



Part One

An Overview of the Essay

The equivalent word of “essay” in Chinese is “lunwen,” which is specially used to indicate academic papers. The word “essay” in English has more meanings. It refers to not only academic papers but also ordinary expository writings. Sharing one name, these two sorts of writing must have something in common. If we learn about their common features, we will find that an academic paper, or a research paper, and an ordinary essay enjoy almost the same structure. Consequently, we will become more confident in writing the undergraduate honors paper, maybe our first research paper in real sense.

I What Is an Essay?

An essay is “a short literary composition on a particular theme or subject” (*Random House Dictionary*). In *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, it is defined as “an analytic or interpretative literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point of view; something resembling such a composition.” The two dictionaries have told us that basically, an essay is a composition on a certain topic, and with a point of view. It is always analytic or interpretative. It is also called a theme, especially when referring to the student’s essay.

An essay is written about one topic or one main idea, just as a paragraph is. The main idea of the essay is expressed in a thesis statement, which is much like the topic sentence in a paragraph. However, the topic of an essay is bigger and more complex than that of a paragraph. A well-written thesis statement not only pinpoints the main idea or topic, but also indicates the major subdivisions of the topic. In other words, it tells both the writer and the reader what the essay is driving home, and what major points are planned to help.

1 The Basic Structure of an Essay

An essay has three main parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction presents the thesis statement and catches the reader’s interest. Introductions can vary in length. For a brief essay of 300 to 500 words, a paragraph will be enough. Longer essays sometimes contain introductions of two or more paragraphs. The thesis statement is usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph, or at the end of the last paragraph of the introduction. Although it is acceptable to place it in other locations, many writers recommend that the thesis statement conclude the introduction so that it can lead naturally to the body of the essay.

To analyze in detail, an introduction has two parts: general statements, and a thesis statement. The following chart can well describe the functions of the two parts.

Introduction	
Items	Functions
general statements	introduce the topic of an essay give background information on the topic
thesis statement	state the main topic list subdivisions/subtopics indicate organization of the entire paper

A skillful writer will start his introduction with a very general comment about the subject of the essay so as to attract the reader's attention and to give background information on the topic. Each subsequent sentence in the introduction becomes more specific than the previous one and finally leads into or brings forth the thesis statement.

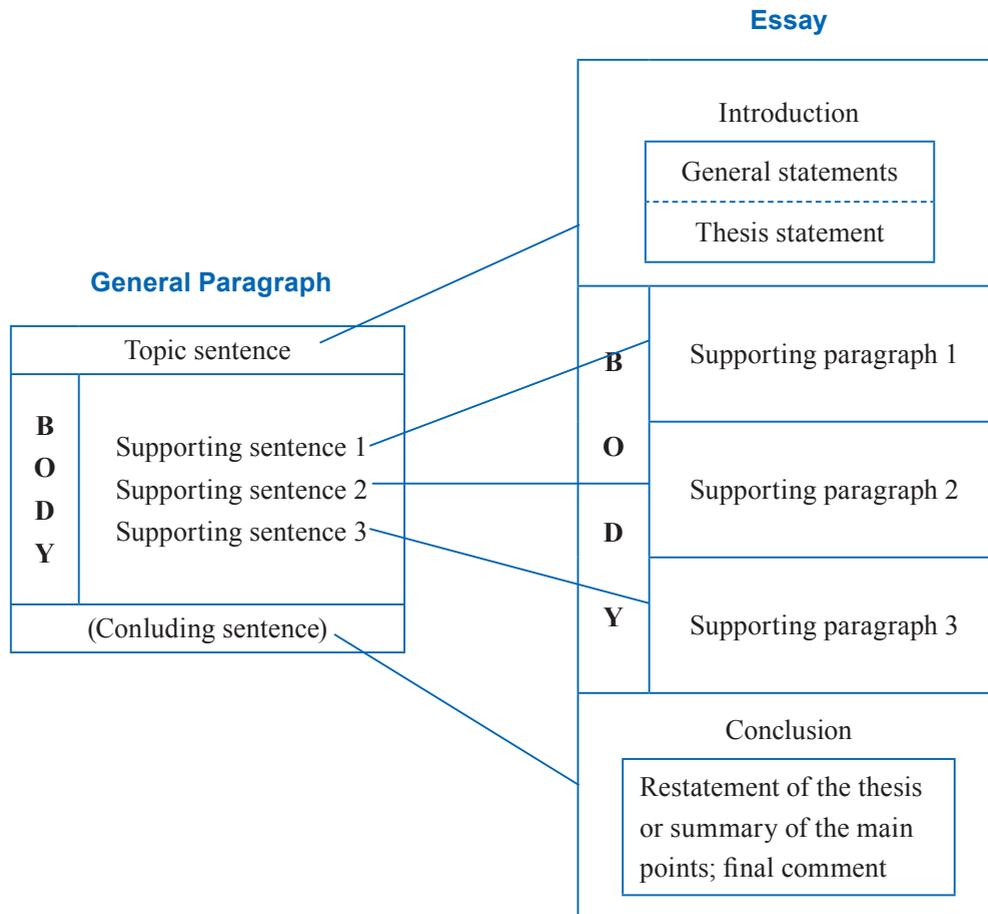
The body is the longest part of an essay. It usually consists of one or more paragraphs, and its purpose is to develop and expand upon the thesis statement. Each body paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic, so the number of paragraphs in the body is usually decided by the number of subdivisions indicated in the thesis statement. The body paragraphs are like the supporting sentences of a paragraph. They can be arranged by chronological order or by order of importance, just as the supporting sentences in a paragraph. And the ways of organization are very often suggested in the thesis statement by the order of subdivision listing.

The conclusion of an essay is usually stated in the last paragraph. It may consume more than one paragraph in a long essay as in the case of introductions. The conclusion in an essay, like the concluding sentence in a paragraph, is a summary or review of the main points discussed in the body, or a restatement of the main topic/thesis. Moreover, a skillful writer would think that besides having a strong and effective message to the reader by taking the last opportunity to make the point, it is wise to add a final comment on the subject to urge the reader to take a certain course of action. Usually, the conclusion starts with a transitional signal to call the attention of the reader. The following chart can well describe the functions of the conclusion.

Conclusion	
Items	Functions
a transitional signal	tell the reader we are going to wind up the essay
a summary of the main points or a restatement of the thesis in different words	remind the reader of the main idea or main points
a final comment on the subject	urge the reader to take a certain course of action

In actual reading, we may occasionally find an essay that departs slightly from this three-part structure. For example, an introduction may consist of only one sentence or start with a question. A conclusion may be a one-sentence paragraph or several paragraphs. We may even find essays in which the thesis is implied rather than directly stated. In any case, we can recognize the basic three-part structure and the functions of each part in such essays. We can see that writing an essay is essentially the same as writing a paragraph: An essay is just longer. This is decided by the same purpose of writing a paragraph or an essay. In both forms of writing, the writer is to express some certain idea. To get this idea clearly explained, he follows the same way to organize his material just because of the restriction of the English thought pattern. The chart below shows us how the parts of a paragraph correspond to the parts of an essay.

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2 Essays in Different Types of Writing

Different types of writing are required for different purposes. In general, we can divide writing into four kinds: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Since argumentation is actually exposition with the additional purpose of convincing and persuading, in some writing books, writing is classified as narration, description and exposition.

1) Narration and the narrative essay

Narration tells what happened. It tells a story. It is the kind of writing we find in novels, short stories, and biographies. In actual writing, the account of events often goes with **description**, and sometimes, with other kinds of writing.

There are two kinds of narration. One is an exact account of what happened. The purpose of this kind of narration is to recreate or retell the experience. In such a narrative,

facts are the most important things, and they are required to be stated correctly and in a good chronological order. We call it a **factual narrative**.

Another is a story told to make a point, and therefore, is regarded as a **personal essay** or a **personal narrative**, or a **narrative essay**. The writer of this form of narrative deals with personal experience and expresses a personal attitude toward the subject, but the emphasis changes from stating facts or recreating experiences to explaining the effect they have. In other words, a personal essay focuses on a central idea or theme observed in a series of events or as some emotional response to a particular incident. This kind of narration demands different organizational skills of the writer. Instead of presenting a story arranged step by step in time, the writer focuses on some generalization or conclusion. His purpose is to **talk about** or **comment on**, not **recreate** or **retell** the experience.

Although their subject matter is virtually unrestricted, most contemporary narrative essays do display similarities in form and style. Characterized by first-person pronouns (I, we) and a tone that is usually relaxed, informal, genial, somewhat amused, and conversational, they reflect the writer's personality. Especially in newspapers and magazines, the essay is often mildly satirical, poking gentle fun at the subject matter.

Less flexible in form than the factual narrative, the personal essay focuses on an opening generalization or conclusion about the subject. Usually this focusing statement appears in the first or second sentence of the opening paragraph. Not only does it introduce the theme, but it establishes the tone of the essay and indicates the writer's attitude toward the subject. The following statements can tell us how these ends are achieved.

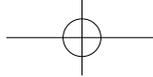
Surely nothing in the astonishing scheme of life can have nonplussed Nature so much as the fact that none of the females of any of the species she created really cared very much for the male as such.

—James Thurber

In this beginning statement, Thurber introduces his subject and theme, the universal indifference of females toward males. In addition, this sentence establishes the tongue-in-cheek tone that is sustained throughout the essay. The words “astonishing” and “nonplussed” contribute to this end, as does the ironic suggestion that this indifference is not what Nature intended.

There is a book out called *Dog Training Made Easy* and it was sent to me the other day by the publisher, who rightly guessed that it would catch my eye. I like to read books on dog training.

—E. B. White



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Here again, in his opening statement the writer introduces his subject and establishes his sympathetic point of view toward it. The first-person pronouns and the commonplace vocabulary help to establish a conversational, familiar tone, too.

I'm wild about walking....

—Leo Rosten

In this succinct statement, Rosten introduces his subject—walking, and establishes his enthusiasm for it by using the word **wild**. To make ourselves aware of how one word can make a difference in tone and point of view, we may try substituting different adjectives for **wild**. “I’m **fond of** walking,” for instance, has a markedly different tone.

From these examples, we can see that the opening statement acts as a direction pointer and a barometer: It sets off the personal essay in a particular direction and indicates its climate or the writer’s attitude toward the subject—sympathetic, sardonic, hostile, or amused. Sustained throughout the paper, this attitude supplies a characteristic necessary to the personal essay: focus, or unity. In the following personal essay, the opening statement provides the subject and the focus of the essay—kids who carry around blaring radios. The essay then maintains coherence and unity because the author’s further comments are only concerned with this one subject.

Making a Statement with Blaring Boxes

Russell Baker

One of the things poor kids in a lot of cities like to do is to walk around carrying a big machine they call a “box.” The box plays music through a radio and sometimes, in the fancier models, through cassette machinery.

It almost always plays this music very loudly. Sometimes you can hear the box coming a block or two away. It drives a lot of people crazy. These people say that the box makes noise, not music.

How you feel about this depends on your definition of music.

★ If your idea of music is being hounded through the streets by the amplifiers from a rock concert in Madison Square Garden, if your idea of music is a subway collision followed by the screams of the injured, the box stuff is music.

There is some question whether kids who tote this machinery think they are bringing music to the masses or doing something more sinister, like giving the world an ice pick in the eardrum.

Having been a kid once myself, I can see how a boy with a box could find it hard to resist full volume after he realized it drove a lot of people crazy.

There is also the theory that the kid with a box is making a statement.

Is there anybody who isn't making a statement these days?

A man throws away his flannel suit and starts wearing denim, he's making a statement. Somebody throws a flower pot off the Empire State Building and bashes in a car roof on Fifth Avenue, he's making a statement. A kid gets a box and walks the streets driving a lot of people crazy—sure, he's making a statement.

But what does this statement say?

The answer to that question is another question: Who cares? Not the kid, that's for sure. If you fight your way through the wall of oncoming music and get inside, right there in the center where the music originates, and you look the kid right in the eye and scream, "Kid, I know you're making a statement, but I don't know what it is, so could you articulate it more precisely?"—If you do that, what happens?

The kid looks at you as if you're a lunatic. "You crazy, man?" he asks.

★ And with good reason. Here is the kid, having a perfectly good time listening to his music, showing everybody he owns this beautiful, complicated, enviable hunk of electronic hardware, making girls' mouths water with desire to caress that fabulous machinery and driving a lot of people crazy at the same time.

And here is this character—some nut?—asking him this asinine grown-up question about what he is trying to state. It has probably never occurred to the kid that he is trying to state anything, any more than it ever occurred to him as a baby that he was making a statement when he dumped the creamed spinach on the floor.

When he dumped the spinach, he was making a mess first and if there was a statement added, let somebody else decode it.

When he goes strolling with his box at maximum blare he is grooving in musical ruts that satisfy something inexplicable in his central nervous system. To put it simply, he is enjoying himself.

Baker establishes the casual tone in the opening sentence with his use of the slang term for radio, **box**, then maintains the "slangy" tone throughout his essay, using such words as "kid," "sure," and "nut." Baker also uses two other devices popular with writers of personal essays: the use of short rhetorical questions (those not requiring an answer) as in "Who cares?" and hyperbole (exaggeration). For example, he discusses the "box stuff" as music in Paragraph 4 (marked with an asterisk) and describes the effect of the box on girls in Paragraph 13 (marked with an asterisk). He also occasionally addresses readers directly, which adds life to the essay. The final sentence completes the discussion; it closes off the essay.

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Like Baker's, most personal essays are light in tone and subject matter. They deal with the minor, petty joys and discomforts of human existence; weighty problems deserve a more formal and serious treatment. Writing a personal essay should be fun; we need not worry about explaining difficult concepts or relationships. But we must keep in mind that two ingredients are essential: an opening statement and brief narrative examples.

2) Description and the descriptive essay

Description tells how something looks or feels or sounds. It talks about such features as size, shape, color, sound, smell or taste. A good description is filled with details that help to create a dominant impression, and it always has a focus.

There are two basic forms of description: factual and personal.

Factual description is designed to furnish information—usually about physical appearance of some person, place, or thing—objectively and clearly. In other words, it presents the subject not as it seems to the writer alone, but as it exists to any objective observer. Organized spatially, it is usually serious, factual, and formal in tone, using simple, specific language and short sentences, while avoiding personal pronouns.

Personal description presents the writer's impression of some place or thing to interest and inform the reader. It follows the principle of describing things as they are to the writer. In the process of describing, the writer may reveal much about his own reactions, responses, impressions, and feelings about the thing he sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels. This description often begins with a focusing statement of the dominant feature of what is described, and then proceeds according to some spatial plan of organization, which includes an indication of the point of view or position of the writer. To convey feelings strongly and evocatively, **personal description** should have rich details, precisely chosen words and varied sentence structures.

The following outline borrowed from *The Writing Commitment, Third Edition* can well help us see what the differences between the two types of description are, once the purpose is decided.

	Factual	Personal
Purpose	To present information	To present an impression
Approach	Objective, dispassionate	Subjective, interpretative
Appeal	To reason	To the senses
Tone	Matter-of-fact	Emotional
Coverage	Complete, exact	Selective, some facts
Language	Simple, clear	Rich, suggestive
Use	Writing in science, industry, government, professions, business	Novels, short stories, poems, personal narratives, some essays

Moreover, decided by the differences shown in the outline, factual and personal descriptions are organized in different ways. With the purpose to make a point, **personal description** usually takes a **three-part structure** with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, which is the basic format of an essay. Partly because of this, **personal description** belongs to essay writing and takes the name of **descriptive essay**.

Among factual descriptions, there is one we name a process description. In describing how to do something, a writer presents not only the steps factually, but his personal idea so as to make the reader pleased to follow. Such a factual description takes the three-part structure as an essay, and it is commonly accepted as a form of **expository writing**.

3) Exposition and the expository essay

Exposition is a writing that explains something to inform. It often answers the questions **what**, **how**, and **why** to make the reader understand the process, relationship, cause and effect, and nature and significance of things.

To make the reader receive the message clearly, there are four commonly used methods or organizational patterns: **process description**, **classification**, **definition**, and **analysis**. The first three are relatively objective, while the last needs more logical reasoning.

Obviously, exposition belongs to essay writing, and takes the **three-part structure** of the essay. Logical arrangement, and distinctive explanation are the most important qualities of a good expository essay.

Unlike the relatively loose quality of narrative and descriptive essays, which permits much variety and individuality in shaping their paragraphs, being generally more tightly constructed is the nature of paragraphs in expository papers, like that of expository forms themselves. The length and content of expository paragraphs may vary in books, magazines, and newspapers, but there is evidence that each of them is a recognizable unit of discourse, containing a sequence of sentences closely related in structure and meaning. The main or subject idea, or theme may be expressed implicitly or explicitly; in the latter case, the subject idea generally takes the form of a topic sentence. Other sentences explain, develop, prove, illustrate, or expand on the topic sentence. All these sentences are linked by structural or formal signals that unify the paragraph and provide continuity to the information expressed in it.

A. L. Becker's research indicates that an expository paragraph consists of three components: topic (or subject), restriction, and illustration. Becker's "restriction" is a function name of "subtopics" or "subdivisions," which we have learned about. His "illustration" refers to the supporting sentences in a paragraph. The topic/subject and its restriction may go together in one sentence. In longer and more complex paragraphs, the writer may use two or three sentences to establish subject and restriction, that is, to have the topic/subject loaded in one sentence, and the subtopics in some other sentence(s), which is (are) usually called subtopic sentence(s).



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With its basic components—subject (S), restriction (R), and illustration (I), an expository paragraph can be developed in SRI, IRS, or SRIS organization according to the observation of Becker and his colleagues.

4) Argumentation and the persuasive essay

Argumentation is, in reality, exposition with the additional purpose of convincing or persuading. In exposition, the writer tries to explain to make the reader learn or understand some message. To clarify his points, he may provide reasons, facts, statistics and examples. In **argumentation**, the writer will arrange and shape the evidence to convince the reader of some conclusion, to persuade the reader to agree to his point of view and support it, and to spur the reader to some action. Convincing readers and motivating them to act seem to be more difficult than informing them about a subject. Whether the writer can persuade his audience or not depends on how much he knows about them. So, in argumentation, the prewriting process of audience analysis is crucial. And all through the paper, great attention must be paid to readers, to their needs and attitudes. Then, a good argumentative paper should have a valid viewpoint, sufficient evidence, logical reasoning, proper tone, and skillful use of the other types of writing.

Sure enough, argumentative papers are, by every means, essays. They are persuasive essays and take the **three-part structure** of the essay.

II What Is a Research Paper?

A research paper is an essay. It is a long or an extended expository or persuasive essay. Writing a research paper involves most of the same prewriting, writing, and rewriting skills in writing any other sort of essay. It differs from the latter in that it requires that we learn how to use library sources, take notes effectively, and master the conventions of documentation, i.e. proper use of quotations, footnotes or endnotes, and bibliographies.

In doing prewriting work, we will be involved in the process of gathering information from library sources, unless we are instructed differently. After finding, studying, interpreting, analyzing, and organizing the information, we will be ready to write out the results of our study.

These results may be presented in one of the two forms: expository or persuasive. We may decide to present information about a subject for the sake of explaining or analyzing it. We might try to explain, for instance, “what,” “how,” and “why” questions by classifying, defining, analyzing, exploring, interpreting, and evaluating the facts and opinions from numerous sources. On the other hand, we could investigate some subjects, such as premature love in secondary schools, to argue a point or propose a solution to the problem. The investigation process is the same as when we do it with an expository purpose in mind, but the organization of the material is different as we shape our evidence into a problem-solution or propositional form.

The academic community designates research papers by a number of different names—research paper, report, term paper, review article, thesis, dissertation—depending in part on the level, scope, and nature of the paper, as well as on individual and institutional preferences. There are widely accepted definitions of these types of papers.

■ Research paper

The library paper assigned in undergraduate courses is most often labeled a [research paper](#). This name distinguishes a paper based on work in the library from an essay, which usually draws on common knowledge, a personal interpretation of a text or condition, or the writer’s experience. An essay on the situation facing the elderly today, for example, could derive from conversations with the writer’s grandparents. A research paper on the same topic might be based on a thorough review of sources such as government statistics on Social Security benefits, a critical reading of books such as Richard A. Posner’s *Aging and Old*



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Age, or a study of social and political issues related to aging. The writer of a research paper carefully documents the sources of information and conclusions presented in the paper. In general, the more advanced the course, the more extensive is the research required for the assigned paper.

■ Report

The word **report** usually refers to a thorough record or description of the results of firsthand experiences, empirical studies, or reading in primary sources. A report might present the results of mixing particular chemicals under specified conditions, a compilation of observations of classes in a school for gifted children, or a summary of attitudes toward new business in a particular region. Although the writer of a report may evaluate or interpret the results of research, most often a report presents information as objectively as possible so that readers can make judgments or decisions for themselves.

■ Term paper

The name **term paper** refers to a project that summarizes or demonstrates mastery of the work of a term or semester. Many instructors use this label interchangeably with **research paper**. Depending on the course, a term paper may or may not include formal research. A course that includes fieldwork in teaching, for example, could require a term paper summarizing the development of teaching skills during the semester. A literature course might require a critical paper as evidence of the development of analytical techniques during the term. Similarly, a paper for either of these courses might require library research in secondary sources to substantiate the student's observations and conclusions.

■ Review article

The name **review article** designates a presentation of secondary sources, which are organized, evaluated, and analyzed to apprise the reader of the current state of research on a topic. A review article can also serve to identify problems with the sources or to suggest possibilities for future research.

■ Thesis

The word **thesis** commonly refers to a substantial research project. As the word (which also means a proposition or point of view defended through argument) implies, a thesis should draw an original conclusion based on information derived from research. Although the term can also designate the paper written for a doctoral degree, American usage generally reserves the name **thesis** for the master's paper or the undergraduate honors paper.

■ Dissertation

A **dissertation** is a research paper submitted by a candidate for the doctoral degree. This paper requires more research and more extensive development of ideas than a master's thesis. The word **thesis** can generally be used interchangeably with **dissertation**, depending on the field and on the preference of the institution.

Theses and dissertations are usually written under the supervision of a professor but outside of any particular course and after the completion of course work and qualifying examinations. Most institutions require a thesis or dissertation to draw upon substantial research, to demonstrate mastery of research techniques, and to display an ability to communicate knowledge to the academic community. A doctoral dissertation should make an original contribution to knowledge in the field through presentation of new conclusions, previously undiscovered materials, or new methods of analysis. Theses and dissertations usually require the approval of a group of readers and an oral defense, or justification, of the procedures and conclusions before readers and other members of the university community.

Most doctoral dissertations accepted by American universities are indexed in one of several bibliographies, such as *Dissertation Abstracts International* (DAI) and *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* (CDI).

Practice 1

1. Read this narrative essay and then answer the questions that follow.

Don't You Remember Me!

W. E. B. DuBois

"Don't you remember me?" I always hear the question with an uncontrollable sinking of heart. I cannot put aside the feeling of panic. I do not remember the person and the person knows perfectly well that I do not. I am desperately trying to find some adequate answer, although I know there is none, and the person is trying, with more or less success, usually less, not to show his pique.

One of my latest experiences was in Asbury Park. I was lecturing on a warm night. There was a large audience in a low-ceilinged room—a kind of audience who listened a long time, not simply to what I said, but to what many others said. It was late before I was released, and I was tired. I came out on the darkened street. A man was standing in the shadow. I saw his bulk but I had not yet seen his face clearly. He was very dark and reticent.

"Don't you remember me?" he said. I wanted to say, "I have not seen your face yet," but tried to be pleasant. "I am afraid"—I began gropingly.



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- Don't you think that DuBois has clearly stated his central idea or theme—panic at being asked to identify someone?
- The second and third paragraphs sketch an encounter, similar to many others that collectively have been responsible for his present reaction. Together, these incidents form a recurring pattern in his life. Don't you think that the described encounter well supports the theme?
- What is more concerned with by DuBois: the frustration resulting from the encounter, or the incident itself?

2. Compare the two excerpts describing the praying mantis, and discuss the differences between factual description and personal description.

A

The praying mantis, a member of the family Mantida, order Orthoptera, derives its name from the prayerful position it assumes with front legs raised while it is waiting to attack its prey. A full-grown mantis varies from two to five inches in length, resembles in color the plants on which it rests. Behind the small, freely movable, triangular head with a biting mouthpiece is a long and thin prothorax, which is held almost erect. The rest of the body is thicker, although the general shape is long and slender. The wings are short and broad. The forelegs have sharp hooks for capturing and holding the prey, which consists mainly of injurious insects.

B

Apart from her lethal implement (the forelegs), the Mantis has nothing to inspire dread. She is not without a certain beauty, in fact, with her slender figure, her elegant bust, her pale-green coloring and her long gauze wings. No ferocious mandibles, opening like shears; on the contrary, a dainty pointed muzzle that seems made for billing and cooing. Thanks to a flexible neck, quite independent of the thorax, the head is able to move freely, to turn to right or left, to bend, to lift itself. Alone among insects, the Mantis directs her gaze; she inspects and examines; she almost has a physiognomy.

3. Identify the organizational technique used in each of the following paragraphs. Is it SRI, IRS, SRIS—or is one slot missing?

A

For a time, the television industry comforted itself with the theory that children listened to children's programs and that, if by any chance they saw programs for adults, violence would serve as a safety valve, offering a harmless outlet for pent up aggressions: the more violence on the screen, the less in life. Alas, this turns out not to be necessarily so.

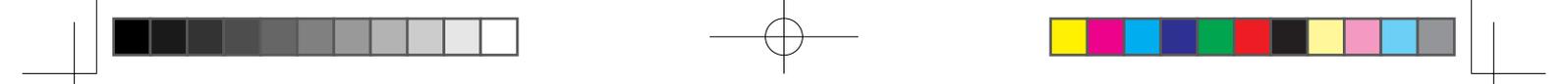
As Dr. Wilbur Schramm, director of the Institute of Communication Research at Stanford has reported, children, even in the early elementary school years, view more programs designed for adults than for themselves; “above all, they prefer the more violent type of adult program including the Western, the adventure program, and the crime drama.” Experiments show that such programs, far from serving as safety valves for aggression, attract children with high levels of aggression and stimulate them to seek overt means of acting out their aggressions. Evidence suggests that these programs work the same incitement on adults. And televiolence does more than condition emotion and behavior. It also may attenuate people’s sense of reality. Men murdered on the television screen ordinarily spring to life after the episode is over: All death is therefore diminished. A child asked a man last June where he was headed in his car. “To Washington,” he said. “Why?” he asked. “To attend the funeral of Senator Kennedy.” The child said, “Oh yeah—they shot him again.” And such shooting may well condition the manner in which people approach the perplexities of existence. On television the hero too glibly resolves his problems by shooting somebody. The Gunsmoke ethos, however, is not necessarily the best way to deal with human or social complexity. It is hardly compatible with any kind of humane or libertarian democracy.

B

However, one important aspect of the college that is often considered early in the planning stage is the particular college’s general reputation. This general reputation is made up of the picture one sees of the college in academics, sports, and social life. The image that is thus presented of what the school is like is quite often a prerequisite to trying to find out more about the college. For example, perhaps a young man in junior high school read an article in a sports magazine about the outstanding athletic program at College “X.” After reading it, he decided that this school was one that interested him. So, he then tried to learn about other aspects of the college. In a similar manner, what a student has read or heard about a school’s academic, athletic, or social life can be the initial factor in his beginning to select a college.

C

The grading system also contains penalties and rewards, but that’s what makes people tick. Would any student write a term paper, read a textbook, or attend a lecture in a field outside his interest if he were not motivated by grades? Because studying and learning are hard work, students need penalties and rewards. Of course, this results in pressure. Certainly, this produces competition. But without them, few people would strive to let their learning exceed their intellectual reach. Oh yes, there are a few students who are highly



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self-motivated and are genuinely interested in learning. But most students would rather see a basketball game, rap in the Grill, or watch a movie. Let's face it—that's why we need the present grading system. Anything else would result in a lowering of the standards and a fifth-rate university.

4. Read this argumentative paper, and then answer the questions that follow.

The Control of Death

Joseph Fletcher

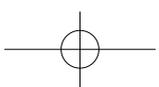
It is harder morally to justify letting somebody die a slow and ugly death, dehumanized, than it is to justify helping him to escape from such misery. This is the case at least in any code of ethics that is humanistic or personalistic, i.e. in any code of ethics that puts humanness and personal integrity above biological life and function.

What follows is a moral defense of euthanasia. Primarily, I mean active or positive euthanasia, which helps the patient to die; not merely the passive or negative form of euthanasia, which "lets the patient go" by simply withholding life-preserving treatments. The plain fact is that negative euthanasia is already a *fait accompli*¹ in modern medicine. Every day in a hundred hospitals across the land decisions are made clinically that the line has been crossed from prolonging genuinely human life to prolonging only subhuman dying. When that judgment is made, respirators are turned off, life-perpetuating intravenous infusions stopped, proposed surgery canceled and drugs countermanded. "Code 90" stickers are put on many record jackets, indicating "Give no intensive care or resuscitation." Arguing pro and con about negative euthanasia is therefore irrelevant. Ethically, the issue of whether to let the patient go is already settled.

Given modern medicine's capabilities, always to do what is technically possible to prolong life would be morally indefensible on any ground other than vitalistic outlook; that is, that biological survival is the first-order value and that all other considerations, such as personality, dignity, well-being and self-possession, necessarily take second place. Vestigial last-ditch provitalists still mumble threateningly about "what the Nazis did," but, in fact, the Nazis never engaged in euthanasia or mercy killing; what they did was merciless killing, either genocidal or for ruthless experimental purposes.

The traditional ethics based on the sanctity of life—which was the classic doctrine of medical idealism in its prescientific phases—must give way to a code of ethics based on the quality of life. This new ethics comes about for humane reason. It is a result of modern medicine's successes, not failures. New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth, as Whittier said.

Many of us look upon living and dying as we do upon health and medical care—as person centered. This is not solely or basically a biological understanding of what it means



to be “alive” and to be “dead.” It asserts that a so-called vegetable, a brain-damaged victim of an auto accident or a microencephalic² newborn or a case of massive neurologic deficit and lost cerebral capacity, is no longer a human being, no longer a person, no longer really alive. It is personal function that counts, not biological function. Humanness is understood as primarily rational, not physiological. This doctrine of man puts man and reason before life. It holds that being human is more “valuable” than being alive.

Most of our major moral problems are posed by scientific discoveries and by the subsequent technical know-how we gain in the control of health, life and death. Ethical questions jump out at us from every laboratory and clinic. Every advance in medical capabilities is an increase in our moral responsibility, a widening of the range of our decision-making obligations.

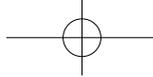
Genetics, molecular biology, fetology and obstetrics have developed to a point where we now have effective control over the start of human life’s continuum. What has taken place in birth control is equally imperative in death control. The whole armory of resuscitation and prolongation of life forces us to be responsible decision makers about death as well as about birth; there must be as much quality control in the terminating of life as in its initiating.

A careful typology of elective death will distinguish at least four forms—ways of dying that are not willy-nilly matters of blind chance but of choice, purpose and responsible freedom.

1) Euthanasia, or a “good death,” can be **voluntary and direct**, i.e. chosen and carried out by the patient. The most familiar way is the overdose left near at hand for the patient. It is a simple matter of request and of personal liberty. To hold that euthanasia in this category is justifiable entails a rejection of the simplistic canard that all suicide victims are mentally disordered.

Voluntary euthanasia is, of course, a form of suicide. Presumably a related issue arises around the conventional notion of consent in medical ethics. The codes (American Medical Association, Helsinki, World Medical Association, Nuremberg) all contend that valid consent to surgery or any kind of medical treatment requires a reasonable prospect of benefit to the patient. What, then, is benefit? Could death in some situations be a benefit? My own answer is in the affirmative.

2) Euthanasia can be **voluntary but indirect**. The choice might be made either in *situ* or long in advance of a terminal illness, e.g. by exacting a promise that if and when the “bare bodkin”³ or potion cannot be self-administered, somebody will do it for the patient. In this case, the patient gives to others—physicians, lawyers, family, friends—the discretion to end it all as and when the situation requires, if the patient becomes comatose or too dysfunctional to make the decision.



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3) Euthanasia may be **direct but involuntary**. This is the form in which a simple mercy killing is done on a patient's behalf without his present or past request. Instances would be giving an idiot a fatal dose; speeding up the death of a child in the worst stages of Tay-Sachs disease;⁴ shooting a man trapped inextricably in a blazing fire to end his suffering; or ordering a "shutdown" on a patient deep in an irreversible mindless condition, perhaps due to an injury or an infection or some biological breakdown. It is in this form, direct but involuntary, that the problem has reached the courts in legal charges and indictments.

To my knowledge, Uruguay is the only country that allows this type of euthanasia. Article 37 of the *Codiga Penal* specifically states that although it is a "crime," the courts are authorized to forgo any penalty. In time the world will follow suit. Laws in Colombia and in the Soviet Union are similar to those of Uruguay, but in their codes freedom from punishment is the exception rather than the norm. In Italy, Germany and Switzerland the law provides for a reduction of penalties when euthanasia is done upon the patient's request.

4) Finally, euthanasia might be both **indirect and involuntary**. This is the "letting-the-patient-go" tactic that is taking place every day in our hospitals. Nothing is done positively for the patient to release him from his tragic condition (other than "trying to make him comfortable"), and what is done negatively is decided for him rather than in response to his request.

But ethically regarded, this indirect and involuntary form of euthanasia is manifestly superficial, morally timid and evasive of the real issue. I repeat it: It is harder morally to justify letting somebody die a slow and ugly death, dehumanized, than it is to justify helping him to avoid it.

What, then, is the real issue? Briefly, it is whether we can morally justify taking it into our own hands to hasten death for ourselves (suicide) or for others (mercy killing) out of reasons of compassion. The answer to this in my view is clearly yes on both sides of it. Indeed, to justify either one, suicide or mercy killing, is to justify the other.

The heart of the matter analytically is the question of whether the end justifies the means. If the end sought is the patient's death as a release from pointless misery and dehumanization, then the requisite or appropriate means is justified. Immanuel Kant said that if we will the end we will the means. The old maxim of some moral theologians was *finis sanctificat media*⁵. The point is that no act is anything but random and meaningless unless it is purposefully related to some end or object. To be moral, an act must be seeking an end.

The really searching question of conscience is, therefore, whether we are right in believing that the well-being of persons is the highest good. If so, then it follows that either suicide or mercy killing could be the right thing to do in some exigent and tragic circumstances.

Another way of putting this is to say that the crucial question is not whether the end justifies the means (what else could?) but *what justifies the end*. And my answer is, plainly and confidently, that human happiness and well-being are the highest good, and, therefore,

any ends or purposes validated by that standard or ideal are just, right, good. This reasoning is what humanistic medicine is all about; it is what the concepts of loving concern and social justice are built upon.

The plain hard logic of it is that the end, or purpose, of both negative and positive euthanasia is exactly the same: to bring about the patient's death. Acts of deliberate omission are morally not different from acts of commission.

Careful study of the basic texts of the Hippocratic Oath shows that it says nothing at all about preserving life as such. It says that "so far as power and discernment shall be mine, I will carry out regimens for the benefit of the sick and will keep them from harm and wrong." The case for euthanasia depends upon how we understand "benefit of the sick" and "harm" and "wrong." If we regard preserving dehumanized and merely biological life as sometimes being really harmful and not beneficial, to refuse to welcome or even introduce death would be quite wrong morally.

In most states in this country people can and do carry cards, legally established by the Anatomical Gift Acts, explaining that when the carrier dies he wishes his organs and tissue to be used for transplant when needed by the living. The day will come when people will also be able to carry a card, notarized and legally executed, explaining that they do not want to be kept alive beyond the humanum point and authorizing the ending of their biological processes by any method of euthanasia that seems appropriate. Suicide may or may not be the ultimate problem of philosophy, as Albert Camus thought, but in any case it is the ultimate problem of medical ethics.

Notes:

1. An accomplished and apparently irreversible fact.
2. Having an abnormally small brain, a condition with extremely severe mental retardation.
3. Dagger. The allusion is to *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1, Line 76.
4. A congenital disease of the central nervous system, resulting in blindness, paralysis, and death.
5. The end sanctifies the means.

- Does the essay have a debatable point?
- Is there sufficient evidence to convince the reader? What kind of evidence does the paper provide?
- Does the writer consider the other side of the argument before stating and amplifying his views?
- Is the writer's reasoning logical and effective?
- Is the writer's attitude honest and friendly and his tone placid?