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# Introduction

**W**riting is a complex task that requires students to integrate many skills all at once. The complexity of writing and the importance of basic mastery puts pressure on teachers and students alike. In this book, we've tried to break down the process of writing an essay. The activities and exercises in these pages help build a strong foundation through reading and analyzing essays and by taking students through the steps of writing an essay.

## ▲ **The Approach of This Book**

This book addresses the following aspects of essays:

- structure
- types (expository, narrative, descriptive, persuasive)
- brainstorming
- writing a thesis
- outlining and taking notes
- writing the introduction, body, and conclusion
- introducing transitions
- editing and proofreading

We suggest that you teach the lessons in sequence, as the lessons build upon each other.

An overhead transparency accompanies most of the lessons in this book. The transparencies give a brief overview and present examples for the class to analyze together. Each lesson also includes at least one reproducible that provides students with more practice and/or reference sheets. When a lesson includes an overhead, we suggest that you display it for reference as students work on the reproducible.

The teaching pages display the pertinent National Language Arts Standards as well as information about how to present the overheads and the reproducibles. Writing Practice is a feature that allows students to apply the lesson skills in their own writing. Some lessons also include sections on Enriching the Lesson and Teaching Tips.

## ▲ **On Overhead Writing Lessons**

*Strong Sentences*, *Powerful Paragraphs*, and *Exceptional Essays* comprise the Overhead Writing Lessons series of books. Each book targets and teaches specific grammar and writing skills that will make your students better and more confident writers.

# The Thesis

## National Language Arts Standards:

- ▲ Uses prewriting strategies to plan written work
- ▲ Uses strategies to draft and revise written work
- ▲ Writes expository compositions
- ▲ Identifies and stays on topic

## ◆ Purpose ◆

To explain the importance of a thesis and how to write a strong thesis

The thesis of an essay should ring with significance. If students can't produce a good thesis, they will have difficulty developing their essay. They'll find themselves rambling about the topic because their thesis offers them no direction. Another problem is that students sometimes present basic facts as a thesis. They fail to realize that facts are not debatable in the same way that an arguable point is. It's important for students to understand that creating a good thesis is a process and that they may need to rework it several times.

## ▲ Launching Activity: The Thesis (Overhead 4)

Begin by reminding students about the brainstorming they did on hurricanes in the previous lesson. Review the Brainstorming overhead to refresh their memories about the methods and ideas generated. Point out the ways in which ideas and/or questions about hurricanes' names appear in the web, the list, and the free writing. Explain that the next step in writing an essay is creating a thesis. Tell students that they'll be learning how to use the information about hurricanes' names to create a thesis.

Since the information in the web and the free writing doesn't appear as questions, it's important to show students how to generate a question from the material. Here's what you might say: *I've decided I want you all to write about hurricanes' names. That's still a big topic. To narrow it down, I think about a question I have about hurricanes' names. For instance, Why are names given to hurricanes? Answering this question will help you develop a thesis for your essay.*

Display the overhead, and read the introduction. Guide students through the development of the thesis from an essay question. Make sure they can see the differences between each of the statements and the progressive development to the final thesis statement.

Then go over the definition and information on the overhead. After posing the essay question to students, give them a few minutes to think about it. You may want to start the process by modeling your own thinking: *First, I wrote this down: We should recycle aluminum cans and glass bottles because [blank]. Then, I thought, we should recycle because it's good. But why is recycling good?*

## Overhead Transparency

### ◆ The Thesis

## Reproducible

### ◆ What Am I Going to Write About?

overhead 4

## The Thesis

Remember the brainstorming you did about hurricanes? Suppose your teacher assigned the following essay question: Why are hurricanes given names? You can use that question to help you state the thesis, or main idea, of your expository essay.

Question: Why are hurricanes given names?

Possible Thesis: Hurricanes are given names.  
(This is not a good thesis because it doesn't answer the essay question.)

Possible Thesis: Hurricanes have been named after saints and first ladies. Today, they receive both men's and women's names.  
(This is not a good thesis because it still doesn't tell why hurricanes receive names.)

Possible Thesis: Hurricanes are given names because it helps meteorologists keep track of them.  
(This thesis is better: It tells why.)


Possible Thesis: Hurricanes are given names so that meteorologists can keep track of different storms.  
(This thesis is even better: It is less confusing than the thesis above.)

Possible Thesis: Sometimes, more than one hurricane is blowing across the ocean, so the World Meteorological Organization gives them different names to track them more easily.  
(This is the strongest thesis. It clearly and completely answers the question.)

A thesis states the writer's idea or opinion.

- ▲ The thesis appears in the introduction, the first paragraph, of an essay.
- ▲ The thesis doesn't always have to be the first sentence of an essay.
- ▲ A good thesis leads naturally to the discussion in the body of the essay.

Create a thesis from the following essay question: Why should we recycle aluminum cans and glass bottles?



Write on the board students' responses about the benefits of recycling. Use the responses to complete the thesis you modeled, for example: *We should recycle aluminum cans and glass bottles because that creates less garbage.* Continue to ask for students' input about how to make the thesis stronger until the class reaches a consensus.

### ▲ **Student Reproducible**

What Am I Going to Write About?: This reproducible builds upon the reproducibles (pages 18 and 19) on dogs that students completed in the previous lesson. They continue the process of planning their essays with this reproducible. If students are overwhelmed by the amount of material they generated in their brainstorming sessions, this reproducible will help them focus their thoughts and ideas.

### ▲ **Writing Practice**

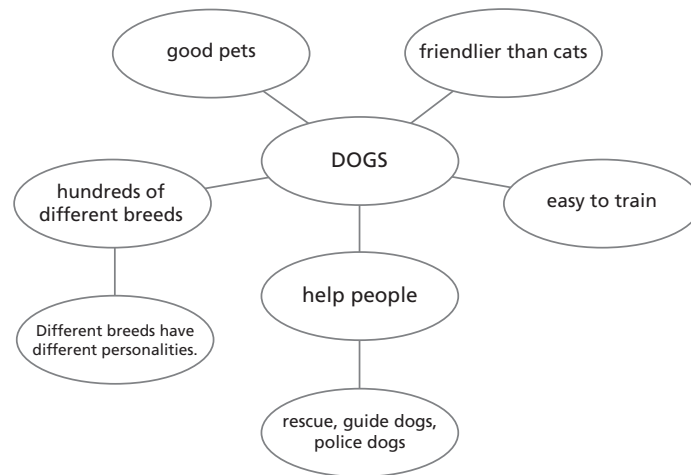
Now it's time for students to write a thesis for the expository essay topic or topics you introduced in the previous lesson on brainstorming. Move among students as they work in case anyone is struggling to transform their ideas and questions into a strong thesis. Also, meet with students individually to discuss their thesis statements. Ask them to tell you how they used their brainstorming ideas to create the thesis. Help students fine-tune as necessary.

### ▲ **Enriching the Lesson**

Have students pull out their examples of each type of essay (reproducible pages 9, 11, 13, 15). Ask them to look at the thesis in each essay and note its position in the introductory paragraph and its length. Challenge them to restate each thesis as a possible essay question.

# What Am I Going to Write About?

In the last lesson, you brainstormed about the topic of dogs. If you were going to write an expository essay about dogs, how would you begin?



**1.** Look over the information you brainstormed.

Which idea really interests you?

Does a big idea jump out at you?

Which ideas have you already developed by adding another oval to the web?

**2.** Choose one of the ideas from the web.

Dogs help people.

**3.** Change the statement into a question.

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**4.** Use the question to write a thesis. You can write on another sheet of paper in case you want to keep revising your thesis.

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**5.** Does any of the information in the web help support your thesis?

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# Outlining

## ◆ Purpose ◆

To introduce the concept of outlining to organize the ideas in an essay

**N**ow that students have a thesis in place, they can move on to create an outline to help them organize their ideas and to guide their research. An outline can spotlight any blank areas in their arguments. Although an outline is an orderly plan, students are sometimes confused about the sequence of Roman numerals and capital letters. The reproducible Organizing Your Ideas (page 25) provides a template for them to use.

## ▲ Launching Activity: Outlining (Overhead 5)

This overhead continues the exploration of writing an expository essay on naming hurricanes. In the previous lesson, students saw the thesis evolve from a question into several possible thesis statements. In this lesson, they learn how to place that thesis within a framework. You may want to briefly review those thesis statements.

Display the overhead, and read through the introduction and sample outline with students. Make sure they understand the connection to the previous lesson. As you read the bulleted information, point out the corresponding material on the sample outline (Roman numerals and so on). Emphasize that this is a basic outline, which can be lengthened. Any outlines they create will always show the number and order of paragraphs in their essay. The conclusion is undeveloped because they haven't yet begun writing. It will follow once students develop their ideas.

Then discuss the questions at the bottom of the overhead. Encourage students to think critically about question 1 by asking: *Is there anything you want to know about hurricanes' names that might not fit into these two main points? Is the writer forgetting any main points?*

If students disagree about where the supporting details should go in the outline, draw them out to assess their thinking. Several of the choices could be placed under either section II or section III. Answers for question 2: Until 1979...(II.); The 2007 list...(III.); The names of really destructive...(II. or III.); The names of ...(II. or III.).

## ▲ Student Reproducible

Make extra copies for students to keep in their notebooks and store some in your Writing Center.

### National Language Arts Standards:

- ▲ Uses prewriting strategies to plan written work
- ▲ Uses strategies to draft and revise written work
- ▲ Writes expository compositions
- ▲ Identifies and stays on topic

### Overhead Transparency

#### ◆ Outlining

### Reproducible

#### ◆ Organizing Your Ideas

overhead 5

### Outlining

You should discuss a different point in each paragraph of an essay. Outlining these points before you start writing can help you organize your ideas. It can also help you narrow your research. Here's how an outline for an essay about hurricane names might look.

Topic: Why are hurricanes given names?

I. Introduction/Thesis: Hurricanes are given names so meteorologists can keep track of different storms.

II. Main Point to Discuss: History of naming hurricanes

A.

B.

III. Main Point to Discuss: How names are chosen each year

A.


B.

IV. Conclusion: Naming hurricanes is helpful when tracking them.

- ▲ An outline shows the order of the paragraphs in an essay. It always begins with the introduction and ends with the conclusion.
- ▲ The Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV) show the main points of each paragraph.
- ▲ The capital letters (A, B) show details that support each main point.
- ▲ An essay should have at least two points for discussion. You may always add more Roman numerals.
- ▲ Each main point should have at least two supporting details. You may always add more capital letters.

**After reviewing the outline above, answer these questions.**

1. Would you add any more main points to the outline? Do you think the writer is leaving out anything important?
2. Here are more supporting details for the outline. Where do they go in the outline?  
*Until 1979, hurricanes were always named after women.*  
*The 2007 list of names for hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean begins with Andrea and ends with Wendy.*  
*The names of really destructive hurricanes are never used again.*  
*The names of hurricanes never begin with the following letters: Q, U, X, Y and Z.*



Organizing Your Ideas: This activity extends students' work on the thesis statements about dogs they produced in the previous lesson. At this point, they shouldn't be concerned with what they know, or don't know, about these types of working dogs. Emphasize that the important thing is for them to set a plan in place. Then they will know where and how to look for details about each group of dogs. On the other hand, if students can use their own knowledge to flesh out details in the outline, that's terrific.

▲ **Writing Practice**

Now it's time for students to apply what they've learned about outlining to their own expository essays on the topic(s) you've assigned. Again, set aside time for individual conferences to make sure students are on the right track. Also, use class time to discuss any questions students have or any problems you've noticed in the conferences.

# Organizing Your Ideas

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**I.** Introduction/Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**II.** Main Point to Discuss: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**III.** Main Point to Discuss: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**IV.** Main Point to Discuss: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**V.** Conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Essay Checklist

## Editing All Essays:

- Does the essay have a title?
- Are all the paragraphs indented?
- Is the thesis clear? Is it included in the first paragraph?
- Does each paragraph in the body of the essay have a main idea?
- Does each paragraph in the body contain at least two ideas that support the main idea?
- Do all the paragraphs in the body relate to the thesis?
- Have I used transition words to connect the ideas in the essay?
- Does the essay contain any unnecessary information?
- Does the conclusion wrap up the essay and tie in the thesis?

## Editing Expository Essays:

- Does the essay present information about a topic?
- Have I researched the topic well enough?
- Does the essay contain facts that support the thesis?
- Are the facts presented in a logical order?

## Editing Narrative Essays:

- Does the essay tell a story?
- Does the essay use the story to make a point?
- Is the material presented in sequence?

## Editing Descriptive Essays:

- Does the essay paint a strong picture of a person, place, or thing?
- Have I used expressive language?
- Have I included sensory details?

## Editing Persuasive Essays:

- Does the thesis contain a statement I want to prove?
- Have I researched the statement well enough?
- Does the essay contain facts to support the thesis?
- Have I used opinions instead of facts to try to prove the thesis?

## Proofreading

### Grammar, Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation:

- Have I checked the grammar?
- Are all the words in the essay spelled correctly?
- Have I capitalized all proper nouns and the beginning of sentences?
- Is the essay punctuated correctly?