

Essay Basics

a general overview

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EWRT IA – xx

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A Sense of Self

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge and developing reasoning and comprehension skills, all of which are crucial for personal development. The processes of education is integral for progress because it stimulates a person's curiosity and fills in the void of ignorance through learning. It also permits a person to establish his or her own sense of judgment and thought. Therefore, in a sense, education is able to liberate a person from the bindings of a limited knowledge, because it challenges the individual to obtain and explore information unperceived before. All the while it empowers that person by allowing them to build his or her own judgment and sense of self.

One great example of a person who found his true potential through education is Malcolm X. In his essay, Learning to Read, Malcolm X reminisces about his experience with education. And the struggles that he went through in order to educate himself and discover his true potential. In his essay, he describes learning to read and educating himself as opening his eyes to a new world which he had never experienced before. Yet, even though he was in prison, he was able to explore the world from the outside through his self-education. And therefore, in a sense, education liberated Malcolm X from the restrictions of prison and allowed him to explore the world through his newfound knowledge. At the beginning of his essay, Malcolm X describes his motivation to educate himself, "I became increasingly frustrated at not being able to express what I wanted to convey in letters that I wrote, especially those to Mr. Elijah Muhammad...I saw that the best things I could do was get hold of a dictionary – to study, to learn some words" (X 26-27). Through self-education Malcolm X was able to improve his vocabulary using the dictionary. And from the knowledge which he gained from the dictionary, he was able to apply in understanding the ideas within the books that he read; Allowing Malcolm X to explore a world beyond his jail cell.

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Education liberated Malcolm X from his physical boundaries and allowed him to see past the prison bars by challenging his intellect with novel information. And from this newfound knowledge Malcolm X was able to realize his true interests; which was discovering the history of his people and the expression of his thoughts. And by confronting his own ignorance, Malcolm X was able to find his goal in life, which was to aid the advancement of the African American race, "I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive... You will never catch me with a free fifteen minutes in which I'm not studying something I feel might be able to help the black man" (X 33).

Similar to Malcolm X, Fan Shen, a Chinese immigrant, was also liberated and empowered by education. In his essay "The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a key to learning English Composition", he shares his experience as an immigrant student trying to adjust to English composition. Like Malcolm X, Fan Shen had a drive for self education aimed at being able to understand English composition. Being a Chinese immigrant, Fan Shen only knew how to write English through a Chinese structure. Words like "individualism" and the sense of self was never important back in China. And being in a Communist ruled country; it was always "we" over "I". However, it wasn't until he exposed himself to American culture that he was able to truly understand English composition.

This knowledge which he gained made learning English in America much easier for Fan Shen, because he was able to change his sense of self to incorporate American social and cultural values. Like Malcolm X, Fan Shen was changed by education, "The change is profound: Through my understanding of new meanings of words like "individualism," "idealism," and "I," I began to accept the underlying concepts and values of American writing, and by learning to use "topic sentences" I began to accept new logic" (Shen 51). Fan Shen was set free through education because he was able to remedy his ignorance, which was his limited view of self. And by finding his individual voice which he didn't know he had before, he was able to keep his heritage, and understand English composition.

Much like Fan Shen, I was an immigrant student struggling with the English language. Without the education that I had through school, I would not be as proficient in the English language as I am today. Therefore, I find that education fills in the void of human curiosity, it gives us as humans the freedom to discover and explore for ourselves; and as we continue to discover and explore, we advance and progress. In many ways, education opened my eyes to a whole new world. It freed me from my ignorance, and allowed me to build a sense of self and judgment. To me education liberated me in the sense that it made me into a unique individual with my own values and judgment. In a way, education kept me from being oppressed because it allowed me to analyze my own interests and thoughts based on my judgment; not the thoughts and interests of others.

Ultimately, education liberates people by allowing them to become unique individuals through the exploration of knowledge. Education protects us from being oppressed by others because it allows us to question authority and think for ourselves. Also, education empowers us because it allows us to improve basic skills and obtain new ones which open profoundly different worlds for us to explore. Therefore, without education we wouldn't be able to advance because the chains of a limited knowledge would ultimately hold down our potentials. And if we couldn't obtain newfound knowledge, we would not be able to empower ourselves to see the world in different ways, have our own point of view, or question the world itself. Therefore, without education, we are willingly allowing ourselves to be kept in the dark and oppressed by others.

works cited

Shen, Fan. "The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition." *Readings for Writers*. Ed. Nick Mullins. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. 42-52. Print.

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Essay Definition

- An essay is a formal written statement of an **argument**.

An argument is a point of view that you are explaining and defending.

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 - it takes a stand, makes an arguable claim
- **persuasive**
 - it tries to convince the reader the argument is valid
- **interactive**
 - it engages with the audience

Essay Elements

- The argument is your **thesis**.
When presented in one or more sentences, it is a **thesis statement**.

thesis = **topic** + **opinion**

Thesis = Topic + Opinion

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Essay Elements

- An essay always contains multiple paragraphs.
- The **introduction** begins the essay and usually contains the thesis statement.

It can be one paragraph or several.

Essay Elements: Introduction

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Essay Elements

- The thesis is supported and explained by evidence provided in the **body paragraphs**.

A body paragraph always has:

- a stated **point**
- specific evidence (**illustration**)
- clear **explanation** of that evidence

Essay Elements: Body Paragraphs

One great example of a person who found his true potential through education is Malcolm X. In his essay, *Learning to Read*, Malcolm X reminisces about his experience with education and the struggles that he went through in order to educate himself and discover his true potential. In his essay, he describes learning to read and educating himself as opening his eyes to a new world which he had never experienced before. Yet, even though he was in prison, he was able to explore the world from the outside through his self-education. And therefore, in a sense, education liberated Malcolm X from the restrictions of prison and allowed him to explore the world through his newfound knowledge. At the beginning of his essay, Malcolm X describes his motivation to educate himself, "I became increasingly frustrated at not being able to express what I wanted to convey in letters that I wrote, especially those to Mr. Elijah Muhammad...I saw that the best things I could do was get hold of a dictionary – to study, to learn some words" (X 26-27). Through self-education Malcolm X was able to improve his vocabulary using the dictionary. And from the knowledge which he gained from the dictionary, he was able to apply in understanding the ideas within the books that he read; Allowing Malcolm X to explore a world beyond his jail cell.

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Essay Elements

- The **conclusion** ends the essay and wraps up the argument.
It can be one paragraph or several.

Essay Elements: Conclusion

Ultimately, education liberates people by allowing them to become unique individuals through the exploration of knowledge. Education protects us from being oppressed by others because it allows us to question authority and think for ourselves. Also, education empowers us because it allows us to improve basic skills and obtain new ones which open profoundly different worlds for us to explore. Therefore, without education we wouldn't be able to advance because the chains of a limited knowledge would ultimately hold down our potentials. And if we couldn't obtain newfound knowledge, we would not be able to empower ourselves to see the world in different ways, have our own point of view, or question the world itself. Therefore, without education, we are willingly allowing ourselves to be kept in the dark and oppressed by others.

Essay Elements

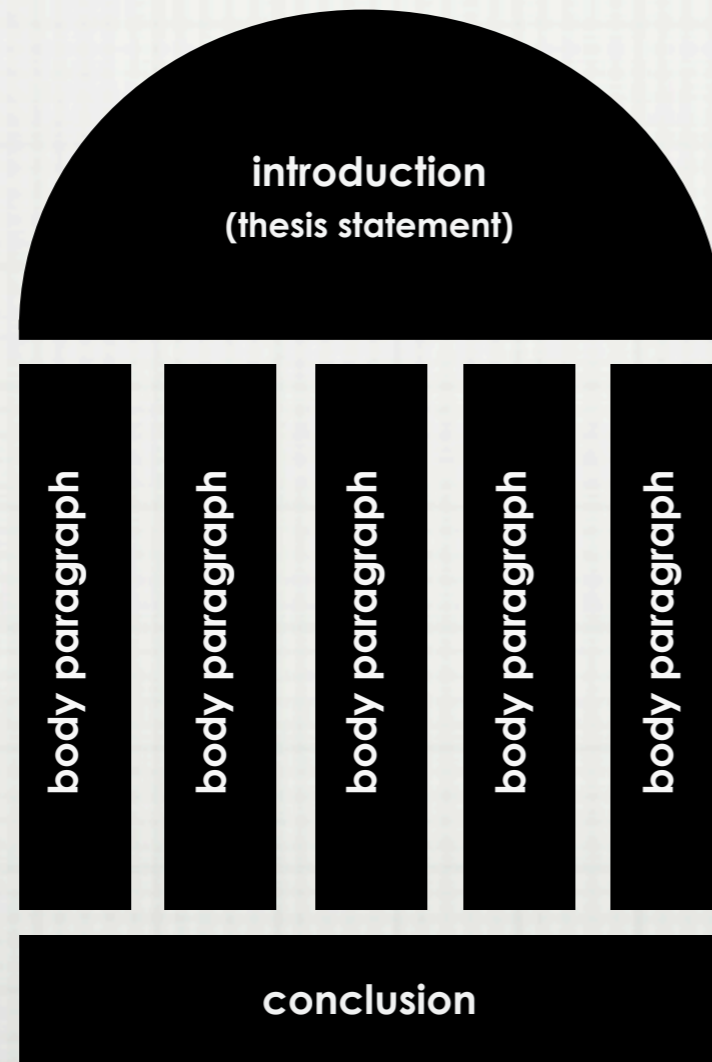
- All the elements- introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion- work to progress the argument. All support the thesis.

Essay Elements

Basic essay structure

The essay should be a unified piece of writing. The unifying principle for an essay is the **thesis**. Everything—the examples, the style, the conclusion, etc.—should work towards supporting and reinforcing the thesis.

Imagine the essay as an architectural structure:



The introduction is the dome that covers the essay. It establishes the scope of the essay and draws the reader into the rest of the paper. An introduction generally contains a thesis statement, which is the focus of the entire paper.

thesis = topic + opinion/insight

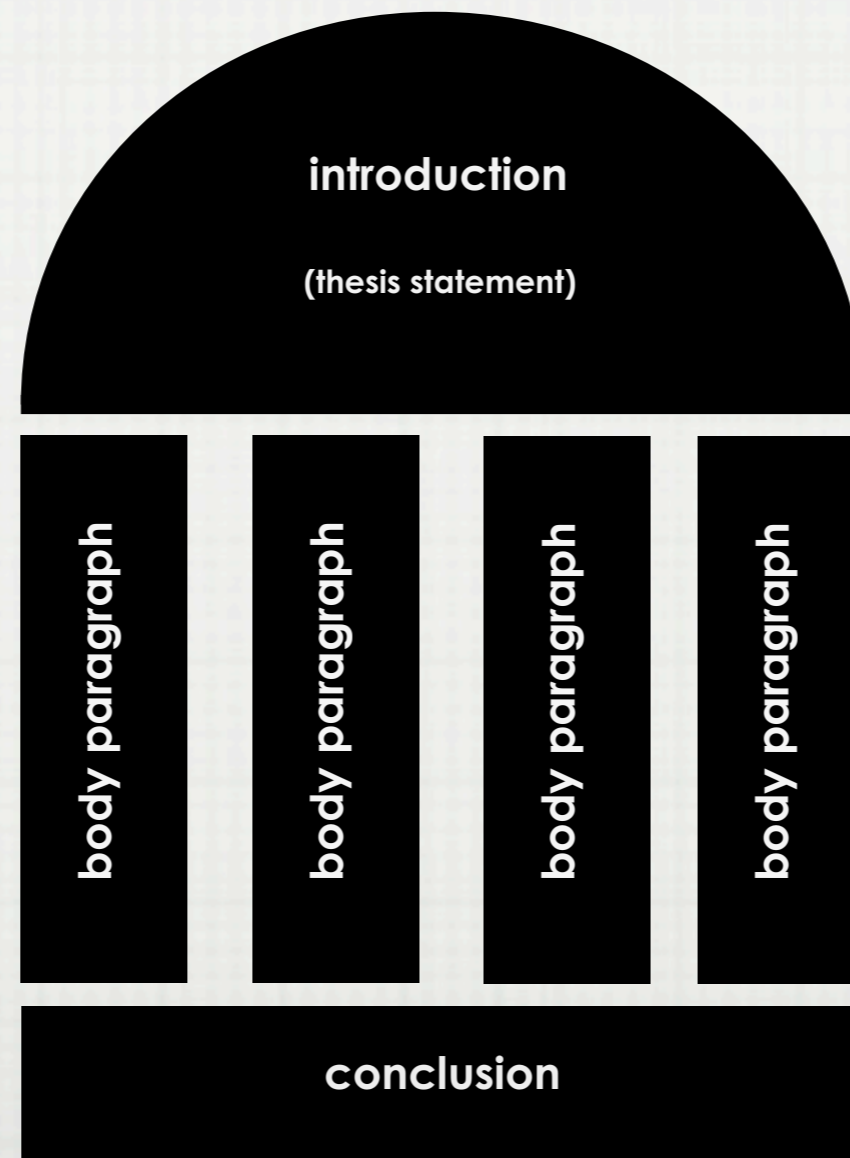
Each body paragraph must support the thesis.

That means that the arguments and examples in each paragraph must not only relate to the topic of the paper, but also to the opinion/insight on that topic.

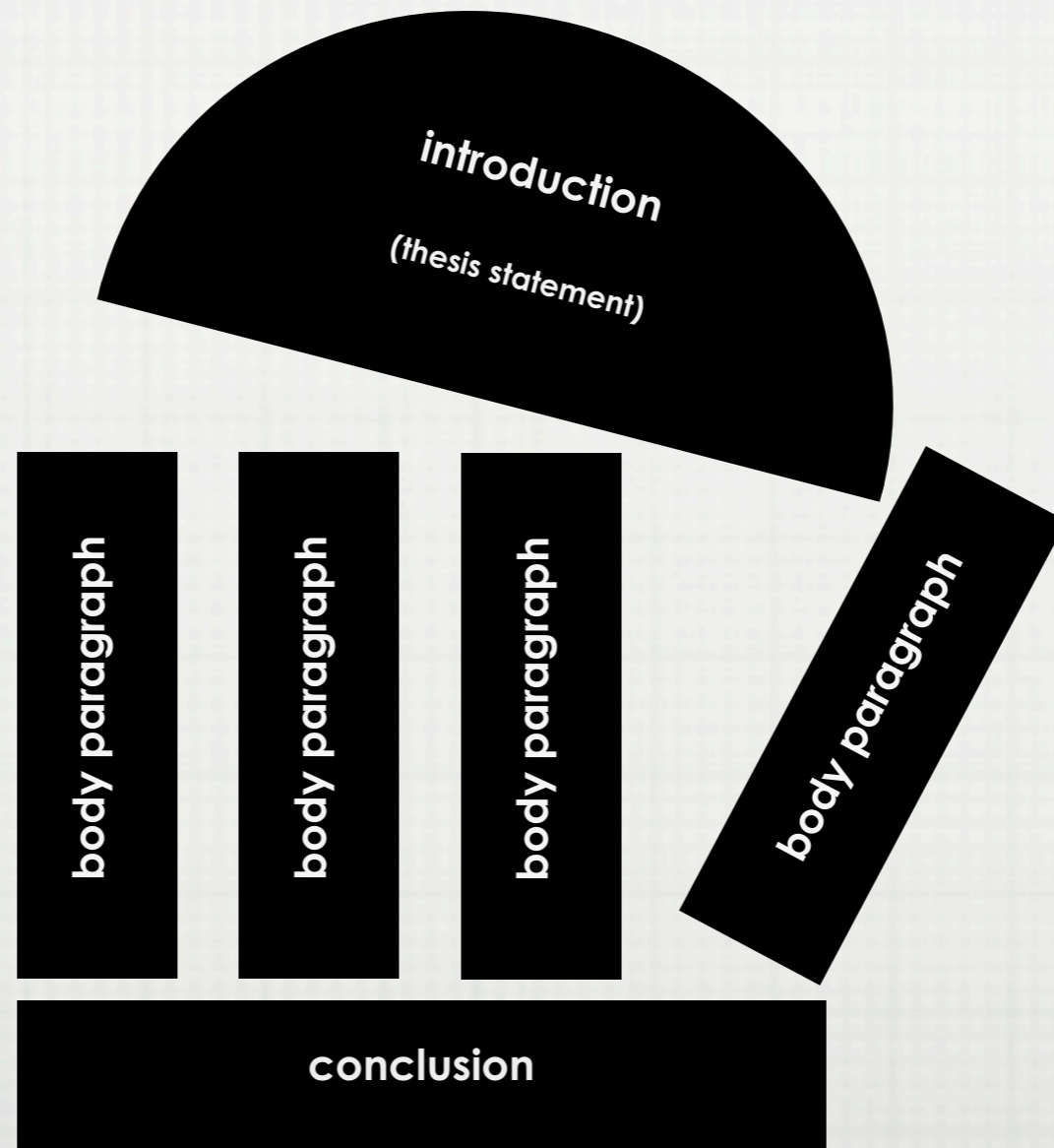
If a body paragraph does not give detail about both the topic and the opinion/insight, then the thesis will be unsupported and the essay will come crashing down.

Everything comes to rest on the conclusion. If the conclusion brings up a new topic or opinion/insight, then the essay will have no base and will be left incomplete.

Essay Elements



Essay Elements



Essay Writing Assignments

- Every essay is written for a **purpose** and an **audience**.

A writer must understand the purpose and audience before writing.

Essay Writing Assignments

Purpose = topic + method

Topic

What the essay prompt asks you to write about.
Look for nouns.

Method

How you are supposed to address the topic.
Look for verbs.

Essay Writing Assignments

- **Audience.**

Who the essay is written for, the intended reader(s).

If the assignment does not name a specific audience, assume the audience is the instructor and the other students in the class.

Essay Writing Assignments

- The written situation given to you by your instructor is called a **prompt**. The prompt should name the purpose and audience for your paper, as well as any other constraints, such as page count and citation style.

Your task as a student is follow the prompt to generate your essay. You need to make sure that the thesis statement you develop is on prompt.

Most prompts are put in the form of questions, so one way to make sure your are sticking to the prompt is to turn the question into a statement.

Essay Writing Assignments

Sample prompt:

Paulo Freire believes that most school systems make their students into passive drones, not into critical thinkers. Do you agree with him?

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Tentative thesis statement:

Because of my years in school, I agree wholeheartedly with Freire's idea that school makes us into passive drones, not critical thinkers.

Essay Writing Assignments

- The thesis statement that you use to get you started is known as a **tentative thesis statement**.

“Tentative” means not fixed. As you work on your essay, your thesis may change. That’s fine. In fact, that’s good. Your tentative thesis is just a starting point. It is what helps get you going, not necessarily where you end up.