

HOW TO WRITE ESSAYS

By
Dr. Eric Davin

- 1) Tell'em What You're Gonna Tell'em.
 - a) Have a point.
 - b) Tell us your point.
 - c) Don't be trivial!
 - d) Only Dummies Lack Titles!
 - e) First Paragraph.
- 2) Tell' em.
- 3) Tell' em What You Told'em.

1) Tell'em What You're Gonna Tell'em!

a) Have a Point.

To begin with, you actually have to have a point to make in your essay. Your point is the argument you want to make, your thesis. If you don't have a thesis, you don't have an essay, no matter how many pages you write. Take a stand and defend it. This stand is your thesis, your argument, your message. What are you asserting in this essay? If you are asserting nothing -then you're wasting my time & yours also!

b) Tell us Your Point.

Even if you have a point to your essay, no one will pay attention to you if you don't let'em know that. We need to know why we're being told something. Your reader must not discover somewhere along the way what it is you might be trying to say. The reader must know from the very outset that you have a point and what that point is. So, you have to begin with a clearly stated point you want to prove. A good thesis gives guidance as to what to look for in the following essay & suggests that the essay is worth reading. And here you can't afford to be convoluted, vague and rambling. You have to grab the reader's attention and make him or her believe that what you are saying is worth paying attention to. Make it as simple and straight forward as possible.

c) Don't Be Trivial!

Beyond having a point to make and clearly stating it right up front, your thesis should not be trivial, obvious, or self-evident. In other words, is your thesis debatable or controversial? If your point is obvious - then you have a paper which isn't worth writing or reading. Could some knowledgeable person take issue with what you say? If so, then you have a good thesis.

d) Only Dummies Lack Titles!

The first point of contact between your thesis and the mind of your audience is your title. The first basic rule of good writing, then, is to have a title. This is something everyone in the world except students seem to realize. The only things in the universe which lack titles are student papers. . .because students think it's not important. Or perhaps their papers don't really have a case to make anyway, so they really don't know what point they'd make in their titles. Your title is your first chance you have, perhaps your most important chance, to make your case. Lack of a title often indicates lack of a case, a thesis. Don't be a dummie! Make sure you have a title!

Beyond the simple fact of having a title, you need to make your title as evocative of your thesis as possible, because your title is your thesis. It's your thesis in a nutshell. Ideally, you want something catchy, evocative of what you're trying to sell or argue, something that will stick.

e) First Paragraph.

Begin with a short introductory paragraph which moves from two or three general sentences to the specific in which your thesis statement is generally the last sentence. Ideally, your thesis statement should be a single identifiable sentence which encapsulates your point. A good thesis statement is one which specifically states right up front what it is you intend to prove.

2) Tell'em.

In the body of your essay you present the evidence for your case. Here you tell'em what you said you'd tell'em. Here you are presenting specific detailed evidence. Avoid the generic. Use telling, revealing, evocative facts. Specific evidence is convincing, vague generalities are not. In presenting your evidence, quality rather than quantity is what counts. A single piece of specific persuasive evidence out-weighs pages and pages of padding. Verbosity cannot conceal a vacuum.

Also, don't assume the reader already knows what you know. Your reader should be visualized as smart & intelligent, but not expert in what you're talking about and not a mind reader! You have to tell the reader what the reader needs to know to accept your thesis.

3) Tell'em What You Told'em!

Finally, in your summary paragraph, tell'em what you told'em. Summarize your evidence and show how it supports your argument, your thesis. "If the glove does not fit .you must acquit."