

GUIDE TO DIFFERENT KINDS OF ESSAYS



Descriptive:

Examples: A **descriptive essay** could describe . . .

- * a tree in my backyard;
- * a visit to the children's ward of a hospital;
- * a hot fudge sundae;
- * what an athlete did in order to make it to the Olympics.

The **descriptive essay** provides details about how something looks, feels, tastes, smells, makes one feel, or sounds. It can also describe what something is, or how something happened. These essays generally use a lot of sensory details. The essay could be a list-like description that provides point by point details. Or, it could function as a story, keeping the reader interested in the plot and theme of the event described.



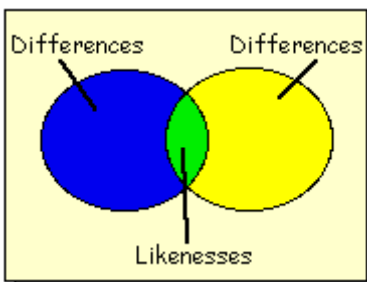
Definition:

Examples: A **definition essay** may try and define . . .

- * the meaning of an abstract concept, like *love*;
- * the true meaning and importance of *honesty*;
- * how the meaning of *family* goes deeper than just your blood relatives.

A **definition essay** attempts to define a specific term. It could try to pin down the meaning of a specific word, or define an abstract concept. The analysis goes deeper than a simple dictionary definition; it should attempt to explain *why* the term is defined as

such. It could define the term directly, giving no information other than the explanation of the term. Or, it could imply the definition of the term, telling a story that requires the reader to infer the meaning.

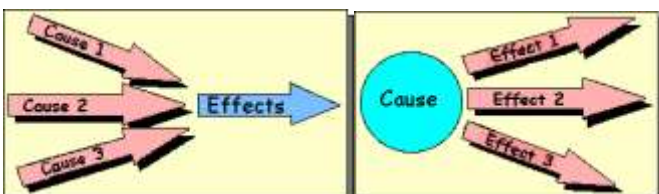


Compare/Contrast:

Examples: A **compare/contrast** essay may discuss . . .

- * the likenesses and differences between two places, like New York City and Istanbul;
- * the similarities and differences between two religions, like Islam and Christianity;
- * two people, like my brother and myself.

The **compare/contrast** essay discusses the similarities and differences between two things, people, concepts, places, etc. The essay could be an unbiased discussion, or an attempt to convince the reader of the benefits of one thing, person, or concept. It could also be written simply to entertain the reader, or to arrive at an insight into human nature. The essay could discuss both similarities and differences, or it could just focus on one or the other. A **comparison essay** usually discusses the similarities between two things, while the **contrast essay** discusses the differences.



Cause/Effect:

Examples: A **cause/effect** essay may explain . . .

- * why a volcano erupts, and what happens afterwards
- * what happens after a loved one's death.

The **cause/effect** essay explains why or how some event happened, and what resulted from the event. This essay is a study of the relationship between two or more events or experiences. A **cause essay** discusses the reasons why something happened.

My brother always knew how to find the best fishing spots. I used to love to go fishing with him, because that's when he would tell me his secrets. He told me which fly was best for catching bass, and what time of day was ...

Narrative:

Examples: A **narrative essay** could tell of . . .

- * my brother's and my fishing trips;
- * a boring trip to the grocery store;
- * my near-death experience at the beach.

The **narrative essay** tells a story. It can also be called a "short story." Generally the narrative essay is conversational in style, and tells of a personal experience. It is most commonly written in the first person (uses *I*). This essay could tell of a single, life-shaping event, or simply a mundane daily experience.

Start Process:

Step 1 Examples: A **process essay** may explain . . .

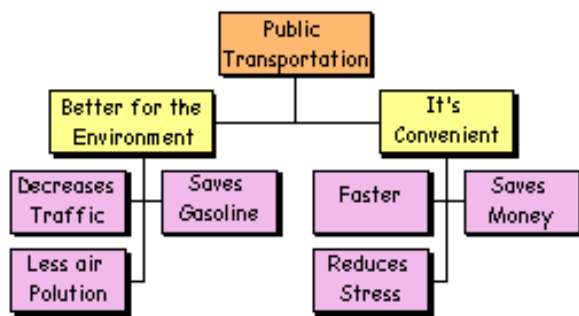
- * how to properly re-pot a plant;
- * how an individual came to appreciate hard work.

Step 2 A **process essay** describes how something is done. It generally explains actions that should be performed in a series. It can explain in detail how to accomplish a specific task, or it can show how an individual came to a certain personal awareness. The essay could be in the form of step-by-step instructions, or in story form, with the instructions/explanations subtly given along the way.

Step 3

Finish

Why you should use public transportation:



Argumentative:

Examples: An **argumentative essay** may persuade a reader that . . .

- * he or she should use public transportation instead of driving.
- * cats are better than dogs.

An **argumentative essay** is one that attempts to persuade the reader to the writer's point of view. The writer can either be serious or funny, but always tries to convince the reader of the validity of his or her opinion. The essay may argue openly, or it may attempt to subtly persuade the reader by using irony or sarcasm.



Critical:

Examples: A **critical essay** may analyze . . .

- * how Shakespeare presents the character, Othello, in his play
- * the strengths and weaknesses of the movie,
- * the use of color in Monet's painting, *Sunflowers*.

A **critical essay** analyzes the strengths, weaknesses and methods of someone else's work. Generally these essays begin with a brief overview of the main points of the text, movie, or piece of art, followed by an analysis of the work's meaning. It should then discuss how well the author/creator accomplishes his/her goals

and makes his/her points. A critical essay can be written about another essay, story, book, poem, movie, or work of art.