

ESSAY WRITING

The word Essay is defined in "The Concise Oxford Dictionary" as "a literary composition (usually prose and short) on any subject." Properly speaking, it is a written composition giving expression to one's own personal ideas or opinions on some topic; but the term usually covers also any written composition, whether it expresses personal opinions, or gives information on any given subject, or details of a narrative or description.

So far as we are concerned here, an essay is an exercise in composition; and it is well to remember that the word essay means, literally, an attempt. (Compare the verb "to essay", with the accent on the second syllable, meaning to attempt or try.)

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD ESSAY

1. Unity: An essay must be a unity, developing one theme with a definite purpose. The subject must be clearly defined in the mind and kept in view throughout. Nothing that is not relevant to it should be admitted to the essay. At the same time, the subject may be treated in a variety of ways and from different points of view.

2. Order: The essay should follow a certain ordered line of thought and come to a definite conclusion. It should not consist of haphazard reflections put down anyhow. There should be not only unity of subject but also unity of treatment. Hence the necessity for thinking out a line of thought before beginning to write.

3. Brevity: The essays should not be extremely long. The limit should be about three hundred words; though, of course, there can be no strict rule as to length, which will depend a good deal on the nature of the subject. But an essay should be a brief exercise, concisely expressed.

4. Style: In friendly letters, the style should be conversational - easy, natural and familiar; and in writing such letters we may use colloquial terms which would be out of place in a book. But the style of an essay must be more dignified and literary. Slang, colloquial terms and free and easy constructions are not proper in an essay. At the same time it is a mistake to attempt any flights of fine writing. The language and sentence construction should be simple, direct and natural. The secret of clear writing is clear thinking. "If you clearly understand all about your matter, you will never want thoughts, and thoughts instantly become words." This was said by Cobbett, a writer whose style is a model of clearness, simplicity and directness.

5. The Personal Touch: An essay should reveal the personal feelings and opinions of the writer. It should have his individuality in it. Strictly speaking, as has been already said, an essay is a written composition giving expression to one's personal ideas or opinions on a subject; and this personal touch should not be lost, or the essay will be colourless and devoid of individuality. So do not be afraid to express in your essays your own views, and do not be content with repeating the opinions of others. Let there be a note of sincerity in all that you write.

To sum up :- An essay must be a unity, treating in an orderly manner of one subject; it should be concisely written and not too long, and the style should be simple, direct and clear; and it should have an individuality, or show the personal touch of the writer. Three features are necessary in a good essay - suitable subject-matter, proper arrangement, and adequate power of expression. Where all these three are presents, the essay will be a success.

CLASSIFICATION OF ESSAYS

Essays may be classified as Narrative Essays, Descriptive Essays, Expository Essays, Reflective Essays and Imaginative Essays. The classification is useful, so long as it is remembered that these classes are not mutually exclusive, and that some essays may partake of the peculiarities of more than one class. For example, a narrative essay may contain a good deal of description; and essays of all classes should be more or less reflective, for the original idea of this form of composition is an expression of the writer's own feelings and opinions about a given subject. For this reason, let us begin with:-

1. Reflective Essays:-A reflection is a thought on some subject-on an idea arising in the mind. So a reflective essay consists of reflections or thoughts on some topic, which is generally of an abstract nature; for example; (a) habits, qualities, etc., such as truthfulness, thrift, temperance, cowardice, heroism, patriotism, industry, etc., (b) social, political and domestic topics, such as riches and poverty, caste, democracy, liberty, government, family life, education, marriage, business, etc., (c) philosophical subjects, such as right and wrong, reality, consciousness, the meaning of the universe, etc.; or (d) religious and theological topics.

In treating such themes, you should try (i) to explain, for example, the importance or advantages of possessing good habits and qualities, and the risks and disadvantages of lacking them; and quote stories, fables, or historical or literary references in support of your statements; (ii) discuss the importance of social institutions etc.; (iii) expound and discuss philosophical and theological theories. You should reason and support your statements with arguments and facts.

2. Narrative Essays:- A narrative essay consists mainly in the narration of some event, or series of events. I say "mainly" because a narrative essay must not be confused with a short story or bits of history. The narrative it relates should be treated as a subject for thought and comment, and so the essay should be more or less reflective. Narrative essays may treat of- (a) historical stories or legends (e.g., the reign of Akbar, the story of Heer and Ranjha); (b) biographies (e.g., life of Babar); (c) incidents (e.g., a street quarrel, a festival, a marriage); (d) an accident or natural disaster (e.g., a flood, a fire, a ship-wreck, an earthquake); (e) a journey or voyage; (f) a story (real or imaginary).

3. Descriptive Essays:- A descriptive essay consists of a description of some place or thing; e.g., (a) animals, plants, minerals (such as the elephant, the pipal tree, coal); (b) towns, countries, buildings, etc., (e.g., Islamabad, Italy, the Faisal Mosque); (c) aspects and phenomena of nature

(such as volcanoes, the monsoon, sunlight, organic life); and (d) manufactured articles (such as motor-cars, steam-engines, silk, paper, etc.).

4. Expository Essays:- An expository (or explanatory) essay consists of an exposition or explanation of some subject; e.g. : (a) institutions, industries, occupations {e.g., parliament, the press, silk- weaving, farming, etc.}: (b) scientific topics (such as gravitation, evolution, astronomy, etc.); (c) literary topics (such as the nature of poetry, prose styles, the genius of Shakespeare, the novels of Scott, history of fiction, etc.).

5. Imaginative Essays:- Essays on subjects such as the feelings and experiences of the sailor wrecked on a desert island may be called imaginative Essays. In such the writer is called to place himself in imagination in a position of which he has had no actual experience. Such subjects as "If I were a king," or "The autobiography of a horse," would call for imaginative essays.

HINTS ON ESSAY-WRITING

1. General Preparation:- One of the chief difficulties the people feel in essay-writing is lack of matter. They do not easily find anything to say about a subject. This is natural, because their experience and general reading are limited. But it may be remedied by reading, and by training the power of observation.

(a) Reading:- Bacon said, "Reading maketh a full man"; that is, a person who reads much and widely stores his mind with a large variety of facts, thoughts, illustrations and general information. If you want to write good essays you must acquire a love of reading-not simply reading stories for amusement, but reading good books of history, travel, biography and science. Fill your mind with fine thoughts and accurate information. By so doing you will become "a full man", and "a full man" can always find plenty to say on most subjects.

(b) Observation:- But all knowledge does not come from books. "We may learn much from the life around us - what we see and hear and observe for ourselves. Keep eyes and ears open, and learn from your own experience. Practice writing short descriptions of what you see in everyday life - the people you meet, bits of scenery that strike you, buildings, street scenes, trees and flowers, hills and valleys, the habits of animals and birds. Don't be contented with reading other people's description of such things, but see them for yourself. It is surprising what a lot may be learnt from personal observation.

(c) Conversation:- Books are written by men and women; and if we can learn from the books they write, we can learn also from the words they say. Listen to people's conversation; get them to talk to you about the things they know, and discuss subjects that interest you, with your friends. In this way, also, you may learn much.

A writer reads, observes, and gets people to talk; and in these ways he is always enriching his mind with ideas and knowledge.

2. Special Preparation:- Now we come to the special preparation needed for writing an essay on some particular subject; and the first thing we must do is to define the subject.

(a) Defining the Subject:- It is very important that you should have a clear and accurate conception of the subject of the essay before you attempt to write on it-what exactly it is and (equally important) what it is not. Some subjects are so simple that you can scarcely make a mistake about them; but some want looking into to define them exactly. For example, "The Uses of Computers". The subject is not how computers work. Nor is it the history of computers. Yet some students, carelessly reading the subject, might easily take up a large part of their essay with such topics. In a short school-essay there is no room for irrelevant matter. You have to come to the point at once, and start away with the subject. The subject in this case is the uses of computers in offices, in industries, in aircraft, in spacecraft, etc. It is, therefore, very necessary that you should define the subject clearly in your own mind, or you may waste much time and paper in writing on more or less irrelevant matters.

(b) Collecting materials :- (i) Reading up the Subject:- When you have got a clear idea of your subject, the next step will be to think of what you can say about it. Some subjects are so simple that a little reflection should supply you with sufficient material for a short essay; but for others, special information will be needed for which you may have to do some special reading. For instance, if you have to write about some historical subjects, or give a description of some country you have seen, you will have to get hold of some book and read the subject up. But in any case, you have to collect materials for your essay before you can write it. In schools, class-discussions on the subject, under the guidance of the teacher, are very helpful in this stage of special preparation. In any case, do not attempt to write the essay before you have given some time to thinking over what you can say on the subject. The common habit of beginning to write down the first thing that comes into one's head, without knowing what is to come next, is fatal to good essay writing.

(ii) Collection:- As you think over the subject, ideas, facts, and illustrations will pass through your mind. But if you don't catch them as they come, you may forget them just when you want them. So, as you catch birds and put them in a cage, catch and cage these fleeting thoughts by jotting them down on a piece of paper just as they come into your head, without troubling yourself at this stage about their order or suitability. You can examine the birds thus caught at your leisure later. (To save time afterwards, and for convenience of reference, number these notes as you jot them down.)

(iii) Selection:- When you think you have collected enough material for your essay, or you can't think of any more points, read over the notes you have jotted down to select the points most suitable for your purpose. Examine at your leisure the birds in the cage, to see what they are worth. You may find that some points are not very relevant or won't fit in; cross them out. You may find that some are mere repetitions of others; and others may be simply illustrations to be

brought under main heads. This process of selection will probably suggest to you in a general way the line of thought you may follow in the essay.

(c) Logical Arrangement:- Now you should be ready to decide on the line of thought of the essay, i.e., the logical order in which you can arrange the points you have selected. The necessity of thus arranging your thoughts according to some ordinary plan cannot be too strongly insisted upon. Without it, the essay will probably be badly arranged, rambling, disproportioned, and full of repetitions and irrelevancies.

(i) Making the outline:- Bearing your subject definitely in your mind and with your purpose clearly before you, sketch out a bare outline of the main heads, under which you will arrange your various materials in a natural, logical and convincing order - from a brief Introduction to an effective Conclusion.

(ii) Filling in the Outline:- Having thus mapped out the main points with which you are going to deal, arrange the ideas you have collected each under its proper main head, rejecting all those not really relevant to your subject or which simply repeat other thoughts, and taking care that each really belongs to the division in which you place it. You will now have a full outline, which is to be a guide to you in writing the essay. But this is not the essay, but only its well-articulated skeleton. You must now clothe the skeleton with flesh, and (most difficult of all) breathe into it the breath of life, before you can call your production an essay.

EXAMPLE

To illustrate this method of collecting materials and drawing up an outline, let us work out together a simple example for an essay on, say, "The Elephant."

The subject is so simple, that we need not spend any time defining it. What is wanted is evidently a Descriptive Essay, and all we have to do is to think of all we can say about the Elephant,

So we can set to work at once catching and caging our birds, or, in other words, jotting down, as they come into our mind, all we can remember about elephants. The thoughts may come to us something like this, and we will put them down and number them as they occur to us.

The Elephant

1. Largest of all animals.
2. Used in tiger-hunting.
3. Revengeful - story of tailor and elephant.
4. Its trunk and large ears.
5. Found in India and Africa - two kinds.

6. Its skill in piling logs.
7. Its great strength.
8. In India, used in state processions.
9. How caught and tamed.
10. Mad elephants.
11. Elephant grass.
12. Its tusks - hunted for ivory.
13. Howdah and mahout.
14. Story of blind men and elephant.
15. In old times used in war.
16. Its intelligence.
17. Feeds on leaves and grass.
18. Decoy elephants, and Kheddahs.
19. Can draw heavy loads.

Here is plenty of material; but it is in no order, and it will want a lot of sifting before it can be used. We must examine all these details to see which are suitable and arrange them.

A little scrutiny will show that they may be arranged in groups under different headings.

Nos. 1, 4, 7, 12, and 16 are parts of a description of an elephant.

Nos. 2, 6, 8 (with 13), 12, 15 and 19 refer to different ways in which elephants are of use to man.

Nos. 7 and 16 give reasons why the elephant is useful to man.

Nos. 9, 12 and 18 refer to the hunting of the elephant.

Nos. 5 and 17 mention the habitat and food of the elephant.

We have now classified all the points except Nos. 3, 10, 11 and 14. As to No. 11, it is of no use to us, as the grass referred to gets its name simply from its great size. No. 14 would be too long; and besides the story is not so much about the elephant as an illustration-of the fact that truth is

many-sided. No. 10 might be brought in incidentally, and perhaps taken along with No. 3; but we may have more than enough material without them.

Already something like an outline is emerging from the disorderly mass of material. We see how we may group the different items under such heads as Description, Habitat, Uses, Hunting, etc. soon some such provisional bare outline as this may suggest itself:

BARE OUTLINE

1. Description.
2. Habitat and food.
3. How and why hunted.
4. Strength and intelligence, making elephant useful to man.
5. Its different uses.

Now we must fill in this bare outline by grouping the various points under the main heads. In doing this, we may find occasion to modify or alter the bare outline, and additional details may suggest themselves.

FULL OUTLINE

The Elephant

1. Description - (Nos. 1, 4, 7, 12.) Great size and strength; trunk (its uses); big ears; small tail; tusks; speed.

2. Habitat - (Nos. 5 and 17.) Found in Africa and India; two kinds; lives in herds; feeds on leaves and grass in jungles.

3. Of great use to man (because of its strength and intelligence) - (Nos. 7 and 16) Different uses:

- (a) Draws heavy loads (No. 19).
- (b) Piles logs (No. 6).
- (c) Used in tiger-hunting (No. 2); howdah and mahout (No. 13).
- (d) Used in battles in old days (No. 15).

(e) Used in state processions in India (No. 8).

4. Elephant hunting - Why and how. (a) Hunted for ivory with elephant guns (No, 12).

(b) Caught alive to be tamed (No. 9) - Decoy elephants entice herd into Kheddah(Uo. 18).

The outline will be quite long enough for an ordinary essay; so we had better omit some of the points we first jotted down and marked as doubtful, viz., Nos. 3, 10, 11 and 14. This illustrates the necessity for selection.

When we come to write the essay, we must keep this outline before us as a guide; but, unless we are required to do so, the outline should not appear in the fair copy of the essay. (In examinations, the outline can be written on the left-hand page of the answer-book, on which scribbling is allowed.)

WRITING THE ESSAY

1. Paragraphs:- Every essay should be divided into paragraphs, and each point should have at least one paragraph to itself. An essay not thus paragraphed looks unattractive, and is not easy to read. [A paragraph is a group of related sentences that develop a single point. In constructing a paragraph these principles should be kept in view :- (i) Unity. The paragraph must treat of one subject only, (ii) Variety. Paragraphs should not all be of the same length or of the same monotonous structure. (iii) Logical sequence of thought, (iv) Topical sentence. The most important sentences of a paragraph are the first and the last. In many paragraphs the first sentence states the subject, and is called the topical sentence. The concluding sentence may sum up effectively what is been said in the paragraph.]

2. Structure of an Essay:- We may divide an essay into three parts - the Introduction, the Body of the Essay, and the Conclusion.

(a) The Introduction:- This, in a short essay, must be very brief. It would be absurd to have the porch bigger than the building itself. It may be simply a sentence, or a very short paragraph. But it should always be arresting and pertinent to the subject. The introduction may consist of a definition or a quotation, proverb, very brief story, or general remark, leading up to the subject.

(b) The Body of the Essay. This is really the essay itself – the house to which the introduction is the front door, and the conclusion the back door, or exit.

In arranging the body of the essay observe proportion; that is, let each part have due weight given to it. If the subject is "The good and bad influence of Newspapers," do not devote three-quarters of the essay to good influences and so leave only a quarter for the bad. Closely follow your full outline throughout.

The paragraphs should be well constructed and should be related to one another according to the direction of your outline; and, as far as possible, the connection between one and another should be shown. Avoid "padding" and keep to the point. Take pains in selecting words and phrases which exactly express the ideas which you have in mind; and frame your sentences so that they are quite clear and forceful. Avoid the use of unnecessary words. In revising your essay, look out for useless repetitions and redundant expressions, and strike them out.

Match the words to the sense, and adapt the style to the subject-matter. Do not write frivolously on a serious subject, or ponderously on a light and humorous subject.

(c) The Conclusion:-As the introduction should arouse interest, the conclusion should satisfy it. An effective and satisfying end to an essay is as important as an arresting beginning. An abrupt or feeble ending may spoil the whole effect of the essay. A good conclusion may consist of :- (a) a summing up of the arguments of the essay; (b) final conclusion drawn from the subject-matter; (c) a suitable quotation; (d) a sentence that strikingly expresses the main point you want to drive home.

3. Finally, a few words about your Style in Writing - To acquire a simple, direct and forceful style in writing calls for constant practice. It does not come "by nature." As the poet Pope says:- True case in writing comes from art, not chance; As those move easiest who have learned to dance." The secret of clear writing is clear thinking. So, be perfectly clear about what you want to say, and then say it-as directly, as simply, as concisely as possible. Be direct: use short sentences in preference to long and involved periods. B simple : don't attempt any oratory or flowery language but use simple words and constructions and avoid elaborate and superfluous words; say what you want to say as tersely as is consistent with making your meaning clear. Never use two words where one (the right one) will do. Be natural: don't try to imitate any author's style, however eloquent, but be yourself.

SUMMARY OF METHOD OF PROCEDURE

To sum up:-

1. Clearly define your subject in your own mind.
2. Think over it, until ideas about it come into your mind, and jot the points down on paper as they occur to you - numbering them.
3. Classify these points in groups under suitable headings, rejecting any that are unsuitable.
4. Arrange these headings in a bare outline.
5. Fill in the outline, making a full outline.
6. Now begin to write the essay, dividing it into paragraphs.

7. The essay should consist of introduction, body and conclusion.

(a) Make the introduction arresting.

(b) Keep the parts of the body of the essay in proper proportion; and take pains in choosing words, constructing sentences and building up paragraphs.

(c) Make the conclusion effective and satisfying.

8. Write in a simple, concise, clear, direct and natural style.

1. HOLIDAYS

There is not much need of proving to most schoolboys that holidays are necessary. They are quite convinced that they are-and most desirable, too. They welcome a holiday from school with hilarious joy, and plague the headmaster on the least excuse to let them off their lessons. It would be more in place to try to convince them of the necessity of work and study. Yet it may be desirable to show that regular intervals of rest, recreation, or a change of occupation are really necessary. As the old rhyme says,

"All work and no play,

Makes Jack a dull boy."

Holidays at proper intervals are especially necessary for young people, and for those engaged in hard mental work; for continuous work, without a break, will injure the health, and may cause a nervous break-down. A short holiday, rightly used, will send us back to our work with renewed zest and vigour.

"Rightly used." It all depends upon, that. For holidays may be abused. If the holiday is spent in stupid idleness, or in an exhausting round of exciting amusements, or shut up in close stuffy rooms drinking and playing, or in any other unhealthy way, the boy or man will come back to his work tired, listless, and uninterested. The holiday, instead of doing good, has done harm, much more harm than steady work could ever do.

How can a holiday, be best used, so that at the end of it we shall come back to our work with energies renewed and interest keener than ever? If we are students, or have been shut up in stuffy offices, we should get away into the pure air of the country and live a healthy, open air life, enjoying games or sports. We should avoid unhealthy amusement, keep early hours and get plenty of refreshing sleep. And we should not be completely idle. Change of occupation is a rest. And if we have a little regular work to do, work that we take an interest in, it will make our holiday not only healthier, but more enjoyable.

2. BOOKS AND READING

Happy is the man who acquires the habit of reading when he is young. He has secured a life-long source of pleasure, instruction and inspiration. So long as he has his beloved books, he need never feel lonely. He always has a pleasant occupation of leisure moments, so that he need never feel bored. He is the possessor of wealth more precious than gold. Ruskin calls books "Kings' Treasures" - treasuries filled, not with gold and silver and precious stones, but with riches much more valuable than these - knowledge, noble thoughts and high ideals. Poor indeed is the man who does not read, and empty is his life.

The blessings which the reading habit confers on its possessor are many provided we choose the right kind of books. Reading gives the highest kind of pleasure. Some books we read simply for pleasure and amusement-for example, good novels, books of imagination must have their place in everybody's reading, /hence we are tired, or the brain is weary with serious study, it is a healthy recreation to lose ourselves in some absorbing story written by a master hand.

But to read nothing but books of Fiction is like eating nothing but cakes and sweetmeats. As we need plain, wholesome food for the body, so we must have serious reading for the mind. And here we can choose according to our taste. There are many noble books on history, biography, philosophy, religion, travel, and science which we ought to read, and which will give us not only pleasure but an education. And we can develop a taste for serious reading, so that in the end it will give us more solid pleasure than even novels and books of fiction. Nor should poetry be neglected, for the best poetry gives us noble thoughts and beautiful imaginings clothed in lovely and musical language.

Books are the most faithful of friends. Our friends may change, or die; but our books are always patiently waiting to talk to us. They are never cross, peevish, or unwilling to converse, as our friends sometimes are. No wonder a reader becomes a "book-lover."

3. A HOUSE ON FIRE

I had never seen a house on fire before. So, one evening when I heard fire engines with loud alarm bells rushing past my house, I quickly ran out and, a few streets away, joined a large crowd of people; but we could see the fire only from a distance because the police would not allow any one near the building on fire.

What a terrible scene I saw that day ! Huge flames of fire were coming out of each floor, and black and thick smoke spread all around. Every now and then tongues of fire would shoot up almost sky-high, sending huge sparks of fire round-about.

Three fire engines were busily engaged and the firemen in their dark uniform were playing the hose on various parts of the building. The rushing water from several hoses soaked the building but it did not seem to have any effect on the flames. Then the tall red ladders of the fire engine

were stretched upwards and I could see some firemen climbing up with hoses in their hands, On reaching almost the top of the ladder, they began to pour floods of water on the topmost part of the building. This continuous flooding brought the fire under control but the building was completely destroyed.

While fire is a blessing in many ways, it can also be a great danger to human life and property.

Exercise

Write a short essay on any two of the following topics:-

1. The Pleasures of Reading.
2. Life in a large City: its Advantages and Disadvantages.
3. The Book you like the Best.
4. My Role Model.