs. In this case, you might write about your future goals.

There is no one “right” way to write an essay...

Essays are written around the world, not just in the United States. That means that there are many ways to write an essay. For example, French essays

You may have already learned one or two approaches to writing an essay. These styles are just as correct as the American style.

However, each essay style has a context where it is appropriate. Schools in the United States have certain expectations, including that students use the American style when writing essays. Learning the American style as an *additional* skill will help you adapt to the American classroom and/or apply to academic programs in the United States.

Activity #1: Try making 2 short lists. Make one list describing essays in your origin country. Make another list describing essays in the United States as you understand them at this time. Find similarities and differences between the lists!

Example: American essays..

- Are very direct.
- Begin with a “thesis statement” in the first paragraph.
- The last paragraph restates the thesis and summarizes the argument.
- ...

Essays in my origin country...

-
-
-
-

Section 2: What is the goal of an essay?

A essay helps organize and present information. With American essays, this information is often either:

- An argument in response to a question
- A description of something or someone

The type of information you want to organize and present affects what essay structure you might use. There are many structures to choose from, but Argumentative and Descriptive Essays are two of the most commonly used in school.

Basic Essay Structure:

Regardless of the type of essay, all American essays follow this structure:

Thesis > Body Paragraphs > Conclusion

The thesis introduces your topic. Each body paragraph supports or discusses one (1) element of your topic. Finally, your conclusion summarizes your essay.

The Five Paragraph Essay is a simple and effective way to use this structure.

Ex. Five Paragraph Essay:

Introduction/Thesis Paragraph

Body Paragraph 1

Body Paragraph 2

Body Paragraph 3

Conclusion Paragraph

Activity #2: Develop an essay outline in response to a basic prompt: *How did your background influence your goals?* What are some ideas you plan to discuss?

EXAMPLE:

Thesis/Introduction:

- My parents were hardworking and helped others so I am now hardworking and trying to help others.

Body Paragraph 1

- Discuss how my parents were hardworking.

Body Paragraph: 2:

- Discuss how my parents helped others.

Body Paragraph 3:

- Discuss how I want to help others now, too.

Conclusion

Section 3: What is a thesis? How do you write a thesis?

In an American essay, the first paragraph introduces your topic. However, near the end of that first paragraph, there will be a sentence called a thesis statement.

The thesis statement tells the reader what you are discussing. For example: What is your argument? What is the main idea or theme of your paper? What topic or issue will you be exploring?

The thesis statement might also state why the topic is important and what your body paragraphs will discuss.

Activity #3: Using your essay outline, write the first paragraph of your essay. Introduce the topic of your essay. Form a thesis statement at the end of the paragraph.

Thesis:

I grew up in the American Midwest, far from any big city. My family was far from rich. In fact, my parents sometimes struggled to support our family as an electrician and a hairdresser. What we lacked in money, we made up for with strong values, such as kindness toward our neighbors and determination to accomplish our goals. My kind, working-class family raised me to be a hardworking person with the goal of helping others.

Section 4: How do you write body paragraphs?

Body paragraphs support your argument or explain your topic. Each paragraph focuses on one main idea and presents evidence related to that topic. Evidence could be scientific data, but it could also be an event or example of a behavior.

A paragraph is typically 3 to 5 sentences. The first sentence is usually a topic sentence; this is a thesis statement for the paragraph, introducing what the paragraph will discuss. The following sentences will support the claim of this topic sentence.

Toward the end of the paragraph, prepare to transition to the the next body paragraph.

Example:

Body Paragraph 1: My parents worked hard to support our family. My father was an electrician when I was little, while my mom took care of the kids. He could not always be around because he was so busy working. Eventually, my dad became sick and my mom had to study to become a hairdresser. Because she was working part-time while studying and my dad was sick, I learned how to cook and clean. This is how I did my part to support the family.

Example:

Body Paragraph 1: My parents worked hard to support our family. My father was an electrician when I was little, while my mom took care of the kids. He could not always be around because he was so busy working. Eventually, my dad became sick and my mom had to study to become a hairdresser. Because she was working part-time while studying and my dad was sick, I learned how to cook and clean. This is how I did my part to support the family.

Body Paragraph 2: While supporting ourselves, my parents also helped others when they could. My mom always looked out for her brother and his children, my cousins. She made sure that they had food as well as a place to shower and sleep. My dad helped my grandmother with her charity work; they would find stray animals and take them to get their vaccines. My parents taught me that you have the ability to help, you should always reach out.

Body Paragraph 3: I want to do what my parents did for me for others. My mom took care of family; my dad took care of animals. Personally, I want to help students. Since I was a student myself, I have tutored and mentored youths. After I graduated, I began to volunteer with the RYSE Initiative with the goal of helping both young mentors and mentees. For example, since starting, I have designed the Basic Essay Writing module to help mentees adjust to the American education system.

Activity #4: Using your essay outline, write one paragraph discussing each idea that supports your thesis.

Tips: Try forming your topic sentences first!

Body Paragraph 1

- Topic Sentence: My parents worked hard to support our family.

Body Paragraph: 2:

- Topic Sentence: While supporting ourselves, my parents also helped others when they could.

Body Paragraph 3:

- Topic Sentence: I want to do what my parents did for me for others.

Section 5: How do you conclude an essay?

In an American essay, the conclusion is used to restate your thesis and summarize your argument or the other information discussed in your body paragraphs.

The last sentence usually expresses why the topic was significant. It could be significant to a debate between experts. It could be significant to a field of knowledge. It could be significant to real-life beliefs or practices. Or, it could be significant for you personally.

Activity #5: Using your essay outline, write a paragraph restating your thesis statement and summarizing the points your essay discussed in support of your thesis statement.

Example:

Conclusion:

My family was a major influence on my goals. They taught me to work and study hard. At the same time, they taught me to help others when I can. I learned to do my part and pitch in from a young age. Now, I can apply those lessons toward helping students through programs like RYSE.

Section 6: How do you review a first draft?

Now that you have completed Activity #5, you should have:

- One introduction/thesis paragraph
- Three body paragraphs
- One conclusion paragraph

Congratulations! You have a complete first draft of an essay.

Now, you must review it all. A first draft allowed you to write out all your ideas. Once your draft is complete, you

There are many questions to ask yourself:

- Does your essay answer the original prompt?
- Do the body paragraphs support your thesis statement?
- Is all the information in the essay relevant?
- Is the information well organized? Does the essay move logically from Point A to Point B?

If you find yourself answering “no” to any of these questions, then it is okay to make changes. You can rewrite or rearrange paragraphs. You can remove sentences. You can even change your thesis statement to match your body paragraphs if that is the simplest solution.

Activity #6: Try reviewing and revising your essay with your mentor.

Feel free to view my first draft versus my second draft using the following link: [X](#)

Notice how certain sentences are rewritten in order to better respond to the original prompt from Activity #2.

Some sentences are completely removed because they were not relevant to the topic. Other sentences are added to provide more evidence for the claims of my topic sentences.

Section 7: Who else can help me review my draft?

It can be difficult to review an essay on our own. Sometimes, the best thing we can do to improve an essay is to have someone else read it.

There are many resources available to help you review your essays, both in-person and online.

In-Person Resources:

If you are currently enrolled in school, it is often best to reach out to instructors.

Teachers may be willing to work with you one-on-one, or they might be able to connect you to fellow students who are willing to help.

Some schools, especially libraries and universities, will have writing workshops intended to help students improve their essays. Try contacting your university to see if they have specialized services for ESL Learners.

Online Resources

If you lack access to in-person resources, there are many free resources found online and used if you have consistent access to a computer.

Online browser extensions like Grammarly, WordQ, and SpeakIt! help students review for spelling, grammar, context, and tone.

It may also be worthwhile to look into services like Tutor.com. This service can help students with many subjects, not just essay writing. While you may have to pay an hourly rate for these services, any schools and public libraries provide free access.

Activity #7: Research and create a list of potential essay reviewing resources with your mentor.

- Do you have instructors, classmates, family or friends who can help review your essays?
- Does your school or local library provide workshops or host a writing center?
- Does your school or local library provide access to services like Tutor.com?
- Do you have a computer to use to download softwares like grammarly?

Thank you for
completing the Basic
Essay Writing module!