

Instructor note: The following is an example of how to write a short essay. I have embedded a number of guiding comments into the essay which I hope are of help.

## How to write a short essay

Many students struggle with the format of a short essay and so I will present here a sample of how this might be accomplished. Even though I will not use the specifics of a particular assignment, I will provide a general framework that will be useful.

In the paragraph above I want you to note I did not give any specific details; this is because a first paragraph should be an introduction and not overwhelm the reader with details. In fact, the best way to think of the introductory paragraph is that its purpose is to explain to the reader why they should read further. In the second and subsequent paragraphs of a short essay provide details. Note that in this paragraph the details I provide are about the way to write an introductory paragraph. Other issues are of importance when writing the short essay and they include avoiding the use of dictionaries and wikis, the need not to create a mega-paragraph, and the need to include transitions.

One might ask why dictionaries and wikis are not a part of a short essay. The short answer is that dictionaries are for the writer, not the reader. The sophisticated writer uses the meaning of a term in context in such a way that meaning is clear to the reader. In fact, this writing skill is expected at the college level. As to wikis, many are simply plagiarized entries from other sources. Given that the average student does not know who wrote this material using wikis can be a tricky practice.

Short essays should be written to an audience that does not have access to the materials being cited (Clarke, 2008). Clarke (2008) reminds us that “by the selection of which sources to include, the author demonstrates his or her comprehension of the issue, rather than just knowledge of fact” (para. 5). Content is important, but sometimes one starts writing down all the information and fails to note how long a paragraph has been generated. It is important to remember that a paragraph should consist of only 1 main idea. This is so important for the reader. Another important consideration is the use of transition sentences.

Transitions are the ‘glue’ of the short essay. Often, without them, the essay seems to jump from topic to topic, without any cohesion. The transition helps the reader to follow your train of thought.

After you have provided the details in the middle paragraph or paragraphs you will want to end your short essay well. There are many techniques for doing so (University of Richmond Writer's Web, n.d.) and each has advantages. No matter how you end remember the techniques discussed in this sample short essay as they will be of great help.

## References<sup>1,2</sup>

Clarke, C. (2008). Anthropology tutorials: The differences between a short essay and a short answer: Your instructor’s expectations. Retrieved from <http://www.cynthiaclarke.com/tutorial2/differences.rtf>

University of Richmond Writer's Web (n.d.) *Writing conclusions*. Retrieved from <http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/conclude.html>

---

<sup>1</sup> For all students: In most papers the References page is a new page. Here I did not do so to save paper.

<sup>2</sup> For OL (online) students only: Do not bother with using a new page for the References section, indenting references or double spacing within each reference.