

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
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HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY EXAM  
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**TYPE OF QUESTION**

It has been my experience that students generally wait until the last minute to write an essay. A reader of your essay (that's me) can artfully distinguish an essay that is the product of much thought from one that is not. In some cases, students wait until the last minute to write an essay because they work, because they have a demanding schedule and because they do not like to write essays. This guide is meant to help you write "A" essay answers so please take the time to thoroughly read it.

You will be given an essay question(s) that will require you to think about the material covered, form a position in response to the questions asked, and write a persuasive essay in which you argue in support of your position by providing evidence. Included in your response is a counterargument i.e. statements and or facts that others may offer to challenge your position. Following the counterargument is a paragraph or two in which you challenge the counter argument.

The type of question I tend to ask has several parts which require your thoughtful consideration. Many students make the mistake of answering each part of the question as if the parts are not related to each other. This is not what I want. If you write such an answer, you will merit 35 points out of a possible 75 points.

I want you to think about the question and ask yourself the following: what is really going on in this question? What is this question really about? What is the key relationship inferred by this question? More often or not it is a question about the issues related to globalization that we will study this

semester. For example, one issue is the question "Does globalization cause poverty?" Well first of all you would have to differentiate what is meant by "causing poverty". There is poverty and then there is poverty as a consequence of globalization. Poverty as a consequence of globalization is the issue about which you must take a position, pro or con. So your first step is to think about the question and figure out what it is about; then, you can think about the best argument you can make to answer the question.

### **FIRST STEP**

Read the question(s) thoroughly, think about the question and ask yourself questions about the question i.e. "what is this question about" and "what is the position I want to argue and what are my supporting reasons?"

### **SECOND STEP**

Plan to write a 7 paragraph essay (the number of paragraphs is dictated by your thesis statement. (Here I describe a thesis that requires three paragraphs to make an argument pro or con. ) The seven paragraph essay follows a definite format. The first paragraph introduces the thesis statement which is the position you are going to argue. The second through fourth paragraphs are all similar in format. They individually state claims in support of your thesis. Example, if your thesis is "Cats make better pets than Dogs" your second paragraph would begin with the topic sentence, "cats" are independent and then you discuss why independent cats make better pets. In your fifth paragraph, you take the opposite position and offer reasons why cats do not make better pets. In your sixth, paragraph, you challenge everything you stated in the sixth paragraph and defeat the counter argument. The seventh paragraph is where you summarize your argument. It is important to re-state your thesis and the three or four supporting ideas in an original and powerful manner as this is the last chance you have to convince me of the wisdom of the information presented.

### **Third Step**

- As you may have gathered you are writing a persuasive essay. Persuasive writing attempts to convince the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by the writer is valid.

- To accomplish this, the writer must develop a limited topic which is well defined and debatable, that it has more than one side. It is important that the author understand other sides of the position so that the strongest information to counter the others can be presented.
- The persuasive essay is based on the 7 paragraph essay but there are additional elements that must be taken into account. The topic sentences of paragraphs cannot be a fact as facts are not debatable.
- In the introductory paragraph, the topic sentence should be a statement of position. That position must be clear and direct. This statement directs the reader to follow along with your logic toward the specific stated conclusion you want your reader to support. Do not make it personal and do not use personal pronouns. Make it definitive.
- Then in the same introductory paragraph, state your four best reasons that you have to support your position as the remainder of the opening paragraph. These reasons become the topics of the following four supporting paragraphs.
- The fifth paragraph is where you anticipate criticism of your position and four stated reasons in support of your position.
- Your sixth paragraph is where you argue against (offer reasons, details and examples as to why the criticism offered in paragraph 5 is not valid) the criticism offered in paragraph five. Be sure that you build transitions from paragraph to paragraph.
- As one closes (concluding paragraph) it is most important to clearly restate your position and restate the most compelling evidence cited in paragraphs 2 through 4. Again remember this is your last chance to remind the reader (me) and convince me to accept your position. Never introduce new material in the concluding paragraph

## Fourth Step

Visually, your outline should look like this:

### Introductory Paragraph

- Opening sentence that grabs my attention—an anecdote, a quotation, an interesting question and so on
- *General Topic Sentence*: the position you take in answer to the question
- *Subtopic sentence one* (reason in support of *General Topic Sentence*)
- *Subtopic sentence two*
- *Subtopic sentence three*
- Transition to paragraph 1

### First Supporting Paragraph

- Restate subtopic sentence one
- First supporting detail or example
- Second supporting detail or example
- Third supporting detail or example
- Transition to paragraph 2

### Second Supporting Paragraph

- Restate subtopic sentence 2
- First supporting detail or example
- Second supporting detail or example
- Third supporting detail or example
- Transition to paragraph 3

Repeat Format for paragraph 3 and 4

### Fifth Paragraph

- A general statement critiquing all subtopic sentences
- Argue against your position by criticizing your supporting information—select your three strongest points
- Transition to Sixth Paragraph

### Sixth Paragraph

- A general statement in which you argue against the claims made in paragraph 5
- Take the three strongest points made in paragraph 5 and state why they are weak and unacceptable
- A sentence in support of your original position
- Transition to Concluding paragraph

### Seventh Paragraph

- Synthesis of subtopic one
- Synthesis of subtopic two
- Synthesis of subtopic three
- Synthesis of subtopic four
- Restate your position in firm and vivid language—remember this is your last opportunity to convince me that your argument is valid and strong.