

Faculty of Community Services

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Organizing Your Essay

WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

- Simply put, an essay is an **organized** collection of your ideas presented in a *logical manner* that readers can follow
- Often, an essay involves you **arguing your position** on a particular topic – a paper that just summarizes the ideas of others isn't really an essay!

TYPES OF ESSAYS

1. The Argumentative Essay: This is the most common essay type, and usually implied if the type of essay isn't specified.

- **Introduction**
 - ✓ Grabs readers' attention - Can use a quotation, anecdote, or definition
 - ✓ Answers the question: "What is this and why am I reading it?"
 - ✓ Introduces your thesis statement, which clearly describes your position on an issue and will be backed up by evidence throughout your essay
- **Body Paragraphs**
 - ✓ Each paragraph articulates only ONE **complex idea/topic**
 - ✓ Each paragraph should have a topic sentence and a concluding sentence
 - ✓ How to organize the body paragraphs:
 - If arguments build upon one another, argue from **simplest** to most **complex** – if your idea is progressing throughout the essay, the order of arguments should reflect this progression
 - If arguments are not closely related to one another, your first and last arguments should be the **strongest** and other arguments should go in the **middle**
 - Just because an essay talks about something that happened chronologically in history does not necessarily mean that it must be discussed chronologically; *this organization becomes too restrictive and does not reflect the progression of logic in your paper*
- **Conclusion**
 - ✓ Don't introduce new ideas – **wrap-up** and **review**
 - ✓ Remind readers of the **main ideas** introduced and restate your thesis
 - ✓ Provide food for thought: Answer **so what?** And who **cares?**

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2. **The Comparative Essay:** Comparison essays compare and contrast two subjects, which could be theories, points of view, methods, or sources. **Even if a professor only mentions a comparison essay, you may contrast as well.** Comparative essays should include an introduction and conclusion like the argumentative essay above.

- **Thesis for Comparative Essays**

- ✓ You still need a thesis that says your **point of view** on the subject. This could include:
 - Which subject do you think is more effective?
 - What is the most important **distinguishing** factor between the subjects?
 - Overall, are the subjects **supporting** or **opposing** each other?

- **The Divided Comparison** → Compare your ideas separately

- ✓ List all the evidence you want to make about **Subject A** first. Then move on to **Subject B**. List all the evidence in the same *order*
- ✓ This method is helpful when there are 3 or more things being compared
- ✓ Disadvantage of separating the subjects is that it is harder for the reader to compare/contrast

Subject (1 paragraph each)	Evidence
A	1 2 3 4
B	1 2 3 4
C	1 2 3 4

- **The Alternating Comparison**

- ✓ **Categorize** your comparisons. For example, if you are comparing and contrasting Ai Wei Wei's form of protest art with that of UK graffiti artist Banksy, you could compare/contrast both artists in terms of their mediums, messages, and cultural background
- ✓ This method is generally better at **highlighting** similarities and differences.

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Topic	Subjects
1 – eg. mediums	A – eg. Ai Wei Wei: installation art B – eg. Banksy: painting
2 – eg. messages	A – eg. Ai Wei Wei: government corruption B – eg. Banksy: anti-war, anti-capitalist
3 – eg. culture	A – eg. Ai Wei Wei: Chinese B – eg. Banksy: English

NOTE: It's sometimes easier to begin formulating your work using the divided comparison method and to then organize your work into the alternating comparison method.

3. The Literature Review: Literature reviews provide a background, and should show that you have a good understanding of a particular topic or field.

- ✓ Literature reviews should follow the general rules of an argumentative essay
 - ✓ Your essay should **not** be organized article by article. Instead, you should be using all of the literature that you are reviewing to develop arguments and points
- **Thesis for Literature Reviews**
 - ✓ What is the overall **conclusion** that you can reach by reviewing many academic sources?

For more on writing literature reviews, please refer to the “Writing A Literature Review” handout!

4. The Reflection Paper: Reflection papers are personal, and can have a variety of structures – but they still need a structure!

- ✓ **Analyze** your current knowledge, your experiences and your own assumptions to gain a broader perspective of the issue on which you are reflecting
- ✓ **Criticize** gaps in your knowledge and areas for growth in your practice; identify and apply theorists or articles that supplement your knowledge and can strengthen your work
- ✓ **Revise** your behavior and come to some sort of conclusion based on your new analysis and critical thinking

For more on writing reflection papers, please refer to the “An Introduction to Reflection Papers” and “So You’re Writing a LEARN Reflection” handouts!