

Illustration

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TLC 1201

Illustration Essay¹

An illustration essay, or example essay, uses specific and vivid examples to prove a general point. These types of essays are used frequently not only in college writing, but also in business writing.

Writing a Good Thesis for an Illustration Essay

Brainstorm on ideas that could easily be proved by examples.

Topics, like odd places to get married and television programs with too much violence, would be fine for an illustrative essay, while an essay on if online newspapers will replace print newspapers, would be too specific.

Narrow your topic in light of your audience, purpose, and word limit.

While you need to choose a topic that can be supported by many examples, you do not want a topic so broad that you are unable to make a specific point.

Make sure that your thesis is a general statement.

When writing an argumentative essay, your thesis needs to be a specific argument. However, with an illustration essay, your thesis should be a general statement proved later by specific examples.

Proceeding with an Illustration Essay

Brainstorm on examples that will support your thesis and chose the strongest for your essay.

You can either have one extended example that allows your reader to understand the subject completely from one angle, or multiple examples that support your generalized thesis.

Organize your paragraphs.

You may choose to organize your examples in order of increasing importance, or if you have several examples, you may need to separate them into groups. If you are using only one example, you may organize your paper in order of increasing importance of your points.

Prepare a rough draft.

Use transitional phrases like for example, for instance, another example of, etc . . . to introduce new examples.

Personal Checklist

Use this checklist to determine if you have fully developed your paper. Make any revisions necessary until each question can be answered “yes.”

Unity

Is the thesis a general topic that is easily understood?

Does each supporting paragraph back up your thesis?

Is each example necessary for the reader to understand the essay?

Support

Do you have specific examples that capture your reader's interest and support your thesis?

Do you have enough examples to support your points?

Coherence

Do you have a clear method of organization?

Did you use transitions and connecting words with your examples?

Do you have an effective introduction, conclusion, and title?

Audience and Purpose

Do you have an appropriate audience in mind? Can you describe them?

Do you have a purpose for the paper?

Does the purpose match the assignment?

Sentence Skills--- Consult a grammar guide like Hodges's Harbrace Handbook to check for errors in grammar and sentence structure. These typically include:

Sentence fragments

Fused sentences

Incorrect verb forms

Problems with subject/verb agreement

Problems with pronoun/antecedent agreement

Punctuation problems: apostrophes, quotation marks, semicolons, colons, commas, dashes, hyphens, and parentheses

¹ Adapted from John Lagan, College Writing Skills with Readings, 4th edition

Academic Resource Center

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How Do I Write an Example/Illustration Essay?

The example/illustration essay is the most simple, straightforward essay form you will encounter. It is also the one you will **always** continue to use in writing your future essays, because **all essays, whether argumentative or informational, need the support that good illustrations provide.**

Example

Say you're providing examples of racial stereotyping on television. Your thesis ought to indicate simply that you will be giving examples of racial stereotyping. Save your analysis of the types of stereotyping for a classification essay, your analysis of the causes of racial stereotyping for a cause-effect essay, and your analysis of the differences between racial stereotyping on television and in the movies for a comparison/contrast essay. All you're "proving" in the example essay is that racial stereotyping on television exists.

Things to Watch for

Although this is a very basic paper, there are still detours and dead ends to avoid.

- ✓ Examples without a point do not help your essay. A long anecdote from your personal experience isn't necessarily relevant just because it's an essay written about you; make sure that your example has a point, and that the point is the one you're trying to make.
- ✓ Beware of piling on too many examples. An example essay for a 105/110-level course probably needs no less than two and no more than four examples to support its thesis statement, unless you have been specifically assigned to use only a single extended example (sometimes called a "narrative essay").

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- ✓ Lack of an initial thesis statement to give the example or examples some sense of purpose can make a paper self-destruct before you begin. **Remember that your thesis statement is not so much arguing a position in the example essay as arguing that a certain condition or phenomenon exists.**
 - ✓ Beware, too, of lack of transitions between examples. Be particularly wary of the phrase, "For example." How many times can you reasonably use this phrase in an example essay before it becomes repetitive or redundant? That's up to you—but repetition is often an indication of a lack of imagination, and it certainly won't endear you to your reader.

Example/Illustration Structure

I. Introduction

- States general idea to be proved (thesis statement)

II. Body

- Provides example(s) or illustration(s), which support(s) the thesis

III. Conclusion

- Restates the thesis and draws some conclusion from the paper; in the case of our example of racial stereotypes on television, the conclusion might suggest that television also offers many positive racial models, and that viewers must simply use discretion in absorbing what they see and hear on television.

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