**What is Expository Writing?**

‘Expository’ (expose) is a synonym of ‘explanatory’. Thus, an expository essay or article is a piece of writing that **explains** or **informs**. It is meant to be based on fact and free of the writer’s prejudices. Opinion is often expressed, *but only* if it is backed by fact. For example, if someone asked you to write an essay on the causes of World War II, you might write about Germany’s losses in World War I, the Treaty of Versailles, the fall of the Weimar Republic, and the rise of Hitler led Nazism. In other words, everything would be based on verifiable fact – an expository essay.

The expository writing process is centered on five activities:

1. **Generate an idea, topic, or hypothesis**
2. **Inform yourself before you form any opinions (Some choose to start with a question)**
3. **Determine a perspective and/or question to present to your audience**
4. **Find evidence to back up this idea**
5. **Expound on the idea**

For example, if you were to say that the Treaty of Versailles was the chief cause of World War II, you would first talk about the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, the financial condition of Germany after WWI, the ineffectiveness of the Weimar Republic, and how they all led to the rise of Nazism. ***(Words underlined above would be the topics of focus and are what each paragraph is explaining.)***

Structurally, a piece of expository writing has the following components:

* An **introduction** that introduces the central idea you’ll talk about in the essay or article.
* The **main body** that presents evidence to back up the idea.
* A **conclusion** that presents your idea again *but in the light of the evidence.*

Thus, the central structure of expository writing should be to build towards explaining a truth, fact by fact, evidence by evidence. You will use expository writing a lot throughout your academic life. Every essay you write in college will be expository in nature, as will the writing segment of the ACT/SAGE/GRE/SAT exams. Even if you don’t go to college, most writing you’ll have to do in your professional life will involve a lot of expository content as well. In other words, sharpening up this skill will serve you well throughout your life.

**Here are the Top 5 Styles of Expository Essays**

**1. Descriptive / Definition Essay**

The author describes a topic by listing characteristics, features, and examples. It provides details about how something looks, feels, tastes, smells, sounds, or makes one feel, as well as how it fits into the world.

*Cue Words:*

for example, the characteristics are...

**Example of Descriptive / Definition Writing**

Expository essays are written by students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a particular topic. For example, a student might use a descriptive pattern to emphasize the features and characteristics of a topic. Sequential writing emphasizes the order of events, listing items in numerical or chronological order. A writer might use a comparison or contrast pattern to emphasize the similarities or differences between two topics. A cause and/or effect pattern shows the relationship between events, while a problem/solution pattern shows a different kind of relationship that discusses a problem and suggests solutions. Variations of these patterns are sometimes used, as well as a combination of patterns to create an expository essay.

**2. Sequence or Process**

The author lists items or events in numerical or chronological order.

*Cue Words:*

first, second, third; next; then; finally

**Example of Sequential Writing**

Expository writing is intended to convey the writer's knowledge about a topic. While different patterns may be employed to create the essay, every essay contains the same features: the introduction, the thesis, the body paragraphs, and the conclusion. The introduction is the first paragraph in the essay. The introduction contains the thesis statement, one sentence that summarizes the main idea of the essay. The body paragraphs follow the introduction and explain the main topics. Lastly, the conclusion is the final paragraph that restates the main topics and the thesis. Every expository essay contains these features, in this order.

**3. Comparison / Contrast**

The author explains how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different. A comparison essay usually discusses the similarities between two things, while the contrast essay discusses the differences.

*Cue Words:*

different; in contrast; alike; same as; on the other hand

**Example of Compare/Contrast Writing**

Expository writing has distinct features that distinguish it from creative writing. The content of an expository essay is factual and straight-forward while the content of a creative story is imaginative and symbolic. Expository essays are written for a general audience but creative stories are designed for a specific audience. The writing style of an expository essay is formal, standard and academic, while a creative story uses an informal and artistic style. The organization of an expository essay is systematic and deliberate; on the other hand, the organization of a creative story is more arbitrary and artistic. Finally, the most important difference between the two types of writing is the purpose of the text. An expository essay is written to inform and instruct, while a creative story is written to entertain and captivate.

**4. Cause / Effect**

The author focuses on the relationship between two or more events or experiences. The essay could discuss both causes and effects, or it could simply address one or the other. A cause essay usually discusses the reasons why something happened. An effect essay discusses what happens after a specific event or circumstance.

*Cue Words:*

reasons why; if...then; as a result; therefore; because

**Example of Cause/Effect Writing**

There are several reasons why so many people attend the Olympic Games or watch them on television. One reason is tradition. The name Olympics and the torch and flame remind people of the ancient games. People can escape the ordinariness of daily life by attending or watching the Olympics. They like to identify with someone else's individual sacrifice and accomplishment. National pride is another reason, and an athlete's or a team's hard earned victory becomes a nation's victory. There are national medal counts and people keep track of how many medals their country's athletes have won.

**5. Problem / Solution**

The author states a problem and lists one or more solutions for the problem. A variation of this pattern is the question and-answer format in which the author poses a question and then answers it. Please note that argumentative writing falls under this category, although its main purpose is more to persuade than inform.

*Cue Words:*

the problem is; the dilemma is; puzzle is solved; question... answer

**Example of Problem/Solution Writing**

One problem with the modern Olympics is that it has become very big and expensive to operate. The city or country that hosts the games often loses a lot of money. A stadium, pools, and playing fields must be built for the athletic events and housing is needed for the athletes who come from around the world. And all of these facilities are used for only 2 weeks! In 1984, Los Angeles solved these problems by charging a fee for companies who wanted to be official sponsors of the games. Companies like McDonald's paid a lot of money to be part of the Olympics. Many buildings that were already built in the Los Angeles area were also used. The Coliseum where the 1932 games were held was used again and many colleges and universities in the area became playing and living sites.

**Expository Writing Prompts**

* As we move further on the academic ladder, writing prompts require detailed research and a college-level grasp of subject matter.
* Listed below are 10 examples of expository writing prompts.
* These are great ways to determine the direction of your thought process and research goals.

1. Explore how obesity affects a nation’s productivity and economy.

2. What were the direct and indirect causes of World War II?

3. What are the long-term effects of global warming, especially its estimated impact on coastal cities?

4. What is your favorite retail business (Starbucks, McDonalds, etc.)? Describe to a layman how this business was started, what products it sells, how it makes money, and what its best qualities are.

5. Describe the evolution of communication in the last 25 years since the advent of the internet.

6. What is your favorite poem or short story? Explore and analyze its salient features in an essay.

7. What is a serious public health concern that you believe does not get enough attention? Describe this problem in detail.

8. Why is diversity in a workplace important?

9. What are the causes and effects of not voting in the elections?

10. What steps would you take to buy a new computer? Describe the process in-detail.