

WRITING GUIDE | What is a college (academic) essay??

The traditional form for writing in college is the *college* or *academic essay*. Students who went to high school recently have probably practiced this form. But in college, the expectations can be higher: a college essay is more complicated and formal than most high school writing.

A college essay

- is usually not personal (but it depends on the assignment!)
- often requires support from source material (usually scholarly sources)
- is written to an *academic audience*
- uses *academic style*: “formal, but not too formal”

What about structure?

A college essay is made up of an introduction, body, and conclusion.

- The *introduction* raises the topic and presents a focused *thesis*: the main idea, claim or assertion that the entire essay develops.
- Each *body paragraph* is guided by a *topic sentence*, which presents the paragraph’s main idea.
- The *conclusion* brings the discussion to a close

What are college essays about?

Essay assignments usually ask you to respond to a specific question OR ask you to choose a topic from course material and “narrow” it to a meaningful focus.

What’s the best way to write a college essay?

Writers use lots of different strategies, but the most important thing is to use a thoughtful *writing process*. Divide your writing task into steps, like these:

selecting a topic → study/research → note-taking → idea-mapping → drafting →
→ revision, revision, revision! → editing → proofreading

Want some more good advice?

- Create a *schedule* before you get started, to help you stay on track.
- Remember to *edit!* Save editing until the end of your process, and plan plenty of time!
- Get *feedback* from peers and your instructor.
- *Visit the Writing Center!*