

## THE ART OF THE ESSAY

An essay is a short nonfiction piece told in the first person point of view. It is about the author and the author's insight, precipitated by a simple thought, event, or experience.

*It is about insight.*

The purpose of an essay is for the author to coalesce the initiating experience into words on paper, so the reader may learn something about him/herself by reading the essay. In other words, the essay must have its genesis in something fairly normal, but have greater, broader, meaning and value. The essayist must pass that insight, as closely as possible, to the reader.

There are roughly three classifications of essays:

1. Observational, where the essayist observes something, teases out its meaning and documents the result.
2. Investigational, where the essayist engages in research to discover one thing and discovers other, more important things in the process.
3. Opinion, where the essayist believes his/her opinion to be of importance due to specific, unique insights about the topic at hand. (Be careful; an opinion essay without form devolves into a rant.)

Begin with the thesis, a provocative statement that kicks the whole thing off.

“When I finally quit playing the piano, the first thing I learned to appreciate was the possibility of my own silence.” —*Daisy Eunyoungh Rhau*

“Fashion nearly wrecked my life.” —*Barbara Kingsolver*

“The human species, according to the best theory I can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, the men who borrow, and the men who lend.” —*Charles Lamb*

Then give as much background as is required, and as much information as is needed in order to have the reader follow the progression of thought all the way around to the end, to the *insight*, which should, in fact, explain the thesis. Be wary of indulging in too much extraneous biographical information. Stick to the topic at hand.

Essays are circular in nature, and the ending should not merely echo the beginning, but should tie in directly. The thesis is the ending. The body of the essay is an explanation of the thesis, and the ending is a restatement of the thesis, expanded with insight.

It is a simple, important form of communication.

As with all things, if you intend to write a good essay, go to the library, pick up a couple of books of essays, and read a dozen.

[www.elizabethengstrom.com](http://www.elizabethengstrom.com)