

Glenbard North Guide to **Writing an Essay**

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

- T.S. Eliot

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Narration: Narration is the sequencing of events that results in a story with identifiable structure and devices, using sensory words (“parts”) to sharpen and deepen meaning (the “whole”).

Exposition: Exposition is the process by which a writer explores a subject by examining its key points sequentially or by adding meaning to the subject by examining its relationship with other subjects.

- **Process:** Process is the way in which a writer examines the chronological steps of an action or series of actions.
- **Definition:** Definition occurs when a writer names and explains the integral characteristics that give a subject its identity and meaning.
- **Classification:** Through classification, a writer explains a large category of a subject (whole) by identifying and explaining the relationship among its subgroups (part).
- **Comparison/Contrast:** Comparison/contrast is the process by which a writer establishes meaning for two distinct subjects by naming and explaining similarities and/or differences between the two subjects.
- **Cause-Effect:** Through cause-effect, a writer selects a subject and explains the forces or events shaping and/or resulting from the subject.
- **Explication:** Explication is a close reading of a poem or prose selection in which a writer, by evaluating the smallest units of structure of the work, explains how individual poetic and rhetorical devices contribute to the meaning of the passage.
- **Analysis:** A writer uses analysis by identifying key concepts and/or writing patterns and evaluating these large thematic/compositional strands throughout the piece.

Persuasion: Persuasion is the way in which a writer identifies and develops key points of a position/argument for the purpose of moving an audience to his or her position.

Research: Research is a form of informational writing in which a writer formulates a thesis, an arguable position on a subject; supports that position with documented information; and analyzes the significance of the findings.

I. **Introduction**

- A. [Opener](#)
- B. [Identification](#)
- C. [Thesis](#)

II. **Body paragraph:** The following process should be repeated at least once in another paragraph or paragraphs.

- A. [Topic Sentence](#) (thesis reference)
- B. [Evidence](#) - *Set-up* (providing context of claim) and evidence *integration*
- C. [Analysis](#) (elaboration)
- D. [Clincher Sentence](#) (“so what?” why is this important?)

III. **Repetition of the above body paragraph format**

IV. **[Conclusion](#)**

- A. Revisit [thesis](#) (evolution of argument)
- B. Enduring Understanding: Discuss relationship between thesis and larger context of the real world
- C. [Closer](#)

DEFINED: The opener, also referred to as the **attention-getter**, begins the essay (or speech). Its purpose is to engage the audience in the subject of the piece.

OPTIONS:

- Definition
- Anecdote (more common in a narrative, but a more general story may be appropriate for other genres as well)
- Fact/Observation/ Statement
- Quotation (not from analyzed text and must be cited appropriately)
- Allusion
- Question (should not be overly vague or general)
 - ✓ Weak e.g.: “What does it mean to have courage?”
 - ✓ Better e.g.: “How does an act of courage define a person’s character?”

QUALITIES:

STRONG	WEAK
Original	Gimmicky
Genuine	Obvious
Useful	Exaggerated
Specific	Generic
Accurate	Inaccurate
Provocative	Predictable
Relevant	Vague

EVALUATION:

- Is the opener **related** to the subject of the piece?
- Is the length of the opener **balanced** in relation to the rest of the piece?
- Is the opener **effective** (see qualities)?

DEFINED: The identification links the opener to the thesis by narrowing the scope of discussion and providing pertinent information to aid in understanding the upcoming thesis.

Depending on the purpose of the essay, the identification may include:

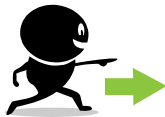
1. Title, Author, and Genre (for a literary essay)

EXAMPLE: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, is a book that gives courage a new meaning.

BETTER EXAMPLE: In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, author Harper Lee examines how the most influential acts of courage are born from an ordinary person who demonstrates an extraordinary act of bravery.

2. Issue under Discussion (persuasive/explanatory essay or speech)

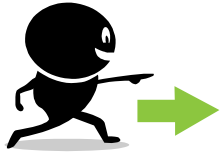
3. Background Information (research product)



HELPFUL HINT: Throughout the *introduction*, *transition* or *bridge sentences* need to be included in order to connect the *opener* to the *identification* to the *thesis*. Make sure these sentences stay focused and bring the reader to the eventual point of the paper—your THESIS.

DEFINED: The thesis statement is a statement of the purpose, focus, or main idea of the essay.

For most types of essays, the thesis is an arguable assertion. There are different levels of thesis statements.



HELPFUL HINT: Much of the thesis can be pulled from the assignment or essay topic the teacher assigns. First, search the assignment to find what the teacher wants. If you look hard enough, more often than not, your teacher will practically give you a thesis and save you the trouble of thinking one up. You want to look for the argument/stand/position stated or implied in the topic. Next, pull important/key words and phrases from the topic that you would include in your thesis and topic sentences.

A THESIS	A THESIS IS NOT
must be a COMPLETE SENTENCE	a title
takes a STAND / ARGUMENT	an announcement
makes a JUDGMENT / INTERPRETATION	an absolute fact
is the MAIN IDEA expressed in ONE SENTENCE	the entire essay

A good thesis is **RESTRICTED, UNIFIED, and SPECIFIC!**

SIMPLE: Usually more descriptive and generic in nature

SPECIFIC SUBJECT + SPECIFIC FEELING[S]/FEATURES[S] = THESIS

EXAMPLE: *The history of the United States is dominated by lust for money, possessions, and power.*

Unexpected, average people like Mrs. Dubose, Atticus Finch, and Link Deas all show the real meaning of courage without the supernatural powers or fancy costumes throughout the novel.

INTERMEDIATE: Usually more complex; addresses the larger message/call to action

AUTHOR + VERB + CHARACTER/SYMBOL/THEME/DEVICE/ETC. + PICK FROM BELOW + POINT

to discuss

in order to

to examine

to relate

concentrates on

to trace

to see if

to show [shows]

to prove [proves]

to determine

to explain

to argue [argues]

to persuade [persuades]

EXAMPLE: *Author Harper Lee uses characters like Mrs. Dubose, Atticus Finch, and Link Deas to persuade the reader that average people can perform courageous acts.*

Although most students believe their clothing expresses their individuality, uniforms are a school's best bet to ensure a positive learning environment.

ADVANCED: This developed thesis includes contrast and may use words like *therefore* or *although*. With this type of thesis sentence, you will want to include the part and whole.

EXAMPLE: *Though many people wait for an extraordinary person to stop injustice, Lee passionately argues it is the courageous acts of average people that changes society for the better.*

Ralph's inability to lead exposes main's inherent evil nature in the face of adversity.

DEFINED: The topic sentence is the first sentence of a body paragraph. All topic sentences should announce the topic of the paragraph with a reference to the main idea of the thesis.

While not necessarily applicable to the first body paragraph, all successive topic sentences should reveal the interrelationships of the body paragraphs. Specifically, that means an inclusion of some kind of transition from one paragraph to the next.

A topic sentence should include the following parts:

- A. **transition**
- B. **topic** of the paragraph
- C. **thesis reference** may be a direct repetition of a key word(s) or idea(s) from the thesis, or it may also expand on the idea(s) behind the thesis

EXAMPLE 1:

THESIS: Unexpected average people like Mrs. Dubose, Atticus Finch, and Link Deas all show the real meaning of courage without the supernatural powers or fancy costumes throughout the pages of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

TOPIC SENTENCE: In addition, Atticus Finch shows courage when he fights racism in a town where the discrimination of black people is a part of every-day lifestyle.

Construction of topic sentence:

Transition = In addition

Topic = fighting racism

Thesis reference = Atticus shows courage

TOPIC SENTENCE: Lastly, Link Deas shows courage when he stands up in defense of a black man and a black woman, Tom and Helen Robinson.

Construction of topic sentence:

Transition = Lastly

Topic = defense of a black man and a black woman

Thesis reference = Link Deas shows courage

EXAMPLE 2:

THESIS: Holden Caulfield's disillusionment with the imperfections of humankind leads to his mental breakdown.

TOPIC SENTENCE: Initially at Pencey Prep, Holden is frustrated by his peers' inability to acknowledge their own personal shortcomings, and this is demonstrated in his interactions with Stradlater.

Construction of topic sentence:

Transition = Initially at Pencey Prep

Topic = Holden's interactions with Stradlater's inability to acknowledge personal shortcomings

Thesis reference = Holden's frustration

TOPIC SENTENCE: Once on his own in New York City, Holden is more than frustrated; he is angered by society because of the hypocrisy of adults, especially in his encounter with Maurice and Sunny.

Construction of topic sentence:

Transition = Once on his own in New York City

Topic = Holden and the hypocrisy of adults, especially in the characters of Sunny and Maurice

Thesis reference = more than frustrated, he is angered

DEFINED: Its purpose is to support a point in a body paragraph. Well chosen evidence is insightful and will clearly and adequately illustrate that point. **Evidence** (depending on the assignment) **can be:**

- a fact
- an anecdote
- a summary
- a paraphrase

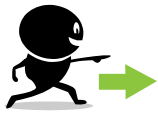
OR

- a textual reference

EVIDENCE INTEGRATION:

Once you have chosen quality evidence, effective writing about literature includes smooth, clear combining of your thoughts with the author's words/ideas.

LACK OF INTEGRATION:



NEVER just drop in your evidence – in the following example, there is no effort to incorporate an author's passage into the sentence; it just sort of lands on the page.

Evidence should prove: *Scout and Jem learn important life lessons from Atticus.*

In a conversation with Miss Maudie, Atticus' sister, Aunt Alexandra, explains what Atticus has to go through in their town. "They're perfectly willing to let him do what they're too afraid to do themselves – it might lose 'em a nickel'" (269).

Why it's bad: Not only is this quote dropped into the sentence without any thought given to integrating it naturally, but it also is an example of poorly chosen evidence because it is vague. It does not specifically state a life lesson that Jem or Scout has learned from Atticus. It merely addresses a part of the plot that could easily be addressed as the writer sets up the textual reference.

WEAK INTEGRATION:



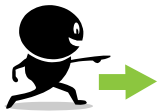
TRY VERY HARD NOT to force evidence to fit – the integration below is attempted but not smooth.

Evidence should prove: *Scout and Jem learn important life lessons from Atticus.*

When Jem must read to Mrs. Dubose, Atticus says to his son, “Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict” (111).

Why it’s weak: In addition to being poorly integrated, this quotation is also poorly chosen because it does not show any life lesson that Jem or Scout has learned from Atticus. As stated above, it merely addresses a part of the plot that could have been explained by the writer.

IDEAL INTEGRATION:



IDEALLY, the well-chosen evidence is integrated so naturally that there is no division between the writer’s words and the author’s words.

Evidence should prove: *Scout and Jem learn important life lessons from Atticus.*

After the death of Mrs. Dubose, Atticus explains to Jem why he felt it was so important for Jem to read to her. Even though Mrs. Dubose said terrible things about Atticus, he wants Jem “to see something about her – [He] wanted [Jem] to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand” (112). Atticus wants Jem to learn that real courage is “when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what” (112).

Why it’s good: This quotation is a better choice for proving that Atticus teaches his children lessons because it shows a specific lesson that he teaches them and how they learn this lesson. Its integration into the sentence is also flawless.



REMEMBER: *Collection of support in a paragraph should insightfully advance the argument of the paragraph!*

DEFINED: Analysis explains how the evidence supports the assertion. It is a close examination of the evidence that clarifies possible layers of meaning. It is **not** a mere paraphrase.

Depending on the complexity of the assignment, you may need to:

- Clarify the evidence, i.e. explicate the symbolism.
- Explain in more depth how it makes the current point.
- Explain how it relates to a previous point.
- Explain how it supports the assertion in the topic sentence or even how it relates back to the thesis.
- Identifies the overall significance of the evidence

Effective analysis will insightfully explain the connection between the whole (topic sentence/thesis) and its part (evidence to support it).



DO NOT lead with “this quote says”!
Some good words to signal further analysis are “suggests,” “reveals,” “implies”

EXAMPLE:

TOPIC SENTENCE: *Lastly, Link Deas shows courage (thesis reference) when he stands up in defense of a black man and a black woman, Tom and Helen Robinson.*

Integration/Assertion: Link, her boss, decides to step in and protect Helen by threatening Bob Ewell.

Evidence: “Now hear me, Bob Ewell; if I hear one more peep outa my girl Helen about not bein’ able to walk this road I’ll have you in jail by sundown” (286).

Analysis (WEAK): It takes great courage for a white man to help out a black person, let alone a black woman.



How could it be improved? Though the author has developed the context of racism, this paragraph provides opportunity for more depth.

Analysis (BETTER): In a way, Link Deas’s threat places Helen Robinson, a black, above Bob Ewell, a white. Therefore, Mr. Deas is going against Maycomb County’s long tradition of racism. Perhaps Mr. Deas has been inspired by Atticus’s display of courage (thesis reference) during the trial.

DEFINED: A clincher is a single sentence that ends a body paragraph.

A *clincher sentence*:

- states how the assertion of the topic sentence is true
- connects to the larger idea that the author is trying to communicate through the examples presented in the paragraph
- focuses on analytical thinking related to the significance of the paragraph

A *clincher sentence* should NOT:

- be a transition to the next paragraph nor should it be a quotation
- be a textual reference

EXAMPLE:

To begin with, an old woman named Mrs. Dubose demonstrates true courage as she battles a morphine addiction. Atticus explains to his children how Mrs. Dubose is courageous: “I wanted you to see something about her—I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what” (128). . . (CONTINUATION OF PARAGRAPH) ***Moreover, Mrs. Dubose demonstrates real courage when she gave her life for her freedom from drugs.***

CONCLUSION: THESIS • ENDURING UNDERSTANDING • CLOSER 16

DEFINED: Your **conclusion** should be appropriate to the purpose of your piece and might do any of the following:

- call to action
- judge
- reflect
- generalize.

- Begin by **revisiting**—**not restating**—**your thesis**. In other words, refer back to your paper’s central argument.
- Address the **enduring understanding** of your piece. In other words, now that you have presented your argument in the body of your paper, what is the greater message about life you want your audience to understand?
- Your **closer** should respond to the **opener** chosen at the beginning of the paper. The effectiveness of a closer is directly related to the effectiveness of the opener.

OPENER (If you...)

CLOSER (then...)

asked a question	answer it
defined something	add a layer of meaning to it
told a story (anecdote)	reference a greater meaning to the story
gave a F/O/S	comment on its greater significance
quoted something	return to it with new relevance



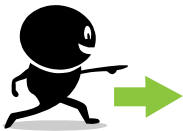
HELPFUL HINT: *Never close with a question! Follow the above steps in order to bring your paper full circle.*

DEFINED: To transition is to “to pass from one form, state, style, idea, or place to another.”
When writing an essay, there are two places where transitions are important.

TYPES OF TRANSITIONS:

There are a couple of different types of transitions. There are transitions from one paragraph to another: **paragraph-to-paragraph transitions**. There are also transitions from one sentence to another within a paragraph: **internal transitions**. Once you have determined your overall organizational structure, these are things to keep in mind so that you, as a writer, signal to your reader how the argument is advancing.

- I. **Paragraph-to-Paragraph Transitions:** Transitions between paragraphs often require more than one word or one phrase. While the suggestions that follow are useful between paragraphs, keep in mind that the transition is being revealed throughout the topic sentence. After the introduction of an essay, every subsequent paragraph needs a signal revealing the logical advancement. The topic sentence of a paragraph should signal a shift to another phase of your topic. You should, therefore, make your train of thought clear to the reader by showing the relationship between the new phase and the phase discussed in the preceding paragraph.

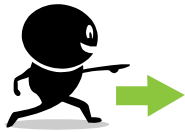


Ways to transition between paragraphs:

- pronouns that refer to an idea mentioned earlier
- repetition of a key word or term from the preceding paragraph
- direct reference to the preceding idea, perhaps by means of a summarizing phrase
- connective – transitional expressions

EXAMPLE: *Lastly, Link Deas shows courage when* he stands up in defense of a black man and a black woman, Tom and Helen Robinson.

- II. **Internal Transitions:** As you are writing your paragraph, remember that each sentence should connect to the preceding one, continually advancing your argument as established by the thesis and topic sentences.



Ways to transition *within* a paragraph:

- First, what kind of signal is needed? Are you *adding an idea, giving an example, etc.*?
- Then, what word or phrase is most appropriate for the specific topic?

EXAMPLE Body Paragraph w/ Internal Transitions in Bold:

Lastly, Link Deas shows courage when he stands up in defense of a black man and a black woman, Tom and Helen Robinson. **For example** when Bob Ewell, a drunken good-for-nothing, starts to harass Helen Robinson after the conclusion of the heated trial, Helen is afraid to walk to work because he follows her all the way down the public road. Link, her boss, decides to step in and protect Helen by threatening Bob Ewell: “Now hear me, Bob Ewell; if I hear one more peep outa my girl Helen about not bein’ able to walk this road I’ll have you in jail by sundown” (286). It takes great courage for a white man to help out a black person, let alone a black woman. **As a result** of his courage, Bob Ewell stops harassing Helen and life goes on as usual. **Equally important** is when Link stands up for Tom Robinson in front of the whole courtroom. He defends Tom’s honor in court, which takes a lot of courage; it also leads to him being kicked out of the courtroom immediately afterwards. In defense of Tom, Link explains, “I just want the whole lot of you to know one thing right now. That boy’s worked for me for eight years an’ I ain’t had a speck o’trouble outa him. Not a speck” (222). Link defends both Tom and Helen at the most suspenseful and dangerous times of the story, which adds up to tremendous courage. It shows that maybe courage is contagious; perhaps one good deed does lead to another. Sooner or later the courage will build enough to make an actual difference—in this case against racism. **Overall**, Link Deas shows true courage as he stands up and defends Tom and Helen Robinson against one of Maycomb’s most spiteful residents.

TYPE OF SIGNAL	WORDS TO USE
To signal an addition	in addition, furthermore, moreover, also, equally important
To signal an example	for example, for instance, thus, in other words, as an illustration, in particular
To signal a suggestion	for this purpose, to this end, with this object
To signal emphasis	indeed, truly, again, to repeat, in fact
To signal granting a point	granted that, although, though, even though, while it may be true, in spite of
To signal a summary	in summary, in conclusion, therefore, finally, consequently, thus, accordingly, in short, in brief, as a result, on the whole
To signal the development of a sequence	<p>Value sequence: first, second, secondly, next, last, finally</p> <p>Time sequence: then, once, after, afterward, at last, meanwhile, in the meantime, immediately, soon, at length, when, yesterday, today, tomorrow, thereafter</p> <p>Space sequence: above, across, under, beyond, nearby, nearer, opposite to, adjacent to, in the foreground, in the background</p>
To signal a relationship	<p>Similarity: similarly, likewise, in like manner</p> <p>Contrast: in contrast to, however, but, still, nevertheless, yet, conversely, not withstanding, on the other hand, on the contrary, at the same time, while this may be true, otherwise, instead</p> <p>Cause and Effect: consequently, because, since, therefore, accordingly, thus, hence, due to, as a result, so</p>
To link similar ideas or add an idea	again, also, and, another, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, in the same way, likewise, moreover, then, too

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Summer 2009

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