



The Lantern English Co.  
The Advanced Writer

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## **The Expository Essay I – Syllabus**

**Course Description:** In this class, students will focus on learning how to write the expository essay. Expository thesis development will be at the forefront of this class, as students learn to inform readers about meaningful topics while utilizing research & citation skills. Students will use their skills in expository writing to construct an initial expository essay, a definition essay, and a classification essay, structured with rough drafts and revisions.

### **Course Outline:**

**Week One:** The Expository Thesis

**Week Two:** Basics of Sources and Citations – Submit Thesis & Source List

**Week Three:** The Expository Essay – Submit Rough Draft

**Week Four:** The Expository Essay – Submit Final Draft

**Week Five:** The Definition Essay – Submit Rough Draft

**Week Six:** The Definition Essay – Submit Final Draft

**Week Seven:** The Classification Essay – Submit Rough Draft

**Week Eight:** The Classification Essay – Submit Final Draft



## The Expository Essay I – Grading Information

Rough draft assignments (Week 3, 5, and 7) will be graded using the rough draft rubric shown below. Assignments 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 will be graded using our standard grading rubric for *The Advanced Writer*. All assignments will be averaged to receive a final course grade.

### Rough Draft Rubric –

<b>Exemplary 100%</b>	<b>Strong 99%-90%</b>	<b>Proficient 89%-80%</b>	<b>Developing 79%-70%</b>	<b>Emerging 69%-60%</b>	<b>Beginning 59%-50%</b>	<b>No Attempt 49% and below</b>
Student has followed all assignment directions and has demonstrated exemplary understanding of lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a complete assignment and demonstrated excellent effort.	Student has followed most assignment directions and has demonstrated strong understanding of lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated strong effort.	Student has followed most assignment directions but has struggled to fully understand lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated proficient effort.	Student has followed some or most assignment directions but has demonstrated a need for better understanding of lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted mediocre written work and demonstrated some lack of effort.	Student has followed some assignment directions but has demonstrated inadequate understanding of lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted inadequate written work so that the instructor finds it difficult to provide helpful feedback.	Student has followed few assignment directions and has demonstrated poor understanding of lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted short and poorly written work so that the instructor is unable to provide helpful feedback.	Student has followed few to no assignment directions and has demonstrated no understanding of lesson concepts.  For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted nothing.



## The Expository Essay I

### Lesson One: The Expository Thesis

#### SAMPLE LESSON

In *Essay Basics*, we introduced the concept of the thesis statement. Every essay you write must contain a thesis statement. By now, you should understand the difference between a topic and thesis, so we will not discuss that here. We want to focus this week on what goes into developing a strong expository thesis.

In much of the writing world and even the academic sphere, there is discrepancy between what a thesis is and is not. Many experts or professors suggest that every essay must contain a thesis, whether that thesis is expository or persuasive. On the other hand, many different experts or professors suggest that all thesis statements are persuasive because thesis statements must be debatable. In this case, they suggest that expository essays use topic sentences, not thesis statements.

However, a perusal of websites for various university writing centers, essay-writing handouts, and even writing handbooks will demonstrate that the opinions on defining thesis statements are inconsistent. We think it is important that you are aware of this as we move forward, because an understanding of thesis development is crucial to success in writing.

For the purpose of our classes, we teach two different thesis structures: **expository** and **persuasive**. *Although both can make a claim, these two types of thesis statements make different kinds of claims.*

This distinction feels easy when you are writing about simple topics, such as “There are four seasons each year” or “Although cats and dogs are both common household pets, they are very different in personality and needs.” Obviously, these topics are expository because they are factual and would not produce much or any argument.

However, when you get into more complex subjects, such as what we learn about in this class, the distinction between the two types of thesis statements blurs.

Because we assert that there are two types of thesis statements—expository and persuasive—we will teach them as such. **The expository thesis presents the subject to the reader, without providing an argument or opinion.** The goal of expository writing is to inform, explain, describe, or define. Therefore, an expository thesis should embody these goals by remaining factual and informative, not needing to prove or defend.

In the future, you may be called upon to write essays with thesis statements such as you will learn about in this class. However, the assignments may not be worded in a way that suggests that these essays are expository. The assignment may say something such as, “Choose a complex topic, develop a debatable thesis and write . . .”; if you read this, you might be tempted to think that you are about to write a persuasive essay, but that may not be the case. The essay may be about a complex topic which others might disagree with, but the structure of the essay may not actually be persuasive in style. Again, this is where the lines get blurred.

In all writing situations, it is really important to understand the assignment(s) and what the instructor is asking or looking for. If you are at all unsure, it is wise to contact the instructor and even submit a thesis statement ahead of your writing to make sure it is along the lines of what is acceptable.

Whether or not an assignment is clearly expository or persuasive or somewhere blurred in the middle, you can use the skills you learn in this class and in *The Persuasive Essay* to help you construct strong thesis statements and strong essays in any situation. The concepts for both types of theses are really the same, across the board; the confusion lies more or less in the definitions.

With all of that said up front, let's start by reviewing the lists of expository and persuasive thesis statements provided in *Essay Basics*. Then, we will hone in on what makes a strong expository statement for this class.

### **Expository Thesis Statements:**

- Students can become more effective writers by employing three strategies.
- Wolves are often pictured in fairy tales as ferocious animals, but they are very social and unique animals who do not deserve their scary reputation.
- George Washington was an excellent leader—a man of courage, perseverance, and desire to help our country succeed.
- The rewarding process of photographing a lunar eclipse requires careful preparation and sound equipment.

## Persuasive Thesis Statements:

- Although many of us love taking hot showers, taking cold showers is actually the better choice because of the countless health benefits associated with cool temperatures.
- A longer school day does not guarantee that students will be productive in classes, reminding us that young people must find learning meaningful.
- Free public transportation should be implemented as a key step in reducing unemployment rates.
- Our family should get a dog because of the opportunity it will provide us children for learning responsibility.

Again, both sets of statements make claims. People could disagree with both sets of statements. But, from our perspective, the statements are not the same, and they are not all persuasive by nature. The top four focus on using facts to explain the theses. The bottom four statements make opinion-based claims that will need to be proven and discussed against counter claims. Notice also how the first persuasive thesis statement suggests that one character is the most important, and how the other three use the terms *must* & *should*.

Remember, the expository thesis presents the subject to the reader, without providing an argument or opinion. **Your expository thesis should focus on informing, explaining, describing, or defining. The expository essay should focus on laying out the facts, without telling the reader what he or she should do with those facts.**

## HOW TO CREATE AN EXPOSITORY THESIS –

1. **Identify the topic.**
2. **Make a statement of fact.** Remember, an expository thesis is always factual. “Dogs are popular pets because they are loyal, useful, and excellent companions” = fact. With this statement, I am merely explaining three key reasons why dogs are popular pets. On the other hand, if I say, “Dogs are better than cats because they are loyal, useful, and excellent companies,” I have now made an opinion-based claim, which is persuasive, not expository. With this statement, I am challenging the reader to see these three reasons as proof for liking dogs better than cats, when in fact, cats have their own traits which make them wonderful pets as well. An expository thesis should never make a claim that needs to be proven.

**NOTE:** This is also a good place to discuss personal fact vs. personal opinion. A statement such as “My favorite holiday is Christmas” is considered personal *fact*. It may not be a scientific fact or a world-wide fact, but it is a fact of who YOU ARE. With this statement, you are not trying to prove why Christmas is the best holiday, nor are you trying to convince others to like Christmas as well. You are merely explaining why Christmas is your favorite holiday. Personal facts are acceptable for use when writing expository thesis statements. On the other hand, personal opinion is reserved strictly for persuasive writing. For example, if you write that “Christmas is the best holiday,” you are now stating a personal *opinion* and making a *claim*, suggesting that Christmas is better than any other holiday. Personal opinion is not acceptable for use when writing expository thesis statements.

3. **If useful, qualify the topic.** For expository thesis statements, a common and simple qualifying word is *because*. “Spring is my favorite season because I love planting the garden with my mom, visiting the local Lilac Festival, and celebrating all of the birthdays in my immediate family.”
4. **Write just a sentence, not a paragraph.** A lot of students get confused with this one. A thesis is not a group of sentences, not a paragraph, and not the complete introduction. A thesis should be one sentence, two ONLY if absolutely necessary.

## **STRONG VS. WEAK –**

Although the concept of writing an expository thesis statement seems easy enough, putting it into practice is completely different. Obviously, you want to write a strong, compelling thesis statement. With this goal in mind, however, we must focus on errors that frequently occur when developing thesis statements.

### **ERROR 1: Your thesis is a road map only.**

- I am going to write about George Washington.
- This paper will cover three reasons why good sleep habits are important.

While this type of statement is clear in terms of where the essay is headed, there is no interest or context provided. Phrases such as those seen above (“This paper will be about,” “I am going to cover,” “Let's discuss,” etc. ) should be avoided!

**Strong:**

- George Washington was an excellent leader—a man of courage, perseverance, and desire to help our country succeed.”
- Many people view sleep as an inconvenience, but plenty of quality sleep on a regular basis is necessary for our bodies to heal and stay healthy.

**ERROR 2: Your thesis is too general.**

- I like herbal tea.
- Playing sports is exciting.
- *The Green Ember* is an interesting book.

What makes your essay important to read is a thesis that is interesting and compelling, a statement that contains not just the subject but some ideas or information about it. A good tip to follow is to avoid vague/general words such as *interesting*, *negative*, *exciting*, *unusual*, or *difficult*; then include some specific details that answer 'why' or 'because.'

**Strong:**

- Because of its medicinal qualities and ability to improve focus, herbal tea is often my drink of choice.
- Practicing a sport provides not only physical benefits but also benefits in mental strength, personal development, and social skills.
- J.D. Smith's use of rich description and emotionally engaging characters made his book *The Green Ember* one that I could not put down.

**ERROR 3: Your thesis is factual but overly obvious. (This goes hand in hand with ERROR 2.)**

- Exercise is good for you.
- Education is important.
- Traveling the world is exciting.

While it is fine to use factual statements when writing expository, narrative, and descriptive essays, they still must contain some interest. Your audience doesn't want to read another essay stating the basic facts about the importance of exercise or education. They want you to inform them of something they perhaps do not already know or fully understand.

**Strong:**

- Exercise doesn't mean you have to join a gym, register for a marathon, or start lifting weights; moving your body is always the goal, and there are several really fun ways to accomplish this!
- As education has always been considered a crucial part of any society, there are several major educational methods promoted today.
- Traveling the world has given me the opportunity to grow in empathy for people of many different cultures.

**ERROR 4: Your thesis merely restates the prompt.**

**Original prompt:** A better understanding of other people contributes to the development of moral virtues. We shall be both kinder and fairer in our treatment of others if we understand them better. Understanding ourselves and understanding others are connected, since as human beings we all have things in common.

Adapted from Anne Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*

- **Thesis A:** A better understanding of other people contributes to the development of moral virtues.
- **Thesis B:** Understanding ourselves and understanding others are connected, since as human beings we all have things in common.

While restating the prompt certainly seems easy, this method is far too obvious, looks like the student is just trying to fill up space, and could be considered plagiarism. This type of thesis does not demonstrate any critical thinking or original ideas. Your thesis statement needs to be original—not a mere restatement of what the assignment already says.



**Strong:**

- While our culture pushes progressively towards independence and autonomy, relationships actually help us understand others in order to understand ourselves.

**ERROR 5: Your thesis is vague.**

**Prompt:** The old saying “be careful what you wish for” may be an appropriate warning. The drive to achieve a particular goal can dangerously narrow one’s perspective and encourage the fantasy that success in one endeavor will solve all of life’s difficulties. In fact, success can sometimes have unexpected consequences. Those who propel themselves toward the achievement of one goal often find that their lives are worse once “success” is achieved than they were before.

**Assignment:** Can success be disastrous?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide*, The College Board, 2009

Examples of a vague, assumptive thesis would be:

- We should certainly heed this quote, because it is absolutely true.
- Yes, it can be disastrous.
- This may seem true initially, but it is all in how you look at it.

If you read any of these thesis statements as stand-alone sentences, would you have any idea what I was talking about? Absolutely not. You would have no idea what quote I was referring to. You would have no idea what “it” or “this” stand for. These statements are in no way clear.

Do not construct your thesis statement and essay with the assumption that your readers know the topic. Write with the idea that your reader will have no opportunity to view the original prompt. What you say is the only thing the reader will know about the topic.

**Strong:**

- Although success may seem wonderful, it can at times be detrimental to our well-being.
- Success can be disastrous when not handled appropriately.

- Initially, it may seem true that success should be avoided because of its disastrous consequences; however, when approached properly, success does not have to become a harm.

**ERROR 6: Your thesis contains incongruous ideas.**

- Yogurt can be made at home following a few easy steps, although I do not enjoy yogurt as much as my sister.
- A Tale of Two Cities* is one of my favorite books, and there are several other classics I would like to read.

Remember, the thesis statement sets the direction of the essay. The reader should understand the direction and the main point you are attempting to make simply from reading your thesis. If your thesis statement contains more than one idea, the reader is confused, and the paper has little chance of being focused and logical. Remember to carefully define and narrow your topic so that you can develop a thesis statement that highlights a single, clear point.

**Strong:**

- Yogurt can be made at home following a few easy steps.
- Because of its intriguing characters and historical plot, *A Tale of Two Cities* is one of my favorite books.

**ERROR 7: Your thesis is a question. No examples needed here—a thesis is never a question. By nature, a thesis makes a statement, one that either informs/explains/describes/defines OR makes a claim.**

**FINAL THOUGHTS –**

This may be unconventional, but can we step back from the realm of academic essay writing and have a conversation? With the mention of essay writing or thesis development, many students would rather run the other direction. The whole process seems too complicated and rather pointless sometimes. But, do you understand the power of words, the power of your ideas? When you write something, you have the potential to communicate important things and impact other people.

Although essays are a large part of education, our hope is that your main takeaway from this class would not be that you need to learn to write expository essays so that you can get good grades or go to college.

Instead, we hope you can see the positive elements of being able to express yourself through writing in a way that communicates logically with others. The ability to communicate your thoughts clearly, logically, and respectfully is something that will help you in many areas of life, far beyond and outside of your education.

So, yes – we will be using stuffy academic words like *thesis*, *sources*, and *citations*. But, please try to see the big picture. If you can look at these concepts and assignments as an opportunity to expand your skill in meaningful communication about what matters to you, the work may come more easily.

Back to the thesis then – The thesis is not some lofty, elusive statement. Instead, it is a single sentence that provides your essay with a focused, central idea. While the thesis should be interesting, it does not need to be complicated. A thesis is made interesting when you have truly thought about a topic or already find the topic interesting. **The purpose of the thesis is to be able to articulate your thoughts in a single, controlling idea—the main idea upon which you develop your essay.**

Regardless of the topic for an assignment, ask yourself, “What do I want to say about this topic?” Don't think about what you *should* say about the topic or what everyone else is saying about the topic. Writing should never merely be about completing an assignment, getting a good grade, or impressing an instructor. Writing should be a form in which you can communicate your ideas about a topic in a logical, meaningful, and respectful way—in a way that opens dialogue between you and your audience, in a way that adds to cultural conversation, rather than just becoming another bit of 'noise' among the noise of everyone else.

## **CLASS NOTES –**

We will not be assigning topics for this class. Students naturally write better about topics that interest them. Of course, you will not always be able to write about topics of your choice, but for the purpose of *learning* how to craft meaningful and convincing essays, we find it can be helpful for students to demonstrate their own ideas and personalities rather than having to respond to assigned topics.

However, for the purpose of this class, there are some topics that are off limits. Please do not submit thesis statements or papers discussing the following topics:

- texting while driving
- obesity
- gun control
- overuse of technology

- current military conflicts
- issues of morality
- politics

There is certainly nothing wrong with discussing these topics. Yet, we find that these topics are overused (perhaps because they are such talking points in our current culture!) and do not enable the student to easily express original ideas. There are better times and places to discuss these things, but in your writing for this class, we want to see your interests come alive.

**Assignment 1:** Submit a list of **ten** original topics and corresponding **expository** thesis statements. Remember that each thesis statement should present a clear, strong **central idea** that focuses on the foundations of expository writing: informing, explaining, describing, or defining.

One of these statements will be chosen for your first essay (Lesson 2-4), based on initial instructor feedback. In addition, you can use the feedback from this first assignment to help you develop the thesis statements necessary for Lessons 5-8.