



Putting the Ease back into Essay Writing 2

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Review

- What exactly is an essay anyway?
- What are its features and
- What are its component parts?



A Working Definition

- What exactly is an essay anyway?
- Define “Essay”; what is it?
 - Definitions are made up of three parts: the thing being defined, the class to which it belongs, and a feature that distinguishes it from other things in its class:
 - A Bozo is the kind of person who usually behaves like a clown, or who does silly things that are often thought of as being...well, a little stupid.



Some ways to define *essay*

- A short literary composition on a particular theme or subject, usually in prose and generally analytic, speculative, or interpretative. ([Dictionary.com Unabridged \(v 1.1\)](#))
- A short literary composition on a single subject, usually presenting the personal view of the author. ([American Heritage Dictionary](#))
- *To exert one's power or faculties upon; to make an effort to perform; to attempt; to endeavor; to make experiment or trial of; to try.* [Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary](#)



The History of a Word

- Es"say\, n.; pl. [Essays](#). [F. essai, fr. L. exagium a weighing, weight, balance; ex out + agere to drive, do; cf. examen, exagmen, a means of weighing, a weighing, the tongue of a balance, exigere to drive out, examine, weigh, Gr. 'exa' gion a weight, 'exagia`zein to examine, 'exa`gein to drive out, export. See [Agent](#), and cf. [Exact](#), [Examine](#), [Assay](#).]
 - 1. An effort made, or exertion of body or mind, for the performance of anything; a trial; attempt; as, to make an essay to benefit a friend. "The essay at organization." --M. Arnold.
 - 2. (Lit.) A composition treating of any particular subject; -- usually shorter and less methodical than a formal, finished treatise; as, an essay on the life and writings of Homer; an essay on fossils, or on commerce.
 - 3. An assay. See [Assay](#), n. [Obs.]
 - Syn: Attempt; trial; endeavor; effort; tract; treatise; dissertation; disquisition. *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.



Characteristics and Components

- Could you write a list of characteristics common to all academic essays?
 - What features or traits do most academic essays share?
- Could you write a list of components common to all academic essays?
 - What elements or ingredients constitute their make up?



What makes an essay academic?

- What are some of the characteristics of academic writing?
 - Complexity
 - Formality
 - Objectivity
 - Explicitness
 - Hedging
 - Responsibility



Academic-speak

- **Me Da's old car's a ball-o-shite!**
- **My father's car is in rather poor condition.**
- **I got laid last night.**
- **Yesterday evening, I exercised my primal urges.**
- **Feck ye!**
- **Be fruitful and multiply.**



Some Other Characteristics?

- Academic Essays tend to be argumentative.
- Arguments are explicitly stated and unfold logically.
- Arguments tend to be balanced.
- Arguments rely on evidence that is valued by the community addressed.
- Arguments have to be evaluated in accordance with criteria that meets with rigorous academic standards.



Academic Argumentation

- Balance
- Academic Integrity
- Components of argumentative essays
- Components of an argument: a claim and a reason.



Components

- Introduction
 - Who is talking about your topic?
 - In general, what are they saying?
 - Why is it important?
 - What do you believe? (Your thesis or organizing principle)
- Main Body
 - Argument in support of your position
 - Argument against your position
- Conclusion
 - An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the two positions
 - An evaluation of the results of the analysis (argument A is stronger than argument B because...) and your conclusion based on that evaluation.



Order and type

- Discussion essays
- Comparison/Contrast essays
- Cause/Effect essays
- Explain essays



Sample Questions

- **Assess** the contribution of Asoka to the spread of Buddhism in India.
- **Explain** the concept of 'role'. Of what use is the concept to a practising manager?
- **Compare and contrast** cellulose and lignin decomposition in soil.
- **List** the criteria you would apply to the presentation of government expenditure policy.
- **Critically discuss** economies and diseconomies of scale.
- **What deductions can be made** after studying the cell exhibited at C?
- **Evaluate** the contribution of political parties to the development of public policy in the United States and Canada.
- **To what extent** does the British public participate in the political process?

– [From UEfAP.com. (2009) Understanding the Question: Examples of Questions [online], available at: <http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm> [accessed 12 May 2009].



Important Influences

- The Rhetorical Situation
 - Occasion, Topic, Audience, Purpose, and Writer
- Your Writing Process and the kinds of strategies you use to achieve writing goals
- The Question
- Disciplinary Conventions
- Your Mom
- Your medication



Seen one, seen'm all

- Is an essay like a Ritz cracker?
- Is it a case of: It's not the Ritz; it's what's on the Ritz?
- Are there different types of essays?
 - *Essays in constructive mathematics*
 - *On knowing: Essays for the left hand*
 - *Essays in commutative harmonic analysis*
 - *The Essays of Francis Bacon*



It's not a Ritz

- Okay, so it's not a Ritz—there are differences.
- What determines the differences?
- And what is my strategy for assessing the different expectations before submitting my essay for assessment?



Some influential factors

- Disciplinary conventions (genre)
 - Answer a question/solve a problem
 - Defend a claim
 - Affirm or disaffirm a hypothesis
- Purpose:
 - To inform
 - To express your feelings
 - To persuade: ethos/pathos/logos/bathos
- Method of Development:
 - Compare and contrast, show cause and effect, classification, analysis, description, narration, etc.



Other influential factors

- Writing Process:
 - Prewriting (including assessment of context into which you write), drafting, revising, editing and proofreading
- Assessing the Rhetorical Situation:
 - Occasion, Topic, Audience, Purpose, Author
- Writing Strategies:
 - Cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social



Game Plan

- What are you going to do first?
- How much writing do you hope to have done by the end of the week?
- At what point will you stop to reassess and revise?
- How much time will you give yourself to proofread?
- What social strategies will you employ as part of your writing plan?



Let's Write an Essay

- Read “Limerick priest hits out at magic show”
- Who are the combatants? What are the claims? What evidence backs the claims?
- What would you say to Fr. O’Connell or Principal Cowhey if you were to meet them in the hall?
- Write a response: Should the proceeds from a magic show be used to fund a trip to Lourdes?



Academic arguments and balance

- **Group 1: Read James Walsh's letter.**
 - Identify his position (in line with Fr. O'Connell or Principal Cowhey?), his claim's and the support that he provides for those claims.
 - Communicate your findings to group 2.
- **Group 2: Read Paddy Monaghan's letter.**
 - Identify his position (with regard to Fr. O'Connell's or Principal Cowhey's positions), his claim's and the support that he provides for those claims.
 - Communicate your findings to group 1.



Letter to the Editor

- Taking into account all you have learned from the research, write a letter to the editor, saying who you support in the debate and why.
- Too, tell the editor why the opposing arguments are weak.
- Begin the letter with: ‘Dear Editor,...’



Academic-speak

- What changes would you make to your letter if you were to develop your ideas into an academic essay for a university course in:
 - Cultural Theory module
 - Theology module
 - Politics and Public Administration module
 - Etc?



The Shannon Consortium Regional Writing Centre at UL

- What can we do?
 - We offer friendly one-on-one support on all matters related to writing.
 - We run workshops, seminars and clinics on writing for all levels (first years through post-doctoral researchers).
 - We are developing a culture of support for writers at UL and at the member institutions.



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