

## **FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY**

First of all, you're going to have a teacher who tells you that a good essay is not formulaic, that it comes from the heart and that it isn't something you can just crank out. That is absolutely true! But maybe you are a person who doesn't have anything on your heart to write about, or maybe you're in a hurry and all you CAN do is crank it out. Or maybe you just don't know how to write. The best way to learn how to write well is to read a lot, and think about what makes certain writers good, and other writers...well, not so good. This is not a good guide for becoming the next Orwell, or at least, you're not going to become a great essayist using this formula. BUT –you may learn to organize your thoughts for an essay so that when you DO decide to write something you care about, you'll understand the simple structure behind it. Think of writing as architecture: the very simple five paragraph essay is kind of a tract house: it's not beautiful, but it's a place to live, and lots of people buy them. And you may be inspired to soaring feats of architectural wonder once you have the basics of walls, floor, and roof mastered.

Basically- and it's really this simple:  
SAY WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY  
SAY IT (THREE DIFFERENT WAYS)  
SAY WHAT YOU SAID.

### **STEP ONE:**

Ideally, you have an open-ended question and you have some time to brainstorm. What you want to think is: "How do I want to answer this question?" and "What three things back up my answer?" Think of more than three things, because some of them are going to not make the final cut.... When you have five solid things that support your answer, you are seriously almost done.

### **STEP TWO:**

Try to flesh out your supports. Make them stronger. Think of why they back up your answer. See if you can find a correlation between three of them—failing that, see if three of them support your answer in different ways. Pick three that either are similar or are different. Write a short paragraph (that's about 5-10 sentences) about each of them, showing how they support your answer.

### **STEP THREE:**

Now you want to write your introduction. You should review the question, either by rephrasing it or by something like, "When asked what my favorite color is, my response has to be that it is blue". Then you're going to SAY WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO SAY—I respond this way because a) first reason; b) second reason; and c) third reason. If you are asked for an opinion, you may start with "I think the greatest hero of all time is definitely Superman," or "I believe it would be great to be the President for a day". If you are supposed to persuade your audience, use stronger language, "School uniforms should be required." "Students should not be separated by ability." Etc.

### **STEP FOUR:**

Write nice little sentences to introduce each of your three supporting reasons (SAY IT THREE DIFFERENT WAYS) that tie them back to your response "One reason (I feel that) ... is that..." "Another reason (I feel)... is that...". It's a good idea to arrange your supporting ideas this way: second best idea, least good idea, best idea. Start with a punch, finish with a bang.

### **STEP FIVE:**

Write your conclusion. You can be obvious, "In conclusion, I feel that ... because a), b), and c)" or a bit more hidden, but basically, you need to SAY WHAT YOU SAID and wrap it up.

And you're done.

(note: a nice trick—if you can back up your three reasons with one to three factual supports each, you have the makings of a research paper!)

NOW PRACTICE.

Here are some questions to get you started.

What do you think about school uniforms?

Should students be separated into classes by ability?

What is your favorite color?

Who do you think is the greatest hero (or heroine) of all time?

If you could be someone else for a day, who would you be?

Where would you like to spend your summer vacation?

What was today's headline? How do you feel about it?

Is there anything you believe that you could not be persuaded to not believe?

What is the best show on television?

Who is the greatest musician of all time?

If you were an artist, would you rather be a musician, a painter, a sculptor, or something else?

If you had a time machine, to what time (past or future) would you go?

What makes a movie a good movie?

What is your favorite movie?

What does it take to make your day "ideal"?

Is it important to go to college?

What should the age of emancipation be? (it's currently 18 in the United States)

Other than the basics of food, clothing, and shelter, what do you need to survive?