

HOW TO DEVELOP IDEAS AND WRITE AN EXPOSITORY ESSAY

Expository Writing is educated, thought provoking writing in response to:

- Quotes-famous quotations by historians, authors, politicians...
- Adages-short, memorable sayings with meaning attached.
- Universally Accessible Topic-Food for thought that is not attached to curriculum or studies, but rather an idea from the experience.

SAMPLE EXPOSITORY WRITING TASK

“A person does not simply “receive” his or her identity. Identity is much more than the name or features one is born with. True identity is something people must create for themselves by making choices that are significant and that require a courageous commitment in the face of challenges. Identity means having ideas and values that one lives by.”—Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*.

Using examples from literature, history, science, film, or your own experiences, write an essay in which you develop your point of view as to whether identity is something people are born with or given, or is identity something people create for themselves.

STEP 1: READING CAREFULLY

Before you write a single word, you must make sure that you will specifically address only the topic you have been asked to address. Here's how:

- First, read the prompt carefully.
- Then, read the prompt again to clarify your writing task.
- Finally, identify key words and ideas in the prompt as you read it a third time.

My Writing task: *Decide whether one's identity is something people are born with or whether people create their own identities throughout their lives.*

Key words: *Identity: People born with or given; something people create for themselves.*

STEP 2: NARROW YOUR FOCUS (PREWRITING)

You need to narrow your focus by thinking of two or more examples/supporting details from literature, history, science, film, or your own experiences to support your point of view on the topic.

Your Point of View: *Identity is something people create for themselves.*

Examples: *Literature: Robert Louis Stevenson's novel* **Treasure Island**

Literature: Kevin Kesey's novel **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**

STEP 3: CHOOSE A THESIS STATEMENT

- A thesis statement not only lets a reader know your viewpoint; it also helps **you** to focus on that viewpoint as you write.
- Your thesis statement, which should emerge from your prewriting, should present your position as if it were a fact.

Thesis Statement: *Identity is an earned characteristic of a human being, whether the identity, and the actions which merit that identity, are good or bad.*

STEP 4: THE INTRODUCTION: OPENING STRONG

- A strong opening to an essay will capture a reader's attention.
- In contrast, a dull or confusing opening can put off a reader by creating a negative first impression.
- A strong introduction should...
 1. Begin with a grabbing lead which "hooks the reader".
 2. State/integrate the quote, adage, or topic.
 3. Include background information to introduce the question.
 4. End with a thesis statement expressing the main idea of the essay.

Introduction: *The identity of a person is defined by what he or she creates for himself or herself. Identity is an earned characteristic of a human being, whether the identity and the actions which merit that identity are good or bad. "Creating a name" for oneself comes from the actions and decisions that one person makes. It is entirely up to that one person to work towards creating a positive identity. Even with a distinguished background, a powerful ancestor, or a number of other factors, one must use these factors to one's own advantage solely in creating an identity of one's own.*

STEP 5: ELABORATE IN THE BODY

Example(s) from literature, history, science, or film:

- You can actually study for this part, because themes are UNIVERSAL.
- Think about some major novels that you have read thus far and/or some historical figures. Figure out what they stand for, what themes they exemplify, and be ready to work that into whatever prompt presents itself.

Example(s) from your own experience or observation:

- You will write this as an explanation, not a narration
- Do not be tempted to relive the story; speak with an academic voice.

Each paragraph in the body of your essay should:

- Begin with a topic sentence.
- Focus on only one idea (one idea/paragraph)
- Include an example from literature, history, science, film, or your own experience or observation to explain the quote.
- Relate to the thesis statement.
- Be written as an explanation, not narration, and speak with an academic voice.

Example of a Body Paragraph: *Finding one's true identity within themselves is a huge responsibility, and a challenging task. In Robert Louis Stevenson's **Treasure Island**, the young protagonist, Jim Hawkins, desires an escape from the fruitless and banal existence he leads working in a tavern. When he sets sail on a quest for lost reassurance with a newly acquired map, he must undergo a series of challenges including skirmishes with pirates and the making of decisions which will change the fate of the crew. Jim thwarts the evil pirates' attempts and saves his shipmates, proving his worth and creating his own identity as a hero. He works against adversity to gain his true identity.*

STEP 6: THE CONCLUSION—FINISH MEMORABLY

Some ways to end your essay memorably:

- Generate final remarks without introducing brand new examples.
- Unify and summarize your ideas.
- Remind the audience of your main point/thesis.
- Use a satisfactory closing sentence/clinch (could tie back into introduction)

Example of a Concluding Paragraph: *All human beings have the power to create names for themselves. To delve into the identity of a person is to witness the character of a person, as well as the actions that person has performed. As seen in literature as well as in history, a person has the power to gain his own identity by working against adversity or by challenging society's bonds and labels to gain a knowledge of oneself. In the end, we can see the identities of people in the good or bad they do.*

STEP 7: PROOFREADING AND REVISION

- Be sure that all sentences are complete. Avoid **sentence fragments** (lack subjects, verbs, or both).
- Fix **run-on sentences** (two or more sentences that are masquerading as a single sentence because of incorrect punctuation).
- Vary **sentence types** (i.e. declarative, imperative, exclamatory, and interrogative)
- Vary **sentence structures and lengths** (i.e. simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence, and compound-complex sentence).
- Vary **sentence beginnings** (i.e. start with an adverb, prepositional phrase, participial phrase, subordinate clause, or predicate).
- Avoid **clichés and slang** (i.e. clichés are expressions or idioms that have become trite from overuse; slang, which is composed of newly made-up terms, or new meanings attached to existing terms).
- Avoid **wordy and empty sentences** (i.e. when you write, aim for brevity. Avoid wordy sentences. Choose your words carefully and economically).
- Avoid **choppy sentences** (i.e. eliminate a series of short, choppy sentences by combining sentences using coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and relative pronouns).
- Use **the active voice** (i.e. the subject performs the action named by the verb).
- Use **commas, semicolons, and colons** (i.e. commas signal pauses; semicolons signal a longer pause than a comma, but a shorter pause than a period; colons serve as a signal to pay close attention to what follows. Use one before an extended quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series).

“IDENTITY” (MODEL ESSAY)

The identity of a person is defined by what he or she creates for himself or herself. Identity is an earned characteristic of a human being, whether the identity and the actions which merit that identity are good or bad. “Creating a name” for oneself comes from the actions and decisions that one person makes. It is entirely up to that one person to work towards creating a positive identity. Even with a distinguished background, a powerful ancestor, or a number of other factors, one must use these factors to one’s own advantage solely in creating an identity of one’s own.

Finding one’s true identity within themselves is a huge responsibility, and a challenging task. In Robert Louis Stevenson’s **Treasure Island**, the young protagonist, Jim Hawkins, desires an escape from the fruitless and banal existence he leads working in a tavern. When he sets sail on a quest for lost reassurance with a newly acquired map, he must undergo a series of challenges including skirmishes with pirates and the making of decisions which will change the fate of the crew. Jim thwarts the evil pirates’ attempts and saves his shipmates, proving his worth and creating his own identity as a hero. He works against adversity to gain his true identity.

Society also attempts to shape our identity. In **One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest** by Ken Kesey, many of the patients on the mental ward are victims of society’s labels. They could leave at any time, but society’s impression into their identities keeps them from the knowledge of their true selves. It requires the courage of Randle McMurphy to reveal to the patients their true identities uninhibited by society’s constraints. With his help and sacrifice, the patients strip the bonds of society to pursue their knowledge of themselves.

Throughout history, people have made names for themselves, for discoveries in science or technology to events that changed the world. Good events, such as the discovery of the New World or the invention of the light bulb, have been recorded in history along with the people who made them famous. Bad things, as well, such as the Holocaust, have brought infamy to people such as Adolph Hitler and his followers.

All human beings have the power to create names for themselves. To delve into the identity of a person is to witness the character of a person, as well as the actions that person has performed. As seen in literature as well as in history, a person has the power to gain his own identity by working against adversity or by challenging society’s bonds and labels to gain knowledge of oneself. In the end, we can see the identities of people in the good or bad they do.