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**PART TWO:LESSON ONE: ESSAY WRITING**

In a subject like Communication Studies, much of your university work will be assessed by

*essay*, whether that’s an essay you prepare in your own time over a period of days or weeks,

or one you concoct in an examination hall in the space of an hour. It therefore follows that if

you learn how to prepare, organize and present essays, you will do much better in your degree

overall.

**1.Essay definition**

You are no longer in high school, so most study at a tertiary level requires *an analytical approach.* Written work must present an argument. Essays are generally answers to questions which ask whether or not you agree with a certain statement, or which ask you to discuss something critically, to assess a statement, or to make a choice. University essays are therefore arguments for or against certain propositions

Kathleen McWhorter, author of *The Writer’s Express,* defines an essay as *“a group of paragraphs about one subject*.” Aldous Huxley called the essay *“a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything.”*

Just as a unified paragraph has a stated or implied topic to which each sentence contributes, a unified composition has a central idea to which each paragraph contributes. Therefore, many of the techniques used to write paragraphs (e.g., developing a major idea, arranging supporting details logically and effectively, and making appropriate transitions) are applicable to the essay as a whole.

**2. Essential elements**

Although there are many ways to write well, the most important elements in writing the essay are focus, development, and organization.

**2.1. Focus**: It 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

**2.2. Development**:It 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, 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.

**2.3.** **Organization**: This helps the reader follow the points you are making. The best way to do this is by using a predictable form. The essay is organized with an introduction, developing paragraphs, and a conclusion. You can help the organization of your paper by outlining it before you begin to write. 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.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.

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.

**3.Essay structure**

Compositions are structured much like individual paragraphs. There are clear introductory and concluding elements. However, compositions are a series of paragraphs that attempt to communicate a main idea that cannot be sufficiently developed in one paragraph. Generally, compositions have three main sections: introductory paragraph, supporting paragraphs, and concluding paragraph.

**3.1. Introductory paragraph (The introduction)**

The first and the most important paragraph in an essay is called *the introductory paragraph*. The introduction is a unique paragraph because it must prepare the reader for the text that will follow. It should accomplish each of the following:

* Catch the interest of the audience
* Clearly indicate the topic and purpose
* Establish the tone of the composition

In long essays (Five paragraph essays), the introduction should have *a hook, background information*, and *a thesis statement*

**3.1.1.Hook (Attention grabber)**

A hook is a statement that begins the introduction. It includes one or two interesting sentences that *engage* the readers ‘attention and stimulate their curiosity.

**Attracting the readers’ interest**

* **Anecdote / Example**

Use a brief personal story or an example that leads naturally to the thesis statement. Of sure, you have to use a story that is related to the topic of the essay. For example, if you want to talk about the bad effects of obesity on human health, you can narrate a short story about a fat person whom you know. The story should be amazing and should lead to the central idea of the essay (Thesis statement)

* **Contradictory statement**

Begin with a statement that contradicts your thesis in order to interest the reader.

* **General background knowledge**

Provide background knowledge when it might be helpful to an audience that is not familiar with your topic.

* **Question**

Although this technique should only be used as a last resort or unless the topic truly warrants it, ask a question that requires more than a “yes” or “no” response that will encourage your audience to continue reading. Asking a provocative question can entice your reader. This question should be asked in a creative way.

**E.g**. Have you ever killed a man? If you are called upon tomorrow to go to Iraq knowing that you might have to kill another person, could you do it? These same questions faced an American soldier almost 40 years ago when he ,as a young man, chose to avoid being drafted to fight to Vietnam War, a war he did not believe in. He said” What I did was legal, but was it right?”

* **Direct quotation**

Use a passage or a text or a comment from someone notable to introduce the general topic and connect it with your thesis statement.

* **Definition of a key term or a concept**

Beginning your essay with a definition may be of a great importance to the reader’s understanding of the raised issue.

**E.g.** Democracy is a form of government in which the ultimate authority is given to and exercised by people. This is may be so in theory, but recent elections, especially the 2000 presidential race, have raised concerns about the future of democracy as we know it and define it…( Thesis)

**3.1.2. Background information**

Background information in most cases follows the hook. It contains a general statement or statements that give a broader picture of the subject to be discussed.

**3.1.3. Thesis statement**

A thesis statement usually comes at the end of the introduction. This movement from the general to the specific is referred to as a *funnel* paragraph. The thesis statement summarizes what the entire essay is about. It contains *the topic* and the *controlling idea* of the whole essay. The topic is the theme or the subject matter of the essay. The controlling idea defines the purpose of the essay and sets its direction (feeling/ attitude about the subject).The success of your introduction depends on the way you state your thesis statement. Hence, a good thesis:

* expresses the writer’s position or opinion on a subject or sums up the lesson learned from the subject.
* can be implied or directly stated; the latter is safer because it tells the reader rather than suggests the point of the essay.
* is specific, not general.
* does not point out the obvious.
* should appear in the introduction of a paper and should be restated in its conclusion.
* should be accompanied by a preview of the points the writer is going to make in the body of the paper.

The thesis statement **should not be** *a title, an announcement of what you are going to do in the paper, a statement of fact, or a question (* in most cases).

**3.2.Body paragraphs ( developmental / supporting paragraphs)**

The body of the essay *supports* the main points of the thesis. Each point is developed by one or more paragraphs and backed with specific details. These details include evidence from books, articles, websites, personal experiences, etc. In addition to this research or support, the author’s own analysis and discussion of the topic is important. This is what ties ideas together and draws conclusions that support the thesis. The body paragraphs should be organized according to the order of ideas set forth in the thesis statement.Each developmental paragraph made up of:

* The topic sentence clearly states *the content of each paragraph*. It supports and expands on *an aspect* of the topic and controlling idea of the thesis statement. The topic sentence is often the first sentence of a body paragraph
* Each body paragraph must develop a point presented in the topic statement. All the supporting details in the body paragraph must relate to each other. They can be descriptions, definitions, examples, anecdotes, statistics, or quotations.
* The concluding sentence may either bring the idea of the paragraph to a close or suggest the content of the next paragraph.

When you begin each new body paragraph, you should use a transition, which could be one word, a phrase, or even a full sentence. **Transitions** help paragraphs connect to each other and to the thesis. They are used both within and between paragraphs to help the paper flow from one topic to the next. These transitions can be one or two words (*First*, *Next*, *In addition*, etc.) ,phrases or even sentences that bring the reader to the next main point as (*In the first place, On the other hand,* or *By contrast)*

**3.3. Concluding paragraph**

The conclusion brings together all the main points of the essay. It refers back to and restates the thesis statement (re-wording). The conclusion leaves readers with a final thought and sense of closure by resolving any ideas brought up in the essay. In the conclusion, new topics or ideas that were not developed in the essay should not be introduced. In the conclusion, the movement from the specific to the general is just the opposite of that in the introduction, and is known as an *inverted funnel.*

**4. Some common mistakes in essay writing**

**1. The Shotgun Technique**

This is putting down everything you know about the subject, and is a common fault. It is like firing a shotgun and hoping that some of the many pellets hit home. The question you are asked or the topic you are set will be specific, and not of the form `What do you know about X'. Some students feel that by putting down all they know, they impress. Unfortunately it usually works the other way round, and persuades the reader that you are not very bright

**2. Getting side-tracked from the very beginning**

Never start off any assignment, be it written or oral, by saying `*Before I deal with the question set, I will....*' or `*Before we can tackle this question, we must*....'. You have been set a topic or question and must answer it. If you side‐track yourself from the very beginning, you will not impress the marker. You will probably persuade them that either you are not very intelligent, or else you wish a different question had been set, because you know more about it, and therefore intend to change the question for yourself.

**3.** **Skimpy (brief) lightweight work**

This results in an essay that is too short and lacks sufficient content. If you find it is a problem of yours, the solution is easy ‐ you need to do more work! If you receive such a criticism, take heed. When you think that you have finished writing the essay, you should read it over and ask yourself `What is out that should be in?' then put it in.

**4.** Badly organized/structured work

**5. Too Personal Answers:** This can be a problem for some. If it is, *you are advised to avoid the word `I'* and be careful not to express your personal views too much, unless the question actuallyasks what you yourself think. It is safer to keep it in third person whenever possible. The passive tense isoften the best, although some now think this is an old fashioned way.