

1) **Activate prior knowledge:**

Skim the essay, look at the title, and predict what it’s about. What do you already know about this subject, author, and context? Look for unfamiliar vocabulary and search for definitions. Read through the essay once from start to finish. Then do a second reading while taking notes, keeping the following items in mind.

2) **Classify the essay as formal or informal:**

Formal	Informal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience is educated and academic</li> <li>• May be directed to a specific group of readers</li> <li>• May require prior knowledge</li> <li>• Diction emphasizes charity and precision</li> <li>• Avoids idioms and colloquialisms</li> <li>• Less of writer’s personality evident</li> <li>• Topic is the primary focus — not the writer</li> <li>• Usually factual and logical</li> <li>• Follows prescribed plan</li> <li>• Purpose is to inform, instruct, or convince — may also entertain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic is of interest to the writer</li> <li>• Appeals to a general audience</li> <li>• Conversational tone</li> <li>• May use popular imagery and idioms</li> <li>• May even deal with “trivial” topics</li> <li>• Doesn’t pretend to treat a topic fully</li> <li>• Topic can be serious but the essay strives to entertain and interest reader</li> <li>• Vivid language</li> <li>• Use of illustration, personal anecdote, humour</li> <li>• Writer as important as topic</li> </ul>

3) **Identify the purpose of the essay:**

- **Persuasion:** goal is the assent of the reader
- **Argument:** truth is the goal; writer makes an assertion supported by proofs
- **Exposition:** the goal is to present completely and fairly other people’s views or to report about an event or a situation and by doing so elucidate that subject.

4) **Identify the essay’s structure:**

- **Narrative:** tells a story and analyzes/evaluates the significance of the story
- **Comparison/contrast:** used to develop an argument that focuses on two primary elements and how they differ or are similar
- **Description:** presents a sensory experience in words and extends to include an analysis of significance of the “picture”
- **Analogy:** uses an extended comparison to illustrate a more difficult concept by comparing it to a simpler concept.
- **Process Analysis:** explains how to do something; provides some kind of analysis of effectiveness or importance of purpose or process
- **Cause and Effect:** examines causes and their results or predicts results by describing causes
- **Problem/solution:** examines a problem from multiple angles, advocates importance of problem and solutions (similar to cause and effect)
- **Classification:** sorts information into logically defined categories; thesis revolves around the categories; proves those categories as acceptable

5) **Determine the method of organization**, which is also part of its structure (Note: there is some overlap between the pattern of argument and method of organization)

Method of Organization	Purpose	Example
<i>Chronological (time)</i> : details are presented in the order in which they occur	To show a process unfolding or a series of events	Technical descriptions History reports
<i>Spatial Order (order of location)</i> details are presented as seen – for example top to bottom or left to right	To help reader visualize what is being described	Descriptive essays Directions Observational reports
<i>Climactic (order of importance)</i> details are presented from least important to most important	To help readers understand the importance of ideas	Persuasive essays News stories Reports
<i>Main idea and details</i> : an important idea is followed by facts, reasons, and proofs	To prove or support an idea or opinion	Persuasive essays Expository essays Reports
<i>Cause/effect and problem/solution</i> : begin with general statement giving the cause of a problem and then add a number of specific effects	To help readers explore or analyse problems (often based on current events)	Expository essays Argumentative essays Persuasive essays History essays Reports
<i>Order of impression</i> : details are presented in the order in which they catch the writer's attention	To help the reader understand the writer's point of view	Journals Personal narratives Responses to literature
<i>Question and answer</i> : a question is followed by an answer, which may raise other questions	To anticipate the reader's questions	Persuasive essays Argumentative essays Expository essays
<i>Comparison</i> : develop two or more subjects by showing how they are alike or dissimilar	To help the reader understand similarities and differences	Expository essays Persuasive essays Argumentative essays

6) **Determine the thesis** and author's viewpoint (is thesis explicit or implicit?)

### 7) **Types of proofs**

- **Historical reference**: events from the past that support an idea, must relate in some way
- **Examples** (take many forms): personal experience, experience of others, hypothetical examples (what if?), quotations, statistics, facts, and other devices such as comparison, analogy, contrast. Examples should be detailed enough to allow the reader to visualize them and understand the point illustrated.
- **Logic and reason**
- **Quotations**: must be knowledgeable source and appropriate
- **Opinions**: personal beliefs that are reasonable and logical
- **Literary references**: well-known and topical
- **Authoritative reference**: experts on the topic, must be recognized
- **Personal observation**: clearly explained links

- **Facts:** research, generally accepted truths, statistics
- **Anecdotes:** brief stories, incidents
- **Analogy:** comparison of similar concept that explains a more difficult idea
- **Emotional appeal** (must be used only to create a sympathetic reader: cannot be excessive)

8) **Analyze the writer's style:**

Examine diction, literary devices, figurative language and how it influences tone and mood. Look at how style contributes to the arguments and their effectiveness. Explain these devices, including allusions, technical language, analogies or other difficult structures.

9) **Examine the effectiveness and limitations of the essay** with mature, insightful, reasoned explanations and proofs.