

ESSAY DEFINITIONS

Regis Writing Center

An essay is a composition that focuses on a theme or subject. There are four common types of academic essays, all of which must have a thesis, clear organization, and supporting details:

- 1) **Argumentative** essays take a stance on an issue that has two sides. They present both sides but argue why one is more valid than the other. Argumentative essays must avoid logical and rhetorical fallacies.
- 2) **Expository** essays explain or inform by using facts or ideas. The language should be concise and direct, with few figurative images or words. The author relies on his or her own expertise to construct an expository essay and cites outside sources only for ideas beyond the author's knowledge.
- 3) **Personal** essays explore the author's ideas about a topic or relates the author's own experiences. Using the word "I" is acceptable, and creating a "personal voice" is expected.
- 4) **Research** essays rely on published work by others to support a thesis. Documentation of these sources by MLA or APA guidelines (or other formats) is expected.

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Below are definitions that may be used in any of these four types of essay.

Analyze	Break down the topic into its components and look for patterns in or relationships among the various parts.
Compare	Write about points of similarity.
Contrast	Write about points of difference.
Compare/Contrast	Write about points of similarity and difference.
Criticize	State an opinion of the correctness or merits of an item or issue; criticism may approve or disapprove. NOTE: Literary criticism may describe, interpret, or evaluate literature using, for example, Marxist, feminist, psychological, or historical critical theory.
Critique	Write about the strong and weak points.
Define	Write an explanation of a word or concept by placing it in a group, a class, or a subgroup, or by describing what it means to the author, to a specific group, or in comparison to other similar terms.
Describe	Write about the subject to give readers a mental picture.

Discuss	Write about a subject as if carrying on a conversation with the reader. As in a real discussion, consider multiple aspects or sides of the subject.
Enumerate	Write about one thing after another, making a list.
Evaluate	Write about the significance or worth of the subject. The author might also include negative aspects of the subject or the author's opinion about the value of the subject while examining its worth and limitations.
Explain	Write about the subject to clarify it for readers. Explaining may involve interpreting or telling readers how to treat the subject.
Interpret	Write about the subject in words that make the reader know how the author feels about it. Interpreting often involves "translating" the subject so it is put into new words.
Illustrate	Write about the subject to create a mental picture of it, or draw a diagram or other visual aid for the reader.
Justify	Write about the reasons the subject should be accepted as the author wants it to be.
Prove	Write about the truth of the subject by supplying facts about it or by supplying logical evidence that leads readers to believe the author.
Summarize	Write about the subject to capture the main points of the original more concisely.