

The Basics of Good Essay Form

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The ability to write a good essay is important to your college success. Besides its importance for passing the WCT, the essay is basic to nearly all classes. It is really not difficult to write a good essay, once you understand the logic behind it. The form illustrated in this paper should help you to see how to arrange your essays. The subject of your essay will depend upon the situation, of course, but the basic form shown here will apply to many situations. Although there are many ways to write well, the most important elements in writing the essay are focus, development, and organization.

Focus is probably the single most important component of a good essay. Focus is achieved by having a strong thesis which tells the reader your main point. Every part of the essay should pertain to this point. The best place to state your thesis is at the end of the introductory paragraph. (Look at the end of the paragraph above to see the thesis of this paper.) The WCT requires you to have an argumentative slant in your thesis. In the thesis sentence above, the words "most important" provide this slant, because not everyone might agree that these elements are in fact the most important. My purpose then, as the writer, is to convince the reader that this is true. The way I develop this thesis will determine if I have accomplished this purpose.

Development is the next important element to a good essay. Your development is the "meat" of the essay--the information you give to support your point. You can develop your thesis with examples from your own experience, information which comes from research (like the information in the WCT packet), or with sound reasoning which you explain to the reader. Each paragraph should contain some explanation or support for the point made in the topic sentence of the paragraph. A fully-developed essay makes the reader feel like he has been provided with a full discussion of the topic. Don't ramble or "rant" with too much emotion on your points; good reasoning is the best way to convince your reader. Be sure to stay on the point, though, by

keeping sight of your thesis as you develop the essay. Once you have decided how you will develop your thesis, you can turn your attention to its organization.

Organization helps the reader follow the points you are making. The best way to do this is by using a predictable form, like the one shown here. This essay is organized with an introduction, three developing paragraphs, and a conclusion. You can help the organization of your paper by outlining it before you begin to write. Notice that each paragraph begins with a topic sentence which tells the point of that paragraph and relates to the thesis. The information in the paragraph explains the topic sentence and gives details about it. Also notice that the last sentence of each paragraph leads the reader into the next one. This is called a transition. Transitions help the paper flow smoothly from beginning to end. Good organization keeps the writer and the reader on track, and helps avoid repetition and straying from the point.

Of course, focus, development, and organization are not the only considerations in writing a successful essay. After drafting the essay, go back through it to check for errors in spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, etc. You must also be sure to cite any references you have used. You must cite your sources in the paragraphs of the paper as well as on the Works Cited page at the end. Get help from a friend or a writing tutor if you have trouble with these things. Although mechanics like these are important, the three elements described above really show your skill in writing. If you can master these concepts, you will be able to handle almost any writing assignment that comes your way.