

THE ESSAY

I BITE INTO THEM, I MELT THEM DOWN . . .
I LOVE WORDS SO MUCH . . . THE
UNEXPECTED ONES. . . FOR GREEDILY OR
STALK UNTIL, SUDDENLY, THEY DROP. . .
VOWELS I LOVE . . . THEY GLITTER LIKE
COLORED STONES, THEY LEAP LIKE
SILVER FISH, THEY ARE FOAM, THREAD,
METAL, DEW. . . I RUN AFTER CERTAIN
WORDS. . . THEY ARE SO BEAUTIFUL THAT I
WANT TO FIT THEM ALL INTO MY POEM
. . . I CATCH THEM IN MIDFLIGHT, AS THEY
BUZZ PAST, I TRAP THEM, CLEAN THEM,
PEEL THEM, I SET MYSELF IN FRONT OF
THE DISH, THEY HAVE A CRYSTALLINE
TEXTURE TO ME, VIBRANT, IVORY,
VEGETABLE, OILY, LIKE FRUIT, LIKE
ALGAE, LIKE AGATES, LIKE OLIVES. . .
AND I STIR THEM, I SHAKE THEM, I DRINK
THEM, I GULP THEM DOWN, I MASH
THEM, I GARNISH THEM, I LET THEM GO
. . . I LEAVE THEM IN MY POEM LIKE
STALACTITES, LIKE SLIVERS OF POLISHED
WOOD, LIKE COALS, PICKINGS FROM A
SHIPWRECK, GIFTS FROM THE WAVES . . .
EVERYTHING EXISTS IN THE WORD . . .

WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

It is any brief composition in **prose** that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or persuade us to accept a **thesis** on any subject whatever. The **essay** discusses its subject in non-technical fashion, often with a liberal use of such devices as **anecdote**, striking illustration, and humor to augment its appeal.

Essays are not always called essays. They could be called editorials, letters, speeches, sermons, or even hidden as part of a play or novel. An essay is determined by style, purpose, structure, and so on. It is almost impossible to define essay in such a way that all essays can be classified adequately.

WHAT'S A FORMAL ESSAY?

The formal essay is relatively impersonal: the author writes as an authority, or at least as highly knowledgeable, on the subject and expounds it in an ordered and thorough fashion. Examples will be found among the serious articles on current topics and issues in any of the magazines addressed to a thoughtful audience -- *Harper's*, *Scientific American*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and so on. **Formal** essays almost always follow a rigid structure -- the statement of thesis, development of supporting details, etc. -- the five-paragraph essay, for example. The purpose of most **formal** essays is exposition or explanation; whereas the purpose of an **informal** essay may well be entertainment or merely the expression of a personal opinion.

Qualities which make an essay **formal** include:

1. Seriousness of purpose.
2. Dignity.
3. Logical organization.
4. Length.

WHAT'S AN INFORMAL ESSAY?

In the **informal essay** (or "familiar" or "personal essay"), the author assumes a tone of intimacy with his audience, tends to be concerned with everyday things rather than with public affairs or specialized topics, and writes in a relaxed, self-revelatory, and often whimsical fashion. Accessible modern examples are to be found in any major periodical, usually labelled as editorials or essays. Some famous writers of informal essays include Francis Bacon (**aphoristic essay**), Joseph Addison and Richard Steele (periodical **essay**), and Charles Lamb (**personal essay**).

Qualities which make an essay **informal** include:

1. The personal element: self-revelation, individual tastes and experiences, confidential manner.
2. Humor: sarcasm, satire, parody.
3. Graceful style: quotation, figures of speech.
4. Rambling structure: narrative, conversational.
5. Unconventionality or novelty of theme.
6. Freshness of form: virtually unlimited.
7. Freedom from stiffness and affectation.
8. Incomplete or tentative treatment of topic.

One way of discussing essays is to describe them -- as best one can. The following are terms which can be used to consider the author's approach, purpose, and subject matter:

10 CHARACTERISTICS OF ESSAYS (often any one essay may include several of these)

1. **Personal:** Tone is light, deals with author or his world. Interpretive, familiar, conversational. Has characteristics of a monologue.
2. **Formal:** Tone is serious; so is subject matter. Tendency for language to be stylized, grammatically perfect. Intended to educate and arouse.
3. **Descriptive:** Calls for close observation. Contains emotional, evocative, concrete details.
4. **Narrative:** Gives a picture of author colored by personality. Often a thread of story broken by digressions.
5. **Expository:** A process of enumeration, definition, comparison, contrast, illustration, analysis, cause and effect.
6. **Didactic:** Intended to teach, instruct or clarify some point for the reader.
7. **Character Sketch:** Portraying either individual traits, type, class or rank of person with a moral purpose.
8. **Biographical:** Thumbnail sketch often with anecdotes. Written by close associate of subject.
9. **Philosophical:** Also called "reflective." Deals with author's personal views on life.
10. **Critical:** Dealing with some form or piece of art, literature or government. May contain humor or satire.

HOW DOES AN ESSAYIST CREATE EMPHASIS?

Emphasis is a principle of rhetoric dictating that important elements be given important positions and adequate development whether in the sentence, the paragraph, or the whole composition. The more important positions are, naturally, at the beginning and end. But **emphasis** may also be secured:

1. By repetition of important ideas.
2. By the development of important ideas through supplying plenty of specific detail.
3. By simply giving more space to the more important phases of the composition.
4. By contrasting one element with another since such contrasts focus the reader's attention on the point in question.
5. By careful selection of details so chosen that subjects related to the main idea are included and all irrelevant material excluded.
6. By climactic arrangement.
7. By mechanical devices such as capitalization, italics, symbols, and different colors of ink.

WHAT IS SATIRE

Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn. It differs from the **comic** in that **comedy** evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire “derides”; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself.” That butt may be an individual, or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even the whole race of man.

Satirical pieces are usually short, funny, and entertaining; they are *always* critical and unfair. The satirist purposely disregards extenuating circumstances in deriding a situation, and ignores the favorable attributes of any individual he mocks. But his work must be simplistic and forceful, or he may not get his message across. In taking on the powers that be and Everyman’s disinclination to be criticized, the satirist is often a lonely combatant.

True satirists are conscious of the frailty of institutions of human devising and attempt through laughter not so much to tear down as to inspire a remodeling. If critics simply abuse, they are writing **invective**; if they are personal and splenetic, they are writing **sarcasm**; if they are sad and morose over the state of society, they are writing **irony** or a **jeremiad**.

Types of Satire

Formal (or direct) satire: The satiric voice speaks, usually in the first person, either directly to the reader or to a character in the satire. Two types of formal satire are commonly distinguished, defined by the character of the **persona** of the speaker and by the attitude and **tone** the persona manifests toward his subject matter and audience.

1. **Horatian satire:** The persona is that of an urbane, witty, and tolerant man of the world, who is moved more often to wry amusement than to indignation at the spectacle of human folly, pretentiousness, and hypocrisy, and who uses a relaxed and informal language to evoke a smile at human follies and absurdities -- sometimes including his own.

2. **Juvenalian satire:** The persona is that of a serious moralist who uses a dignified and public style to decry vice and error which are no less dangerous because they are ridiculous. The tone is biting, bitter, angry. It points with contempt and moral indignation to the corruption and evil of human beings and institutions.

Indirect satire: The satire is expressed through a narrative instead of direct address, and the objects of the satire are characters who make themselves and their opinions ridiculous by what they think, say, and do. A special form of indirect satire is **Menippean satire**, which deals with mental attitudes rather than fully realized characters by presenting speakers who make ludicrous the intellectual attitudes they typify by the arguments they urge in their support.

There is also a distinction between romantic satire and so-called realistic satire (though no satire is ever entirely realistic). **Romantic satire** features otherworldly characters and exotic, far-removed places and eras. **Realistic satire** is heavily laden with true-to-life, down-to-earth minutiae.

Definition of Terms

- Burlesque:** The imitation of people, actions, and literary and dramatic works for comical effect by a ridiculous disparity between its style and subject matter. In **high burlesque**, a ridiculous, trivial subject is treated in a very serious, lofty manner. In **low burlesque**, a serious subject is treated comically, with mock disrespect.
- Caricature:** A picture or verbal description which ridiculously exaggerates the features and characteristics of the person or thing depicted, but which keeps the subject's identity and likeness intact.
- Lampoon:** A satire ridiculing a specific person.
- Mock Epic:** A humorous, tongue-in-cheek depiction of an absurd hero's adventures and glorious deeds (e.g., *Don Quixote de La Mancha*).
- Parody:** A comical imitation of an author's or artist's style.
- Travesty:** A grotesque imitation of a specific literary or dramatic work.

Key Questions About Any Satire

1. What vehicle for satire did the satirist choose? Why is or isn't it effective for getting his message across?
2. Does the satirist speak his own thoughts, in a pretended first-person voice, or through a cast of characters? Are you aware of his presence?
3. What is the tone of the satire -- gentle and amused or scornful and contemptuous?
4. What are the targets and messages of the satire?
5. What satirical elements and techniques are used and how -- e.g., exaggeration, distortion, understatement, irony, twisted cliches, paradoxes, contrasts, surprise, etc.?
6. Is a solution to the problem implied in the satire? What is it?
7. How does the satirist stack the deck in his own favor? What extenuating details of circumstances favorable to his target does he omit?
8. Does the satire's message convince you? Does the satire make you laugh? Why or why not?
9. If you were going to satirize the same subject, how might you go about it?

TIMED ESSAYS

Directions: You will have 20 minutes to plan and write the essay assigned below. You are expected to express your thoughts carefully, naturally, and effectively. Be specific -- one concrete, pertinent example is worth a thousand words. Remember that how well you write is much more important than how much you write. *Do not write on a topic other than the one assigned below. An essay on a topic of your own choice will receive no credit.*

First, consider carefully the following statement. Then, read and follow the directions that are given in the assignment that follows the statement.

“We need more people who specialize in the impossible.”

Assignment: Do you agree or disagree with this quotation? Has attempting to do what other people have always thought impossible always led to gains for humanity? Write an essay in which you support your view with examples from literature, history, or observation.

Evaluating Timed Essay Questions

Essay can receive a ranking from 0 to 5, with 5 being the highest assessment possible. Essays are evaluated by the following criteria:

- _____ 1. **Legibility.** Is the essay readable?
- _____ 2. **Topic.** Does the essay address the topic assigned in an intelligent manner? Are all aspects of the topic covered proportionately?
- _____ 3. **Organization.** Does the essay have an introduction, body, and conclusion? Does the essay use effective transition words and phrases?
- _____ 4. **Development of Idea.** Does the essay use explicit example(s) to prove the writer’s opinion?
- _____ 5. **Grammar.** Are sentences complete sentences? Do subject and verb agree? Is pronoun reference clear?
- _____ 6. **Punctuation.** Do all sentences have correct end punctuation? Are commas used correctly? Are quotations used correctly?
- _____ 7. **Spelling.** Are there excessive misspelled words? Are those words which are misspelled of some difficulty or are they inexcusably simple words? Are simple homonyms misspelled?
- _____ 8. **Syntax.** Do sentences “flow” together in a pleasing manner? Does the essay include a variety of sentence structures?
- _____ 9. **Diction.** Are the words chosen used correctly? Is the vocabulary of the essay sophisticated enough for high school students? Are the best possible words used?
- _____ 10. **Completeness.** Is the essay finished?

TIMED ESSAYS

Sample Student Essay:

Only when one mind reaches into the void of unknown knowledge can the entire human race benefit. There have been drawbacks to this search's results, but on the whole it is beneficial. It is the only way to progress and continue our minds' expansion away from the lower animals.

When people specialize in the impossible, they can invent wonderful things. Edison's light bulb came from this process, and so did such everyday items as the radio and television. Also, advances in the medical field exist only because of people like Jonas Salk and his polio vaccine, and Louis Pasteur, whose method of purifying milk we use to this day. These things are so taken for granted that we forget the special people who brought the knowledge in from the realm of the "Unknown" and utilized it for practical use in our lives, and indeed that there was ever a time we did not know the concepts they discovered.

However, there are instances where the benefits our new knowledge can contain are questioned and debated. One foremost example is the use of the nuclear bomb. Einstein was a genius, it is true, but should we thank him for introducing a bomb that did away with thousands of people in an instant? And connected with that is the question of nuclear energy. Is it safe enough to use on a wide scale? Beside the worry over escaping radiation in melt-downs, what is a good way to dispose of waste without slowly destroying the land and sea? Is nuclear energy a benefit of progress or an ominous threat to our continued existence? Over questions like these, some may find it difficult to praise "progress."

In all, however, we do "need more people who specialize in the impossible" because it is only through those who experiment that we can learn more about ourselves and our environment. Maybe it is only a matter of learning enough to control our knowledge.

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First, consider carefully the following statement. Then, read and follow the directions that are given in the assignment that follows the statement.

“Some possessions, like a mink coat. A certain car or dog, or membership in a club, by seeming to confer upon their owners a particular status, influence the average person more than he realizes.”

Assignment: Choose one of those status symbols, or another that you think of, explain the reasons for its appeal, and show how that symbol has been a force for both good and evil..

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First, consider carefully the following statement. Then, read and follow the directions that are given in the assignment that follows the statement.

“Growing up requires the acceptance of limitation.”

Assignment: Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What evidence can you find in your own observation, reading and study to support your point of view? Be sure in your discussion to make clear your interpretation or definition of “limitations.”

TIMED ESSAYS: Topical Statements

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First, make certain that you understand the statement. Then, decide whether you agree or disagree with it. Support your position with specific examples from your reading, study, observation, or experiences.

1. "Adventure is not outside a man; it is within."
2. "Adversity makes men, and prosperity makes monsters."
3. "Any change for the better brings its own evil with it, and so one powerful consideration should always be in the back of our minds: if we release this good thing, what evil is likely to escape with it?"
4. "Boredom is an insult to oneself."
5. "Each of us assumes a personality to satisfy each group into which we enter; i.e., we do not act at home precisely as we act with the gang, in the classroom, or before an employer."
6. "Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment."
7. "Life is a tragedy for those who feel, and a comedy for those who think."
8. "Man is a make-believe animal: he is never so truly himself as when he is acting a part."
9. "Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know."
10. "Nothing is more sad than the death of an illusion."
11. "Opposition is indispensable. People will always learn more from those who disagree with them than from those who share their views."
12. "A nation writes its autobiography in the uses to which it puts its leisure time no less than in the produce of its industries."
13. "Some societies have had strong faith in the greatness and nobility of man. Americans today have lost such faith. One symptom of this loss is the absence of hero-figures. As a result, Americans have little faith in mankind generally."
14. "There are everyday objects whose utility we take for granted and whose beauty we overlook."

15. "Success is a journey, not a destination."
16. "Adventure movies, romantic tales, science fiction, and detective stories are often the means of escaping from reality. Such escape is irresponsible. It is also harmful, both to the individual and to his society."
17. "Any change for the better brings its own evil with it, and so one powerful consideration should always be in the back of our minds: if we release this good thing, what evil is likely to escape with it?"
18. "Each of us is fascinated by stories of crime and violence. Perhaps we are curious about the varieties of experience that have come to people. Or perhaps we are cleansing ourselves of the violence of our own emotions."
19. "I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education."
20. "Nothing is wonderful when you get used to it."
21. "The American student is a victim of herd instinct, and the herd instinct is today taking us in an unfortunate direction."
22. "The tragedy of life is not so much what men suffer, but rather what they miss."
23. "Tradition is society's safeguard, but also its potential executioner."
24. "Wastefulness is part of the American way of life. We use three packages or wrappings when one would do, build machines to be obsolete in five years, and generally waste time, energy, and natural resources. Yet we consider thrift a virtue and we consider ourselves efficient."
25. "We are private beings, but we are also social beings; that we must live in the world with other people is both exasperating and comforting."
26. "We live in an era of language inflation. Being a star is no longer significant because we have superstars; what is normal is tremendous or fabulous (or excellent, extraordinary, superterrific, etc.) This wholesale distribution of highest ratings defeats its own purpose. Everything is presented as something unique, unheard-of, outstanding. Thus, nothing is unique, unheard-of, outstanding. When everything is superlative, everything is mediocre."

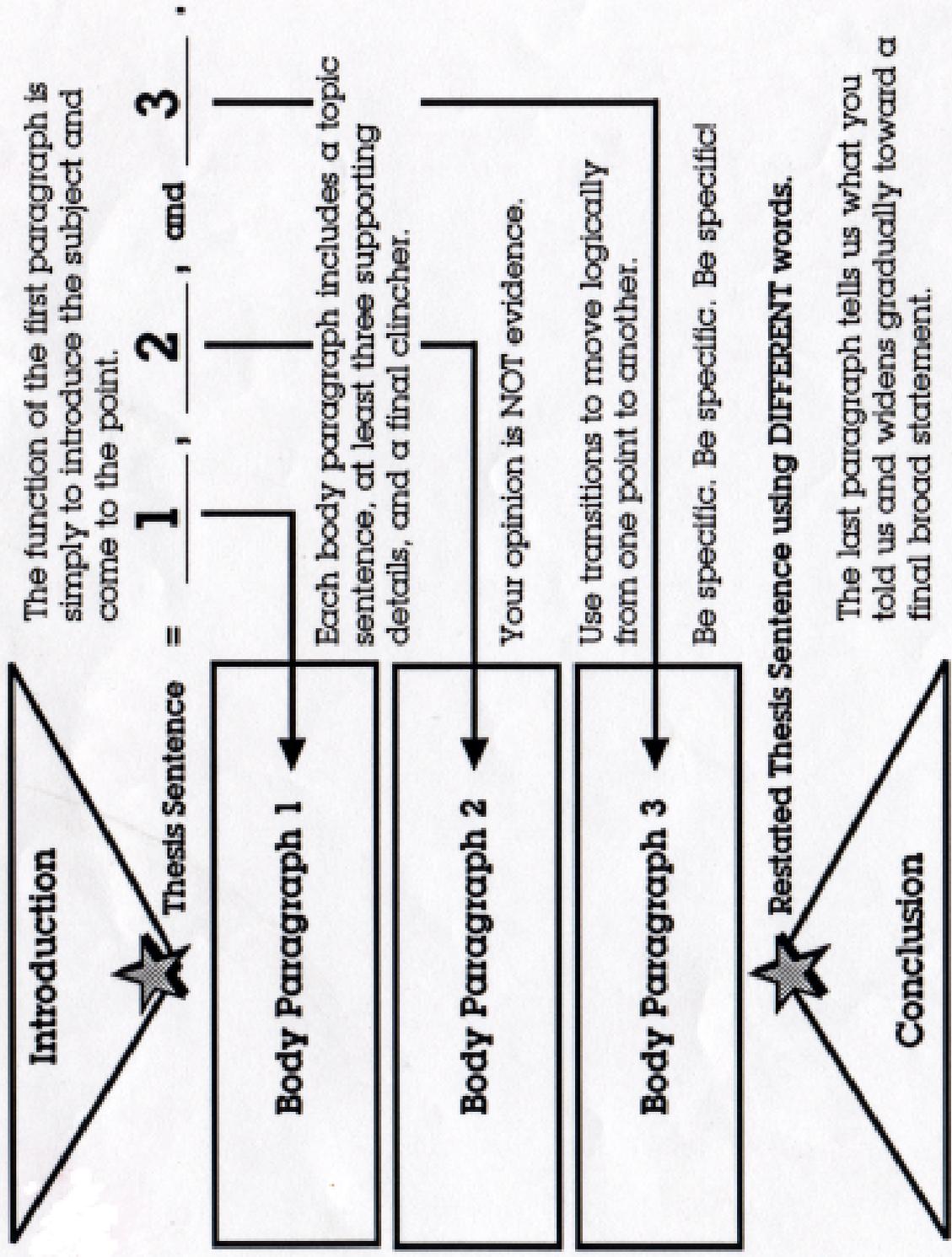
TIMED ESSAYS: Well-known Quotes

Directions: You will have 20 minutes to plan and write the essay assigned below. You are expected to express your thoughts carefully, naturally, and effectively. Be specific -- one concrete, pertinent example is worth a thousand words. Remember that how well you write is much more important than how much you write. *Do not write on a topic other than the one assigned below. An essay on a topic of your own choice will receive no credit.*

First, make certain that you understand the quotation. Then, decide whether you agree or disagree with it. Support your position with specific examples from your reading, study, observation, or experiences.

1. "Alas, possessions possess us." (Henry David Thoreau)
2. "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
3. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" (Robert Browning)
4. "Breed is stronger than pasture." (George Eliot)
5. "Hatred is too great a burden to bear." (Martin Luther King, Jr.)
6. "If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." (Benjamin Franklin)
7. "Money often costs too much." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
8. "Our life is frittered away by detail...Simplify, simplify." (Henry David Thoreau)
9. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings." (William Shakespeare)
10. "The history of the world is but the biography of great men." (Thomas Carlyle)
11. "The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation...A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind." (Henry David Thoreau)
12. "The size of a man can be measured by the size of the thing that makes him angry." (J. K. Morley)
13. "There are some remedies worse than the disease." (Publius Syrus)
14. "To acquire immunity to eloquence is of the utmost importance to the citizens of a democracy." (Bertrand Russell)

Traditional Essay Structure



The FIVE-PARAGRAPH THEME



COLOR: Glossy rose-colored exterior, rather blue underneath.
Occasional theme has a blend, resulting in purple passages.