

## **THE PARABLE ESSAY**

### **Concept**

Most essays do something very simple--they test or try an idea. In other words the writer makes a claim and then tries to support and illustrate that claim. By writing an essay we, along with the audience, discover if our claim is valid.

### **Description**

The parable essay starts with the simplest and oldest method of instruction: story. A parable is a short, entertaining story that has within it a larger lesson. The lesson is not bold but rather self-evident. The parable essay melds together the idea of claim and support through the most accessible place--our own stories.

### **Directions**

1. Think of a personal experience that has taken on the quality of a story--"the time I..." or a story that is told in your family with some frequency--"the time uncle Marvin....."
2. Freewrite for 15 to 20 minutes about that story. Try to recreate it. Let your mind drift to forgotten details. Make sure you write for the entire time even if you've "finished" the story.
3. Consider the main character in the story at the crucial point of the story. Come up with a list of 4-6 adjectives that describe this him or her at that point. Identify the best adjective on your list and turn it into a noun. (anxious becomes anxiety, afraid becomes fear, angry becomes anger.) You now have an abstract concept which will become the subject of your essay.
4. Write a sentence that starts with your noun and is followed by the verb is. Now, write 3-5 more sentences that define, describe, and explain generally the meaning of the noun. (Do not refer to your story just yet.) You now have the first paragraph of your essay which is a claim.
5. Return to your freewrite and begin cutting and adding so that it takes on the qualities of an interesting story. Work on plot, pacing, and details but don't forget that you are building to the crucial point of the story--the illustrative principle.
6. Now write a paragraph of 3-5 sentences that explains clearly how your story illustrates the concept defined in the first paragraph.
7. Revise, working on transitions, improving the sounds of sentences, the story's plot, and anything else which will make your essay smooth and clear.

## **THEN/NOW ESSAY**

### Concept

Time and history are always with us. Past and present continuously interact but we tend to place ourselves outside of both. Contrast is a form of interaction. Concepts and ideas gain definition in relation to other concepts and ideas. Black/White, Good/Evil, Male, Female etc. This essay structure deals with simple contrasts, simple parallels, and simple paradox.

### Description

Your essay will deal with you and some crucial difference between your past and present.

### Directions

Begin with the two part seed sentence: Once I was/thought/believed \_\_\_\_\_;  
Now I am/know/realize \_\_\_\_\_. Build from this simple structure and make sure that your essay builds each part completely. Your essay will be in two parts but the beauty of this is that you do not need to provide any kind of transition or explanation. The nature of the difference will be self evident if each half is fully developed.

## **THE OPPOSING VOICE**

### **Concept**

Part of growing up is discovering that much of what you've been told is simply not true or not quite the whole truth. However, because such ideas become such a part of ourselves it is difficult to argue against them or see things clearly and truthfully.

### **Description**

The essay of the opposing voice attempts to use a simple two part structure to create an effective argument. It is effective because it is based in your specific experience and builds from your personal observations.

### **Directions**

This essay builds out of a single, simple sentence: *They say* \_\_\_\_\_, *but my experience tells me* \_\_\_\_\_. The first half of the essay will explain and describe what is frequently said and meant by "they". The second half counteracts that sentence with your concrete experience.

## **SNAPSHOT ESSAY**

### **Concept**

So often in school we are asked to break things down to their simplest components. So often in life we try to look at things from a single perspective or reduce things to a single answer. However, this is a limited and sometimes inaccurate perspective. Love, hate, friendship, basketball, car, home, mean not one thing to us but many things.

### **Description**

The snapshot essay examines a single concept from a variety of angles. It takes a seemingly simple subject and looks at it from multiple perspectives--each is independent and valid but when taken as a whole they all say more than any single one.

### **Directions**

Begin with something you take for granted or is with you daily. List everything you can associate with that subject. Shoot for 25-30 connections, the more specific the better. The connections do not need to be limited to the purely personal and in fact you'll have a better essay if you balance and blend the personal with more general or distant connections. Select the 5-7 (or more) most interesting connections and freewrite about each. Return to those freewrites and begin revising each to pull out the essential, the truthful, and the compelling aspects of each. After you revise begin to consider how each piece fits. Consider each piece as separate but able to connect to others. Decide what order the different pieces will be placed to make the whole.

## **THE ECLECTIC ESSAY**

### **Concept**

As Americans we like to eliminate ambiguity and complications. We want a single, black or white answer rather than a grey one or one with multiple faces. However most fields of knowledge argue that truth and reality are filled with mystery, uncertainty, and ambiguity. The nature of knowledge is that all things are interconnected.

### **Description**

The eclectic essay asks you to discuss a personal issue or experience but draw information from many and varied sources to discuss that subject. It works backward--start with what is known and move outward to connections.

### **Directions**

Think of a moment, a person, an experience or a place of particular importance. Write for 15-20 minutes exploring its importance and significance. Start searching out information that is connected in some way. Let your interest and curiosity guide you. Search out concrete facts and details that might add or connect to your story in odd or unusual ways. In revising make sure that while you might drift that you return to your focus. Also make sure that your facts and details blend in smoothly and serve as interesting tangents but not distractions or random tidbits. Your final essay should include at a minimum the following specific references:

*-quote from a dead philosopher -a bit of scientific information -reference to a current newspaper story -a religious reference -a line or two of quoted poetry -the definition or history of an interesting word - reference to a historical event or period -a geographical reference*