

## The Four Main Types of Essay

An [essay](#) is a focused piece of writing designed to inform or persuade. There are many different types of essay, but they are often defined in four categories: argumentative, expository, narrative, and descriptive essays.

Argumentative and expository essays are focused on conveying information and making clear points, while narrative and descriptive essays are about exercising creativity and writing in an interesting way. At university level, argumentative essays are the most common type.

Essay type	Skills tested	Example prompt
<a href="#">Argumentative</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Forming an opinion via research</li><li>Building an evidence-based argument</li></ul>	Has the rise of the internet had a positive or negative impact on education?
<a href="#">Expository</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Knowledge of a topic</li><li>Communicating information clearly</li></ul>	Explain how the invention of the printing press changed European society in the 15th century.
<a href="#">Narrative</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Creative language use</li><li>Presenting a compelling narrative</li></ul>	Write about an experience where you learned something about yourself.
<a href="#">Descriptive</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Creative language use</li><li>Describing sensory details</li></ul>	Describe an object that has sentimental value for you.

### Argumentative essays

An [argumentative essay](#) presents an extended, evidence-based argument. It requires a strong [thesis statement](#)—a clearly defined stance on your topic. Your aim is to convince the reader of your thesis using evidence (such as [quotations](#)) and analysis. Argumentative essays test your ability to research and present your own position on a topic. This is the most common type of essay at college level—most papers you write will involve some kind of argumentation.

The essay is divided into an introduction, body, and conclusion:

- The [introduction](#) provides your topic and thesis statement
- The [body](#) presents your evidence and arguments
- The [conclusion](#) summarizes your argument and emphasizes its importance

The example below is a [paragraph](#) from the body of an argumentative essay about the effects of the internet on education. Mouse over it to learn more.

#### Argumentative essay example paragraph

A common frustration for teachers is students' use of Wikipedia as a source in their writing. Its prevalence among students is not exaggerated; a survey found that the vast majority of the students surveyed used Wikipedia (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). An article in *The Guardian* stresses a common objection to its use: "a reliance on Wikipedia can discourage students from engaging with genuine academic writing" (Coomer, 2013). Teachers are clearly not mistaken in viewing Wikipedia usage as ubiquitous among their students; but the claim that it discourages engagement with academic sources requires further investigation. This point is treated as self-evident by many teachers, but Wikipedia itself explicitly encourages students to look into other sources. Its articles often provide references to academic publications and include warning notes where citations are missing; the site's own guidelines for research make clear that it should be used as a starting point, emphasizing that users should always "read the references and check whether they really do support what the article says" ("Wikipedia:Researching with Wikipedia," 2020). Indeed, for many students, Wikipedia is their first encounter with the concepts of citation and referencing. The use of Wikipedia therefore has a positive side that merits deeper consideration than it often receives.

### Expository essays

An [expository essay](#) provides a clear, focused explanation of a topic. It doesn't require an original argument, just a balanced and well-organized view of the topic.

Expository essays test your familiarity with a topic and your ability to organize and convey information. They are commonly assigned at high school or in exam questions at college level.

The introduction of an expository essay states your topic and provides some general background, the body presents the details, and the conclusion summarizes the information presented.

A typical body paragraph from an expository essay about the invention of the printing press is shown below. Mouse over it to learn more.

#### Expository essay example paragraph

The invention of the printing press in 1440 changed this situation dramatically. Johannes Gutenberg, who had worked as a goldsmith, used his knowledge of metals in the design of the press. He made his type from an alloy of lead, tin, and antimony, whose durability allowed for the reliable production of high-quality books. This new technology allowed texts to be reproduced and disseminated on a much larger scale than was previously possible. The Gutenberg Bible appeared in the 1450s, and a large number of printing presses sprang up across the continent in the following decades. Gutenberg's invention rapidly transformed cultural production in Europe; among other things, it would lead to the Protestant Reformation.

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#### Narrative essays

A [narrative essay](#) is one that tells a story. This is usually a story about a personal experience you had, but it may also be an imaginative exploration of something you have not experienced.

Narrative essays test your ability to build up a narrative in an engaging, well-structured way. They are much more personal and creative than other kinds of [academic writing](#). Writing a [personal statement](#) for an application requires the same skills as a narrative essay.

A narrative essay isn't strictly divided into introduction, body, and conclusion, but it should still begin by setting up the narrative and finish by expressing the point of the story—what you learned from your experience, or why it made an impression on you.

Mouse over the example below, a short narrative essay responding to the prompt “Write about an experience where you learned something about yourself,” to explore its structure.

#### Narrative essay example

Since elementary school, I have always favored subjects like science and math over the humanities. My instinct was always to think of these subjects as more solid and serious than classes like English. If there was no right answer, I thought,

why bother? But recently I had an experience that taught me my academic interests are more flexible than I had thought: I took my first philosophy class.

Before I entered the classroom, I was skeptical. I waited outside with the other students and wondered what exactly philosophy would involve—I really had no idea. I imagined something pretty abstract: long, stilted conversations pondering the meaning of life. But what I got was something quite different.

A young man in jeans, Mr. Jones—“but you can call me Rob”—was far from the white-haired, buttoned-up old man I had half-expected. And rather than pulling us into pedantic arguments about obscure philosophical points, Rob engaged us on our level. To talk free will, we looked at our own choices. To talk ethics, we looked at dilemmas we had faced ourselves. By the end of class, I’d discovered that questions with no right answer can turn out to be the most interesting ones.

The experience has taught me to look at things a little more “philosophically”—and not just because it was a philosophy class! I learned that if I let go of my preconceptions, I can actually get a lot out of subjects I was previously dismissive of. The class taught me—in more ways than one—to look at things with an open mind.

## **Descriptive essays**

A [descriptive essay](#) provides a detailed sensory description of something. Like narrative essays, they allow you to be more creative than most academic writing, but they are more tightly focused than narrative essays. You might describe a specific place or object, rather than telling a whole story.

Descriptive essays test your ability to use language creatively, making striking word choices to convey a memorable picture of what you’re describing.

A descriptive essay can be quite loosely structured, though it should usually begin by introducing the object of your description and end by drawing an overall picture of it. The important thing is to use careful word choices and figurative language to create an original description of your object.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES:**

Do not use “I” in argumentative essay specially.

Do not use inverted commas for a quotation if you don’t know the exact words of the speaker.

Do not use headings for paragraphs.

Discuss only one idea in a paragraph.

Do not use arrows or dots or numbers to indicate paragraphs.

An essay is not only about showcasing your knowledge. Your essay should be coherent, that is all the ideas should be well connected. There should be a flow and logical order.

Don’t go against your thesis statement in your essay.

Try to avoid use of other languages (Urdu poetry, or Quranic verse etc.) in your essay. If you still want to add, write it along with its English translation.

Try to be as objective as possible.

Your first paragraph (introduction) should be the crux of your essay.

Your last paragraph (conclusion) should not introduce any new idea.

Do not underline or bold any part of the essay unnecessarily.