How To Teach
The Five-Paragraph Essay

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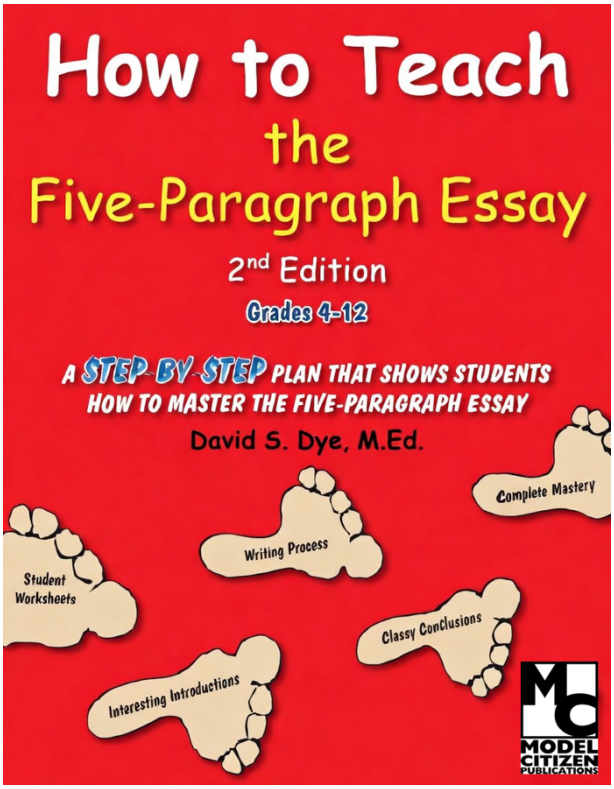


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Introduction

There are many ways to write a five-paragraph essay. Consider this: There are four domains of writing. Also, within these four domains of writing there are sub-domains such as problem/solution, persuasive, letter writing, personal narrative, biography, autobiography, cause and effect… I could go on and on. In addition to this, every person has his or her own distinct style of writing. With all these factors to consider, it's no wonder that so many students struggle with essay writing.

Don't let all of this intimidate you. This book is going to show you how to teach the five-paragraph essay using one simple essay format. From this basic format, you will discover that adjusting it to fit the different domains of writing is very simple. More importantly, your students will feel confident in their ability to write in any situation.

One Simple Format



This book is going to take you by the hand and show you how to teach the basic five-paragraph essay using one standard format. Following these easy steps, your students will achieve mastery of the five-paragraph essay and be prepared for ANY timed test you, your district, your state, or college throws at them.

Bells and Whistles



Everyone likes the machine with extra bells and whistles. This book will also show your students how to add the "bells and whistles" to their five-paragraph essays. Once they've mastered the basic format of the five-paragraph essay, they will learn important ideas such as Interesting Introductions, Smooth Transitions from paragraph to paragraph, Classy Conclusions, and much more. If you are teaching fourth graders, only a few bells and whistles will be needed. However, if you are teaching middle or high school, you will have all the resources you need to help your students write sophisticated essays. Once again, they will do this by adding these "bells and whistles" to a basic, easy to use five-paragraph essay format.

The Next Level

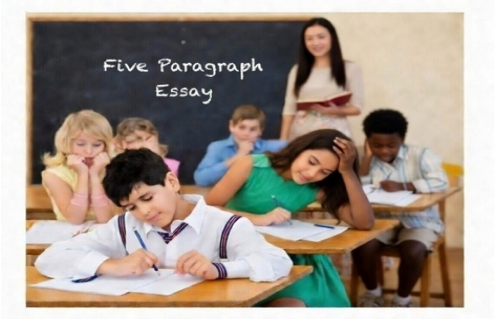
Before discussing the next level, let me tell you about a common mistake used with essay writing. Many teachers will write a five-paragraph essay, such as a persuasive argument, with their class. Next, they will write a narrative with their class. Next, they will write a problem-solution, cause and effect, or compare-and-contrast essay with their class. At the end of the year, their students have wonderful, finished essays to show parents, administrators, and the district. What they DON'T have is a class full of students who know how to write the five-paragraph essay completely on their own. Each essay was done with the teacher's guidance.

Isn't our goal to help students achieve mastery of the five-paragraph essay? If the students are relying on the teacher to walk them through the process, have they really mastered this skill?

So, what is the next level? The next level is the ability of the students to take the basic format of the five-paragraph essay and "tweak" it to fit any domain of writing. By "tweaking", I mean simply adding an extra step or two to meet the requirements of the assignment. For example, essays are not generally stories. However, by "tweaking" the outlining/prewriting procedure from the five-paragraph essay, they can change the body of the essay into the beginning, middle, and end of their story. As you will see, this is a very easy thing to do.

THE FORMAT OF THIS BOOK

1. **List of Steps** - First you will receive a list of steps to follow when teaching the five-paragraph essay. This will serve as an overview as you get comfortable teaching this process as well as a guide while teaching the five-paragraph essay. After teaching the five-paragraph essay a few times, you might find that this is the only reference you need.
2. **Sample Pacing Chart** - From Day 1 to Day 20, what will your daily lessons look like? Obviously, it will vary from grade and ability level. However, it is nice to have a model to use as a starting point. While using this pacing chart, you will find that speeding up or slowing down is easy. Simply take more time to complete each step or jump to the next step when you feel your students have understood each lesson.
3. **Detailed Lesson Plan** - Next, each step will be explained in greater detail. You will see pictures and receive a detailed explanation of each step.
4. **Plan for Total Mastery** - The goal is to have every student master the five-paragraph essay. This lesson plan will show you what to do with the students who have mastered the skill, and how to find time to work in small groups for those who continue to need support.
5. **Bells and Whistles** - Here you will learn to teach your students how to make more exciting introductions, classy conclusions, smooth transitions, and more...
6. **The Next Level** - Show your students how to use the basic format of the five-paragraph essay to create any domain of writing. Does your district give your students a timed test on informative essays? Are your students required to take a state writing test on problem-solution? Not a problem. In minutes your students will know exactly what to do to prepare and write for any genre of writing.



THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY

I. The Steps

1. Review "What is a Paragraph?" Make sure the students understand that a paragraph is about ONE MAIN IDEA.
2. Teach the Five-Paragraph Essay in 60 seconds. Start your watch! Ready...Set...Go!
3. Prewriting Practice for the Five-Paragraph Essay. Creating your Three Main Ideas and listing your supporting details for each.
4. Introductory Paragraph - Make a thesis statement and give your three main ideas.
5. Conclusion Paragraph - Summarize your thesis statement, review your three main ideas, and say goodbye.
6. Putting It All Together
7. Timed Prompt Writing
8. Assess and Re-Teach as needed. Put the expert essay writers into "writer's workshop" activities while working with those who need a little more help.

Bells and Whistles

1. Teach Interesting Introductions
2. Teach Classy Conclusions
3. Teach Terrific Transitions

The Next Level - Tweaking the Essay to Fit All Domains and Genres

1. Narratives
2. Persuasive Essay
3. Problem-Solution Essay
4. Cause and Effect Essay
5. Research Reports



THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY

III. Detailed Lesson Plan for Each Step

Step I – Review the Paragraph (Approx. 1 Week to 3 Months)

Make no mistake, the ability to write a strong paragraph is the very backbone of all writing. If your students cannot write a good paragraph, trying to write an essay will be futile. On the other hand, if your students can produce a well-organized paragraph, the battle is nearly over. Writing a five-paragraph essay simply requires a few extra steps.

For a more detailed lesson plan on paragraph writing, go to CreateBetterWriters.com. You can download the paragraph lesson plan from the "Past Newsletters" section of this site. Below you will see an abridged version of what you will find in How to Write a Paragraph.

> There is one all-important, vital, key, pivotal thought that your students must have on their minds at all times when writing the paragraph (and consequently, the five-paragraph essay). That one thought is this:
>
> **A Paragraph is about ONE MAIN IDEA!**

This point could not be stressed strongly enough. Pound it into your students' minds every chance you get. Keeping this thought on the forefront of your students' minds will make teaching the five-paragraph essay infinitely easier. Here are the steps for teaching the paragraph:

1. **Pretest: Let the students try to guess the five parts of a good paragraph.**

Write the numbers 1 – 5 on the board. Have the students number 1-5 on their papers. Let the students try to guess the five parts of the paragraph. Make a game out of it. Offer five raffle tickets or a small prize to the student who can name the #1 part of a paragraph. (The list is in order of importance.) Offer four raffle tickets for the student who guesses the second item and so on. The class will have fun guessing, and it will get them thinking about everything they've ever been taught about writing a paragraph. This is a great time of review, even if they don't discover all five. For the classes that aren't coming close, I'll give as many hints as I can until they get it.

A GOOD PARAGRAPH

1. One Main Idea
2. Topic Sentence
3. 5-7 Sentences
4. Closing Sentence
5. Indent; Spelling and Punctuation

Step II – Teach the Five-Paragraph Essay in 60 seconds. Start your watch! Ready…Set…Go! (Approx. 5 min.)



When your students can organize a paragraph by writing their one main idea, listing their supporting details, and writing it using topic and closing sentences, they are ready for the five-paragraph essay.

This is my favorite part of the entire process. It's fun, and it builds their confidence. They know how long it took to learn the paragraph. Telling them that they are going to learn the five-paragraph essay in just one minute, will make them very eager to learn the essay.

1. Begin by telling your students how good a teacher you are. You are so good that you are going to teach them the five-paragraph essay in 60 seconds. You can even set your watch to it.
2. Five-Paragraph Essay in 60 seconds. Start your watch! Ready…Set…Go!

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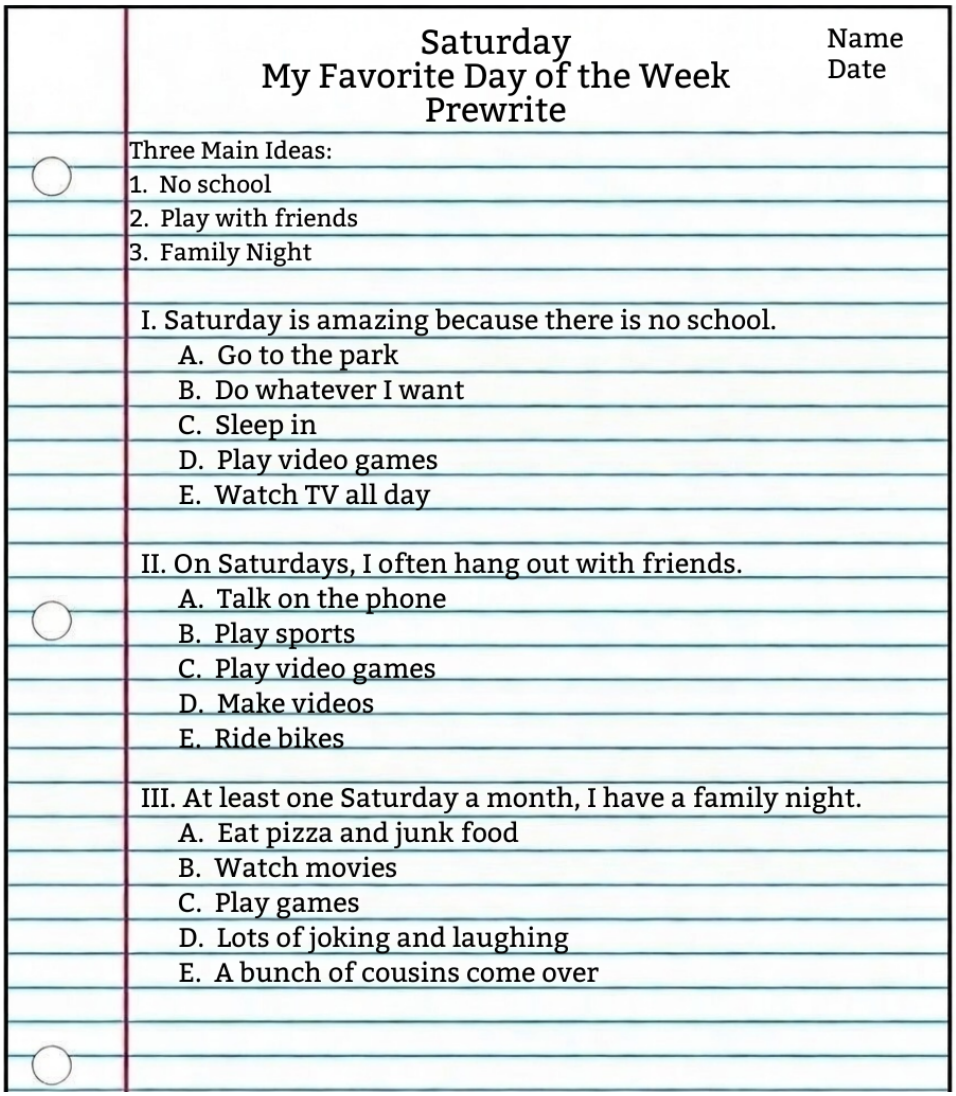
Prewriting Practice – Topic Sentences and Supporting Details

Your students have practiced the paper set-up with six topics, and they've found three main ideas for each. Now, practice listing supporting details for each main idea. You may want to have them set up a fresh sheet of paper for each of these topics just to give them more practice internalizing the paper set-up.

Out of the six topics you've already done, practice listing supporting details for two of the topics as a class. For each topic, do the following:

1. Come up with a topic sentence for each main idea. Have them write the topic sentence for Main Idea #1 next to Roman numeral I. Have them write the topic sentence for Main Idea #2 next to Roman numeral II. Finally, have them write the topic sentence for Main Idea #3 next to Roman numeral III.
2. Generate supporting details for each of the main ideas.
3. As you work, review the question: **What is the only difference between writing a paragraph and an essay?**

Have the students complete the other four topics for independent practice. Here is a sample for Favorite Day of the Week. See the appendix for several samples of actual prewriting outlines written by students.



Saturday
My Favorite Day of the Week
Prewrite

Name
Date

Three Main Ideas:
1. No school
2. Play with friends
3. Family Night

I. Saturday is amazing because there is no school.
- A. Go to the park
- B. Do whatever I want
- C. Sleep in
- D. Play video games
- E. Watch TV all day

II. On Saturdays, I often hang out with friends.
- A. Talk on the phone
- B. Play sports
- C. Play video games
- D. Make videos
- E. Ride bikes

III. At least one Saturday a month, I have a family night.
- A. Eat pizza and junk food
- B. Watch movies
- C. Play games
- D. Lots of joking and laughing
- E. A bunch of cousins come over

Step IV – Introductory Paragraph (Approx. One to Two Weeks)

Disclaimer: This is a VERY basic introduction meant to get the students comfortable with the process of writing introductions (and conclusions). Think of this section as teaching a child to ride a bicycle. The way this introduction and conclusion is being taught is like putting training wheels on a bike. For the advanced students (elementary school) and older students (middle / high school), once they've grasped the basic concept, introduce the following ideas:

A. The thesis statement shouldn't just tell the main idea of the essay. An advanced essay doesn't just give facts; it is trying to Make a Point, State a Position on a Topic, Make a Claim, Solve a Problem, etc. Basically, the thesis statement is using facts to support a critical analysis of a topic.

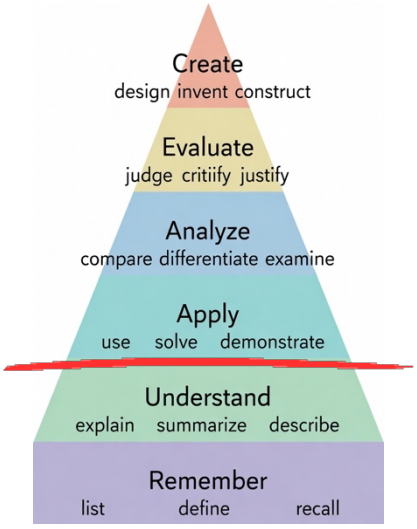
Example:

Training Wheel Thesis Statement:

Teenagers love social media.

Stronger Thesis Statement:

Social media does more harm than good to teenagers as it raises anxiety levels, creates unrealistic standards, and reduces in-person contact with others.



The goal is to have the students working at the upper end of Bloom's Taxonomy, not the bottom.

1. Teach the parts of an introduction.

Begin teaching the introductory paragraph by having the students memorize its three parts. I put a poster on the wall for a reference, but I warn them that the poster is going to go away in a week or two.

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How to Teach the Five-Paragraph Essay

How to Write a Transition Sentence:

This is a very difficult concept to teach students. Some get it right away and others never seem to get it. Students can still write excellent essays without good transition sentences, but good transitions give the essay an excellent flow.

First, if writers have a solid grasp of the topic of their essays, the transitions seem to come naturally. For now, the students just need to get into the habit of putting transitions in their writing. To help them, I give them two strategies:

1. **Word Borrowing**: With this trick, the students look to see if there is a word in the next topic sentence they can borrow. When the reader sees the same word at the end of one paragraph and again at the beginning of the next paragraph, it can make for a smooth transition. Sometimes looking for this word that can be shared might inspire a better topic sentence. Look at the topic sentence for Main Idea #1:

   "Saturday is amazing because there is no school."

   The idea of "no school" makes me think of "freedom". Can I use the word "freedom" in my transition sentence and in the topic sentence? Let's see:

   Transitions Sentence from the Introductory Paragraph:

   "I look forward to the freedom Saturday brings all week."

   New Topic Sentence for Main Idea #1:

   Saturday is amazing because of the freedom from school.

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Step VI – Putting It All Together.

Your students now know everything they need to write a clear, well-organized five-paragraph essay. Here are some suggestions below to help keep this skill fresh in their minds.

1. Require your students to write a five-paragraph essay every week.
    a. Monday = Make an Outline
    b. Tuesday = Write the Introduction and Paragraph #1 of the body.
    c. Wednesday = Write Paragraphs #2 and #3 of the body.
    d. Thursday = Write your conclusion.
    e. Friday, in class, assess each other's essays.



2. Use topics in other areas of the curriculum to write essays. Suggestions:
    a. Response to Literature
    Example: Write a five-paragraph essay about how different personalities in the story affected the plot of a story.

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Timed Prompt Writing – Cont.

Note: There is a copy of the rubric in the appendix. Below is an explanation to help explain it to your students. There are many benefits to having the students assess each other's writing.

The Rubric

_____ 1. Five-Paragraph Essay Prewriting. (8 out of 10 needed to pass.)

When you score the prewriting, you're looking for:

A. Three good main ideas. They should be listed in an order that makes sense.
B. At least five details listed for each main idea. If they make minor mistakes, but the overall prewriting is good, you can give them 8, 9, or 10 points. These are passing scores. If they do not pass, list the items that need work on the rubric.

_____ 2. Introductory Paragraph (8 out of 10 needed to pass.)

A. Is there a good thesis statement?
B. Three main ideas? Are they appropriate to the topic?
C. Transition sentence?

*If the introductory paragraph is acceptable, give them 8, 9, or 10. If not, list any problems on the rubric.

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THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY

IV. Plan for Mastery

I've discovered that a big reason middle schoolers haven't mastered the five-paragraph essay is that they have not been given opportunities to internalize all the skills required to write a paragraph. The paper set-up they've learned in this book makes it easy to learn the paragraph; however, the students will need time and practice to internalize this skill.

Many students are asked to write an essay every six to eight weeks. By the time the next essay comes along, they've forgotten many steps and need the teacher's guidance once again.

You can create a block of time for your students to internalize essay writing and give you an opportunity to work with struggling students. This section will give you a plan that will help most of your students master the essay. Any student who fails to master the five-paragraph essay after this is either not trying or is not ready to internalize this skill.

Note: You may want to do this activity AFTER teaching the Bells and Whistles section. This will give the advanced students more practice with the more challenging skills.

1. Begin by teaching the five-paragraph essay to the entire class. When you sense that a large portion of your class understands the five-paragraph essay, give a timed test. The students who receive a "Pass" according to the rubric are ready to move on to a writing project that will help them internalize essay writing for a very long time.

   There have been years when I have been able to give the first timed test after only a week of instruction. The students understood the prewriting, introduction, and conclusion immediately with more than half the class passing on the first try.

   Other years, it is weeks before the class is ready for their first timed test. Each class, as well as each student, has their own personality. This is why teaching is an art as well as a science.

2. Dividing the Class
   A. Go over the project. The explanation follows this step here in this section. The students who passed the essay test will get started on the project after the explanation. The students who have NOT passed the essay test will work on the project while you help students who need extra attention.



B. Since you've given the essay test, you and the students know who has passed and who hasn't. For the students who have NOT passed:

   i. Say the magic words, you are about to write an essay.

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The Five-Paragraph Essay Project

The goal of this project is to help the students solidify the steps for writing a five-paragraph essay. Once again, I'll stress that the paper set-up is all they need to remember how to write the essay. This project should teach them long term memory of the paper set-up and the ability to trust it to guide them through the essay. Here are the steps:

1. Give the students a list of five topics. They will write a five-paragraph essay for each. Use the topics to the right or select your own.
2. Give each student the rubric from the appendix. Have them write "Essay #1" on the top along with the date and time they start each step. By writing down the times they begin each step, you can keep track of the amount of work they are doing.

Essay Topics

1. What I like about my school.
2. The best way to spend a day off.
3. How to _____. Select something you know how to do.
4. What I would change about myself, my life, my city or the world. Pick one!
5. A place everyone should visit.



THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY

V. Bells and Whistles

Interesting Introductions

In the detailed lesson plan, you were shown how to write a well-organized, but less than exciting introduction. Now you see some tricks you can teach your students to make their introductory paragraphs more intelligent and interesting.

Here is a procedure ("Days" are suggestions) with some explanation for teaching these interesting introductions:

1. (Day 1) Ask your students:
    a. How many sentences are you allowed to have in your introduction paragraph? **Answer**: Just like any other paragraph, you only get 5 – 7 Sentences.
    b. How many sentences did we use to tell the thesis statement and three main ideas? **Answer**: Four. That doesn't leave many left to say anything interesting, does it?
    c. Is there a way to put the thesis statement and three main ideas into one sentence so you have more space for more interesting information? **Answer**: Yes… See Step 2.

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