

# Introductions, Body Paragraphs, and Conclusions for Exploratory Papers

Many paper assignments call for you to establish a position and defend that position with an effective argument. However, some assignments are not argumentative, but rather, they are exploratory. Exploratory essays ask questions and gather information that may answer these questions. However, the main point of the exploratory or inquiry essay is not to find definite answers. The main point is to conduct inquiry into a topic, gather information, and share that information with readers.

## Introductions for Exploratory Essays

The introduction is the broad beginning of the paper that answers three important questions:

1. What is this?
2. Why am I reading it?
3. What do you want me to do?

You should answer these questions in an exploratory essay by doing the following:

1. *Set the context* – provide general information about the main idea, explaining the situation so the reader can make sense of the topic and the questions you will ask
2. *State your research question* – compose a question or two that clearly keep reading. Your goal is to create a compelling, clear, and educational essay people will want to read and act upon
3. *State why the main idea is important* – tell the reader why s/he should care and communicate what you want to discover and why you are interested in the topic. An overview of the types of sources you explored might follow your research question.

If your inquiry paper is long, you may want to forecast how you explored your topic by outlining the structure of your paper, the sources you considered, and the information you found in these sources. Your forecast could read something like this:

In order to explore my topic and try to answer my research question, I began with news sources. I then conducted research in scholarly sources, such as peer-reviewed journals. Lastly, I conducted an interview with a primary source. All these sources gave me a better understanding of my topic, and even though I was not able to fully answer my research questions, I learned a lot and narrowed my subject for the next paper assignment, the problem-solution report.

For this fellowship, the exploratory process investigates a local issue to gather more information so that eventually a solution may be suggested.

Identify an issue facing you, your organization, and/or the youth work field in Minnesota and conduct exploratory research to find out as much as you can on the following:

- Background of the issue, causes of problems and other contributing factors
- People/institutions involved in the issue: decision makers and stakeholders
- Possible take-aways on the issue or solutions to problems.

*You do not have to argue for a solution to a problem at this point.* The point of the exploratory essay is to ask an inquiry question and find out as much as you can to try to answer your question. Then write about your inquiry and findings.

# Organizing an Exploratory Essay

An exploratory essay is likely different from any other essay you've written. Instead of writing to convince an audience of the validity of a thesis, you will be writing to find out about a problem or issue and perhaps to form some preliminary conclusions about how it might be solved.

But there is another aspect the exploratory genre that is equally important. An exploratory essay is, in essence, a retrospective of your writing and thinking process as you work through a problem. It describes when, how, and why you completed certain types of research. This kind of writing is about how you work through problems that require writing and research. You will have to be introspective and think about your thinking process in order for your essay to turn out well.

Very roughly, then, your exploratory essay may follow this sort of structure:

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