

blackbird & company
WRITING DISCOVERY GUIDE

Intro to Composition:
The Essay

VOLUME 1

Essay as Structure: Become an Architect

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*Fill your paper
with the breathings
of your heart.*

- William Wordsworth

Great Essays

Just as no two fingerprints are alike, every author has a distinct writing style. Voice is the fingerprint of an author. Architectural structures are embellished with the voice of the architect. Essays are embellished with the voice of the writer. Blackbird & Company Writing Discovery Guides have been developed with the fundamental belief that great writing begins with great ideas. As young writers develop confidence in their ability to express their ideas, they will recognize and embrace the power of writing.

The purpose of writing is to communicate.

Students will actively engage in the work of transforming a cluster of abstract thoughts into a single big idea. This course teaches them to coherently communicate that idea within a focused structure while drawing the reader into their thoughts. *Activities will emphasize content, process, strategy, mechanical conventions, and style.*

Writing is for a reader.

Everything that is read, was once written by someone who had an idea. An essay can have many purposes, but ultimately it must first engage the reader. Unless the essay engages the reader, its underlying purposes—to instruct, to convince, to convey—will be lost. *Writing directives will guide the writer through the process of crafting words and develop their awareness of audience and purpose.*

Big ideas can be communicated through a range of writing domains, including creative writing. It is vital that students discover and explore the potential of all types. Some writing describes, some narrates, some exposes, and some persuades. Some writing is simply meant to entertain. All writing has the power to inform. *This 10 week course will focus on composing the descriptive and literary essay.*

Great essays have the power to encourage, empower, and enlighten. For this reason essay writing should not just be treated as a mechanical endeavor, but as a pathway for the writer to communicate the depths of the heart and mind.

Take flight!

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The Writing Process

Before they are ever built, architectural structures are first imagined. Materials are gathered and then, through a series of steps, from the foundation up, a structure is built. In writing, the *idea* is first imagined. Words are gathered to be crafted—words into phrases, phrases into sentences, sentences into passages—until at last, an idea is realized.

1. Imagine a big idea.

Brainstorming begins! Make a list, diagram, topic wheel, or outline to help organize your thoughts before you begin writing. ***Remember, your ideas are important!***



2. Get your idea on paper.

It's called a rough draft for a reason! Don't worry about being perfect here. ***Get your words out of your head and onto the page using a free flow of ideas.*** Skip lines during this initial stage in the writing process so you can easily modify your ideas when you revise.



3. Conference, then revise your idea.

Before you get a second opinion, read your work aloud to yourself and then ***ask someone else to read it.*** See if the content conveys the idea you set out to communicate in a clear and stylish manner. Make sure your voice shines!



4. Proofread your idea.

Now that you've received feedback and made changes, ***re-read your writing carefully,*** making additional spelling, grammar, and punctuation edits where necessary.



5. Publish your idea.

Remember, your idea is a gift meant to be shared. Type out your polished final draft and share it with someone.

The Writer's Toolkit

Imposition or *Preposition*

Prepositions are glorious little words! Use them to indicate a relationship between things and to add both detail and clarity to your writing. Prepositional phrases begin with a preposition and end with a noun. Sample prepositions: after, before, from, about, in, over, under, above, below.

The peaches in the basket are ready to be baked into a pie.

Not Santa, the Other *Clause*

Subordinate clauses bring a little something extra to a sentence by expanding your idea and adding specificity. A clause cannot stand alone because it is not a complete sentence. Clauses often begin with because, since, as, whenever, although, though, while, etc.

Liam ran for paper towels as the spilled milk was dripping over the edge of the table.

Positively *Appositive*

The **appositive** is an interjected phrase that gives more details about the next door noun. Remember to always punctuate your appositive phrase with commas.

Søren, the youngest member of the family, likes to crack jokes during dinner.

To Be or Not to Be, that is the *Infinitive*

An **infinitive** is simply a basic form of a verb and will almost always begin with “to.” For example: to be, to sing, to love, to send, to sneeze

Sara was delighted to see her best friend after so many months away from her.

Zing-ing

Add “zing” and a sense of immediate action to sentences by opening with an “ing” word.

Seeing the race inspired Jack, who hoped to one day become a sprinter.

Ready, Set, *Active*

When writing in the **active voice** the subject is doing the action. Sentences are stronger, more direct, and very clear as to who is doing what.

My grandmother mailed me a care package on my birthday.

Essay as Structure:

Become an Architect

Writers always begin by shaping a thesis statement that declares a big idea and gives the reader insight into the construction plan.

At this point, the real work begins as the writer crafts the architectural details that will shelter that big idea. The purpose of this section is to gather the tools that will enable you to discover and delight in the process of shaping and crafting. These tools will help you communicate your big idea to an audience in the form of an essay.

- Lesson 1 (weeks 1+2): Getting Started
- Lesson 2 (weeks 3+4): The Introduction, part 1
- Lesson 3 (weeks 5+6): The Introduction, part 2
- Lesson 4 (weeks 7+8): The Body
- Lesson 5 (weeks 9+10): The Conclusion

Lesson 1: Getting Started

Use a dictionary to define:
.....

architecture

shelter (architectural definition)

structure (architectural definition)

Define in your own words:
.....

essay

Now use a dictionary to define:
.....

essay



One purpose of an architectural structure is to provide shelter.

Similarly, the essay consists of a distinct three-part structure that serves as a shelter for your idea.

Part 1: Introduction

The introduction is a very short presentation of your big idea in thesis form that hints at your plan to develop the idea in your body paragraphs. The thesis statement is your opportunity to lead the reader into the train of thought that will be developed throughout the essay.

Part 2: Body

The body consists of three paragraphs that develop your idea by exploring specific details and concepts in depth.

Part 3: Conclusion

The conclusion is a short paragraph that should echo your idea and leave your reader with something surprisingly meaningful to consider.

Good writing always begins with an idea you want to communicate to others. Just as architecture provides shelter, the foundational structure of an essay shelters your idea.

Think About It »

Architecture has many functions in addition to providing shelter. In some cases a square box might be all the structure you need, a place to find protection from the elements or a place to store your car. However, the next time you drive through a neighborhood, notice how each house becomes an individual home as the owner embellishes it with personal touches. Even though the structures are similar, there are distinct differences if you look closely.

Look around your city or town and observe different architectural structures. How are they similar? How are they unique? What shapes, colors, and materials do you notice? Look for examples and describe your findings.

.....



Now look again, in some cases a square box may be an adequate structural solution to a problem. A square box, however, is a completely inadequate structure for a grand monument or a place to house great works of art.

Architect Le Corbusier reminds us that, "Space and light and order. Those are the things that men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep."

Think About It »

Architecture can do much more than meet our basic needs. Architecture can give us a sense of peace, a sense of wonder, it can be a canvas for creative expression, and it can communicate power and security.

The next time you drive around, notice the buildings that stand out from their surroundings. What is the basic function of the structure and how does it go beyond the basic function? What makes them stand out? Look for an example and describe your findings.

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Workbook Assignments »

Complete the following assignments this week in *Thinking In Threes*.

- ❑ Pages 11-14: “The Power of Three”
- ❑ Pages 17-20: “Brainstorming”

“Voice” Warm-Up »

This warm-up will help you practice different style techniques to develop your voice. Review pages 10-12 and then complete the following exercises.

Complete a sentence that begins with a preposition:
.....

1. *After* the big storm, _____ .

Complete a sentence that begins with a clause:
.....

2. *When the bell rang*, _____ .

Insert an appositive:
.....

3. Hannah, _____ , earned her spot in the orchestra.

Complete a sentence that begins with an “ing” word:
.....

4. *Singing* in the rain, _____ .

Complete a sentence that begins with an infinitive:
.....

5. *To send* a text during the speaker’s introduction _____ .

Change the sentences to active voice:
.....

6. My neighbor’s house *was painted* green last week.

7. Kristen *was tickled* by her brother every time she fell asleep on the couch.

Change the sentences to passive voice:
.....

8. The surfer *wears* a wet suit when the water is especially cold.

9. *Leaving* dirty dishes in the sink discourages mother.

Lesson 1: Getting Started (cont.)

"Voice" Writing Exercise »

Write Through the Senses: SIGHT

As writers, we gather details that will spark the reader's senses. This week write a paragraph through the sense of sight, **avoiding all passive verbs**, incorporating instead strong, active verbs. Use as many of the voice techniques as possible. Remember, this is a voice exercise and, as such, may sound stilted.

The purpose is to experiment with language and gain confidence using the tools that will elevate your voice.

Example of writing through the sense of *sight*:

*Flashing red, green, orange, and blue billboards **compete** for my attention as I **saunter** dazedly down Times Square. Psychedelic lights **replace** the moon and stars in the Manhattan night sky. Scores of people **walk** determinedly past me like an army of robots outfitted in black winter coats. The New Yorkers do not **cast** a single glance at an overwhelmed tourist like myself. Shiny black skyscrapers **tower** above me from all sides. People **shuffle** in and out of stores that cater to every sized pocket book. I **walk** past various electronic shops *simultaneously displaying cameras, stereos, and TV's at deceptively low prices*. Neon white light **illuminates** the sidewalk in front of a Rolex Watch store. The nightly news anchor **looks** down at me placidly from giant TV screens suspended in the night. In the distance King Kong **clutches** an enormous Empire State Building made entirely out of LEGOs.*

Begin your sight paragraph by brainstorming some topic ideas:

Now, generate a list of descriptive sight words:

Finally, compile a list of active verbs you might use for this paragraph:

On the following two pages, write a rough draft and a final draft of your paragraph »

SIGHT Paragraph » *Rough Draft*

Begin drafting your sight paragraph. Use a highlighter to find your verbs and make sure you have not used the passive voice. If you have, make revisions. Once you have completed writing, re-read your work a final time.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Student Self-Evaluation

This is your opportunity to **assess your ability to communicate with the active voice**. An honest and thorough evaluation is an opportunity for you to learn from your own writing and move through the process of revision thoughtfully and productively.

Student Name _____

Assignment _____

Date _____

- ☐ Make a thorough sweep of your rough draft, underline all active verbs in red. If you find a passive verb, draw a red box around the verb or verb phrase and change it to an active verb when you revise.
- ☐ Re-read your draft making sure you communicate singularly through the directed sense. Ask yourself if the paragraph precisely describes through the focus of the particular sense.
- ☐ Make a thorough sweep of your paragraph for mechanics—capitalization, punctuation, fragments, run-ons, and tense.

SIGHT Paragraph » *Final Draft*

After you have made revisions to your rough draft, copy your work neatly on this page.

[illegible]