

# Writing the Essay



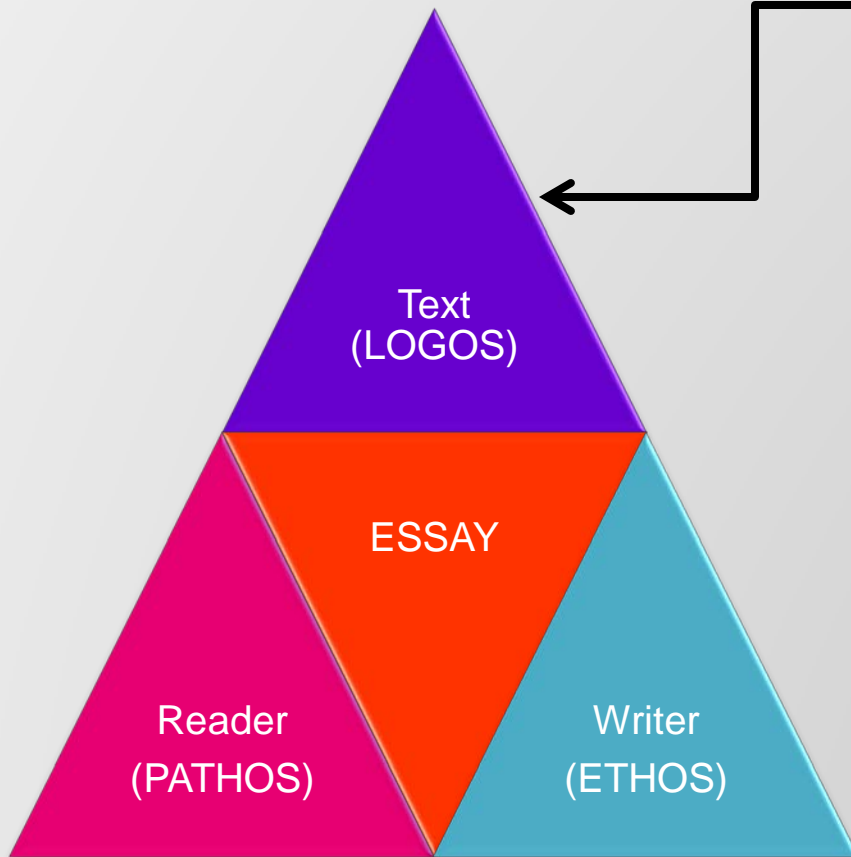
**A BASIC GUIDE TO STRUCTURE, STYLE, &  
GRAMMAR**

# Defining the Academic Essay



- The academic essay is composed of 3 parts: **introduction**, **body**, and **conclusion**.
- The **purpose** of the academic essay is to communicate your researched and objective views of a topic to a specific audience.
- Academic writing uses the **Rhetorical Triangle** to conceptualize the relationship of the text, the author, and the audience.

# The Rhetorical Triangle

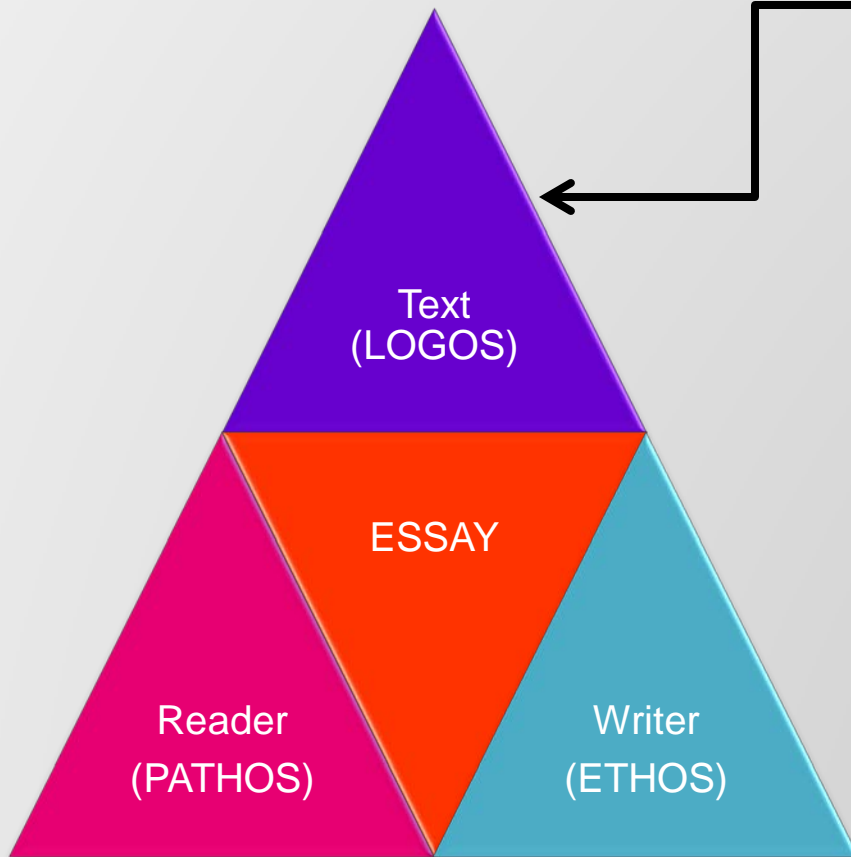


## TEXT / LOGOS

This is the most important part of the academic essay. It is objective, relying on **credible evidence** to support the thesis rather than personal opinion or experience, or emotion to convince the reader.

- Supporting your position on an issue is vital. Academic essays do not rely on *opinion* but demand *logical evidence (LOGOS)*.
- Some assignments require the writer only deal with **primary sources**. A primary source would be the work you are asked to interpret or respond to. An essay on Plato's *Republic* would use the *Republic* as a primary source.

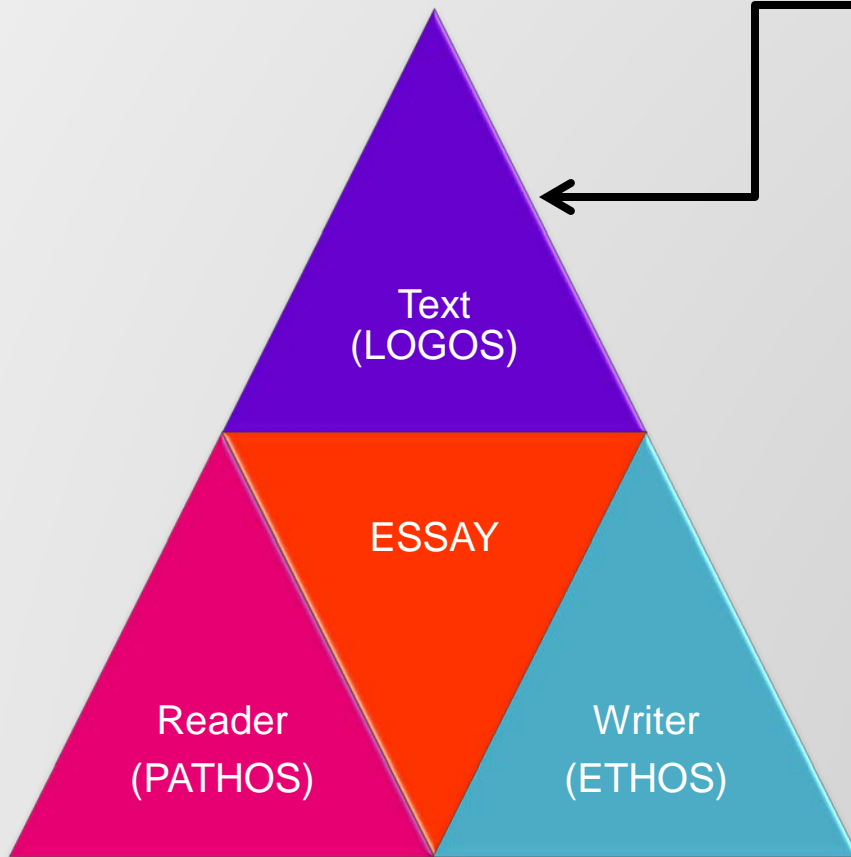
# The Rhetorical Triangle



## TEXT / LOGOS

- Some assignments require **secondary sources** – those written about the primary source or about the particular issue being discussed. An essay on *Hamlet* would use books, articles, videos, and reference works about literature, Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, or other relevant topics to support the writer's interpretation.

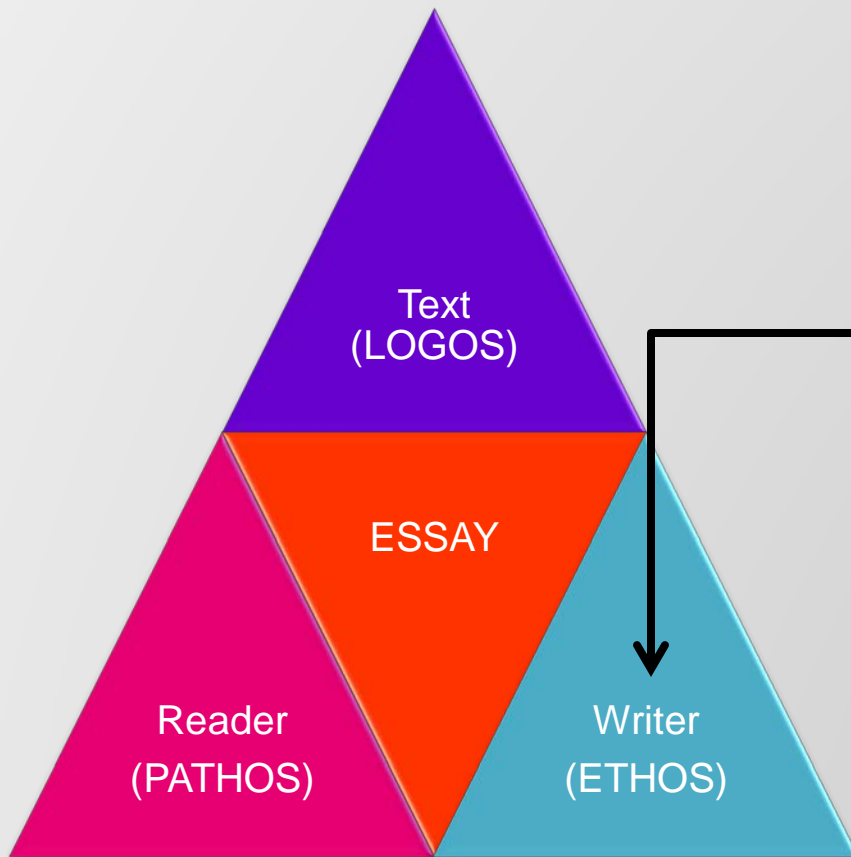
# The Rhetorical Triangle



## TEXT / LOGOS

- General reference works, like Wikipedia, Webster's Dictionary, or the World Book encyclopedia are not considered academic sources. They are too general and usually provide common knowledge only, so they do not truly rate as research, or they have issues with timeliness, target audience, and credibility. For example, Wikipedia has credibility issues because anyone can post information in a wiki. It can take weeks for the person in charge of that entry to verify the info. Plus, many wikis are unsubstantiated. Use Wikipedia as a place to find great links to other, credible sources (at the bottom of the entry page).

# The Rhetorical Triangle

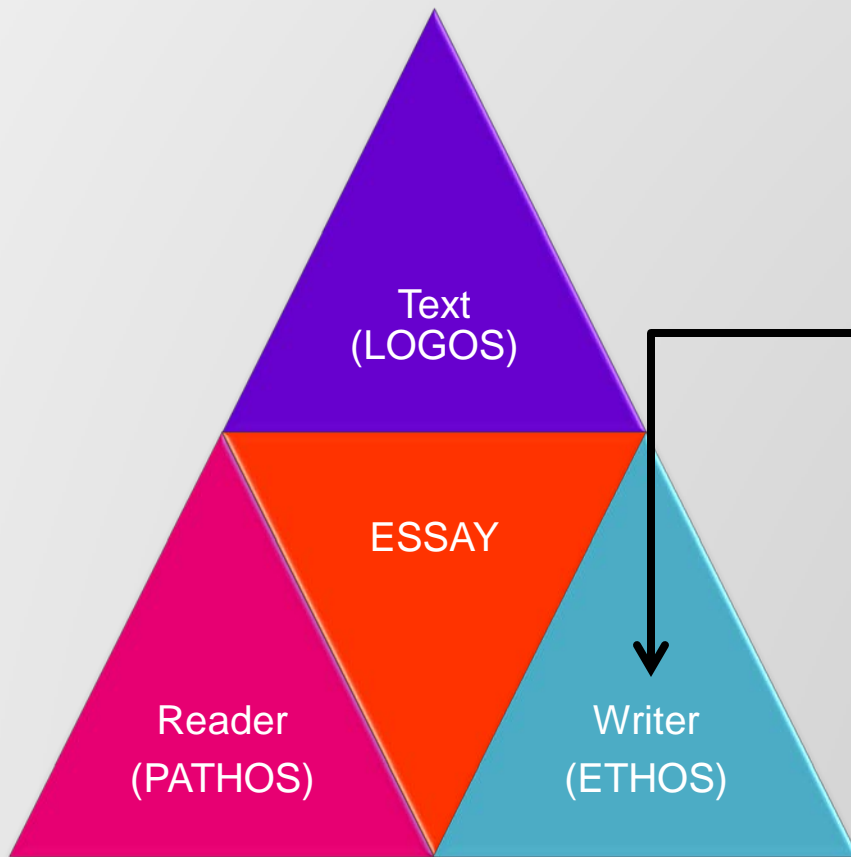


## WRITER / ETHOS

This is often tricky for beginning writers because it deals with the writer's credibility and trust – how do you build that with your audience if you are not famous or an expert in the field being discussed? You do so by:

- The tone you take in the essay.
- The presentation of the essay: grammar, mechanics, style that are all appropriate for the setting and audience.
- By the types of evidence you use.

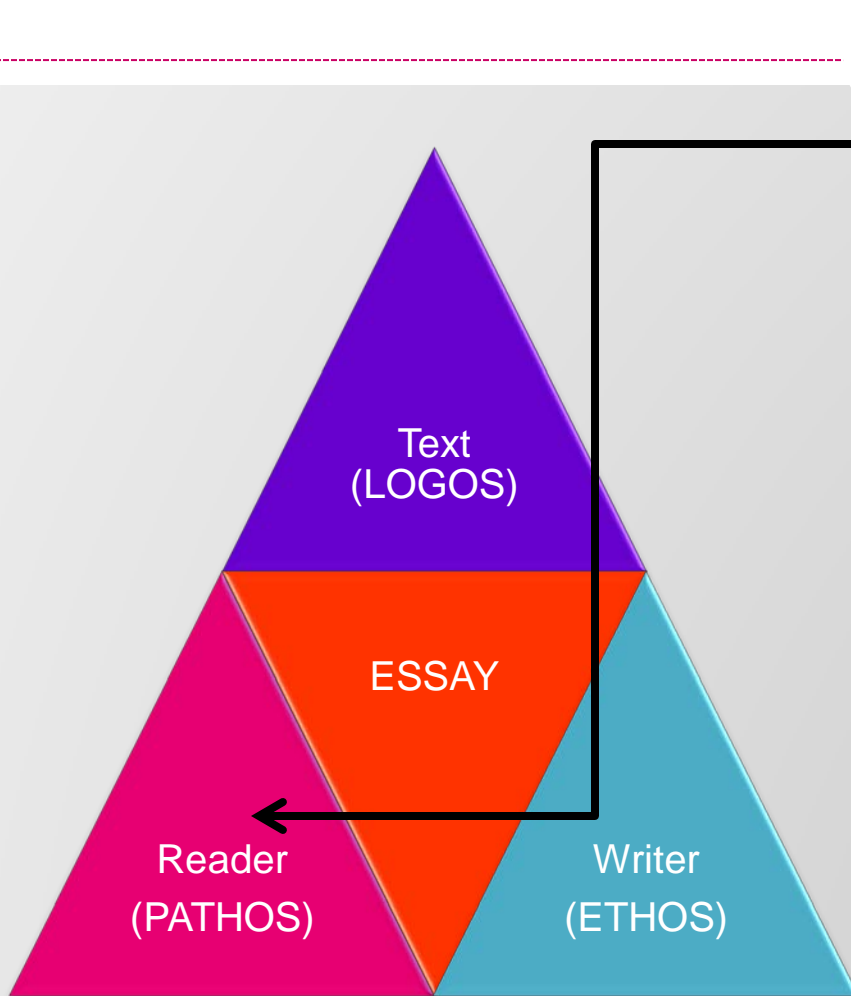
# The Rhetorical Triangle



## WRITER / ETHOS

- By the quality of sources you are getting that evidence from.
- By the documentation of all evidence used in the essay.
- By your honest presentation of not only the strengths of your argument, but also the potential weaknesses as well as the strengths of any major opposing argument. By showing you are aware of these elements but are not afraid of them, and even may have still a convincing reason for the reader to overlook them, you establish your trustworthiness and credibility.

# The Rhetorical Triangle



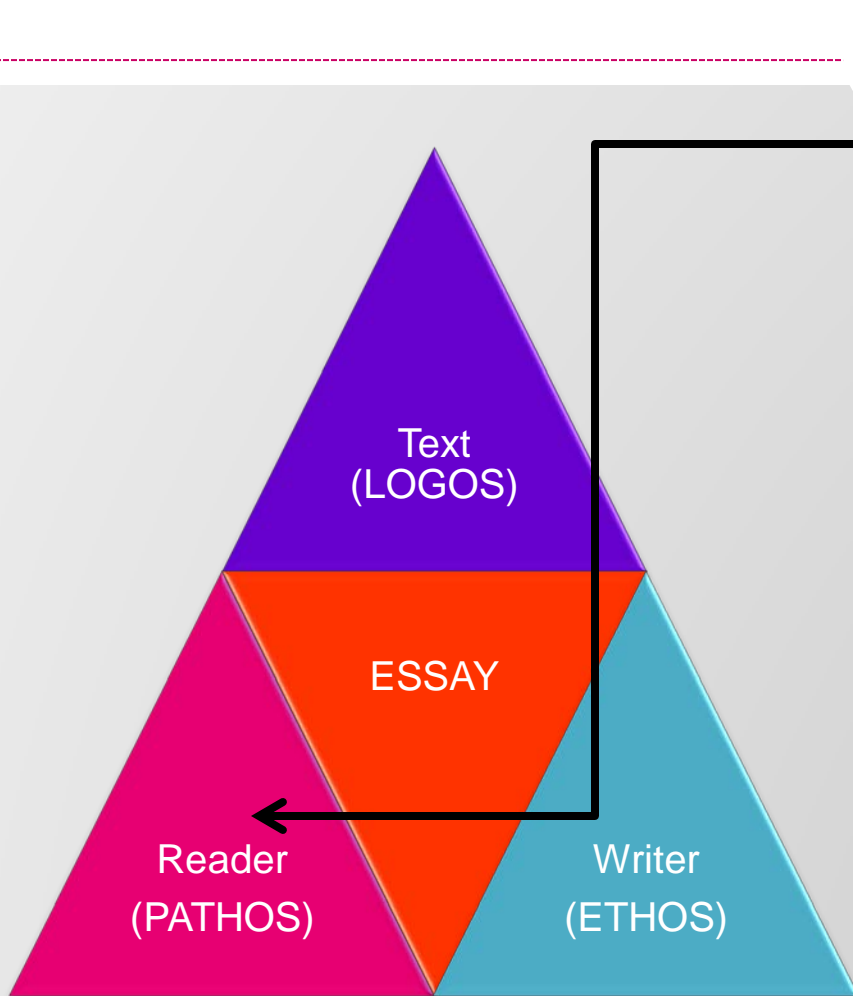
## READER / PATHOS

This aspect is another tricky one for beginning writers, mainly because in the past they have usually been told that their teacher is their audience. That is usually not the case in academic writing. In this class, you are expected to identify a target audience who you want to present your case to. You must:

- Analyze the audience: who are they, what do they believe, what is their education level, religious and political affiliations, what prior contact do they have with this issue?
- The answers to these questions will help you determine: how much background information to give the reader, when you need to define specific terms, what types of sources will be convincing to them, what deep-seated beliefs they hold that might be a barrier to your position.



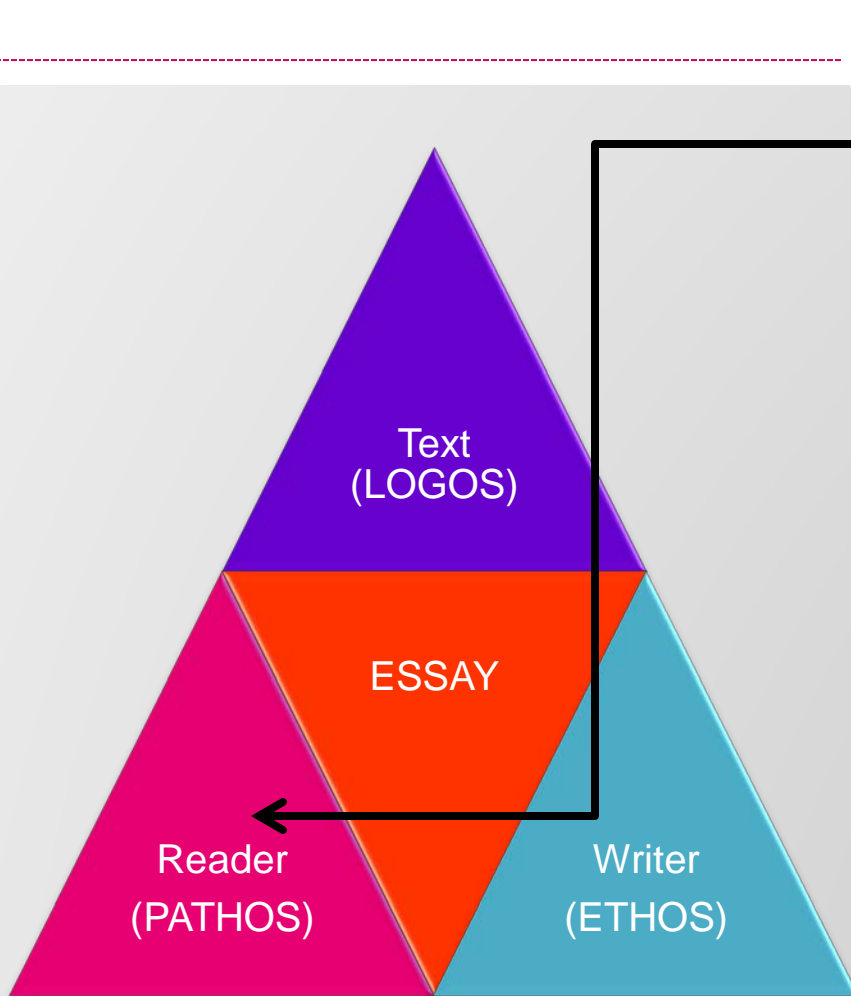
# The Rhetorical Triangle



## READER / PATHOS

- Pathos is the emotional appeal. It is the least useful in most academic arguments because it is the least objective. How I FEEL about something can change depending on my mood. People's feelings are also not based usually in rational thinking, so it is difficult proving something based on emotions.
- The time to use emotion is usually in the conclusion, when you are trying to wrap up the essay and want to get the reader to think or act. Often, it is the emotional impact of the issue that can spur action. However, you want to use it sparingly.

# The Rhetorical Triangle



## READER / PATHOS

- Be careful of insidious pathos: using adjectives to describe people or events: “the unfair and underhanded tactics of the sheriff...” Unless you can back this up with logos to prove that the sheriff acted unfairly and underhandedly (which means looking at procedures and legal requirements), you have just made an emotional appeal, not a logical one.

# The Introduction



- The introduction should include:
  - An attention getter – something that grabs the reader's interest and is relevant to the essay's topic and tone;
  - Important background information the reader must have concerning the issue. This helps establish the context for the discussion and why it is a debatable one.
  - The thesis statement.

# The Introduction



- The introduction should announce your purpose in a sentence we call the thesis.
- The thesis has 2 major parts: **the subject** (what you are writing about) and **the attitude** (what you are saying about the subject):
  - **The narrator in Lucien Stryk's poem, "Cherries," reflects the greedy and selfish attitude of corporate leadership in America concerning the welfare of employees versus the benefits of the top levels of management.**

# The Introduction



- For long essays that are responding to a specific work, a standard component of the introduction is a very brief **plot summary**. The summary tells the essential plot elements of the work in the writer's own words, using MLA signal-outs. The introduction should not only be summary, though.
- Another option is to only mention the **overall point** of the work in the introduction and work in summary as needed in the body paragraphs.
- For short essays, or essay exam answers, you **do not** include a summary unless the assignment specifically requires one.
- If unclear, **always ask the teacher for clarification.**

# The Introduction as Blue Print



- Often, the introduction acts as a **blue print** for the paper, letting the reader know what is to come, and the order in which you will arrange the information.
- You will also indicate your **method of organization**, such as comparison/contrast.
- Whatever you announce in the introduction, you must cover it in the essay. Be sure your introduction at the end of the writing process **reflects** exactly what you've ended up writing about.

# The Body



- The **body** is where writers present their evidence to support their thesis. We call this **developing** the theme of the essay.
- For an academic essay, the writer must present **at least two points of support**. You will develop each point in a body paragraph.
- The first sentence of each body paragraph should clearly support some part of the thesis. We call these **topic sentences**.

# Topic Sentences



- Like the thesis, the topic sentence has a subject and attitude, only it reflects a portion of the thesis. Take our sample thesis: The narrator in Lucien Stryk's poem, "Cherries," reflects the greedy and selfish attitude of corporate leadership in America concerning the welfare of employees versus the benefits of the top levels of management.
- We will find our topic sentences here:
  - The narrator's continued need for more cherries, even though he has more than enough and he sees others who have none at all, is similar to the serious gap in pay received by upper management in large corporations and the average worker.
  - The selfish attitude of upper management of large corporations in America, who will take pay increases, bonuses, golden parachutes, and compensation packets, all while the company is cutting salaries and jobs for average employees, or is perhaps filing bankruptcy, is matched by the narrator's attitude of not sharing the cherries even as others around him starve or fight others for basic necessities.



# Developing the Topic Sentence: Defining



- Once you have expressed your **topic sentence**, you now need to prove your point.
- **Define terms:** if you are using a specific term that is either unknown to your audience or is open to multiple definitions, you should define it for your reader. Sometimes you will need to use class materials, such as **handouts** from the teacher or assigned readings, for your definitions. Other times, you will need to research to find credible sources to use. Only in the most rare cases will you turn to a more generic source like a common dictionary. That's because common dictionaries are considered common knowledge sources – things most people with a high school education would know, or answers and information so easily available that the reader can find them if they need to understand a term. So, I would not define “friendship” unless I were using it in a way contrary to the most common understanding of the word.

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Explanation



- **Explanation:** You will now explain your point to your reader. This is where you show the reader your reasoning – how you have come to the position you hold on this issue. For our sample thesis, that might include answering:
  - How is it greed and not just capitalism for CEO's to make millions and average employees make barely enough to live on?
  - Why is it selfish to want all that you can get? Isn't that the American dream?
  - How is this not socialism – why should a CEO, who works hard, take a pay cut so employees can have benefits or more money?
  - How widespread is this? Is it just a few bad apples, or is this a systemic problem that has contributed to the economic crisis America faces? – Note: this should be introduced in the introduction as one of your themes.

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Examples



**Examples:** After explaining, you will provide one or more illustrations of this problem in action. This helps your reader “see” what you are talking about. Think about how helpful examples are in this class when I ask you to do something. The PowerPoint on the “Cherries” assignment gave you specific examples of how to do it. That provided a **concrete** example of the more **abstract** concept I was asking you to write about. The same is true in essay writing.

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Examples



- Often, you are dealing with issues that are abstract only – like liberty, greed, bravery, etc. Since these can be interpreted in many ways, you must clarify how YOU are interpreting it for the reader. That happens in part in the explanation, but the example “seals the deal” by giving your reader an objective source that is concrete – they can look it up themselves if necessary.
- One big difference in ENG 1113 and ENG 1213 is the type of evidence to use. In ENG 1113, you could often depend completely on **personal** experience – first hand knowledge. In ENG 1213, you must rely on **objective** evidence – that which we can verify outside of the writer’s word for it. If you provide an example from your own life, but you have not established any verifiable expertise or credibility in the issue at hand, then it is really useless as academic evidence.
- Instead, go to an expert and find evidence that readers will consider credible. That’s where research comes in. Readers will not just “take your word for it.” They must be **persuaded**, and since they do not know you, you cannot depend on your **ETHOS** being persuasive enough in most arguments to win their trust.

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Examples



Examples to back up your claim (thesis) include:

- References to the literature itself to show us where in the text you see this played out. You can do this by **quoting** or **summarizing**. Some assignments will only ask you to work with a primary source. Can you prove your argument by explaining where you see this issue in the text itself? This is an interpretive argument and requires writers present examples from the text to support the point they are making, and then analyze how exactly these examples do prove it. You will use this technique in Essays 1 and 2 primarily.

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Examples



Examples to back up your claim (thesis) include:

- Research that clearly proves the connections you are making between the issue or literature and the group your are targeting, like corporations in America. Not all essays require outside evidence. However, even if you are not required to find outside sources, if your particular argument cannot be proven by the references in the primary text alone, then you must back it up with outside evidence. That is ALWAYS the standard for this class.
- **DOCUMENT VIA MLA EVERY RESOURCE YOU USE IN YOUR ESSAY, WHETHER QUOTED, SUMMARIZED, OR PARAPHRASED. EVEN ONE SLIP CAN RESULT IN AN F.**

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Examples



- It is crucial that you show your reader that your point is significant and effects more than just these few specific examples. You must somehow indicate that these are representative of a much larger group rather than the only examples of the problem.
  - Preface the example(s) by indicating the breadth (how widespread) and depth (how significant and dug-in) of the problem. Then lead into the example with the clear transition that this is just one illustration of many that you could give. In some cases, you might provide more than one example if it is vital that you establish a pattern of behavior.

# Developing the Topic Sentence: Examples



For example, just doing something once or finding one person who has done it is not necessarily a crisis or systemic problem. You would need, in that case, to show more than one incident to prove how widespread or common this action is.

Or, you would need to include with the example a credible source that shows how common it is. If I gave an example of someone who is the epitome of corporate greed, I could also find evidence that shows the percentage of CEOs or upper management who make more than, say, 400 times what the average worker does in American corporations. I would want to look for information that supports the stance that the gap between management and employee pay is too wide.



# To Quote or Not to Quote...



- MLA cautions writers to devote no more than **20%** of the paper to quotations.
- **Summary** is usually the preferred method of incorporating outside sources in an essay because it allows for the writer to maintain personal voice, tone, and style.
- **Quotations** are powerful, though, when the words themselves reveal an important character trait, theme, perspective, etc.
- Another reason to use quotation is if the author's words create an impact that helps make your point. If summary would lessen this impact, then you should turn to quotation.
- Whether summarizing or quoting, you must always use **MLA documentation** to credit the source. See your Troyka/Hesse handbook for more information about incorporating evidence into your essays and/or how to summarize or quote effectively.

# Developing the Body



- **Transition:** This is the last step in a body paragraph. Transitions help wrap up the paragraph's point and move the reader to the next stage of the essay.
- Writers use transitions throughout the essay to create **coherence** and **cohesion** between their sentences, paragraphs, and ideas.
- **Examples:** for example, on the other hand, first, next, after, two days later, before, in contrast, ultimately.

# The Conclusion



- This paragraph ends the essay. The first element in a conclusion is traditionally a **restatement** of the thesis. You never copy the thesis exactly as it appears in the introduction, but you do want to remind your reader of the overall point of your essay.
- Your conclusion is a place to show the **significance** of your thesis – why your interpretation is important or unique.

# MLA Style Documentation



- Throughout your essay, you will be documenting your sources using MLA style. Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation “MLA Documentation for Literary Classes” available on the website.
- Remember:
  - All sources in your essay need a **parenthetical notation**, the **signal-out**.
  - All sources must be documented on the **works cited page** at the end of the essay.
  - Failure to do this will result in **plagiarism**.

# Grammar & Mechanics



- College-level writing requires proficiency in grammar and mechanics.
- The diction level for college writing is formal or relaxed formal (allows for contractions).
- Students must **revise** (reconsider their thesis, organization, use of examples, etc.), **edit** (check for spelling mistakes, sentence errors, formatting errors), and **check MLA**. These should be separate steps.

# Grammar & Mechanics



- The five most common grammar mistakes students make are:
  - **Sentence boundary errors:** comma splices, run-ons, and fragments.
  - **Point of view errors:** Students use 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person when they should only use 3<sup>rd</sup> person in literary essays unless the assignment specifies otherwise.
  - **Wordiness:** student writing rambles, is full of redundancies, does not use precise language.
  - **Poor verb choice:** overuse of the verbs to be, to do, to get, to have. Students overlook more interesting and precise verb choices.
  - **Poor proofreading:** students do not spell check or edit their writing for mistakes.

# Use Class Resources!!



- For help with these problems, check out the class web page (not WebCT) on writing the academic essay. There are handouts, guides, and links to all Power Point presentations as well as outside sources:  
<http://www.kellimcbride.com/1213online.htm>
- Your QA Compact handbook also provides valuable information to help you with all aspects of this class.
- In ENG 1213, grammar and mechanics are your responsibilities, as is basic essay structure. If you do not understand a term I use, then look in your class resources first, try to find an answer in the Internet or our class web page, and then ask me if you cannot find the answer or you are unsure if you have the correct answer.