

Essay Types

The ability to write effectively is undoubtedly one of the critical skills that everyone has to acquire during school and later in college years. Typically this is attained via practice: writing skills develop as the result of assigning students dozens, if not hundreds of essays on different topics, with every essay serving its own purpose. It is so easy to get lost in the multitude of different **essay types** that a closer look at them is a must. The kinds of essays that are most commonly given to students include: expository essay, persuasive essay, informal essay, the review, research essay, literary essay, expository essay, argumentative essay, expository essay, compare and contrast essay. A comparative table with these **essay types** will be posted at the end of the article to briefly outline similarities and differences in each of them (see *Table 1*). Before we proceed with analysis, it is important to remember a general rule: *essays get their names according to the function they serve.*

Table 1. Comparative Table of the Main Essay Types

Essay Type	Tone	Referencing	Purpose
Expository	Objective	Required	Inform
Persuasive	Objective	Required	Persuade
Informal	Subjective	Unnecessary	Communicate
Review	Objective/Subjective	Preferable	Analyze and Present
Research	Objective	Required	Discover
Literary	Objective	Preferable	Analyze literature
Argumentative	Objective	Required	Prove a viewpoint
Cause and Effect	Objective	Required	Establish relation

The Expository Essay

The main function of the expository essay is to explain, or to acquaint your reader with something; it can be used to describe, explain or present some information. In order to write an expository essay, preparation and background research will be required. This will arm you with facts and information that will be subsequently conveyed to your reader. Expository writing will also require you to show understanding of the chosen topic – this is why many professors and tutors choose this essay type to check how well a student has mastered a given topic. In their most common form, expository essays will take about 5 paragraphs; however, classes and instructors may require them to be larger in size. No matter the size, an essay should at all times include an introduction and a conclusion – the body length may vary.

The Persuasive Essay

If you have to persuade your reader about something, your essay becomes a persuasive one. With this type of writing you will need not only to prove your point, but will also have to persuade your opposition that your viewpoint is logical and well founded, and thus – better. In this case, you are no longer merely showing what you know; you are convincing the reader that you are correct in your viewpoint. In order to

write this kind of essay it is important to prepare in advance by choosing a side, making a case for it, anticipating alternative arguments and finding ways how to refute them. You must be aware of other sides of the argument and be fair to them; dismissing them completely will weaken your own argument. It is always best to take a side that you believe in, preferably with the most supporting evidence. It can often be educational to adopt a different position from what you might normally choose (debating requires this kind of flexibility).

The Informal Essay

The informal essay is a type of essay written mainly for enjoyment. This is not to say that it cannot be informative or persuasive; however, it is a less formal statement with a more relaxed expression of opinion, observation or humor. A good informal essay has a relaxed style but retains a strong structure, though the structure may be less rigid than a formal paper.

The informal essay tends to be more personal than the formal, even though both may express subjective opinions. In a formal essay the writer is in a silent presence behind the words, while in an informal essay the writer is speaking directly to the reader in a conversational manner. If you are writing informally, try to maintain a sense of your own personality. Do not worry about sounding academic, but make sure you avoid sloppiness.

The Review

A review may be either formal or informal, depending on the context. Its goal is to evaluate a specific piece, perhaps a novel or movie. This implies that the reviewer's personal opinion plays a significant role in the process. Despite a degree of subjectivity, a certain objective standard needs to be maintained and, as in a persuasive essay, your assertions need to be proved.

The formality of the review will be determined by how much of the essay is analysis, how much is summary, and how much is your reaction to the work you are reviewing. A more formal review will not only discuss the work or its own merits but will also place it in context. Newspapers and popular magazines tend to review in terms of finance, e.g. is this record or film worth spending money on? Critical journals will attempt to determine whether a new novel or play has achieved something new and significant. A good review will discuss both these qualities and the importance of a given work.

The Research Essay

The research essay leads you into the works of others and asks you to compare their thoughts with your own. Writing a research paper involves going to source material and synthesizing what you learned from it with your own ideas. You must find texts on the subject and use them to support the topic you have been given to explore. Since it is easy to become lost in a wilderness of outside material, you must take particular care in narrowing your topic.

The greatest inherent danger in the research essay is plagiarism. If your paper consists of a string of quotations or paraphrases with little input of your own, you are not synthesizing but copying, and you should expect a low grade. If any of the borrowings are unacknowledged, you are plagiarizing and the penalties are severe.

The Literary Essay

In the literary essay, you are exploring the meaning and construction of a piece of literature. This task is more complicated than reviewing, though the two are similarly evaluative. In a review you are discussing the overall effect and validity of a work, while in a literary essay you are paying greater attention to specifics.

A literary essay focuses on such elements as structure, character, theme, style, tone, and subtext. You are taking a piece of writing and trying to discover how and why it is put together the way that it is. You

must adopt a viewpoint on the work in question and show how the details of the work support your viewpoint.

A literary essay may be your own interpretation, based only on your reading of the piece, or it may be a mixture of your opinions and references to the criticism of others, much like a research paper. Again, be wary of plagiarism and of letting the opinions of more experienced writers swamp your own response to the work. If you are going to consult the critics, you should re-read the literary work you are discussing and make some notes on it before looking at any other opinions.

The Argumentative Essay

The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that if one simply has an opinion, one can argue it effectively, and these folks are always surprised when others don't agree with them because their logic seems so correct. Additionally, writers of argumentation often forget that their primary purpose in an argument is to "win" it – to sway the reader to accept their point of view. It is easy to call names, easy to ignore the point of view or research of others, and extremely easy to accept one's own opinion as gospel, even if the writer has not checked his or her premise in a couple of years, or, as is the case for many young writers, never questioned the beliefs inherited from others.

Want to know what you think about something? Then write an argumentative essay. To be fair, however, you'll find that one of the first things you must do is become an expert on the issue. When you pick a topic, you should avoid writing about issues that cannot be won, no matter how strongly you might feel about them. The five hottest topics of our time seem to be gun control, abortion, capital punishment, freedom of speech, and probably the most recent, euthanasia, or the right to die. If possible, avoid writing about these topics because they are either impossible to "win," or because your instructor is probably sick of reading about them and knows all the pros and cons by heart (this could put you at a serious disadvantage). If you have difficulty picking a decent topic for your essay, feel free to check out our list of good argumentative essay topics. Either way, the topics may be some fine reading material, because most people are somewhat aware of the problems and can then concentrate on understanding the method of argument itself. But care should be taken; if you read one side, you also read the other. Far too many individuals only read the side that they already believe in. These issues cannot be won for good reason: each touches on matters of faith and beliefs that for many people are unshakable and deeply private.

The Cause and Effect Essay

The cause and effect essay includes some elements of writing that might be considered more professional than those a descriptive or narrative essay might include. It is very important, for instance, that your tone be reasonable, and that your presentation be factual and believable. Sources are often required in a cause/effect paper, and your choice of these sources is important as they reflect on the validity of your paper. Additionally, the first-person point of view does not work; you should sound objective and impartial. Consider the following sentences:

I believe that gun control measures should be taken in every hamlet in America.

Gun control measures should be taken in every hamlet in America.

In the first sentence, the first person is used. This would work in a narrative, but here it actually limits the meaning of the sentence to just the writer, and it makes the writer sound weak – as if he were justifying himself or herself. The second sentence is much more forceful. It makes a statement and does not limit itself to just what the writer believes. The purpose of a cause and effect paper is to be as convincing as possible, and to convince readers to accept the cause/effect as fact.

The Comparison and Contrast Essays

The main purpose and function of compare and contrast essays is obvious – to find similarities and dissimilarities between two or more objects or things. This kind of writing requires the writer to be an observer; in most cases it doesn't require scholarly research or any specific referencing. Such essays are mostly subjective in nature, and writers are required to come up with differences or similarities they are able to point out and analyze. There are different compare and contrast patterns for these essays, yet the overall essay structure remains invariable: there should be an introduction, a few body paragraphs and a conclusion. While working on your compare and contrast essay, don't forget to use the so-called cue words. These words help you to tie paragraphs together by means of small logical connectors. For example, you can use words like: on the one hand/on the other hand, this is such/in contrast, however, like, as well, too, unlike, though, but etc. These words will pull your essay together and will make it hold better. Check out an article that covers our [compare and contrast essays](#) in detail – and good luck with your writing!