

## Tips on the Essay

- A. Remember that an insightful **thesis** contains a challenging, precise, arguable, and significant statement. If your thesis is vague and lifeless, your essay may also be vague and lifeless. Traditionally, expository essays have the thesis at the end of the introduction, but other variations are possible; the goal is to get your point out in a logical way early on in the piece.

Ask yourself the following:

1. Is my point as precise as I should make it?
2. Can any of my words say what I mean more exactly?
3. Is my point deep enough?
4. Am I interpreting or merely stating the obvious?
5. Am I pushing my idea as far as it can go?
6. Are any points in the paper not covered by this thesis?
7. Will this idea fit the length of this essay?
8. Am I bringing my own new insight or parroting a commonly held interpretation?
9. Can I truly argue this point?
10. Could this point be disagreed with?

- B. **Topic Sentences** appear as **the first sentence** of each paragraph. State your point right away and keep your intended focus on it. **Don't** begin your paragraph with background information which is not the point of paragraph. This "clearing of the throat" is generally transparent and distracting. **Transitions** in the first sentence can come in the form of phrases and clauses that connect to the ideas in the previous paragraphs. Transitions should guide the reader through your structure and ideas.
- C. **Support and Evidence:** You should use at least **two quotes** in each paragraph which support or prove your topic sentence. Always give the page number right after the quote in parentheses. If citation appears at the end of a sentence, follow it with a period.

**Remember that your teacher says, "most quotes should be imbedded within sentences of your words"(pg. 28).** This keeps your quotes short and in context of your commentary.

However, occasionally, longer quotes require a block quote format:

Remember that with quotes over three lines long, you should indent an extra tab, single space, just as this paragraph is doing now. Notice that this paragraph does not have quotation marks around it, but does contain a page number. (pg. 28)

After a long quote, you may continue in the normal format, either as a continuation of the same paragraph, or in the form of a new paragraph by indenting.

- D. **Commentary** connects the evidence to the topic sentence and thesis. Watch that you are not offering summary of the quote as commentary. Quotes alone don't prove your topic sentence or your argument. You must offer **your words** to connect the quotes to the topic sentence. Avoid those dreaded words, "This quote shows...." Just explain how the content of the quote backs up your paragraph's point.

- E. **Paragraph development.** One thing to remember when making your point is: "**Start where you want to end up.**"

When you get to the end of your paragraph, and also your essay, check that the point which you ended up with is the same point you started with. Often, writers find that they didn't know what they wanted to really say in a paragraph or essay until they wrote it. Sometimes the point you really meant to prove in a paragraph, for example, might come out of your head *after* you have written the paragraph. You may have to go back after you finish the paragraph and modify the original starting point (topic sentence or thesis) so that it says what you really wanted to say all along. Oh, and above all, be brilliant!