

# San Diego Miramar College Library / LRC

## Writing an Essay

### I. CHOOSE THE TOPIC

- A. Pick a topic that will interest both you and your readers.
- B. Choose a topic that is limited enough to be treated adequately in the space allotted.

### II. WRITE THE OUTLINE

- A. Write a statement of purpose (thesis sentence).
  - State your subject, a point of view, and a rough development plan.
  - For example, for an essay on being a college freshman, the purpose might be: "New college freshmen face problems that seem overwhelming, but they can overcome these problems if they develop good study habits."
- B. Jot down everything that comes to mind about the topic. Don't worry about the formal order as that can come later.
- C. Decide on the major points you will make.
- D. Write a preliminary outline giving both major and specific points.
- E. Prepare a final outline (determine the logical order of major and specific points).
- F. Test all points against your statement of purpose. If it doesn't fit, delete it.

### III. WRITE AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

- A. Arouse the interest of your reader in your first sentence.
- B. Introduce the subject of the essay.
- C. Here are some ways to begin the introductory paragraph:
  - 1. Incident: start with an incident or episode.
  - 2. Example: give an example that illustrates an important aspect of your subject.
  - 3. Analogy: explain an unfamiliar thing in terms of something more familiar.
  - 4. Question: make a question of your first sentence.
  - 5. Quotation: begin with a pertinent quote.
  - 6. Startling statement: surprise the reader.
  - 7. Definition: begin by defining an unfamiliar term.
  - 8. Description: effective when your topic is a person, place or object.
- D. State your thesis in the last sentence of the introduction paragraph.
- E. Avoid the following:
  - 1. Apologizing or complaining.

2. Beginning with an obvious statement ("Today everyone must prepare himself to earn a living in a world that is becoming more and more populous.")
3. Beginning with irrelevant information.
4. Unsupported or too-broad generalizations ("All labor leaders are crooks.")

#### **IV. WRITE THE DEVELOPMENTAL PARAGRAPHS**

- A. Use one paragraph for each idea you present.
- B. Do not wander aimlessly or become incoherent. Lead the reader somewhere.

#### **V. WRITE THE CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH**

- A. Refer back to the purpose statement in your first paragraph and "wrap up" your essay.
- B. Don't be afraid to restate your main point.

#### **VI. GENERAL RULES**

- A. Remember that the beginning and the end of your essay will leave the greatest impression on your reader, so make them good (and preferably catchy).
- B. Suit your style and vocabulary to the reader you expect to influence.
- C. If you are writing an argumentative essay, keep your temper. Ill-tempered screeching and name-calling are not likely to convert many readers.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY:**

**PE**  
**1112** Hodges, John. Harbrace college handbook.  
**.H6**  
**1998**

**PE**  
**1408** Meriwether, Nell W. Strategies for writing successful essays.  
**.M48**  
**1998**

**PE**  
**1408** White, Nancy. Writing Power.  
**.W58026**  
**1997**

**PE**  
**1439** Donald, Robert B. Writing clear paragraphs.  
**.W**