



The Simple Essay

(Or how to disguise narrative pieces as expository essays by means of introduction and conclusion)

Locate a short (ca.1 page), personal piece of writing from show not tell, a journal entry, a personal narrative—actually, any descriptive or narrative piece you have written that means something to you will work. Your “Me as a Writer” draft would suit this format, I think. Simple Essay is also useful for contest entries such as “What Freedom Means to Me,” or “How Respect Helps Me Be Drug Free, et. al...those red ribbon contests that occur each year...”

Read your piece thoughtfully and choose an **abstract word** that describes what seems to be the most important theme of the writing, for example *love, joy, confusion, regret, fear, anticipation*, etc. Use that word to begin the introduction on your simple essay.

Introductory paragraph

(Abstract noun) is.....

.....
Define the word (connotation) and say a bit more about the idea it conveys. Give a brief example, perhaps, that relates to the piece you have selected for the body paragraph. Model on the *Appreciation* essay on the back of this page.


Middle part of the essay

Your completed piece of expressive writing becomes the body of the essay. It serves as a concrete example of the abstract word defined in the introductory paragraph. It should take ten to twenty concrete sentences to support one abstract statement.

Concluding paragraph

Draw a conclusion by putting together some words and/or ideas from the introduction and middle sections of your essay, and offer a fuller view of the abstract idea. The last sentence should contain a reference to the abstract noun. (Again, feel free to model on the *Appreciation* essay.)

Finally, compose an interesting title for your simple essay. Be sure to re-read and revise your essay to make it as rich and fine as it can be.



Written Impressions

Appreciation is the feeling of realizing the worth of what you have, treasuring and sharing it. When something taken for granted is lost, it may be truly appreciated in retrospect. When it is regained, the joy is overwhelming. Appreciation is what Robinson Crusoe felt for the fine companionship of the savage, Friday, having spent many empty years alone on his island of isolation.

My father lost the sight in his right eye in a boyhood slingshot accident. In middle age, he lost the sight of his left eye due to a detached retina. As a very young child my responsibilities for helping him were diverse, but none were as satisfying as collecting the mail. Periodically, my dad would receive big, black metal cases, strapped together with webbed belts and addressed in over-sized white painted printing. When mail such as this arrived, my importance in being the person of deliverance was justified. Excitedly, I would unstrap the box, take out the heavy records and place them on the phonograph. An anonymous voice would begin to read the classics to us. Slouched together on the couch, we listened raptly to the “Talking Books.”

Although he could order from a long list of titles, invariably it was Charles Dickens we listened to. I understood the tangled plots and sub-plots as well as I understood the reasons for happiness that filled me on such days. I loved the sounds of the words, the feel of my dad’s arms around me and sharing his contentment.

An operation was suggested for the retina. We were advised that the success rate was very low. It worked! His detached retina was somehow welded back together – mysteriously, scientifically, miraculously. My dad could see again.

If his appreciation of literature had been a joy unfulfilled while he was blind, it now became a joy fulfilled. He shared this joy by becoming to our family – a “Talking Book” personified. Every night of our lives from that point on, he read to us. Chapter by chapter, night by night, we heard all of the classics read in a voice pleased to be sharing the great works of man. We listened and were excited by his joy. You could even stop him and ask what a word meant, a luxury impossible with the original “Talking Books.” Many of the books were repeated, and if I complained, the stock answer was, “Well, you may have heard it but your little sister hasn’t heard this one.” Later it was my little brother hadn’t heard this one and so on. Out of desperation, I came to value the melody of the words more than surprise.

The years passed and I left home to attend college. Returning from school, late one evening, I opened the door and heard my father reading to my youngest brother, the baby of the family. He was reading *Robinson Crusoe*. The delight and surprise as he spied Friday’s footprints in the sand was thrilling. As inevitably as the tide and waves washed away those footprints, time has dispersed our family. But we each carry with us, wherever we go, our appreciation for the written word.