

Essays - 2

Informative Essay

👉 Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

Purpose

👉 Explain, describe, define, and inform your audience about your subject..

Topic

👉 Something you know a great deal about.

Example: *In high school, Sara played basketball. She knows a lot about it.*

👉 Narrow that topic down so you can talk about a certain aspect of it thoroughly.

Example: *Basketball is a big topic. Sara will go with positions on the court.*

👉 Decide what “subtopics” you will need to explain.

Example: *Notice that “positions on the court” gives Sara a particular number of subtopics, or body paragraphs. She will need five body paragraphs, one for each position.*

Thesis

👉 For this paper, your thesis statement will probably be a summary of the information you will provide.

Example: *There are five positions in basketball, each performing certain tasks on the team.*

Audience

👉 It is crucial that you consider how much your audience does or does not already know about your topic. Decide for whom you are writing the essay.

👉 How familiar are they with the topic?

Example: *Sara’s reader does not know anything about basketball positions, but he does know that players basically try to put the ball in the basket on offense.*

👉 What do they need to know to understand the topic?

Example: *They do not need to know what a ball looks like, but they will need to know where each position tends to stand on offense and what they tend to do*

👉 Keep these questions in mind so that you consistently address the same kind of audience.

Example: *Sara would not want to decide her audience is totally ignorant of basketball positions and then throw out something like “Some forwards play point forward” without explaining what “point forward” means.*

Structure

👉 Break your topic down into its parts and consider their relationships. It will usually be either:

1) *A narrative in which a person encounters your topic...*

👉 This is the way to go for “how to” essays that explain the chronological steps involved in making or doing something. (Some instructors do not allow “how to” essays)

Example: Someone watching a basketball game for the first time may notice player heights before anything else. Sara could order the essay according to a progression or regression of height. However, that would not be meaningful to the actual information Sara’s hope to share.

Or 2) *A narrative that follows an object through each of the subtopics you want to explain.*

Example: Sara could follow the ball through a hypothetical play in which each player touches the ball at some point. She might even go backwards, if that made sense for her. Either way, the thing that “moves” (the ball) influences the order in which she addresses each subtopic she wants to discuss.

👉 Be sure to consider how much each subtopic must be explained for your reader to understand later subtopics. In other words, does your reader need to know about Y to understand Z?

Example: *Because point guards often tell other players what to do, Sara thinks it is best that she describe them last. That way, as she uses examples of a point guard directing other players (to post up, set a screen, etc.), her reader will already know what the action means.*

Specifics

👉 As you explain, define, and describe, be sure to use interesting and precise words.

👉 Use examples to illustrate broader information.

Example: *On offense, point guards perform several key duties: ball handling, play calling, and passing. Usually facing the basket, point guards tend to handle the ball more than other players. Many point guards have earned acclaim for their dribbling ability. For example, Tim Hardaway was known for his “killer crossover,” which was a ball-handling method he developed for confusing his defender. By faking a move in one direction, then cutting quickly to the other, guards like Hardaway can trick opponents, or even make them fall down, an effect sometimes called “breaking ankles.”*

👉 Sara wants to communicate something general about this subtopic: point guards are good dribblers. Then, she uses a specific example. She also tries to describe something visual with colorful language (“killer crossover” and “breaking ankles”) so readers who do not care about basketball have at least a little something vivid to experience.

👉 Use jargon, but explain it. Many topics come with their own vocabulary and using it can play an important role in teaching your audience about your topic.

Example: *When Sara uses “crossover” to explain what Hardaway did, she was sure to describe what that involved so that her reader might better understand the terminology.*