

Unit 7 Creative Writing and Basic Essay

In Unit 7, Mr. Pudewa teaches the students to complete a “brain inventory” to write a paragraph on any topic. In the SWI C, Mr. Pudewa presents the basic essay model and shows them how to write a five-paragraph essay on any topic.

This is the Creative Writing Unit 7 and is presented in *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* on the second half of disc five.

Aren't there different kinds of essays that I need to teach my student?

The basic essay can be used as a model for almost any kind of essay. The different kinds of essays (argumentative, compare/contrast, expository, etc.) simply describe what the essay should do. The process of creating the essay is still the same. These kinds of essays help teachers design writing prompts to get their students to write on any subject. These prompts can be used for single paragraphs or full-blown essays.

What are the kinds of essays, and what do they look like?

Below is a list of typical kinds of essays that your student might be asked to write. You can also use this list to come up with your own prompts for your students to write on what they are learning. Be sure to assign a length. These can be single paragraphs up to 5-10 paragraph essays/super essays.

Argumentative: Take a position on a controversial subject and argue your point. The topics of the paragraph would be the reasons why your position is true. Some might also call this a persuasive essay, but it usually states the author's position right off the bat. A persuasive essay follows a different model where the author's position is not presented until near the end of the paper. Thus, everyone will hopefully read to the end of the essay to find out the position of the author, and in that way be persuaded. Sample prompts: Should bathrooms have paper towels or air dryers? Why should people eat less sugar?

Cause/Effect: Explain how or why some event happened and explain the result of the event. The event can be from history (a war, battle, election), science (plant growth or a disease), or events (car accident, falling in love). Sometimes the essay identifies multiple causes for a single effect (limited visibility, old brakes, and driver fatigue lead to a car accident) or one cause with multiple effects (too much sugar in the diet leads to obesity, diabetes, and diminished immune function). Sample prompts: Explain the causes of the French Revolution. Discuss the effects of the plague on medieval Europe.

Compare/Contrast: Explain the similarities and differences between two things. The topics can be the things compared. When comparing the two people, one might compare looks, interests, personality, etc. Sample prompts: Compare and contrast the religion of the ancient Egyptians with the religion of the ancient Greeks.

Critical: Analyze the strengths, weaknesses and methods of another person's work. It should give a brief overview of the person's work, analyze the work's meaning and explain how well the person did at conveying his message. Sample prompts: How did Shakespeare present Hamlet in the play *Hamlet*? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the movie ____? How does Rembrandt use dark and light in his paintings?

Definition: Define a specific word or concept. Instead of giving a dictionary definition, it should explain why the term is defined that way. Sample prompts: Define the meaning of liberty. Explain what is meant by responsibility.

Descriptive: Describe something in great detail. Use all five senses (looks, feels, tastes, smells, sounds, and how it makes you feel). Sample prompts: Describe the tree in your backyard; describe this Ming vase.

Expository: This kind of essay is more of a personal report on something. Sample prompts: tell me about Russia, Native Americans, or Diabetes.

Narrative: Tell a story. This can follow the story sequence model or simply narrate a sequence of events. Sample prompts: What did you do on your vacation? Tell about the time you forgot your homework. Tell about the time you were hit by a car.

Process: Describe how to do something. Include all the steps in the right order. Sample prompts: Describe how to make a cake, change the oil in the car, or start a campfire.

How do you approach a compare/contrast essay?

Pamela White offered some suggestions on our IEWFamilies e-group:

Comparison/contrast is best using one of two formulas: 1) compare the two (or more) items by topic in each paragraph. 2) compare with back to back paragraphs per topic. Below is an example comparing and contrasting Disney's "Little Mermaid" with Anderson's short story.

Strategy 1: Compare the two (or more) items by topic in each paragraph.

- Disney's vs. Anderson's **characters**
- Disney's vs. Anderson's **themes**

Strategy 2: Compare with back-to-back paragraphs per topic.

- Disney's mermaid (the character)
- Anderson's mermaid
- Disney's themes
- Anderson's themes

Once you have your main topic ideas, you go through the sources looking for details/facts to develop and support your ideas. This is a thesis-driven paper, however, and not a research paper, so the topic ideas must be arguable ideas rather than simply descriptions or facts.

Here are some sample topic sentences (plus a couple more sentences) one student of mine wrote on this assignment, following the first strategy of comparing both within the same paragraph.

Body paragraph #1 (Characters) In Disney's production of *The Little Mermaid*, the originally quiet and thoughtful youth portrayed in Andersen's short story is completely turned about and is instead made to be a willful day-dreamer who disrespects her father and acts upon her selfish fancies, never giving thought to others.

Body Paragraph #2 (Themes): Sadly, the change in culture has made it impossible for a good story to run the gauntlet of writers and movie producers and come out unharmed. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" is a prime example of this. His unforgettable tale of self-sacrifice, love, and eternal salvation was destroyed when the Disney Company laid hands upon it.

Body Paragraph #3: The real injustice of Disney's version is not against Andersen but against the children who will and have watched the movie.

Conclusion begins: Disney's change of character, plot, and theme is a testimony to how much our culture has changed from the time of Hans Christian Andersen.