

What is an essay?

An essay is a literary genre used to **clearly, concisely** and **persuasively** convey an idea, which follows certain thematic and stylistic guidelines. For example, while writing a résumé you are not supposed to talk about anyone else but yourself and you are expected to list your previous workplaces in order starting with the most current. If you start talking about "*your smart friend Jimmy*", they will most probably stop taking you seriously and when you write a poem or the lyrics to a song, you can say to someone "*you are the sunshine of my life*", but if you were to say to someone in a plain way: "*please, come here I can't see well, this room is not well-lit and as you come, could you switch yourself on?*" the person most probably won't understand and may wonder what is wrong with you.

10 + 1 most important guidelines to follow while writing an essay:

- 1) elaborate on **one topic and one topic only**
- 2) **do not repeat yourself** or paraphrase your statements ("*my parents used to bring me to school when I was little, when my mother or my father accompanied me to school ...*"). In general, the less wordy, the better essays are (yet, a tweet won't do ;-)) Some essays must be written within a prescribed number of words
- 3) clearly articulate **opinions, falsifiable statements** and **facts**
 - 3.a) **facts** are well-known information based on real occurrences, "clouds form from evaporated water", "gravity acts anywhere on earth", "babies aren't brought by storks, but conceived by their parents and given birth to by their mothers"
 - 3.b) **falsifiable statements** may not be undeniably known, but are verifiable through a factual check, experimental science or truthful historical records, "he is the father of her baby", "My neighbor kept an actual crocodile in his garage", "The Curtiss NC (NC-4), nicknamed 'Nancy boat', was the first fixed-wing aircraft to make a West-to-East transatlantic flight from Newfoundland, Canada to Ponta Delgada in the archipelago of the Azores, Portugal in May 1919", "He (God) has fixed the earth firm, immovable" --Chronicles 16:30.
Notice that falsifiable statements are not those that can be proved to be false, but such statements which can be **-verified-**
 - 3.c) **opinions** are beliefs or judgments held with confidence but not necessarily substantiated by positive knowledge or proof, "Brazilian soccer players are the best", "That boy is the nicest person in the school", "You can easily beat a drug test by drinking plenty of water and 'staying clean' for two weeks", "As people grow older, their opinions, like their diseases, grow chronic" --Josh Billings, "There are as many opinions as there are people; each has his own correct way" --Terence Phormio, "The pressure of public opinion is like the pressure of the atmosphere; you can't see it but, all the same, it is sixteen pounds to the square inch" --James R. Lowell, New York Times, April 2, 1922
- 4) **do not back an opinion with another opinion**
- 5) section your essay with an **introduction**, a **body** and a **conclusion**, dedicating to the introduction and the conclusion just one paragraph and elaborating on the main ideas in the body
- 6) **do not use meta phrases**, such as: "*Now, I will write to you about ...*" or "*this is why I think ...*", you should just state what you intend to say
- 7) do articulate your ideas in a **logical way that is easy to follow**, for example, while writing an anecdote ideas should naturally follow in a timely fashion and while writing a user manual the steps should proceed towards the sought functional end
- 8) be realistic, avoid writing up a rant, **balance the pros and cons of your argument**, being persuasive doesn't mean exclusively pointing out what adds to your argument
- 9) **avoid unnecessary adjectives and adverbs** when they are suggested by the connotations of substantives and verbs, it is much better to write: "*the Smith's mansion (or four-story dwelling) ...*", than: "*the 'large' house in which the Smith's lived ...*"
- 10) **write legibly** on the lined pages of the separate answer sheet booklet
- 11) do not waste time rewriting your ideas on an extra sheet. You may and should **use the provided booklet as a scratch-pad** to underline certain words and phrases, charting connections and jot notes on the margins even on the Reading and Math sections of your GED test

Your essay reviewers may be lenient when it comes to a few typos, grammatical mistakes, scratched/corrected words or the veracity of what you are writing about ("Monkeys in Alaska" or "My rich uncle Joe"), but once you, say, veer off your essay topic you will automatically fail your GED writing section.

Most professional essayists, such as grant writers, are not subject-matter experts, but it helps greatly to have some general knowledge about the subject on which you are writing.

Do not return the booklet until you finish both Parts I and II of the Language Arts, Writing test. If you still have time, you may return to the multiple-choice section after you complete your essay.

Mechanics of writing an essay:

You will be given a general, controversial topic to write about in **45 minutes**, for example: "Should we take celebrities as role models?", "To what extent is the use of computers in classrooms beneficial?", "Is thematic or optional segregation good for schools and society?"; so, you won't have time to research your essay topic on the Internet or a library.

As with all other sections of the GED exam (and, in fact, life), it is very important to be organized and to pace yourself in order to make the best use of the allotted time. Authors have different strengths and weaknesses, as well as differing ways to work, yet here you have a general outline about how much time you should spend on each phase:

- a) reading topic and directions to come up with a thesis statement and outline your well-focused main ideas (5 min)
- b) brainstorming, charting ideas, free writing, clustering, mapping, etc.) (5 min)
- c) drafting/writing your essay (20 min)
- d) revising (reading through the essay and making changes if necessary) (10 min)
- e) editing (checking for correctness in grammar and spelling) (5 min)