

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY ANSWER

Read the Question

This sounds too obvious to mention. But every year some people proceed to reel off a prepared answer without considering whether what they are writing actually addresses the question asked. This will be immediately obvious to anyone reading the essay. Read the question several times to make sure you understand what it is asking.

Analyze the Question

When you have read the question, you should then analyze it. This is vital. Look for key words (the issue to be considered) and topic words (the subject matter) and you can ensure that you actually answer the question rather than provide a simple narrative of events. Once you have analyzed the question, you are ready to write your plan. Answer the question asked without adding extraneous information.

The simple question "Describe the factors and issues involved in the termination of an employee" should not have a response including progressive discipline, work performance improvement plans. The question is limited to termination not the steps leading up to termination.

Planning (Outlines)

This is without doubt the most vital part of writing an essay. It is your plan that determines what approach you take to answering the question. If you have written your plan properly, you will know exactly what your answer is going to be -- this is not something that should be decided while you are writing your essay! More importantly, your plan will ensure that you actually answer the question. Everything you write must be related to the question, and without a plan it is all too easy to lose focus and write irrelevant nonsense.

Introductions

Once you have made your plan, you are ready to begin. How do you start an essay? Unfortunately there is no hard and fast rule. However, one thing is certain: your introduction must make a good impression. It is the first thing anyone will read: if it fails to grip, the rest of the essay will have to be very good to retrieve the situation. At the very least it must be competent. Preferably, it should also be short -- if your introduction lasts much more than a third of a page, you have missed the point. So, faced with a blank piece of paper, what do you actually write?

The Middle

Once you have planned your essay, this section will almost write itself. It is just a question of filling in the gaps. You have already identified the key words in the question -- now is the time to use them. Every paragraph must refer in some way to the key words or it will be irrelevant. Be ruthless -- you will have far more information than you need and must select carefully only that which you need.

Conclusions

The conclusion is where you sum up what you have said in your essay. It is absolutely vital -- never fail to write one. This is the last thing an examiner reads and counts for a great deal: a good conclusion can rescue an indifferent essay and set the seal on a good one. It is here that you draw together the threads of your argument and hammer home your points, leaving the reader in no doubt as to your answer. You should refer explicitly to the key words of the question and reinforce the points you made in the main body. Above all it should contain nothing new -- it is simply a restatement of your points. If there is anything you have not already said it is too late now!

OK, now that you've seen the technical aspects I "borrowed" off the web, here's what you need to do:

Read the question! There sometimes is more than meets the eye.
Figure out what you want to say.
Do a brief outline.
Then start writing!

Here's some sample questions to practice with.

In December, the County recognizes that it has a budgetary crisis and all departments are asked to implement a 10% reduction in their budget for the remaining year. In addition, departments are required to submit a budget with a 30% reduction within two weeks. You are responsible for the budget preparation which is normally reviewed by the Commissioner/Sealer, who just happens to be on vacation in Bagdad. How would you accomplish the reductions requested and what considerations must be made?

You are faced with a workforce where 60% of your people will retire within the next four years, including 80% of your supervisory and management positions. Of the remaining 40%, only one person has a deputy license. You have a total of 30 people on your staff. How would you deal with this problem? (And no, you can't retire too!)

Describe the factors and issues involved in the termination of an employee.

RULES

Don't restate the issue as the opening to your answer. (There are many factors and issues to consider when terminating an employee.)

Don't make statements that are platitudes or "fluff" (Terminating an employee is always a difficult thing to do. DUH!)

Don't use words that you can't spell right or are used incorrectly. (It leaves a bad expression.)

Avoid the use of repetitious sentence structure. (Complex sentences with clauses often create a more interesting answer whereas short, choppy sentences, such as some of the above, can be boring.)

Your answer must be longer than just a few sentences, but don't ramble because rambling leads to long, disjointed sentences or sentences that detract or otherwise cause the reader to wonder what you are trying to say despite you, yourself, knowing exactly what you are trying to say when you were writing the answer to the question.

Paragraphs are nice. Try to use some. Remember a paragraph consists of more than a single sentence but addresses a single idea.

If you have a first there had better be a second.

Write sentences not:

1. Bullet Points
2. Outline Topics
3. Simple phrases

Proofread your answer.

Here are some additional tips:

1. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
4. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
5. Avoid clichés like the plague. (They're old hat.)
6. Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.
7. Be more or less specific.
8. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
9. Also too, never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
10. No sentence fragments.
11. Contractions aren't necessary and shouldn't be used.
12. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
13. Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
14. One should NEVER generalize.
15. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
16. Don't use no double negatives.
17. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
18. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
19. The passive voice is to be ignored.
20. Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary. Parenthetical words, however, should be enclosed in commas not parentheses.
21. Never use a big word when a diminutive one would suffice.
22. DO NOT use multiple exclamation points and all caps to emphasize!!!
23. Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
24. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
25. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
26. If you've heard it once, you've heard it a thousand times: Resist hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it correctly.
27. Puns are for children, not groan readers.
28. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
29. Even IF a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
30. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
31. Do not put statements in the negative form.
32. A writer must not shift your point of view.
33. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.
34. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
35. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
36. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
37. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
38. The adverb always follows the verb.
39. Be careful to use the rite homonym.
40. And finally...
41. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.