

Suggestions for How to Write a Short Essay

Gordon Thompson, 28 September 2010

You should write as though your life depends on it, because it does. Your opening sentence and your essay title must grab attention and tell your reader know your subject: say something that will make your reader want to continue. Choose any topic we have considered in class and then set up the essay's thesis. If this were a murder mystery, you would describe the death in a particularly poignant way and set up a tentative explanation for what happened. Academic essays can function similarly. Remember: a good story has a beginning, middle, and end.

In the middle paragraphs, examine the evidence. What do different authors say about your subject? What are their prejudices, proclivities, and agendas and how might you want to consider these positions when evaluating them? If this were a mystery essay, whom would you choose to be your suspects? What does the forensic team say? Beware: some authors get stuck in this section, mired in too many and irrelevant data and facts. Indeed, some want to mislead you with false or misleading information. However, in a 500-word essay you need to keep your story clear. These essays allow me to assess your learning and to offer you a chance to challenge any "unexamined assumptions" I might have about what you know (Angelo and Cross, 371).

Your closing paragraph must bring your story to a satisfying conclusion. Did you prove the thesis that you posited in the opening paragraph? If this were a murder mystery, were you able to prove your guess about who perpetrated the crime or did you leave the tragedy unsolved? If the latter, what have we learned in the course of the investigation. Did you cite all of your sources and list them at the end using the MLA styles described in *The Skidmore Guide to Writing*? Was the essay free of grammatical and spelling mistakes? Was every sentence clear? Did you stay within the word count described in the requirements? The grade you earn will be proportionate with how well you have met these standards. When you are done, email me your essay attached as a Word document. I will respond to let you know that I have received your essay and will return it to you with comments as an attachment.

Sources

Angelo, Thomas A. and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993.

Expository Writing Committee. *The Skidmore Guide to Writing*. Saratoga Springs: Skidmore College, 1999.