

Essay Writing: the basics

A resource created by Dr. Vidya Natarajan for The Write Place

- Decide on and narrow your topic
 - Unpack/analyze the question; have **all parts of it before you** when you address the writing task
 - Identify the purpose of your essay by interpreting the question
 - Let your interests, academic inclinations, even feelings, guide your topic choice
 - Add one or more terms to your basic topic in order to sharpen your essay's focus
 - Brainstorm, doodle, or free-write while moving between your topic and your research/resources, to arrive at your specific angle on the topic
 - Ask the wh—questions (use Kipling's rhyme!)
 - I keep six honest serving-men*
 - (They taught me all I knew);*
 - Their names are What and Why and When*
 - And How and Where and Who.*
 - Express your topic in terms of a title and subtitle if possible
 - Don't be satisfied with the first idea you come up with; create a thesis that needs **proving** by testing your idea; see if you can find counter-arguments and improve your thesis by addressing them; ask the wh—questions again
 - Don't confuse an opinion with a thesis
- Use parallel structure to create a thesis that has parts/sub-points in it
- Once you have a thesis, use its parts to outline your essay
- Expand each part of the outline into a paragraph or two, using your own ideas and evidence drawn from research
- Carefully connect each paragraph with the previous one, and to the thesis: if you create a topic sentence for each paragraph, make sure it relates to the thesis in a clear way
- ✓ Qualifying or relationship words useful for your introductory sentences: although, because, despite, whether, if, where, while, as, before, in order that, unless, whereas... not only/but also; the reasons why; in contrast, on the contrary, conversely, however;
- ✓ Useful verbs/phrases for the thesis: this essay argues that; this essay identifies; this essay applies the theory x to the text/situation y; the causes/reasons/effects of x include 1, 2 and 3;
- ✓ Useful verbs for analyzing secondary sources: the author/source explains, discusses, proves, demonstrates, confirms, exemplifies, defines, describes, addresses, presents, represents, notes, suggests, disproves, critiques or interrogates, identifies, examines or considers, evaluates or assesses, lists or enumerates, argues or contends, proposes, analyzes, justifies, validates...