

Types of Writing

Paragraphs and essays can be written in different types or styles. A writer will choose a type depending on what he or she wishes to accomplish, what sort of material is to be discussed, and what kind of effect s/he wants to have on the reader. Generally speaking, there are four types of writing, though normally these types are mixed together.

Narrative: The narrative paragraph or essay tells a story, just like a narrator in a play (though it should be a **true** story, unlike a short story or a play). Narrative writing is best used to illustrate the "personal developmental path" a person (often yourself) has taken to reach a particular point in his/her life. As a result, it is normally written in a **first person** point of view. True narrative writing is unusual, because it is demanding. A narrative must have a **conflict that is overcome**. *This is the core of any narrative form of writing, be it a paragraph, an essay, or a story*). In an essay, it usually means a single incident/anecdote, where the narrator experiences some brief challenge that is met and (hopefully) survived. This "overcoming" should in turn lead to some form of understanding. Simply describing or explaining one's surroundings is not a narrative. You need a (brief) establishment of setting, an explanation of the challenge, and the resolution of this challenge. In other words, you need a **plot**.

Descriptive: Descriptive writing paints a picture. In its pure form, nothing much happens. "Description" tells us what something looks like, feels like, tastes like, sounds like or smells like - without action or events. It **doesn't** explain a relationship or a process beyond oneself; it focuses on one's immediate subjective **perceptions**. Thus, descriptive writing connects the outer world with our inner feelings. It is usually concerned with creating a verbal picture of what we experience and feel at one moment, and it will use many rich and vivid **adjectives and adverbs**. So, as a writer, you should make the reader long to smell the rich essence of the trees, the haunting call of the wolves, or the rank odour of the sewer... if that's what you're writing about! Descriptive paragraphs and essays are usually written in the **first person** point of view, and are much more emotional and personal than expository writing. It should be said that you will rarely write a purely descriptive passage. Normally speaking, descriptive writing is mixed in with other styles as a supplement.

Expository: Expository writing "exposes" or **explains** things about a subject. It is also sometimes called "information writing" because it gives information about a person, place, thing, relationship or idea. To accomplish that, it is best developed by the use of **clear reasons, facts and statistical information, cause and effect relationships, or examples**. Since expository paragraphs are factual, they are written without emotion and usually written in the **third person**. Nevertheless, you *can* use "I" in your expository writing if the focus is on external, neutral descriptions and explanations, rather than personal feelings (personal feelings move you into "descriptive writing"). Indeed, expository paragraphs and essays are sometimes confused with descriptive writing, because both can spend a lot of time describing things. But again, the big difference is that expository description tends to focus on external objects, situations and processes, in order to explain something in a **neutral**, matter-of-fact manner. Descriptive paragraphs, on the other hand, tend to focus on our emotional responses as we perceive the world at one point in time.

Persuasive: This type of writing is probably the most common form of writing at the university level. Persuasive (or argumentative) writing attempts **to convince** the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by the writer is valid. To accomplish this, the writer must develop a limited topic which is well defined and debatable, and has more than one side. It is important that the author understand other sides of the topic so that the strongest information to counter the others can be presented. You may present these opposing points of view, but they must be summarized at the beginning and then quickly refuted (to refute something means to show it is false or not particularly important). If you're not sure how to do this, then simply stick to your side of an argument. While persuasive writing attempts to prove *your* point of view, it's usually written in an objective, **third person** point of view; such a stance helps demonstrate your objectivity. It should be noted that "argumentative" writing is said by some to be more rational and empirical (i.e. based on facts), whereas "persuasive" writing will often use emotional appeals to manipulate the reader's sympathy. However, most writing experts view the two terms as synonymous; few essays are so coldly dispassionate that they will not use strong and loaded language to win an argument, and analytic facts are always a good way to persuade the reader of one side over another.