



Illinois Valley Community College
Writing Center

TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE ESSAYS

Essay writing is a complex process, more than can be adequately discussed in one handout. This sheet offers some general guidelines for creating effective essays. For more information on any writing topic, visit the Writing Center in D-201.

- Understand the assignment. Consult the assignment sheet and clarify questions with your instructor. Visit the Writing Center, office hours, or other resource for extra help.
- Conduct prewriting to generate ideas. Do not censor your ideas at this point. Some common prewriting techniques are brainstorming, listing, mapping, and outlining. When finished, review your prewriting and select the best ideas to write about.
- Conduct research, if necessary. Focus on credible, relevant, and current sources. Avoid “wiki” sites, blogs, discussion forums, and content farms (like About.com).
- Write an essay that has at least 5 paragraphs: introduction, 3 body paragraphs, and conclusion.
- Begin the essay with an introduction that introduces and contextualizes your topic. Use an attention-getting technique to engage your audience and relate it to your topic. Include your thesis statement in the introduction (they are often placed as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph).
- Create a clear, one-sentence thesis statement that identifies the main idea of your essay. The rest of the essay should be organized around supporting this statement. It should state your main idea and preview the essay’s purpose. Use clear wording, and avoid announcements of intent (“This essay will discuss...”)
- Use the *claim-evidence-analysis* (also known as *details and development*) pattern in body paragraphs. Start each body paragraph with one sentence that supports the thesis and makes a claim. Support that claim using relevant evidence, citing when necessary. Explain how the evidence supports your claim. Include about 2-4 details to support the claim of each paragraph.
- End the essay with a concluding paragraph that revisits your thesis and main ideas and wraps up the essay in a pleasing way. Be sure the length of your introduction and conclusion are on par with your body paragraphs.
- Cite secondary evidence using the documentation style preferred in the respective course (MLA, APA, and Chicago Style are common). Include an in-text citation whenever you use evidence from a source. Include a Works Cited, References, or Bibliography page (depending on the documentation style you use). See the [Stylebook](http://www.ivcc.edu/stylebook) for help (www.ivcc.edu/stylebook)
- Avoid plagiarism. Whenever you use the words or ideas of another source, you **must** include a citation and reference the source in the bibliography.
- Use proper grammar and mechanics. Avoid major sentence boundary errors like comma splices, run-ons, and fragments. Seek extra help when necessary.
- Pay attention to writing style. Use vivid and precise language, and avoid using “text language.” Use a variety of sentence structures and avoid repetitiveness. Usually, academic writing should avoid the first person (“I”) and second person (“you”). Avoid contractions, slang, foul language, and abbreviations. Aim for clarity and grace in your writing.