

## News & Announcements

### Fall Workshops

Welcome back to a new school year! This fall Smart Tutor Referrals is pleased to be offering workshops for students and parents through Pearkes and Juan de Fuca Recreation Centres. The workshops are run by Smart Tutor Referrals instructors and focus on building understanding through practical, engaging activities.

#### Fall Workshop Topics

- ▶ Transition to Middle School
- ▶ Transition to High School
- ▶ KidSpeak (public speaking for middle school students)
- ▶ Essay Writing
- ▶ Provincial Exam Preparation

For more information on workshops, visit us online, contact us via telephone, or register directly through Pearkes or Juan de Fuca Recreation Centres.

*Space is limited, so please register early to avoid disappointment.*

### We're 3 Years Old!

We are pleased to announce the third anniversary of STR. Since 2002, hundreds of students in Victoria have benefitted from STR's private tutoring services and workshops.

Supporting the individual to success with a values-based approach is the key to our on-going success. Students and families benefit from our dedication to honesty, respect, positive vision, building learning confidence, individual ability and contribution.

### Saying Good-bye

Ruth McGhee, STR's School Liaison is returning to the classroom in September. Ruth, who has worked with Smart Tutor Referrals for more than a year, will continue to provide occasional workshops for STR. Her enthusiasm will be missed. Best of luck with your new classes, Ruth!

## Writing Essays

by *Dahlia Miller*

*"Writing is the best way to talk without being interrupted."*

Jules Renard

Do you enjoy writing essays? Like it or not, if you're in school above the grade four level, you are going to be asked to write at least one essay every term. So you need to know how to move through the essay writing process.

Why are teachers so crazy about having students write essays? Through your writing, your teachers can measure your ability to do research, to think logically, to organize ideas, to communicate formally in writing, to edit, and to keep on track in the writing process.

Luckily, essay writing is very structured. This means that once you've learned an essay-writing pattern, it's possible to use it over and over in cookie-cutter fashion. (Of course you'll impress your teachers more if you add some variety to your essay structure.)

This article focuses on the writing process. If you'd like more detailed information on other aspects of essay writing, you are invited to attend one of our four-hour essay writing workshops.

### The Essay Writing Process

There are 8 main steps in the essay writing process. They are the same whether you're writing a research paper or an essay in an exam, only the timeline changes.

#### 1. Define Your Topic

Often your teacher will assign an essay topic that is broad and needs to be narrowed. Or, you'll be asked to select a topic for yourself. To write a good essay, your topic needs to be very specific. Not "dogs", but "why big dogs make better pets than small dogs".

A good essay explores a narrow topic thoroughly. The trick is to find a topic that is specific enough so that you can easily stay focused, but broad enough so that you can find information to back your main idea.

It's easiest to write on topics that interest you personally. If you're interested, you'll enjoy the research and writing more, and you'll do a better job overall.

If a topic has been assigned, read it carefully for clues. What is the teacher looking for? You can brainstorm the topic to see which angle you've got the most interest in and information for. (Note: there are several effective styles for brainstorming – use whichever suits you best.) For instance, if the topic is "homelessness in Victoria", to look at the topic from different angles, you might consider the people affected (the homeless, the families of teens on the streets, the government, street workers, local business owners, street shelter providers). Then consider what each group's issues or problems are in relation to the topic. From here you can choose the perspective that interests you and has the most potential for development.

#### 2. Research

To back your argument, you need facts. You can find facts in books, in magazines, on the Internet, through interviews, and in class notes. It is important to use several sources when you are researching your topic.

In this first stage of research, skim sources briefly. You want to get a very general understanding of the facts so that you can formulate an argument (i.e. thesis). You'll do more thorough research at a later stage.

Obviously in an exam setting, you'll have to rely on brainstorming and materials provided in the exam for this step.

# About Us

## Our Mission Is:

- ▶ To provide top quality, flexible learning support and service to students and parents of students through:

*Superior private tutoring  
matched specifically to  
each student's needs.*

*Stimulating workshops  
building skills in a practical  
and creative way.*

- ▶ To enhance students' skills and increase learning confidence through individualized support, recognizing each student's unique abilities.
- ▶ To improve the quality of life, in individuals and communities through education.

**Our tutors** are certified teachers and professionals. Each is carefully screened and selected to match individual students' needs.

*We help students to achieve.*

For more information, and free study tips, visit us on-line at:

[www.SmartTutorReferrals.com](http://www.SmartTutorReferrals.com)

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## 3. Write a Thesis Statement

Your thesis is your argument. Once you've thought about the topic, it's important to narrow it even further to decide what you are going to argue.

A thesis statement describes what point you are going to prove. Be specific – if your thesis is too broad you may not have space to prove it, if it's too narrow you may not be able to prove it thoroughly. Don't be wishy-washy – say what you think and then back it up with facts. Be clear – lack of focus in a thesis statement will lead to an unfocused essay.

## 4. Create an Outline

Once you've written a thesis statement, go back to your research sources to find specific facts to back your argument. Most essays have one thesis statement with three main points to back it up. These points are like the main branches of a tree – they give shape and direction.

Your outline is a skeletal map to your final essay. Write your thesis statement at the top of a page and your main points equally spaced down the left hand side. Then consider each point as a mini-essay in itself. During your research, now, or after brainstorming, come up with three facts to back up each of your three main points. Fill these in on your outline.

## 5. Research

Once you have your outline in place, you can begin to fill in the gaps. Look more closely at your sources for specific details. Take time to understand the topic, but don't get caught up in detailed reading. Your reading and research should flesh out your outline. If you aren't finding facts to fill in your outline with more details, you're not on track.

Make notes as you read. It can help to organize your notes by topic. For example if you're writing about big versus small dogs for pets, you may have one page of notes for facts on attitude, one on cost of keeping the pet, and one on health concerns.

Be sure to keep track of bibliographic information as you research (i.e. author,

title of article, title of book or journal, page number, date, publisher and place of publication, web address). It's much easier to recycle unused bibliographic information than to relocate specific details once you've finished your research.

## 6. Write

An essay is made up of a number of pieces that should fit together logically. This is where your writing and editing skills come into play. You need to take all of your facts and arguments and weave them together into a unified piece of writing.

If your outline is detailed, it can help a great deal with the writing process. Focus on one paragraph at a time. Make a point and back it up with facts. Once you've written a number of paragraphs, you can add in linking words or sentences between them.

To get the words flowing, it can help to talk about a point then write what you say. On your first draft, just write, don't edit. You may like to write very bare bones sentences and add descriptive words in after.

## 7. Edit

Once you've finished your first draft, take a bit of time to think about your topic and thesis. If you can, leave a day or two between writing and editing. When you read your draft, ask yourself if it conveys the idea you want it to. Is your writing logical? Is it predictable or interesting? Are the sentences well written? Do you prove your point without exaggeration? Do you hold to one argument? Does the order of paragraphs make sense? It can help to read your writing aloud see how it flows.

## 8. Proofread

Once you've completed a second draft, proofread for spelling and grammatical errors. Check that you're within the assigned word limit. Be sure that you have varied the style of your sentences. It's really helpful to have someone else read your essay over. Perhaps you can swap with a classmate or ask a parent to proofread for you.

Essay writing is challenging. It takes time to develop this skill. Reflect on the process as you write. Improving the steps that give you the most difficulty will certainly benefit your writing over time.