

**How to Write an Essay:
Or
A fail proof way to survive English essay
writing assignments**

Directions: complete each step of this handout in the order they are presented to you and you will end up with an essay that earns you a passing grade.

If you skip a step, or do the steps out of order, I will not promise you that this method will earn you any sort of grade, let alone a passing one.

This packet belongs to:

From class:

Step One: Determine the topic.

- If your topic has been assigned to you that's great!
- If your topic has not been assigned to you follow these steps:
 - Think about the ideas that the class has talked about leading up to the assignment—chances are your teacher gave you some ideas along the way.
 - Think about the goal of the paper—chances are the teacher has at least given you a ball park to aim at. Is it a comparison/contrast paper, should it deal with character, are you trying to focus on theme?
 - Do you have assigned sources to use? If you do, looking at the sources may give you an idea for a topic you can choose.

Write your topic here:

Step Two: Determine the essay type.

- What sort of essay are you writing?
 - Narrative
 - Persuasive
 - Explanatory
 - Imaginative
 - Descriptive
- What format should it take:
 - Comparison/Contrast
 - Analytical
 - Research
 - Cause and Effect
 - Critical
 - Argumentative
 - Another format?

Name the type of essay you will be writing here:

Step Three: Gather your ideas

- You need to get your thoughts in order. There are two major ways this sort of brainstorming is done:
 - Make an outline
 - List the topic, the main points, the sub points, and the support in a classic letter/number/roman numeral outline. You can find an example by going here:
<http://www.mta.ca/music/academics/guides/styleguide/outline.html>
 - Make a diagram
 - When you make a diagram you start with your main topic in the center of the page, and “web” your ideas off of the main idea. You should try and get to the 4th level of ideas before you begin inserting your support. You can find an example here:

<http://wvuwritingcenter.blogspot.com/2011/02/not-your-grandmas-outlining-one-tutors.html>

You should complete your outline or diagram on a separate sheet of paper and staple it to this packet here:

Step Four: Write your thesis

- A thesis is like the steering wheel. Without a thesis your essay can't go anywhere, just like without a steering wheel a car can't go anywhere.
- You should review your "Guide to writing an outstanding thesis statement" sheet now to get some help
- You should also review your "thesis cheat sheet" now to get even more help
- You can also review "Writing Academic English" chapter 4 pages 64-68 for a review
 - You should write several thesis statements based on your work from step three.
 - You should know that the best thesis statements are long (some as long as 50 words)

Write your thesis for your essay here:

Step Five: Write your topic sentences

- You should be able to write your topic sentences after you write your thesis statement.
- If your thesis statement is strong, you will have clear points to address in the body paragraphs.
- You can address one thesis point in multiple body paragraphs—so don't feel like you must limit yourself to one body paragraph for each thesis point
- Your topic sentences must address every part of your thesis statement.

Write your topic sentences here (there is some extra space, so don't panic):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Step Six: Organize your topic sentences

- There is no law that says you need to keep the topic sentences in the order that you wrote them
- Look at your topic ideas again. They should
 - Mirror the structure of your thesis statement
 - Flow from one idea into the next without making a huge jump
 - Should support the thesis directly
- If you want to reorganize your topic sentences, do it now

Write the new order for your topic sentences here:

Step Seven: Write your transition sentences

- You've already identified your topic ideas and put them in an order you like, now it's time to write the sentences that will connect one idea to the next.
- Your transition sentences will be the last sentence of each of the body paragraphs.
- Transitions show how one idea links to the next
- Transitions are helpful to the reader because they are the sign posts that lead to new ideas and help your essay to develop
- You should have one less transition than you have body paragraphs, because your last body paragraph does not need a transition to the conclusion paragraph

Write your transitions here:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Step Eight: Write your supporting ideas for each topic sentence

- Each body paragraph should have two supporting ideas
- The supporting ideas relate directly to a point that you made in the topic sentence
- The supporting **ideas are not** the same as **evidence** (evidence might be a quote, a paraphrase, or another aspect of your research)

Write your supporting ideas here:

1a.

1b.

2a.

2b.

3a.

3b.

4a.

4b.

5a.

5b.

6a.

6b.

7a.

7b.

Step Nine: Select your evidence

- Each of your supporting points should have a piece of evidence taken from your research
 - Your research might be a story that you read or it might be actual research that you have done in the library or on the internet
 - Your research might also be made up of different sources like a personal interview if the essay format demands it
- Your evidence should use a combination of direct quotes, paraphrase and summary
- Your evidence should relate directly to the topic sentence and the supporting idea
- Your evidence should not paraphrase the entire source (story, article, or other reference materials)
- Your evidence should be short and to the point
 - Long quotes should only be used in extreme cases
 - Normally, a partial quote of sentence is what you need to support your idea (5-10 words in length)
 - You don't need to quote everything
 - You can use paraphrase or summary to support your point

Write your support for each body paragraph supporting ideas here:

1a.

1b.

2a.

2b.

3a.

3b.

4a.

4b.

5a.

5b.

6a.

6b.

7a.

7b.

Step Ten: Explaining your evidence

- You should never leave a piece of evidence on its own
- You need to tell the reader (the teacher who is assigning you a grade) what the evidence shows
- You need to do more than paraphrase the evidence—you need to tell what it means!
- You need to make sure you are linking your supporting ideas together, and you can do this as you are explaining the support

Explain your evidence here:

1a.

1b.

2a.

2b.

3a.

3b.

4a.

4b.

5a.

5b.

6a.

6b.

7a.

7b.

Step Eleven: Write your introduction paragraph

- Wait a second! Isn't it a bit late to be writing the INTRODUCTION?
 - Nope
- You need to know what you are going to say before you can introduce it, right?
- A good intro will have a hook
 - You should review your "Hook" handout now
- Your introduction paragraph should act like a funnel—You can review "Writing Academic English" pages 59-61 for help
- Your introduction should end with your thesis
- Introduction paragraphs are typically 5-7 sentences long

- Make sure that you have explained everything clearly—you might find that you need another sentence explain how the support relates to the topic sentence
- Add the introduction and the conclusion paragraphs

Step Fourteen: Write your works cited page

- You need to create a “Works Cited” page listing all of the sources you used in your paper for support of your ideas
- You should refer to the MLA style guide for help
- You should make sure you list every source you used—even if you only summarized or paraphrased it
 - Failure to do so is plagiarism and you will receive a failing mark on the assignment if you forget to cite a source

You should attach your works cited page to this packet:

Step Fifteen: Proofreading and editing

- The hard part is all done—the paper is written!
- You now need to make sure that you will get a good score for format and grammar
- Double check your paper against the rubric that the teacher provided to you
 - Have you done everything that you need to to get the grade you want?
 - Make sure you have spelled everything correctly, used correct punctuation, and used citations where needed