



# **WRITING AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION**

**Grades 10 and 12**

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## WRITING AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION

This handbook is designed to you plan, organize and write an original composition.

Keep in mind that there is *no right answer* to an *original* essay question. An effective original composition makes a strong and well-supported case for a carefully considered **overall point of view**. The ability to present one's own ideas effectively is what the **exam maker** is looking for. The exam marker is looking to read your views and why you have come to think in a particular way.



### GETTING STARTED

1. **Read the topic.** Pause, think and find your perspective. Consider the topic from several points of view. Ask yourself, “*What are the implications of the topic? What am I being invited to explore?*”
2. **Decide on form.** Ask yourself, “*What form will I write in, narrative or expository?*” This is an important decision for the writing form you choose to write in will determine the structure of your essay.

### NARRATIVE FORM



#### What are the important features I will need to pay attention to?

- Makes a point, tells a story, and leads the reader to reflect on a human experience (memories of past events, memorable person or event, personal reflective, imaginative or real story).
- Can be conversational in style and the point of view is **first person**.
- Introduction indicates what **kind** of narrative (e.g. event, activity, personal experience, observation, imaginative story).
- Includes anecdotes and descriptions.
- May include dialogue (don't over use; punctuate correctly).

#### Will I need a thesis?

- **No**, you will not need a “formal” but you will want to provide some kind of **statement/roadmap** in your introductory paragraph to help guide the reader through your essay.

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## EXPOSITORY FORM



### What are the important features I will need to pay attention to?

- Demonstrates cause and effect, explains how something is done, defines something, sets out an argument, informs, compares and contrasts.

### Will I need a thesis?

- **YES**; you are making a **claim/assertion** (explanation, opinion, an evaluation, a cause-effect statement, or an interpretation about a topic), and **justifying** this claim with reasons and evidence.
- Keep in mind that an argument consists of two main components: a claim, and reasons for that claim. The goal of your essay is to **convince** your reader that your claim is true based on the presentation of your reasons and evidence.



It is helpful to map this reasoning out:

- CLAIM = \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason 1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason 3: \_\_\_\_\_

- 3. Start the ideas flowing.** Ask yourself, “*What do you I want the reader of this essay to have learned or think about after reading this essay?*”

Subject of the Report	
I.	Main Idea
	A. Supporting detail
	B. Supporting detail
	C. Supporting detail
II.	Main Idea
	A. Supporting detail
	B. Supporting detail
	C. Supporting detail
III.	Main Idea
	A. Supporting detail
	B. Supporting detail
	C. Supporting detail
IV.	Main Idea
	A. Supporting detail
	B. Supporting detail
	C. Supporting detail

**WRITE AN OUTLINE/THIS IS A MUST!**

**Writing an outline allows you to think before you write.** What use is there in writing the entire paper only to realize that, had you done a little more planning, you would have organized your essay in an entirely different way?

**Be brief.** Remember that you are only drawing an outline of the forest, not detailing each of the trees. The simplest outline is to use one-line sentences to describe a paragraph's main idea, and bullet points to describe what each paragraph will contain. Another way to write an outline is to use a diagram.

**Each paragraph in the essay should fit into the larger picture.** When looking at your paragraphs from this perspective, you can easily see if each paragraph stays on topic.



In general, put what you want the reader to remember either first or last, not in the middle of your paragraph. Studies have shown that readers remember **least** what is presented in the middle of an essay.



## INTRODUCTION

**First impressions are important.** It is true that the first impression—whether it's a first meeting with a person or the first sentence of an essay—sets the stage for a lasting opinion.



If the essay can be compared to a meal, the introduction is the **appetizer**. The purpose of the introduction is to entice your reader to further delve into your paper.

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### **Step 1: Grab the reader's attention.**

**An exciting quotation:** *According to Napoleon in George Orwell's classic novel, Animal Farm, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others".*

Note: The power of this introduction is that it piques the reader's attention, making him/her wonder what is to come in the essay.

**Imaginary situation or scenario:** *Imagine yourself a twelve year old in high school, trying to establish your independence in a group of your peers.*

Note: The power of this introduction is that it places the reader in the writer's shoes, making him/her more interested in what takes place in the essay.

**A surprising piece of information:** *My father has never had a job in his life.*

Note: The power of this introduction is that it catches the reader off guard.

**A provocative question:** *Influence – Is it really about influence or manipulation? When does influence become manipulation?*

Note: The power in this introduction is that they take an essay question and turns it back around to the reader to respond to.

**Step 2: Present your thesis/framework.** The thesis/framework acts as the main claim of your paper, and typically appears near the end of the introduction so that your reader knows what general position you will take in your essay.

Markers anticipate and read closely your thesis/framework, and they want to find a polished statement!



Check to see that your thesis fulfills the following roles.

- It makes a clear and specific statement.
- It indicates the direction of your thoughts.

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- It sets a stage.
- It provides structure.
- It is supported by the body paragraphs.



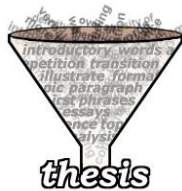
**See this in action:**

Throughout literature the process of coming of age is a common subject, Writers often use tragic or confusing events to help a character receive a sense of maturity, and to put away childish foolery. (Scale Point: 5)



If you are uncertain as to how to write a thesis, try an "although . . . actually" format. This format is one of the most effective ways of finding something original and controversial to say. In effect, you are telling someone that what he or she thought to be previously true really isn't. You're saying, "Hey, you thought X? Well, you're wrong. Really, it's Y!"

Example: *Although* it appears that computers may help students learn to write, *actually* they can become a detriment to the generation of what some writers call "creative flow."



**FUNNEL INTRODUCTION STRATEGY**

**Topic:** *People sometimes let life become too complicated.*

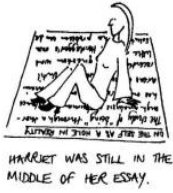
**Wide end of the tunnel** — Sometimes people make life too complicated.

**Narrow subject** — People’s lives become ridiculously busy, leaving not time for spontaneity. They are trying to earn money, raise a family, and have hobbies and be active community members. Worry and internal stress are a large part of pressure.

**Introduce thesis/framework** — It would be good to take regular reality checks, stay focused and take time out for “fun.” (Point Scale: 5)

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## WRITING THE BODY PARAGRAPHS

### Step 1: Begin with a strong topic sentence.

- Topic sentences are like signs on a highway. They tell the reader where they are and where they're going.



#### See this in action:

After the moment of silence in the funeral parlour, an old lady the girl didn't know slowly hobbled her way up to the podium to speak. (Point Scale: 6)

### Step 2: Fully and completely develop a single idea.

- Each paragraph should have a clear, singular focus to it.
- Don't try to stuff in too much material. Body paragraphs are like bricks: Each individual brick needs to be strong and sturdy or the entire structure will collapse.



#### See this in action:

I am terrified of having my teeth pulled. Given the choice, I'd prefer the experience of having my fingers lobbed off with a meat cleaver to the uniform, sickening sounds and nauseating pressure of having my teeth twisted out of my jaw. One can imagine my uncontainable bliss when told my jaw is too small for another four teeth, resulting in the impending excision of my wisdom teeth, and bicuspid for good measure. (Scale Point: 6)



Although given a 6, this essay was also criticized for "overwriting." You may want to keep this in mind when you look at your own writing.

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### Step 3: Use transitions effectively.

- Transitions link the paragraphs together and make your composition easier to read.

Listing Points	Counter Examples	Additional Ideas	Cause and Effect
first	however	another	therefore
second	even though	in addition to	thus
third	on the other hand	related to	as a result of
	nevertheless	furthermore	consequently



If there is an overriding error students make in writing essays, it is shifting topics within the same paragraph, rather than continuing to develop the same idea they began with.



### WRITING THE CONCLUSION

Consider the conclusion the dessert and the after dinner conversation. Don't leave the guests hanging—let them know the party is over and it's time to go home.

**Synthesize the arguments, not summarize them.** Similarly, don't repeat the details of your body paragraphs in your conclusion.

**Make a case for why your points are important.** What do your readers know now that they didn't know before? How will that knowledge help them better appreciate or understand the work overall?

**Stay relevant.** Your conclusion is not the time to pad your essay with all the extra, interesting ideas you came up but couldn't fit into the essay proper.

**Use transitions** such as: on the whole, as I have shown, as I have said, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently, on the whole.





## ADVICE ON HOW NOT TO END AN ESSAY

**Irritate the reader.** Avoid phrases like “in conclusion, “to sum up.”

**Use trite truism.** “And as for the future, only time will tell.”

**End with a waste basket ending.** Do not try in the final paragraph to say everything you didn’t have room for in the body of the essay.

**Use the fade-out.** “Researchers have so much to discover in this area. Whatever we say now will be superseded in the near future.

**Use the wild surmise.**”For this we see the utter futility of ever trying to help another person.”



## REVISING

1. Read your essay (or paragraph) aloud to check for overall interest, sense and sound. Ask yourself, “*Would I want to read this essay?*”
2. Check your sentences for rhythm, balance, and correctness. Does each sentence express a complete thought (no fragments)? Is each sentence punctuated as a complete sentence (no comma splices or run-ons)?
3. Have you used a combination of sentence length, types and arrangements?
4. Check your sentence beginnings. Do not start sentence after sentence with the subject. This is boring for the reader.
5. Check each compound sentence to make sure it shows the proper relationship between the two ideas expressed. Use the best coordinate conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so) for each sentence.
6. Locate and replace any words, which are too *general* or overused to be effective. Use nouns, which are specific, adjectives, and adverbs, which are fresh and colourful, and verbs, which are lively and vivid.
7. Make sure your writing is concise. Take out any words, phrases, or ideas, which are, repeated unnecessarily, which sound flowery, or which “pad rather than add” to an explanation or description.
8. Improve the style and clarity of your writing by using a simile, metaphor, or analogy whenever comparing something unfamiliar to something familiar might help the reader.
9. Replace any supporting examples or reasons that do not clearly illustrate or prove the point you are trying to make.

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10. Study each paragraph for overall effectiveness and clarity. Does each paragraph have a clear purpose and focus (topic sentence)? Is each major idea fully developed and supported? Are the details arranged logically? Have you used appropriate transitions within and between paragraphs?
11. Is your writing consistent in tone and structure? Does it sound sincere and natural? Does it accomplish what you set out to accomplish?



### **PROOFREAD – 3 TRICKS**

1. Check your writing for any words or phrases, which may have been left out.
2. Check your writing for spelling, capitalization and punctuation errors.
3. Correct any usage errors. Be sure each subject agrees with each verb and each pronoun with its antecedent.



### **AVOID THE KISS OF DEATH**

**Read your essay aloud.** It will help you to see the difference between what you intended to write and what you actually wrote.

**Try reading your essay backwards, a sentence at a time.** Begin your reading the concluding sentence and end your reading with the introductory sentence. This way, you will be able to *focus* on the sentences, rather than on the content of your essay.

**If spelling is your weak point, look through your paper checking only that problem.** Then proofread again for the next most frequent problem.