

Essay

Definition of Essay

Essay is derived from the French word *essayer*, which means “*to attempt*,” or “*to try*.” An essay is a short form of literary composition based on a single subject matter, and often gives the personal opinion of the author. A famous English essayist, *Aldous Huxley* defines essays as, “*a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything*.” The Oxford Dictionary describes it as “*a short piece of writing on a particular subject*.” In simple words, we can define it as a scholarly work in writing that provides the author’s personal [argument](#).

Types of Essay

There are two forms of essay: literary and non-literary. Literary essays are of four types:

[Expository Essay](#) – In an expository essay, the writer gives an explanation of an idea, [theme](#), or issue to the [audience](#) by giving his personal opinions. This essay is presented through examples, definitions, comparisons, and [contrast](#).

[Descriptive Essay](#) – As it sounds, this type of essay gives a description about a particular topic, or describes the traits and characteristics of something or a person in detail. It allows artistic freedom, and creates images in the minds of readers through the use of the five senses.

[Narrative Essay](#) – Narrative essay is non-[fiction](#), but describes a story with sensory descriptions. The writer not only tells a story, but also makes a point by giving reasons.

[Persuasive Essay](#) – In this type of essay, the writer tries to convince his readers to adopt his position or [point of view](#) on an issue, after he provides them solid reasoning in this connection. It requires a lot of research to [claim](#) and defend an idea. It is also called an [argumentative essay](#).

Non-literary essays could also be of the same types but they could be written in any format.

Examples of Essay in Literature

Example #1: *The Sacred Grove of Oshogbo* (By Jeffrey Tayler)

“As I passed through the gates I heard a squeaky [voice](#). A diminutive middle-aged man came out from behind the trees — the caretaker. He worked a toothbrush-sized stick around in his mouth, digging into the crevices between algae’d stubs of teeth. He was barefoot; he wore a blue batik shirt known as a buba, baggy purple trousers, and an embroidered skullcap. I asked him if he would show me around the shrine. Motioning me to follow, he spat out the results of his stick work and set off down the trail.”

This is an example of a descriptive essay, as the author has used descriptive language to paint a dramatic picture for his readers of an encounter with a stranger.

Example #2: *Of Love* (By Francis Bacon)

“It is impossible to love, and be wise ... Love is a child of folly. ... Love is ever rewarded either with the reciprocal, or with an inward and secret contempt. You may observe that amongst all the great and worthy persons...there is not one that hath been transported to the mad degree of love: which shows that great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion...That he had preferred Helena, quitted the gifts of Juno and Pallas. For whosoever esteemeth too much of amorous affection quitted both riches and wisdom.”

In this excerpt, Bacon attempts to persuade readers that people who want to be successful in this world must never fall in love. By giving an example of famous people like Paris, who chose Helen as his beloved but lost his wealth and wisdom, the author attempts to convince the audience that they

Example #3: *The Autobiography of a Kettle* (By John Russell)

“I am afraid I do not attract attention, and yet there is not a single home in which I could do without. I am only a small, black kettle but I have much to interest me, for something new happens to me every day. The kitchen is not always a cheerful place in which to live, but still I find plenty of excitement there, and I am quite happy and contented with my lot ...”

In this example, the author is telling an [autobiography](#) of a kettle, and describes the whole story in chronological order. The author has described the kettle as a human being, and allows readers to feel, as he has felt.

Function of Essay

The function of an essay depends upon the subject matter, whether the writer wants to inform, persuade, explain, or entertain. In fact, the essay increases the analytical and intellectual abilities of the writer as well as readers. It evaluates and tests the writing skills of a writer, and organizes his or her thinking to respond personally or critically to an issue. Through an essay, a writer presents his argument in a more sophisticated manner. In addition, it encourages students to develop concepts and skills, such as analysis, [comparison](#) and contrast, clarity, [exposition](#), conciseness, and [persuasion](#).