

# Writing and Reading Expository Compositions

## Purposes of Writing and Reading Expository Compositions

The main purpose in writing expository compositions is to present factual information clearly and succinctly. Often, the writer must collect, synthesize and organize information before writing. Once the information is assembled, the writer methodically explains, informs, examines, or clarifies an idea or event in an attempt to increase the readers' knowledge. The writer's duty is to maintain objectivity and to inform rather than to persuade, argue, or interpret.

According to Toby Fulwiler, exposition is "defined not so much by its subject (which can be almost anything) as by the way the subject is treated. When you write to explain, you are answering one or more of these questions: What is it? (define) What happened? What does it look like? Where is it? (describe) How is it related to other things? (compare/contrast) How does it work? Why did it happen? (analyze) How is it held together? (synthesize)"

## Characteristics of Expository Compositions

The expository essay is driven by a clearly articulated focus or controlling idea on a topic and an organized pattern of development. "The controlling idea is the writer's primary concern and determines the writer's choice of points for elaboration. While the controlling idea may be either directly stated or implied, it will be clear to the careful reader. The controlling idea may convey the writer's point of view by the writer's choice of elements or by the writer's organizational approach to the subject, but the controlling idea itself will be presented clearly and objectively." (*California Assessment Program (CAP), High School Writing Guide, "Report of Information"*)

According to the California State Standards, once writers have narrowed an issue to explore, marshaled and prioritized the information, and established a controlling idea, they provide support for elaboration and logical development of the topic. The pertinent evidence is presented using appropriate breadth, depth and/or scope of examples, anecdotes, facts, statistics, and details. The information is presented logically, may cite text for support from a variety of sources and may use summary as evidence. Skilled writers shift patterns of development between paragraphs to effectively present information.

All the while, writers consider reader's needs by anticipating prior knowledge and the possibility of confusion.

## **At a Glance:**

### **A one page resource guide for writing and reading expository compositions**

#### **Purposes of Expository Compositions**

The expository composition -

- Presents factual information clearly and succinctly
- Explains, informs, examines or clarifies an idea or event
- Increases readers' knowledge of an idea or event
- Informs rather than persuades

#### **Characteristics of Expository Compositions**

The expository composition -

- Articulates a clear focus or controlling idea on a topic
- Includes support that elaborates on the controlling idea
- Presents information logically (i.e. chronologically, spatial, general to specific)
- Considers readers' needs by anticipating readers' knowledge, confusion, etc.
- Selects pertinent information as support using appropriate breadth, depth, and/or scope of incidents, examples, facts, statistics and details

#### **Strategies for Development**

Writers choose from the following to relate information to the reader -

- Defining
- Describing
- Comparing or contrasting
- Analyzing
- Synthesizing
- Reporting
- Summarizing

#### **Grammar of Expository Essays**

The teacher instructs writers to –

- Use technical and academic vocabulary specific to the topic
- Present information using an authoritative voice
- Use markers of contrast, classification, and logical sequence
- Use coherent paragraphs

The teacher explicitly teaches ELL students to use verb tenses –

- Centered in the world of the present
- Centered in the world of the past

#### **Applications**

- Testing: CAHSEE Expository Essay, CSU English Placement Test, SAT I Essay
- School: research reports, lab Reports, term Papers, saturation reports, informational articles
- Beyond School: news articles, profession-specific reports, lectures, technical writing

# Writing and Reading Expository Compositions

## Links to the California English/Language Arts Standards

### Writing Applications

- 2.3 Write expository compositions including analytical essays and research reports
- Marshall evidence in support of a thesis and related claims, including information on all relevant perspectives.
  - Convey information and ideas from primary and secondary sources accurately and coherently.
  - Make distinctions between relative value and significance of specific data, facts, and ideas.
  - Include visual aids by employing appropriate technology to organize and record information on charts, maps and graphs.
  - Anticipate readers' potential misunderstanding, biases, and expectations.
  - Use technical terms and notations accurately.

### Writing Strategies

1.0 Students write coherent and focused essay that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students' awareness of the audience and purpose. Students progress through the stages of the writing process as needed.

#### Organization and Focus

- 1.1 Establish a controlling impression or coherent thesis that conveys a clear and distinctive perspective on the subject and maintain a consistent tone and focus throughout the piece of writing.
- 1.2 Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, appropriate modifiers, and the active rather than the passive voice.

#### Research and Technology

- 1.3 Use clear research questions and suitable research methods (e.g. library, electronic media, personal interview) to elicit and present evidence from primary and secondary sources.
- 1.4 Develop the main ideas within the body of the composition through supporting evidence (e.g. scenarios, commonly held beliefs, hypotheses, definitions).
- 1.5 Synthesize information from multiple sources and identify complexities and discrepancies in the information and the different perspectives found in each medium (e.g. almanacs, microfiche, news sources, in-depth field studies, speeches, journals, technical documents).
- 1.6 Integrate quotations and citations into a written text while maintaining the flow of ideas.
- 1.7 Use appropriate conventions for documentation in the text, notes, and bibliographies by adhering to those in style manuals (e.g., *Modern Language Association Handbook*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*).

#### Evaluation and Revision

- 1.9 Revise writing to improve the logic and coherence of the organization and controlling perspective, the precision of word choice, and the tone by taking into consideration the audience, purpose, and formality of the context.

**Written and Oral English Language Conventions**

1.0 Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions.

**Grammar and Mechanics of Writing**

1.3 Demonstrate an understanding of proper English usage and control of grammar, paragraph and sentence structure, diction, and syntax.

**Reading Comprehension Standards**

2.7 Analyze the structure and format of functional workplace documents, including the graphics and headers, and explain how authors use the features to achieve their purposes. Critique the logic of functional documents by examining the sequence of information and procedures in anticipation of possible reader misunderstandings

2.8 Evaluate the credibility of an author's argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author's intent affects the structure and tone of the text (e.g. in professional journals, editorials, political speeches, primary source material).