

THE PERFECT PAPER

A GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING

FOR ALL AGES, GRADE LEVELS, AND TYPES OF
ESSAYS. FOLLOW THIS GUIDE WHEN WRITING
AN ACADEMIC ESSAY AND YOU CAN'T GO
WRONG!

BY LINDSAY STRONGIN

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The Perfect Paper

Before You Begin:

Here are some quick tips!

1. You can use this guide **any** and **every** time **you** **need to write an essay!**
2. The essay-writing template is a worksheet that can help **ANYONE** write an essay/paper. Let me say that again, **this works for ANYONE**. Simply fill it in like you would a worksheet and then put it all together.
 3. Use the '**Cheat Sheet**' section for a better understanding of the terms used on this guide.
 4. **You should add additional rounds of evidence/facts, and analysis/ opinions** in the 'body paragraph' sections as necessary for YOUR essay.
 5. Some essays may need to be longer/shorter or consist of more paragraphs to fully prove all aspects of your thesis, but **at the end of the day, your main focus should be "did I fully support and prove ALL parts of my thesis?" by the time you finish**. If not, see number 4 on this list.
6. **You've got this! Happy Writing!**

The Cheat Sheet

- For the purposes of this guidebook, we will use a sample essay topic to help explain the terms used in the workbook
- Let's say you are writing an essay on the topic of school starting later in the morning.
- The prompt/assignment says:
- Some people believe school should start later and many schools have already taken to starting later in various districts. Take a position and write an essay in which you develop and support a well constructed argument regarding the issue of whether school should continue to start at 8:00am or if it should start later.

The Cheat Sheet

- **Now that you have your essay topic, let's discuss the terms:**
 - **Hook:** This is the very first sentence of your essay. It needs to draw the reader in and make them want to keep reading. Consider the topic of your essay, and try to think of something interesting, unique, or shocking you can say about it. These can be rhetorical questions, short anecdotes, images, hypothetical scenarios, etc.
 - **Here are a few potential hook starters:**
 - “Imagine if...(worst or best case scenario surrounding your topic)”
 - “Picture a world in which....(paint a picture based on your topic)”
 - “What if...(paint another picture asking a rhetorical question surrounding the topic)”
- Remember that different teachers/instructors have different ideas about what is considered a “correct” hook, so be sure to ask your teacher if you’re unsure about this.

The Cheat Sheet

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- For our sample essay, your hook might be the quote, “To sleep perchance to dream...ay there’s the rub’ - William Shakespeare” (and then you would go into background info about your topic).
- This hook may seem random and irrelevant, but stay with me.
- The reason this hook works is that it is a famous and compelling quote that most people know and recognize as Shakespeare, and with which they are familiar, even if they're unsure of its context. When you explain how it relates to starting school later because, for instance, students get more sleep if school starts later, the reader has that “aha!” moment.
- **Background Info:** This is where you describe and define your topic. Give specific information that informs the reader and gives a general sense of what this essay is about.

The Cheat Sheet

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- For example, this may include the author, title, and brief synopsis of a book or article, the overall issue surrounding a research topic, etc...
- Careful not to get too specific though, because it may limit what you can write in the rest of your essay. As a general rule of thumb, think ‘if I had to explain the whole topic in 2-3 sentences in a day-to-day conversation, how would I sum it up?’ Use definitions, dates, whatever background info needed to set up where your essay will be going so that your readers understand the issue/topic before they keep reading.
- Continuing with our sample essay, this can include a brief introduction about how schools are considering starting an hour later, where this issue is most prominent, why schools are or are not considering it, etc...

The Cheat Sheet

continued....

- When in doubt, use the old cliché 5 w's and an h: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Who is this topic about/affecting, what is it about, when is this taking place, why is it happening/being discussed, and how is this affecting the discussion/how is it going to affect people?
- **Thesis statement:** See the "Thesis Formula" guide (separate) for help with crafting a thesis statement.
- The thesis statement is the direct answer to the essay prompt. This is the most important part of your essay. This is also a map to the rest of your essay.
- Each body paragraph should address one specific part of your thesis. Some people write a thesis after they've written the essay and base it on the points they've already made. I would exercise caution doing this, because you could easily get off topic while writing. Some people find this method easier, so find what works for you!

The Cheat Sheet

continued....

- An example of a thesis statement for our sample essay might be:
- “School should start an hour later because students will get more sleep, they will be more focused during class, and they will be more likely to be on time.”

Body Paragraphs

- **Topic Sentence:** This is the first sentence of your body paragraph.
- You can take this directly from your thesis statement and simply use different wording.
- Using our sample essay thesis “School should start an hour later because students will get more sleep, they will be more focused in school and they will be more likely to be on time” would lead to your first body paragraph being about why students getting more sleep is beneficial.
- So your first topic sentence, pulled right from your thesis is “The first reason school should start later is because students will be able to get more sleep.”

The Cheat Sheet

continued....

- The second body paragraph will then, of course, be the second reason from your thesis: "In addition to getting more sleep, school should start later because it will be easier for students to focus."
- Your next/third paragraph will then be the third reason from your thesis statement: "Finally, school should start later because it will help with students ability to arrive on time."
- The important thing to remember is topic sentences are the main idea of each paragraph.
- These main ideas come from the thesis statement.
- Remember, if you mention it in your thesis, you must discuss it in your essay, and if you discuss it in your essay, it must be in your thesis.
- Boom. Pow. Simple, right? Essays don't have to be difficult! sentences.

The Cheat Sheet

continued....

- **Evidence/Facts:** Any quotes from research, stories, books, articles, etc. that support your point.
- This is an inarguable hard fact that can be proven, or a quote from a credible source that is relevant to your paper.
- To be clear, use real facts/evidence, and make sure it's so relevant that it fits this particular subclaim of this particular paragraph.
- You do not want to use a quote that works perfectly for your third paragraph here because then what do you use for the third paragraph?
- So, just make sure it proves whichever specific point you're making.
- These supporting details can be very simple.
- You can then use the analysis/opinion section to explain how this fact proves your point.

The Cheat Sheet

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- For example, using our sample topic, if you are still on your first body paragraph about why not being tired is a good reason to support your thesis, your fact can be as simple as “sleep is necessary for survival” -- this is an inarguable, provable fact.
- Then, your analysis will explain how this affects students ability to do well in school if they have not slept enough.
- Keep in mind, you can use well known facts, but some essays will have requirements set by your instructor.
- If this is a research paper, or an essay in which cited sources are required, quote and cite your sources (in other words, for this particular example, you’d want to find a quote from a credible source that states that sleep is necessary for survival and then you would cite the source using the proper formatting-- your class/teacher will indicate what format you are to follow).

The Cheat Sheet

continued....

- However, if this is an in-class, surprise essay, or even a standardized test essay that has no primary source documents for you to use, you won't have many sources and will have to just rely on well-known facts.
- **Analysis/opinion:** This is where you comment on the evidence/fact/quote you just presented and use your own logic/thought to explain how the evidence/fact proves your original point and ties back to your thesis.
- For example, continuing with the essay about school starting later, let's say you just used the fact "sleep is necessary for survival" or even a quote from a doctor/ a statistic to the effect of sleep being healthy or necessary for survival.
- Your analysis following this evidence could be "If sleep is necessary for survival, one might say it is the most important thing people need in their lives, and therefore should be preserved longer. Allowing students to sleep in would lead to longer, healthier lives."

The Cheat Sheet

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- Or, you might say, “Since sleep is so important for good health, depriving students of enough sleep is detrimental to their health in the future. Therefore, starting school later and thus allowing students to sleep longer will benefit students greatly in both the short and long term.”
- See how I used the quote/fact to make an arguable claim/comment about what is important, and then also brought it back around to proving my main point which is that school should start later? That’s the goal of this.
- Use as many sentences as necessary to make your point clear but keep it relevant to the thesis, always!
- **Transitions:** Think of this as either a word, phrase or sentence that acts as a bridge.
- It gets you from one idea to the next smoothly, so it does not seem like parts of your essay pop up out of the blue or are irrelevant.

The Cheat Sheet

continued....

- This can be as simple as “In addition,” or “However,” as long as it makes a clear connection from one paragraph to the next.
- In our sample essay, your transition might look something like “Not only would more sleep be better for students health, but it would give them mental stamina and allow them to focus better, for longer periods of time” Then you start your next paragraph or use this as the topic sentence of the next paragraph.
- **Conclusion Paragraph**
- Simply restate your thesis and main points
- **Closing** - get philosophical - comment on the bigger picture, mankind, the universe, etc.
- This can also be a call to action.
- The goal here is to leave the reader with something to think about. For our sample essay your closing could be something like "The students that get to sleep in today are the geniuses and heroes of tomorrow."

Body Paragraph 1

Note: repeat this structure for all body paragraphs

TOPIC SENTENCE (TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM YOUR THESIS STATEMENT-THE FIRST POINT/CLAIM):

EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

NEW/DIFFERENT EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

Body Paragraph 1

Continued...

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

NEW/DIFFERENT EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

TIE IT BACK TO THESIS AND TRANSITION:

***REPEAT THIS CYCLE OF EVIDENCE/ANALYSIS AS MANY TIMES AS NECESSARY TO FULLY PROVE THIS POINT FROM YOUR THESIS.**

Body Paragraph 2

Note: repeat this structure for all body paragraphs

TOPIC SENTENCE (TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM YOUR THESIS STATEMENT-THE SECOND POINT/CLAIM):

EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

NEW/DIFFERENT EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

Body Paragraph 2

Continued...

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

NEW/DIFFERENT EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

TIE IT BACK TO THESIS AND TRANSITION:

***REPEAT THIS CYCLE OF EVIDENCE/ANALYSIS AS MANY TIMES AS NECESSARY TO FULLY PROVE THIS POINT FROM YOUR THESIS.**

Body Paragraph 3

Note: repeat this structure for all body paragraphs

TOPIC SENTENCE (TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM YOUR THESIS STATEMENT-THE THIRD POINT/CLAIM):

EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

NEW/DIFFERENT EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

Body Paragraph 3

Continued...

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

NEW/DIFFERENT EVIDENCE/FACT TO SUPPORT THIS TOPIC:

ANALYSIS/OPINION BASED ON THIS EVIDENCE:

TIE IT BACK TO THESIS AND TRANSITION:

***REPEAT THIS CYCLE OF EVIDENCE/ANAYSIS AND/OR REPEAT THIS STRUCTURE FOR AS MANY BODY PARAGRAPHS AS NECESSARY TO FULLY PROVE ALL PARTS OF YOUR THESIS.**

There you go!

Now put it together in complete sentences, with proper indentation/paragraph format, slap on a bibliography (aka works cited), and **MAKE SURE YOU PROOFREAD, EDIT, AND REVISE YOUR WORK.**

Usually essays are expected to follow **MLA guidelines**, but this varies by region, country, school, etc--make sure you know the rules for the specific format that is expected of you and revise your essay to fit those formatting expectations/follow those rules.

For resources on writing rules and format info, check out <http://StronginLearning.com> and click on the “Resources” tab.

REMEMBER:

The best writing is done in the **REVISION** stage, so **YOU MUST** revise your essay **MORE THAN ONCE**.

Let me emphasize **AGAIN: Do not skip this step!**

Far too many of my students have had the following experience: They need help with an essay. We start from scratch, they finish writing the essay within a 1-2 hour tutoring session, pat themselves on the back for getting it done quickly, and never look at it again (even though I explicitly instruct them to either revise it after I leave, or schedule an additional session so we can do it together). They don't. They're happy to be "done" (they're really not).

A week later they're unhappily telling me about how unfair it is that they got a C or D on the essay.

That thought process of, "Well I already wrote it so does it really *need* more revision? Nah it's fine,"

IS THE BIGGEST MISTAKE YOU CAN MAKE IN WRITING. DO NOT MAKE THIS MISTAKE REVISE. REVISE. REVISE.

It **will** make the difference between a C and an A-grade paper!

"I draft quickly and then revise, a lot"

-Erin Morgenstern