

English Composition

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial examines the goals of English Composition, and the skills and competencies used to achieve them. It addresses the importance of engaged reading, and how it is connected to writing, and describes the three main types of academic writing. The ways in which writing skills can be applied to accomplish goals outside college are also considered.

This tutorial provides an introduction to English Composition in four parts:

1. Goals of English Composition
2. The Reading-Writing Connection
3. Types of Academic Writing
 - a. Personal Narratives
 - b. Expository Writing
 - c. Persuasive Writing
4. Writing Beyond the Academy

1. Goals of English Composition

Four primary goals have been established for students of English Composition:

- Developing writing skills, including the process of creating essays through brainstorming, research, drafting, revision, and proofreading
- Learning to read and write in an academic context
- Becoming an engaged reader
- Thinking critically



HINT

In some very important ways, this class prepares you for all of your college coursework. English Composition provides training that will help you to succeed in your *other* classes.



THINK ABOUT IT

All academic fields, and many jobs, require reading and writing ability. Effective business documents (e.g.,

email messages, project reports, etc.) are produced by those who are competent readers and writers. For example, think about those who work in marketing or human resources. Do they write business memos? Do they read resumes and cover letters? Almost all careers begin with written applications, resumes, and cover letters. An employer's first impressions of job-seekers are often the result of their writing ability (or lack of it). Remember, it's important to make a good first impression!

2. The Reading-Writing Connection

The first thing you must be able to do to succeed in a writing course is to read effectively. Effective reading is referred to as *engaged reading*, and it can help you in many ways.



HINT

Engaged, independent reading requires the reader's complete concentration.

Engaged reading provides a launch point for the consideration, examination and discussion of any subject. It enables you to identify topics for your written work, and to support those topics effectively.

3. Types of Academic Writing

What kind of writing must you learn how to do? **Academic writing** is used to make assertions that are supported by research, and which contribute to the advance of knowledge in a particular area. There are three main types of academic writing:

- Personal narratives
- Informative or expository writing
- Persuasive or argumentative writing



TERM TO KNOW

Academic Writing

Writing that makes assertions, supported by research, that contribute to the advance of knowledge in a particular area.

3a. Personal Narratives

Personal **narratives**, which include memoirs, creative nonfiction, and other kinds writing about lives and experiences, convey information in the form of a story.



TERM TO KNOW

Narrative Writing

Writing that conveys information in the form of a story.

Following are the first paragraphs of an essay about "my experiences while learning to ride a motorcycle." The only source of information for the essay was the narrator, since it is a story about his or her personal experience. This essay demonstrates one way in which personal narrative can be used to establish the background for an argument that will follow.

"Last summer I bought a motorcycle, learned to ride it, and crashed, in that order. During the months of my rehabilitation, I had a lot of time to think. I began to do so during the Vicodin-induced haze in which I spent the first few days after the accident. But mostly, I watched Netflix, attempted to read, and tried to find a comfortable position in which I could both eat ice cream and not bleed on my bed sheets."

3b. Expository Writing

The second type of academic writing you must learn is **expository writing**. Expository writing is informative: The writer explains his or her ideas, and conveys information. It is used to analyze processes, compare and contrast concepts and ideas, and to define terms.



TERM TO KNOW

Expository Writing

Writing that explains, defines, or describes.

Following is an informative section of the essay referenced above. This section cites some of the research that was performed to support the essay. In this section the subject of the essay has expanded beyond narration of the writer's story to a broad consideration of motorcycling. Do you see how the writer develops his or her argument using exposition?

"The type of accident involving cars and motorcycles that occurs most frequently in England is called the SMIDSY (Sorry Mate, I Didn't See You). In this type of accident, a car pulls into traffic and collides with a motorcycle because the driver of the car doesn't see the motorcycle approaching, or mistakes it for a car that's further away. In over 70% of accidents involving a car and a motorcycle in the U.S., the driver of the car was found to be at fault."

3c. Persuasive Writing

The third, and perhaps the most common type of academic writing, is **persuasive or argumentative writing**. This is writing meant to convince readers of something; to accept a proposal, take specific action, agree with the writer's interpretation of data or research, etc.



TERM TO KNOW

Persuasive Writing

Writing designed to convince readers to accept a proposition or take an action.

Here is the final paragraph of the motorcycling essay. In it the writer presents his or her conclusion about who was to blame for the accident — and by implication, who is to blame in most motorcycle accidents. Note how the writer uses the personal narrative and exposition provided earlier in the essay to build an argument, and to convince readers to agree with the conclusion.

"Before the accident, I didn't want to admit that I was willfully ignorant of the dangers of motorcycle riding. I still sometimes try to deny it, even now. I didn't think about the dangers, because I didn't want to. This means that I am to blame for everything that happened to me, regardless of the other driver's actions. This applies to all motorcyclists as well: it's their choice to ride and, therefore, their

4. Writing Beyond the Academy

The knowledge and competencies you'll gain while reading and writing these kinds of academic projects will help you in your college career, and outside the classroom. Solid writing and critical-thinking skills will help you to achieve your goals in life beyond school.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Newspapers and online news sources are most useful to those who are literate, and who think critically. Those who lack these skills are less likely to be well-informed (and may be misinformed) about issues and events.

Each field of work or study has its own set of assumptions about what is (and is not) acceptable communication. If, for example, you can't tell the difference between a professional memo and an inappropriate email message, you may not be able to build or maintain professional relationships in a business setting. Maybe you won't even be taken seriously. As you work to achieve academic literacy in this course, don't forget that the skills you'll acquire will continue to serve you outside the academy.



SUMMARY

This tutorial identified reasons for studying English Composition, and the benefits of doing so. It also examined the connection between writing and engaged reading. The three different types of academic writing — narrative, expository, and persuasive — were defined, as well as the ways in which writing skills can help you outside school.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall



TERMS TO KNOW

Academic Writing

Writing driven by research-based argument that expands human knowledge.

Expository Writing

Writing designed to explain, define, or describe.

Narrative Writing

Writing that is driven by story.

Persuasive Writing

Writing designed to sway its audience to accept a specific proposition or take an action.