

How to write a great essay:

Asking someone “what is a great essay” is a bit like asking “what does a great tie look like?” Everyone has their opinion, so you should ask your individual subject teachers for an example, both in College and in University. However, there are a few brief points that everyone can agree on. So “Annie, get your pen” and tick off these points as you review that all important essay.

- 1) Clear communication: The tip for this is “know your audience”. Consider a day in the life of your friendly neighbourhood teacher. They arrive early in the morning, go home late in the day, pick up the kids, cook, clean... and usually get round to marking your essay at 11:30 at night. This reduces them from the bright, compassionate and indulgent visions of intellectual loveliness that you know them as to exhausted tyrants when it comes to marking! So go easy on them by marking your arguments clear. Break the essay up into small sentences and small paragraphs, with usually one topic to a paragraph. Moreover, don’t assume knowledge of the reader. As a general point, anyone, whether they have subject training or not, should be able to read and understand your information.

One more thing. Clear communication means you use the “slang” of your subject. Use the glossary in the back of your textbooks to use the right subject words. Oh, by the way; never use “street-talk”. Frankly, it’s irritating and unprofessional. Let me break my own rules by penning the apt words “ ’nuff said”.

- 2) An essay is an argument. Which, to employ Socratic logic, means there must be a counter-argument. The best essays don’t ignore these, they quote these counter-arguments and argue *back*.
- 3) A good essay has a beginning, middle and end, but it is not a novel. An essay does not need suspense! For instance, as a history teacher, I don’t want to be halfway through an essay and say “oh, the *Allies* won the war!” Use the introduction to set out what you’re arguing and how you’re going to do it. Use the body to present these arguments in a logical sequence, with each paragraph smoothly flowing into the other. The conclusion brings it all together. I always like my students to end it with a fantastic quote (‘cause you’ve got to give ‘em the ol’ razzle-dazzle...), but ask your subject teachers about this one.

And now the most important lesson of all, grasshopper. Be calm. Be still. Research and write early, so you don’t panic and write it at three AM the day its due. Get your friends, parents and other assorted well wishers to read it and take their criticism on board. And know bad karma will follow anyone who plagiarizes.

You have been enlightened.