

THE JOURNEY OF ESSAY

What is an Essay? Perhaps it is thinking about things; lingering with ideas; meandering and free-associating; language leading to language.

LENSES FOR COMPARING ESSAY to ARGUMENT & INFORMATION

VOICE/TONE

<i>ESSAY</i>	<i>ARGUMENT/PERSUASION</i>	<i>INFORMATION</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Skeptical</i>• <i>Tentative</i>• <i>Conversational</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Authoritative</i>• <i>Factual</i>• <i>Formal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Teaching</i>• <i>Organized</i>• <i>Documentary</i>

STANCE

<i>ESSAY</i>	<i>ARGUMENT/PERSUASION</i>	<i>INFORMATION</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Exploring</i>• <i>Lingering</i>• <i>Entertaining</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Taking a side</i>• <i>Airtight</i>• <i>Gravitas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Delivering</i>• <i>Knowledgeable</i>• <i>Useful</i>

PURPOSE/INTENTION

<i>ESSAY</i>	<i>ARGUMENT/PERSUASION</i>	<i>INFORMATION</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>To think & reflect</i>• <i>To entertain or move readers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>To win</i>• <i>To change minds & hearts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>To teach</i>• <i>To advise</i>• <i>To help</i>

GENERATING: Topics Student Frequently Essay About

The following is a sampling of subjects that students often write about (when they can choose their own topics!).

Concrete Objects and Concepts

music	games	social media
divorce	friends	death
sports	family	money
adoption	the future	makeup
jobs	pets	movies
popularity	food	illness
toys/electronics	science	race
dating	identity	neighborhood
gender	cars	freedom (and restraint)

These are topics that students love to think, write, and grow big ideas about. Any one of these could also be sliced thinner; for instance, *sports* might be narrowed to *soccer* or might adopt a stance like *who has or does not have access to soccer training*.

Emotions

desire	disgust	anger
pleasure	avoidance	pain
grief	loneliness	worry
boredom	fear	jealousy

These are emotions that students choose to grow ideas about, using specific events, observations, and personal stories to flesh out the concept or idea of a particular strong feeling.

HABITS OF WRITING TO THINK: Begin somewhere, and keep writing from there

Begin with an Observation

Begin with a Question

Begin with a Fact

Begin with a Grand Proclamation

Begin with an Anecdote

Ways to Pursue “Writing to Think” in the Writer’s Notebook.
(These can also become ways to develop and revise essays)

- Accept what comes to you and get started
- Start from “another time I felt this way was...”
- Reach back into memory and accept whatever occurs to you to write
- Sustain thoughts about a person: physicality, personality, anecdotes
- Begin with a story and flip toward an idea/lesson/moral
- Begin with an idea and find stories that show how it works
- Move between concrete/specific and reflections
- Write about the history of your topic or idea
- Write about the science of your topic
- With any topic, write toward what is significant about it
- With any topic, write toward what is silly and trivial and trite about it
- Write about how your idea or topic affects your life
- Take several big, long things in your notebook and try to mesh them into a single entry
- Look back at an old entry and add layers of meaning, thinking and possible ideas onto it
- Write about one idea or event from multiple perspectives
- Probe everything around you for issues of fairness and justice
- Imagine and plan actions, things you might do in the world to make it better
- Use questions to pursue ideas about a topic. Keep asking “why” & answering
- Deliberately take an opposing view from what you think/believe & write

Some Possible Questions for Writing Conferences

- Why this topic?
- What is the heart of your essay?
- Who is going to read this and why?
- Using honest, reflective language.
- Is research necessary with this topic?

A UNIT OF STUDY IN ESSAY WRITING

I. Reading Essays Like Writers

- *Study multiple mentor essays
- *Name features of essay: topics, style, structure, etc.
- *Teach from those named features

II. Generating Ideas for Essay in Writers Notebooks

- *Make lists of possible topics
- *Share out lists to help each other think of more possibilities
- *Write short entries from different items chosen from lists

III. Collecting/ Layering/Texturing Around an Idea

- *Choose one idea/entry to become the essay
- *Research a bit, talk to people, read about topic
- *Write from another point of view, explore topic deeply

IV. Drafting, Revising, and Finding a Shape for the Essay

- *Move to draft paper/screen
- *Play with shape as draft unfolds
- *Revise: (for instance) new beginning, new ending, rearrange chunks

V. Editing & Publishing Essays

- *Read aloud, exchange with partner for editing
- *Determine where and how to publish essay
- *Celebration!