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Once you've created an outline that lays out your thesis and the arguments you will use to support it, you are ready to begin writing. It is essential to create a good first impression by means of an effective introduction. Through an enticing introduction, you convince your reader that they would benefit from and even enjoy reading further. An excellent introduction transforms an essay on the most mundane of topics into something interesting and fun to read, at least for a little while. Conversely, a bland and sterile opening can turn reading about the most exciting thing imaginable into a chore. Consider the opening line of *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." You immediately know this novel is about an unhappy family (since all happy families are alike, why bother writing about them?), but you have no idea as to the manner or extent to which this one is so. In this way the introduction is effective in getting you to read further to discern exactly that. While this example is from a work of fiction, the same holds true for expository writing because the end purpose of an effective introduction is to make your reader eager to continue.

To this end, the introduction is a great place to let your creative juices flow. While being careful not to make it too shocking or far-fetched, creating an interesting (but plausible) parallel between the topic and something else is a good way to lead into your composition. In addition, a solid introduction of this type almost always guarantees a smooth off-ramp at the end of the essay. Nothing is more frustrating than sitting there, staring at the end of an essay, knowing you need something better than the equivalent of "Thank you very much! You've been great! I'm here till Thursday!" or, even worse, "The End." Instead, you can close by restating your introductory parallel as it is relevant in light of the points you have so eloquently argued throughout the course of your essay.

Inspiration for great introductions comes from many places. Some of the most effective introductions utilize quotes or anecdotes. Consequently, it might be a good idea to memorize three to five great quotations. Avoid common ones such as “We have nothing to fear but fear itself” and “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Keep your eyes and ears open for quotes that strike a chord with you, ones that resonate with your view of life. When deciding which quotes to memorize, stick to comments that can be applied to various subjects. At the same time, while you do not want the quote to seem overly general, neither do you want it to seem “tacked on.” Something like “Do small things with great love” (Mother Teresa), for example, has potential in that it can introduce an essay on anything from the care and maintenance of your lawn to Rousseau’s Social Contract.

Fables and parables are also great sources for introductions. These are short stories with messages of a general nature. Think about some of Aesop’s fables (such as the Tortoise and the Hare or Sour Grapes) or biblical parables (such as the parable of the talents or the parable of the house built on sand), and you can see the potential for a strong introduction. One characteristic that makes this type of story so successful is the fact that the stories are common; it is quite likely that your audience will be familiar with the story you reference, so they begin with a good idea of how to interpret your essay. Psychological experiments are also a good source for introductions, for they set up situations conducted under controlled circumstances that yield insight into human nature. Take, for instance, one study that examined the way children play. The children were allowed to choose whatever they wanted to do in the playroom; some chose blocks, some chose dolls, some chose coloring, etc. But when the children were paid a nickel to color, (an activity they previously enjoyed for its own sake), they eventually lost interest in it. Being paid took the enjoyment out of an otherwise enjoyable activity. A little imagination reveals how this experiment can be a useful anecdote for essays concerning careers, creativity, and human nature.

The Meat of It All

Body. After the introduction comes...you guessed it...the body of your essay. This is where you make the connection between your thesis (presented in the introduction) and your closing statement using coherent, relevant, and logically sequenced arguments and examples. Because you have an outline, you already know the points you want to make and the order in which you wish to make them. How you go about doing just that, however, can be somewhat intimidating.

Writing for the Reader. One way to relieve some of this tension is by imagining an actual human reading your essay. Rather than thinking of your work as being sent off into an anonymous room with faceless judges who take the fruit of your labors and reduce it to a set of numbers, think about each judge as a real person. Write for that person. Make a point with that person. Keep the interest and attention of that person. Express your personality and intellect to that person. Approaching the essay writing process with this mind-set helps take focus off the performance aspect of the situation and allow you to concentrate your efforts on the mechanics of the writing process, which will allow you to manipulate these mechanics most effectively to achieve the highest possible score in all three components. Furthermore, the more you conceive of your audience as a person, the more your writing will emerge in a way that will cause the reader to conceive of the author as a person as well.

One very effective way to connect with the human side of judges (or any grader of your academic writings, for that matter) is by using words and images that are universal. Appeal to the five senses. Peppering your essay with descriptions and metaphors that utilize images, smells, sounds, tastes, and textures may bring the reader back from the academic stance they've adopted into one that is more sympathetic, more human. Because sensory input is a trait shared by absolutely everyone, chances are good that descriptions and metaphors such as these will strike a chord with the judges. Notice, however, that I limited it to the five senses, omitting senses such as a sense of

Pitfalls to Avoid

As is evident from the preceding paragraphs, there is quite a bit to keep in mind while writing an expository essay. Unfortunately, for every one feat you should try to accomplish there are many more you should do your best to avoid. Although there is no way to avoid all pitfalls in your Ready Writing endeavors, there are some common mistakes you can consciously avoid.

Poor Structure. Remember that your composition is an expository piece, not a stream-of-consciousness piece. The judges want to see if you can organize and support your thoughts. Your structure needs to be clear, perhaps to the point of predictability. This is where your outline will be most helpful. Be sure that each paragraph flows logically from the one preceding it. Keep asking yourself the same question you've been told to ask yourself many times: "Does this idea, story, or illustration support my thesis?" This is the ultimate litmus test in this area.

Rambling. When you write you may feel like you are on a roll, but if you venture too far from your point, the judge will just get tired. Think about someone you know who jumps quickly from topic to topic when talking. In that person's mind this random assortment of comments is related. To you, less so. Be specific and precise. Keep in mind that rambling will result in points lost under both Interest *and* Organization

Lapses in Logic. Ensure there are no logic gaps in the transfer of ideas from your head onto the page; what may be crystal clear to you may not make sense to someone else. Suppose you write, "Growing up, I lived near a church, which is why our family always had cats." To you, this makes perfect sense: you wanted a dog, but the constant activity at the church would result in too much barking, so you had to have cats. Does your reader understand this? Not a chance. At the same time, though, readers should understand what you have to say without explaining it multiple times. Write it clearly the first time. The propensity to repeat an explanation becomes more evident when dealing with philosophical issues, so be alert.