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How to Write a Discursive Essay

*A discursive essay is a formal essay about a controversial topic. The writer of a discursive essay attempts to present both sides, while showing why she favors one side over the other (this can be a choice – multiple viewpoints can remain in place – you are **favoring** your position while not necessarily proving it and disproving other views. Discursive writing is a good way to learn how to explore viewpoints and arguments; however it is not an argumentative essay and the question/issue can remain open/unresolved.*

Instructions / Suggestions

1

Introduce a controversial topic in the first paragraph and explain the topic and how you feel about it / what your position/"thesis" is.

○ 2

Explain your strongest argument in the second paragraph. This should be the most compelling piece of evidence that you can support logically to aid your position. Strengthen it with expert opinions, statistics and real-world examples, but avoid anecdotal claims, especially when writing college essays.

○ 3

Write supporting paragraphs in descending order of importance. Each paragraph should illustrate a single argument. (this is optional. Depending on complexity, depth and length of your essay.)

○ 4

Explain the counterarguments/differing viewpoints to your essay's thesis. Explain their beliefs and reasoning as completely as possible. Don't artificially weaken your opponent's arguments; your essay will be stronger if you represent the counterarguments fairly. (this should be brief.)

○ 5

Conclude: Explain why you favor your viewpoint and not the opposing views. Your reasons might be moral, practical or logical – name these only – you have already unpacked them in your body paragraphs. You may start with a

concession statement, admitting that some of the opposing arguments are valid, but state that you still think your side is right. No new arguments or views to be brought in here.

Writing a discursive essay requires you to logically recognise both sides of the topic while explaining why you prefer one side of the argument. The first paragraph is the introduction and how you feel about the topic, then the second paragraph is the explanation of the strongest topic. Write supporting paragraphs in descending order while explaining the counter arguments then conclude with a strong point and acknowledge your opponent's argument.

Here is an example which is persuasive and rather argumentative – your essay may be like this but you may also take a more flexible, exploratory approach.

Use correct English and an appropriate register which is, traditionally, formal; however, current style norms allow a more conversational style/ register and you may use the first (less formal) or third person.

PURPOSE: to persuade

A point of view and thesis statement are required for both argumentative and discursive essays. We may use the analogy of a court case. Consider the thesis statement as the defence and the antithesis as the prosecution. There is no point in holding a trial without a verdict. In terms of spoken text, consider your discursive essay as a debate in which both sides are presented. Without a final adjudication, the debate has little purpose. Remember the purpose of an exposition (argumentative or discursive) is to persuade, if the writer has no clear viewpoint, then it is impossible to persuade the reader.

Example: ***'There's no need to write letters any more. Telephoning is a better way of communicating with people.'***

STRUCTURE:

1. Introduction – a short paragraph stating both points of view and a thesis statement. (The thesis indicates your point of view)

It's certainly** quicker to telephone than to write a letter **but it may not always be the best way to communicate. The use depends, like so many other things in life, on the circumstances.

2. Points **For** – one paragraph giving reasons in favour. These reasons should be supported by evidence and examples. (This will develop the antithesis)

*Telephoning **is ideal if you want** immediate action. You wouldn't want to write to the plumber if you had water pouring through your ceiling, for example. **It's also the obvious choice if** you need a quick answer to a question like 'What time is the next train to Oxford?' or 'Did I leave my wallet in your shop?' Many problems can be solved more easily and decisions taken more quickly if you can discuss them with someone on the phone rather than wait for a reply to a letter. **Finally, few people would disagree that** telephoning is a pleasant way to keep in touch with friends and family.*

3. Points **Against** – one paragraph giving reasons against. These reasons should be supported by evidence and examples. (This will develop the thesis)

***On the other hand, there can be a number of disadvantages to** telephoning. **In the first place,** some problems are too complicated to explain on the phone, **especially if** they involve facts and figures, and it may be clearer if you set them out in a letter. **Secondly, it might be important to** have a record of what you say, especially if it's a booking or a complaint. **Last but not least,** telephoning, especially long-distance, can be terribly expensive.*

4. Further **support** and follow a logical argument.

***The nice thing about** receiving letters is that you can keep them and re-read them. **Who wouldn't rather have** a six-page letter full of news from a friend abroad than a two-minute telephone call on a bad line?*

5. **Conclusion** – a brief paragraph stating your point of view (thesis) based on the reasons and evidence you have given.

***To sum up,** letter writing **is far from dead, in my view. Each form of** communication **has its advantages and disadvantages: the important thing to recognise is** which is more appropriate for what you want to say, and to whom.*

ANOTHER DISCURSIVE ESSAY: 'The Future is Bright' - Discuss

The future is a mystery to everyone. **Some people would argue that** the future is bright because modern technology will soon be able to solve most problems in our society. **Other people think that** modern technology will bring about the destruction of the world. **If we consider** the recent negative environmental and social trends in the world today it is impossible to be optimistic about the future.

It can be argued that modern technology has solved many of the world's problems, and may continue to do so in the future. We have made rapid progress, especially in the fields of medicine, communication and transport.[Scientists are now able to cure or prevent many of the diseases that previously affected millions of people. For example, polio can be eliminated simply by vaccination.[As well as this there has been an explosion in the area of information technology and communication. This also makes it easier to conduct business in any part of the world.[Along with the advances made in communication, transport has also been improved all over the world. Even in developing

countries, many people now own private transport or are able to travel quickly and easily using public transport. Therefore, it is sometimes claimed that technology will provide mankind with the universal panacea of the future.

However, modern technology **also brings many disadvantages**. [Pollution is one result of increased technology and industrialization. **The effects of this can be seen** in the destruction of the ozone layer as well as global warming. [Improvements in technology have also increased the effectiveness of weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction. [**As a direct result of** modern technology, certainly in the future new diseases will appear. [**Although** transport has improved, it brings with it the danger of air pollution and traffic congestion. [Overpopulation and starvation will increase in the future because natural resources are limited and undoubtedly the amount of fertile land is decreasing steadily.

In conclusion, it is clear that for most people in the world the future is not bright because mankind is destroying the environment through unsustainable development. Modern technology can solve some problems but without careful planning the future looks bleak.

NOTES AND USEFUL LANGUAGE

TOPICS

Typical discussion topics include statements which you are asked to agree or disagree with (e.g. There's too much violence on television.) and invitations to discuss aspects of a subject

APPROACH

Generally, the important thing is to consider the various aspects of the topic before giving a balanced opinion. Occasionally, you may be asked directly for a personal opinion (e.g. What's the best way to bring up children?), but even here you would need to consider some different views so that you can contrast them with your own.

STRUCTURE

The structure of a discursive composition should be clear and logical. In the first paragraph, introduce the topic and your argument. In the next, deal with one aspect of the topic. Give supporting evidence in following paragraphs if necessary. After that, consider the opposite point of view. In the final paragraph, sum up your argument and give a balanced personal opinion.

INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

- Many people believe/feel that...
- It is said ...
- People's opinions on ... differ widely.

SUPPORTING YOUR ARGUMENT

- One of the main advantages of ... is that ...
- In the first place,/Firstly,/To begin with,/ Secondly,/ Thirdly, / Finally, / Last but not least, ...

ADDING FURTHER REASONS

- Both ... and/not only ... but also ...
- In addition,/What is more,/Furthermore,...

EXPRESSING AN OPPOSITE POINT OF VIEW

- On the other hand, there are also a number of disadvantages.

LINKING SENTENCES

- Although...,/However,/In spite of this,/Despite...
- Some people... while/whereas others ...

- On the one hand ... on the other hand...

EXPRESSING OPINIONS

- In my view/opinion,/It seems to me that ...
- I think/feel that ...

SUMMING UP

- In conclusion,/To sum up,/On balance,

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