

Essays: history and definition

An essay is a piece of composition. Composition is the art of composing an article on a theme or subject. A piece of composition has to be written in clear and grammatically correct English so that it becomes interesting to read. You can write on any topic you like; you can express your thoughts in any way you like. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the size of an essay. It could consist of any number of paragraphs.

History of essays

The first man who used the term *essai* was a Frenchman called Michel de Montaigne. He wrote about his feelings on certain ideas like idleness, agony etc in the late 1500s. The first English essayist was Sir Francis Bacon who wrote on subjects like death, fear, friendship, studies etc in the early 1600s.

What is an essay?

An essay is a short piece of composition that expresses the writer's opinion on a particular subject. It is a major form of literature that includes many types of writings such as magazine articles and newspaper editorials.

Structure

An essay has a loose structure. According to Samuel Johnson an essay is 'an irregular, indigested piece of writing'. However, well-structured essays also exist. Academic essays, for example, follow a well-structured pattern. In any case, structure or its absence doesn't seem to matter much in the case of essays.

Generally speaking, an essay has an introduction and a conclusion. You can find several paragraphs between the introductory and the ending paragraph.

Type

There are several different types of essays. An essay can be formal or informal, impersonal or familiar. Formal essays tend to have a rigid structure. They are also more expository and systematic. Informal essays, on the other hand, have a personal, intimate and often humorous style. They could even be written in conversational language.