How to Write the In-class Essay!

1) First, read the question carefully. Pick out the salient points. What is the topic? A book, an event, an idea? What is the focus? A character? A problem?
What are you being asked to do with this? Discuss? Contrast? Agree/Disagree?

2) Next, make a few very quick notes in answer to the question or in response to the topic.

3) Stop and take a breath. Read over your ideas and ask yourself which ones directly address the question or essay prompt. Throw out whatever is irrelevant to the task at hand no matter how much you love it. Really!

4) Now make a very brief (very rapid) outline:

1. What is your thesis? What will you argue? Remember that your thesis is your promise to the reader: you are promising that by the end of this essay, you will have convinced the reader of such and such and nothing else. Once again, check to make sure the thesis responds directly and specifically to the question. The thesis will keep you honest as well as help prepare the reader.
2. Create a list of the points you’ll need to make to prove your thesis. Throw out any point that only shows off another bit of information you have in your head rather than builds the argument for your thesis. Each point should be in the form of an assertion, a mini-thesis and will serve as the topic-sentences for your body paragraphs.
3. Arrange these topic sentences in some sort of logical order rather in the order they have just occurred to you. What piece of information does the reader need first? Second? Etc. Each point should build on the one that comes before and towards making the case for your thesis.

5) Now start writing the essay. Do not let yourself write a long introduction. You don’t want to take time away from the argument itself. Just use a sentence or two to introduce the problem being addressed, transition to your thesis, state your thesis, and then stop.

6) As you work your way through your body paragraphs—as specified in your brief outline—remember that each assertion needs an example as evidence. Your position means very little if you haven’t demonstrated an ability to support it. That’s what your professor is looking for. So specific, concrete evidence is crucial. If you are arguing that a character in a novel is greedy, don’t simply assert that she is greedy. Give the reader an example from the plot that illustrates her nature and then explain or analyze how it does so.

7) Always try to leave yourself a few minutes at the end to look over your essays. They won’t be perfect. No one expects that. But they should be clear, logical, and easy to read.

Possible essay questions from *Lord of the Flies*:

1. At the end of the novel, the Naval Officer says, “I know. Jolly good show. Like the Coral Island.” Why did Golding choose to end the novel with such a mistaken view.
2. Simon says: “Maybe there is a beast.”

Ralph says: “But there isn’t a beast.”

Jack says: “We’ll make sure when we go hunting.”

How does William Golding use the “beast” in the novel as a whole?

You could write about: - what the “beast” may symbolize – the way the boys’ ideas about the “beast” change – and/or what effect the “best” has on the boys.

1. At the end of Chapter Five, Ralph asks for “something grown up… a sign or something.” What do you think is the significance of the “world of grown-ups” at this point in the story, and/or in the novel as a whole?

You should could write about: - the different attitudes of the boys towards “grownups” – events that occur on the island and in the outside world – and the writer’s ideas and how he conveys them to the reader.

1. Ralph is changed by his experience on the island. How does Golding show this?

You could write about: - what he is like when he is first stranded on the island – what he tries to do and how he responds to events and situations – how the writer presents the character of Ralph – and/or your own opinions of Ralph.

1. Although the reader’s sympathies are usually with Ralph, many of the boys decide to follow Jack. Explain why the boys chose Jack over Ralph by the end.
2. Explain what went wrong on the island and why, in order to bring out what you think Golding has to say about how societies operate.
3. Why do you think Golding called his novel *Lord of the Flies*?
4. What do you think Golding has to say about civilization and civilized behaviour in the novel?

You could consider the following as part of your answer: - which characters and ideas are “civilized” – how Golding presents the “uncivilized” – and/or the ending of the novel.

1. What do you think Golding has to say about human nature in the novel, and how does he convey these ideas to you?

You should make detailed references to at least three specific passages of your choice.

1. Write about one or more of the following and explain why they are or are not important to the novel
* Violence and savagery
* Children and adults
* How leaders gain power
* Loyalty and trust
* Meetings and rituals
1. Ralph says, “Things are breaking up. I don’t understand why. We began well. We were happy.” Explain what went wrong and why.
2. Write about the importance of the conch in Lord of the Flies, and in the importance of any two from the following list:
* Masks
* Piggy’s glasses
* The fire
* The parachutist
* The pigs head
1. Show how Golding creates a world of increasing violence in the novel, by considering all or some of the following:
* The characters themselves
* The setting of the novel
* The events of the novel
* The behaviour of the characters
* The way the author works out his theme.
1. Golding wrote his novel 10 years after the close of World War II and during the era of Communist containment. In what way does his book reflect the particular world politics of his time? Does the book have relevance today?
2. What does hunting mean to Jack...at the beginning, and then later? What happens to his mental state after he kills his first pig?
3. Or if you have something that you want to argue about the book, create your own essay topic! Just make sure you talk to Mr. Flasch first.

Rules for the in-class essay:

1. You are not allowed to bring anything into the exam with the exception of your essay outline, and quotes page.
2. You will have roughly 50 minutes to complete your essay. Once the bell rings, the essays are to be handed in. That is why it is important to prepare beforehand.
3. I will allow a dictionary (must be print—no phones allowed!).
4. You will hand in the essay, the outline, and quotes page.

**WRITING A POSITION PAPER**

The following material explains how to produce a position paper. A template is provided that outlines the major parts of a good position paper. Keep in mind, however, **that this is just a guide.** Like a debate, a position paper presents one side of an arguable opinion about an issue. The goal of a position paper is to convince the audience that your opinion is valid and defensible. Ideas that you are considering need to be carefully examined in choosing a topic, developing your argument, and organizing your paper. It is very important to ensure that you are addressing all sides of the issue and presenting it in a manner that is easy for your audience to understand. Your job is to take one side of the argument and persuade your audience that you have well-founded knowledge of the topic being presented. It is important to support your argument with evidence to ensure the validity of your claims, as well as to refute the counterclaims to show that you are well informed about both sides.

**Issue Criteria**

To take a side on a subject, you should first establish the arguability of a topic that interests you. Ask yourself the following questions to ensure that you will be able to present a strong argument:

* Is it a real issue, with genuine controversy and uncertainty?
* Can you identify at least two distinctive positions?
* Are you personally interested in advocating one of these positions?
* Is the scope of the issue narrow enough to be manageable?

**Analyzing an Issue and Developing an Argument**

While you may already have an opinion on your topic and an idea about which side of the argument you want to take, **you need to ensure that your position is well supported**. Listing the pro and con sides of the topic will help you examine your ability to support your counterclaims, along with a list of supporting evidence for both sides. Look for quotations to use to support your argument!

**Considering your audience and determining your viewpoint**

Once you have made your pro and con lists, compare the information side by side. Considering your audience, as well as your own viewpoint, choose the position you will take.

Considering your audience does not mean playing up to the teacher. To convince a particular person that your own views are sound, you have to consider his or her way of thinking. You will have to make specific decisions about the terms you should explain, the background information you should supply, and the details you need to convince that particular reader.

In determining your viewpoint, ask yourself the following:

* Is your topic interesting? Remember that originality counts. Be aware that your teacher will probably read a number of essays on the same topic(s), so any paper that is inventive and original will not only stand out but will also be appreciated.
* Can you manage the material within the specifications set by the instructor?
* Does your topic assert something specific, prove it, and where applicable, propose a plan of action?
* Do you have enough material or proof to support your opinion?

**Organization**

**Sample Outline (fill this out for your essay to being into the in-class portion)**

I. Introduction \_\_\_A. Introduce the topic \_\_\_B. Provide background on the topic to explain why it is important\_\_\_C. Assert the thesis (your view of the issue). More on thesis statements can be found below.

Your introduction has a dual purpose: to indicate both the topic and your approach to it (your thesis statement), and to arouse your reader’s interest in what you have to say. One effective way of introducing a topic is to place it in context – to supply a kind of backdrop that will put it in perspective. You should discuss the area into which your topic fits, and then gradually lead into your specific field of discussion (re: your thesis statement).

II. Counter Argument \_\_\_A. Summarize the counterclaims \_\_\_B. Provide supporting information for counterclaims \_\_\_C. Refute the counterclaims \_\_\_D. Give evidence for argument

You can generate counterarguments by asking yourself what someone who disagrees with you might say about each of the points you've made or about your position as a whole. Once you have thought up some counterarguments, consider how you will respond to them--will you concede that your opponent has a point but explain why your audience should nonetheless accept your argument? Will you reject the counterargument and explain why it is mistaken? Either way, you will want to leave your reader with a sense that your argument is stronger than opposing arguments.

When you are summarizing opposing arguments, be charitable. Present each argument fairly and objectively, rather than trying to make it look foolish. You want to show that you have seriously considered the many sides of the issue, and that you are not simply attacking or mocking your opponents.

It is usually better to consider one or two serious counterarguments in some depth, rather than to give a long but superficial list of many different counterarguments and replies.

Be sure that your reply is consistent with your original argument. If considering a counterargument changes your position, you will need to go back and revise your original argument accordingly.

For more on counterarguments visit: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>

1. Your Argument \_\_\_A. Assert point #1 of your claims \_\_\_\_\_1. Give your educated and informed opinion \_\_\_\_\_2. Provide support/proof using more than one quote (preferably three)

\_\_\_B. Assert point #2 of your claims \_\_\_\_\_1. Give your educated and informed opinion \_\_\_\_\_2. Provide support/proof using more than one quote (preferably three)

\_\_\_C. Assert point #3 of your claims \_\_\_\_\_1. Give your educated and informed opinion \_\_\_\_\_2. Provide support/proof using more than one quote (preferably three)

**You may have more than 3 overall points to your argument, but you should not have fewer.**

IV. Conclusion \_\_\_A. Restate your argument \_\_\_B. Provide a plan of action but do not introduce new information

The simplest and most basic conclusion is one that restates the thesis in different words and then discusses its implications.

**Stating Your Thesis**

A thesis is a one-sentence statement about your topic. It's an assertion about your topic, something you claim to be true. **Notice that a topic alone makes no such claim; it merely defines an area to be covered.** To make your topic into a thesis statement, you need to make a claim about it, make it into a sentence. Look back over your materials--brainstorms, investigative notes, etc.--and think about what you believe to be true. Think about what your readers want or need to know. Then write a sentence, preferably at this point, a simple one, stating what will be the central idea of your paper. The result should look something like this:

**Writing with style and clarity**

Many students make the mistake of thinking that the content of their paper is all that matters. Although the content is important, it will not mean much if the reader can’t understand what you are trying to say. You may have some great ideas in your paper but if you cannot effectively communicate them, you will not receive a very good mark. Keep the following in mind when writing your paper:

**Diction**

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| --- | --- |
| **LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP** | **TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION** |
| **Similarity** | also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly |
| **Exception/Contrast** | but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet |
| **Sequence/Order** | first, second, third, ... next, then, finally |
| **Time** | after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then |
| **Example** | for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate |
| **Emphasis** | even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly |
| **Place/Position** | above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there |
| **Cause and Effect** | accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus |
| **Additional Support or Evidence** | additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then |
| **Conclusion/Summary** | finally, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, in summary  |

Diction refers to the choice of words for the expression of ideas; the construction, disposition, and application of words in your essay, with regard to clearness, accuracy, variety, etc.; mode of expression; and language. There is often a tendency for students to use fancy words and extravagant images in hopes that it will make them sound more intelligent when in fact the result is a confusing mess. Although this approach can sometimes be effective, it is advisable that you choose clear words and be as precise in the expression of your ideas as possible.

**Paragraphs**

Creating clear paragraphs is essential. Paragraphs come in so many sizes and patterns that no single formula could possibly cover them all. The two basic principles to remember are these:

1. 1) A paragraph is a means of developing and framing an idea or impression. As a general rule, you should address only one major idea per paragraph.
2. 2) The divisions between paragraphs aren’t random, but indicate a shift in focus. In other words you must carefully and clearly organize the order of your paragraphs so that they are logically positioned throughout your paper. Transitions will help you with this.

For further information on paragraph development visit: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/paragraphs.html>

**Transitions**

In academic writing your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, if not to convert the reader to your way of thinking. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present them. Whether single words, quick phrases or full sentences, they function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas as they read through what you have written.

Transitions signal relationships between ideas. Basically, transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument. They are words with particular meanings that tell the reader to think and react in a particular way to your ideas. In providing the reader with these important cues, transitions help readers understand the logic of how your ideas fit together. For more information on transitions visit: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html>

**Grammar and Spelling**

You must make certain that your paper is free from grammar and spelling mistakes. Mechanical errors are usually the main reason for lack of clarity in essays, so be sure to thoroughly proof read your paper before handing it in. For help with common errors in grammar and usage consult the following websites:

<http://www.sfu.ca/~gmccarro/Grammar/Grammar.html> <http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/index2.htm> <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/>

**Plagiarism and academic honesty**

Plagiarism is a form of stealing; as with other offences against the law, **ignorance is no excuse**. The way to avoid plagiarism is to give credit where credit is due. If you are using someone else’s idea, acknowledge it, even if you have changed the wording or just summarized the main points.

To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit whenever you use

* another person's idea, opinion, or theory;
* any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings--any pieces of information--that are not common knowledge;
* quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words; or
* paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.