Effectively writing different types of essays has become critical to academic success. Essay writing is a common school assignment, a part of standardized tests, and a requirement on college applications. Often on tests, choosing the correct type of essay to write in response to a writing prompt is key to getting the question right. Clearly, students can’t afford to remain confused about types of essays.

There are over a dozen types of essays, so it’s easy to get confused. However, rest assured, the number is actually more manageable. Essentially there are four major types of essays, with the variations making up the remainder.

**Four Major Types of Essays**  
Distinguishing between types of essays is simply a matter of determining the writer’s goal. Does the writer want to tell about a personal experience, describe something, explain an issue, or convince the reader to accept a certain viewpoint? The four major types of essays address these purposes:

* ***Narrative Essays: (Telling a Story)***  
  In a [**narrative essay**](https://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/narrative-essays/), the writer tells a story about a real-life experience. While telling a story may sound easy to do, the narrative essay challenges students to think and write about themselves. When writing a narrative essay, writers should try to involve the reader by making the story as vivid as possible. The fact that narrative essays are usually written in the first person helps engage the reader. “I” sentences give readers a feeling of being part of the story. A well-crafted narrative essay will also build towards drawing a conclusion or making a personal statement.
* Personal narratives are naturally written in first person (“I”).
* The purpose of the story should be stated in the opening sentence.
* The story should be told in chronological order (1st, 2nd, 3rd).
* You may add dialogue between characters.
* Make sure to include vivid and descriptive details so your reader will feel as if they were there.

***2. Descriptive Essays: (Painting a Picture)***  
A cousin of the narrative essay, a [**descriptive essay**](https://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/descriptive-essay/) paints a picture with words. A writer might describe a person, place, object, or even memory of special significance. However, this type of essay is not description for description’s sake. The descriptive essay strives to communicate a deeper meaning through the description. In a descriptive essay, the writer should show, not tell, through the use of colorful words and sensory details. The best descriptive essays appeal to the reader’s emotions, with a result that is highly evocative.

* They are very similar to narrative essays.
* The purpose of the story should be stated in the opening sentence.
* The essay should be written in some logical narrative order.
* When describing the topic, cover the five senses in order to be as descriptive as possible.
* Get creative and try to describe every detail making it more descriptive leaving your reader with a lasting impression.

***3. Expository Essays: (Just the Facts)***  
The [**expository essay**](https://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/expository-essay/) is an informative piece of writing that presents a balanced analysis of a topic. In an expository essay, the writer explains or defines a topic, using facts, statistics, and examples. Expository writing encompasses a wide range of essay variations, such as the comparison and contrast essay, the cause and effect essay, and the “how to” or process essay. Because expository essays are based on facts and not personal feelings, writers don’t reveal their emotions or write in the first person.

* Expository essays are written in third person – (stay away from “I” or “you”).
* Make sure your thesis is included in your introductory paragraph.
* It is important to just state the facts and keep your opinion out of the essay.
* Each body paragraph should cover a separate point that ties back into the thesis.
* In the conclusion, you need to restate your thesis, using different wording, as well as your points stated in the body paragraphs.

***4. Persuasive Essays: (Convince Me)***  
While like an expository essay in its presentation of facts, the goal of the [**persuasive essay**](https://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/writing-resourcespersuasive-essay/) is to convince the reader to accept the writer’s point of view or recommendation. The writer must build a case using facts and logic, as well as examples, expert opinion, and sound reasoning. The writer should present all sides of the argument, but must be able to communicate clearly and without equivocation why a certain position is correct.

* A person should choose a side in which he will advocate.
* The writer must understand the audience’s perspective on the topic.
* Research! A persuasive essay is highly dependent on the resources you can provide to back up your reasonings.
* Make sure to cite any resources used within your essay to avoid plagiarism.
* Identify the most convincing evidence and key points for the opposing view.