

Crafting a Thesis for an Expository Essay

WITH A GREAT THESIS IN PLACE, WRITING YOUR ESSAY WILL BE A SNAP. **LC** SHOWS YOU HOW TO WRITE THIS ALL-IMPORTANT SENTENCE.

By Sarah Montante

Although the name may be new to you, chances are, you've written several expository essays in your lifetime. Every time you wrote about your summer vacation or did a book report, you were practicing expository writing. You've also read a lot of expository essays, both big and small. How-to articles, encyclopedic entries, science textbooks, and history textbooks are all examples of expository writing that you have no doubt encountered. Sound less intimidating?

> THE ESSAY EXPOSED

The expository essay is actually one of the most straightforward assignments you will ever encounter. Its purpose is simply to describe or explain a specific topic to the reader, using factual information. You do not have to develop an argument or prove anything in an expository essay; you only have to understand your topic and present it to the reader in a logical, cogent manner. An expository-writing prompt will ask you to describe the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution, but it will not require you to take a position on whether the Industrial Revolution had a positive or negative impact on America.

Usually, an expository essay is structured in five paragraphs. The first is the introduction, which



contains the thesis statement. The next three body paragraphs each develop a separate point to support the thesis, and provide factual examples and information. The fifth and final paragraph is the conclusion, which ties the body paragraphs together and sums up the essay. Since the content is factual, you will need to write in the third person only. This means no "I" or "you" in the essay.

> A SIMPLE SENTENCE

The thesis statement drives the structure and content

of the expository essay. It's the most important sentence in your essay, but that doesn't mean it has to be complicated. In fact, the best thesis statements are simple. It's important that the statement be clear and that it be one that you can support with facts. A thesis statement for an expository essay should not express an opinion or take a position on a topic.

Too much: *The Boston Tea Party was the most important act of civil disobedience in the American colony because it protested unjust taxation without representation and was therefore the main cause of the Revolutionary War.*

Just right: *The Boston Tea Party was a significant act of civil disobedience that galvanized Americans around the issue of taxation without representation and helped spark the Revolutionary War.*

Too much: *The steam engine was invented because America is a very large country and people needed to travel long distances so they could settle the frontier and find gold in California.*

Just right: *The invention of the steam engine changed the landscape of America, allowing people to travel further than they ever had before and speeding the settlement of the frontier.*

A strong thesis for an expository essay will not present an opinion, make outlandish claims, or state an argument. Remember, your thesis statement should be based purely on factual information that you present in the body of your essay. It should be clear, concise, and well written. Once you have a sound thesis in place, writing the rest of your essay will be easy because you will know exactly what information you need to present, and in what order.

BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

YOU NEED TO HAVE A STRONG THESIS BEFORE YOU CAN BEGIN WRITING YOUR ESSAY. BUT BEFORE YOU CAN HAVE A STRONG THESIS, YOU NEED TO DO YOUR RESEARCH.

1 Define your topic. If you have to come up with your own topic, be sure that it is narrow and specific enough that you can thoroughly address it in five paragraphs. The Revolutionary War is probably too broad a topic to address in a short essay, but the Boston Tea Party is just the right size. Even if your teacher has given you a writing prompt, it's important for you to recognize the exact nature and scope of your topic, so that you can be efficient in your research.

2 Find sources. Once you know what you are looking for, it will be easy for you to identify relevant information. Plan to spend a few hours at your library looking at several different

sources for your paper. Some good sources are encyclopedias, history books, and magazine and newspaper articles. A librarian can point you in the right direction if you feel overwhelmed. Do not rely on the Internet for factual information unless you are going to a well-known, reliable source like bartleby.com or to the Web site of a major newspaper or magazine.

3 Take notes. Research has two parts: finding the sources and then digesting them. You will need to write down important facts—dates, statistics, quotations—as you read, noting where you found each one of them (i.e., the source and page number). This will enable you to refer to the

source easily as you review your notes. It will also make writing footnotes a breeze.

4 Draw a conclusion. Once you have gathered all your facts, you'll need to evaluate them. What is the main thread that ties together all of the information? What do you want to say about this particular topic? Brainstorm on paper, then boil your answer down to one sentence. This is your thesis.

>>STAY TUNED: Next month, we'll show you the thesis statement in action. You'll learn how to go from a thesis to an outline, and from an outline to a perfect five-paragraph essay.