



A Guide to Essay-Writing: It's Creative, but It's Logical! There's not 'one way' to write an Essay!

Essay-writing: *is your mind on the page:*

- Foremost, essays are a conversation between you and the text(s) you are engaging.
- Yet, it is not only a conversation between you and the text(s), but also your reader (a peer, your professor, etc.). So, the conversation between you and the text(s) should be extended so as to become clear and communicable to your reader/audience.
- Everyone's mind, or thought-process, is different. Some begin with thinking about how dinosaurs evolved into chickens, and some begin with thinking about how chickens evolved from dinosaurs. The two are equivalent, but have opposite starting points.
- In other words, some think A to Z, and others think Z to A. BUT, some also start with M, go to B, then Z, then A. *Hint:* this is the brainstorming process!
- (Un)fortunately, not everyone thinks like you! So, it has become the convention of essay-writing that your ideas must be restructured into a logical sequence, in order that your readers may follow this logic to understand the conversation you are having with the text(s).

An essay: *is a dialogue of ideas, structured into a systematic debate (or argument):*

- No matter which 'letter' in the process you start with (A, Z, or M) in the brainstorming process, in the end, there should be a clear direction of your essay that begins with one end of the logical sequence and concludes with the other (A to Z; or, Z to A).
- (Note: Writing from 'A to Z' is often referred to as a 'top-down approach' to essay-writing, whereas writing from 'Z to A' is often referred to as a 'bottom-up approach' to essay-writing. The first begins with a general idea and concludes with a specific point, while the second begins with a specific point and concludes with a general idea.
- In order for your essay, a dialogue of ideas, to be structured into a systematic debate, or argument, it must clearly show the reader how you arrive at Z from A, or A from Z.
- Each step of the way, you should explain to your reader how it is that you managed to arrive at B from A, and C from B... and Z from Y!

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| <p>*** Why say there is not 'one way' to write an essay, if you just told me there are 'two ways' to write an essay- which are really just inversions of one another! HELP!***</p> |
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- Think of two different writers arguing the same thesis; both are arguing from 'A to Z'. Would they use the same evidence/examples? Maybe. Would their reasons for using the same evidence/examples be the same? Likely not. Just because two students have the same thesis, it is *highly unlikely* that they will argue for this thesis in the same way

(because everyone thinks differently!) So, the structure of their arguments will be different, while their main argument itself (their thesis) will be the same.

- It might be that student #1 thinks that the point in their argument C should, with good reason, come at an earlier or later moment in their paper than student #2 thinks it should. In other words, student #2 may think that, instead of the point C coming third in the logical sequence of their argument, it should come second. So, student #2 thinks that what student #1 understands as point C is better understood as point B. How can both be right?

Because the argument of an essay does not rely on whether point B or C comes first; rather, it relies on *the reasons provided for why point B or C comes first*. This is what is called the **rationale** of your argument.

The rationale: *of your argument is the explanation of why B should follow from A, etc.:*

- NOTE: There are obvious times in which B or C are not interchangeable, where B **must** come before C, logically. For example, imagine that you're providing the rationale for the fact that human babies eventually become elderly persons. Certainly, babies must first become toddlers, young children, adolescents, young adults, and full adults before becoming elderly persons. However, it would not make sense to argue that babies must first become adults, then toddlers, then adolescents (in that order) before becoming elderly persons. As we know, babies must first become toddlers before they can become adolescents, and so on until they become elderly.
- In order to show your reader how you arrived at Z, you must explain your reasoning as to why your argument unfolds in the way it does, (why B should and –even must- follow from A, C from B, etc. in order to arrive at Z). The rationale for why a person must arrive at adolescence only after arriving at being a toddler is because it is impossible for a baby to become an adolescent before becoming a toddler, by definition of what adolescents and toddlers are.
- So, the strength of your essay does not rest on the examples/evidence you include, but the *rationale you provide for* the examples/evidence you include to argue for your thesis.
- Your Thesis is your main argument, and its success depends on the success of all previous rationale.

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| *** If you found this handout helpful, please follow up with the next: “Crafting your Thesis-Steps and Examples” *** |
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