

Monterey Peninsula College English & Study Skills Center

Sample Process Essay

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| General introduction | Many students immediately panic when they are faced with the task of writing an essay. While they may have many ideas when they discuss a topic, picking up pen and paper seems to dry up all ideas. Some students aren't even sure what an essay is. Basically, an essay is an organized way to express an opinion and prove that it's valid. This can take a variety of forms, but the standard format starts with an introduction, has a body, and ends with a conclusion. |
| Identification | |
| Opinion (thesis) | There are a few simple steps to writing an essay. |
| Support (topic) Explain | First, students must generate ideas. They have to think about what they know about a topic and what they want to write. Students do this in different ways. Some students do brainstorming. That is, they sit with a piece of paper and write words and try to relate them to other words. Some students just make a list of ideas. Other students find they need to do some prewriting because they think better when they are writing out their ideas. Some students just sit and think and get the ideas sorted out in their minds. One way is not better than another way. Everyone is different, so everyone writes in a different way. For example, my friend Susan likes to do prewriting. She sets her timer for 15 minutes and then she writes everything she can think of about the topic for that time. When the buzzer goes off, she stops and looks at what she has written. She underlines the ideas that she thinks are Good. This works very well for her, but it doesn't work well for me at all because I hate to do prewriting. I just sit and think about what I want to write until an idea comes to me. The important thing is not the method but the results. Sometimes, students think that the ideas have to be perfect from the beginning, but this isn't true. Sometimes they might find that their ideas need revision or that some can be eliminated. That's ok. Once they have generated ideas, they have a starting point so they can begin to write, and that is what is important. |
| Evidence | |
| Discuss | |
| Support (topic) Explain | Next, students need to organize their ideas. They need to make sure that they have a statement of opinion, and then they need to put their supporting ideas into some kind of order. That is, they need to decide what will come first and so forth. For example, if students are writing about history, most of the time they will organize their ideas chronologically because that's the way that people usually think about history--from past to present. But, it's not always that simple. John wrote a paper about the problems adoptive children have. He made a list of four problems, but then he had to decide which problem was the most serious and which the least. Then, he had to make another decision. Should he put the biggest problem first or last? Sometimes a writer wants to build up to something big, and other times a writer wants to hit the reader right away with something important. John decided to put his biggest problem last. Students need to look carefully at their ideas and think about what will make the strongest paper--and the most interesting paper. |
| Evidence | |
| Discuss | |
| Support (topic) Explain | Last, students need to write. This seems easy enough, but many students delay this part of the paper until the last minute. When I say write, I mean write the first draft because, whenever possible, it's good to save time to write, look at it and make corrections, and then write it again. Students need to give themselves time--especially in the beginning--to learn from their writing. If they wait until an hour before class, the paper becomes a burden instead of an opportunity to learn and share ideas. Sally, for example, had a 1000 word essay due at 11:00 in her English 101 class. She waited until 9:00 PM the night before to begin. By then, she was so nervous about getting the paper finished on time that she couldn't think of anything to write about. She kept thinking about the F she was going to get and what it would do to her grade point average. Students should just start writing and not expect a perfect product the first time, but even an imperfect paper is better than no paper. |
| Evidence | |
| Discuss | |
| Refer back to thesis Summarize main topics | In conclusion, writing an essay is really not so difficult. Students simply need to have a plan for writing. First, they need to find a way to generate ideas, and then they need to organize these ideas in some way that makes sense to them. Lastly, but most importantly, the students have to sit down and pick up their pencils and begin to write. The more students practice writing, the easier it will become because it's really only thinking and sharing ideas—something they do all of the time. |