



English II

Expository Writing: Problem and Solution

Learning Targets

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

LEARNING STRATEGIES

Quickwrite, Note-taking, Think Aloud, Marking the Text, Graphic Organizer, Think-Pair-Share, Brainstorming, Webbing, Outlining, Drafting, Sharing and Responding

Writing an Expository Essay

In this writing workshop, you will practice writing an expository essay to a communicate ideas and information about a topic to a specific audience and for a specific purpose. Writers often use expository essays to define or describe a subject, to provide directions for how to do something, to pose a problem and its solution, or to compare subjects by exploring how they are similar and different.

The focus of this workshop is analyzing and writing an expository essay organized as a problem-solution essay. To complete the workshop, you will work with your teacher and your classmates to construct two model expository essays. You will then use these models to write your own expository essay that achieves the following:

- Presents effective introductory and concluding paragraphs.
- Contains a clearly stated purpose or controlling idea.
- Uses well-chosen details.
- Uses an organizing structure that is appropriate for the purpose, audience, and context.
- Accurately synthesizes ideas from several sources.
- Uses a variety of rhetorical devices, sentence structures, and transitions.

ACTIVITY 1

Discovering Elements of a Multi-Paragraph Problem-Solution Essay

Before Reading

1. **Quickwrite:** What do you know about expository writing? How does the purpose of a problem-solution essay fit into the expository mode?

- 2. In a problem-solution essay, a writer poses a problem and provides one or more solutions to that problem. List some problems and their solutions that you could write about.
- 3. Brainstorm how you might organize a problem-solution essay.

During Reading

- 4. Read the following essay to discover the thesis or controlling idea. As you read, mark the text to locate supporting information (i.e., well-chosen, relevant details that support the thesis).

Sample Text

Class Dismissed

from *The New York Times*, February 28, 2010
by Walter Krin

According to the unwritten constitution that governs ordinary American life and makes possible a shared pop culture that even new immigrants can jump right into after a few movies and a trip to the mall, the senior year of public high school is less a climactic academic experience than an occasion for oafish goofing off, chronic truancy, random bullying, sloppy dancing in rented formalwear and interludes of moody, wan philosophizing (often at sunrise while still half-drunk and staring off at a misty river or the high-school parking lot) about the looming bummer of adulthood. In films like “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off,” “Dazed and Confused” and “High School Musical 3,” senior year is a do-little sabbatical from what is presented as the long dull labor of acquiring knowledge, honing skills and internalizing social norms. It’s a spree, senior year, that discharges built-up tensions. It’s an adolescent Mardi Gras. And it’s not an indulgence but an entitlement. Remember that line in your yearbook? Seniors rule! And they rule not because they’ve accomplished much, necessarily (aside from surviving to age 18 or so and not dropping out or running away from home), but because it’s tradition, and seniors crave tradition. They crave it because they know, deep down, they’re lost, and tradition helps them hide this fear. From juniors.

This year of licensed irresponsibility, this two-semester recurring national holiday, was threatened recently in Utah by a Republican legislator’s proposal to do away with 12th grade entirely. The idea was advanced as a budget-cutting measure — a way to shave millions from the cash-strapped state’s expense sheet — and it called forth the sort of instant, intense hostility that often signals that an inspired notion, truly innovative, truly new, has, by some miracle, entered politics. The proposal drew scorn from teachers and students alike (another tribute to its possible genius) and swiftly spread across the news wires, eliciting such hostility and controversy that its sponsor flinched. Aware, perhaps, that his offbeat plan was drawing unwelcome attention to a state that has spent the modern era in a permanent defensive crouch thanks to a Mormon religious culture that many view as joyless and eccentric, the lawmaker suggested that 12th grade — that ritual time out from the march of time itself — be made optional rather than nonexistent.

My Notes

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But did he compromise too readily? For many American high-school seniors, especially the soberest and most studious, senior year is a holding pattern, a redundancy, a way of running out the clock on a game that has already been won. When winter vacation rolls My Notes around, many of them, thanks to college early-admissions programs, know all they need to about their futures and have no more reason to hang around the schoolhouse than prehistoric fish had need for water once they grew limbs and could crawl out of the oceans. As for students who aren't headed to four-year colleges but two-year community colleges or vocational schools, why not just get started early and read "Moby Dick" for pleasure, if they wish, rather than to earn a grade that they don't need? Kids who plan to move right into the labor force are in the same position. They may as well spend the whole year in detention — which some of them, bored and restless, end up doing. Twelfth grade, for the sorts of students I've just described, amounts to a fidgety waiting period that practically begs for descents into debauchery and concludes in a big dumb party under a mirror ball that spins in place like the minds of those beneath it.

It's not just one Utah lawmaker who has noticed this. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has, too, it seems. In the interest of speeding students on their way to productive, satisfying careers, the foundation intends to give a \$1.5 million grant to a project organized by the nonprofit National Center on Education and the Economy. The goal is to help certain students leapfrog the keg party and go directly from 10th grade to community colleges after passing a battery of tests. The goal is not to save money but precious time, and the program is modeled on systems now in place in Denmark, Finland, France and Singapore — countries whose young folk, in many cases, speak English more grammatically than a lot of American high-school seniors do. One of the fledgling program's backers, Terry Holliday, Kentucky's commissioner of education, calls the program's approach "move on when ready." Compared with the prevailing current system, which might be termed "move on when all your friends do" or "move on when stir-crazy" or just "move on," it seems both more pragmatic and humane, not to mention more likely to raise the G.D.P.

If senior year were to vanish from our high schools, either completely or in part, would its infamous excesses, feats of sloth, dances and stretches of absenteeism shift to junior year? To some degree. But what also might happen is that the education process, if it was shortened and compressed some, might help kids think more clearly about their paths in life and set out on them on the right foot instead of waiting to shape up later on. And what would they miss, really, under such a system? As someone who left high school a year early thanks to an offer from a progressive college that I didn't seek but hungrily accepted (anything to escape those hours of "study hall" that we passed by folding sheets of paper until they couldn't be folded any tighter, at which point we flicked them at one another's heads), I guess I wouldn't know. But I did learn from my visits home that my former classmates' senior years did them few favors maturation-wise, other than to make one an unwed mother and a couple of them into victims of major car collisions. That's why, to my mind, Utah should feel free to ax senior year, bank the savings and see what happens. My hunch is that nothing will happen. Nothing much. Just the loss of a year when nothing much happens anyhow.

After Reading

5. Revisit the sample text, and number each paragraph to help you analyze the organizational structure of the essay. Work to define the purpose of each paragraph and how the writer has organized the information. Note your thoughts in the margin.

6. After analyzing the sample text, use the graphic organizer below to chart the components and characteristics and identify the purpose of each paragraph in this problem-solution essay. This organizer can later serve as a model for you during the writing process as you generate and refine your own essay.

Components/Characteristics	Purpose

WRITING PROMPT:

Write one full paragraph about a problem related to your school. Then write a second paragraph describing possible solutions. Be sure to support your thesis with well-chosen, specific details about the problem as well as the solution. Remember the purpose in expository mode is to explain the situation rather than to persuade as in argumentative writing