

An essay is, generally, a piece of writing that gives the author's own argument, but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of a letter, a paper, an article, a pamphlet, and a short story. Essays have been sub-classified as formal and informal: formal essays are characterized by "serious purpose, dignity, logical organization, length," whereas the informal essay is characterized by "the personal element (self-revelation, individual tastes and experiences, confidential manner), humor, graceful style, rambling structure, unconventionality or novelty of theme," etc.[1]

Essays are commonly used as literary criticism, political manifestos, learned arguments, observations of daily life, recollections, and reflections of the author. Almost all modern essays are written in prose, but works in verse have been dubbed essays (e.g., Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* and *An Essay on Man*). While brevity usually defines an essay, voluminous works like John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* are counterexamples.

In some countries (e.g., the United States and Canada), essays have become a major part of formal education.[2] Secondary students are taught structured essay formats to improve their writing skills; admission essays are often used by universities in selecting applicants, and in the humanities and social sciences essays are often used as a way of assessing the performance of students during final exams.

The concept of an "essay" has been extended to other media beyond writing. A film essay is a movie that often incorporates documentary filmmaking styles and focuses more on the evolution of a theme or idea. A photographic essay covers a topic with a linked series of photographs that may have accompanying text or captions.

In addition to their prevalence in education and written form, essays have extended their influence into various other media and forms of expression. The concept of an "essay" has transcended its traditional boundaries, finding expression in diverse mediums such as film, photography, and even digital platforms.

A film essay, for instance, is a cinematic piece that frequently adopts documentary filmmaking styles. Unlike traditional narrative films, a film essay often prioritizes the exploration and evolution of a specific theme or idea. This genre provides filmmakers with a unique canvas to blend storytelling with factual information, creating a visually compelling and intellectually engaging experience for the audience. The marriage of visuals, sound, and narrative allows for a nuanced exploration of complex topics, making film essays a powerful tool for conveying ideas and perspectives.

Similarly, a photographic essay harnesses the combined impact of images and text to convey a narrative or explore a particular subject. A photographic essay typically consists of a series of interconnected photographs, each contributing to the overall theme or story. The images may be accompanied by text or captions that provide context, interpretation, or additional information. This form of visual storytelling has the ability to evoke emotions, provoke thought, and offer a unique perspective on a wide range of subjects.

Furthermore, the digital age has ushered in new possibilities for the essay format. Online platforms, blogs, and social media have become arenas for the expression of personal opinions, observations, and reflections. The brevity that characterizes the traditional essay is often maintained in these digital spaces, where concise and impactful writing is highly valued. The informal essay, with its personal element, humor, and unconventionality, finds a natural home in the digital realm, where individuals can share their thoughts and experiences with a global audience.

In conclusion, the essay, originally a written form with a broad and somewhat nebulous definition, has evolved and adapted to various media beyond the written word. From film essays that explore themes through cinematography to photographic essays that blend images and text, and to the informal essays thriving in the digital age, the concept of the essay remains a versatile and enduring means of expression across different forms of media. As technology continues to advance, the essay will likely continue to find new and innovative ways to communicate ideas and engage audiences.