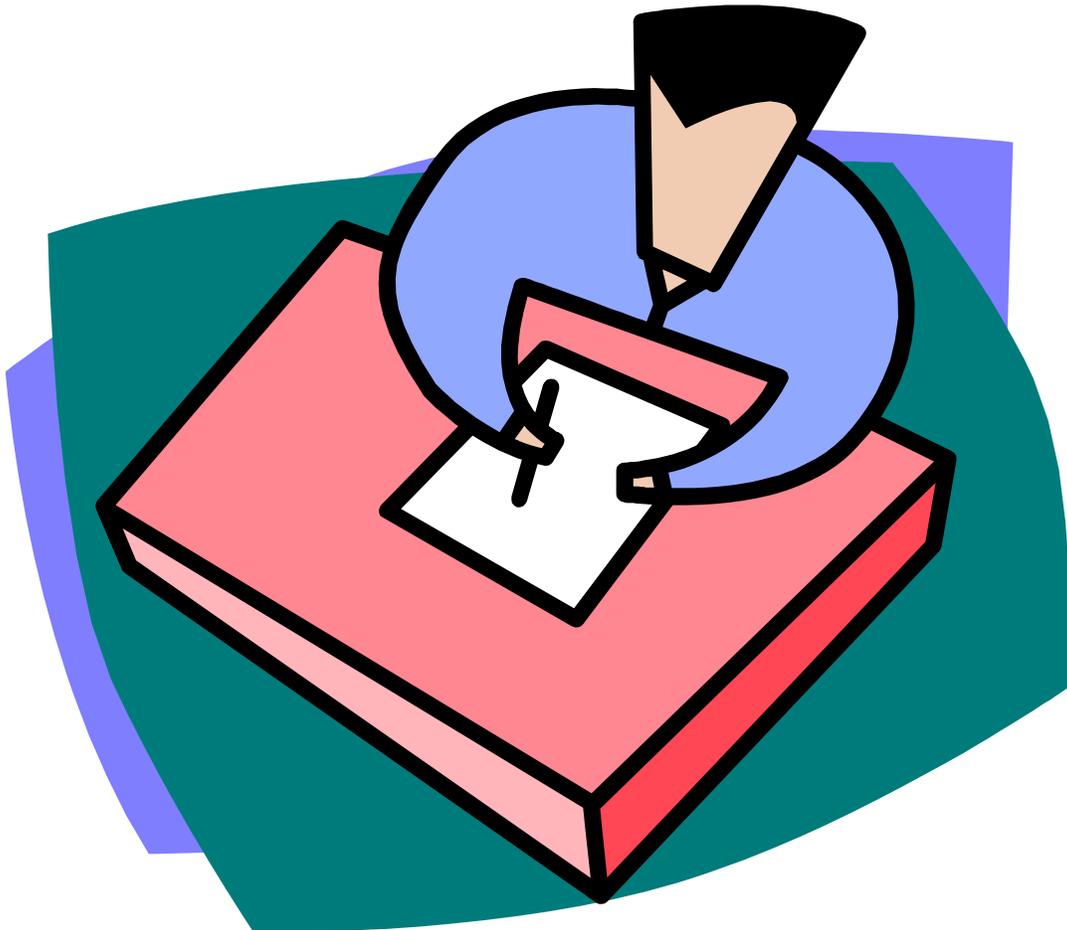


# Writing the Timed Essay



## HOW TO WRITE A TIMED ESSAY TEST

1. Read all the questions carefully. If you choose the ones you will answer, do the ones that offer the most points.
2. Start with the first question. If you are totally unsure of what to write, then skip it and answer another question instead to give yourself confidence.
3. Read the question carefully. Beware of two-part questions.  
Example: "Name the most influential U.S. Presidents of the twentieth century AND describe their foreign policies."
4. Brainstorm, that is, write down any words or phrases that come into your mind. (Write them in the margin or on scrap paper).
5. Look at these words and phrases and group them into several categories. This will help you to organize your essay into main ideas, explanations, or examples.
6. The number of points offered for each question will help you to determine how many main points you need to make in your answer.
7. Begin each paragraph with the main point you are making and then give examples or explanations. You may even want to underline your main point. (Hint: Sometimes you may think of an example first. Leave several spaces blank and write down the example. After you have expressed it in writing, you may be able to determine how this example relates to the question. Then you can fill in the main point.)
8. Start writing as soon as possible because the very act of writing may help you to remember more information.
9. Leave some blank spaces in case you need to fill in more information.
10. When you are out of ideas, STOP. Don't pad your answer. REREAD the question to be sure you have answered every part of it.
11. If there is time, then write a concluding statement by summarizing your main points.
12. If you have more to say but you are out of time, then finish the answer in list or outline form. You will probably receive partial credit.

## STEPS FOR WRITING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

1. Identify the issue. Here's one: "Should new mothers leave the hospital the same day as giving birth?"
2. Decide what you think about it. Take a strong position: "Early release from the hospital is dangerous for new mothers and their babies."
3. Why do you believe this? Brainstorm ideas. Draw a map. Ask questions. Make a list:

exhaustion, baby's possible jaundice

difficult labor, emotional bonding time

complications, help at home?

how to care for the baby

4. Group ideas together. Select the best reasons to support your argument.
5. Begin writing your introduction. Don't forget to write a thesis sentence. List or mention in the first paragraph why you have your opinion.

### I. Introduction:

"Who thought of this? Releasing new mothers from the hospital the same day as delivery is incomprehensible. New mothers are exhausted. Medically, early release is dangerous for mothers who might suffer complications. Babies might have problems that could be overlooked. Emotionally, this is a mind field for all involved."

### II. Body of the essay

This should be about three or more paragraphs. Explain in detail each of your three main reasons of support. You can devote a single paragraph to each reason and then discuss in specific terms what your reason means, citing examples. Use transition words to help you get from paragraph to paragraph. Transition words are first, in addition, finally, another reason. Transitions can come naturally. This might be your third paragraph:

"New mothers are not the only ones affected by release from hospitals. Studies have cited numerous incidents where newborns are at increased risk. [Now explain what is meant by that.] Jaundice, a serious deficiency affecting the infant's liver, cannot be tested in the early hours after delivery. Many babies suffer permanent damage if jaundice is overlooked. Not all mothers are aware of this danger, which can easily be avoided by a more reasonable hospital stay."

### III. Conclusion

After writing at least three paragraphs supporting your thesis, conclude your essay. A concluding paragraph can summarize your ideas and perhaps offer an additional insight:

“The insurance industry may save much money by preventing a healthier hospital stay for mothers and their babies. But the human costs are high. A mother loses valuable emotional time to adjust to one of the most important events of her life and to bond with her child. A mother’s medical risks go unmonitored. But for the youngest patient, a baby without the ability to communicate, early hospital discharge poses perhaps the greatest health risk and potential tragedy. Is it worth it?”

Don’t forget to proofread. Circle words as you are writing. Look them up after you have finished writing. You’re done!

## Introductions and Conclusions

Student: “I just can’t write this paper.”

Friend: “What’s the problem?”

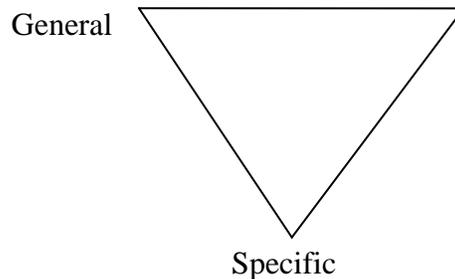
Student: “I have some ideas about the paper, but I don’t know how to start. What can I do?”

Have you ever felt discouraged about starting a paper? Most students have experienced those feelings at one time or another, and even the best and most experienced writers occasionally are subject to writer’s block. The good news is that there are ways to solve this problem and proceed with the task at hand, writing a paper.

If you have ever experienced writer’s block and told yourself that the situation is hopeless, these techniques should help you. Instead of sabotaging yourself with negative thoughts, first decide that *you can* and *will* write the paper. As part of your planning, you can do one of several things to get started. During this prewriting phase, you might find it easier to simply start writing and decide later what material and expressions are appropriate. This freewriting, without concern for the formal conventions of writing or the precise content of your paper, will allow you begin the process. Another technique, brainstorming, encourages you to list some of the major and minor points under consideration for inclusion in this paper. Also, it is important to construct a working thesis, which can be polished later, for this thesis serves to focus your ideas.

Once you are ready to start writing the introductory paragraph, consider your purpose, your audience, and recall that there are numerous ways to stimulate interest in your topic such as providing background information, telling a story, or describing a scene; all work well to engage the reader. Sometimes, you might want to include short dialogues or quotations, if appropriate. On the other hand, challenging commonly held beliefs and acknowledging possible areas of agreement or disagreement may also draw the reader’s interest. Remember that you want your reader to become involved in what you wrote and to find it both interesting and credible.

If you have not already developed a clear thesis, a one sentence statement which encompasses the central ideas of the paper, now is the time to do so. While the thesis can be found anywhere within the introductory paragraph, it is most frequently found at the end of the paragraph where it serves as a wonderful transition to the body of the paper. This form of introduction is called the inverted pyramid where you can move your ideas deductively from general to specific statements.



While this approach of placing the thesis at the end of the introductory paragraph works well, you will not always want to use it because constant use of the same form may be boring. Thus, the best suggestion is to vary your approaches.

When you develop your thesis, remember that it should be broad enough to cover your ideas but specific enough so that it would not be appropriate for any paper written on the topic.

**INADEQUATE EXAMPLES:** Every family must deal with disagreements.  
Cancer is a dreaded disease in America.

Instead, develop a thesis which is specific enough to convey the author's viewpoint but general enough to permit inclusion of all of the main points.

**GOOD EXAMPLES:** Cigarette smoking causes health problems for both the smoker and non-smoker, pollutes the environment, and is an expensive habit.

Euthanasia is a highly controversial subject that needs to be considered from medical, religious, and personal perspectives.

“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson discusses the reluctance of people to give up old customs even if these traditions perpetuate evil and cruelty.

If all else fails and you understand the ideas you want to communicate but at the moment lack the wording to write the introduction, begin by writing the body of the paper. While this latter idea may seem unorthodox, it immediately works to involve you in the writing process. Thus, you can see that there is no one “right” way to begin the writing of a paper.

On the opposite end, once you are satisfied that you have accomplished your purpose and communicated what you wanted in the body paragraphs, you need to provide the reader with closure. Just as you have various options to begin a paper, you have several ways to conclude a paper. Depending on the paper's purpose, you can share your belief, make a prediction, or even recommend a course of action. You can use a quotation or a piece of dialogue if it supports your thesis. Restating your thesis and summarizing the major points are the most commonly used techniques. However, if you have written a narrative paper or one that begins with an anecdote, you can bring the reader full circle and revisit your introductory comments by paraphrasing ideas.

After you have completed writing the paper, remember to edit it and proofread it. Putting your paper aside for twenty-four hours before proofreading is ideal; however, that may not always be possible. Also, one reading is not sufficient to note needed changes. Reading aloud is advisable because it slows your rate of reading and makes you more aware of your errors. By considering your purpose and audience, your thesis statement and support, your organization, and grammar and mechanics as you edit your paper, you will produce a well-written paper.

## Common Strategies for Introductions

**Definition** - Start off by defining a key term relevant to your subject.

“Setting, in regards to literature, refers to the time and place in which an event occurs. Setting is important in short stories and plays and poems just as it is in real life. Our behavior changes all the time, depending on where we are and what particular time it may be. At home we act one way, at school another, and at work perhaps even another. Setting does influence the characters and events in a piece of literature, and we can see that clearly in the short story “Greasy Lake” by T. Coraghessan Boyle.”

**Questions** - Get your reader involved by asking him or her a question relevant to your subject.

“What do you think of when you hear someone described as ‘Bad’? I think of a big, fat, bearded, long-haired, hippie-like dude who rides a big chopper of a Harley-Davidson and wears a leather jacket with a dragon on the back, some ripped up jeans, and a pair of wrinkled, mud stained cowboy boots. Now that is one bad dude that I wouldn’t want to see in a dark alley. The three self-proclaimed ‘bad’ characters in the short story “Greasy Lake” do everything a Harley dude would do, but they don’t drive Harleys; they drive their fathers’ station wagons. Eventually, they realize that being ‘bad’ isn’t such a good idea, and because of this change they qualify as dynamic characters.”

**Current Attitudes** - Introduce your subject by surveying the range of attitudes that people have about it.

“Skeptics said it wouldn’t last. They said it was only a passing fad. Others condemned it and demanded that it be censored. Well guess what? Rap music, the word from the street, is more popular than ever before. The lyrics, music, and messages reach the ears of young people faster, and make more of a positive impact, than anything else. Yet, people still want to censor rap because of the sensitive subjects it deals with. I believe that if you judge something without taking the time to consider the facts, then you are just as bad as the people you condemn. With that in mind, I hope to educate those people who want to censor rap music.”

**Anecdote (Story)** - Get your reader involved by telling a story relevant to your subject.

“As I sat in the car, I leaned over and saw my brother’s finger dangling as if it had been broken. I felt as if nothing had happened to me. I peered into the cracked rear-view mirror and saw blood streaming from my forehead and down my face. I then realized the car accident had put me into a state of shock, which explained why I couldn’t feel anything. I didn’t know it at the time, but the driver of the car who sideswiped us was in worse shape than I was.”

**Quote** - Start with a quote from one of your sources or from a relevant personal experience.

“‘I love you a lot, but I still need the freedom to be able to date other people. I think it would make our relationship even better.’ Have these words ever been spoken to you by a boyfriend or girlfriend? Perhaps you have spoken them yourself. I, for one, have heard these words one too many times, and from past experience I have realized how unrealistic they really are. Dating others while you are seriously involved with someone else cannot make either relationship better. In fact, soon after these words are first spoken, it’s just a matter of time before the primary relationship falls apart.”

Would You Want To Keep Reading?

“Today, one of the problems our society has is babies who are born addicted to drugs or suffer from alcohol withdrawal. It’s ruining our country. I recently discovered many questions and answers to this social problem. I have done my research on fetal alcohol syndrome.”

“I believe the play “Trifles” is a feminist work due to its support of women’s rights and interests. The men treat the women unfairly, and they didn’t seem interested in what the women have to say. I will discuss the reasons why it is a feminist play.”

“Several characters in the short story “The Found Boat” were dynamic because they changed throughout the story. Dynamic characters make literature more interesting, and I found this to be the case here as well. Without characters that change, the reader becomes too familiar with what is happening, and nothing really surprises the reader. That would make a boring story. All three boys changed and so did two of the girls.”

## PLAN FOR A PAPER: OPTION ONE

### CONTROLLING IDEAS\*

OUTLINE TITLE

I. INTRODUCTION

II. SUPPORT PARAGRAPH

- A.
- B.
- C.

III. SUPPORT PARAGRAPH

- A.
- B.
- C.

IV. SUPPORT PARAGRAPH

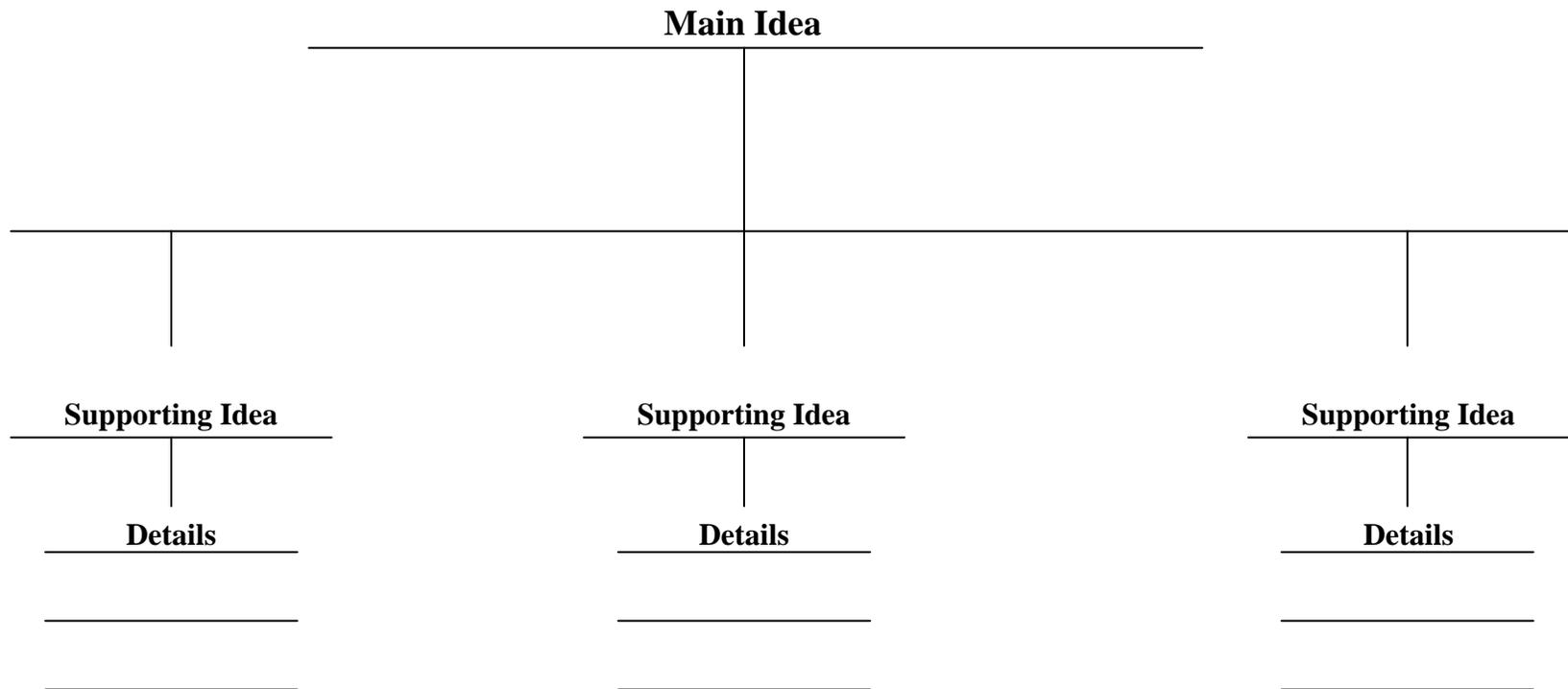
- A.
- B.
- C.

V. CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

TITLE
<p>INTRODUCTION: Subject (what the essay is about)</p> <p>THESIS STATEMENT (controls entire essay)</p>
<p>TOPIC SENTENCE (controls entire paragraph) DETAILS OR EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT TOPIC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SUPPORT PARAGRAPH FOR THESIS STATEMENT</p>
<p>TOPIC SENTENCE (controls entire paragraph) DETAILS OR EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT TOPIC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SUPPORT PARAGRAPH FOR THESIS STATEMENT</p>
<p>TOPIC SENTENCE (controls entire paragraph) DETAILS OR EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT TOPIC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SUPPORT PARAGRAPH FOR THESIS STATEMENT</p>
CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

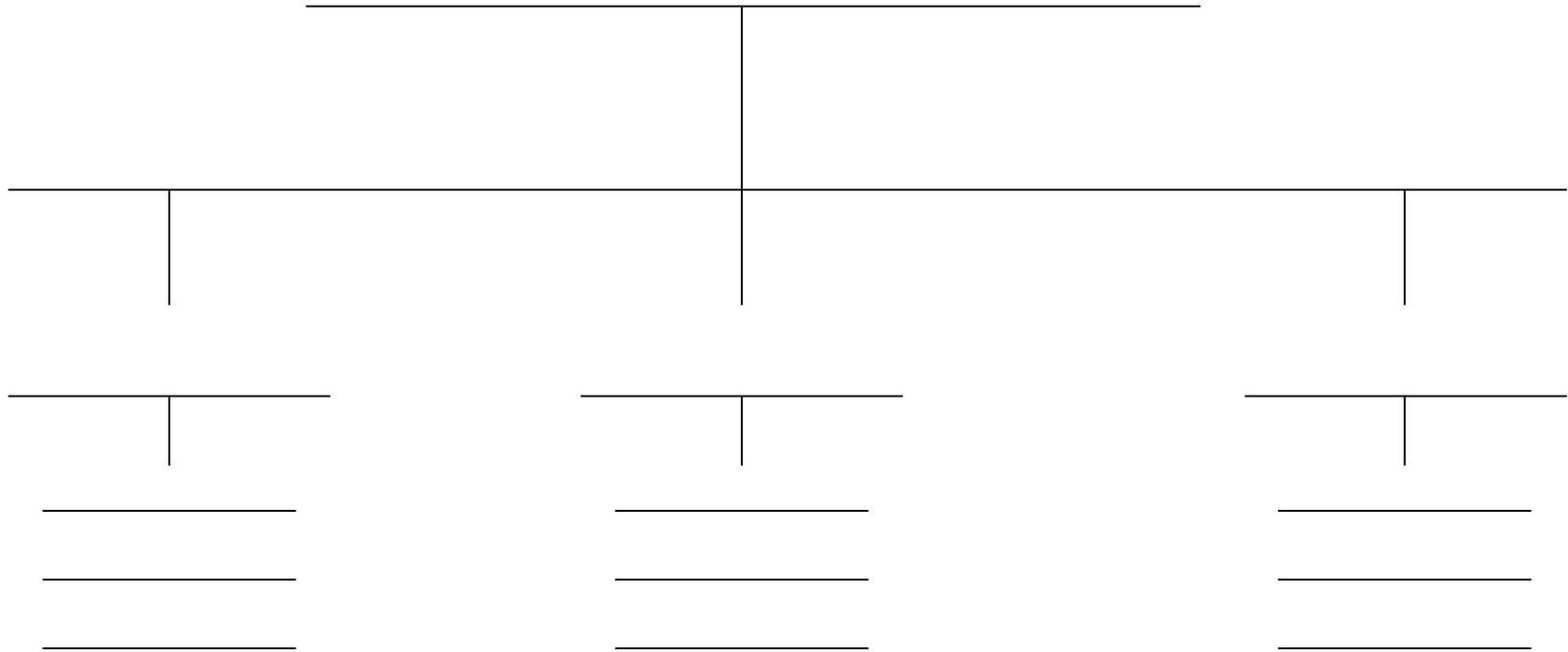
\*Not written at top of paper or outline unless requested by instructor.

## PLAN FOR A PAPER: OPTION TWO





## PLAN FOR A PAPER: OPTION TWO (blank format)



## THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis is a one-sentence statement that encompasses the central idea (the main point) of an essay. It should be specific enough to convey the author's attitude but general enough to permit inclusion of all of the points. The specifics must logically support the thesis. Thus, the thesis is an umbrella statement---it covers all beneath it.

While the thesis can theoretically be found anywhere within the introductory paragraph, the thesis is frequently placed at the conclusion of that paragraph. Many students find this placement advantageous because it serves as a transition to the body paragraphs.

Yet, students frequently comment that published writers often dispense with a thesis. Admittedly, this is true. Published writers have developed the skills necessary to suggest the controlling idea without writing a single, focused sentence that functions as a thesis. However, one caution must be given. As a student writer, always construct a good thesis. Remember that when you have become a published writer, you too can bend the rules.

### EXAMPLE THESIS STATEMENTS:

Cigarette smoking causes health problems for both the smoker and non-smoker, pollutes the environment, and is an expensive habit.

Euthanasia is a highly controversial subject, which needs to be considered from medical, religious, and personal perspectives.

"The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson discusses the reluctance of people to give up old customs even if these traditions perpetuate evil and cruelty.

## THESIS STATEMENTS: ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

Before writing an essay, you need to have a clear idea of your purpose. What is your subject? What is your attitude toward the subject? What are your reasons for believing as you do? The answers to these questions are expressed in one or two sentences called the “thesis statement.”

The thesis statement serves two functions. First, it informs the reader of the essay’s purpose; actually, you can view it as a promise to your reader that you will discuss that, and only that, issue. Thus, you set up an expectation in the reader’s mind and you don’t want to disappoint him/her by not fulfilling that promise. Second, the thesis statement helps you stay on task to fulfill the promise of the thesis statement. As you develop your ideas, it is good practice to frequently read your thesis statement to make sure that you are not straying from the essay’s purpose. For example, if you are arguing that drivers should not be allowed to use cell phones unless they pull off to the side of the road, and, then, you begin to discuss different kinds of cell phones, a quick rereading of the thesis will get you back on track. You will immediately realize that this discussion is irrelevant to your thesis.

Thesis statements must fulfill two requirements; they must be debatable and developable. When planning an argumentative essay, you must choose an issue that has at least two sides. Let’s test our cell phone statement to determine whether or not it is a valid thesis statement. Because some people believe that talking on cell phones is not distracting, we do have a debatable thesis. Now we must consider how this thesis will be developed. How can we prove that cell

phones are a dangerous distraction? Because there is very little data pointing to how many accidents are directly caused by the use of cell phone use, the thesis is not developable, which forces us either to find another angle to our topic or another topic entirely.

Determine whether or not the following sentences are thesis statements. Place an X next to valid theses and tell what kind of evidence could be used to support them.

1. Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, is located in West Virginia.
2. Shopping malls are a symbol of the decline of traditional American values.
3. In the United States, pets are treated better than people.
4. Honesty is not always the best policy.
5. Tobacco companies are now experiencing the moral outrage of juries.

Prepared by G. Volner:0002  
ZipA:thesis statements.doc

**IDENTIFYING THESIS STATEMENTS**

In each pair of statements, one is clearly preferable as a thesis. Circle the letter in front of the thesis statement and explain why it qualifies as a thesis and in what ways it might be developed.

1.    A. Synthetic fabrics have revolutionized the manufacture of clothing.  
      B. Dacron was introduced in 1941.
  
2.    A. Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus.  
      B. Many American Christmas customs originated in England.
  
3.    A. More than three million American children are being raised by their grandparents.  
      B. Unfortunately, the courts are reluctant to allow grandparents to adopt their grandchildren.
  
4.    A. Acupuncture is the attempt to cure illnesses by puncturing specified areas of the skin with needles.  
      B. The traditional Chinese practice of acupuncture is being used more widely in the United States as an anesthetic and as treatment of headaches, hay fever, and extreme pain.
  
5.    A. Carbon monoxide is an extremely poisonous gas.  
      B. A replacement for the internal combustion engine may be necessary to reduce pollution by carbon monoxide.

## Outline: Organization

In each exercise below, there is a list of words and a skeleton outline. Each list of words includes both main topics and subtopics. (Subtopics are those terms that may be included in the main topic). The skeleton outline shows how many main topics are in the list (indicated by the Roman numerals) and how many subtopics under each main topic (indicated by the letters). Begin each main topic and subtopic with a capital letter but do not follow a topic with a period.

### EXERCISE ONE

plate, foul, baseball, tennis, service, mask, court, mound, alley

- I. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- II. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_

### EXERCISE TWO

trumpet, square, instruments, chisel, wrench, flute, plane, violin, file, tools

- I. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- II. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. \_\_\_\_\_

### EXERCISE THREE

hare, flicker, beetle, mole, vulture, bison, insects, burro, cricket, birds, roach, gull, raven, mosquito, eagle, loon, animals.

- I. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- II. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- III. \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. \_\_\_\_\_

**PRE-WRITING ACTIVITY**

Students often struggle to organize their ideas when preparing to write an essay. One of the easiest ways to generate ideas is by writing out various lists. Sometimes it helps to divide a topic into several lists and then combine the ideas while writing the essay. If, for example, you are writing an essay about the benefits of exercise, some of your category lists might look like these.

The Benefits of ExercisePhysical

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Emotional

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Spiritual

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

By breaking the topic down into categories, you can generate ideas for your thesis as well as determine which ideas or topics are too narrow or broad.

After writing out several lists, you should be able to make a clear and concise outline for your essay! Breaking down your essay topic into categories will make the writing process easier for you! Try it!

## PERSUASION

Start a persuasive paper by making a statement that tells what you are for or against. This is your thesis statement.

Example: “Children should be taught to swim before they learn to walk.”

This should then be supported with most, if not all, of the following methods.

There are five methods of support to use when writing a persuasive paper. These are: answering the **O**pposition; **F**acts; referring to an **A**uthority; predicting the **C**onsequences; and **E**xamples (**OFACE**). Here are explanations of these methods and examples of each:

**OPPOSITION:** State the opposing (opposite) viewpoint from your thesis and prove it FALSE.

“Some people say that teaching children to swim when they are very young makes them afraid of the water. However, exactly the opposite is true. Children are more comfortable in the water if they have been exposed to it in a positive manner when they are babies.”

**FACTS:** Support your opinion with facts (information or statistics you can check in a dictionary, encyclopedia, or other sources).

“According to the July 1991 issue of *Parents Magazine*, the majority of children who learn to swim as toddlers, swim well and without fear of the water.”

**AUTHORITY:** Refer to an expert on which you can rely for facts and information. This authority should be fairly well known.

“Mark Spitz, an Olympic swim champion, conducts a swimming clinic that begins with swim classes for four-month old babies. He says, “The younger the baby, the better. Most of my swimmers are happier and safer if they’ve started to enjoy the water before they walk.”

**CONSEQUENCES:** Predict what could occur if your argument does or does not happen.

“If we do not teach all our children to swim at an early age, we will continue to have a great number of children drown every year.”

**EXAMPLES:** These should be typical and relate well to the thesis.

“This year, three young children have fallen into unattended pools. Because two of those three children had had a ‘water safety’ class, they survived. The other child did not.”

Using what you have learned above, do the exercise on the following page.

Adapted from: (Fawcett and Sandberg’s EVERGREEN: A GUIDE TO WRITING)

## PERSUASION EXERCISE

Ten topic sentences are below. Write one reason to support each using the method of persuasion indicated.

### FACTS

1. More parking spaces should be provided at Oakton for students.

---

---

2. Students should not be allowed to take a full course load if they work more than twenty-five hours a week.

---

---

### AUTHORITY

3. These new "error-free" computers will definitely raise the grades on the essays you write.

---

---

4. Most students should study at least three hours a week for every three-hour class they attend.

---

---

5. High school should provide tutoring to all students.

---

---

6. Colleges should provide career counseling for free to all their graduates, past and present, because students need a central clearing house.

---

---

## PREDICTING THE CONSEQUENCES

7. Smoking should be banished from the college completely.

---

---

8. All community college registration should be “phone-in”.

---

---

## ANSWERING THE OPPOSITION

9. The college should have one attendance policy for all departments.

---

---

10. There should be strictly-enforced, quiet, study areas throughout the college.

---

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Prepared by E. Rosati: 9103  
EGL ZIP A: Persuas.doc

## ESSAY WRITING

### MY LIFE: BETTER IN \_\_\_\_\_

#### I. Introduction

##### A. Background information

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

##### B. Thesis statement: In general my life is/was better in \_\_\_\_\_.

##### 1. Reasons

- a.
- b.
- c.

#### II. Reason Number One

##### A. Topic sentence: "The first reason my life was/is better in \_\_\_\_\_ was/is because...."

##### B. Support for topic sentence (details, examples)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### III. Reason Number Two

##### A. Topic sentence: "The next reason my life was/is better in \_\_\_\_\_ was/is because...."

##### B. Support for topic sentence (details, examples)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

IV. Reason Number Three

- A. Topic sentence: "The final reason my life was/is better in \_\_\_\_\_ was/is because...."
- B. Support for topic sentence (details, examples)
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

V. Conclusion

- A. Restate thesis: "My life was/is better in because.... (briefly restate reasons).
- B. Give comments.

EXAMPLES:

"In conclusion, my life was more enjoyable in the country where I was born, but I hope that as more time passes, I will feel more comfortable living in the United States."

or

"In conclusion, my life in the United States is generally better than my life in \_\_\_\_\_, but I miss my friends and family back home and wish they were here with me."

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR SUCCEEDING ON THE WSAT

This handout is designed to explain how to increase the chances of success on Oakton's Writing Skills Assessment Test (WSAT), the school's primary diagnostic tool for determining appropriate placement in English writing courses. It addresses several (though probably not all) helpful hints for preparing to take the test effectively and efficiently. Please feel free also to consult or take any other ISS handouts that more specifically treat any of the many technical elements of writing noted below.

### 1. Budget Time Wisely

In most cases, the time allotted to take the WSAT is fifty (50) minutes. The time is both limited and fleeting. Recognizing this time pressure, you may wish to budget your time wisely to cover all the steps below. Following are rough timetables to remember when taking your WSAT:

#### *50 Minute Time Limit:*

- Read Directions and Select Topic (5 minutes)
- Read Topic again, Prewrite, and Organize (5 – 10 minutes)
- Write Response (20 – 25 minutes)
- Revise Response (5 –10 minutes)

### 2. Read Opening Directions Carefully

While the opening directions may seem basic and clear, you should read the directions completely and understand them fully before continuing with the test. Within these directions, five details are especially important.

First, note that they are being asked to write an essay, which carries many assumptions about writing discussed further below. For now, test takers should note they are to understand and utilize principles of essay writing, such as writing a strong thesis, developing that thesis, structuring the development in an essay form, and writing that essay clearly and concisely.

Second, observe that you are to write on only one of two topics listed. Doing so should help you focus on writing an appropriate one-topic essay response. Some test takers, however, do not select one topic and instead respond to both topics; such a practice usually results in placement in a developmental course.

Third, you may write an outline or notes in the WSAT's "Notes" section; certainly planning a response there before writing an essay can help greatly in developing the thesis, support, and structure. Unfortunately, many test takers simply start writing a response before any sort of prewriting, including outlining and note taking.

Fourth, you may use a dictionary and/or thesaurus throughout the test. Using these references effectively can assist you significantly in reading/understanding directions and topics fully, spelling words correctly, choosing words wisely, and adding word variety. Regrettably, some test takers ignore these sources and, thus, risk misunderstanding directions and topics and including many misspelled, misused, or overused words.

Fifth, you are reminded in the directions that "a good essay usually has several paragraphs, good organization, and well-supported opinions." While these writing elements are considered fully below, essentially, they mean you should write, at a minimum, a five-paragraph essay (an introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph) offering a strong thesis on one topic and developing that thesis through specific reasons, examples, and other evidence.

### 3. Select One Topic Smartly

To account for test takers' differing experiences, interests, and views as well as to allow for some degree of choice, the WSAT offers two topics from which you should select one. As a way to avoid the topic selection

difficulties noted above, you should try to select topics based on the following criteria:

*Greater Comprehension of a Topic:* Understanding exactly what the general topic and what any of the specific terms mean will increase the likelihood of writing an appropriate response.

*Higher Interest Level in a Topic:* Interest in a topic's subject matter as well as a strong opinion concerning it will increase the likelihood of writing about it strongly.

*Better Ability to Write a Strong Response for a Topic:* Confidence in what ideas to write and how to write them relatively quickly and easily, regardless of interest levels in the topic, will increase the quality of the response.

#### **4. Address and Attack the Question Accurately**

While WSAT topics cover many different issues, essentially all topics ask the same of test takers. The questions generally are structured as follows:

1. Presentation of a controversial issue
2. Explanation of two differing sides' views regarding the issue
3. Question asked of the test taker, "What do you think about this issue?"
4. Request to take one side's view (or present an alternate view)
5. Statement directing the test taker to write an essay persuading or convincing a specified audience to believe as the test taker does concerning the issue

Recognizing this question structure, you therefore should realize you are to take one side of the controversial issue and then write a minimum five-paragraph argumentative/persuasive essay, potentially for a certain audience. Failing to take one side's view and to prove a thesis concerning it for designated readers may confuse preliminary essay writing steps.

#### **5. Prewrite a Response Carefully**

Knowing that outlining and note taking are encouraged, even recommended WSAT practices, you should prewrite (plan) in the "Notes" section before you write your essay. Numerous prewriting techniques exist; some of the most common and most useful include brainstorming, freewriting, questioning (i.e., who? what? where? when? why? and how?), diagramming, listing, and (scratch) outlining. If you already know and practice a given technique for essay writing in general, you may want to use it for the WSAT; if not, try all of them and discover a favorite. Any of these techniques can help with planning to write a WSAT essay. Overall, though, the diagramming, listing (which could include a "T chart" which is discussed below), and outlining techniques seem most frequent and most productive for experienced test takers.

#### **6. Generate and Present Strong Content Thoroughly**

While prewriting, writing, and revising WSAT responses, you should focus on creating and developing good ideas; after all, you may struggle unnecessarily by not including well-supported opinions. To assist with content, three ideas are particularly valuable.

One, you must determine and then write a clear thesis. If you already agree with one side of the controversy, then you can write a thesis based on that opinion. If not, then a "T chart," which literally looks like the letter "T," may help you. For the WSAT, it can include on its respective halves the two opposing sides and some of their major arguments. Writing and then viewing this "T" may help you to discover a thesis (as well as potential support). Ultimately, this single idea or opinion concerning the controversial issue will guide the remaining content.

Two, you should think of at least three general arguments/reasons/examples to prove this thesis. These ideas often are readily available from the prewriting effort; if not, you should try to brainstorm at least three distinct

ideas to support the thesis.

Three, you need to develop your ideas as fully as possible. Remembering the WSAT's time constraints, you may wish to observe the following guidelines for development:

Introduction Paragraph: 3-5 sentences

Body Paragraphs: 5-7 sentences

Conclusion Paragraph: 3-5 sentences

(Note: Exactly what information to include in these sentences is discussed below.)

## **7. Structure Content Clearly and Logically**

Arguably, as important as generating and presenting good content for the WSAT is, organizing that content soundly and consistently is even more important. After all, the most original arguments left unstructured can result in wholly unsuccessful responses, while rather routine arguments organized effectively can produce excellent results. In particular, three ideas may prove especially useful when structuring WSAT responses.

First, using a clear five-paragraph essay form will provide overall organization. Below are outlines for all paragraph types:

Introduction Paragraph (#1):

1. Introduce the topic and its controversy
2. Address the audience
3. State the thesis
4. Present a plan of development

Body Paragraphs (#2 - 4):

1. Topic sentence
2. Specific argument/reason/example
3. " " " "
4. " " " "
5. Concluding sentence

Conclusion Paragraph (#5):

1. Return to general topic
2. Restate the thesis
3. Restate the plan of development
4. State a final thought, prediction, or recommendation

Second, utilizing simple transitions at the beginning and end of appropriate paragraphs as well as throughout them can help test takers with adding structure. Generally, transitions such as *first*, *second*, and *third* work well to start the respective body paragraphs and ones such as *in conclusion*, *ultimately*, *to summarize*, or *in short* can begin the conclusion nicely. Further, such transitions as *for example*, *for instance*, *to illustrate*, *additionally*, *furthermore*, and *moreover* can assist with structuring evidence throughout paragraphs. Finally, transitions like *consequently*, *hence*, *therefore*, and *thus* can conclude all paragraphs strongly.

Third, the use of transitional sentences between the first and second body paragraphs and also the second and third ones can provide a final element of organization. Writing a topic sentence beginning with *In addition to ...* or *Not only ... but also ...* can connect your responses further.

## **8. Write Concisely and Precisely**

After considering all the suggestions above, you may feel relatively comfortable with the overall test taking process. Of course, the real work comes with the actual writing of the essay response. Arguably, the writing itself—the words on the WSAT booklet's pages—becomes the only true indicator of essay writing ability and

essentially determines course placement. Clearly, within the timed testing, persuasive essay writing environment, some test takers can flourish while others flounder. Thankfully, again, certain hints can assist in maximizing success. To write a clear response, four suggestions are especially noteworthy.

One, you should watch sentence construction. Simply writing consecutive complete sentences—and perhaps adding some sentence variety (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex)—and avoiding fragments and run-ons will demonstrate solid basic composition skills.

Two, utilizing a consistent point of view can add helpful regularity to the response. Considering the WSAT generally asks a “What do you think?” question, responding with “I” (first person point of view) represents a logical choice. Further, avoiding second and third person as well as skipping from one point of view to another can build this element into the response.

Three, using words wisely in three crucial ways can improve writing quality. For instance, starting with appropriate diction (level of word choice) can help; for the WSAT, you may wish to choose high (academic) or middle (popular) and avoid low (slang, conversational). Additionally, selecting words appropriately can help tremendously. Here, a dictionary or thesaurus can help you with making correct choices with word forms. For example, use the adjective *happy* instead of a noun like *happiness* where appropriate, watch homonyms (*such as, to, too, two; there/their/they're; where, were, we're; do/due*; and *it's/its*), and look for appropriate synonyms (*happy, glad, and content*) and antonyms (*happy or sad*).

Four, utilizing proper mechanics can help you to produce clean, clear writing. In this case, three matters are especially important. First, spelling all words correctly can strengthen writing quality. Any good dictionary used well can produce good spelling. If you are unsure how to spell a word and cannot find it in a dictionary, you may want to write “(sp?)” after the word. Second, punctuating sentences correctly will aid writing clarity. Generally, the most commonly used punctuation marks for the WSAT should be the period and the comma. Use commas and semicolons sparingly (less is more), and use periods or question marks to end sentences. Third, presenting the response in a solid overall form can help. In particular, paragraphing the essay correctly and writing legibly can assist you.

## **9. Revise Writing Soundly**

With five to ten minutes remaining in the WSAT session, you may become mentally and even physically exhausted. If, however, you have budgeted the time wisely, you can stop writing your responses and leave time for revising (checking and evaluating the entire essay and correcting it as needed), and, thus, you can improve the final product substantially. Below is a detailed, though not exhaustive, checklist for revision:

1. A five-paragraph persuasive essay in appropriate form; that is, use five paragraphs: Introduction, three Body paragraphs, and a Conclusion. Indent new paragraphs clearly.
2. Open with a strong Introduction Paragraph (Present Topic, Question, Thesis, Plan of Development).
3. Write three thorough paragraphs of detail corresponding to your Plan of Development; that is, use clear Topic Sentences and develop good Arguments/Examples/Reasons.
4. End with a sound Conclusion Paragraph; that is, restate the Topic, the Thesis, the Plan of Development, and a Add Final Thought.
5. Use Transitions; include them at the beginning of a paragraph, throughout a paragraph, and at the end of a paragraph.
6. Maintain a Consistent Point of View (most likely the first person).
7. Write Strong Sentences: add variety; avoid Fragments and Run-ons.
8. Use effective Diction; utilize appropriate level.
9. Practice Solid Word Choice (Select Right Words for Right Meaning).
10. Use Good Mechanics (Spell Words Correctly, Punctuate Sentences Properly, Write Neatly).

**WRITING A TIMED ESSAY**

## TECHNIQUES

Step 1-Read the topic carefully

- A) Circle the key parts of the topic
- B) Read the topic again

Step 2-Plan (four to five minutes)

- A) Organize
- B) Freewrite, question, cluster, list, outline, or jot down notes
- C) Use plenty of specific examples
- D) Order ideas
- E) Eliminate the weakest ideas

Step 3-Write

- A) Introduction
- B) Discussion with supporting ideas
- C) Conclusion

Step 4-Proofread

- A) Reread
- B) Edit
- C) Correct

## MAJOR ELEMENTS OF A GOOD ESSAY

- A) On topic?
- B) Organized?
- C) Standard Written English?
- D) Development?

In addition, legibility, neatness, and spelling are also important elements. Find out from your instructor what other criteria should be considered.