

Elements of the Expository Essay

Keyterms: *Recurring or repeated words or phrases—or even images*—that help to establish focus, context, argument, theme, or framework either literally or metaphorically. Keyterms should be intentional and thoughtfully well chosen, clear in their intended meaning, and defined. Keyterms initially appear in an introduction & thesis (or the equivalent in poetry, fiction, non-fiction prose, and other genres), but also throughout an argument essay to help maintain focus & assist organization or argumentative strategies. Keyterms should be related to topic & argument, not general or simplistic, clichéd, or vague abstractions (e.g. “the evils of society.”).

Analysis: Critical thinking that breaks down & interprets evidence and ideas to show or create new meaning, and to support or explain, an argument. Analysis occurs when you go beyond merely observing or summarizing to show & explain *how* & *why* evidence contributes to a whole, or *how* causes produce an effect, etc. Analysis can draw out implications not apparent in a quick first cursory reading. Analysis is “I Say” writing that makes a writer present as an active, discerning, critical reader/voice.

Motive: The reason an argument is important and why readers should care about an argument. Motive is introduced at the start of an essay, initially in a hook (an attention-getting quotation, saying, idea, image, anecdote, example, etc.). Motive answers the questions: *So What? Why does this problem or issue matter?* and *Who Cares?* You establish motive by using & referring back to the hook, putting your ideas into a larger conversation or discussion about a topic, addressing assumptions or other arguments, showing that others disagree, explaining different positions, presenting puzzles or conflicts, or offering new insights. Developing motive involves entering a conversation (with critics, interlocutors, sources, audiences)—in the case of the intended audience you’re writing to, inviting them to join a conversation that continues in *your* argument. Establishing Motive is a key component of successful introductions because it both provides context for the argument and heralds your imminent thesis with nuance & complexity.

Thesis: The main I SAY assertion in an argument—the main proposition that an essay argues for & supports. A thesis is not a question, but can be prompted by one, i.e. establishing Motive can involve posing a question that the Thesis provides the start of a thoughtful, well-thought-out answer. Thesis must be arguable & propose an alternative among other viewpoints. It must be focused & limited enough in scope to connect to evidence, texts and focus of analysis. Thesis should be stated clearly & concretely (usually at the end of an Introduction), and govern the flow of the argument—not disappear into tangents or digressions (though it can expand or become more elaborate or complex as the essay argument develops). A thesis makes a promise to readers that the argument fulfills.

Evidence: Data, quotations, examples, facts, or statistics that you reference by citing & explain through analysis to support an argument introduced by a Thesis. The argument must have *enough relevant* evidence to be persuasive. Evidence should not be taken out of context, connected to an argument, well documented, from reliable sources, & handled *accurately & fairly*.

Assumptions: Beliefs about life, people, history, ideas, etc. that are usually taken for granted or assumed to be common, natural, or universal by a group, and that you align or juxtapose your argument to in an attempt to connect with, diverge from, or illuminate readers. Your own assumptions should be acknowledged to show your biases and subject position—this makes an argument more objective and establishes strong ethos. We can allude to, evoke, challenge, or question our readers’ assumptions to help establish motive, or to persuade them of an alternative viewpoint.

Stance & Style: Stance refers to your position on an issue or argument & your implied relationship to readers & subject. When you develop stance, you position yourself as arbiter & interpreter. Stance is characterized by style & tone (e.g. familiar or formal); the presence or absence of specialized language; your willingness or unwillingness to orient a general, non-expert reader; or use or avoidance of scholarly conventions, as well as the strength of your position. Establish stance within the first few paragraphs of your essay & keep it consistent throughout. Style involves choices about using words, language/diction, literary or rhetorical devices, sentence structures, etc. Your style should be intentional, well thought out, precise (the right word), clear (unless your intention is irony, understatement, or surprise), & plain without being boring. Prose flow should be graceful & interesting, but without flowery language or purple prose (unless you have a good reason to use such language). The diction should not be abstract, vague, or clichéd, and the sentences should avoid meandering (again, unless this decision is part of writing strategy). Style works together with Stance to create writing animated by *your presence*. As you develop your own style, you develop a distinctive voice.

Stitching: Stitching refers to the ways you smoothly and logically tie together parts of an argument *using transition words or phrases* that connect the flow of ideas, assertions, evidence, analysis and paragraphs. Stitching can also *recollect or reiterate* ideas, keyterms, or keyphrases previously mentioned to maintain focus & connection as the essay progresses. *Orienting* is a particular kind of stitching that explains or brief summarizes unfamiliar dates, names, or places, vocabulary, or concepts. Use **Orienting** to introduce or identify people, new terminology or Keyterms, sources, or evidence: time (chronology, history), space (location, place), text (title, describe source or genre), author (professional credentials), etc.

Rhetorical Structural Moves: Intentional rhetorical strategy—turning points or moves—of an argument. Using the functions of those moves to craft logical or semantic shifts from hook to thesis to assertion to evidence to analysis to reflection to conclusion, e.g. *brief pauses to reflect* on meaning & *larger, more complex rhetorical turns* in analysis. Brief pauses might define terms or assumptions (What do I mean by this word? What assumptions am I making here?). Complex rhetorical turns might strategically situate a *counter-argument* to object, qualify, or offer an alternative position, or address a problem that a skeptical or resistant reader might raise. You might incorporate the RSM of *complication* to suggest that the argument you’re making isn’t quite as simple as readers might think.

Sources: Persons, texts, or documents referenced to support the plausibility of an argument. Sources can be books, articles, films, photographs, interviews, podcasts, songs, etc. that provide information or data, interpretations, or differing analyses related to and used to support your argument. Whether agreeing, challenging, or qualifying your sources, they must be *accurately presented, integrated, & fairly acknowledged* by correct citation & documentation using MLA internal citation & *Works Cited*.