

# Writing Terms 11

*This list of terms builds on the preceding lists you have been given in grades 9-10. It contains all the terms you were responsible for learning in the past, as well as the new terms you are now responsible for learning.*

- *The new terms are marked with (NT): New Term.*

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- **Audience:** The particular individual or group to which a piece of writing is addressed or appeals.
  - **Form:** Form refers to genre, as writing can take the form of a story, or poem, or script for a play, for example. It can also refer to the shape or structure of the writing, as an essay, for instance, may use the chronological form or the climactic order form as an organizational technique (see below for details).
  - **Purpose:** The author may have one or more purposes in a piece of writing; these include the desire to inform, satirize, criticize, persuade, entertain or argue, etc.
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## The Paragraph

- **Narrative Paragraph:** Narrative paragraphs tell a story, often a segment from the narrator's life, and the lesson to be learned from the story (which is the thesis). Short anecdotes are written in narrative paragraphs, and, like short stories, they have climax.
- **Descriptive Paragraph:** Descriptive paragraphs describe a scene or a collection of scenes, and rely more on description than action or character to make their point. In fact, often nothing really happens at all in a descriptive paragraph. These paragraphs are like written photographs in that they simply describe a scene.
- **Expository Paragraph:** This paragraph is the basis for the typical essay written for school. In a single paragraph, the writer either persuades the reader to a particular point of view or explains something to the reader. The first type of expository paragraph is called the persuasive or argumentative paragraph; the second is called the explanatory.

## The Essay

An essay is a short piece of prose (comparable in length to the short story in that it can be read in a single sitting) that analyses a subject or offers an argument on a topic. “*Essais*” means “to attempt” or “try out” in French, which is exactly what an essayist does in his/her writing – tries out a few thoughts on a topic. When writing an essay, there are several primary considerations for the writer:

## A. Essay Structure

An essay is comprised of a minimum of three paragraphs. There isn't really a magic number of paragraphs. A typical "canned" structure for an essay is the five-paragraph form. The essay is broken into an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. This is one structure; essays can take a longer multi-paragraphed form.

- **Introduction:** This is the first paragraph or two of an essay and is where the reader is made aware of the purpose for the piece of writing. The introduction provides information on the topic and allows the reader to figure out what kind of essay it is.
- **Thesis:** This is the main idea of the essay, which ties the whole piece together. It is like the theme in a short story. Usually, the thesis is stated explicitly, most often in the opening paragraph. The thesis is most often expressed as a single sentence, otherwise known as the thesis statement.
- **Transitions:** These are words that allow the reader to slide smoothly from one idea to the next or one paragraph to the next (however, therefore, nevertheless, as a result, etc.).
- **Body:** This is the bulk of the essay, where most information is provided (where one proves the thesis).
- **Conclusion:** The end of the essay, usually one or two paragraphs in length, where the writer wraps up the argument or otherwise ties together the content of the essay for the reader.

## B. Types of Essays

Essays can be either formal (NT) or informal, depending on the language and style selected by the writer (see language and style below). There are many different types of essays, including narrative, but four main categories follow. In general, the narrative, descriptive, and personal essays are informal while the expository and literary are formal, but even these guidelines are flexible.

- **Descriptive:** An essay in which the main objective is to engage the senses and convey the essence of a character and/or place rather than plot (as in a narrative essay) or ideas (as in an expository essay). Just as an artist's paint strokes can capture a personality or setting, an author's words illustrate its subject in a moment in time when depicted in a descriptive essay. (NT)
- **Personal:** The personal essay is an extension of the narrative and/or descriptive paragraphs described above. In it, a writer describes a situation in which he/she learned something profound or discovered something about life. These essays are written in first person point of view.

- **Expository:** This is the most common essay form used in school. Expository essays persuade or explain, are written in third person point of view, and follow a fairly strict format. Typical expository essay writing techniques (HOW a writer explains or persuades) include cause and effect and compare/contrast, although there are many, many more other approaches. Exposition is therefore writing that conveys information or explains something in a detailed way.
- **Literary:** The literary essay is a formal, academic essay in which a piece, or pieces, of literature are analyzed for theme, characterization, style, use of figurative language, and/or other stylistic device. The writer expresses his or her interpretation of the literary work and provides evidence from the text to support his/her opinion.
  - **Quotation Incorporation:** This is the method by which a writer defends his/her interpretation of a literary work. Evidence from the text is supplied in the form of direct quotations and/or paraphrases, followed by a page or line reference in parentheses, in order to convince the reader that the writer's interpretation of the literature is sound. Strict rules govern quotation incorporation: ask your teacher for more details about these rules. Also see MLA formatting rules for more information. (NT)

## Organizational Techniques

Whether they write paragraphs or essays, writers require ways of organizing their thoughts and often cite evidence to prove their points. The following is a short list of organizational possibilities and evidence types:

- **Analogy:** An analogy is a comparison of certain similarities between two different things, sometimes expressed as a simile. For example: A street light is like a star in that both provide light at night, both are in predictable locations, both are overhead, and both serve no function in the daytime. (NT)
- **Case Study:** A detailed, intensive study of an individual unit—such as a person, family, social group, or corporation—that emphasizes developmental issues and environmental relationships. The case study analysis stresses factors that contribute to the success or failure of the unit, and it is written as an exemplary, cautionary, or instructive model for the reader. (NT)
- **Cause and Effect:** An essay technique whereby the events leading up to a single effect are explained to the reader. What causes something to occur? The answer to this question is found in the cause and effect essay.
- **Chronological Order:** When the essay, usually a narrative, simply recites the events of an action in the order in which they occurred.
- **Climactic Order:** If an essay is organized so that the least important idea is presented first and the ideas build in importance to the most important idea, that

essay is organized using climactic order. The closing of this essay is the climax, so it doesn't simply trail off into feeble nothingness.

- **Compare and Contrast:** An essay technique whereby one item or concept is evaluated relative to another. Both similarities and differences between the two items are explained
- **Explanatory:** This essay tries to explain something to the reader, either how something works, or how to do something. It simply offers information to the reader, without trying to persuade the reader to think a certain way about the information.
- **Persuasive:** This essay attempts to convince the reader to agree with a particular point of view on a topic. Persuasion is the act of persuading the reader to agree with the writer's position on something. **Persuasive techniques** (NT) are the methods writers use to convince the reader; they include appeals to logic (deduction and induction) and appeals to emotion (through word choice, example, repetition, hyperbole, irony, etc.).
- **Statistical Evidence:** This organizational method is similar to the one on expert opinion. The writer does research to find out about the statistics on his or her topic, and then he or she quotes those statistics in order to convince the reader that the writer's opinion is correct. (NT)
- **Research:** The writer uses researched facts and examples to prove that his or her idea about a topic is correct or to persuade the reader to accept his or her point of view. Research essays always cite sources, so the writer won't be accused of plagiarism, and the reader can feel confident that the writer has done enough research to be knowledgeable. (NT)

## Writing Styles and Language

Style is the individual manner in which an author expresses his or her thoughts and feelings. Style is basically determined by aspects such as diction, tone, sentences, images, and language. Other stylistic devices include descriptive language, parallel construction, exaggeration, sentence fragments, and dialogue. Essentially, style is the way the writer chooses to express his or her ideas. A writer chooses a style for any piece of writing, whether it is a paragraph, an essay, or something else. The following lists different things writers play with when creating their style and making their language choices:

- **Bias:** This is a tendency in a person that prevents objective consideration of an issue. Bias is a form of prejudice, in that a person might be partial to a particular way of seeing something and try to influence others accordingly. Bias is a form of favoritism.

- **Cliché:** An idea that has been so frequently stated over time that it has lost its impact through excessive use. Clichés are too familiar to readers to have any powerful effect on them, and thus are best avoided by writers. For example, “It was a dark and stormy night” is a cliché.
- **Colloquial Language:** The informal language of conversation (not acceptable when writing essays and reports) that often makes a character seem more “real” and believable. Words such as “blab”, “okay”, “check it out”, and “surf the web” are colloquial. When someone uses colloquial language, s/he is using a colloquialism. This type of language is also known as slang.
- **Description:** The use of sensory appeals (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) and poetic language to make powerful writing. The goal of description is to have the reader live the experience described in the writing.
- **Diction:** Choice and use of words in speech or writing—a style of speaking or writing results from a deliberate choice and arrangement of words in a story/essay. Each writer uses diction appropriate to his or her purpose, subject, essay type, and style.
- **Didactic:** A didactic style is a formal kind of writing that is used when the writer wants to teach something important, usually a lesson on morality, ethics, politics, or something of that nature. If the writer is not careful, this kind of writing can make the reader feel he or she is being lectured or preached at (“You should...”). (NT)
- **Formal and Informal Language:** Formal language is writing that is deliberate and dignified; it avoids partial sentences, most contractions, colloquial expression, and slang. Informal language is writing that resembles everyday casual conversation and communication with no regard for formality; this type of language incorporates slang, idiomatic expressions, partial sentences, and contractions. Informal language is the representation of speech in writing. For example, a writer depicting a party would have the characters use informal language at the party itself, while formal language would be used when the characters explain the party to a police officer. (NT)
- **Historical Reference:** Used as a persuasive technique, a historical reference is when a writer cites something that occurred in the past to support his or her argument. (NT)
- **Irony:** When there is a surprising gap between what might be expected and what actually occurs. There are three different kinds of irony (see your “Story Terminology” handout), but **verbal irony** is the type most frequently used in essay writing. Verbal irony occurs when the opposite of what is said is actually meant (sarcasm is an extreme form of verbal irony).

- **Jargon:** Words or expressions developed for use within a specific group (e.g. technology, science, education) that are often meaningless to people outside of that group. For example: megabytes, feedback, guesstimate.
- **Juxtaposition:** The deliberate placing together of two or more thoughts, images or other elements that emphasize each other through their side-by-side placement. Juxtaposition is a form of contrast.
- **Objective:** In objective writing, the author relies more on hard evidence and logical proof than on intuition, prejudices, anecdotal evidence, or personal interpretations. Objective writing is the opposite of subjective writing. (NT)
- **Propaganda:** Information for readers that is designed to influence opinion, sometimes in unfair ways. The information may be true, or even false, but it is carefully selected and organized to manipulate the reader. Propaganda is often associated with corrupt governments, which isn't a necessarily fair association.
- **Rhetorical Question:** A question for which no answer is expected—often used for rhetorical effect, such as making a point in writing. “You don't expect me to really do that, do you?” is an example of a character using a rhetorical question. The implied answer is clearly, “No.” Rhetorical questions are often used in essay conclusions and can be used in a modified way to transition in the body of an essay. In this case, the writer concludes a paragraph with the rhetorical question and answers it as the first sentence of the next paragraph. (NT)
- **Slang:** Another word for casual, colloquial language, which is often the form everyday speech takes: “I was, like, ya know, so INTO that movie!” or “My bad” are examples of slang, or colloquial, expressions.
- **Subjective:** In subjective writing, the author relies more on intuition, prejudices, or emotional appeals than on hard evidence and proof. This is the opposite of objective writing. (NT)
- **Tone:** Tone is the author's attitude toward his/her subject or readers. It is similar to tone of voice and should not be confused with mood or atmosphere. An author's tone might be sarcastic, sincere, apologetic, humorous, bitter, analytic, reflective, nostalgic, resigned, didactic, etc.
- **Understatement:** Understatement is a form of satire or sarcasm. It achieves its effect through stating less than what is necessary. For example, a person might say to a hospitalized car crash victim, “I bet that hurt.”
- **Voice:** Voice is the personality of the writing, the specific characteristics that make the writing unique. The voice of a piece of writing is assessed in terms of style and/or tone. Every writer has a unique and recognizable voice. (NT)

- **Wit:** Wit refers to clever, often humorous, intelligence and the ability to make clever remarks in an amusing way. A witty person can recognize the relationships between seemingly unrelated things and express those relationships with keen perception. Sarcasm is a form of extreme wit intended to wound or ridicule another.

### **Other Forms of Non-Fiction Writing**

- **Autobiography:** An account of a person's life written by that person.
- **Biography:** An account of a person's life written by someone else.
- **Diary:** Writing about, often on a daily basis, the events in a person's life. The diary is a personal and private place where a person can write without an intended audience (though this is not always the case). Ironically, some diaries are later published, especially if the person is famous. (NT)