

CHAPTER TEN



ESSAY ESSENTIALS

An essay is a relatively short piece of writing made up of several paragraphs. An essay is not fiction; it is usually about real life and can express the writer's outlook or personality. An essay develops a topic in more depth and detail than a single paragraph. Essay writing is a part of many college courses, not only a composition course. For example, in your political science class, you might write about the effects of a law passed by your state legislature; in your psychology class, you might write about prejudice. Consequently, learning to use the essay process can help prepare you for writing situations throughout your college career. You might hear the essay referred to as a theme, composition, report, or paper. When an instructor assigns an essay, try not to panic. After all, the process for writing an essay is similar to the process for writing paragraphs.

The structure of an essay is similar to that of a paragraph: a main idea supported by minor ideas. Although an essay is longer than a paragraph, it requires the same decision-making process that you use in writing a paragraph. You must still decide how to limit the topic, exactly what your purpose in writing is, what audience to appeal to, what method of organization to use, how to achieve unity, coherence, and clarity, how to make the essay interesting and unique.

Most essays include the following essential elements: a thesis statement, a plan of organization, and an introduction and conclusion.

DEVELOPING A WORKING THESIS STATEMENT

Once you have limited your topic, determined your purpose and analyzed your audience, and developed a working outline, you have a general idea of how your essay will be put together. To help you achieve a clear direction, you must first write a thesis *statement*. **A thesis statement is a complete sentence that states the main idea of an essay and expresses the writer's purpose.**

A thesis statement does for an essay what a topic sentence does for a paragraph; it gives the writing focus and direction. A good method for organizing your essay is to write a working thesis statement before you write your first draft. A working thesis is one that can be changed as you progress through the writing process; therefore, your thesis for your final draft might be different from your working thesis. Most importantly, a working thesis can help you avoid straying from your purpose in writing.

A thesis statement should state the following:

1. A limited topic

Broad: Cooking

Limited: Preparing a healthful meal in thirty minutes

The limited topic narrows the topic; now the topic is focused on a healthful meal and a time span of thirty minutes. The topic is stated in specific terms.

2. What the writer wants to show or prove

A thesis statement is more than merely an announcement of your topic or a statement of fact. You should state your attitude toward the topic.

Example: Preparing a healthful meal in thirty minutes is simple.

The writer wants to prove that the process is simple.



EXERCISE 1 ► Explain what is ineffective about each of the following thesis statements. Each thesis might have more than one problem:

Topic is too broad.

Thesis does not include a statement of what the writer wants to show or prove.

Statement is an incomplete sentence.

Statement is a fact.

Statement is merely an announcement of the topic. Statement is not specific.

Then rewrite the thesis statement so that it is effective.

Example: *I learned to play the piano from my cousin Sue.*

Explain: Too broad, no statement of what writer wants to show, fact.

Rewrite: Learning to play the piano was worth the many hours of practice, difficult memorization, and expense.

1. The way to get a job interview.

Explain: _____

Rewrite: _____

2. Students are required to take final exams.

Explain: _____

Rewrite: _____

3. I am going to give my opinion about capital punishment.

Explain: _____

Rewrite: _____

4. The ancient Greeks were interesting.

Explain: _____

Rewrite: _____

5. Scheduling my classes for the spring semester.

Explain: _____

Rewrite: _____

6. Last year, over 1,000 lives were saved by vehicle air bags.
 Explain: _____

 Rewrite: _____

7. Being able to work together in a group is good.
 Explain: _____

 Rewrite: _____

8. A short story has a foundation in actual human experience.
 Explain: _____

 Rewrite: _____



EXERCISE 2 ▶ Develop a thesis statement for each of the following four topics.

Example: Yoga

Limited topic: *Yoga is effective exercise* _____

What the writer wants to show or prove: *That yoga is more than just exercise; reduces stress and helps a person sleep more soundly.* _____

Thesis statement: *Yoga is not only effective exercise but also a tool for reducing stress and sleeping more soundly.* _____

1. An embarrassing incident
 Limited topic: _____
 What the writer wants to show or prove: _____

 Thesis statement: _____

2. The library
 Limited topic: _____
 What the writer wants to show or prove: _____

 Thesis statement: _____

3. Grades

Limited topic: _____

What the writer wants to show or prove: _____

Thesis statement: _____

4. A hobby

Limited topic: _____

What the writer wants to show or prove: _____

Thesis statement: _____

ORGANIZING IDEAS

You can add another part to your thesis statement, a part that lists the essay's most important points. This list can help you organize your ideas. The following plan of organization includes explaining the three steps in a process, presented in time order.

Time Order

Example: Preparing a healthful meal in thirty minutes is simple when one follows three steps: planning the menu, assembling the ingredients and utensils, and using the microwave oven.

Here are examples based on the other ways of organizing.

Space Order

During WWII, a young woman from Yugoslavia made an incredible journey on foot from Belgrade through Austria to American Occupied Germany.

Plan of organization: Moves from Belgrade to Austria to American Occupied Germany

Order of Importance

The dangers of amnesia, violent behavior, and even death should prompt a user of phencyclidine, or PCP, to reach out for help immediately.

Plan of organization: Moves from least to most important, from amnesia to violent behavior to death



EXERCISE 1 ► Rewrite the following thesis statements so that they list the essay's most important points.

Example: The library is the most conducive study area on campus.

The quiet atmosphere, the comfortable chairs, and the pleasant staff make the library the most conducive study area on campus.

1. An early snowstorm made a lasting impression on a four-year-old boy visiting his grandparents in Michigan.

2. Most students can learn how to overcome test anxiety.

3. My doctor's office readily promotes an atmosphere of trust.

4. Understanding a poem is not difficult if the reader follows certain guidelines.

5. The West Central Post Office earned its reputation of being the best post office in the northwest part of the city.

Other ways of organizing and developing an essay exist. The more advanced you become as a writer, the more you will learn in other courses and from other textbooks. In this book, you are learning the basics of essay writing.

Now that your thesis statement is written, you can write an outline to use as a guide for writing your essay. An essay includes three basic elements of organization:

1. Introductory paragraph (includes the thesis statement)
2. Body paragraphs (provide support for the thesis statement)
3. Concluding paragraph (summarizes topic or emphasizes importance of topic)

If you have an effective and complete thesis statement, your working outline should develop naturally from it. A working outline, like a working thesis statement, can be changed as you write. Its main value is that it can help you start your first draft of the essay.

Thesis Statement: Preparing a healthful meal in thirty minutes is simple when one follows three steps: planning the menu, assembling the ingredients and utensils, and using the microwave oven.

Outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. Planning the menu
 - A. Balance of food groups
 - B. Quantity
 - C. Complementary tastes
- III. Assembling the ingredients and utensils
 - A. Food
 - B. Spices
 - C. Mixing and cutting utensils
 - D. Cooking dishes
- IV. Using the microwave oven
- V. Conclusion


 BODY

The essay's most important points become the main headings in the outline and usually develop into the body paragraphs of the essay.



EXERCISE 2 ▶ Write a working outline for the thesis statements you wrote in Exercise 1.

- Example:
- I. *Introduction*
 - II. *Quiet atmosphere*
 - A. *Quiet students*
 - B. *Copiers in separate room*
 - III. *Comfortable chairs*
 - A. *Right height*
 - B. *Supportive backs*
 - C. *Not too comfortable*
 - IV. *Pleasant staff*
 - A. *Helpful*
 - B. *Not pesty*
 - V. *Conclusion*

WRITING INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introductory and concluding paragraphs play a special role in an essay. If your first paragraph does not entice the audience to read the essay, it does not matter how effective the rest of the essay is. Similarly, if the last paragraph does not bring the essay to a logical end, your readers will be disappointed. Introductions and conclusions should not be tacked on; they are vital to the effectiveness of your essay.

Introductions

The introductory paragraph begins the essay by arousing the audience's interest and presenting the thesis statement. Do not apologize in the introductory paragraph for the essay, but do write with confidence. Some methods to use in getting the audience's interest are these:

- Ask a question or series of questions about the topic.
- Tell a short story about the topic.
- Use a quotation from a written source, preferably from a well-known person or literary work.
- Emphasize the importance of the topic.
- Define a term or concept to be discussed.
- Give a startling or unusual fact or figure.
- Begin with a general statement of the topic and then limit or narrow it.
- Give a number of vivid, specific details that create a certain setting or mood.

Here is an introduction that gets the audience's interest by telling a story that leads to the last sentence, the thesis statement:

Coming to a new land as a visitor is usually an exciting experience, but being forced to live in exile is not. Paradoxically, I have enjoyed and suffered both such experiences in this country. Granted a Fulbright award, I came from Viet Nam to the United States in 1974 for a graduate program in American studies; I would have eventually taught American Studies at college level back home. Eight months later, Saigon was "liberated" and my plan was defeated. Nevertheless, I nurtured the hope of going back to Viet Nam to be reunited with my wife and two children. Many times I petitioned to the new rulers in my country for my return, but they merely ignored me. At this point I should have realized that I could no longer break through the political barrier to get back to my home. Therefore, I made up my mind to apply for permanent residence and employment authorization in this country. Along with my decision came problems I had not anticipated. Solving the problems of how to make a living, how to adapt to a society I had not planned to live in permanently, and how to plan my future made living in exile quite difficult.

Conclusions

The concluding paragraph should give the audience a sense of completion. You can summarize the main points you made in the body paragraphs, or you can again emphasize the importance of the topic. Be sure that your conclusion is a paragraph, not simply one sentence. And be careful not to introduce a new point in the conclusion. The following sample conclusion was written for the sample introduction:

I have struggled, I have cried, I have cursed, but, most importantly, I have adapted. Living in exile has its problems, yes, but they can be overcome. Now that I have made a life for myself and am planning my future, I can say with confidence that it is on this shore I am harboring my hopes.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN



Writing and Revising the Essay

In writing and revising an essay, as in writing and revising a paragraph, you continue to use the writing process. Note the guidelines and checklists in this chapter.

WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

Guidelines for Writing First Draft Essays

- Write while your ideas are fresh in your mind.
- Remember that no part of your first draft has to be permanent. You can always change what you have written.
- Write on one side of the paper only. Leave wide margins on both the left and right so you can add information or make notes to yourself later. Skip every other line for the same reason.
- Stop occasionally to reread what you have been writing. Then, if you need to delete something, put a line through it. Do not mark out the material completely because you might decide to reinsert the information later or use it somewhere else.
- Briefly consult your working thesis statement and working outline if you need to, but do not spend time trying to make the essay a finished product yet.
- Although you might stop occasionally, do not spend time worrying about individual words. If you cannot think of the word you want, write down a word close to the one you want, circle it, and keep writing. You can change the word later. Likewise, if you write a sentence that is not exactly what you wanted to say, put a mark in the margin so that you can come back to the sentence later rather than interrupting the flow of your ideas.
- Remember, your first draft is supposed to be a rough draft. Sloppy penmanship is fine as long as you can read what you have written.
- Relax and work at a comfortable pace. You do not need to be nervous; try not to rush through the first draft. Think about what you are saying, perhaps even saying it aloud to yourself, and continue with what you should say next.

The stages of a first draft essay are illustrated in the following examples of a brainstorming list, list for developing a working thesis statement, working thesis statement, working outline, and first draft of an essay. Notice how the ideas progress from a random list into a specific, organized topic.

Brainstorming List

After listing ideas, the writer made notes, drew lines through unnecessary information, circled the main ideas, and drew arrows to indicate which ideas work together.

May, 1996- auto accident

main idea

sunny day

just left work

took usual route

changing lanes

checked my blind spot

woman pulled in front of me, I didn't see

looked up into a huge, white wall of car

shocked!

hit my head, chest, knee

passed out for a few seconds

totaled my car

wasn't wearing seat belt

noise of the cars smashing — *senses* — *main idea*

paramedic was driving by, stopped

stayed w/me till ambulance came, took my pulse

presence of mind to take garage door opener w/me

taken to emergency room, minor injuries

soreness for four months

nightmares frequent--hitting car

main idea

that split second

wake up sweating, heart pounding

waiting for husband in hospital

commercial on TV

burst into tears

realized I could have died

{ realized I was mortal

a long time before I would drive that route

~~knew the nurse~~

~~highway patrolman came in to question me~~

~~very professional~~

different topic

~~very nice~~

~~issued me a citation~~

~~Okla. law hit someone from back, you're guilty~~

always wear my seat belt now

nightmares--I ran into trucks, cars, vans, everything

paramedics removed me from car--I could smell spring air *—senses*

on my back, the sky so blue *—senses*

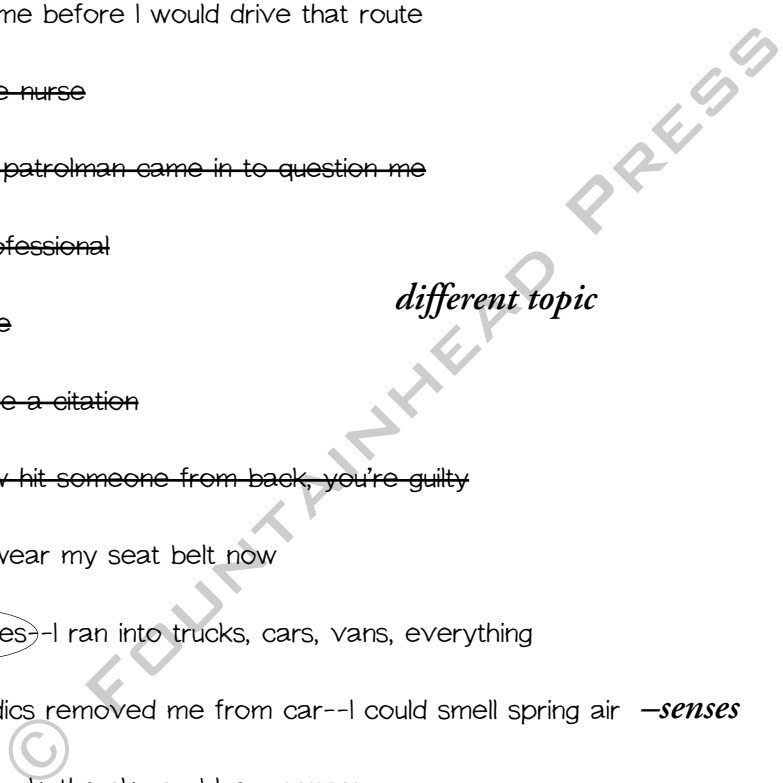
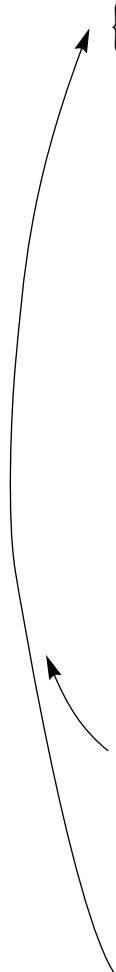
death happens to others, not me

colors seemed so vivid *—senses*

yellow van

blue paramedics' uniforms

white car--big square trunk



huge “Ford”—shiny metal word

embarrassed

scared

stunned

~~my life didn't flash in front of me~~

Developing the Working Thesis Statement

From the notes and marks on the brainstorming list, the writer decided upon a limited topic, what she wanted to show, and which plan of organization to use.

Limited topic: Effects of an automobile accident

What I want to show: I now intensely feel my own mortality.

Plan of organization: (time order) shock of being in an accident, heightened senses, nightmares

Working Thesis Statement

With the limited topic clearly in mind, the writer focused on what she wanted to show—and the order of the ideas—so that she could write a thesis statement.

Working Thesis Statement: After my automobile accident, shock, heightened senses, and, eventually, nightmares combined to make me intensely feel my mortality.

Working Outline

The working outline reflects the thesis statement and plan of organization. The main topics (shock, heightened senses, and nightmares) become the main entries in the outline.

- I. Introduction—leading up to the accident
- II. My shock
 - A. Accident
 - B. Emergency room
- III. Heightened senses
 - A. Feelings
 - B. Smells
 - C. Especially colors
- IV. Nightmares
- V. Conclusion—emphasize feeling of mortality

First Draft

On the first draft, the writer marked out a sentence, circled questionable words, and put a question mark by a one-sentence paragraph she wanted to look at again.

My Automobile Accident

After my automobile accident, shock, heightened senses, and, eventually, nightmares combined to make me intensely feel my mortality. I left work as I usually do, ready for a relaxing evening at home. It was a sunny day in May of 1996. I took my usual route home. I thought nothing of checking my “blind spot” when I decided to change lanes on a busy cross-town thoroughfare. Unfortunately, as I turned to look back, the jerk in the lane to my left pulled in front of me and came to a complete stop. I was going the speed limit, 50 miles per hour, when I turned around, only two seconds later, to see a huge, white wall of automobile ten feet from me. I hit my brake, but it was too late. My car smashed into hers! I was shocked and stunned. How could such a thing have happened to me?

Since I wasn't wearing my seat belt, I hit my head on the windshield, my chest on the steering wheel, and my knee on the dash. The actual impact of my body against the car is still something I don't remember. I must have lost consciousness for a few seconds and slumped into the passenger's seat. Slowly I sat up and felt my forehead, or, rather, the large bump on my forehead.

~~I kept wondering how this could have happened.~~ I couldn't comprehend what had happened. Then someone was opening the passenger door and asking if I was hurt. The caring stranger was a paramedic who just happened to be driving by and saw the accident. This man, whose face I don't remember and whose name I never knew, stayed with me, checked my pulse, talked to me until the ambulance arrived.

I was still shocked, though. “There must be some mistake. Or maybe it's a dream,” I kept thinking. “Things like this don't happen to me,” I said to him, as he patiently watched me.

At the emergency room I kept waiting to wake up from the horrible dream. Instead, I was examined and x-rayed. Unbelievably, not one of my bones was broken and I didn't have a concussion. What I did have was incredible pain throughout my body. I felt like a prize fighter who had just lost a championship fight—or so I imagined.

When I was finally released, I sat waiting for my husband in a waiting room and stared at the television that no one else was watching. My brain refused to function until a commercial for coffee got my attention. A happy family was waking up to the smell of coffee, the sun was pouring in through the kitchen windows, and everyone was smiling. I burst into tears. “I could have died, I could have died,” I muttered. It was the first time in my thirty years that the idea of my own mortality was real to me. The realization was reinforced by nightmares to follow.

As I thought about the accident, the only thing I could focus on was the sense images I had experienced. The awful sound of the cars colliding still made the fillings in my teeth hurt; that sound of metal on metal is awful. The smell of the spring air was sweet and fresh. The sky was as blue as lapis, so blue I could barely look at it. Colors, all colors, were particularly vivid: the yellow of the paramedic's van, the blue of the ambulance driver's uniform.

But the most vivid color was the white of the car I ran into. Bold, menacing white! I didn't even have to shut my eyes to see that big, square trunk with the shiny metal "Ford" on it.

Also, I could still feel the sun on my face like a reminder that everyone else's day was going along fine. ?

For months after the accident, I had nightmares, at first, every night, then, later, every week. The scenario was always the same. I would be just about to fall asleep when I would relive that split second before the crash. The vehicles I ran into were varied; sometimes I hit a car, sometimes a truck, sometimes a van. But I hit it—and then would wake up in a pool of sweat, my heart pounding.

My accident and the reactions I had taught me some valuable lessons: I always wear my seat belt now and I started driving a different route home. However, the most important thing I learned was that I was mortal.

REVISING THE FIRST DRAFT

The stages of revising the essay are illustrated in the following examples of a first draft with revision notes, a second draft, a second draft with revision notes, and a third draft. Although only three drafts are shown here, you might need to write more than three before your essay is completed.

Guidelines for Revising First Draft Essays

- Set your essay aside for some time so you can be more objective when you look at it later.
- When you come back to the essay, do not try to revise everything in it. Instead, concentrate on purpose, audience, organization, and focus by using the checklist that follows.

CHECKLIST: *Revising First Draft Essays*

1. Does the essay fulfill your purpose in writing?
2. Does the essay contain the information pertinent for your particular audience?
3. Is the thesis statement focused on a limited topic? Does it state what you want to show or prove? Does it include the essay's most important points? (See the section Writing the First Draft in this chapter.)
4. Do the major points in the body paragraphs support the thesis statement? Remember that, if you need to, you can rewrite your thesis statement to fit your essay. In fact, by the time you finish the essay, you might have a better thesis statement than the one you used at first.
5. Did you include all the points or ideas you wanted to cover?
6. Are the paragraphs organized in an effective way? (See the section Revising the First Draft in this chapter.)
7. Is each individual paragraph organized in an effective way?
8. Does the introduction arouse the audience's interest and present the thesis statement? (See the section Revising the Second Draft in this chapter.)

9. Does the conclusion give the audience a sense of completion? (See the section Revising the Second Draft in this chapter.)

First Draft with Revision Notes

Here is the first draft of the essay with the writer’s revision marks and notes. Notice how she focused on her purpose in writing and on paragraph organization.

My Automobile Accident – *boring – need better title*

After my automobile accident, shock, heightened senses, and, eventually, nightmares combined to make me intensely feel my mortality. I left work as I usually do, ready for a relaxing evening at home. It was a sunny day in May of 1996. I took my usual route home. I thought nothing of checking my “blind spot” when I decided to change lanes on a busy cross-town thoroughfare. Unfortunately, as I turned to look back, the jerk in the lane to my left pulled in front of me and came to a complete stop. I was going the speed limit, 50 miles per hour, when I turned around, only two seconds later, to see a huge, white wall of automobile ten feet from me. I hit my brakes, but it was too late. My car smashed into hers! (I was shocked and stunned. How could such a thing have happened to me?)

later in ¶ – build up to it – keep readers interested

part of next ¶

Since I wasn’t wearing my seat belt, I hit my head on the windshield, my chest on the steering wheel, and my knee on the dash. The actual impact of my body against the car is still something I don’t remember. I must have lost consciousness for a few seconds and slumped into the passenger’s seat. Slowly I sat up and felt my forehead, or, rather, the large bump on my forehead.

better in intro – part of accident

I kept wondering how this could have happened. I couldn’t comprehend what had happened. Then someone was opening the passenger door and asking if I was hurt. The caring stranger was a paramedic who just happened to be driving by and saw the accident. This man, whose face I don’t remember and whose name I never knew, stayed with me, checked my pulse, talked to me until the ambulance arrived.

I was still shocked, though. “There must be some mistake. or maybe it’s a dream,” I kept thinking. “Things like this don’t happen to me,” I said to him, as he patiently watched me.

¶ too short – probably add to preceding ¶

At the emergency room I kept waiting to wake up from the horrible dream. Instead, I was examined and x-rayed. Unbelievably, not one of my bones was broken and I didn’t have a concussion. What I did have was incredible pain throughout my body. I felt like a prize fighter who had just lost a championship fight—or so I imagined.

When I was finally released, I sat waiting for my husband in a waiting room and stared at the television that no one else was watching. My brain refused to function until a commercial for coffee got my attention. A happy family was waking up to the smell of coffee, the sun was pouring in through the kitchen windows, and everyone was smiling. I burst into tears. “I could have died, I could have died,” I muttered. It was the first time in my thirty years that the idea of my own mortality was real to me. The realization was reinforced by nightmares to follow.

doesn’t belong here – part of another ¶

As I thought about the accident, the only thing I could focus on was the sense images I had experienced. The awful sound of the cars colliding still made the fillings in my teeth hurt; that sound of metal on metal is awful. The smell of the spring air was sweet and fresh. The sky was as blue as lapis, so blue I could barely look at it. Colors, all colors, were particularly vivid: the yellow of the paramedic's van, the blue of the ambulance driver's uniform.

*part of ¶
on senses* (But the most vivid color was the white of the car I ran into. Bold, menacing white! I didn't even have to shut my eyes to see that big, square trunk with the shiny metal "Ford" on it.

*too short –
add to ¶
on senses* (Also, I could still feel the sun on my face like a reminder that everyone else's day was going along fine.

For months after the accident, I had nightmares, at first, every night, then, later, every week. The scenario was always the same. I would be just about to fall asleep when I would relive that split second before the crash. The vehicles I ran into were varied; sometimes I hit a car, sometimes a truck, sometimes a van. But I hit it—and then would wake up in a pool of sweat, my heart pounding.

*no sense of
completion –
add more?* (My accident and the reactions I had taught me some valuable lessons: I always wear my seat belt now and I started driving a different route home. However, the most important thing I learned was that I was mortal.

Second Draft

After incorporating the first draft revisions, the writer wrote the second draft.

Crashing into Mortality

I left work as I usually do, ready for a relaxing evening at home. It was a sunny day in May of 1996. I took my usual route home. I thought nothing of checking my "blind spot" when I decided to change lanes on a busy cross-town thoroughfare. Unfortunately, as I turned to look back, the jerk in the lane to my left pulled in front of me and came to a complete stop. I was going the speed limit, 50 miles per hour, when I turned around, only two seconds later, to see a huge, white wall of automobile ten feet from me. I hit my brakes, but it was too late. My car smashed into hers! Since I wasn't wearing my seat belt, I hit my head on the windshield, my chest on the steering wheel, and my knee on the dash. After my automobile accident, shock, heightened senses, and, eventually, nightmares combined to make me intensely feel my mortality.

The actual impact of my body against the car is still something I don't remember. I must have lost consciousness for a few seconds and slumped into the passenger's seat. Slowly I sat up and felt my forehead, or, rather, the large bump on my forehead.

I couldn't comprehend what had happened. Then someone was opening the passenger door and asking if I was hurt. The caring stranger was a paramedic who just happened to be driving by and saw the accident. This man, whose face I don't remember and whose

name I never knew, stayed with me, checked my pulse, talked to me until the ambulance arrived. I was still shocked, though. “There must be some mistake. Or maybe it’s a dream,” I kept thinking. “Things like this don’t happen to me,” I said to him, as he patiently watched me.

At the emergency room I kept waiting to wake up from the horrible dream. Instead, I was examined and x-rayed. Unbelievably, not one of my bones was broken and I didn’t have a conclusion. What I did have was incredible pain throughout my body. I felt like a prize fighter who had just lost a championship fight—or so I imagined.

When I was finally released, I sat waiting for my husband in a waiting room and stared at the television that no one else was watching. My brain refused to function until a commercial for coffee got my attention. A happy family was waking up to the smell of coffee, the sun was pouring in through the kitchen windows, and everyone was smiling. I burst into tears. “I could have died, I could have died,” I muttered. It was the first time in my thirty years that the idea of my own mortality was real to me.

As I thought about the accident, the only thing I could focus on was the sense images I had experienced. The awful sound of the cars colliding still made the fillings in my teeth hurt; that sound of metal on metal is appalling. The smell of the spring air was sweet and fresh. The sky was as blue as lapis, so blue I could barely look at it. Colors, all colors, were particularly vivid: the yellow of the paramedic’s van, the blue of the ambulance driver’s uniform. But the most vivid color was the white of the car I ran into. Bold, menacing white! I didn’t even have to shut my eyes to see that big, square trunk with the shiny metal “Ford” on it. To top it off, I could still feel the sun on my face like a reminder that everyone else’s day was going along fine.

The realization of my mortality was reinforced by the nightmares I had for months after the accident. At first, I had them every night, then, later, every week. The scenario was always the same. I would be just about to fall asleep when I would relive that split second before the crash. The vehicles I ran into were always different; sometimes I hit a car, sometimes a truck, sometimes a van. But I hit it—and then would wake up in a pool of sweat, my heart pounding.

All my life I thought death was something that happened to other people but would never happen to me. My accident and the reactions I had taught me some valuable lessons: I always wear my seat belt now and I started driving a different route home. However, the most important thing I learned was that I am mortal.

REVISING THE SECOND DRAFT

Revise the second draft of your essay by concentrating on the development of your ideas.

✓ CHECKLIST: *Revising Second Draft Essays*

1. Are all the main points supported and clear?
2. Are specific details used to explain each idea?
3. Is any of the information unnecessary? Think about your purpose in writing and what you are trying to show or prove.
4. Does each paragraph contain an effective topic sentence?
5. Is each paragraph unified and coherent?
6. Is anything repeated too often?

Second Draft with Revision Notes

The revision notes indicate passages that are vague, repetitious, or not detailed enough.

Crashing into Mortality

I left work as I usually do, ready for a relaxing evening at home. It was a sunny day in May of 1996. I took my usual route home. I thought nothing of checking my “blind spot” when I decided to change lanes on a busy cross-town thoroughfare. Unfortunately, as I turned to look back, the jerk in the lane to my left pulled in front of me and came to a complete stop. I was going the speed limit, 50 miles per hour, when I turned around, only two seconds later, to see a huge, white wall of automobile ten feet from me. I hit my brakes, but it was too late. My car smashed into hers! Since I wasn’t wearing my seat belt, I hit my head on the windshield, my chest on the steering wheel, and my knee on the dash. After my automobile accident, shock, heightened senses, and, eventually, nightmares combined to make me intensely feel my mortality.

vague – need better topic sentence – What’s the point? Removed from my memory?

The actual impact of my body against the car is still something I don’t remember. I must have lost consciousness for a few seconds and slumped into the passenger’s seat. Slowly I sat up and felt my forehead, or, rather, the large bump on my forehead.

better t.s. – what’s the main idea

I couldn’t comprehend what had happened. Then someone was opening the passenger door and asking if I was hurt. The caring stranger was a paramedic who just happened to be driving by and saw the accident. This man, whose face I don’t remember and whose name I never knew, stayed with me, checked my pulse, talked to me until the ambulance arrived. I was still shocked, though. “There must be some mistake. Or maybe it’s a dream,” I kept thinking. “Things like this don’t happen to me,” I said to him, as he patiently watched me.

rep.

something missing – more details – knee, head, chest injured

At the emergency room I kept waiting to wake up from the horrible dream. Instead, I was examined and x-rayed. Unbelievably, not one of my bones was broken and I didn’t have a concussion. What I did have was incredible pain throughout my body. I felt like a prize fighter who had just lost a championship fight—or so I imagined.

When I was finally released, I sat waiting for my husband in a waiting room and stared at the television that no one else was watching. My brain refused to function until a commercial for coffee got my attention. A happy family was waking up to the smell of coffee,

the sun was pouring in through the kitchen windows, and everyone was smiling. I burst into tears. “I could have died, I could have died,” I muttered. It was the first time in my thirty years that the idea of my own mortality was real to me.

As I thought about the accident, the only thing I could focus on was the sense images I had experienced. The awful sound of the cars colliding still made the fillings in my teeth hurt; that sound of metal on metal is appalling. The smell of the spring air was sweet and fresh. The sky was as blue as lapis, so blue I could barely look at it. Colors, all colors, were particularly vivid: the yellow of the paramedic’s van, the blue of the ambulance driver’s uniform. But the most vivid color was the white of the car I ran into. Bold, menacing white! I didn’t even have to shut my eyes to see that big, square trunk with the shiny metal “Ford” on it. To top it off, I could still feel the sun on my face like a reminder that everyone else’s day was going along fine.

How do these details fit it?

What’s the point?

The realization of my mortality was reinforced by the nightmares I had for months after the accident. At first, I had them every night, then, later, every week. The scenario was always the same. I would be just about to fall asleep when I would relive that split second before the crash. The vehicles I ran into were always different; sometimes I hit a car, sometimes a truck, sometimes a van. But I hit it—and then would wake up in a pool of sweat, my heart pounding.

All my life I thought death was something that happened to other people but would never happen to me. My accident and the reactions I had taught me some valuable lessons: I always wear my seat belt now and I started driving a different route home. However, the most important thing I learned was that I am mortal.

Third Draft

After incorporating the second draft revisions, the writer wrote the third draft.

Crashing into Mortality

I left work as I usually do, ready for a relaxing evening at home. It was a sunny day in May of 1996. I took my usual route home. I thought nothing of checking my “blind spot” when I decided to change lanes on a busy cross-town thoroughfare. Unfortunately, as I turned to look back, the jerk in the lane to my left pulled in front of me and came to a complete stop. I was going the speed limit, 50 miles per hour, when I turned around, only two seconds later, to see a huge, white wall of automobile ten feet from me. I hit my brake, but it was too late. My car smashed into hers! Since I wasn’t wearing my seat belt, I hit my head on the windshield, my chest on the steering wheel, and my knee on the dash. After my automobile accident, shock, heightened senses, and, eventually, nightmares combined to make me intensely feel my mortality.

The actual impact of my body against the car seemed to be an instant in time that had been immediately removed from my memory. I must have lost consciousness for a few seconds and slumped into the passenger’s seat. Slowly I sat up and felt my forehead, or, rather, the large bump on my forehead.

The next few events were almost incomprehensible to me. Someone was opening the passenger door and asking if I was hurt. The caring stranger was a paramedic who just happened to be driving by and saw the accident. This man, whose face I don't remember and whose name I never knew, stayed with me, checked my pulse, talked to me until the ambulance arrived. I was still in a daze, though. "There must be some mistake. or maybe it's a dream," I kept thinking. "Things like this don't happen to me," I said to him, as he patiently watched me.

At the emergency room I kept waiting to wake up from the horrible dream. Instead, I was examined and x-rayed. Unbelievably, not one of my bones was broken and I didn't have a concussion. What I did have was incredible pain throughout my body. I could barely walk because my knee was swollen and bruised, and my head throbbed with every sound I heard. My chest ached with each small breath I tried to take. I felt like a prize fighter who had just lost a championship fight—or so I imagined.

When I was finally released, I sat waiting for my husband in a waiting room and stared at the television that no one else was watching. My brain refused to function until a commercial for coffee got my attention. A happy family was waking up to the smell of coffee, the sun was pouring in through the kitchen windows, and everyone was smiling. I burst into tears. "I could have died, I could have died," I muttered. It was the first time in my thirty years that the idea of my own mortality was real to me.

As I thought about the accident, the only thing I could focus on was the sense images I had experienced. The awful sound of the cars colliding still made the fillings in my teeth hurt; that sound of metal on metal is appalling. As if suddenly life's images were magnified, the smell of the spring air hit me--sweet and fresh. The sky was as blue as lapis, so blue I could barely look at it. Colors, all colors, were particularly vivid: the yellow of the paramedic's van, the blue of the ambulance driver's uniform. But the most vivid color was the white of the car I ran into. Bold, menacing white! I didn't even have to shut my eyes to see that big, square trunk with the shiny metal "Ford" on it. To top it off, I could still feel the sun on my face like a reminder that everyone else's day was going along fine.

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EDITING AND PROOFREADING THE ESSAY

Editing your essay is a way to concentrate on clarity and emphasis, and proofreading gives you a chance to catch any errors. For instance, the writer of “Crashing into Mortality” must check her essay, perhaps circling words to change, such as “jerk” and “awful.” In addition, she might mark some of the shorter sentences that could benefit from sentence/idea combining.

Practice Writing

Write an essay; you may want to use one of the topics listed below.

Possible Topics

a special person I know who has a particular talent

how I or someone I know copes with a physical or cultural handicap

a time when I was considered an outsider because of social or ethnic differences between me and others

my first experience with real danger

a ritual I participated in: wedding, confirmation, bar mitzvah, and so on

a cherished moment in my life.



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