



The Writing Center at Bristol Community College

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The Essay: What is it? What must it do?

Within the classroom, an essay is an extended piece of formal writing that demonstrates one's knowledge of classroom material and mastery of certain thinking skills. The ingredients of a competent college essay include:

- A sense of audience (To whom am I writing this essay? What does she need to know?)
- Awareness of purpose (What is the assignment or question asking for, exactly?)
- Logical structure (How do the pieces connect and make up a whole?)
- Use of supportive detail or evidence (How do I know this? What support am I offering?)
- Correct language, punctuation, and mechanics (Is this the appropriate word? Am I expressing myself clearly?)

The Process: Where do I begin? How do I get to where I want to go?

The process of writing a college essay involves a series of steps, while at the same time allowing each of us the freedom to write in the way we are accustomed. Some of us, for example, might prefer to state a theme or controlling idea before beginning to write a draft. Others of us might begin with a list or cluster to generate ideas. Yet others might just dive in and start writing the essay itself. All that said, we can nevertheless draw out of the following steps that might help you as you work on writing a college essay.

Evaluating the question or topic

- Underline key phrases, as well as phrases that you are struggling with
- Distinguish between generally directive terms like, "discuss," or "compare/contrast" and content-specific terms like, "sonnet" or "simile"

Do the necessary information-gathering

- Read that poem or that relevant textbook chapter
- Gather all data that you will need in the writing of your essay

Get started: generating writing without writing the perfect paragraph

- Use well-trying invention strategies such as listing, clustering, mapping, or freewriting, especially if you are struggling to find a way into the topic
- Some writers prefer to map out their essay in outline form before proceeding to write a draft; others prefer to use an outline to sharpen the focus of their already written draft (see below)

Draft your response

- Following the formal requirements of your assignments, begin to draft your essay
- Begin by addressing the question
- Patiently develop your points, using supportive detail
- Use topic sentences that sharpen the focus of each of your paragraphs
- Carefully fashion connections between paragraphs through logical transitions
- Outline or gloss your draft to determine the cogency of your writing
- Give your essay a sense of closure (without merely repeating all that you have said in the paper)

Revise and edit thoroughly

- Look back at what you have written, following the criteria that we began with
- Give yourself time to revise and edit
- Use your time wisely, giving appropriate amounts of your time to the more urgent areas of improvement
- Never hand in a final draft without reviewing and editing for grammar, punctuation, and mechanics