

Foundational Elements of an Essay



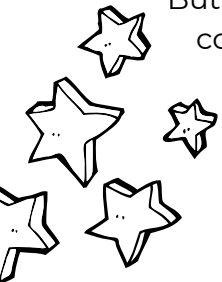
THIS IS NOT A FORMULA!

Depending on size/length, purpose, and audience, the essay as a whole can take on many unique forms, and the various elements within can be assigned any number of varying duties.

So let's get it straight right here that the foundations I'll set in this post are by no means the *only* way, nor is this a strict formula to be followed.

Formulas serve a fine purpose for emerging writers, or those who are not entirely familiar to a language just yet, or for those who lack confidence in their writing and need a lil' nudge.

But formulas are NOT fine when they hinder eager writers from going beyond the bounds of convention to explore. If they're creating an uncomfortable ceiling for the writer, that's a problem.



Introduction

THE INTRODUCTION CAN SERVE ANY NUMBER OF PURPOSES, BUT AT BARE MINIMUM, IT'S GOT TO MAKE IT CLEAR TO THE READER WHAT THE ESSAY WILL ADDRESS, AS IN THE TOPIC AND THE DIRECTION THE WRITER'S POINT WILL TAKE.

An introduction may, in any combination:

- introduce the topic by using key words from the essay question (*i.e. if it is responding to an question or prompt*)
- settle on the definition of terms; help the audience understand your intent by unpacking similar or related terms; prevent readers from making their own assumptions
- determine the scope of your essay; explore the parameters of the topic
- explain why the issue matters or why it is worth reading about now (context)
- present the main idea of the essay (thesis); make your intent clear

REMEMBER

- These introductory elements should not be treated as isolated steps that students 'check off' individually; many actually occur simultaneously.
- There is no set order in which these elements occur; avoid formulaic or rigid requirements.
- ALL of these elements are not necessarily appropriate ALL the time; students should use them organically, and in response to the unique circumstances of the writing task.



Body

SO THE BODY PARAGRAPHS-AS YOU KNOW-SERVE THE MAIN AIM OF SUPPORTING THE THESIS. INCLUDED IN THE BODY SHOULD BE REASONS TO SUPPORT THE THESIS, EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE REASONS, AND ANALYSIS/JUSTIFICATION AS TO WHY THIS INPUT IS RELEVANT.

A good body paragraph:

- stays focused on the thesis, without digressing
- makes reasons clear
- make connections between claims and evidence clear
- uses transitions to show relationship among ideas within a paragraph
- uses transitions to connect ideas from one paragraph to the next.

NOTEWORTHY SUGGESTIONS

- A single point in an essay isn't necessarily reserved to a single paragraph. Depending on the size/length, purpose and audience, a student might take several paragraphs to roll out a single point, so make sure they're given the freedom and license to do this 😊
- Transitions should range from the good ol' obvious to those more seamless in approach; students should demonstrate a varied command in all ways of transitioning and expressing relationship.

Conclusion

THE CONCLUSION IS THAT UNICORN MOMENT WHERE THE WRITER GENUINELY ENTERS THE CONVERSATION, AFTER ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED, SO TO SPEAK., THEY GET TO WEIGH IN ON THE MATTER, BY SHARING INSIGHTS GAINED AS A RESULT OF THEIR RUMINATION.

A good conclusion:

- signals the end of the essay
- restates your thesis
- draws conclusions and reflects on the issue based on the evidence you presented
- offers fresh new ideas, insights or alternate ways of thinking as a result of the input you shared

A strong conclusion may also:

- consider implications and consequences of accepting or denying your position
- offer solutions and/or make value-based judgements when appropriate.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Unless your students are writing a research essay and an argument to boot, the inclusion of ALL these concluding elements is not necessarily likely.
- It doesn't take loads of language to achieve the effect of some of these elements. A student could offer an innovative solution in a simple sentence or two, or inspire future research in a simple point made.
- While you might feel that the words 'I/me/my' have no place in an academic essay, I invite you to reconsider; these words are actually the very language of analysis and evaluation as we know it, and barring them when they might otherwise be appropriate and/or effective is merely prescriptive (i.e. it's not grammatically incorrect to use these terms in an essay). Meanwhile, what it really comes down to is control and command, and it's our job to teach them that.
- While an essay that ends with gloom-and-doom can be disconcerting for the audience, a warning or sense of foreboding shouldn't be outlawed either. As a general rule, it's great to end on a good note, so perhaps offering a potential solution in light of that concern might be a good way to accomplish this without losing the force of such foreboding.
- The conclusion is NOT necessarily a single paragraph. Instead, I invite you to view the conclusion as a portion of the essay that can be developed in several paragraphs as the essay winds down.



Yo, I'm Jill!
I live on macha green tea lattes + nerdy lesson planning sessions.
I'm on a mission to flip the script on how we teach today's writers.

I empower secondary ELA teachers with the

resources + mindset
they need to make the

writing process
more

relevant, authentic, and applicable
for today's learners and tomorrow's leaders.

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