

How to develop a structured essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

How do I write a unified essay?

Your essay of about 750 words must have the basic organizational structure of an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion—in other words, **a beginning, a middle and an end**. Your essay should also use **transitional words and phrases** (e.g., moreover, however, in addition, to conclude) at the start of each paragraph and when adding points within your paragraphs to show how ideas connect within or between paragraphs.

Why is the first paragraph so important?

The introduction paragraph sets the tone for your essay, makes the first and strongest impression on readers, and is therefore very important. The introduction should include, at least, 1) the title and author of the text you are writing about, 2) the main idea or ideas you have identified in the essay, and 3) the thesis you have chosen to develop in your own essay. You should also include a brief mention of writing techniques used by the author that you will include in your discussion of the essay. Do not make sweeping or vague generalizations, do not pronounce, do not begin tritely with a dictionary definition, and do not apologize for your inadequate ideas or knowledge.

How many paragraphs do I write?

For the body of the essay, you should write at least three substantial paragraphs, each developing one idea and stating a topic sentence that makes the focus of the paragraph clear. For example, you may decide to develop a discussion of techniques and devices in one of the three body paragraphs, or you may decide to discuss one technique in each body paragraph.

What do I do for a conclusion?

Your conclusion paragraph should be a restatement of the major ideas you have presented in your essay and it should bring some closure to your essay. It can be shorter than the body paragraphs; the most important thing is that it include some statements that bring a sense of conclusion to your ideas and observations about the text you are discussing.

Instructions

In Module 10, we created thesis statements, and in earlier modules (Module 9, for example), we identified main ideas in an essay. Now you must take your own thesis ideas and turn them into a 750-word essay. This exercise asks you to work on developing a structured essay. This exercise will also help you practise creating a short outline for your essay. You should aim for a five or six paragraph essay. Even if you did not complete Modules 9 and 10, you should start in the same way by thinking about main ideas and good thesis statements you could write about in your own essay in response to the short story or essay you will be writing about in this particular exercise.

Always express yourself clearly, even when you are listing ideas. In the sections below, you will be asked to list some of the ideas you might develop in the various paragraphs of your essay.

- In **PART 1** of this exercise you will draft an outline for an essay based on your response to an original essay. In preparing an outline, your goal is to create a skeleton structure that you can use to guide yourself through the writing of a 750-word essay about a text. Never attempt to write an essay without first planning, in an outline, what you will discuss. The outline does not have to be written in full paragraphs. Instead, you can briefly list the topic sentence and supporting points that might go into each paragraph. In the appropriate spaces below, fill in the outline plan for an opening paragraph, three or four body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph.
- In **PARTS 2 and 3**, simply identify the paragraphs as acceptable or unacceptable examples of introduction and conclusion paragraphs.

Exercise

I PART 1

OUTLINING: In the spaces below, create an outline for a 750-word essay based on “Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski.

INTRODUCTION

“Dance with a Giraffe” – Main Ideas

“Dance with a Giraffe” – Thesis Statement

BODY

First body paragraph

Second body paragraph

Third body paragraph

Fourth body paragraph (if applicable)

CONCLUSION

II PART 2

Determine whether the sample paragraphs below are acceptable or unacceptable as introductory paragraphs.

1. “Dance with a Giraffe,” by Christine Jurzykowski, shows how the author was emotionally affected by the sad death of a giraffe that she had come to love, and her story makes us remember that all living things sometimes deserve and need care, especially in their last moments on earth. The title of the essay makes it clear what she will talk about. She uses a very personal tone and effective description to get her ideas across.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

If unacceptable, explain why

2. Ms. Jurzykowski has written a very sad essay about the death of a giraffe, probably an animal abandoned by some zoo somewhere, because we all know there are no giraffes in the American wilds, but some have been gathered together with other animals on a farm in Texas. There is even a rhino there. The author felt very sad about the death of her favourite pet and I know what that feels like.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

If unacceptable, explain why

III PART 3

Determine whether the sample paragraphs below are acceptable or unacceptable as conclusion paragraphs for an essay.

1. This essay is all about animals, about how they feel, about how they suffer, about how they affect the humans they encounter, about how they live, and about how they die. These are animals man has abandoned for one reason or another. Jurzykowski uses the example of a giraffe, and makes us feel for this suffering beast; it might have been any animal. The important thing to remember is that we, too, are animals and part of the cycle of nature. All living things deserve care and love.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

If unacceptable, explain why

2. To conclude, tone is important in the effectiveness of this essay. The tone is serious and personal and we are moved by what we read because it is a very sad story. She makes us feel for the animals; she was very sad about what happened. She was probably sad about the deaths of other animals on the farm too, but she did not talk about them much.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

If unacceptable, explain why

Answer key

I PART 1

Here are two examples of outlines for an essay on “Dance with a Giraffe.”

Example 1

a) First paragraph - Introduction

1. mention essay title and author
2. explain the topic of the impact of the death of the animal on the narrator
3. state the theme of how all living things deserve our care
4. and finally mention that the very personal tone and simple, colloquial diction are two techniques that will be discussed

Remember: You may have chosen other acceptable writing techniques to discuss in your essay.

Possible body structure

- b) second paragraph – brief summary of what happens in the essay, how the author came to care about animals and work in Texas, of the events surrounding the death of the giraffe, and most importantly, some hint about how these event had a profound effect on the author
- c) third paragraph – how the death of this particular animal affected everyone so much, when you would not expect such strong reactions, not only for the author, but even other animals and people in the area—how all this drove home the idea of caring for others
- d) fourth paragraph – how personal tone and the use of the first-person narrator helps make the emotions come through, and how the diction and language used are appropriate to the topic (simple yet appropriate)

Final paragraph

- e) conclusion – difficult not to be moved emotionally by this personal and effective essay, mainly because death is something we must all deal with

Example 2

a) First paragraph – Introduction

1. mention author and essay title
2. explain that the essay is not about dancing but about dying
3. state how the theme is about the inevitability yet emotional and amazing impact of death experienced first-hand
4. and finally, show how the author uses descriptive detail, narration (storytelling and suspense), and a serious tone to get our attention and make it all credible

Remember: you may have chosen other acceptable writing techniques to discuss in your essay

Possible body structure

- b) second paragraph – examples of narrative structure (author’s travels, getting to Texas, caring for animals, care for one special dying animal in particular) all from a personal point of view
- c) third paragraph – examples of how descriptive detail (most of the essay deals with one or two hours and days surrounding the death) makes the scenes come alive and makes us feel and share the author’s emotions
- d) fourth paragraph – discussion of the emotional and serious tone of the essay and how the author never changes her tone

Final paragraph

- e) conclusion – essay uses emotional death of giraffe to make us realize we are all part of the life cycle, that all life matters, that animals have feelings too, and most important of all, animals can seemingly appreciate our love and caring attitude in a time of need

II PART 2

1. **Acceptable.** This paragraph gives the author's name, the essay title, a one sentence content summary, identifies a reaction to the content of the essay, and even mentions two literary techniques to be discussed.
2. **Unacceptable.** This paragraph provides the author's name and a summary of some of the important events mentioned in the essay, but no real thesis sentence (reaction-response) on the reader's part, or even any mention of techniques used by the author in the Giraffe essay is included.

III PART 3

1. **Acceptable.** We find here a good conclusion paragraph that restates some of the major ideas both within the original essay and the student essay as well. There is a sense of closure and ending, and we are left with something to think about.
2. **Unacceptable.** At the start, this paragraph says it is will be a conclusion paragraph, but in reality it is all about one technique used by the author, namely tone, and there is little or no sense of closure or ending. We need more than the intention to conclude; there must be a real conclusion evident.