

Writing Handout E-14: Essay Basics

The Basic Steps to Writing an Essay: The Rules Never Change

Writing an essay requires several basic steps any writer can follow. Writing requires taking ideas and building upon them. Finding your ideas is part of the beginning process during prewriting. You might draw inspiration from experience, memories, or an everyday routine. Often, the topic is provided, and a writer must develop ideas to prove a point. Writers will sort through ideas and choose which ones to keep and develop. Then it is time to structure and organize the content into logical ideas. Every writer can prewrite to build ideas, sort through the ideas, and structure an essay. Follow these steps to achieve success:

Step 1 – Identifying the topic and taking a POSITION on the topic: SAMPLE TOPIC: #167 – Handout W-4
(200 Theme Subjects)

People Who Disgust Me (broad topic)

Writer's POSITION on the topic will narrow it down to a workable thesis or topic sentence:

People who disgust me are those who litter. (Notice this sentence has taken the broad topic and narrowed it down to a more specific point the writer can develop.)

Step 2 – Brainstorming – how will the writer develop the thesis? For a 1-3-1 essay, there are usually **three** major supporting details:

Writer develops the topic (litter) by talking about the negative aspects of litter in/on:

1. Roadways
2. Waterways
3. Public Restrooms

Step 3 – Prewriting: Before writing the essay, writers should develop a hook (also known as interesting introductory material).

The introductory material will cleverly lead the reader into the THESIS. (The thesis is the backbone and main point of the essay. It is what the essay works to prove.)

A student can accumulate 100 words or more from a good introduction!

Several types of hooks are:

- **a short narrative (anecdote or short amusing story about a real incident or person)**
- a compelling quote
- an appropriate definition
- a surprising statement
- conflict
- dialogue
- historical facts or background

*** In the sample essay, a descriptive anecdote introduces the thesis statement.**

(Re-read and consider the introduction because it will be related to the **conclusion** stated in different words... a full circle essay brings the reader back to where the essay began (completes the circle).

Step 4 – Writing the Rough Draft (begin putting ideas down in paragraph/essay *format*)

The rough draft is a time to get ideas written into essay format without worrying about grammar or word count. Writers can think of this stage as a focused freewriting with more direction than the prewriting stage. Even the best writers produce multiple rough drafts.

Step 5 - Revising (take out sentences or paragraphs that stray from the topic)

The revision stage focuses on adding relevant ideas, rearranging ideas when needed, removing unnecessary or irrelevant ideas, and replacing ideas. The revision stage will require lots of work as a writer works to perfect the flow, pacing, and unity of the essay. Writers should ask for a second opinion of their work by having someone else read the essay.

Step 6 - Editing (focuses on grammar and spelling).

Editing is a time to fine tune the essay. A writer should focus on looking for grammar errors, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. It is a detailed process, and a writer should take adequate time to edit completely. Since editing can require specific knowledge, consulting a professional is recommended if possible.

*In the sample essay below, *transitions are italicized* and the **main ideas are bolded**. **The thesis statement is bolded and underlined**. The notations are made noticeable to help identify important, organizational aspects of the essay. In an actual essay, these items would not be marked.

Title:

Do not underline, italicize, or boldface your own title. Note how the title complements topic.

Litterers: Dangers to the World

Introduction:

An anecdote is used to then present the thesis statement. The thesis statement is bold in this example. Do not bold yours.

One splendid summer afternoon, I found myself enjoying a drive down a deserted two-lane country road because I had missed the turn to the I-95 entrance ramp. The tar on this narrow stretch was coal black, probably because it had seen too little traffic to properly break it in. The bright white line dividing the blacktop in the center of the road looked like a sparkly skunk stripe as it traveled endlessly towards the deep blue sky. The view was incredible! *Suddenly and unexpectedly*, a flash caught my eye, something crude in between the tall green pines, woodsy brush, and glittering retention ponds. The slight summer breeze that flowed into my car's open sun-roof had suddenly lifted a bleached white McDonald's bag up into the air like a wayward balloon. As I got closer, I realized its contents, now scattered, contaminated the roadside like spoiled ashen wreckage. White napkins waved like flags, and yellow fries decayed next to rotting half-eaten burgers and other discarded waste. **As I looked at this garbage carelessly thrown into the otherwise beautiful environment, I came to the conclusion that people who litter disgust me.**

Body paragraphs:

Note specific examples that support the thesis statement.

Instantly, I thought fines for **littering on the roadways** do not help perpetrators recognize why littering is bad. Unwanted trash disturbs the effortless beauty that nature provides and can have grim consequences. A person driving down the road may have his or her attention temporarily thwarted by flying debris. *For example*, I once saw paper swirling through the air land on the windshield of the car in front of me, causing that car to swerve for a second or two. How alarming! In addition, debris dropped on the highway can be a threat if the traffic is heavy and there is no way to dodge the litter. Litter disturbs the natural flow of traffic when cars must weave around obstacles, large or small, to avoid hitting them. Even worse, if the offending object is hit by someone and suddenly becomes airborne, it may crash into someone's windshield, causing damage, injury, or worse. *Finally*, litter poses a threat to the wild life that inhabits the areas beside roads. Discarded objects are lethal to birds and small animals if ingested and cause harm to the environment. *Furthermore*, litter is just plain ugly. No one wants the blemish of someone else's trash; it is an eyesore and a sensory attack! People who litter lack respect for others.

Transition words:

Note italicized words that help essay move from point to point.

Next, **litter ruins beaches and oceans**. It destroys the delicate balance of the ecosystems thriving there. It is destructive to fish and other marine life. *For example*, plastic containers are often mistaken for food. Nets strangle creatures that make their home in the sea. Decomposing waste adds bacteria to fresh, clean water and turns it into a gloomy garbage dump. Water is important in sustaining a livable planet, and litter contributes to the problem of maintaining a healthy environment. People who litter lack respect for their natural surroundings.

Note to students: This essay is a sample to illustrate format. Course instructors have copies. Duplication or near duplication would be regarded as plagiarism.

Finally, **public restrooms** provide relief to people who travel, dine out, or simply find themselves away from home. People who abuse and trash this sacred oasis by causing toilets to overflow, throwing paper on the floors, or committing other atrocities are negating the service a public restroom was meant to provide. This abuse may cause customers to become unnecessarily tainted by dangerous microorganisms. *Furthermore*, employees who use these facilities on the job may transfer these infections to food, dishes, money, or anything that is handled by workers in public places. This spreads to the hands of others through rapid exchange. Public restroom litter and abuse can ultimately translate into health issues for the traveler who may or may not choose to venture into the disgusting mess caused by litterers. People who litter lack consideration.

Conclusion:

Summarizes the main ideas, repeats thesis sentence, and draws a conclusion.

Thus, **people who disgust me are litterers who trash roadways, waterways, and restrooms**. These unconcerned pirates of nature leave destruction in their wake along with the sensory sabotage their litter creates. The next time someone is enjoying a pleasant ride on a summer's day, I hope he or she will consider restraint before tossing that McDonald's bag out the window.

(A full circle essay brings the reader back around to where the essay began – the introduction!)

-Josephine Lewis