

Below are brief summaries of each of the ten steps to writing an essay.

1. **Research**: Begin the essay writing process by researching your topic, making yourself an expert. Utilize the internet, the academic databases, and the library. Take notes and immerse yourself in the words of great thinkers.

2. **Analysis**: Now that you have a good knowledge base, start analyzing the arguments of the essays you're reading. Clearly define the claims, write out the reasons, the evidence. Look for weaknesses of logic, and also strengths. Learning how to write an essay begins by learning how to analyze essays written by others.

3. **Brainstorming**: Your essay will require insight of your own, genuine essay-writing brilliance. Ask yourself a dozen questions and answer them. Meditate with a pen in your hand. Take walks and think and think until you come up with original insights to write about.



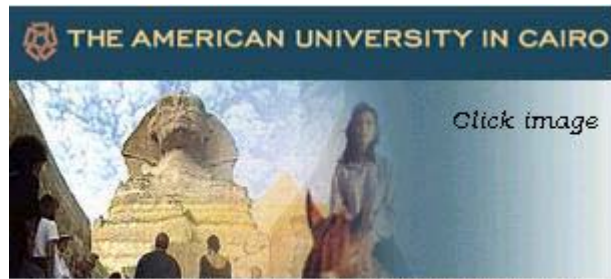
4. **Thesis**: Pick your best idea and pin it down in a clear assertion that you can write your entire essay around. Your thesis is your main point, summed up in a concise sentence that lets the reader know where you're going, and why. It's practically impossible to write a good essay without a clear thesis.

5. **Outline**: Sketch out your essay before straightway writing it out. Use one-line sentences to describe paragraphs, and bullet points to describe what each paragraph will contain. Play with the essay's order. Map out the structure of your argument, and make sure each paragraph is unified.

6. **Introduction**: Now sit down and write the essay. The introduction should grab the reader's attention, set up the issue, and lead in to your thesis. Your intro is merely a buildup of the issue, a stage of bringing your reader into the essay's argument.

*(Note: The title and first paragraph are probably the most important elements in your essay. This is an essay-writing point that doesn't always sink in within the context of the classroom. In the first paragraph you either hook the reader's interest or lose it. Of course your teacher, who's getting paid to teach you how to write an essay, will read the essay you've written regardless, but in the real world, readers make up their minds about whether or not to read your essay by glancing at the title alone.)*

7. **Paragraphs:** Each individual paragraph should be focused on a single idea that supports your thesis. Begin paragraphs with topic sentences, support assertions with evidence, and expound your ideas in the clearest, most sensible way you can. Speak to your reader as if he or she were sitting in front of you. In other words, instead of writing the essay, try *talking* the essay.



8. **Conclusion:** Gracefully exit your essay by making a quick wrap-up sentence, and then end on some memorable thought, perhaps a quotation, or an interesting twist of logic, or some call to action. Is there something you want the reader to walk away and do? Let him or her know exactly what.

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9. **MLA Style:** Format your essay according to the correct guidelines for citation. All borrowed ideas and quotations should be correctly cited in the body of your text, followed up with a Works Cited (references) page listing the details of your sources.

10. **Language:** You're not done writing your essay until you've polished your language by correcting the grammar, making sentences flow, incorporating rhythm, emphasis, adjusting the formality, giving it a level-headed tone, and making other intuitive edits. Proofread until it reads just how you want it to sound. Writing an essay can be tedious, but you don't want to bungle the hours of conceptual work you've put into writing your essay by leaving a few sloppy misppallings and pourly wordedd phrazies..

You're done. Great job. Now move over Ernest Hemingway — a new writer is coming of age! (*Of course Hemingway was a fiction writer, not an essay writer, but he probably knew how to write an essay just as well.*)