

Four Main Types of Essays in Academic Writing

Writing an essay is the most common assignment in Academic writing, so it is important to know the basic types of essays. In this lecture you are going to learn about the **four major essay types**.

First of all, what is an essay?

An essay is a piece of nonfiction academic writing created to **develop a specific idea** or **support an argument**. In general, essays are mainly used to give some information, share the writer's point of view, or dispute a thesis statement. Depending on the purpose of writing, the essay tone can be either formal or informal. The essay formatting requirements may also vary – it may be a standard 5-paragraph piece or a lengthy academic work.

Four Main Types of Essays

The four major essay types are:

1. Expository
2. Descriptive
3. Narrative
4. Persuasive/argumentative

These types of essays may share similar features. For example, expository and persuasive essays mostly **deal with factual information** that ensures a clear presentation of ideas. Narrative and descriptive essays are written informally and **require a creative approach**.

Expository essay	Descriptive essay	Narrative essay	Argumentative essay
presents and explains the facts	creates a story through descriptions	narrates a story from life experience	convinces a reader to agree

Expository Essay

An expository essay is a piece of writing designed to explore a particular subject by providing factual information. The primary purpose of expository writing is to analyze a topic without making an argument. Expository essays require a writer to communicate **complex information in a simple**, easy-to-understand way. Unlike other types of essays, it offers an analysis based on facts. Therefore, a student should use a neutral tone of voice and introduce ideas in a logical order.

Main Features

This academic assignment tests the student's ability to present a clear explanation of an issue. To create an informative piece, you should refer to statistics and find factual examples. Some of the most common characteristics of expository essays include:

- **Instructive:** conveys accurate information
- **Specific:** a clear and precise explanation of facts
- **Well-organized:** follows the sequence of events
- **Semi-formal:** doesn't contain first-person nouns
- **Objective:** informs a reader without presenting any subjective opinions

A standard expository essay structure includes the following sections:

- **An introduction** presents a topic and gives background information
- **Body paragraphs** explain the facts
- **A conclusion** sums up the information

Subtypes

As a rule, expository writing is divided into several sub-categories. Some of the most common variations focus on the following matters:

1. **A problem and solution essay** is a type of expository writing that determines an issue and offers a range of problem-solving solutions. After exploring the matter in detail, a writer investigates the best ways to target an issue and how such methods can be applied efficiently.

2. **A cause and effect essay** explains the way things are interrelated in this world. In this essay type, a writer specifies the reasons why some things happen and discusses possible consequences. This basically means drawing a parallel between specific objects or events. A great example of cause and effect essay can be a piece on the reasons and consequences of the Civil War in the US.
3. **Compare and contrast essay** specifies the similarities and differences between specific subjects, people, locations or events to let the reader compare and contrast things. Comparing refers to finding similarities, while contrasting deals with figuring out the differences. In its essence, compare and contrast essay helps to understand more than one topic at a time.
4. **A definition essay** is a type of essay that provides an accurate definition of a subject and offers a classification. A writer should include both the official definitions from credible sources and personal understanding of a specific concept or thing.
5. **A process analysis essay** explains a specific process step-by-step by providing detailed instructions. Such assignments answer the "how-to" question. The ideas for topics are broad and may focus on any process, such as how the US President is elected or how a chocolate factory makes its best candies.

Below you can view an example of a complete expository essay that has all crucial features and follows a standard structure.

Descriptive Essay

A descriptive essay is a type of writing that **provides a detailed description** of a chosen literary piece, subject, event, etc. A sensory portrayal, commonly used in descriptive writing, serves two purposes. On the one hand, it helps to visualize things; on the other hand, a detailed description is a tool that allows conveying a deeper meaning.

High school and college teachers assign a descriptive essay to improve student's creative skills. In this type of writing, you **shouldn't limit your imagination**. Instead, you will want to show your creativity and resourcefulness.

Main Features

Typically, descriptive essays share the features of informal writing. Here are the key characteristics descriptive writing should have:

- **Demonstrative:** aims to showcase a subject, not just narrate
- **Vivid:** creates an impression in a reader's mind through descriptive details
- **Sensory:** the use of expressions that appeal to all human senses
- **Figurative language:** analogies, metaphors, similes, allegories, and personifications
- **Emotional:** describes issues of sentimental significance

As a rule, a descriptive essay doesn't have specific requirements to its structure. You are free to leverage your creativity to describe an object in the most unusual manner possible. However, this type of essay should contain the following information to address academic objective:

- **A brief introduction** of the subject you are going to portray
- **A detailed description**
- **A short summary** that offers an insight

Take a look at the attached example to have an idea how a perfect descriptive essay should look like.

Narrative Essay

A narrative essay, as the name suggests, tells **a story significant to the author**. Basically, it's a personal narrative created **to share a meaningful experience** that impacts a writer. This type of essay explores different challenges a writer has gone through, and that's what makes it so engaging.

While telling a story may sound easy to do, the narrative essay challenges students to think and write about themselves. When writing a narrative essay, writers should try to involve the reader by making the story as vivid as possible. The fact that narrative essays are usually written in the first person helps engage the reader. "I" sentences give readers a feeling of being part of

the story. A well-crafted narrative essay will also build towards drawing a conclusion or making a personal statement.

Main Features

Don't confuse a **narrative essay** with a **short story**: they are **not quite the same**. In a nutshell, the narrative essay has an academic objective, meaning that it should focus on the personal experience that has actually happened. At the same time, narrative essays share some common features with those of a short story. This type of essay typically contains **five elements of storytelling**:

- **Plot**: the sequence of events
- **Setting**: when and where a story takes place
- **Character**: a protagonist that triggers all events
- **Conflict**: an issue a protagonist tries to solve
- **Theme**: a sense of a moral

As well as any other type of academic assignment, narrative essays have **peculiar features** listed as follows:

- **Informative**: narrates a story without proving any argument
- **Subjective**: written in the first person
- **Non-fictional**: shares the real personal experience
- **Conversational**: the use of informal and expressive tone of voice
- **Organized**: introduces people and events in sequential order

Persuasive/Argumentative (Discursive) Essay

A **persuasive essay** is a type of essay where a writer has to **persuade a reader** to adopt a specific point of view. A persuasive essay is otherwise called an argumentative essay, as it has to convince the reader of the truth presented in the argument. Besides, in a persuasive essay, one would take a **firm stance on a matter**. A writer should then provide **supporting evidence** and facts to back up a thesis statement.

An argumentative essay writing requires good research and persuasive skills. A college student should be able to communicate their point of view through evidence-driven research. On top of that, it is crucial to **refer to the credible sources**, otherwise, chances are that a reader will doubt the argument.

The goal of **the persuasive essay** is to convince the reader to accept the writer's point of view or recommendation. The writer must **build a case using facts and logic**, as well as **examples, expert opinion, and sound reasoning**. The writer should present all sides of the argument, but must be able to communicate clearly why a certain position is correct. Here your argument is most important. You are presenting an opinion and trying to persuade readers, you want to win readers over to your point of view.

Main Features

To establish a steady stance, a writer needs to create persuasive essays with such characteristics in mind:

- **Convincing:** has a persuasive tone of voice to make a reader agree
- **Accurate:** provides valid information and current cases or events
- **Informative:** focuses on facts, statistics, and evidence
- **Reader-oriented:** conveys information from a reader's perspective
- **Arguable:** this type of essay has a debatable topic that triggers discussion

Just like any other type of essay, an argumentative essay should be structured according to academic instructions. As a rule, college teachers and university professors require students to include the following parts:

- **An introduction** that presents a topic and a strong thesis statement
- **A body part** that includes arguments and supporting evidence
- **A conclusion** that wraps up the argument and focuses on its significance

Like an expository essay in its presentation of facts, **the persuasive essay** has the goal to convince the reader to accept the writer's point of view or

recommendation. The writer must **build a case using facts and logic**, as well as **examples, expert opinion, and sound reasoning**. The writer should present all sides of the argument, but must be able to communicate clearly why a certain position is correct.

Here your argument is most important. You are presenting an opinion and trying to persuade readers, you want to win readers over to your point of view.

For a persuasive essay:

- Have a definite point of view.
- Maintain the reader's interest.
- Use sound reasoning.
- Use solid evidence.
- Be aware of your intended audience. How can you win them over?
- Research your topic so your evidence is convincing.
- Your purpose is to convince someone else so don't overdo your language and don't bore the reader. And don't keep repeating your points!
- Remember the rules of the good paragraph. One single topic per paragraph, and natural progression from one to the next.
- End with a strong conclusion.

For an argumentative essay:

- The argument should be focused
- The argument should be a clear statement (a question cannot be an argument)
- It should be on a topic that you can support with solid evidence
- The argumentative essay should be based on pros and cons
- Structure your approach well
- Use good transition words/phrases
- Be aware of your intended audience. How can you win them over?
- Research your topic so your evidence is convincing.
- Don't overdo your language and don't bore the reader. And don't keep repeating your points!
- Remember the rules of the good paragraph. One single topic per paragraph, and natural progression from one to the next.

- End with a strong conclusion.

TIPS FOR WRITING

1. Define your topic

Before you begin your essay you need to define what the topic is. **Argumentative (Discursive) essay** topics can be about anything, but they are primarily used to argue ideas about controversial topics such as gun control. You should decide at this point which side you are supporting.

2. Outline

The foundation of any well structured essay is an outline. An **Argumentative (Discursive) essay** should have:

- **Introduction:** The Introduction clearly states the topic and explains why it is important.
- **Body:** The Body contains the arguments and logic for both sides.
- **Conclusion:** The Conclusion is where you establish your personal stance on the argument and explain why. Here you explain why it is difficult to establish a solid stance on the topic.

(Lecture notes on Clusters, Listing Outlines)

for	against

3. Write 4-6 different points to include in body

Each individual argument is a paragraph. The amount of paragraphs is up to you, but if this is for a class there should be at least 4.

4. Fill in the content

Now that you've fully outlined your essay, it's time to fill it with the content. Establish credibility by citing valid sources. Don't believe everything you read. Look for scientific studies or valid statistics. Hard facts enrich any argument.

Your tone should be neutral throughout the body, giving each point its turn to truly speak. Try to be as thorough and unbiased as possible.

5. Write a conclusion

In the last paragraph you will wrap up the argument by stating your personal stance on the issue. Try to explain why you feel the way you do, and if you don't actually have an opinion, try to define as to why that is. Mention again why the issue is important and should be evaluated further.

Tips:

- Stay in formal third person perspective throughout the body
- Before you begin writing, you should create a "spider-diagram", or "mind-map" (a cluster) to help clearly relate your points.
- When writing the separate arguments, try to pretend as though a person from that specific viewpoint "has the floor". Pretend as though you are trying to convince another person of that viewpoint, even if you don't necessarily agree with it. Make sure to keep a third person writing style.

Use the phrases for linking ideas in an **argumentative/ discursive** essay (Transition Signals)

Same line of thought

e.g. - and, firstly, secondly etc., next, furthermore, likewise, in addition, similarly, also, moreover.

Conclusion/summary

e.g. - thus, therefore, consequently, accordingly, in retrospect, hence, in conclusion, in brief, as a result.

Definite statement

e.g. - without question, without doubt, unquestionably, absolutely.

Contrasting idea

e.g. - yet, on the other hand, nevertheless, however, although, conversely, otherwise, on the contrary.

Further examples

for instance, for example, because, since, so that, despite the fact that, accordingly, although, if, though, unless.

Proofread and review your essay

Here are a few aspects to pay attention to while you proofread:

- Look out for any spelling errors or grammatical mistakes regardless of how minor fix them! They can derail the focus of the reader and undermine the intellectual integrity of your essay (Lecture notes on Sentence structure, Punctuation, Capitalization)
- Keep your audience in mind. In most cases it will be your teacher or professor. Make sure your language reflects this; keep it formal and academic, don't use colloquialisms!
- Have you got enough evidence and explained it well? If not, you can always do a little more to strengthen any weaker arguments.

It certainly takes time but if you want improve your critical thinking and problem solving skills while getting good essay grades proof-reading and reviewing are the necessary ones.

Bottom line

A deep understanding of the reader's intent helps to write along the right lines. Once you determine which of the four types of essays best addresses your goal, you will be able to create an astounding essay tailored to your writing purpose.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I choose the right type of essay?

High school and college teachers usually assign a specific type of essay. But sometimes you may be given writing prompts on the basis of which you have to choose an essay type yourself.

In such case, you will need to pay attention to the requirements of each assignment - they will give you a hint. For example, the word “convince” means you need to write a persuasive essay, whereas the word “describe” indicates you should create a descriptive essay. The word “tell” suggests you should write a narrative essay.

2. What is a hybrid essay?

A hybrid essay is a unique combination of two or more types of essays. Sometimes you may be required to address two objectives at once, for instance, tell about your previous and current experience and compare them. In this case, you will need to write a narrative essay with the elements of compare-and-contrast essay.

Reference:

<https://writemyessay4me.org/blog/5-different-types-of-essays>