**Essay Tips and Reminders**

In the real world, there are no five-paragraph essays. Open a newspaper and read the editorials. Read your favorite magazine. You won’t find any five-paragraph essays. The familiar structure was useful when you were first learning to organize your thoughts, but is limiting for the mature writers you are becoming. Our goal is to help you develop into lifelong writers with written voices you feel confident using to express your ideas. You are progressing toward that goal. You are now ready to take a more authentic approach to writing.

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| Beginning | Middle | End |
| The beginning of your essay, which can be more than one paragraph, should do the following:   * Entice/hook the reader * Introduce the main focus or idea of your essay | The middle of your essay, which will usually require several paragraphs, should logically organize your main points, arguments, relevant evidence, and counterarguments. | The end of your essay, which can be more than one paragraph, should do the following:   * End with a “hooking” strategy * Leave your reader with a memorable thought, question, anecdote, or quotation |
| Types of Introductions (see your notes for details):   * Anecdotal * Factual/Statistical * Quotation * Question | Body Paragraph Reminders:   * Use topic sentences to clarify your main ideas. * Provide relevant evidence from the text. * Explain all textual evidence clearly and concisely in your own words. | Types of Conclusions (see your notes for details):   * Repetition * Anecdotal * Quotation * Question |

**Five Things You Can Do To Improve Your Writing**

1. **Read more.** People who read more write better. As a teacher, I can always tell when I am reading an essay written by a reader. Readers write essays that have longer development, more mature vocabulary, and better and more diverse sentence structure.
2. **Write more.** Writing is a skill, like running or playing an instrument. You have to do it a lot to get good at it.
3. **Don’t fall in love with your first draft.** Get used to the idea that your first draft will almost always need work. If your writing is going to improve, you will have to move past the “I wrote it; I’m done” mentality.
4. **Get feedback.** Sharing your writing with others is essential if you want to move it to a better place. Receiving meaningful feedback on your writing will help you catch errors and craft better final drafts.
5. **Notice what other writers are doing.** We learn best when we stand next to someone who knows how to do the skill we are working on and observe how it is done. Learning to write is no exception. Rather than reading only to learn what a writer is saying, skilled writers also pay attention to how the writing is constructed.

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| MLA Checklist |  |
| 12 point Times New Roman Font |  |
| Entire paper is double spaced |  |
| Header: Last Name and Page Number |  |
| MLA heading |  |
| Title centered under MLA heading – no extra spaces |  |
| MLA in-text citations |  |
| MLA works cited page |  |
| Avoid contractions (“didn’t” should be “did not”) |  |

**Common Problems:**

1. **Wordiness.** When you revise your writing, watch for unnecessary or repetitive phrases. When you see them, get rid of them! Saying the same thing repeatedly does not strengthen your argument. In fact, it can make you sound like you aren’t sure what else to say.
2. **Letting evidence run your writing.** This is your essay. The strongest arguments and the most memorable statements should be yours. Textual evidence is crucial in backing up your ideas, but quotes cannot speak for you. Every time you use a quotation, it should be to emphasize or prove a point that you make clear in your own words.
3. **Lack of evidence.** On the other hand, a lack of evidence significantly limits the strength of your writing. If you make a connection to the text to prove a point, you must provide a quote. For example, stating that Pearl is a child of nature is not enough. Go a step further and show me where Hawthorne made this connection.
4. **Spelling errors.** You have spell check and you should use it. Failing to do so shows a serious lack of effort. On a similar note, when writing about literature be sure to spell characters’ names correctly. Not doing so leads me to question if you honestly read the work.
5. **Missing transitions.** For an essay to be effective, the writer must connect his/her ideas clearly. Show me why your main points matter, and how they work together to prove your thesis.

Work Cited:

Gallagher, Kelly. *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling and Mentor Texts*. 1.

Portland: Stenhouse, 2011. Print.

**Introductions**

A strong introduction gives the reader a good initial impression and entices him/her to read on. It also introduces the topic and explains what the essay will be about. An essay introduction contains three features that usually appear in the following order: an attention-getter, some background information, and a thesis.

**Attention-getters**

* Anecdotes – recount a brief story related to the subject of the essay
* Facts/statistics – begin with interesting facts that may surprise the reader
* Quotations – choose an engaging quotation that connects to the topic
* Questions – pose a central question that will be answered in the essay

**Background Information**

Background information in an essay serves as a bridge to link the reader to the topic of the essay. Provide enough information for the reader to understand the issue being discussed and appreciate its importance.

**Thesis Statements**

Thesis statements are generally one or two sentences long and tell the reader what the whole essay is going to be about. A strong, direct thesis gives a specific argument and outlines the essay to follow.

**What Not To Do**

The following list includes common mistakes that students make in their introductions.

* Do not make your introduction unnecessarily long.
* Don’t write like you are talking casually to the reader. Use third person.
* Do not refer directly to your essay with statements like, “In this essay…”
* Do not forget to mention the title and author of the work you are writing about.

**Conclusions**

A good conclusion is an integral part of every strong essay. The conclusion is your last chance to persuade your reader that your point of view is best. A conclusion should stress the importance of the thesis, give the essay a sense of completeness, and leave a final impression on the reader.

**Restate the Thesis**

Do not simply copy your thesis into your conclusion. Rephrase it using concise and effective language.

**Summarize the Sub Points**

After restating your thesis, you should also reiterate your main arguments. Do not copy your topic sentences into your conclusion. As with the thesis, you will need to rephrase your arguments.

**Types of Conclusions**

Just as there are several ways to capture a reader’s attention with an introduction, there are many effective ways to organize a conclusion.

* Repetition – conclude by linking the last paragraph to the first. Try reusing a key word or phrase to tie everything together
* Question – ask a question that provokes thought or ask a rhetorical question that makes clear your point of view
* Quotation – finish with a quote that amplifies your argument
* Anecdotal – wrap up the anecdote you began with your introduction or simply tell a story that ties in with your main idea

**What Not To Do**

The following list includes common mistakes that students make in their conclusions.

* Do not simply summarize your essay. Leave your reader with something to think about.
* Avoid phrases like “in conclusion,” “to conclude,” “in summary,” and “to sum up.”
* Do not present new information. If you have more to say, find a place to present it within the body.