Many of the following ideas have been written elsewhere. (I encourage the reader to obtain the books in the bibliography as a starting reference library.)  The following will describe a description based upon those sources.

Essays follow the form: 1) introduction, 2) body, and 3) conclusion.

The Introduction:

This is where the author explains background to the topic and proposes the thesis.  Crafting the thesis is one of the most difficult tasks, both for beginners and for advanced scholars. Sometimes, (in the more fortunate circumstances), the thesis is based upon some previously explored topic, which has not been investigated sufficiently, from all possible angles, or even, correctly.  In this circumstance, the scholar is at a definite advantage, because he or she knows exactly what to look for in the course of research.   Sometimes, it is the very last step in a long process of research and critical thinking.  This is difficult, but more personally rewarding, since the author potentially breaks into new realms of thought.  It is, however, dangerous, since the scholar runs the risk of missing a deadline, or worse, having his or her research arrive at no new point at all.  Minimize this risk by filtering your hypothesis through the following test:

1.  Is the answer to my basic question self-evident?

2.  Is it impossible to find sources to support or disprove my claim?

3.  Can my claim be disproven?(1)

A good rule to follow is to limit the space allowed for one's introduction to one-sixth of the overall length of the paper. (Harrill)

Disregard your gradeschool teacher who told you to make your thesis the very first sentence in your paper.  This unnecessarily forces you to backtrack and explain the background to your topic, when you should really be doing that first.  The human mind likes things in chronological order.  Your line of thought should run like this:  *This is what you need to know, or has been done on this particular subject (or on a relevant topic) in the past, now consider this new point.*

The Body:

The body of a paper is best seen in the form of an outline that highlights all of the main points and shows how these points are interrelated. Which points support the main ones? What is the author’s overall purpose in writing this? These kind of questions should be easily answered in an outline.

From Nothingness to First Draft:

With rare exceptions, when you are particularly fired up about a topic and have had a lot of time to subconsciously ruminate on it, you will be at a complete loss about what kind of points you want to say. Many books recommend various pre-writing exercises. For example, you might start listing facts about your topic that you know or questions that you may have in mind. Or, you might start with a web-diagram, with the topic of your paper encircled on the center of a clean sheet of paper, to which you will draw various points, linking ideas together, drawing more and more rarefied points. My own preferred method of brainstorming takes place in my notes while I’m reading. I constantly keep a list of ideas, summarizing what the author has said, and questions that I have as they arise. The point is to condense a text and the ideas it inspires into a long stream of babble, from which, hopefully gems may be drawn.

Whatever your method of brainstorming, I recommend you have something, even if is just writing a first draft instantly.

Style and Rhetoric:

   Style is largely a matter of personal choice.  It is strongly associated with the notion of a personal, authorial voice.  Still, there is a basic pattern, and there are conventions that academics follow.

   The main unit of a paper is not a word, phrase, or sentence.  It is the *paragraph*.  A paragraph is a tool used to explain a complete idea.  Paragraphs are ideally made up of, not just sentences, but specific sentences: claims, reasons, and warrants. (2)  Claims are the main issues you want your reader to understand from reading your paragraph.  They can stand on their own or support each other to lead towards a grand conclusion.  Reasons and warrants act as the logical connectives between a claim and the evidence that supports that claim.  Reasons explain the reason for the existence of the claim; warrants support the use of the reason.  The most important and most conventionally used type of warrant in research papers is evidence.  Evidence provides a specific, localized example, which should, it is thought support the truth-value of the claim made.  The structure is therefore:

X is Y, based upon evidence Z.  Evidence Z is important because W.  Most papers will rarely follow this format.  Experienced researchers have a distinct knack for breaking the rules but still arriving at a paper that nonetheless makes sense.  You are not that cool, yet.  Focus on structure.

To really learn structure, nothing is more informative than taking an afternoon and dissecting an essay piece by piece to see how the author supports each of his or her argument with subarguments, evidence, disproved counterexamples and so on.  Break down each part of the paper into its composite points.  Look specifically at

In this article, I will look at ancient rituals of animation with two goals in mind.   The first is historical. I will examine our ancient evidence and argue that, pace Faraone and Steiner, the formal practice of ritualized animation developed only late in Greek and Roman antiquity, under a particular set of circumstances and within a particular intellectual climate— namely the Platonizing religious system called theurgy.   ***claim 1. Johnston will argue that Faraone and Steiner are wrong to think that ritualized animation was an early aspect of Greco-Roman religious practice.***  Ritualized animation enabled the theurgists to work within a worldview that sharply distinguished between the physical and spiritual realms—a worldview that was not common to earlier, more traditional Greek and Roman religious

mentalities. ***claim 2 and implication of claim 1*** I will suggest that once such a sharply divided worldview was in place, the invention of the animated statue or something like it had to follow, lest the theurgists be cut off from the gods’ beneficence.  ***claim 3*** Theurgic soteriology depended both on a stratified cosmos and on interaction between gods and humans; ritually animated statues mediated between these otherwise mutually exclusive desiderata. ***Thesis (Note, it comes at the end of the paragraph and combines the preceding three claims into a single sentence.)***