**FORMAL ESSAYS** tend to take a serious, evidence-based approach while **INFORMAL ESSAYS** tend to be more relaxed and personable. The style fits the purpose and audience.

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| **CHARACTERISTIC** | **MOST FORMAL ESSAYS…** | **MOST INFORMAL ESSAYS…** |
| Audience | Are written for   * Academic audiences such as other students or teachers/professors * Professionals such as historians, psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists | Are written for   * The general public * People of certain age group, such as teens or seniors * People with specific interests such as fishing or fashion |
| Purpose/Goal | * Present facts and information gathered through research, experiments, or observation * Aim to engage readers through logical reasoning, facts, and objective audience | * Express the writer’s personal thoughts, feelings, and opinions * Aim to engage readers by appealing to their senses and emotions |
| Subject | * Focus on scholarly topics related to literature, history, and other shared knowledge and events | * Focus on everyday topics related to events and experiences in the writer’s life |
| Thesis | * Explicitly state the thesis in one or two sentences * Place the thesis statement in the first or second paragraph | * Do not follow hard-and-fast rules related to thesis statements; they may not have a thesis statement; If they do, it may appear anywhere in the essay |
| Point-of-View | * Are written in third person | * Are written in first person |
| Tone | * Have a detached, unemotional tone * Feels objective | * Have a relaxed, sometimes emotional tone * Feels personal, subjective |
| Diction | * Use formal language, professional terminology * Avoid slang, colloquialisms, and contractions | * Use relaxed, often conversational language * Include slang, colloquialisms, and contracts |

Adapted from Van Zoost, et al. *Beyond Five Paragraphs*