

06 Assignment 02: The Expository Essay

Overview

Expository writing is generally writing that seeks to explain or provide information to an audience on a given topic. These essays can seek to describe, classify, define, or establish cause-effect relationships regarding their topics using clear assertions and supporting details.

We encounter expository writing all the time, from magazine and newspaper feature articles to literary essays to travel guides, instructions, blog posts, movie reviews, and promotional materials.

Expository essays are often developed around a coherent idea—a thesis—and thoroughly supported with details and other information that will be useful to the reader.

Assignment Options:

1. Discuss the three people who have had the most influence upon your life up to this point. Describe who each person is, your relation to them, and what impact they had on your life. Did they motivate you? Provide assistance or help in key moment? Conversely, did they challenge you? Present an obstacle for you to overcome?
2. Discuss the three most significant accomplishments you have had in your education or your profession thus far. These can be projects that you completed, obstacles you overcame, honors you attained, or important lessons that you learned.
3. [MORE DIFFICULT] Choose three words that characterize several of your key educational experiences in high school or college. In this version of the assignment, your task will be to connect these words—such as “happy” or “challenging” or “frustrating” or “boring” or “exciting”—with key events in your education. The challenge of this version of the assignment is to use the words that you’ve chosen as controlling ideas for discussing a *narrow* and specific set of key experiences. If, for example, you choose “confusing,” “exciting,” and “frustrating,” you will then choose

three experiences that correspond with those terms to develop your paper. You might discuss your “confusing” experience in 10th grade chemistry, your “exciting” internship at Johns Hopkins hospital, and your “frustrating” attempts to coordinate a group project in your senior year world-history class.

4. Discuss the three most important objects you currently own. These can be items of social, historical, or emotional value, pieces of technology, or things that you use or depend on all the time. This essay will challenge you to think about what possessions mean to you—and more generally, how people view the things they own as contributing to who they are and the kind of person they want to be. Are you welded to your iPhone X 24 hours a day? Do you have an old copy of *A Wrinkle In Time* that you couldn't imagine living without? Are you a cook, and spend a lot of time in front of the stove in your house? What does this mean and how do these things impact us and our lives?
5. Choose an emotion, and select / discuss three of the most important and influential times you have felt that emotion in your life. You might choose “anger” and discuss three times when you felt that emotion acutely; conversely, you might talk about several instances of joy or love. You should, however, use these instances to draw some conclusions about the place of that particular emotion in your life and how it has shaped you as a person.

Basic Assignment Requirements

The Narrative essay must meet the following **format** guidelines:

- Be in MLA Manuscript Format
 - Have 1 inch top, bottom, right and left margins;
 - Times New Roman 12 font;
 - Running header with last name and page number;
 - MLA compliant title block on first page;
 - All content double spaced.

The Expository essay must meet the following **content and mechanics** guidelines:

- Must be at least 1,250 words long;
- Must be guided by a clearly identified thesis statement that articulates the three primary points of discussion;

- Must be organized logically with clear topic sentences that connect back to the thesis statement;
- Must provide adequate levels of detail and description to depict the event using the Methods of Development that we discuss in class:
 - Narration
 - Description
 - Exposition
 - Exemplification;
- Must contain a clear introduction, body, and conclusion that discuss the event and establish its importance to the audience;
- Must contain none of the following major mechanical errors:
 - Run-on sentences
 - Fragments
 - Tense shifts
 - Possession errors
 - Capitalization errors
 - Subject-verb agreement errors
- Must conform to Standard English Grammar requirements for proofreading, usage, and spelling.

Invention and Generating Ideas

In the expository mode, we frequently write about both personal experiences, whether they are our own experiences or those of others and material that we gather from sources outside ourselves. For this purpose, the **freewriting and brainstorming** techniques (See Chapter 05, The Writing Process) are often useful in gathering ideas for a first draft.

In many cases, our expository writing will start with a (possibly rough) thesis that we must explain. Use that thesis as a starting point. If your thesis is something like “The Four Best Vacation Spots in Maryland,” (a type of writing common on websites and in newspaper features), you might start with first brainstorming as many good vacation destinations as you can, and then narrowing down your focus with subsequent brainstorms (i.e., “looping.”).

Once you have a narrower focus for your writing, brainstorm and freewrite details about each subtopic—the more the better. From here, you will have enough raw materials to start outlining and drafting.

Invention and Generating Ideas

In the expository mode we are often tasked with synthesizing and organizing sizable amounts of information. For this purpose, the **brainstorming** technique (See Chapter 05, The Writing Process) is often useful in gathering ideas for a first draft. Gathering and listing ideas, the organizing them into a coherent whole, is a crucial step toward presenting clear and informative essay.

Often, brainstorming ideas can be a step toward generating / recognizing a key controlling idea: a thesis.

Organizing a Writing Plan

Expository essays are often built around a solid, coherent thesis that outlines the subject(s) for discussion. Whether the aim is informative (“Four Great Weekend Vacations in Maryland!”), or more descriptive (“Characteristics of Post-Traumatic Stress in Iraq War Veterans”), your starting point should be that thesis.

Use your thesis to form the basis of an outline. Let’s return to “Four Great Weekend Vacation Spots in Maryland” as an example. We would narrow our focus to four concrete places for people to visit in Maryland: Ocean City, Deep Creek Lake, St. Michaels, and Point Lookout. Our thesis would thus look like this:

Four great places to spend a weekend in Maryland are Ocean City, Deep Creek Lake, St. Michaels, and Point Lookout.

From the thesis, we can extrapolate what our essay would look like as a whole:

- I. **Introduction: Maryland is a great vacation spot; a brief overview of the paper, leading up to the THESIS:** Four great places to spend a weekend in Maryland are Ocean City, Deep Creek Lake, St. Michaels, and Point Lookout.
- II. **Body Section 1: Ocean City, MD**
- III. **Body Section 2: Deep Creek Lake, MD**
- IV. **Body Section 3: St. Michaels, Eastern Shore**
- V. **Body Section 4: Point Lookout, MD**

We now have a rough blueprint as to what we'll discuss overall; we now have to plan *each section*. Ideally, one should have some consistency in terms of the type of information presented in each section—this promotes coherence. In the example above, one might want to discuss “what to do” at the destination, restaurants and food, and places to stay.

II. **Ocean City MD is a great place for a weekend getaway.**

- a. **Attractions in OC:** Lots of free beach, two amusement parks, waterslides, miniature golf, shopping options, and a Boardwalk.
- b. **Best places to Eat in OC:** Seafood restaurants like Phillips, Marina Deck, and Marlin, as well as Higgins' Crab House. Eastern shore specialties like ham and fried chicken are available in numerous places. Even fine dining at *The Hobbit* and *Fager's Island*. For people who like bar / restaurants, Seacrets is world-famous.
- c. **Where to Stay:** Hundreds of hotels and condos cover the whole of Ocean City, so finding a place to stay won't be hard. You might want to stay at the famous Carousel Hotel, the modern Sea Colony, or even the old-school Dunes Motel, right on the beach. For a quieter time, you might choose a small Bayfront hotel like the Bay Princess or the Maryland House.

Once you have a rough idea of the *types* of things to talk about in each section, you can repeat this for each of your other body sections: Attractions, Places to Eat, and Where to Stay. Build in more and more detail in each successive attempt at your outline.