

Four types of essay: expository, persuasive, analytical, argumentative

For our academic writing purposes we will focus on four types of essay.

1) The expository essay

What is it?

This is a writer's explanation of a short theme, idea or issue.

The key here is that you are explaining an issue, theme or idea to your intended audience. Your reaction to a work of literature could be in the form of an expository essay, for example if you decide to simply explain your personal response to a work. The expository essay can also be used to give a personal response to a world event, political debate, football game, work of art and so on.

What are its most important qualities?

You want to get and, of course, keep your reader's attention. So, you should:

- Have a well defined thesis. Start with a thesis statement/research question/statement of intent. Make sure you answer your question or do what you say you set out to do. Do not wander from your topic.
- Provide evidence to back up what you are saying. Support your arguments with facts and reasoning. Do not simply list facts, incorporate these as examples supporting your position, but at the same time make your point as succinctly as possible.
- The essay should be concise. Make your point and conclude your essay. Don't make the mistake of believing that repetition and over-stating your case will score points with your readers.

2) The persuasive essay

What is it?

This is the type of essay where you try to convince the reader to adopt your position on an issue or point of view.

Here your rationale, 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.

What are its most important qualities?

- 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.
- Don't get so sentimental or so passionate that you lose the reader, as Irish poet W. B. Yeats put it:
*The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity*
- 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.

3) The analytical essay

What is it?

In this type of essay you analyze, examine and interpret such things as an event, book, poem, play or other work of art.

What are its most important qualities?

Your analytical essay should have an:

- *Introduction and presentation of argument*
The introductory paragraph is used to tell the reader what text or texts you will be discussing. Every

literary work raises at least one major issue. In your introduction you will also define the idea or issue of the text that you wish to examine in your analysis. This is sometimes called the thesis or research question. It is important that you narrow the focus of your essay.

- *Analysis of the text (the longest part of the essay)*
The issue you have chosen to analyze is connected to your argument. After stating the problem, present your argument. When you start analyzing the text, pay attention to the stylistic devices (the “hows” of the text) the author uses to convey some specific meaning. You must decide if the author accomplishes his goal of conveying his ideas to the reader. Do not forget to support your assumptions with examples and reasonable judgment.
- *Personal response*
Your personal response will show a deeper understanding of the text and by forming a personal meaning about the text you will get more out of it. Do not make the mistake of thinking that you only have to have a positive response to a text. If a writer is trying to convince you of something but fails to do so, in your opinion, your critical personal response can be very enlightening. The key word here is *critical*. Base any objections on the text and use evidence from the text. Personal response should be in evidence throughout the essay, not tacked on at the end.
- *Conclusion (related to the analysis and the argument)*
Your conclusion should explain the relation between the analyzed text and the presented argument.

Tips for writing analytical essays:

- Be well organized. Plan what you want to write before you start. It is a good idea to know exactly what your conclusion is going to be before you start to write. When you know where you are going, you tend to get there in a well organized way with logical progression.
- Analytical essays normally use the present tense. When talking about a text, write about it in the present tense.
- Be “objective”: avoid using the first person too much. For example, instead of saying “I think Louisa is imaginative because...”, try: “It appears that Louisa has a vivid imagination, because...”.
- Do not use slang or colloquial language (the language of informal speech).
- Do not use contractions.
- Avoid using “etc.” This is an expression that is generally used by writers who have nothing more to say.
- Create an original title, do not use the title of the text.
- Analysis does not mean retelling the story. Many students fall into the trap of telling the reader what is happening in the text instead of analyzing it. Analysis aims to explain how the writer makes us see what he or she wants us to see, the effect of the writing techniques, the text’s themes and your personal response to these.

4) The argumentative essay

What is it?

This is the type of essay where you prove that your opinion, theory or hypothesis about an issue is correct or more truthful than those of others. In short, it is very similar to the persuasive essay (see above), but the difference is that you are arguing for your opinion as opposed to others, rather than directly trying to persuade someone to adopt your point of view.

What are its most important qualities?

- The argument should be focused
- The argument should be a clear statement (a question cannot be an argument)
- It should be a topic that you can support with solid evidence
- The argumentative essay should be based on pros and cons (see below)
- Structure your approach well (see below)
- Use good transition words/phrases (see below)
- 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 argumentative essays:

1) Make a list of the pros and cons in your plan before you start writing. Choose the most important that support your argument (the pros) and the most important to refute (the cons) and focus on them.

2) The argumentative essay has three approaches. Choose the one that you find most effective for your argument. Do you find it better to “sell” your argument first and then present the counter arguments and refute them? Or do you prefer to save the best for last?

- Approach 1:
Thesis statement (main argument):
Pro idea 1
Pro idea 2
Con(s) + Refutation(s): these are the opinions of others that you disagree with. You must clearly specify these opinions if you are to refute them convincingly.
Conclusion
- Approach 2:
Thesis statement:
Con(s) + Refutation(s)
Pro idea 1
Pro idea 2
Conclusion
- Approach 3
Thesis statement:
Con idea 1 and the your refutation
Con idea 2 and the your refutation
Con idea 3 and the your refutation
Conclusion

3) Use good transition words when moving between arguments and most importantly when moving from pros to cons and vice versa. For example:

- While I have shown that... other may say
- Opponents of this idea claim / maintain that ...
- Those who disagree claim that ...
- While some people may disagree with this idea...

When you want to refute or counter the cons you may start with:

- However,
- Nonetheless,
- but
- On the other hand,
- This claim notwithstanding

If you want to mark your total disagreement:

- After seeing this evidence, it is impossible to agree with what they say
- Their argument is irrelevant
- Contrary to what they might think ...

These are just a few suggestions. You can, of course, come up with many good transitions of your own.

4) Use facts, statistics, quotes and examples to convince your readers of your argument

