Expository Writing

What is it?

Expository writing is a general term given to a non-fiction writing style. It is not story telling because it depends on facts, opinions supported by facts, and fully developed ideas that must be made clear through the use of example. Expository paragraphs or essays are usually written in the third person. The writer does not use the pronoun “I”, but uses he, she, the reader, the audience, etc. This gives the writing more authority.

Examples:

A. First Person Statement

_ I believe Alberta should have a mandatory seat belt law to lessen the number of deaths resulting from traffic accidents._

This statement is very opinion-based and leads the reader to see it as such.

B. Third Person Statement

_Alberta should have a mandatory seat belt law to lessen the number of deaths resulting from traffic accidents._

The ‘tone’ of this third person statement is authoritative. The reader becomes more interested in reading what the author has to say on the matter of seat belt legislation. Third person writing sounds more logical.

Methods of organizing expository writing

The topic students are given for their essay or paragraph will help them decide what method of expository writing to use. There are many kinds of expository writing, but the most common ones used by students are:

1) Process Writing
2) Classification
3) Comparison and Contrast
4) Persuasive
1. Process Writing

This is a ‘How-To’ type of writing. For example, if a student is given the topic, How to Make Beer, then the writing can be developed through the use of steps. This easily explains the topic to the reader. It is the process of doing something.

When using Process Writing be sure to use the following guidelines:

a) **Sequence**
   Make sure your paragraph puts the steps of a process in chronological order. For example, if the topic is How to Bake a Simple Cake, remember to list the ingredients for your reader before plunging in to the actual recipe.

   Hint – When a first draft of the topic has been completed, read it aloud to a friend. Can he/she understand the directions?

b) **Excess Detail**
   Just as too little information is disastrous, too much is boring. Don’t fall into the trap of bombarding the reader with useless details.

   Hint – List all the details about the topic before writing the first draft. Get rid of non-essential details.

c) **Relate new ideas to previous experiences**
   New ideas are difficult because people may find them hard to accept. In order to encourage better understanding of an idea by a reader, use examples that are common to everyone.

   For example, some people are nervous about cell phone applications. To eliminate the fear which may interfere with the understanding of this topic, match the idea of using cell phone applications with the use of a computer. Because most people have used a computer, cell phone applications as a new improved version are not as threatening.

2. Classification

A second method of expository writing that is commonly used is called Classification, which is simply sorting information into common groups.

For example, if the topic of an essay is Man’s Best Friend, how does a student make this topic less general and more manageable? Look for definite links or common characteristics to join the ideas together. Therefore man’s best friend could be either dogs or cats because they share a common link of both being household pets.
3. Comparison and Contrast

A third method for organizing expository writing is through the use of similarities and differences. Comparison and contrast connects ideas that are usually thought of as separate. Connecting the ideas can be done in two ways:

a) **Point by Point comparison**
   This allows the writer to talk about two things at the same time; comparing (or contrasting) them point by point.

   *Example:*
   Flying is considered one of the safest and fastest ways to travel. On the other hand, some people prefer driving over flying because they can take in all of the interesting scenery along the way.

b) **Block Method of comparison**
   The purpose of the Block Method of comparison/contrast is to be able to look at two things individually by using two separate paragraphs.

   *Example:*
   **Paragraph 1**
   Driving is one of the simplest forms of transportation. The traveler gets to choose when to depart, how long to travel for, and when take rest stops.

   **Paragraph 2**
   Flying is a very efficient way of travelling. If a person is traveling far enough they may save a lot of time which they could spend working, or enjoying their vacation.

   **Hint** – When writing an essay using the block method of paragraph development, ideas must be connected between paragraphs with transitions.

4. Persuasive Writing (argument)

The whole point of persuasive expository writing is to make a difference in the way a reader thinks or acts. Persuasive writing must emotionally involve the reader but must not depend on emotional language to produce this result. Emotional language such as, ‘abortion is murder’ exaggerates an issue and discredits the writer. Persuasive writing depends on facts to back up the writer’s opinion.
Guidelines for persuasive writing

a) **Look at both sides**

Persuasive writing involves research. You must be able to look objectively at both sides of an issue.

*For example*, if the topic of an essay is, the rights of non-smokers, and the writer’s main objective is to persuade the reader that non-smokers have rights. Possibly start by discussing the viewpoint of the smoker or non-smoker. From this point, eliminate the opposition by systematically discrediting smokers’ rights with cold, hard facts.

b) **Persuade – little by little**

Tact and diplomacy go a long way toward getting a reader to accept your point of view. Using degrees of persuasion helps the reader accept less controversial ideas and leads him/her carefully to the clincher in the essay’s argument.

*For example*, when discussing non-smokers’ rights, start with the simple acts a smoker could do to make a non-smoker happy, i.e., every individual has the right to make decisions affecting his/her life, as long as those decisions do not hurt others. A smoker sharing an office with other smokers may continue this habit; however, one smoker surrounded by non-smokers should consider the impact of the action on the others.