

WRITING AN ESSAY

Students often complain when they are told to write an essay. Many times they procrastinate and then hurriedly write a paper which lacks logical organization, adequate content, and/or correct mechanics. Procrastination and its subsequent problems can be avoided if a student masters the basic steps in the writing process. If he plans carefully, develops fully, and polishes diligently, he should be able to produce an essay which communicates effectively.

The first step in writing an essay is to decide what you want to say. Pick a topic you know something about and then narrow the topic down to a thesis statement which concisely states what the paper will be about. This sentence is your preliminary thesis. Now decide how to develop this idea. Jot down prospective paragraph topics. If this seems difficult—or turns out to be impossible—alter the thesis. Keep working until your thesis and main points are logically related. Then put your thesis and main ideas into outline form.

The actual writing of an essay is time-consuming, but if your outline is well-planned, composition should not be difficult. Write an introduction which makes the reader want to read your paper. Make sure that your thesis statement falls in such a place that he knows—without saying so—that this is what your essay will be about. Now develop each body paragraph. Use topic sentences which both support your thesis and allow your ideas to flow smoothly. When you reach the conclusion, try to tie up all loose ideas. You may summarize, but don't merely repeat what you just said.

After writing the rough draft, make sure it is written the way you want it to be. See that all sentences are easy to understand and that you have developed your thesis without starving from the subject or being illogical. Your style should be smooth and exhibit a variety of sentence patterns. In revising, try to subordinate your less important ideas and to replace all vague words with specific ones. Oftentimes the addition of simple modifiers can drastically improve a paper. When your essay seems to read smoothly, begin to proofread it. Check carefully for careless mistakes or mechanical errors that can destroy the sense of a sentence. A good method for proofreading is to begin with the last sentence and then progress through your paper backwards.

The essay should now be ready to turn in. At this point you should always proofread it one more time. Then, if you have followed this method, you should have a polished product which you are proud of. Some of the steps may seem difficult, but the results of the process are worth the effort.