

LUC WRITING CENTER - “THE ESSAY: PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE”

What is the purpose of an essay?

Every good essay is an argument incorporating proof, evidence, the opinions of critics and experts, logic, reasoning, and problem-solving solutions in order to convince the reader of something. Think of the essay as a conversation you are having with someone. If you are telling someone a story, you need context. **Historical context.** You need to explain who your friends are, what their names are, and what relationship they have to each other. The essay is similar in the sense that it requires **background** so that your reader can understand the issue.

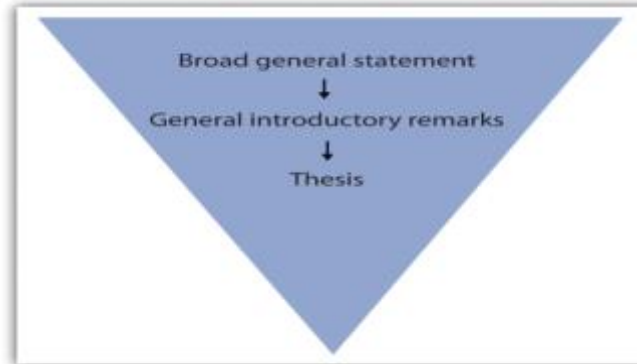
Next the reader needs to understand **what is at stake** – if they read this essay, how will their opinions change? **Your thesis is the new opinion** you want them to have, clearly stated. Next you must **prove it in the body of your essay.**

Most essays are attempting to achieve one or more of the following actions:

- Asking you to revise/change a previous opinion you had on the subject.
- Advocating a course of action that will rectify or prevent a problem.
- Attacking an incorrect opinion or course of action.
- Informing the reader about a new “discovery” in a field that offers potential for correcting mistaken ideas.
- Explaining what an author has said and then making an argument based on or against it.

Intro Paragraph:

Your intro, or topic paragraph should provide background on the issue (the wider context) and then narrow your focus. Remember to write the first paragraph [Intro] in a funnel shape.



- 1) Sentence(s) giving **general context/background** of issue.
- 2) Sentence(s) explaining **opposing opinions/specific context/particular focus** of issue.
- 3) **Thesis statement summing up argument and stating the opinion** that will be argued in the following paragraphs.

Example:

- **Clarify the big issue/perspective:** *Piracy, the act of boarding and pillaging a vessel by another, severely threatened the British fleet in the early to late eighteenth century, costing European merchants hundreds of thousands of pounds in lost cargo and revenue.*
- **Move to opposing opinions:** *Contrary to popular belief, pirates were not always enemies of the British navy, but once served as an integral part of its naval ventures.*

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- **Provide another transition sentence:** *Though the British Crown regarded piracy as an act of violence deserving of the death penalty, the fact remains that it originally created and financed the privateer-turned-pirate in order to maintain naval supremacy and only outlawed piracy when it was no longer useful.*
- **End with your particular argument/thesis statement:** *Therefore, eighteenth century piracy should be interpreted as both resisting global imperial ambitions and operating as a socially subversive capitalist venture by enriching lower class pirates, raising them beyond their original social station.*

Remember that your thesis statement should sum up your entire paper – that is, state what you will be arguing in **specific terms**.

Subsequent Paragraphs [Each Should Prove One Point]

- The intro paragraph, body paragraphs, and conclusion paragraph should all be of equal length (roughly 10-12 lines each). Avoid writing very long and very short paragraphs as this is a sign of structural issues with your paper such as insufficient explanation and not enough “proof.” One and a half or two paragraphs per page (Times New Roman 12 pt. double-paced font) is considered to be an excellent number.
- Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence of 1-3 lines that sums up the thesis-supporting point that you are going to prove in this paragraph. This sentence should not contain any quotes, since your “proof” is better saved for the middle of each paragraph.
- First introduce your quotes, i.e. tell your reader who the author of the quote is and what he/she said. Next, the quote should follow so your reader can read the author’s words and understand how this quote supports your overall argument. Make sure to properly cite the quote. Finally, end with a sentence “unpacking,” or explaining the relevance of the quote you have just used. Like the topic sentence, this conclusion sentence should not contain any quotes.
- Your conclusion paragraph should reiterate your main argument but also do something more. Explain the implications of your argument on the field or prevalent opinion; basically, what is the practical use of your argument? The last sentence should be a “mic-drop” sentence that captures the value and urgency of your argument as applied to the general issue you have discussed.

Example:

1. **Topic Sentence/Transition Sentence:** *Despite privateering being outlawed by James I in 1603, many privateers found the practice so lucrative that they continued thieving from merchant vessels as pirates, mostly in the southern hemisphere of the New World. Increasingly after the Peace of Utrecht (1713), some privateersmen accustomed to high profits refused to work for low pay as merchant or naval sailors, and instead turned pirate.*

2. **Summarize/Introduce Quote:** *David Starkey defines privateersmen and pirates as existing and operating in vastly different political environments from each other, the former accountable to naval authorities and the latter flouting them.*

3. **Quote:** *He claims, “Pirates put themselves beyond the law and the confines of established society to live in outlaw communities and deploy their labour in risk- and profit-sharing ventures” (Starkey 3).*

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4. **Explain Quote:** *Where privateers were accountable to naval authorities for their actions, and could lose their licenses, pirates were able to illegally acquire equal goods with even more individual profit.*

Conclusion Paragraph

Explain the "SO WHAT?" of your argument. What is the big "takeaway," or point of your paper? How should your audience readjust their ideas after reading your paper?

1. Sentence(s) **reiterating the general takeaway.**
2. Sentence(s) **reiterating several factors that should be taken into consideration** when rethinking an issue.
3. Sentence giving the **final most important point of your paper.**

Example:

- **Start big:** *Piracy evolved from imperialism's failure to control the privateer, a sixteenth-century tool used to protect English trade interests by crippling enemy ships during war.*
- **Then move to factors, or "proof" you have already listed and explored that should be taken into consideration:** *The pirate represents a postcolonial legacy victimizing the very upper classes that once profited by its former actions against other nations as a privateer.*
- **End with your ultimate takeaway:** *Reconsidering the causes and origins of piracy illuminates the practice as doubly dangerous to the social structure of Great Britain, frustrating not only British attempts to conquer and control trade routes, but also threatening to destabilize class structure by allowing members of the lower class to gain fabulous wealth.*

Works Cited

Starkey, David J. *Pirates and Privateers: New Perspectives on the War on Trade in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* University of Exeter Press, 1997.

Your Works Cited makes it possible to fact-check every source in this essay. If the reader wants to, he or she can go to the library, check this particular book out, and go to page 3 of *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century* to see if your quote is accurate. This is useful for experts in all fields, especially science and mathematics, where successful experiments need to be replicated over and over. **Essays must contain precise and reliable directions and accurate sources. Don't make up stuff!**