

BILCANS

ESSAY WRITING

A SKILL DEVELOPMENT STUDY

For

(English Classes)

A STUDENT INTRODUCTION TO GRAMMAR

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(BIRF—THE GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE)

ESSAY WRITING

“Literary composition is the art of expressing thought or feeling effectively by words”, says a modern grammarian. The word “essay”, when functioning as verb, means “to attempt or strive”; however, in literature essay stands for “a literary composition on any subject.” Essay is a medium of composition that has become a standard style, especially in academics, of non-fictional writing. Today, from scholarly opinions to newspaper columns, from compositions giving information to narrative details, almost every non-fictional piece of writing falls into the category of essay. Some famous essays in English are those written by Sir Francis Bacon and Lord McCauley, whereof the former’s essays are compressed and eloquent and the latter’s are verbose and lengthy. We will add below a specimen essay by Francis Bacon to let our readers have a most inspiring insight into the pithy and eloquent composition of essay.

In the current instance, we are going to deal with the academic essay exclusively—the one that students are required to commit to writing while taking post-matriculation examinations.

STRUCTURE

An essay must be balanced and relevant to the subject. If outlines are a requirement asked by the examiner, make up your mind to follow a sequence of things and commit this sequence on the paper in an indented or numbered way. Outlines serve as the skeleton of the body of text, without which, no essay can be congruous or concise. If the outlines are not demanded, still spend some time to make a mental sketch of what you are going to write and then divide your subject into different sections. Now these sections will function as your outlines, for each of them will represent at least one organic part of the composition. An outline does not mean to write something as a heading in the paper, but it stands for a guiding idea that knits one after another all-important features of the essay. An essay should, according to an expert, “begin with the most recent general survey of the topic” covering and including in the essay the latest research on the topic.¹

To begin the essay in a reasonable way, do not get into the detailed discussion on the subject straightaway; rather insert a small introductory paragraph to the subject at first. Use small sentences at this stage to avoid syntactic lapses. Moreover, the employing of subject-definition from some standard dictionaries, such as Oxford Dictionary or Webster Dictionary, would be a great device to leave a healthy impression. Similarly, scholarly quotations would be appreciated as well.

A good essay will essentially possess the characteristics described immediately below:

a. Organic unity

¹ John Clanchy & Brigid Ballard, *How to Write Essays*, Longman Melbourne: Cheshire Pty Limited, 1983, P. 21

- b. Sequential order**
- c. Brevity and eloquence**
- d. Impersonal touch (unless asked for your own opinion)**
- e. An argumentative & summarizing conclusion**

LANGUAGE & SYNTAX

Language should be neither too easy nor too complex. Simple, understandable language with few mistakes is far-better than sophisticated language with quite a few mistakes. Errors of syntax have extremely negative effect on the reader; therefore, it is strongly suggested to avoid syntax mistakes as much as possible. For essay writing, a good understanding of tenses (active & passive voices) is inevitable. A mind teemed with ideas is unable to pen down those ideas until it has the power of language. This language-factor further demands smart selection of words and a good understanding of their use.

OUTLINES

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'outline' as "a description of the main facts or points involved in something." The use of 'outlines' in essay-writing is a very effective technique to organize our disorderly thoughts and focus on the subject. This is simply to make sure that we do not make any mistakes while committing our thoughts to writing. Well-structured and balanced outlines are an end in themselves in addition to a purpose, for well-structured outlines make it far easy and simple to organize all the text putting ideas in a sequence and write the essay. This balancing and structuring of outlines help us move 'point to point' and 'step to step' with great ease, which, in turn, creates a 'naturalness' in the flow of the essay. In the smooth flow of the essay, thereby, pops up what is called the "punch line" leading forth to the conclusion.

Outlines can be written in two ways. We can either use complete sentences containing finite verb or write outlines in a "heading" style. I prefer the heading style, and it is this style that has been employed in this book. Giving complete sentences or headings as outlines under traditional 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 outline-markers or excluding these markers make no real difference. However, what is important at this stage is the organization of the outlines. The 'title' should be placed at the top, and then should follow the 'introduction'. The upcoming outlines should cover the 'main body' of the essay that is usually classed in different sections. Each section is represented by a 'paragraph', and it is technically appropriate to supply an outline for each of such sections. Conclusion comes in the end. The conclusion has two chief objectives: (i) the summary of supporting information and evidences showing how the essay writer has reached this conclusion, and (ii) essay writers concluding remarks.

An outline helps us determine the length of the essay in addition to organize our thoughts. Furthermore, outlines are also a great help at determining the length of paragraphs. We should do well to bear in mind that a good

Essay Writing

organization of outlines can make our work of writing an essay as easy and simple as ‘filling in banks’. We can say, therefore, with great ease that outlines guide us from *beginning* through *middle* to the *end* of the essay.

Specimen Essay

Of Studies

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament is in discourse; and for ability is in the judgement and disposition of business. For expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies make judgement wholly by their rules is the humour of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men condemn studies; simple men admire them; and wise men use them: for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weight and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts; other to be read but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others: but that would be only in the less important arguments and the meaner sort of books; else distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things. Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little he had need have a present wit; and if he read little he had need have much cunning to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make men wise; poets, witty; the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy, deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend. *Abeunt studia in mores*. Nay there is no stound or impediment in the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies: like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises. Bowling is good for the stone and reins; shooting for the lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; riding for the head; and the like. So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the schoolmen; for they *Cymini sectores*. If he be not apt to beat over matters, and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study lawyers' cases. So every defect of mind may have a special receipt.

(Sir Francis Bacon)