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The Informative Essay

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The purpose of this article is to explain how to write an informative essay that not only educates readers but does so in a way that is useful and tailored to your audience.

The Purpose

As its name suggests, the goal of the informative essay is to inform. While the informative essay may seem simple compared to the persuasive essay, which aims to present facts and move the reader to action, it can be challenging to inform in a way that is interesting and engaging. A good informative essay has a clear topic, is detailed, and expands the reader's scope to consider other perspectives. Think of the informative essay as a way of packaging your research into a digestible, time-saving format for your reader.

Pre-Writing: Subject and Audience

Unlike the argumentative essay, the informative essay is more objective. You could be informing a reader about a historical event, a person's life, a system, or a concept. Whatever is presented in the informative essay needs to be factual; but just as important is rhetoric – or how those facts are presented to an audience. An informative essay can tackle a broad or narrow subject, depending on the question you pose and the needs of your readers. For example, a narrow informative essay could describe pre-colonial Hawaiian civilization. However, a broader informative essay could share the entire history of the United States. A broad informative essay would explain Newton's three laws of motion, while a narrower informative essay would focus on only one. Before you write, briefly examine the parameters of your assignment. First, consider your prompt, make sure you understand what is being asked, and write to answer that question. Then, think about the maximum length requirement. If your professor wants a longer paper, choosing a broader topic can give you more material to write about. Next, plan your research. Ask yourself how many sources you'll need to complete the job. Ask yourself how you can present your research in a novel. Finally, think about the needs of your audience. Being aware of what they already know and what they need to know is critical to presenting facts that keep the reader engaged.

Revision: Scope and Sequence

Relatedly, an important part of writing the informative essay is deciding what is worth including, and what can be removed. It is usually better to say more with less. Too much information can overwhelm readers, especially if it is disorganized. Even so, some topics demand more thorough elaboration. If you have a strong introduction, clearly explain concepts, and maintain continuity, you can capture your reader's attention for the whole paper.

With all papers, challenge the purpose of each sentence. By extension, challenge the purpose of each paragraph. Does everything bring something new to the paper, or expand on an idea? Imagine yourself

in the mind of a reader who is experiencing this information for the first time. What would bore them or move them? What are some possible questions your readers may develop as they read?

To ensure that you are using reliable sources, make sure the source is peer-reviewed. Additionally, look at the publishing date of the source, so you can consider whether it may be outdated or challenged by newer research. However, old research can still have a place in your informative essay, for example, if you are comparing perspectives throughout time. Your goal should be to present a complete picture, avoiding misleading readers by only providing partial information.

Example

Say that you are writing about ancient Egyptian art. Are you writing about the entire history of ancient Egyptian artwork or just the pyramids? For either, you would need to gather resources and learn about the subject. However, the broader paper would likely require more resources. You could write chronologically, dating the oldest art to the newest, or you could focus on the most well-known or preserved. You might even reorganize it around what discoveries you think are most significant from least to greatest. What matters is identifying the needs of the audience and meeting them in a compelling way. Your organization says a lot about what you think matters – and what you think matters to your audience. Find the right organizational structure to match the scope of your topic.

Tips

1. Before you write, identify what you already know and what you need to know. Additional research can deepen your understanding and give you material to reference.
2. Think deeply about your topic before outlining. Have you chosen a wide or narrow topic? How much are you prepared to write? What do your readers need to get the picture?
3. Find someone who is unfamiliar with your topic and see how well they understand it after reading your paper. What questions did they have? Did they feel overwhelmed, or did they want more?

Works Consulted

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