

Collège Sismondi
English Group

Writing

3rd year & 4th year

Essay Writing

When you write down an account of your ideas for other people to read, you have to explain yourself particularly carefully. You cannot make the mental leaps you do when you talk with others or think about things by yourself. This makes writing probably the most challenging aspect of studying.

Why write?

In our society writing is a very valuable skill. It puts you on a much better footing with other people if you can present your point of view forcefully in writing.

Looking at other people's essays

One of the best ways of developing your essay writing ability is to see how other students respond to the same essay title as you. It is not that you want to copy someone else's style. It's just that you need to broaden your understanding of what is possible when you are answering an essay question.

Key points regarding essay writing

An essay should take the form of an *argument*. This argument should start from the problem posed by the *question* or *title* at the top of your page, and it should lead your reader through to a *conclusion* set out in the final paragraph. **It is a journey from the question in the title to the answer in your 'conclusion'.**

An essay never asks you just to 'write what you know about the topic' – it always requires you to present an *argument* of some kind. Often, the purpose is to answer a question. Other essay titles may ask you to discuss a particular point of view, or compare and contrast two points of view. But however the title is worded, **it is always meant to pose a 'problem' which your essay should then set out to argue about and solve.**

A lack of clear purpose is a big weakness in essay writing.

An essay can be good in almost every other way and yet be judged poor because it ignores the question in the title. Strictly speaking, 'it ignores the issues presented in the title' because not every essay title actually contains a question. But, in fact, there is usually a central question underlying an essay title, *even when it takes the form of a quotation from a text followed by the instruction 'Discuss'*. And you need to work out what the underlying question is, because this provides a sharper focus for your 'answer'.

Arguing a point

An argument is a series of points arranged in logical sequence, with links made from one point to the next. Putting in points that distract from the main flow of the argument diminishes its impact.

You have to *develop* an argument in *stages* towards your conclusion. This means you have to *link* each stage to the next, so that the reader can follow the *direction* your argument is taking. **Make sure to use linking words/connectors, that's what they are for!** (cf. Appendix 2)

In summary

When drafting your next essay, ask yourself:

- Is my argument logical and worth making?
- Have I made the argument as clearly as I can?
- Have I been sidetracked by issues that are irrelevant?
- Have I explained what lies behind my argument in sufficient detail – not too much, not too little?
- Do my points follow on from each other and strengthen my argument?
- Have I provided evidence for what I say?

Choice of words

When you are writing you have to use the words that come to you. You would never get started if you stopped to worry over each one. However, **when you are reading over what you have written** you should check that you have used words that convey the meaning you intended. The exact meaning of the words you use is more important in writing than in speech. You should also avoid repetitions and try to find synonyms. Usually, the essay question is related to a topic or reading done in class for which new

vocabulary and themes have been discussed. It is important to show that you are able to use this new knowledge in your writing.

Drawing on your course material

Essays are generally meant to help you consolidate what you have been studying. You are not asked to answer the question 'off the top of your head' nor on the basis of some prior knowledge. You are expected to take the essay as an opportunity to scan back over what you have been reading or doing and select relevant material from that. The teacher who marks your essay will already have in mind a range of course material that could be used in answer to the question. Your ability to make good, relevant selections from that material is part of what she or he assesses.

If you miss out some of the important ideas and information, or make the occasional strange selection, it may not matter, provided you make good use of other relevant material. But if you try to answer the question entirely from knowledge drawn from outside the course, you may run into trouble. In effect, what you are doing is focusing attention on the fact that you *haven't* used the relevant material in the course and the *new* knowledge available to you.

References

When using ideas or phrases from other writers in your own essay, you must correctly cite in your text exactly where the ideas or phrases come from. Correctly identifying these ideas and phrases is called "in-text citation". All borrowed ideas and quotations should be correctly cited in the body of your text.

Criteria of good essay-writing

When a teacher reads your essay, she or he will be asking the following questions:

- Have you answered the question in the title?
- Have you drawn on the relevant parts of the course for the main content of your essay?
- Do you show a good grasp of the ideas you have been studying in the course?
- Have you presented a coherent argument?
- Is the essay written in an objective, analytical way, with appropriate use of illustration and evidence?
- Is the essay clearly written and well presented?

What is an introduction paragraph?

The introduction paragraph is the first paragraph of your essay.

What does it do?

It introduces the main idea of your essay. A good opening paragraph should grab the reader's attention, set up the issue, and lead in to your thesis.

How do I write one?

Your introduction is merely a build up of the issue, a stage of bringing your reader into the essay's argument. Write the thesis statement. The main idea of the essay is stated in a single sentence called the thesis statement or topic sentence. You must limit your entire essay to the topic you have introduced in your topic sentence.

Exercise 1

Consider the following essay question.

Essay question

On the basis of the two short stories "The Colonel's Lady" and "Union Street", write a rich, concise & well-structured comparison.

You need to compare and contrast at least three different aspects. Give a minimum of 3 quotes to back up your arguments.

Between 300 - 350 words.

Here's a list of possible introductions to the essay you had to write

Which one is the best and why?

1.

George and Evie Peregrine are a very different couple than John and Muriel. The two couples have really nothing in common, they are so different!

First, we can see ...

2.

In this essay, I'm going to compare two short stories "Union Street" and "The Colonel's Lady". First I'm going to introduce and summarize each one of the two texts. Then I'm going to refer to some themes and show the difference between them. And eventually in the end, I'm going to present a short conclusion of all of these different aspects.

So, first ...

3.

"Union Street" and "The Colonel's Lady" are two very different stories. In this text I will try to show you three different aspects between the two short stories and I will compare them.

First of all, ...

4.

This essay intends to compare and contrast two short stories, namely "Union Street" and "The Colonel's Lady" on the basis of three atemporal themes: social status, love and faithfulness.

Firstly, ...

5.

In this essay I will compare the relationship of the two spouses in both stories, their social class as well as their relative happiness.

First of all ...

6.

"Union Street" and "The Colonel's Lady" are pretty different texts. These readings deal with love, fidelity and social classes. There are many oppositions between them.

First of all, ...

The main body of your essay

Each individual paragraph should be focused on a single idea that supports your thesis. Begin paragraphs with topic sentences, support assertions with evidence, and expound your ideas in the clearest, most sensible way you can.

How do I develop an idea?

- Illustrate your ideas with examples
- Give authoritative quotations
- anticipate and respond to counterarguments
- back your ideas with more evidence

Make clear transitions

Transitions act as bridges between your paragraphs. Since each paragraph offers a distinct thought, you need to connect these distinct thoughts in some logical way for the reader. The transition supply the logic of how two paragraphs connect, how one idea leads to the next, or how the two are related. Use connectors/linking words!

Exercise 2

Refer to the essay question in exercise 1

Here's an example of how to start your development. Your job is to organise the text into paragraphs. Use the following linking words to complete the text.

but – although – to begin with – however – first – in opposition – despite – moreover

....., one can clearly notice that both couples present striking differences., one can consider their social status as well as their relationship. In "The Colonel's Lady", George and Evie Perigrine are a wealthy British couple who clearly belongs to the upper class. They live on a large estate, are landowners who don't need to work in order to maintain their status. They both enjoy a leisurely lifestyle. George being a "spirited man" enjoys hunting, fishing, playing golf as well as managing his estate. Evie, on the other hand, is more introverted and prefers writing poetry. George and Evie are both comfortable, settled and apparently contented in their relationship, the latter is far from being

perfect. They have long drifted apart, always sit opposite one another no matter where they are, at the table or on a train. They clearly don't love each other any longer, if they ever have and are both guilty of being unfaithful.they merely share a common space, keeping their distance, George being disappointed by his wife and she, being indifferent to him.

....., John and Muriel are classic examples of a tough British couple who clearly belongs to the working class. They live their lives worrying about the lack of money, grit their teeth when it comes to suffering and are both hard working. Neither of them has the luxury to spend much time with the other they are still desperately in love. tragic the situation they find themselves in, may be, as any terminal illness is, the way they relate and care for one another is deeply poignant. Their need to remain close to one another and show their affection through tender everyday life gestures like preparing a cooked breakfast or a warm cup of tea. The way John will, at all cost, sleep with Muriel's coat the strong smell of fish and chips, the way he still notices after all those years which perfume she wears and when she does so. The way she would rather stay up all night in order to be close to her husband, lying uncomfortably on their sofa. That old and dilapidated piece of furniture she strongly associates with many vivid and moving memories, like the one time they made love on it. (...)

Conclusion

If your essay was long and complex, in the conclusion you'll want to recap your ideas in a clear, summarizing manner. You want your readers to understand the message you intended to communicate. It doesn't need to be long but remember it is not enough to just restate your main ideas – if you only did that and then ended your essay, your conclusion would be flat and boring. You've got to make a *graceful* exit from your essay by leaving a memorable impression on the reader. To leave this memorable impression try

- giving a thought-provoking quotation
- talking about consequences or implications
- ending on an interesting twist of thought
- ...

Proofreading

You're not done writing your essay until you've polished your language by correcting your grammar and making sentences flow. Make sure to do so before you hand in your essay. It improves the quality of your language and therefore your mark! So don't EVER forget to do it. As you proofread you'll be checking for misspellings, bad grammar, punctuation, etc.

- Check verb/subject agreement, tenses, irregular verbs, modal verbs, etc.
- Check relative pronouns, prepositions, word order.
- Check spelling and vocabulary. Avoid repetitions and enrich your vocabulary.

Formal Aspects

How to use quotations

You are often asked to use quotations in your essay. They are there to support your ideas and illustrate that what you are saying is coherent and possible. Quotations should not take the place of your own ideas nor be used to tell the story.

Quotations :

- must always be signalled by **quotation marks** ("...") and followed by a **reference** (page, line, etc.)
- can never stand by themselves and should be part of the running text of your essay.
- must be **introduced** and explained.

Example :

Topic Sentence

O'Brien's character in his novel, *The Things They Carried*, is able to sort through his emotions by writing about what he experienced in Vietnam.

Quotation

The method of story-telling is effective for him, because "by telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin down certain truths." (p. 158).

Relevance

His stories thus become a type of therapy for him where O'Brien can discover the lessons he learned without feeling directly involved.

Source/example: <http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/tlc/tipsheets/writing/integrating-quotes.pdf>

How to cite different texts

books / plays / films	---	handwritten text -> <u>Underline</u>	<u>Great Expectations</u>
	---	typewritten text -> <i>italics</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>

short stories / short poems / essays / songs / articles / chapters of books	---	quotation marks -> "..."	"Union Street"
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LINKING WORDS / TEXT ORGANISERS

Narrating / organizing ideas		Comments / Examples
first (of all) / in the first place / to begin with	tout d'abord / premièrement /pour commencer	Usually start a sentence and are followed by a comma (,) First of all, Secondly, Then, Lastly, In the end, In conclusion,
second(ly) / third(ly)	deuxième(ment)/troisième(ment)	
then / next	ensuite	
lastly/finally	enfin, pour finir	
in the end /eventually	à la fin / finalement	
last but not least	enfin et surtout	
in conclusion / to conclude	en conclusion / pour conclure	
Expressing the message of the text and of the author		
this text deals with	ce texte traite de	
he/she/the author/the narrator demonstrates that	il/elle/l'auteur/le narrateur démontre que	
he/she/the author/the narrator intimates that	il/elle/l'auteur/le narrateur laisse entendre que	
according to him	d'après lui	
as he/she/the author/the narrator says	comme il/elle/l'auteur/le narrateur le dit	
This suggests that	ceci donne à penser que / cela suggère	
issue / central issue / key issue / main theme	question, problème/ question clé	The key issue is... The main theme in this passage is...
point out that / notice that / see that		One can point out that.. It can be pointed out that..
discover / learn / find out		In this passage, we learn that...
<u>On</u> page 75, (!)	à la page 75,	
Expressing opinion		
in my mind / in my opinion	d'après moi, à mon avis	
as for me	en ce qui me concerne	
I don't mean that	je ne veux pas dire que	
I'd like to point out that	je voudrais faire remarquer que	
what I find shocking here is	ce qui me choque ici c'est	

I can't understand why	je n'arrive pas à comprendre pourquoi	
I doubt whether	je doute que	
I'm not really convinced	je ne suis pas totalement convaincu que	
I approve of / I disapprove of	j'approuve / je désapprouve	
I don't share such views	je ne partage pas de telles idées	
I'm strongly opposed to	je suis fortement opposé à	
I definitely disagree	je ne suis pas du tout d'accord	
I fully agree with him	je suis tout à fait d'accord	
he gives an accurate analysis	il a fait une analyse très juste de	
He's got a point here	là il a raison	
Moderating comments		
to a certain extent	jusqu'à un certain point	
to some degree/ we could also say that	on pourrait dire aussi que	
one should not forget that	il ne faut pas oublier que	
we must weigh the pros and cons	il faut peser le pour et le contre	
Adding		
besides/moreover/ what is more/ furthermore/ in addition	de plus	In addition, ... Furthermore, ... What is more, ... Moreover, ... In addition, ... / In addition to that, ...
likewise /similarly	de même	Likewise, ... Similarly, ...
indeed	en effet, vraiment, en vérité	Gives emphasis : She has won several awards. Indeed, she is very successful.
Contrasting		
however/yet	cependant	She is very successful. However, she is very modest. She is very successful ; yet, she is very modest.
nevertheless	néanmoins	She is very successful. Nevertheless, she is very modest. She is very successful ; she is, nevertheless, very modest.
all the same	tout de même	

on the one hand...on the other hand	d'une part...d'autre part	
in spite of / despite	malgré	Three different structures are possible : In spite of being successful, she is very modest. (+ -ing form) In spite of her success , she is very modest. (+ noun) In spite of the fact that she is successful , she is very modest. (+ 'the fact that' + clause)
(even) though although	bien que	(Even) though she is successful , she is very modest. (+ clause)
on the contrary by contrast in contrast to/with	au contraire / par contraste	She is very successful. By contrast , a lot of people are not. In contrast to her , a lot of people are not successful.
while / whereas	tandis que	She is very successful whereas others are not.
Expressing consequence and reason		
therefore	par conséquent	She works a lot and therefore she is successful. She works a lot ; therefore, she is successful.
as a result	par conséquent	She works a lot. As a result, she is successful.
so	ainsi, donc	She works a lot so she is successful.
thus	par conséquent	She works a lot. Thus, she is successful.
as / since	puisque, comme	As /Since she works a lot, she is successful.
Giving examples		
for instance /for example	par exemple	
such as	tel que	
Clarifying an idea		
that is to say / namely	c'est-à-dire / à savoir	
what I mean is that	ce que je veux dire c'est que	
in other words	en d'autres termes	
Digressing		
by the way	au fait	
that/it reminds me of	cela me fait penser à	
Summarizing what has been said		
to sum up	pour résumer	
in brief / in short	en bref / en un mot	

KEYS - Writing 3rd & 4th year

Exercise 1

The best one is no 4

Exercise 2

To begin with, one can clearly notice that both couples present striking differences. **First**, one can consider their social status as well as their relationship. In "The Colonel's Lady", George and Evie Perigrine are a wealthy British couple who clearly belongs to the upper class. They live on a large estate, are landowners who don't need to work in order to maintain their status. They both enjoy a leisurely lifestyle. George being a "spirited man" enjoys hunting, fishing, playing golf as well as managing his estate. Evie, **on the other hand**, is more introverted and prefers writing poetry. **Although** George and Evie are both comfortable, settled and apparently contented in their relationship, the latter is far from being perfect. They have long drifted apart, always sit opposite one another no matter where they are, at the table or on a train. They clearly don't love each other any longer, if they ever have and are both guilty of being unfaithful. **Moreover**, they merely share a common space, keeping their distance, George being disappointed by his wife and she, being indifferent to him.

In opposition, John and Muriel are classic examples of a tough British couple who clearly belongs to the working class. They live their lives worrying about the lack of money, grit their teeth when it comes to suffering and are both hard working. Neither of them has the luxury to spend much time with the other **but** they are still desperately in love. **However** tragic the situation they find themselves in, may be, as any terminal illness is, the way they relate and care for one another is deeply poignant. Their need to remain close to one another and show their affection through tender everyday life gestures like preparing a cooked breakfast or a warm cup of tea. The way John will, at all cost, sleep with Muriel's coat **despite** the strong smell of fish and chips, the way he still notices after all those years which perfume she wears and when she does so. The way she would rather stay up all night in order to be close to her husband, lying uncomfortably on their sofa. That old and dilapidated piece of furniture she strongly associates with many vivid and moving memories, like the one time they made love on it. (...)