



Guide to Writing a Basic Essay

No matter what the topic, if you follow these steps, you are on your way to a complete essay.

- Decide on your topic.
- Prepare an outline or diagram of your ideas.
- Write your thesis statement.
- Write the body.
- Write the main points.
- Write the subpoints.
- Elaborate on the subpoints.
- Write the introduction.
- Write the conclusion.
- Add the finishing touches.

Choose a Topic for Your Essay

With most college essays, you may have no choice as to your topic. If this is the case, you still may not be ready to jump to the next step. Think about the type of paper you are expected to produce. Should it be a general overview, or a specific analysis of the topic? If it should be an overview, then you are probably ready to move to the next step. If it should be a specific analysis, make sure your topic is fairly specific. If it is too general, choose a narrower subtopic to discuss. For example, the topic "KENYA" is a general one. If your objective is to write an overview, this topic is suitable. If your objective is to write a specific analysis, this topic is too general. You must narrow it to something like "Politics in Kenya" or "Kenya's Culture." Once you have determined that your topic will be suitable, you can move on.

Organize Your Ideas

Diagram:

The purpose of an outline or diagram is to put your ideas about the topic on paper, in an organized format.

1. Begin your diagram with a circle or a horizontal line in the middle of the page.
 2. Inside the shape or on the line, write your topic.
 3. From your center shape or line, draw three or four lines out into the page. Be sure to spread them out.
 4. At the end of each of these lines, draw another circle or horizontal line or whatever you drew in the center of the page.
 5. In each shape or on each line, write the main ideas or the main points you want to make about your topic.
 - If you are trying to persuade, you want to write your best arguments.
 - If you are trying to explain a process, you want to write the steps that should be followed.
 - If you are trying to inform, you want to write the major categories into which your info can be divided.
 6. From each of your main ideas, draw three or four lines out into the page.
 7. At the end of each of these lines, draw another circle or horizontal line or whatever you drew in the center of the page.
 8. In each shape or on each line, write the facts or information that support that main idea.
- When you have finished, you have the basic structure for your essay and are ready to continue.

or

Outline:

1. Begin your outline by writing your topic at the top of the page.
 2. Next, write the Roman numerals I, II, and III, spread apart down the left side of the page.
 3. Next to each Roman numeral, write the main ideas or the main points you want to make about your topic.
 - If you are trying to persuade, you want to write your best arguments.
 - If you are trying to explain a process, you want to write the steps that should be followed.
 - If you are trying to inform, you want to write the major categories into which your information can be divided.
 4. Under each Roman numeral, write A, B, and C down the left side of the page.
 5. Next to each letter, write the facts or information that support that main idea.
- When you have finished, you have the basic structure for your essay and are ready to continue.

Compose a Thesis Statement

Now that you have decided, at least tentatively, what information you plan to present in your essay, you **are** ready to write your thesis statement. The thesis statement tells the reader what the essay will be about, and what point you, the author, will be making. You know what the essay will be about. Now you must look at your outline or diagram and decide what point you will be making. What do the main ideas and supporting ideas that you listed say about your topic?

Your thesis statement will have two parts.

- The first part states the topic: i.e. Kenya's Culture
- The second part states the point of the essay: i.e. has a rich and varied history

Once you have formulated a thesis statement that fits this pattern and with which you are comfortable, you are ready to continue.



Write the Body Paragraphs

In the body of the essay, all the preparation up to this point comes to fruition. The topic must now be explained, described, or argued. Each main idea that you wrote down in your diagram or outline will become one of the body paragraphs. If you had three or four main ideas, you will have three or four body paragraphs.

Each body paragraph will have the same basic structure.

1. Start by writing down one of your main ideas, in sentence form.
2. Next, write down each of your supporting points for that main idea, but leave four or five lines in between each point.
3. In the space under each point, write down some elaboration for that point. Elaboration can be further description or explanation or discussion.

Once you have fleshed out each of your body paragraphs, one for each main point, you are ready to continue. Write the Introduction and Conclusion. These paragraphs will give the reader a point of entry to and a point of exit from your essay.

Introduction

The introduction should be designed to attract the reader's attention and give her an idea of the essay's focus.

1. Begin with an attention grabber.

The attention grabber you use is up to you, but here are some ideas:

Startling information - This information must be true and verifiable, and it doesn't need to be totally new to your readers. It could simply be a pertinent fact that explicitly illustrates the point you wish to make. If you use a piece of startling information, follow it with a sentence or two of elaboration.

Anecdote - An anecdote is a story that illustrates a point. Be sure your anecdote is short, to the point, and relevant to your topic. This can be a very effective opener for your essay, but use it carefully.

Dialogue - An appropriate dialogue does not have to identify the speakers, but the reader must understand the point you are trying to convey. Use only two or three exchanges between speakers to make your point. Follow dialogue with a sentence or two of elaboration.

Summary Information - A few sentences explaining your topic in general terms can lead the reader gently to your thesis. Each sentence should become gradually more specific, until you reach your thesis.

2. If the attention grabber was only a sentence or two, add one or two more sentences that will lead the reader from your opening to your thesis statement.
3. Finish the paragraph with your thesis statement.

Conclusion

The conclusion brings closure to the reader, summing up your points or providing a final perspective on your topic. All the conclusion needs is three or four strong sentences which do not need to follow any set formula. Simply review the main points (being careful not to restate them exactly) or briefly describe your feelings about the topic. Don't stop just yet! One more step remains before your essay is truly finished.

Check your writing.

1. Check the order of your paragraphs - Look at your paragraphs. Which one is the strongest? You might want to start with the strongest paragraph, end with the second strongest, and put the weakest in the middle. Whatever order you decide on, be sure it makes sense. If your paper is describing a process, you will probably need to stick to the order in which the steps must be completed.

2. Check the instructions for the assignment. - When you prepare a final draft, you must be sure to follow all of the instructions you have been given.

Nothing can substitute for revision of your work. By reviewing what you have done, you can improve weak points that otherwise would be missed. Read and reread your paper.

Does it make logical sense? - Leave it for a few hours and then read it again. Does it still make logical sense?

Do the sentences flow smoothly from one another? - If not, try to add some words and phrases to help connect them. Transition words, such as "therefore" or "however," sometimes help. Also, you might refer in one sentence to a thought in the previous sentence.

This is especially useful when you move from one paragraph to another.

Have you run a spell checker or a grammar checker? - These aids cannot catch every error, but they might catch errors that you have missed.

Once you have checked your work and perfected your formatting, your essay is finished.