



# A GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING

VOL. 2

# GETTING STARTED

# WRITING AN ESSAY

BEING ABLE TO WRITE AND SPEAK PERSUASIVELY WILL SERVE YOU WELL IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE. NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO NOW OR IN THE FUTURE, PART OF YOUR DAY MIGHT INCLUDE YOU TRYING TO CONVINCE SOMEONE TO THINK SOMETHING OR DO SOMETHING.

IN A PERSUASIVE ESSAY, YOU MUST BALANCE EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS TO CONVINCE YOUR READER OF A PARTICULAR POINT OF VIEW. INFORMATION MUST BE SPECIFIC AND RELEVANT, EXPLANATIONS MUST BE CLEAR AND INSIGHTFUL, AND IT ALL MUST BE WRITTEN IN AN ORGANIZED AND ENGAGING STYLE.

## TOPIC SELECTION

A persuasive essay centres on an argument, which is developed from a compelling question — one that the writer is interested in answering. Research and writing are more exciting when you are curious to know more about the topic and care about the question you are answering.

See “What makes a good inquiry question?” in **Volume 1: Research Tips** for tips about how to formulate an effective question to guide your research. These tips will help you move beyond a simple topic.

When selecting your topic and developing your question, be sure that you are meeting the expectations for your assignment. Read the instructions carefully and confirm with your teacher that you are approaching your essay the way they intended. Once you have developed and researched your question, you can think about developing a thesis.

## THESIS DEVELOPMENT

The thesis clearly outlines the overall position of the essay. Though it is found at the beginning of your essay, you should only decide on your thesis after much research. You need to explore multiple sources and do considerable thinking before deciding how you will answer your research question.

## HOW TO DEVELOP A THESIS

**Step 1:** Pick a topic

**Step 2:** Develop a research question

**Step 3:** Research the topic and question

**Step 4:** Develop a thesis based on your research

Even if you have thought a lot about your thesis, it may still evolve as you write your essay. While crafting your arguments, keep checking back to your thesis to make sure it still reflects what you are arguing. If it doesn't, you may need to reevaluate your thesis.

# WHAT MAKES A STRONG THESIS?

- » It clearly states your position — tell the reader what you are going to argue.
- » It is written as one sentence.
- » It is written in the third person, which makes your position appear stronger and more declarative.
- » It is found in the introductory paragraph of your essay.
- » It avoids vague language and abstract words.
- » It is not a statement of fact. There needs to be another side to the argument — or many!
- » It is immediately followed by your main arguments. Provide two or three specific reasons that will be used to prove your thesis.

**Strong:** Canadian identity was born at the Battle of Vimy Ridge when our country united as a nation and proved itself on the world stage.

**Weak:** The Battle of Vimy Ridge occurred on April 9, 1917.

**Strong:** Though fighting to include women's voices in politics, Canada's early suffragists were exclusive in their approach, as they focused on the needs of white, middle- and upper-class women.

**Weak:** White, middle- and upper-class women formed the bulk of Canada's early suffragists.

**Strong:** External factors — namely declining trade and concerns about military threats — were most responsible for the colonies uniting in Confederation.

**Weak:** Confederation was important because of economic and military factors.

**Strong:** Given the threat to national security and the fear experienced by Canadian citizens, Trudeau's response during the October Crisis was justified.

**Weak:** The actions of the FLQ were terrifying for the Canadian public.

# STRUCTURING AN ESSAY

## ONE CRITICAL ELEMENT OF A SUCCESSFUL PERSUASIVE ESSAY IS CLEAR ORGANIZATION.

Think of your essay like a baseball game:

1. Start at home plate: State your position and outline your three main arguments in your introductory paragraph.
2. Run to first base: Restate your overall position and introduce your first argument. Share your specific evidence from your research and explain how those facts support your position. First base can be a single paragraph, or, in the case of a longer essay, several paragraphs centred on the same idea.
3. Continue to second and third bases: For each new point, restate your overall position, introduce your next general argument, and then outline your evidence and analysis to make your point. Third base, or your final argument, should generally be your strongest one so that you leave your reader with the most convincing part of your case.

4. Stay out of the outfield: Only include information and arguments that are relevant to your position. Avoid including facts that are interesting but do not further your argument.
5. Cross home plate: Restate your overall position and your three main arguments in your conclusion.

Though the baseball analogy can be helpful in organizing your essay, it is **not** necessary to always have five paragraphs in an essay (an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion). You may choose to have just two main arguments, and each argument may feature a number of body paragraphs to make your case and avoid overly lengthy paragraphs. Essentially, your introduction and conclusion are the key elements, and the middle section has some flexibility.

Remember that it is always a good idea to check with your teacher about the organizational structure that best fits the kind of essay you have been assigned.

## WHAT GOES IN AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH?

- » Begin with a “hook” to capture your reader’s attention. A hook is the first one or two sentences of your essay that introduce your topic, draw your reader in, and convince them to keep reading. Depending on the formality of your paper, your hook can be factual, catchy, or quirky. It may include a statistic, a quote, or even a question.
- » Provide some background information and context to set the scene.
- » Close with a strong thesis that outlines your position.
- » Include your main arguments to give readers a road map for your essay.
- » You can think of your introduction as an inverted triangle: go from broad information about your general topic down to the specific thesis you will be arguing.

## WHAT GOES IN THE BODY PARAGRAPHS?

- » Start each section of your essay with a statement that both introduces your argument **and** links back to your overall position.
- » Include specific evidence from your research. Think of this as the “what.” You might include facts, examples, quotations, or statistics — the more detailed, the better. Remember that your evidence must be pieces of information that are proven truths. You cannot argue with a fact. (Note, however, that for facts to hold up, the context in which you present them must be accurate and unbiased.)
- » Explain how your evidence supports your position. Think of this as the “so what.” If you only state facts, you are not making an argument. After each piece of evidence, imagine someone asking you: “So what? Why did you tell me that?” to encourage you to explain how the facts prove your overall position. Consider starting sentences of explanation and analysis with phrases such as “This shows...” or “This proves...” or “This demonstrates...” until you get more comfortable in your writing and fine-tune your style.
- » To make a strong argument, you must include both the “what” (your evidence, i.e., specific information from your research) and the “so what” (your analysis, i.e., explanation of how this proves your thesis).
- » Only include information that is directly related to making your case. Avoid irrelevant details even if they are fascinating tidbits.
- » Remember that the source of any facts not generally known or direct quotations must be cited. Check with your teacher about whether you should use in-text citations, footnotes, or endnotes, and what citation style you should use. For more information about citing sources, refer to **Volume 3: Creating a Bibliography**.

# WHAT GOES IN A CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH?

- » Summarize your piece for your reader by restating your thesis and your main arguments.
- » Try to use slightly different words for stylistic interest rather than simply writing out your thesis word for word from your introduction.
- » You can think of your conclusion as a pyramid where you restate your thesis and then expand out to the general topic again and perhaps suggest broader implications of your overall argument.
- » When writing your conclusion, re-read your introduction to ensure that your thesis reflects what you ended up arguing throughout your essay. If necessary, rework your thesis so that it captures the direction of the arguments that follow.

# REMEMBER THAT STYLE IS IMPORTANT, TOO

- » Use persuasive language throughout your essay. Your goal is to convince your reader to support your position.
- » Do **not** write in the first person (e.g., no “I” or “my”) in a persuasive piece. Make sure to write in the third person, using declarative statements.
- » Avoid phrases such as “I think” or “I believe.” Instead, just make a statement!
- » Avoid slang and informal language.
- » Transitional words and phrases help your sentences flow smoothly and build on one another. Some examples include: “for instance,” “in summary,” “as well,” “similarly,” “however,” “for this reason.”
- » Proper spelling and grammar, clear and interesting sentence structure, and thoughtful word choice will improve your final product.

# PERSUASIVE ESSAY PLANNING TEMPLATE

**Thesis (position) plus three main arguments/ideas — write as two full sentences:**  
**POSITION** because **ARGUMENT #1**, **ARGUMENT #2**, and **ARGUMENT #3**.

**STATEMENT #1 (write as a full sentence):** **POSITION** because **ARGUMENT #1**.

<b>Evidence</b> (specific examples/facts, the “what”) — <u>write in point form</u>	<b>Analysis</b> (explanation of how facts support position, the “so what”) — <u>write in point form</u>
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**STATEMENT #2 (write as a full sentence): POSITION because ARGUMENT #2.**

<b>Evidence</b> (specific examples/facts, the “what”) — <u>write in point form</u>	<b>Analysis</b> (explanation of how facts support position, the “so what”) — <u>write in point form</u>
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**STATEMENT #3 (write as a full sentence): POSITION because ARGUMENT #3.**

<b>Evidence</b> (specific examples/facts, the “what”) — <u>write in point form</u>	<b>Analysis</b> (explanation of how facts support position, the “so what”) — <u>write in point form</u>
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## SELF OR PEER EDITING CHECKLIST

CRITERIA	DETAILS		
		MET	NOT YET
<b>Introduction</b>	Begins with hook to capture reader’s attention		
	States thesis that outlines overall position		
	States main arguments		
<b>Argument I</b>	Statement		
	Uses statements throughout to restate and emphasize overall position		
	Evidence (“what”)		
	Features multiple, specific examples		
	Uses facts — cannot argue against them		
	Information made clear and understandable to those not familiar with topic		
	Analysis (“so what”)		
Argument explains how evidence proves position — answers the question of “so what?”			

<b>Argument 2</b>	Statement		
	Uses statements throughout to restate and emphasize overall position		
	Evidence (“what”)		
	Features multiple, specific examples		
	Uses facts — cannot argue against them		
	Information made clear and understandable to those not familiar with topic		
	Analysis (“so what”)		
	Argument explains how evidence proves position — answers the question of “so what?”		
<b>Argument 3</b>	Statement		
	Uses statements throughout to restate and emphasize overall position		
	Evidence (“what”)		
	Features multiple, specific examples		
	Uses facts — cannot argue against them		
	Information made clear and understandable to those not familiar with topic		
	Analysis (“so what”)		
	Argument explains how evidence proves position — answers the question of “so what?”		
<b>Conclusion</b>	Restates thesis that outlines overall position		
	Summarizes main arguments		
<b>Writing Style</b>	Proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation		
	Clear sentence structure		
	Written in third person (no “I” or “my”)		
	Uses formal language		
	Uses interesting vocabulary, persuasive language		
	Uses transition words to lead reader through piece		
<b>Bibliography</b>	Properly cites all sources consulted		