



Table of Contents

Introduction to Teachers	3
Introduction	5
Reading and the Reading Journal	6
Finding a Topic	8
Finding a Topic: The Focus Ladder	9
Brainstorming	10
Webbing and Freewriting	13
Finding Information	15
Outlining	17
Who's Your Audience?	21
Writing Paragraphs	23
Using Transitions	24
Introductions and Conclusions	26
Writing Your Rough Draft	29
Editing, Revising and Rewriting	33
Final Draft Rubric	38
Sample Essays	39
Presenting Your Essay	43
Publishing an Essay Anthology	44
Other Types of Essays	46
Writing a Collective Essay	47
Bibliography	48



Introduction

In the next few weeks, you will be learning how to write a five-paragraph expository essay. *Expository* means the essay should explain or give information. So, you can write an expository essay about trains or dinosaurs or dreams—anything that can be explained or explored is fine.

As you continue in your schooling, you will find that the essay—whether it be a persuasive essay, an interpretive essay or a research report—is the basis of most writing assignments. Furthermore, writing essays isn't limited to English class; you'll write them for history, anthropology and even science. So, you are taking a very valuable step here.

While you learn the skills involved, it's important that you find out that essay writing can be fun. As you will see, your essay can do a good job of providing information and still be creative.

What to Expect

This book explains to you how to write a five-paragraph essay, step by step. You will begin by finding and developing a topic. Then you will learn how to structure your ideas. Next, you will learn some writing tips, how to write a rough draft, and finally how to prepare a revised final draft. When you finish, you will be asked to present your essay. You will also join your classmates in producing a class anthology of essays!

How to Write an Essay is not a guide to grammar or punctuation. Instead, it focuses on what it takes to write a clear, well-structured, interesting essay. There are lots of opportunities to work with classmates. In fact, you will be responding directly to one another's material as you develop your essay.

Before You Begin

Before you start, it's important to discuss and write down how you feel about writing. This will give you a 'fresh start'. Take 15 minutes and write down how you feel about writing. Consider the following questions:

- Do you like to write? Why or why not?
- What kind of writing is your favourite?
- What is an essay? What comes to mind when you think of essay writing?
- How do you feel about your writing abilities?
- How can the class and the teacher best help you along?

When you have finished writing, discuss your responses in a peer group or with your whole class. This will give you a 'fresh start' to begin writing your essay. Good luck!



Reading and the Reading Journal

Reading is one of the best ways to learn about writing. By reading stories, we learn how plots are shaped and characters developed. Reading poetry introduces us to the various forms and rhythms of verse. Likewise, by reading essays, we learn about the structures and ideas involved. We see the array of topics essay writing covers, from ‘Foods of the Australian bush’ to ‘How to Interpret Your Dreams in Three Easy Steps’. We also see how the writing can be friendly, dramatic, funny and creative—not just straightforward.

The more published essays you read, the more you will learn about and, hopefully, the more you will appreciate the form. Of course, most of the essays you find won’t be in five-paragraph form, but they will follow the same principles: They will be clearly written and well organised. To help you with this, we are providing two model essays to study, along with response questions to get you thinking about them. Your teacher will decide when to introduce these essays.

So, with the help of your teacher and librarian, start finding and reading published essays. *You should be reading at least two essays per week as you learn to write your own.* The list of young adult magazines that follows is a good resource, but you shouldn’t limit yourself to these. There are lots of magazines and newspapers that feature essays that might interest you. Are there magazines devoted to your favourite hobby? Did you know there are magazines devoted solely to snowboarding? And magazines all about cooking?

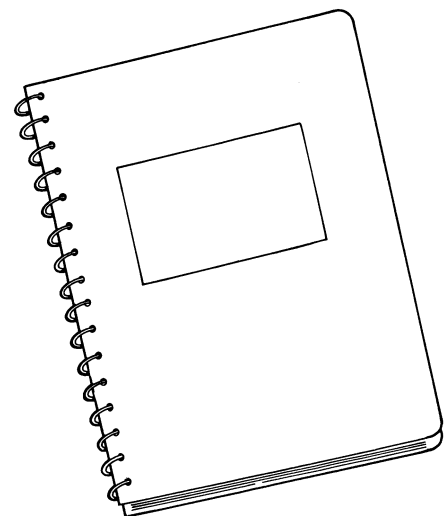
Bring your essays into class and share them with other students. If there’s one in particular that interests you, get it copied for your classmates or present it to them. Discussing essays is a real plus in learning about the form and improving your reading skills.

The Reading Journal

To complement your essay reading, you should keep a reading journal which will include responses to essays and articles you read. Naturally, you will summarise and respond to the essay: What was it about? Did you enjoy it? But you will also go further.

In the following weeks, you will learn about the steps involved in writing an essay. Pay attention to these elements in the essays you read. For example, if you’re practising using effective transitions (pages 24 and 25), look closely at the way the essayist uses transitions. When you study ‘intended audience’ (pages 21 and 22), consider the author’s audience. *Write your impressions in your reading journal.* By reflecting on the specifics of an essay, you’ll learn better and pick up some tips.

Feel free to decorate your reading journal with photos, illustrations, and so forth. If you are diligent about this project, it will pay off! Your reading skills will improve, as will your essay writing.





Finding a Topic

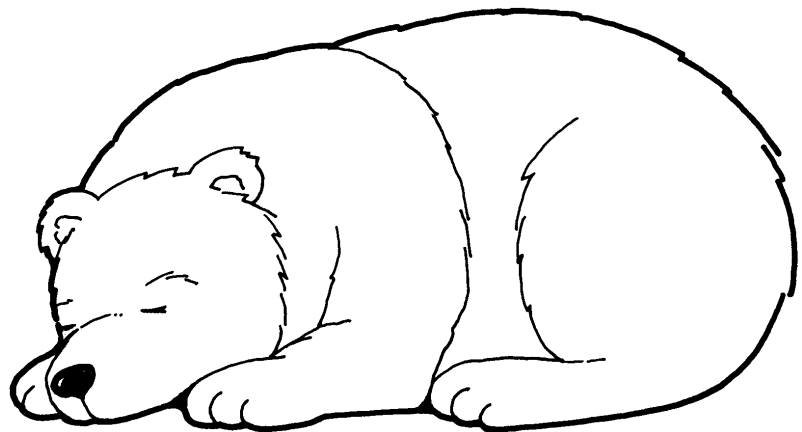
The first step in writing an essay is deciding on your topic. For some students that is an easy step, while others struggle. Have you ever found yourself saying, 'I don't know what to write about'? Or you decide on one topic, and then the next day you change your mind? Fortunately, there are some steps that might make finding a topic a smooth and painless experience.

Before we practise these, however, we have to ask ourselves what kinds of topics are appropriate for an expository essay. Remember that an expository essay explains or gives information about a topic. You could simply write about your favourite sport or about three kinds of spiders that live in your area.

Remember that this information can highlight something about the topic. In other words, you can have an *angle* on your topic. For example, if you write an essay about the nature of cyclones, you can also be doing so as a warning to those of us who live in northern coastal regions. Therefore, the information serves a purpose. Later, we will go into this more deeply.

Does this mean you can write about anything? Yes and no. There are three points to consider:

- Since you will be writing only five paragraphs, you don't want your topic to be too general. For example, 'Earth' is probably too wide a topic. Can you narrow it? How about 'Continents'? That might work, but how about 'South America'? Is there a country in South America that you have always wondered about? What about Brazil? 'Yes', you think to yourself, 'I have a friend from Brazil who lives on a farm. He visits every summer'. A five-paragraph essay about Brazil would be terrific!
- That brings up our second point: Choose a topic that interests you and leaves some room for discovery. A topic that requires at least a little research (see pages 15 and 16) will help keep your momentum flowing.
- You also don't want to choose a topic that's too narrow. If you do, you'll find it hard to develop your topic. In such a case there may not be enough available information, the information may be too detailed and complex, or else it may be too simple and self-evident. For example, it might be difficult to write an essay on the sleeping positions of hibernating bears! 'Hibernation' is more suitable, and there is plenty of information to find on the topic.





Finding a Topic: The Focus Ladder

One way to help you choose a topic is to create a focus ladder. This exercise helps you find details, too. We will explore this further on the following pages. Let's study the focus ladder in the following example to see how this works.

General:	food
Specific:	food for humans
More Specific:	health food for humans
Topic:	Health Food for Kids

The process is simple: You begin with a general topic and then get more specific until you find a topic that works. 'Health Food for Kids' is a wonderful choice for a five-paragraph essay. Since you eat healthy food, you want to show others that they can also, by providing examples of tasty food that's also good for you. You can discuss foods for breakfast, lunch or dinner, or you can discuss the different food groups and healthy options in each of them. In some cases, your focus ladder will be more than four lines.

Here are three topics to begin practising focus ladders. These might lead to the topic you use for your essay. Below the three practice topics are spaces for you to supply two more of your own topics. Begin with a general topic that interests you and go from there!

Note: You should complete these exercises even if you have a topic already.

General	Outer Space	Animals	Entertainment
Specific			
More Specific			
Topic			

Your Own Topics

General		
Specific		
More Specific		
Topic		



Brainstorming

For many people, starting is the most challenging part of writing an essay. Have you ever sat in front of a blank piece of paper (or blank computer screen) and felt like filling it with words would be an impossible task? Have you ever felt as if you have nothing to write about? If so, you're not alone. Here are some strategies that will help.

One of the best ways to think of ideas is to use *brainstorming*. When you play basketball or go jogging, you prepare by shooting the ball or stretching. Brainstorming serves this same purpose. Instead of feeling the pressure to start writing right away, you can relax and write down all the associations that come to mind about your topic.

Here are the steps to follow when brainstorming:

- * Get a large piece of construction paper. Make sure you have plenty of room to write.
- * In the centre of the paper, write your topic, and then circle it.
- * Spend at least 20–30 minutes writing down *everything* that comes to mind. Don't edit! Don't worry about writing something 'wrong'. You may scribble something that you don't think you will use, only to find that it leads you to a wonderful detail you had not thought of. Like warming up for sports, your ideas will start to free themselves up, and you will start gathering momentum.
- * No idea is wrong. Even if you feel silly writing an idea, even if you are sure it won't fit into your essay, write it down!

Study the sample brainstorm about health foods for kids on the following page. Notice the variety of ideas that are generated. Some aren't directly related to the topic, but they might be useful. The ideas are plentiful, so now the writer has some materials to use. As you will see, it's the *details* that bring your essay to life, so spend lots of time on this assignment.

Brainstorming with a Partner

Brainstorming with a partner is fun and useful. It provides twice the 'firepower'. There are a couple of ways to do this: (1) Write together. Make room for both people to write simultaneously, sharing ideas, or (2) each of you writes a brainstorm on the *same topic* separately. When you're finished, come together and see what you have included that the other person hasn't. Then fuse the topics together.

Brainstorming as a Class

The teacher takes control here. Using the overhead projector or writing on a blackboard, your teacher writes ideas that the class offers.