



Growing The Essay I – Syllabus

Course Description: This class helps students naturally progress from the five-paragraph essay to an essay of up to ten paragraphs utilizing the rough draft and revision method. While helping students continue good essay planning and outlining skills, we discuss key ways to grow the essay, through constructing stronger introductions and conclusions, improving writing voice, showing rather than telling (descriptive essay) and creating significance (personal narrative essay).

Course Outline:

Week One: Beginning & End (More About Intros & Conclusions) – Rough Draft

Week Two: Beginning & End (More About Intros & Conclusions) – Revised Draft

Week Three: Improving Writing Voice – Rough Draft

A. Sentence Length & Variety

B. Vivid Vocabulary

C. Showing Sentences

Week Four: Improving Writing Voice – Revised Draft

Week Five: Showing through Writing: The Descriptive Essay – Rough Draft

Week Six: Showing through Writing: The Descriptive Essay – Revised Draft

Week Seven: Creating Significance: The Narrative Essay – Rough Draft

Week Eight: Creating Significance: The Narrative Essay – Revised Draft



Growing the Essay I – Grading Information

Rough draft assignments (Weeks 1, 3, 5, and 7) will be graded using the rough draft rubric shown below. Assignments 2, 4, 6, and 8 will be graded using our standard grading rubric for *The Growing Writer*. All assignments will be averaged to receive a final course grade.

Rough Draft Rubric –

Exemplary 100%	Strong 99%-90%	Proficient 89%-80%	Developing 79%-70%	Emerging 69%-60%	Beginning 59%-50%	No Attempt 49% and below
<p>Student has followed all assignment directions and has demonstrated exemplary understanding of lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a complete assignment and demonstrated excellent effort.</p>	<p>Student has followed most assignment directions and has demonstrated strong understanding of lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated strong effort.</p>	<p>Student has followed most assignment directions but has struggled to fully understand lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated proficient effort.</p>	<p>Student has followed some or most assignment directions but has demonstrated a need for better understanding of lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted mediocre written work and demonstrated some lack of effort.</p>	<p>Student has followed some assignment directions but has demonstrated inadequate understanding of lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted inadequate written work so that the instructor finds it difficult to provide helpful feedback.</p>	<p>Student has followed few assignment directions and has demonstrated poor understanding of lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted short and poorly written work so that the instructor is unable to provide helpful feedback.</p>	<p>Student has followed few to no assignment directions and has demonstrated no understanding of lesson concepts.</p> <p>For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted nothing.</p>



Growing The Essay I

Lesson One: Beginning & End

(More About Introductions & Conclusions)

SAMPLE LESSON

In *Essay Basics*, we did cover the fundamentals of writing introductions and conclusions, but time and time again, we find these portions of essay writing to be what challenge students the most. Many students do well with a METHOD, but unfortunately, as students expand to writing essays longer than five paragraphs, these methods do not always work.

The most common introduction and thesis method for five-paragraph essays is to state the topic and provide the three reasons that will be discussed within the essay. For example: “Spring is my favorite season of the year because the weather is perfect for outdoor play, I celebrate my birthday, and our family goes on our annual vacation.”

This method may certainly be easy, but it is predictable, overly used, and not suitable if your essay will cover more than three reasons (which most essays longer than five paragraphs do). Since this class focuses on expanding your essays beyond five paragraphs and growing your writing voice, we want to begin by helping you start and end your essays even better than you already are.

GROWING THE INTRODUCTION –

As we learned in *Essay Basics*, all introductions must contain a **hook**, a **bridge**, and a **thesis**. Most students can grasp the concept of the hook and even the thesis with some practice, but the bridge can be ambiguous and is often where writing introductions gets tricky. What does one write in the bridge to fill up the space between the hook and thesis? Without a method, writing the bridge can be rather daunting.

Remember, an introduction is like a road map. It gives the reader the idea of where the writer is headed in the essay. While the hook, bridge, and thesis should work together to lay out the basic ideas of what will be presented in the essay, these three things can neither be so broad that they distract nor so narrow that they limit the reader's ability to understand.

Because writing the bridge can feel so challenging, many students still revert to following a method and end up using the bridge to list out all of the main reasons that will be discussed in the essay. This is not necessarily *wrong*, but it does not at all create a compelling introduction. A list-style introduction is too predictable. The reader already knows all of the reasons, so why does the reader need to read the rest of the essay?

One great way to think about an introduction is as a **welcome into your home**. The introduction is used to gain the reader's interest and trust. A list of reasons does not accomplish this.

Suppose I showed up at your door. You could welcome me in two different ways. First, you could open the door and begin rattling off a list of reasons about why you know I will enjoy spending time in your home. "I have just made an amazing dinner. I know you will like it. Also, I arranged the couches in a new way, so I know you will really enjoy conversation more. I turned the thermostat up, because I know you often get cold. Oh, and I bought some new coffee to try. I think you will really like it. And here is my dog. He's really friendly. For all of these reasons, we are going to have a great time tonight. Welcome!"

This, of course, would be *really* weird . . . but this is kind of how list-style introductions sound. They are weird, awkward, and clunky.

Instead, what if I pull up to your house and notice that you had set out a pot of fresh flowers on the porch? I ring the bell, and you answer. You greet me with a hug and a smile. I can smell an amazing aroma coming from the kitchen. Instead of giving me a bunch of talk and reasons, you open the door wide and tell me to come in. You show me where to hang my coat and you introduce me to your dog. I look around and notice that your house is pretty and well-kept, and your spirit is calm and kind, so I immediately feel welcomed without you having to say much of anything.

This is how an introduction should be.

But, what does that mean in writing?

When a reader approaches your essay, their mind is still in their own world. Your introduction is designed to help the reader leave the distractions of their own world and current situations behind in order to enter the world of your essay. The introduction is your opportunity to help the reader embrace your topic and care about the ideas you plan to discuss.

While the conclusion is like a sales pitch to get someone to buy your product (more on that next week!), an introduction is a sales pitch to get someone in the door. Think about some of your local establishments, maybe a store, a coffee shop, or even a home. What things outside of these buildings make them inviting or uninviting? Although you may be thinking, “You should never judge a book by its cover,” the reality is that we *do*. And your readers *will* judge your essay by the content in the introduction. With the introduction, you have to get the reader in the door.

So, now we are back to the bridge. Writing the hook is pretty easy, and with practice, you will be constructing compelling thesis statements more easily. But what do you put in the bridge? This middle section of the introduction that so often causes students to stumble is the place to **put your ideas in context**. Why does your topic matter? How does your topic relate to other things, people, situations, culture, etc? How can you interest the reader in your topic?

Let us look at an example essay:

EXAMPLE –

Aline Towers

March 27, 2017

Putting on a Play

Putting on a play is one of the most challenging undertakings in the entertainment business. It can take years of planning and work to create a well-executed performance. Producing a play is much harder than making a movie since it is performed anew for each audience. There is no stopping to correct mistakes. However, when all of the work is finished, the play will be one of the greatest achievements of the creator’s life.

For any play to be successful, the first step is creating a good story. Stories give the audience the base from which to judge the rest of the play. If the acting and props are superb, yet the story is lacking, then the play will be a failure, and months of preparation will be for naught. Consequently, a good plot is essential. There are infinite possible variations to the plot. Should it be a serious play or a silly one? Should the story have a sad or a happy conclusion? Should the story be based on an actual event or should it have a fictional story line? The possibilities for plot are endless, yet the creator must craft a good story to compel the audience.

To find inspiration and understand how a successful plot is written, it can be beneficial to study the works of others. You can learn a great deal about play writing when you study the works of past craftsmen, such as Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, or Jean Cocteau. Any element of a past play might give you inspiration or insight about structure. In addition, a mistake made by another can be learned from, and a successful formula can be built upon. At the same time, do not forget to keep your story original and imaginative. Your plot must be your own.

Once a good story is in place, actors are needed. The performance of the actors is another element that can make or break the success of a play. Selecting actors who not only have the ability and confidence to play the parts but who also have the right chemistry to be part of a cohesive team is key. The performance is just as important as the story in the minds of the audience. A good director must be able to find actors who can bring the story to life, in a convincing and meaningful way.

The first step to proper casting is to know who is available and willing. This step is accomplished through auditions. There are generally two types of auditions. These are open casting (where anyone who wants to try out simply shows up on the day of auditions), and appointment-only auditions, (where an appointment is made with the director). The latter is designed to limit applicants and usually includes a basic set of requirements. Either type of audition can be useful, based on preferences and needs of the playwright and director.

Once you have an inventory of possible actors who have the right skills to be compatible with the play, it is helpful to look at the physical appearance of all applicants and assess what roles are possible for them accordingly. Though an obvious and perhaps silly example, a man who is 6'4" would not make a good dwarf in a play. Potential applicants should be chosen both on acting skill and suitability of appearance. Once several options are in place, final casting is the next step.

Casting is based on several factors, mainly enunciation, projection, and personality. These factors are determined by a short piece that the applicant is asked to read or memorize upon auditioning. The actor is sometimes allowed to suggest parts, but otherwise the casting is up to the director. It is the director's responsibility to remain open minded and unbiased based on friendships or any other factor, only considering what is good for the production.

Once the roles are chosen, the next step is production, which includes all of the steps leading up to the performance. This includes the development of sets; the creation of costumes, the staging; and, of course, all of the practice. Production usually takes several months, and this time is filled with things like vision meetings, costume sizing, and many rehearsals. Throughout all of this, the actors must learn how to deal with emotions such as stage fright or excitement. It is crucial for the actors to learn to speak clearly and loud enough for an audience to hear. Moreover, the actors must learn how to be true to their character in order to present themselves convincingly on the stage. Production is an incredibly important time for the play, because all of this behind-the-scenes work is what makes successful performances.

Once production is finished and the play is ready to perform, the following step is to find a venue and promote the play. The play can be performed in a public place, such as a park, or on a rented or owned stage. Once the venue is selected, publicity is key to receiving an ample crowd. Promotion is accomplished through the use of billboards, fliers, the internet, and word of mouth. And so the play is ready to perform!

It is important for all participants to be thoroughly prepared on the night(s) of the performance. Plenty of rest and food is essential. It is natural for actors to be nervous, so it is the director's job to reassure the actors. The performance of a play should be an enjoyable and meaningful experience, not one full of stress or worry. The director has the ability to lead his cast in this way, which translates into a positive experience for the audience as well. All of the preparation leads to this moment, and the play is underway.

A well-executed performance is something that the writer himself, the director, the cast, and the audience will never forget. This is a performance that people have devoted themselves to for months or perhaps a year. But, this is a performance that has given new confidence to cast members, shaped a director, moved an audience to tears or inspiration, and in the end, caused a writer to realize that what he started long ago has made an impact.

This essay is eleven (11) paragraphs long, so it is a large departure from the essays you were writing in *Essay Basics*. However, you can begin to see how students push beyond those five paragraphs. With greater detail and development plus more than three reasons, reaching nine or ten or eleven paragraphs will not be so difficult.

This essay, as you have read, contains roughly nine different components of putting on a play: writing a story, learning from other playwrights, finding potential actors, choosing suitable applicants, deciding final casting, going through the production stage, finding a venue and promoting the play, and preparing for performance night.

So, let's get back to the introduction. If you have been relying on a list-the-reasons, method-style introduction, what do you do when your essay has nine components? Your introduction may sound like this:

Putting on a play is one of the most challenging undertakings in the entertainment business. In order to put on a successful play, one must write a story, learn from other playwrights, find potential actors, choose suitable applicants, decide final casting, go through the production stage, find a venue and promote the play, and prepare for performance night. When all of the work is finished, the play will be one of the greatest achievements of the creator's life.

The first sentence and the last have not changed, but that bridge in the middle has been turned into a list. It sounds clunky. It is a bit boring. It is too narrow in that it virtually gives away all of the main ideas to the essay. In addition, this introduction does not provide any context for this challenge of producing a play. For example, why does the challenge matter? What can it be compared to? What makes it interesting and worthy enough to read or learn about?

With only a clunky list and no context, this type of introduction does not *get me in the door*, because I do not really need to read anything else. I already know all of the steps and can envision what they entail myself.

Now, let us look again at the original introduction:

Putting on a play is one of the most challenging undertakings in the entertainment business. It can take years of planning and work to create a well-executed performance. Producing a play is much harder than making a movie since it is performed anew for each audience. There is no stopping to correct mistakes. But, when all of the work is finished, the play will be one of the greatest achievements of the creator's life.

See how this introduction uses the bridge to give context:

- **Why does this challenge matter?** The challenge of putting on a play matters because all of the hard work can pay off to become a great achievement. The bridge in this introduction creates the emotions of committing to a lengthy process, overcoming difficulty, and striving for excellence. This *gets the reader in the door*, because the reader wants to know how all of this is accomplished.
- **What can the challenge be compared to?** The challenge is compared to making a movie, which typically seems like one of the more difficult undertakings in the entertainment business. However, the author's aim now is to show you why the creation of a play is actually far more difficult. This *gets the reader in the door* because the reader wants to know why.

See also how this introduction helps the reader transition into the world of play production. A list is just a list. Lists tell, but they do not show. They do not make ideas come to life. Instead, the original introduction shows the idea of creating a play. This idea of creating a play entails “years of planning,” a process that is “harder than making a movie,” and no opportunity to “correct mistakes.” Description, comparison, and detail allow this introduction to help readers enter the world of play production, so they can be fully immersed in the ideas the writer is about to discuss.

Another way you can avoid using the list method is to group similar ideas into larger sections. Take a look at this list-style introduction:

I would really like to go to Rome because of all the great things it has to offer. First, I would like to go to Rome for its history. Another reason that I would like to go there is the Colosseum which would be really fun to see. There would be a lot of fun stuff to do in Rome which is another great reason that I would want to go there. I would like to know more about the culture in Rome. The weather would also be another reason that I would like to go there. If I could go anywhere in the world, I would like to go to Rome for multiple reasons.

Now, this introduction does not have the best hook, but the biggest problem is simply that the introduction is a list, without any connection or context. It does not gain the reader's interest. However, if we look at the introduction, we can see two major focal points: history and culture. So instead of listing out each individual reason, let's rewrite the introduction to group the reasons into two important sections:

Rome is one of those places that we can often easily imagine because we have seen so many pictures of this city in history books and atlases. However, seeing Rome through pictures and our imagination is far different from seeing it in person. This city plays a central part in

the world's early history, making it an absolutely fascinating place. Thus, if I could travel anywhere in the world, I would go to Rome, for I would love to experience its history and culture firsthand.

The introduction grows my interest and appreciation for Rome, so that when you say you would want to go to Rome more than any other place, I understand *why*. It's not just the fun stuff to see or do . . . because there is fun stuff to see and do anywhere in the world. But, because you are enthralled with Rome's prominence in world history and its diverse culture, you want to visit. The introduction captures this idea, without giving too much information away, while still presenting a clear, specific topic and thesis.

As you write longer essays with greater detail and development and more reasons/components, think really hard about the context of your ideas. What can you put in between a hook and thesis that will capture your audience's attention, help them transition into the world of your topic, and understand the context of your ideas? How can you get the reader in the door?

Finally, we leave you with this: although you should always begin an essay with a thesis, the introduction itself need not be written first. In fact, writing the introduction first is not always the most effective plan. When you start writing an essay, you may not always know where you are headed. Throughout the writing process, you will likely think through complicated issues more thoroughly, which may lead you to reorganize ideas, shift your thoughts, and perhaps even change your main idea or argument. Thus, as the writing process is often a discovery process, the introduction may no longer be suitable once you have finished writing the essay in its entirety. Sometimes, it is best to write a tentative introduction first, then revise it later as necessary. Sometimes, you may even find it easier to write the entire essay first, then write the introduction last, so you can ensure that it matches up with all you have discussed in the essay.

The most important takeaway from this lesson is this: do not get stuck in a box. Do not get stuck in the box of an introduction method, and do not get stuck in the box that says you must craft the perfect introduction from the very beginning. There is so much room for creativity when it comes to the introduction, about how you write it and when you write it. Although you must always include a hook, a bridge, and a thesis, allow freedom to help you create introductions that truly welcome your reader to what you want to say.

Assignment 1: Let's start with something that should be easy to write about! This week, submit a rough draft for your first essay. This essay should be seven (7) to ten (10) paragraphs and tell about a recent vacation or trip.

Focus intently on crafting an introduction that avoids any listing or method-style writing. Remember to include a fitting hook and a clear thesis with a bridge that welcomes the reader and gains his/her attention.

Then write the body of the essay, utilizing either chronological order or order of importance.

You should also write the conclusion, based on what you have learned from *Essay Basics* or already know from previous essay-writing experience. We will cover more information about the conclusion in Lesson 2, so you will have time to revise it if needed before submitting the final essay.

Ensure that the essay is formatted properly. Include your name and the date in the upper left-hand corner of the page and a title centered above the essay. Properly format the paragraphs with an indent or a full space between each, and left-align the text. Justified text is optional but not required. Content should be typed in one of the standard fonts, size 12.