
HOW TO START AN ESSAY

For many people, beginning an essay is very difficult. Planning your essay before writing can help alleviate some of the stress of essay writing. There are a few steps that can be followed to assist any writer in the planning process:

1. Choose a topic
2. Brainstorm
3. Categorize
4. Build a thesis
5. Organize an outline

Once these steps are completed, you may feel more comfortable starting your essay.

Note: These steps are not mandatory. They are just a recommended process. You may alter these steps in any way to suit your style or your essay. Different types of essays will have some differences, but nothing major.

Step 1: Choose a Topic

Choosing a topic is very important, and should not be rushed. A topic should reflect the writer's interests and knowledge. Once your topic has been selected, you should test its strength by brainstorming ideas.

Note: Don't be afraid to narrow your selected topic. Instead of writing about "three characteristics of a good hockey team," you can narrow it down to "three characteristics of the Stanley Cup winning team, the Montreal Canadiens." Just remember to stay on topic. The original topic was about a general hockey team; therefore, the narrowed topic is about a very specific hockey team.

Example: River was about to start an essay that was assigned to them by their teacher. Their teacher gave them a list of topics to choose from, but River didn't know which one to choose. River is a Humber student who is currently enrolled in an Accounting Program. They really like hockey and video games. Which topic is best for them?



Topics

1. Three characteristics of a good hockey team.
2. Three features of a good marketing plan.
3. Three qualities of a good book.

Step 2 Brainstorm:

Brainstorming means to generate ideas. Brainstorming can be done in many different styles. All you need to do is write down every idea about your topic that comes to mind. It doesn't matter whether you put these ideas down as a list or scattered around a page. Make sure that this process is done in point form; there should be no sentences or paragraphs.

Note: You will not need to worry about grammar when you write down your brainstormed ideas. You should, however, make sure that **YOU** understand exactly what you have written. The purpose of this list is for you to look back at it later in the writing process.

Example: River starts to brainstorm their ideas on their chosen topic: three characteristics of a good hockey team.

A GOOD HOCKEY TEAM

- High scoring
- Smart coach/staff
- Young players
- Good defence
- Brave GM
- Plan for future
- Excellent goaltending
- Veteran leadership

If you are finding difficulty brainstorming ideas, it might be wise to start the process again by choosing another topic

Step 3 Categorize:

Now that you have a page that is filled with ideas, it is time to organize them. You will take your ideas and group them together. The ideas will need to be similar or relate to one another to go into the same group. Once the ideas are categorized, label each category with the topic they are about.

Note: Each category should be distinct. You don't want them to overlap similar ideas. For example, three categories that would overlap would be "kind, caring and compassionate." These categories are too similar.

Example: River has nine ideas on their brainstorming page; however, the topic asked for three. They feel all their ideas are strong, so they wisely decide to group them together into three categories



THREE CHARACTERISTICS

Highly Skilled Players

- High scoring
- Good defence
- Excellent goaltending

Strong Organization

- Brave GM
- Fair owner
- Smart coaching Staff

Team Fundamentals

- Young players
- Veteran leadership
- Future plans

River has the three characteristics that they needed. They are almost finished with the planning process. They have all the elements to make a thesis statement, which will be their next step.

Note: Some people would switch steps 2 and 3 around. They would think about three general categories and proceed to brainstorm the points for each. Use a process that you are most comfortable with.

Step 4 Build a Thesis:

A thesis contains the topic and the contents of your writing. At this point, you have everything needed to make a thesis statement. Once the thesis has been built, an outline can be prepared.

Note: Many people like to split the thesis statement into a few sentences or keep it in a single sentence. Both ways are acceptable, so choose whichever process you feel most comfortable with.

Example: River has their thesis right in front of them. They know that a thesis should contain the topic. River looks at their topic, which is “Three characteristics of a good hockey team.” They have the first part, now they need the contents of their essay. They check their category page, which has highly skilled players, strong organization and team fundamentals. They’ve got both parts, so they begin to write their thesis statement.

Thesis Statement: Three characteristics that make a good hockey team are having highly skilled players, having strong organization and having team fundamentals.

As you can see, a thesis can be really short. This is quite an effective thesis because it gets right to the point. The next step is to develop an outline.

Step 5 Organize an Outline:

The outline will make the writing process much easier because it will guide you through the



structure of your essay. It is your essay; it just hasn't been put into paragraphs yet.

An essay contains a hook, a thesis statement, body paragraphs and a conclusion, but not all of the sections have to be included in an outline. The most important parts for an outline would be the thesis and body paragraphs. Each body paragraph should be separated, and every point in that paragraph should be listed. It is also a good idea to show a description and example of each point on the outline.

Note: Different types of essay can have different styled outlines. For example, a compare and contrast outline may be divided in two. The purpose of the division is that two things will be compared to point out similarities or differences.

Example: Let's take a look at River's outline. They have already finished their first body paragraph plan.

OUTLINE

Thesis: Three characteristics that make a good hockey team are having **highly skilled players**, having **strong organization** and having **team fundamentals**.

Body 1: Highly Skilled Players

High scoring players

- Many players scoring 20 or more goals or having 40 or more points
- E.g. Detroit Red Wings - 5 players with 20 or more goals – first place in the western division

Good defence

- Defensive unit plays well together – players with a strong +/- -- +/- = goals scored when the player is on the ice versus goals scored against
- E.g. New Jersey Devils – defensive pairs play well together and have a high positive +/-

Excellent goaltending

- Goalie is experienced with strong goals against average and high save percentage
- E.g. Martin Brodeur – Playoff experience – strong goals against – high save percentage – Stanley cup winner and gold medallist

River would do the same with their other two body paragraphs.

Note: Make sure your points are strong. For example, the first body paragraph in Billy's outline has three points. The rule of thumb is to have three points for each paragraph. If you feel that your body paragraph is a little weak even with three points, try adding a fourth.

Note: Make sure to consider the order of your points. For example, you can have your points in chronological order or have them in order from weakest to strongest.

After all this planning for your essay, you can finally start to write your essay. You have your ideas planned out in a structured way that you can follow.

