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## *Effective Writing Opens Opportunities*

*“The secret of success is to do common things uncommonly well”*

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Can you imagine a prestigious profession where you don't need writing skills? No matter who you are a businessman, a politician, an office manager, or an accountant you still have to write letters, reports, business plans, memos, speeches, etc. We should also consider the fact that to become any of those specialists you have to do immense amount of writing, first at school and then at university. Nowadays writing skills are becoming more and more important to achieve success so I would like to talk about the situation with it in our education.

The first acquaintance of students with writing happens at high school. When I say writing I mean writing as a skill not as ability. In our traditional system of education there were three main types of writing a student had to do: report, exposition and composition. Let's have a brief description of each of them.

For a report students are generally required to find a source of information on a particular topic, process it, summarize and represent it.

For an exposition a certain text is read to students several times. Usually it is an abstract from writing by classical authors. Then students have to reproduce what they heard as close to the original text as possible using their memory and observing punctuation.

Finally, for a composition students are given a certain topic or a list of topics to choose from and write about. These topics are traditionally chosen from the school program and experience little change with passing time.

It is also important to pay special attention to the grading system of these pieces of writing. Traditionally, they are evaluated according to two main points: content and grammar. So the grade of a composition looks like 5/4.

Students face the next level of writing when they enter universities. And this is where the real problem starts. The difference between the requirements to writing at schools and universities is so great, that many of them fail to cross the gap between the two.

In no way, I want to say that the approach to writing at all educational levels is substandard, but in the light of modern changes in educational system and market demands, all academic institutions should reevaluate their standard policies and assessments.

Western system of education is becoming more and more influential in our republic. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in our country has seen many new subjects and notions like critical thinking, study skills, creative thinking, interactive methods of studies, and many others. Open boarders and free communication with other countries have granted modern students many bright opportunities to get or continue their education in foreign universities. But as it always happens those opportunities have come together with new and difficult requirements. All mentioned above calls for the development of completely different and more advanced skills and one of them is the skill of writing essays.

Thus, what exactly is an essay? That is a very good question indeed and usually the first one students ask me on the first day of classes. An essay organization and formation can vary greatly from country to country. However, an essay can be commonly defined as a written composition based on a particular topic. Though this may sound similar to compositions required by our schools, an essay is on a completely different scale according to topics, types, and grading requirements. The discourse of this article will deal with an American essay.

An American essay can include a huge variety of topics from almost all aspects of life, science, literature, politics, art, etc. Let's take a look at a number of topics selected from TOEFL textbooks and internet sites.

1. What do you think is the most important invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Choose only one. Provide specific details to support your choice.

2. Smokers should have the right to smoke whenever and wherever they please, without any government restrictions. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

3. The death penalty should be abolished. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Be specific in your supporting arguments.

4. Success is a very subjective term. How do you define success? In your essay include both your definition of success and a description of a person whom you find successful.

5. "Life seems to me like a Japanese picture which our imagination doesn't allow to end with the margin. We aim at the infinite and when our arrow fall to earth it is in flames." Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1932. Interpret the above quotation by Holmes and explain whether you agree or disagree with his metaphor of a person's life.

6. Describe the best teacher you have ever had. What characteristics make this teacher stand out so strongly in your mind? Support your answer by specific traits and anecdotes (2, p. 438-439).

As you can see almost anything can appear as a topic for an essay, and this makes it a difficult task for students as no one can predict what they will get. Though there is one fact that makes the situation easier, and everyone should remember that – there is no "correct or

incorrect” answer for an essay assignment. Anything will do as long as it is logically organized and well argued.

Students in an English speaking academic environment are required to write essays and papers for several different purposes. Some writing assignments require students to express their opinion or comment upon an issue or topic based on their personal knowledge and experience. Other writing assignments, for example, essays on class exams, require students to demonstrate that they have understood the material in a comprehensive way. Students of our country are especially interested in an essay because it is a requirement to enter both local and western universities and is a part of many tests, for example, Computer Based TOEFL (CBT) and Internet Based TOEFL (IBT), set by grant programs.

First let’s discuss the most common types of essays found in an essay examination.

### ***Compare and Contrast Essay.***

This is one of the most typical forms of an essay examination. A comparison tells the ways in which a person, place, thing, event and so on are similar. A contrast essay points out differences.

### ***Persuasive Essay (also known as Personal Opinion Essay).***

In this type of an essay students must try to convince the reader to agree with a particular position or view point expressed in a thesis. The use of adjectives and adverbs may influence a reader on the emotional level, but the most efficient way to persuade a reader is to use facts, detailed examples, and personal knowledge. This is the type of an essay where a student can write in the first person, but it is advisable to use the third person as it is often more convincing.

### ***Cause and Effect Essay.***

To “cause” an action means to force something happen and the result of that action is referred to as the “effect.” For example: “What are the two causes of the Bermuda Triangle phenomena and how does it influence modern science?” is a typical assignment for this type of an essay.

### ***Interpretation/Analysis Question.***

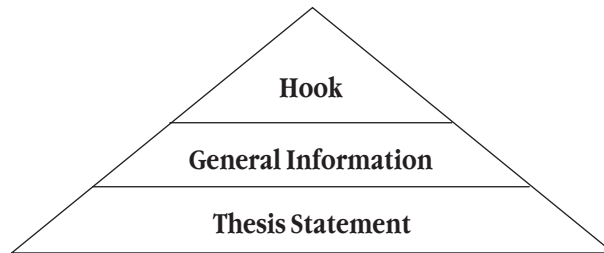
In this type of an essay students are given a short quotation or statement (usually 1 – 3 sentences in length) and asked to interpret the saying (paraphrase the author’s message) with the following analysis or statement of personal opinion about the original quotation. This kind of essay has achieved great popularity especially for essay entrance exams to American university campuses and for many standardized tests. The time allocated for an essay may vary from 30 minutes to two hours.

Unlike the composition used in our country, an American essay has a set of rules according to which it must be structured. Though there are certain differences in approaches used by various books, the bulk of the structure stays the same. One of the most effective ways to write an effective essay is to use the following scheme.

It is common knowledge that an essay must have an introduction, main part or body and conclusion, but it is not so well known that those in turn have to be composed of specific sub points.

Let's now analyze the structure of an essay using the following topic as an example: "If you had a choice, either to go to the university or start working right after graduating from school, what would you choose? Explain why."

The introduction of any essay can be divided into three parts: a hook, general information, and a thesis statement and represented in the form of a pyramid (2, p. 426-427).



(2, p. 429)

A **hook** can be written using the following several methods: a quotation, a definition, or a question.

Now let's write three hooks using each technique for the above mentioned topic.

1. "The most important thing is to learn: money can be lost or stolen, health may fail you, but what you have in your head will remain with you till the end." (Lois L'Amour)

2. Education is a process of creating specialists with solid knowledge in a certain sphere and shaping individuals with an ability to think for themselves.

3. Have you ever thought about how education changed in the last two hundred years and how important it is for a successful career?

As you can see the first hook uses the quotation technique. It is a very good way to start an essay, but beware that quotation must be relevant to your writing and it is always best to know the source of it.

The second one uses a definition. If you use this method make sure it is not a dictionary copied definition. Always use your own words to make it original.

The third hook utilizes the power of question. Questions usually arouse people's curiosity, but the question you ask must be interesting to them and your essay should provide an answer to it.

After you have written a hook you can give all the general information about the topic you know. Take note that introduction is no place for detailed facts, arguments, proofs, or explanations. All those are provided in the main part.

Education has appeared a long time ago, changing from one century to another, until it became what we know it now. Though it wasn't considered so important initially, when time passed people began to understand that it could be a powerful tool to change their lives. Gradually knowledgeable people were more and more appreciated, and early schools and universities were formed.

Nowadays, education is highly diverse and complicated and to see a person who didn't attend a school, college or university is a rare occasion.

After you gave that information it is time to write the most important part of an essay called a thesis statement. A thesis statement is the main idea of an essay plus the point of view of an author. There are four key points you should bare in mind when writing it:

- It is only one single sentence.
- It doesn't state the purpose of writing an essay directly.
- It provides clearly defined main topic.
- It gives clear understanding of the author's position or point of view towards the topic (2).

That taken into consideration your thesis statement may look like this:

*The majority of modern people desire a college or university degree for the following reasons: to occupy a high position in the society, get well paid jobs, and raise their self esteem.*

When you write your thesis statement, it is time to begin the main part of an essay. The structure of your main part will differ depending on your way of organizing information and the type of an essay you are supposed to write. The number of paragraphs will depend on the amount of ideas, mentioned in the thesis statements. The only thing that stays the same in every essay is that you will begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

A **topic sentence** is the main idea of the paragraph it begins, and expresses one of the ideas of your thesis. In our case we'll have three paragraphs: one dealing with the first reason to choose higher education, second dealing with the second one and the third, telling about the last one.

*Many school graduates prefer getting a university degree in order to obtain high position in social hierarchy.*

In the world of steep competition and constantly changing working trends proper education is the only means of surviving and being successful. Modern society sets very high standards for those who would like to move from one social class to another and education is one of them. The majority of organizations, private and state alike, are willing to hire employees with at least a college degree. If you take a look at the newspaper commercials, you will see that almost always the first requirement is higher education (bachelor, specialist or master degrees). Successful businessmen, politicians, scientists, university professors wouldn't be where they are now without their education. For example, can you think of a president of a powerful country like the USA or a top manager of a huge corporation like IBM who became one having no education? No, as these people have the most elite and expensive education in the world. Currently workers of manual labor are not respected in the society as they used to be and are, generally, paid less than those of intellectual one. And whether we want it or not the social status of a person in our world is determined by how much he/she earns, so if you want to be respected you must earn a lot, which brings us to the next point.

*The next reason to get higher education instead of starting to work right after school is getting well paid jobs.*

As it was mentioned earlier people of manual labor generally earn less than those working intellectually. It may be because of the high level of technology that today does a lot of tasks that earlier required people to do it. At the same time, all this technology requires educated people to program and operate. Our century is the century of intellect so the demand is high on educated specialists. For example, if we take a look at the most paid professions in the USA we'll see that they will be doctors, university professors, computer specialists etc.

And, of course, we shouldn't forget about private sector of economy in need of accountants, lawyers, managers, commercial specialists, economists, etc.

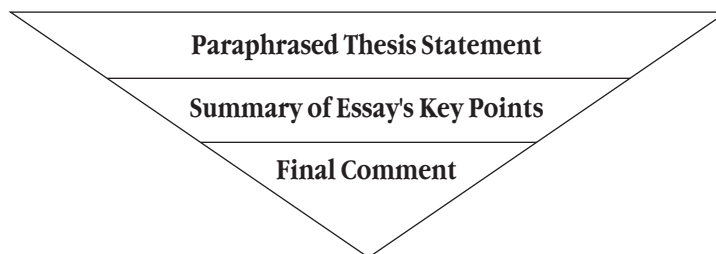
Despite all the differences among these professions there are still two factors common to all of them: above standard salary and high educational requirements. You have to have a degree in order to apply for these positions, regardless of you abilities. High level of salary means not only respect in the society, but also a respect of a different kind.

*The last, but not the least of the arguments in favor of having a degree is the respect for oneself, or self esteem.*

First of all, if you think about it for a minute you will understand why education is so important for a person's self esteem. Education uncovers the potential of a person, sharpens his/her intellect and allows him/her to think critically and independently. If a person is what he/she can do, than he/she knows his/her worth. Education and its fruits give us a satisfaction of knowing that we can accomplish a lot and that we can do many things that previously seemed impossible to us.

On the other hand, many people tend to forget about how dependant we are on the approval and disapproval of the society and how vulnerable we are to its opinion. For example, if a person is not really confident, but people all around him say he is good at something, successful and respected, his self esteem will grow unconsciously. And, of course, a vice versa situation is true too. So education can influence the self esteem of a person both directly and indirectly.

**Conclusion** is the last but not the least part of any essay or composition. A conclusion, just like an introduction, is divided into three parts. It may be viewed as a mirror reflection of an introduction or an introduction read vice versa. This scheme will allow you to understand the structure of a conclusion more accurately.



(2, p.436)

A **paraphrased thesis** is just like the name says, repeats your thesis, but in a different way.

A **summary of the essay's key points** is a short, but concise logical arrangement of your strongest arguments.

A **final comment** is used to put the final dot and once again direct the reader to your point of view.

There are several points that you should consider while writing your conclusion. First of all, you should never include new information (facts, examples, ideas) no matter how good it is into the conclusion. In case you do so, you will have to rewrite both your thesis and main body to accommodate this new information.

Secondly, conclusions provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate your vocabulary and restate your strongest arguments.

Finally, use the opportunity and conclude with the point of view you chose.

The three most important factors that make people pursue a college or a university degree right after school are: establishment of a place in the society, well paid position and increased respect for themselves. (Paraphrased thesis)

The establishment of a place in the society is a very important step of becoming an independent individual and in the constantly changing environment education is the only tool a person can always rely on to achieve this goal.

High salary, which is closely related to the first point, is again more easily achieved when a person is educated and has a degree from a prestigious college or university. Intellectual work requires special educational training and as this work is now highly paid for, education is invaluable.

Finally, a feeling of self esteem is very important to be successful in life and to achieve the first two goals and, in its turn, is the direct result of them. And again, education can really help a person to improve his/her respect for himself/herself. Summing up it can be said that if you want to achieve your goals, to make society acknowledge you and to feel a full fledged person, you really should get a university of college degree. (Final comment)

As you can see any essay or composition abides to certain rules and is somewhat rigid and typical in structure, though it makes reading and understanding much easier. It may seem that all essays will be rather impersonal and similar to each other, but in reality, a form is just that, a form, which can be filled with very different materials. The form is a sign of organization, but the content will always be unique, as unique as each person is.

The ability to write well, organize your ideas and communicate your opinions is becoming more and more important nowadays. Writing is a difficult, yet interesting process which becomes easier with each attempt you make. Remember that the more you try the better and more proficient writer you become. The best writers in the world were not born. They were made. They worked hard and honed their talent. And though you may not be so gifted to become another Tolstoy or Hemingway, you are certain to be able to write clearly and logically if you invest all you have into the charming process of writing.

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