

## How to Write a Great Essay

By Debra Carroll

An essay is not simply a report. The difference is that a report states facts while an essay takes a position on the topic or makes a claim about it. In other words, after studying and explaining the topic, the writer has to do his/her OWN thinking about it, make a logical position, and then use the essay to convince the reader of this position.

ABMF Essay Contest judges use a rubric to aid in their rankings. The use of a rubric is an evidence-based process. It improves reliability and consistency because the student writing is measured against an objective standard.

Do not be intimidated by the rubric, use it as a tool to guide your writing and as a checklist that you have met all the requirements, for both what you write about and also how to follow the procedures to submit the essay. In fact, I wish that my teachers would have provided one for each type of writing when I was in school.

First, think of the overall structure of the essay. How many paragraphs? Do they each have a topic sentence? Does each paragraph have several sentences that develop the topic sentence? Does the concluding paragraph draw “conclusions” as well as “end” the composition?

Focus on the introductory paragraph or paragraphs to identify the **focus, purpose, and thesis statement**. In a fact-based essay, such as the ones you will be scored upon, there are a lot of introductory ideas that are necessary, including clear identification of the individuals or groups involved, the time period, the geographic location, and the purpose or reason for writing about this information.

An essential part of the introduction is the thesis statement, also called a controlling statement, which gives a single sentence claim of what will be included in the essay and the key ideas that will develop that claim. This sentence is usually written at the end of the introductory paragraph or section of paragraphs and it gives the key ideas of the following paragraphs.

Here is an example of an effective thesis statement, using a topic from a previous ABMF Past is Prologue Essay Contest:

“Operation Husky led to the control of Sicily with **brilliant strategies of deception**<sup>1</sup>, **military movements**<sup>2</sup>, and **change of leadership**<sup>3</sup> and offers lessons to be learned about the liberation of Europe.”

The lack of a thesis statement may result in the body paragraphs being competent but not tied together with transitional ideas. The reader has to guess what your point is!

After you have written the essay, step back and look at it as a whole. Ideally, the introductory ideas are revisited in the concluding paragraph. This is an effective use of the thesis statement and gives strength and unity to the entire essay. The rubric score for **purpose** is assessed on the whole essay being effectively tied to the position taken in the thesis.

Remember to include your thoughts on the two mandatory questions: 1) What can we learn from what happened so long ago? 2) What difference does it make to you in your life today and in your future? You are not judged for your opinions on the mandatory questions, but answering the questions counts for some points on your total score.

Citations that show where you found information are generally included **inside paragraphs, and not simply added at the end of the paper**. Citations give the writer the opportunity to use the ideas of other writers without plagiarism. They also allow the writer to either agree, disagree, or add to the ideas of others. Sometimes the source author explains something or expresses an idea in the clearest way, and it is appropriate to use their words - as long as you give credit to the original writer. Citations can be direct quotations or a summary of the ideas of others. One way to cite the ideas of others is, "According to Woodley in his 1998 report entitled '*Strategies for Success*'..." Then you also add Woodley's citation to the list of sources at the end of the paper. Use quoted material sparingly – this is your essay. Ask your teacher or advisor to help you cite your sources properly.

Start your essay by thoroughly reading, watching, and listening to several sources of information. Make an outline of your ideas. Write it without the help of artificial intelligence. You can do it!

Then go back and use the rubric to make sure you include the requirements. You may need to add transitions to compare, contrast or tie ideas together. Check that you support your topic sentence with every sentence in the paragraph. Create originality with your own insights about the topic. Use a persuasive or knowledgeable voice!

Carefully follow the instructions for submitting your paper **using your Unique ID # and NOT your name**. We look forward to seeing your best work!