

Five Paragraph Expository Essay Rationale for Teaching the Expository Essay

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All three of us have had the opportunity to observe ninth grade college preparatory classes during our practicum. We have watched our mentor teachers help their students transition from the group projects of middle school to the academic writing assignments of high school. Even though we do feel that group work is important at the high school level, we know that one of our biggest responsibilities is to guide our students through the process of discovering their individual voices and conveying their ideas in a writing intensive course. Although there are many ways for students to provide evidence of their knowledge through writing, the expository essay is a basic approach that students will use throughout their lives. If we are preparing our students for successful high school and college careers, we cannot ignore the fact that they will be asked to explore topics in many different subject areas in the form of an expository essay. This type of writing is often an explanation or a process, and it emphasizes the construction of well-organized and concise information that students can transfer to any form of writing. We understand that being able to write clearly is an essential task in the development of a person's communication skills, and we want our students to be able to communicate effectively in the classroom and work force.

In addition to teaching the expository essay, we have chosen to use the five paragraph essay structure in our instruction. Even though there is a great deal of criticism of the five paragraph essay, we believe that this structure is a good starting point for the young writers in our classes. We will stress that writing in the five paragraph essay format is not a drill, and students will be encouraged to deviate from the original structure once they understand the essential components of writing an expository essay. We feel that our students will welcome the boundaries as they are trying to grasp the concept of organizing their thoughts into a well-crafted essay. Our reasons for teaching the five paragraph essay are supported by the way that we have chosen to approach this task. As we begin our expository essay unit, we will hook our students by teaching them the basic steps of the fox trot. We will teach them in a systematic manner that will introduce these beginners to a dance that many professionals have built upon in order to choreograph complex dance routines. We will then show the students a video of professional dancers performing the fox trot, and we will make sure to identify the beginning steps that are the basic structure for the advanced movements. Just as professional dancers learn to embellish basic dance steps, we want our students to learn how to add individuality and creativity to the five paragraph essay without abandoning a strong organizational structure. Our goal is to guide them towards finding their own voices and expressing their thoughts in an individualized manner while subconsciously following the outline of an effective five paragraph essay.

While our main focus is to break down the basic components of a five paragraph essay for organizational purposes, we also want to help our students make connections in their writing. We want our students to learn how to write a concise essay while also connecting their thoughts to bigger ideas. We will approach this issue through graphic organizers that will explain how to move from a big idea to a thesis statement that gets straight to the point of their topic. We will also teach them how transitions are integrated into writing without causing abrupt changes in the

direction of an essay. While it may seem that we are just taming their creativity and caging it into an essay, we have avoided doing so by placing a great deal of emphasis on brainstorming. We want our students to know that their individual ideas matter to their audience, but they must be able to keep the attention of their audience by organizing their brilliant ideas into concise statements. We will emphasize that their ideas are relevant, but they must help their audience see how they made these connections.

After observing the structure of middle school classrooms, we have all seen the wonderful ways that many middle school teachers encourage their students to think creatively. We do not want to stifle this creativity, but we want to help ninth graders organize the thoughts that blossom from such activities and convey them in a mature manner. As ninth grade teachers, we are responsible for preparing these students for the high school workload. We will teach them the basic steps of writing an expository essay while also giving them the freedom to move on to more advanced forms. Ninth graders are beginning to realize their place in the world as young adults, and we want to encourage them to voice their thoughts. We want their voices to be heard and respected; we must help them write in a way that is clear, concise, and unified so that the reader can follow along and appreciate each writer's point of view and train of thought.

Context for Teaching:

We anticipate teaching our instructional unit to ninth grade college preparatory students in an affluent district. In our school, reading assignments are almost always accompanied by a writing assignment. The teachers in our school expect their courses to be writing intensive. The students will be expected to take a performance based writing test at the end of the semester that requires them to formulate an expository essay. We will also be preparing them to take the writing portion of the state's high school graduation test that is given in the eleventh grade.

Objective:

- To guide students through the process of composing a five paragraph expository essay.
- To give students the basic skeleton of an essay with an understanding that they will add to and individualize this structure as they become more developed writers.
- To take students through the writing process of brainstorming, drafting, editing, and finalizing.
- To teach students how to form an introduction, thesis statement, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- To teach them how to transition between paragraphs.

Students should know prior to assignment:

- How to formulate a complete sentence.
- How to use proper punctuation in their writing.
- How paragraphs function in their writing.

Task Analysis:

- Students must decide upon a personal situation that meets the requirements of the topic.

Topic: Everyone has thought about trips they might take and places they would like to visit. Write a paper telling where you would go if you could go anywhere in the world. Write supporting paragraphs that include why you would like to visit that particular place, who you

would take with you, and what you would do while you are there. Remember to use specific details to support and explain your reasons. Use interesting adjectives and descriptions to make your paper interesting to read.

- Students must form a thesis statement including why they would like to visit that particular place, who they would take with them, and what they would do while they are there.
- Students must form a topic sentence for each supporting paragraph using appropriate transitions.

Instructional Design:

Unit Hook: Teacher will teach basic steps of “The Fox Trot.” Students will interact with one another to model steps. After students are familiar with the basic steps, teacher will show professional dancers performing an advanced version of “The Fox Trot.” She will explain that, like “The Fox Trot,” writing is a process beginning with basic steps. The basic steps are present in the professional dancing, but are further developed to become a beautiful piece. As the students learn the basic steps for writing an expository essay, they will understand that these steps are only the basics in writing and are not restrictive. The students will understand that they will subconsciously follow the basic steps of writing an expository essay as they craft a more advanced piece of writing.

Activities:

- Read Dr. Seuss Oh the Places you will Go.
- Journal entry about two favorite places students have been. Students will include why these are their favorite places, who they were with, and what they did while they were there.
- Allow students to share in small groups.
- Scaffolding activity: Students will brainstorm three places they would like to visit on a graphic organizer. (See handout 1)
- Students will choose one place they wish to write their expository essay about.
- Students will read a model essay and pick out one sentence that tells what the essay is about. Teacher will lead discussion about thesis statements.
- Students will write their own thesis statements about their chosen place, including why they would like to visit that particular place, who they would take with them, and what they would do while they are there.
- Students will complete graphic organizer to scaffold the forming of their supporting paragraphs. (see handout 2)
- Students will receive a list of transition words. They will practice, in partners, having a conversation eliminating transition words. Then they will practice a conversation including transition words. They will see the effect of transitions in their speaking and in their writing.
- Teacher will handout graphic organizer explaining both introduction and conclusion paragraphs. (see handout 3)
- Students will begin first draft in class.
- Students will peer edit their papers.

- Students will highlight thesis statement, transitions, and topic sentences and circle their introduction and conclusion. This will be the evidence of their understanding of those parts in their own writing.
- Students will meet with teacher and discuss the markings on their paper.
- Students will finalize their essays and type them in the computer lab. Teacher will be available for feedback as they finalize their essays.

Handout #1

Oh the Places You Want to Go

Place #1:	Place #2:	Place #3:
Reason #1	Reason #1:	Reason #1:
Reason #2:	Reason #2:	Reason #2:
Reason #3:	Reason #3:	Reason #3:
Reason #4:	Reason #4:	Reason #4:

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<p>Thesis: (Include three main points of Thesis Statement)</p> <p>1)</p> <p>2)</p> <p>3)</p>	<p>Why would you visit:</p> <p>1)</p> <p>2)</p> <p>3)</p>
<p>Who would you take and why:</p> <p>1)</p> <p>2)</p> <p>3)</p>	<p>What would you do there:</p> <p>1)</p> <p>2)</p> <p>3)</p>

Handout #2

Topic: Everyone has thought about trips they might take and places they would like to visit. Write a paper telling where you would go if you could go anywhere in the world. Write supporting paragraphs that include why you would like to visit that particular place, who you

would take with you, and what you would do while you are there. Remember to use specific details to support and explain your reasons. Use interesting adjectives and descriptions to make your paper interesting to read.

Rubric for Writing an Expository Essay

CATEGORY	4 - Above Standards	3 - Meets Standards	2 - Approaching Standards	1 - Below Standards	Score
Introduction	The introductory paragraph has a strong attention grabber that is appropriate for the audience. It starts with a large idea and is slowly brought to a concise idea, which is the topic of the paper.	The introductory paragraph has an attention grabber, but it is weak, rambling or inappropriate for the audience. It starts out with a large idea, but does not smoothly transition to a smaller idea.	The author has an interesting introductory paragraph but the connection to the topic is not clear.	The introductory paragraph is not interesting AND is not relevant to the topic.	
Thesis Statement	The thesis statement states the topic of the essay and outlines the main points to be discussed (a minimum of three).	The thesis statement names the topic of the essay, but does not elaborate into the main points discussed in the paper.	The thesis statement outlines some or all of the main points to be discussed but does not state the topic.	The thesis statement does not state the topic AND does not reveal what will be discussed.	
Support for Position	Includes evidence that support the position statement. The writer anticipates the reader's biases or arguments and the evidence is well-developed.	Includes evidence that supports the position statement, but the position of the writer is unclear and the topics are not as developed as they should be.	Includes little evidence that supports the position statement. The topics are underdeveloped and the position of the writer is unclear.	Does not include evidence supporting the topic and the writer's position is not stated.	
Evidence and Examples	All of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the writer's position.	Most of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the writer's position.	At least one of the pieces of evidence and examples is relevant and has an explanation that shows how that piece of evidence supports the writer's position.	Evidence and examples are not relevant and/or are not explained.	
Conclusion	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the writer's position. Effective restatement of the position statement begins the closing paragraph.	The conclusion is recognizable. The writer's position is restated within the first two sentences of the closing paragraph.	The writer's position is restated within the closing paragraph, but not near the beginning.	There is no conclusion, and the paper ends.	

Grammar & Spelling

Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

Writer makes few errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

Author makes a significant amount of errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

Author makes numerous errors in grammar or spelling that are extremely distracting from the content of the paper.