Demystifying
the
English
Exit
Exam

Academic Success Centre
John Abbott College
3rd Edition
Thank you for consulting *Demystifying the English Exit Exam*. Many students consider writing the exam a daunting task so we hope that the tips and strategies outlined here will help remove some of your anxiety. For teachers, tutors, parents and interested parties, this booklet is also for you because available resources are sometimes lacking and additional information is always helpful.

We always encourage feedback on the book's content and helpfulness so feel free to get in touch at academicsuccesscentre@johnabbott.qc.ca

Thanks to Wayne Alfonso who co-wrote an earlier edition of this book. Additional thanks to Ronnie Dorsnie (Dean of Academic Resources, John Abbott College) and our colleagues at the John Abbott Academic Success Centre for their continued support.

Finally, as always, we thank all the students who have come to see us, or attended workshops, before taking the exam. They taught - and continue to teach - us more about this subject than they realize. This is for them and the next ones, and the next ones, and the...

*Demystifying the English Exit Exam*
*Winter 2015, 3rd edition*

Written by:
*Kathleen Toohy & Neil Briffett*
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **GENERAL INFORMATION** ..............................................................
- **GENERAL PREPARATION** ..............................................................
- **THE TASK** .................................................................................
- **THE QUESTION** ..........................................................................  
- **HOW YOU ARE MARKED** ..............................................................
- **HOW TO CHOOSE A READING SELECTION** .................................
- **FINDING MEANING IN THE READING** ...........................................
- **LITERARY TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES** .......................................  
- **OUTLINING** ...................................................................................
- **INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS** ....................................................
- **BODY PARAGRAPHS** ......................................................................
- **CONCLUSIONS** ...............................................................................  
- **KEEP IN MIND** ...............................................................................  
- **SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAYS** ..........................................................
- **TIME MANAGEMENT** .......................................................................  
- **PROOFREADING AND EDITING** ....................................................
- **FINAL THOUGHTS** ...........................................................................
- **ABOUT THE AUTHORS** .................................................................
- **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** ................................................................
GENERAL INFORMATION

**What is the English Exit Exam?**
The English Exit Exam (EEE) is a test of proficiency in reading, writing, and critical thinking skills at the college level. It takes place 3 times a year (May, August, and December).

The EEE is an exam where you are required to write a 750-word essay on one of three reading selections within a 4-hour time limit. Your essay is graded on 3 criteria: Comprehension & Insight, Organization of Response, and Expression. You must receive a grade of A, B, or C in each criterion to pass (see *How You are Marked* for all the details).

**Do I have to pass it in order to receive my DEC?**
**YES, YES, YES...** you must pass this exam in order to receive your Diplôme d’études collégiales (DEC) even though you may have completed all the required courses in your program. If you no longer attend college and have not yet passed the EEE, you can still write it. You may write the EEE as many times as it takes to pass it – there is no limit; however, every time you write the exam, the results appear on your transcript.

**How do I know if I’m eligible to write it? How do I register?**
If you’ve either passed, or are in the process of taking, your third English class, you are likely eligible to write the exam. If you’re unsure, get in touch with your CEGEP’s contact person (see *Additional Resources*) to find out about eligibility requirements and registration protocols.

**What can I bring into the exam?**
As with all exams, you will need your student ID card. You can use a dictionary (unilingual and/or bilingual) and, as of December 2013, you are now allowed to bring a thesaurus. You may not use an electronic dictionary, personal notes, texts on writing, etc., and yes, the invigilators will be checking! Cell phones and backpacks are left outside or at the front of the exam room.

**How do I know if I passed?**
Results regarding pass/fail should be made available to you about 6 weeks after the date of the exam. Detailed results are mailed to you by *Le Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche, de la Science et de la Technologie*. Information about getting a grade review and/or a copy of your graded essay is also included.
GENERAL PREPARATION

Adopt a positive attitude about this exam! You are probably more prepared for it than you think you are. Do you know that the pass rate is usually between 85-90%?

Use Your College’s Resources:

- Consult your CEGEP’s Writing, Learning or Academic Skills Centre.
- Find out if your college offers workshops prior to the EEE.
- Find out where your college keeps tipsheets about reading and writing.
- Remember: you have already written many academic essays in your courses. Review them carefully and look for recurring errors. During the last couple of weeks of classes, some English teachers give practice EEE tests. Take one and pay close attention to the feedback given.

Freshen up your analytical and language skills by:

- practicing your reading by looking at a variety of short stories. Can you identify the theme and literary devices used? What would your thesis be and how would you support it?
- reading editorials and opinion page columnists to practice interpreting essays. What is the author's main idea and what arguments or points do they use to support it?

The EEE should be viewed as equally important as any exam you write in CEGEP. So be prepared, get a good night’s sleep beforehand and eat something the morning of. Everything you have to do on exam day is dependent on being awake and aware enough to do it.
THE TASK

Students have four hours to choose one of the three selections of fiction or non-fiction, read it in detail, organize and draft an essay and revise and edit their work.

The task: Write a 750-word essay based on a main idea in ONE of the three readings. You should interpret the reading and discuss the ways in which the author develops his or her ideas. Do not simply summarize the reading or write an opinion paper that does not analyze the text itself. Be certain to write the required number of words.

You are marked according to very specific criteria in three different categories: Comprehension & Insight, Organization of Response & Expression.

Passing Grade: A grade of A, B or C in each criterion is a passing grade. Papers which are graded D, E or F in any criterion will fail.
THE QUESTION

"Identify a main idea in the author’s essay or short story. Structure your essay around a thesis statement that is the focus of your interpretation and analysis of the author’s essay or story. Comment on the author’s use of techniques and devices and make appropriate references to the reading."

So, you are writing the English Exit Exam and you just got the question! The question never changes so you can start preparing to answer it right away. If we take a look at what this question is specifically asking you to do, it can loosely be broken down as:

Find a main idea in the text you’re writing on, come up with a thesis or way of looking at it which you’ll then use to create and organize your essay. Write about how the author wrote his/her text and use quotes to back up your analysis.

Let’s consider what each of these elements in bold actually mean.

A main idea is what the story or essay’s theme is; what it’s about. If you had to describe what you just read to someone else, what would you say the author wants us to think about or consider? What ideas - or truths - does the author want to convey to us? Remember: it’s unlikely that you’ll be able to identify a main idea after the first time you read something; it’ll surely take a few passes to get a sense of what it might be. There are always many ideas found within any text but you have to focus on just one which can be true for the story or essay as a whole.

If a main idea is what the author is writing about, a thesis statement is where you (the writer of the essay) tell us (the readers of it) what you want to write about. It’s where you give us the key to how to interpret your analysis. It’s the angle you’re taking, your organizing principle, and the specific aspect(s) of the story/essay you’re considering. Take a stand and argue something! So, organizing your essay around your thesis statement is very important. You can’t just throw words on a page: there has to be an order in mind that will serve to support what you want to say. Many people can come up with a good thesis but it’s important that your essay be structured around it. And, like all essays you’ve written up to this point, it has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Techniques and devices are the language tools that all writers use. Anyone speaking or writing uses them all the time though they may not know how to identify them or know what they are “technically” called. The most important thing is to know is that you have to talk about how the author wrote what they wrote. It’s not enough to just discuss what they wrote (which is a summary); you also have to discuss how they did it.

Quotes and appropriate references are also extremely important because whatever conclusions you’re coming to in your analysis, you need to back them up with examples from the text. Remember: quotes support what you’re arguing; don’t just give quotes and then try to explain what you think they “mean.” That’s reviewing; not analyzing.
COMPREHENSION & INSIGHT

- Recognition of a main idea from the selected reading
- Identification of techniques and devices as employed by the author
- Evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of the selection
- References that demonstrate understanding of the reading

This section focuses on the actual reading of the text and how well you understand, and then interpret, what you have read. You must also identify relevant literary devices the author uses to develop their story or essay.

Recognition of a main idea
Quite simply, the main idea in both fiction and non-fiction is the author’s central idea, purpose, or message. In short stories the main idea is usually referred to as the theme. It is rarely stated explicitly; it is up to the reader to determine what it might be by analyzing things like characters, setting and action. Stories tend to have more than one theme so your job is to find a major one that is woven throughout the entire text. In essays, the main idea is the point or the argument the essayist is making. Sometimes it is explicitly stated while other times implicit. As with stories, it must also be found throughout the entire text and not just in one section.

Identification of techniques and devices as employed by the author
Literary techniques and devices are the language tools employed by the author; they are what writers use to create meaning and also what the reader considers when analyzing a text. Although essays and stories share common techniques, some are more apropos to one format than to the other.

Evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of the selection
Analytical interpretation is not simply writing about the plot or giving a summary of what happens. Analyzing a text is breaking it up into pieces, looking very carefully at the pieces, and insightfully expressing why each piece is significant to the whole.

References that demonstrate understanding of the reading
References to the text are needed to support your key ideas or main points. When you make an analytical statement, you should use references from the text to back up what you are saying. References need not just be direct quotes from the text; you may also paraphrase or give brief examples.
ORGANIZATION OF RESPONSE

- statement of a thesis about the text
- structured development of the essay
- use of detail to support the thesis
- unified paragraph structure

This section has to do with everything related to the structure of your essay: how you choose to arrange the parts and how well you execute your plan of approach.

**Statement of a thesis about the text**
As mentioned earlier, this is where you state somewhere, usually in your opening paragraph, what the point of your essay is. It’s where you tell the reader what angle you’re taking, what your analysis will consist of, what perspective you’re asking the reader to consider. It has to be clear and to-the-point. It also has to be something more than “I agree with X” or “I liked what they said”: that’s a high school-level response and just won’t do here. *Take a stand and argue something.*

**Structured development of the essay**
Your essay has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. There has to be a plan of analysis apparent to the reader and you have to execute that plan. There is no minimum/maximum number of paragraphs; that’s all up to you as long as your structure supports your arguments. Remember to make your structure clear because anyone correcting anything you write is always asking themselves: why are you structuring your response this way?

**Use of detail to support the thesis**
Once you’ve stated your thesis, you actually have to, y’know, do that. You can write a beautifully-worded thesis but if that’s also the last time you mention the idea, you will do poorly in this criteria. State what you’re going to do in your essay and then do it.

**Unified paragraph structure**
Once you’ve stated, in a topic sentence, what a particular paragraph is going to be devoted to, do exactly that! You can write a clear first line to your paragraph but unless what comes next is somehow connected to what you said you were going to write about, it becomes very difficult to follow. Use transitional words and phrases, clear quote incorporation and, like all effective paragraphs, concise topic and conclusion sentences.
**EXPRESSION**

- appropriate use of words
- varied and correct sentence structures
- correct grammar
- conventional spelling, punctuation, and mechanics

Expression involves the actual writing of your essay and includes the language choices you make in communicating and articulating your ideas.

**Appropriate use of words**
This section involves everything related to your vocabulary like word choice and usage and includes factors like repetition, wordiness and using the author’s words more than your own.

**Varied and correct sentence structure**
This is about more than complete sentences; it is the ability to incorporate simple, compound and complex sentences throughout your essay while avoiding things like run-ons and fragments. Remember: sentence variety adds spice to your writing.

**Correct grammar**
Grammar is the formal set of rules applied to words and/or parts of sentences. Poor grammar usage often leads to confusion and/or frustration for most readers. Subject-verb agreement, proper pronoun usage, tense shifts, articles and possessives are among the things to be concerned with here. If you’re concerned, review the basic rules of grammar once again before the exam.

**Conventional spelling, punctuation, and mechanics**
Spelling mistakes are reduced by the use of dictionaries - use yours! This section also includes periods, apostrophes, question and quotation marks, colons and semicolons, and capitalization.
How do you know which reading you can comfortably write 750 words on? Which reading will make the most sense to you? Use these tips to help you choose.

Skim all the readings first! Don’t make up your mind without giving all three at least some consideration. Don’t believe the myth that texts that are shorter are easier to understand (or that longer texts are always harder): not true whatsoever!

Check the Writing Guidelines (the first page of the exam booklet) to see which are short stories and which are essays and make a note on the readings themselves. Read the title and ask yourself what ideas or images spring to your mind. Does the title remind you of something in particular? Can you relate to it in some way? Is the author familiar to you? Are there footnotes at the bottom of the pages? About what?

Read the first and last few paragraphs of each selection and dip into the text here and there to get a feel for the language. Are you comfortable with the author’s word choice or do you find the language too difficult? Jot down any impressions or ideas you might have.

What text have you decided to consider? Is it an essay or a short story?

Now you are ready to begin your first reading. Read it all the way through at an even pace even if the vocabulary is unfamiliar to you or a paragraph is a bit confusing. Just keep reading! If you can’t keep focused, use a pen or your finger to guide you. When you are done, ask yourself what the general idea of the reading is and what the author is trying to say.

Do not spend a lot of time annotating during your first reading; however, if a particular quote or passage seems important or unclear, highlight or underline it as well as any unfamiliar words. You can look them up in the dictionary later.

Okay, you now have some ideas about the reading selection you have chosen; in other words, you have a basic understanding and a general impression. If you want to change your mind about which text you’re writing on, now is the time to do so. You will not have enough time to critically read all three reading selections. Remember that your goal is to read a text and outline your essay in about 2 hours (see Time Management).

Now read it again! Your second reading (and third or fourth if possible) is closer, more focused, and analytical; now you are reading for the theme or the main points that the author is conveying. This is when you should be annotating, highlighting and underlining.
FINDING MEANING IN THE READING

A Short Story
Reading fiction requires a different approach than reading non-fiction. Meaning in a short story usually isn’t stated directly but rather is implied as the author very seldom makes the theme obvious. You have to get a sense on your own what the work means. To accomplish this, focus on the characters, the setting, and the action; it is from these elements that a theme will likely emerge. There can be more than one possible interpretation; however the one you choose must be woven throughout the entire story. As you read, ask yourself, “What is the author trying to convey?” or “Why did the author choose this subject/approach?”

Read each paragraph carefully then decide what the author is focusing on. Write down your thoughts as they occur to you. Be aware of any techniques and devices used and make note of them (see Literary Techniques and Devices for a more comprehensive complete list).

An Essay
As you read an essay, look for the author’s main idea(s). Sometimes, but not always, the main idea is found at or near the beginning of the essay. Also, the author’s point is not always clearly stated but often implied. Other essayists put their thesis at the end of the text as a kind of summation of all the points they discussed.

The essayist uses a variety of paragraph types to support their points. Perhaps they use descriptive paragraphs, or paragraphs which include examples or classification (again, see Literary Techniques and Devices). Many essays also include a logical and progressive order for supporting evidence.

Read each paragraph closely and determine the topic of that section. Sometimes a topic can take up two, three or more paragraphs so don’t always expect to find one topic per paragraph. When you think you’ve identified the topic, make note of it. Highlight the details the author uses to support the topic. Make connections to other paragraphs.

Think about and engage with what you are reading and what you are highlighting. Write “good point” or “Where’s the proof?” when you come across something that seems well-stated or ambiguous.
LITERARY TECHNIQUES & DEVICES

**Allusion:**
A reference to an historic event, literary text, myth, speech, work of art or well-known person. The Bible, Shakespeare’s plays, historic figures, wars, and great love stories are all common allusions.
- Examples: “She felt she had been struck by Cupid’s arrow.”
  “When his divorced parents saw one another again, it was the Battle of Waterloo revisited.”

**Analogy:**
A comparison between two similar things, ideas or situations; or showing a likeness between two things not at all alike.
- Examples: “A classic comparison is the heart’s structure to a pump.”
  “Our brains share qualities with computers, but the two aren’t totally connected.”

**Anecdote:**
Employed primarily by essayists, a short, usually true story that is used to illustrate a larger point or idea.
- Example: “To provide an emotional connection to her argument that daycares contribute to obesity in young people, the author uses anecdotes from her own childhood.”

**Appeal to Authority:**
Used by an essayist to add credence to their position by claiming that another person with relevant expertise also holds the same, or a similar, position.
- Example: “Fad diets do not work. Dr. Joe Schwartz uses the example of the popular Cookie Diet to show that failure to lose weight is inevitable.”

**Argument:**
The point being stated or asserted in an essay. Used to persuade or convince the reader that a writer’s position on a topic is correct and/or credible. The writer often uses evidence, reasoning and logic to claim that a particular perspective is valid or invalid.
- Example: “The author claims that not everything technically possible is morally justified and uses three convincing arguments to prove his stance.”

**Atmosphere:**
The prevailing impression, sense or feeling that a story conveys through the author’s choice of diction, setting, imagery, etc. a.k.a. mood.
- Example: “Poe uses descriptive words to convey a sinister atmosphere: ‘mask of black silk’, ‘deep vaults’, ‘loud and shrill screams’ and ‘The nitre!... It hangs like moss’.”
**Attitude:**
The essayist’s choice of words; details used which create a specific effect. Possible attitudes include pessimism, optimism, humorousness, seriousness and mockery. See tone

**Cause and Effect:**
An essayist’s arguments that focus on a particular event or circumstance (cause); the effect is what happens as a result of the cause. The two are almost always interconnected.

Examples: “Excessive video-game playing is addictive.”
“By increasing the amount of cruciferous vegetables in our diet, we decrease our risk of cancer.”

**Characterization:**
Everything we are told – or not told – about characters in a story (actions, appearance, thoughts, desires, etc.); either through them, other characters, or the narrator.

**Classification:**
When an essayist groups items or subjects into categories in order to make a certain point.

Example: “Montreal has restaurants for every budget and taste: fast-food chains, delicatessens, funky vegan eateries, and upscale 5-star fine dining.”

**Cliché:**
An expression that has been used so often that it loses its originality, meaning and impact. Writing is almost always weakened by their use. See metaphor, simile

Examples: “My parents fight like cats and dogs.”
“Curiosity killed the cat so just let sleeping dogs lie.”

**Climax:**
The highest point of tension or interest in a story.

**Comparison and Contrast:**
An essayist’s focus on the similarities (comparison) and/or differences (contrast) between related or unrelated objects, subjects, themes or categories. May be used by a writer as the primary method of development for an entire essay or used as a technique in only one part. Note that some essays only compare or contrast; not both together.

Example: “The author’s rationale in comparing rodent studies and laboratory experiments to humans is weak because rodents are usually injected with toxins whereas humans ingest them.”

**Concrete Language:**
Writer’s use of language based in reality or “the real world” - opposite of figurative language

**Counterargument:**
When an essayist takes a contrary position on a matter, or references the position of another, in order to make a point or draw a contrast.

Example: “Although doctors recommend the H1N1 vaccine, the side effects just might outweigh the benefits.”
**Description:**
An essayist’s careful detailing of a person, place, thing, or event that allows the reader to form a mental picture.

Example: “The spring garden was ablaze with colour. The red tulips were waving in the breeze; the blue irises were stiff and stately and looked elegant amidst a carpet of bright purple crocus.”

**Dialect:**
The language of a particular location, class, or group of persons that is distinct because of its sounds, spelling, grammar, and diction. See *jargon, slang, vernacular*

Example: “The author’s rough patois – ‘Yuh see dem pickney?’ – brings a street-level realism to his story.”

**Dialogue:**
Used primarily in fiction, spoken conversation between people (may or may not be in quotation marks).

**Diction:**
A writer’s choice of a particular word over another. Word choice may determine the reader’s reaction to what is being described or create a specific and intended effect. See *attitude, tone*

**Enumeration:**
When an essayist lists groups of items or things.

Example: “The possible side effects of the new drug are scary: vomiting, diarrhea, heart palpitations, and blurry vision; in some cases, even death.”

**Epiphany:**
Used in stories, a character’s moment of insight and/or revelation; usually about themselves or others.

**Example:**
The points utilized in an essay to support or back up an author’s ideas or arguments.

Example: “The essayist uses plastic water bottles, plastic wrap and microwave-safe containers to show that dioxins are not released into our food.”

**Figurative Language:**
Writing that does not employ the literal meanings of words in order to achieve a desired effect (ex. *imagery, metaphor, symbolism*, etc.) Opposite of *concrete language*

**Flashback:**
In stories, when something in the present triggers an earlier, often more significant, recollection.

Example: “The sounds of the busker playing at Côte Vertu metro brought her back to childhood when classical music filled the house.”

**Foreshadowing:**
In stories, clues or hints about events/actions that will happen in the future.
Hyperbole:
An extravagant and sometimes outrageous exaggeration used for emphasis and not meant to be taken literally. See clichés
   Example: “I ate so much pizza that I feel as big as a house!”
   “I’ve told you a million times to be quiet!”

Imagery:
Used in both fiction and non-fiction, visual pictures conveyed through descriptive language and meant to appeal to the senses.
   Example: “The rain ‘impinges upon the earth’ with ‘fine incessant needles of water’; ‘dark dripping gardens where odors arose’; ‘the curses of laborers’; and the ‘nasal chanting’ of singers create the image of a cold and unfriendly environment in Joyce’s story.”

Irony:
Writing that uses contrast or difference between how things appear to be, or were expected to be, and reality.
   Example: “Tom, voted the most extroverted boy in school, is actually very introverted when at home.”

Jargon:
Specialized vocabulary used in a technical/professional field; often confusing or unfamiliar to “outsiders.”
   Examples: “Leetspeak saves keystrokes and therefore time.”
   “DUI reported at 2 Maple. Code 3.”

Level of Language:
The formality or informality of the language used in writing, particularly in essays. The author might use very formal language geared for perhaps an academic audience or informal, plain and direct language geared for a general audience.

Metaphor:
A comparison between something concrete and something abstract.
   Examples: “They met again in the winter of their lives.”
   “Her childhood was a prison from which there was no escape.”

Methods of Argumentation:
How an essayist chooses to structure their argument or define how others have structured theirs.

Narrative Point of View:
The perspective/angle by which an author chooses to tell a story (omniscient, limited omniscient, first person, etc.)

Oxymoron:
A figure of speech in which contradictory words are used together to create a different or unique effect.
   Examples: “clean dirt”, “virtual reality”, “organized mess”

Personification:
A reference that applies human qualities to that which is non-human.
   Example: “The leaves danced sprightly in the soft wind.”

Plot:
The sequence of events or actions that make up a story’s structure.
**Repetition:**
When a specific word, phrase, sentence or structure is used several times; often for emphasis.

**Rhetorical Question:**
A question that conveys a point rather than expects an answer as the answers are usually obvious ones. Employed for emphasis, they also encourage the reader to think about the question itself.
   Example: “Will people ever stop fighting each other?”

**Setting:**
Everything we are told – or not told – about the time and place in which a story occurs (date, duration of time, rural/urban, past/present/future, etc.)

**Simile:**
A comparison using “like” or “as”
   Examples: “Like a bull in a china shop, he destroyed everything in his wake.”
   “He tried to suppress his anger but it was as uncontrollable as a hurricane.”

**Slang:**
Very informal vocabulary found in casual speech but also in informal writing like emails or texting; sometimes including expressions that many would consider to be rude or inappropriate.
   Example: “I just have to tell you about my date last night... got to go, parent over shoulder.”

**Symbolism:**
An author’s use of something that suggests, or stands for, more than its literal meaning.
   Example: “In his story, the author uses religious symbolism such as the dove to examine the theme of purity.”

**Tone:**
The author’s position toward a subject or the reader. See *atmosphere, attitude*

**Vernacular:**
The domestic or native language spoken by people of a particular geographical area. A vernacular writer does not write in a formal tradition.
   Example: “By employing phrases commonly used in the rural South such as ‘Sho’nuff’ and ‘He tole us so hisself’, Hurston celebrates the unique individuality of her characters.”
## Techniques and Devices often used by authors in Fiction/Stories and Non-Fiction/Essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction/Stories</th>
<th>Non-Fiction/Essays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>Anecdote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>Appeal to Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epiphany</td>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashback</td>
<td>Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreshadowing</td>
<td>Comparison and Contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagery</td>
<td>Counterargument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Point of View</td>
<td>Enumeration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Level of Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simile</td>
<td>Rhetorical Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism</td>
<td>Tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OUTLINING

Outlining is a prerequisite to clear and organized writing. It allows you to see, at a glance, a condensed version of your analysis. You are also able to make any needed changes prior to writing your essay. You must make it as easy as possible in your essay for the reader to understand what you are saying and to follow your analysis without difficulty. Outlines help you stay on track and keep focused.

Outlines need not be formal or overly detailed; however, simply making a list of topics without connections is not a good idea. Use the Rough Draft Booklet to sketch out what you intend to include in your essay and where.

Possible ways of organizing your essay’s body paragraphs include:

**Key Ideas:** Your essay is structured around key ideas found in the reading with one key idea, accompanied by critical analysis, in each body paragraph.

**Literary Techniques & Devices:** Your essay is structured around specific techniques and devices the author uses (typically one technique looked at in detail per paragraph).

**1, 2, 3:** Your essay follows the basic format of the text you are considering while still maintaining an analytical approach throughout. Again, do not simply summarize.

These format ideas are just suggestions. If another possible method of organization occurs to you, go for it!
Introductory Paragraphs

It’s often helpful in introductions to say something “general” from the very beginning as it’s a good way of slowly drawing the reader into what you are going to discuss. Maybe mention the “idea” behind certain words in the title. State the author’s name, the title of the piece you are analyzing, its format (story or essay), and give a brief synopsis of what it is about. Your thesis should be clearly stated along with an indication (often called a method statement) of how you intend to structure your body paragraphs.

Below you will find samples of introductory paragraphs. See if you can identify their strengths and weaknesses.

A father/son relationship is a common theme in all genres of literature. The Odyssey, for example, tells of a father and son who overcome huge obstacles to meet again; in Shakespeare’s Hamlet Laeartes returns home to avenge his father’s death. In Disney’s The Lion King, Mufasa saves his son, Simba, from certain death and in a more recent novel, The Kite Runner, a strong father/son bond grows as the father spends his last years alone with his son in America. In the short story “Powder”, the theme of father/son relationship is also explored as Tobias Wolff tells the story of a young boy and his father who go skiing on Christmas Eve. At the beginning of the story, tension exists between the father and the son; and it is only at the end when the son accepts his father’s irresponsible nature that a bond begins. The author uses imagery, symbolism and characterization to develop this theme. (156 words)

I always looked forward to bedtime when I was a child because bedtime meant Munsch time. Robert Munsch was my best-loved author and I enjoyed his books because of their exaggerated and many times bizarre storylines and illustrations. One of my favourites was called David’s Father and it is a story about a young boy who just moved into Julie’s neighbourhood and invites her over for supper. This is when Julie discovers that David’s father is a giant and we are not surprised that David looks up to him! The theme of father/son relationships is also explored in the short story “Powder” by Tobias Wolff. However, instead of admiring his father, the young boy has a strained relationship with him. It is only at the end of the short story that this tension gives way to acceptance. Wolff uses imagery, symbolism and characterization to show the change in the father/son relationship. (151 words)

In the essay “Seven Wonders”, Lewis Thomas discusses what he believes to be seven wonders found in our world. He begins by describing bacteria and various insects and ends with the human child as the seventh wonder. He claims that a child is a wonder because it is during this stage of a human’s life that children learn language. The author uses the literary techniques of enumeration and description to explain his seven wonders of the world. (77 words)

To replace the original Seven Wonders of the World with another list is a daunting task. After all, how can seven people agree on one wonder let alone seven wonders? The world is simply too large with too many “miraculous and marvelous” people, places and things to restrict a list to just seven. Lewis Thomas, the author of “Seven Wonders”, creates his own list with the most significant wonder, the planet earth, as being his first choice. By using enumeration, comparison, and description, Thomas shows that even though our planet is a wonder, human beings have the potential to destroy it. (101 words)
Body Paragraphs

This is the largest part of your essay. Because you’re aiming for about 750 words, expect to have somewhere between 2-4 body paragraphs depending on how you’re formatting. Each one is a sort of mini essay unto itself and should contain:

A **topic sentence** which expresses the purpose or intent of the paragraph. Try to formulate a clear statement that generally expresses your analytical goals for this paragraph.

A **concluding sentence** which pulls together or summarizes the focus of the paragraph. Do not just repeat your topic sentence! Rather, its focus should be wrapping up final thoughts of the points you’ve made throughout this particular paragraph.

**References to the author** which can be in the form of the techniques and devices that they use. Remember: the question for the EEE asks you to consider what the author is doing, why and how: *always* keep that in mind.

**Quotes/paraphrasing** which are essential elements of your analysis. Firstly, never use a quote as a sentence by itself; always incorporate them into your own sentences so that the point you’re making and the quote are clearly connected. Never use more of a quote than is needed to make your point; otherwise, markers will assume you either a) don’t know how much is necessary; or b) are just puffing up your word count. Paraphrasing is generally used when you are making a brief reference to a particular part of the text in order to make a larger analytical point. Also, after quoting or paraphrasing, unlike MLA or APA, it is not necessary to give the page numbers; if you choose to, a simple reference to the page like (6) or (pg. 6) is fine.

**Transitions** which are words and phrases used to link one idea to the next. Without transitions, your paragraph becomes a grocery list of one thing after another with no sense of how your points connect or why. Some common transitional words and phrases include in addition, in other words, as a result, on the other hand, therefore, often, lastly, for example, however, consequently, etc.
Conclusions

Often the weakest part of any essay because writers believe they’ve already said all that was needed to be said in the body paragraphs. Many also view this part of their essay as an afterthought. Don’t. This is the last thing the marker is going to read before deciding upon your grade so try to give them something memorable to think about!

Weaker conclusions:
- repeat what’s already been said elsewhere using only slightly different words
- take a “victory lap” around their work: “In this essay I have clearly shown...”
- introduce new points not mentioned in the body paragraphs (often because the writer couldn’t “fit” them anywhere else)
- restate the thesis in the exact same words as before

These approaches are all acceptable but simplistic and unimaginative – and boring. It can even make the marker think that you don’t stand behind what you’ve written.

Your job in a conclusion is to show confidence that you’ve made your points as you color what the reader has just read.

Stronger conclusions:
- point back to the idea and the thoughts behind the thesis
- consider larger concerns or suggest new ways of thinking about an idea
- ask questions (often phrased rhetorically – see “Rhetorical Question” under Literary Techniques and Devices)
- reverse the order of the beginning - if your introduction went from the general to the specific, then perhaps here you might want to go in the reverse order (specific to general)
- can reassert your thesis but aren’t repetitive or phrased in the exact same way as in the introduction
- can be personal. We realize that this suggestion goes against what many teachers have told you to this point; however, if a personal comment is appropriate, and will serve to shed light or inform your analysis for the reader, a better question is why not use one? Remember: there is a difference between using “I” and “being personal”.

So, in conclusion...it is not necessary to write the words “In conclusion”. Doing so often just allows you to think you have one and you are actually “concluding” the essay rather than “ending” it which is more often the case.

Besides, the white space that follows your final words is a dead giveaway.
Keep in Mind…

▶️ **Use of “I”** is, generally, to be avoided in academic essays. Is there a fundamental difference between writing “I think the author uses symbolism to…” and “The author uses symbolism to…”? Not really; besides, you wrote it so the marker knows you think it. There is, however, a big difference between using “I” and “being personal” (see Conclusions).

▶️ **Active vs. Passive Voice:** Use the active and not the passive voice in your writing. The active voice means that the subject of the sentence performs the action/verb. Instead of writing “The ball was thrown by the boy” (passive), write “The boy threw the ball” (active).

▶️ **Tense Consistency:** Unnecessary shifts in verb tense are very confusing and annoying to the reader so make a point of keeping consistent (for the purposes of literary analysis, generally the present tense).

▶️ **Indent** at the beginning of each paragraph and double-space between lines. No need for extra space between paragraphs; just indent.

▶️ **Write your final essay in blue or black pen** and make sure your words are legible to the reader.

▶️ **Don’t worry too much** about whiting out or erasing errors. This is a waste of time. Just draw a line through the word(s) and rewrite on the line above (yet another good reason to double-space!)
SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAYS

Here you will find copies of two student essays: the first is an essay on a short story that breaks down its paragraphs through techniques and devices; the second is on an essay that breaks its paragraphs down through key ideas. See if you can spot each essay’s strengths and weaknesses.

Essay #1

The topic of death has troubled people throughout the history of humanity. While some fear death, others welcome it with open arms because they view it as a kind of escape—a release from life’s trials and tribulations. In Edward McCourt’s short story “Cranes Fly South”, literary devices such as setting, imagery and irony are used by the author to illustrate and explore this theme of death as a release from the human condition.

The first literary technique the author uses to convey the theme of humanity’s reaction to death as a welcome release from life is setting. The story takes place on a “black open prairie” which is symbolic of the grandfather’s disabling sickness, a condition that leads him to welcome death as a sort of cure. Another example is the grandfather character’s interpretation of the setting as it contributes to his condition. “Me, I’m going south too”, Grandpa said, “You can set in the sun all winter and see things besides flatness. Man gets mighty tired of flatness – after eighty years”. He believes that he will be happier if he goes south, or symbolically, if he dies, because then he can finally enjoy his surroundings without any longer suffering the mundane, bleak, flatness of the prairie that is his life. “Like I say, boy, they go south. Figger they see the Mississippi from a mile up. Sure like to see it myself, will too, some day.” In this example of setting the grandfather expresses his yearning to see the great Mississippi river which stands in for his voyage from the hardships of life to the peaceful waters of paradise.

Much like the vivid descriptions of setting, the author also uses imagery to convey the theme of acceptance of death. The most prominent image in the story is that of the crane which represents the process of dying and the passage of one’s soul from life on earth to the afterlife. “They come in the night and you hear a sound like thunder and the sky gets dark – and there’s the Mississippi below and the smell of the sea blown in from a hundred miles away.” This image stands in for a kind of journey; a flight in the darkness surrounded by a thunderous supernatural entity such as the cranes, terminating at the Mississippi, which represents the passage of the soul from this realm into the next. McCourt’s use of this image further emphasizes the grandfather’s desire to leave one level of existence in order to attain the next.

Along with the use of imagery, the author also uses irony to express the theme of death in the short story. The story is ironic in that the character of grandpa, who is old, frail and sick, waits for forty years to see a crane, and then he dies. Grandpa’s reaction of surprise, disbelief and wonder conveyed by his expression “Great God Heaven!” demonstrates his determination to see a crane before he dies, thereby preparing himself for death. Lee’s dialogue with his father illustrates how necessary Grandpa felt it was to see a crane before he died, which ironically happened soon after. “He just had to see it”, he said stubbornly to his father. “He just had to.” Lee’s father’s response to this innocent plea is also ironic. With “a queer inexplicable note of pain in his voice,” Lee’s father replied: “Wish I’d been along.” This is ironic in the sense that the crane represents death and, in Lee’s father lamenting over the crane, he also longs for a release from the burdens of his life; perhaps even wishing it were him dying instead of grandpa. Another ironic point is that the father could have chosen to go on the journey with his father but instead the task has fallen to Lee, his son. This sense of irony is reconciled in the end by Lee’s assurance of his grandfather’s happiness when “the words sprang clean and triumphant from the throat. He’s gone south”.

The theme of death, which is prominent in McCourt’s short story, is reconciled by various literary devices and techniques used by the author. The use of setting, imagery and
irony are all essential in conveying this theme of death as a release from the human condition. This condition, which is subject to old age, decay and disease, is accompanied by a certain longing for an escape through death to end suffering. (735 words)

Essay #2

In February 2010, all Canadians were hockey fans the day they watched the women’s team beat their US rivals in a 2-0 game to win Olympic Gold. The women on both teams played hockey as the game should be played with incredible skill, powerful skating and a strong sense of teamwork. In Jay Teitel’s essay “Shorter, Slower, Weaker: And That’s a good Thing”, the author promotes this type of performance in women’s sports. He contrasts women’s with men’s sports to show how differently they play. Teitel claims that today’s male athletes play to entertain, leaving skill and teamwork in second place whereas women have not strayed from the origins of the game when ability came first. Women athletes today are bringing back yesterday’s game when bigger did not mean better.

Women athletes make the team because of their talent for their particular sport, an argument that Teitel uses throughout his essay. When the majority of sports were introduced over a hundred years ago, coaches looked first at the player’s talent. The author uses the example of basketball to make his point clear. When the sport was first created, the height of the athletes was not a criterion. In fact, as Teitel states, the average size of a basketball player “was only marginally taller than the lay-population average of the day” and about the same as today’s women basketball players. Audiences could actually identify better with these athletes because they were more like the athletes themselves. Extremely tall basketball players were not recruited because many coaches felt they would be uncoordinated. Height was actually a “handicap”; today, height is everything and it is not unusual to find basketball players over 7 feet tall. Yesterday’s sport focused on the ability to shoot baskets, plain and simple. It focused on skill as opposed to today’s focus of entertaining audiences with mega sized athletes making millions of dollars. Women athletes today play as the game was intended to be played; they play with finesse and skill.

The author’s claim that men have become “ubermenchen” in sports is another convincing argument to support the idea that bigger does not mean better. Male athletes today have out stepped the boundaries of the game. In addition to humongous basketball players, present day baseball players and even hockey players are much larger than ever before. With this exceptional size also comes a loss of teamwork. What happens is that the play is dominated by 2 main players who, like Teitel’s analogy to the pinball machine, go back and forth across their playing field (or the ice) to the delight of the audience. In basketball, it is not uncommon for two men to play “one-on-one” in a game. Yes, it is incredible to watch these giants sail through the air and make amazing jump shots, but the focus is on these two men and their acrobatics. What happened to teamwork? Bobby Orr, Wayne Gretsky and Guy Lafleur were all superheroes in their day. They were not large men, just gifted and talented men who became even greater with the help of their team mates.

Women athletes play because of the passion they have for their game and not for fame and fortune. Women have become an “oasis of form” according to Teitel and this is why he enjoyed the hockey game he describes at the beginning of his essay. His description of the game includes a “…shapely and unbroken” play; teams played in “creative wholes”; and passes “being completed” regularly. There was not one main player who stood out as a giant and squished other players into the boards to the delight of the audience. The women played as a team. Teitel proves this because there is no money to be made in the majority of women’s sports today. This is certainly true in team sports where mega salaries and bonuses are not part of women’s’ games; they can only “dream about six-figure salaries.” It is obvious that women, then, do not play for the money because they don’t earn any! Again, they remain true to the origins of the game.

Does bigger mean better in sports? Of course not and Teitel makes this point very clear in his essay. However, he does omit one important reason why some men have become so
much bigger and stronger than yesterday’s men and today’s women and that reason is steroids. Canada’s own Ben Johnston is an example of this. After winning Gold in the 1988 Olympics, he lost his medal because he tested positive when tested for drugs. Mark McGuire also used steroids which helped him break the home run record. Performance-enhancing drugs are a part of the athletic world today and are found in virtually every sport. But I have not heard of steroids being used in women’s sports. Perhaps if there was mandatory drug testing for athletes in all sports the players would not outgrow their playing fields and be judged on skill, teamwork and passion to play instead. In women’s sports, it is ability that matters and not size! (842 words)
You have four hours to complete the exam. Here are some general guidelines to help you break down how you might approach it.

For the **first two hours** you should be focused on:

- Familiarizing yourself with, and committing to, a particular reading (+/- 15-20 minutes)

- Through multiple readings, gaining a deeper understanding of what’s “really going on” in the text you’ve chosen. Annotating, generating ideas, drafting and organizing your thoughts in a clear manner (+/- 90 minutes).

For the **last two hours**, you should be concerned with:

- Writing your final essay (+/- 90 minutes).

- Proofreading and editing (+/- 30 min)

These time frames are only suggestions; some steps can occur at any time during the exam.

Remember to take frequent breaks throughout because being rested and clear is necessary for **everything** you have to do.

And use the **full four hours you have been given!**
Proofreading and Editing

Proofreading focuses on how something reads; editing on how something is written. The two tasks are not mutually exclusive; they should occur at the same time.

Once your essay is complete, it must be proofread.

Some of the things you should ask yourself include:
Are my ideas organized in paragraphs that have structure and flow?
Are my quotes appropriately incorporated?
Am I summarizing instead of analyzing?
Have I commented on the author’s use of techniques and devices?
Are my ideas communicated using college-level expression?

The importance of proofreading is that it allows you to make any adjustments that reduce the number of times the marker has to ask him/herself, “What is this student really trying to say here?” while reading your essay.

Editing means going over your work so that what remains is more clearly understood.

Things to consider here include:

* Spelling
* Wordiness/Word Choice
* Punctuation
* Repetition
* Subject/Verb Agreement
* Verb Tense
* Prepositions and Conjunctions
* Sentence Structure

Remember: the markers expect you to make some errors – that’s inevitable. Your job while editing and proofreading is to reduce needless errors that might lower your grade in Expression.
Final Thoughts

Before you hand in your essay, you should ask yourself a series of very important questions. Your ability to answer “yes” to these questions means you have likely met the required objectives for the English Exit Exam.

►► Did I answer the question? Any answer other than “yes” here means the past 4 hours were a complete waste of time!
►► Did I edit and proofread to the best of my ability?
►► Did I meet the 750-word requirement?
►► Did I write something I am satisfied with?

Lastly, one final, “final” thought:

This may be the last essay you will ever have to write for school.

Niiiiiiice...
Kathleen Toohy (B.A., M.Ed. McGill) has been involved with the English Exit Exam since it was first introduced in 1996. She has developed workshops on exam preparation and has helped students write mock EEE tests. Kathleen presently works in JAC's Academic Success Centre. kathy.toohy@johnabbott.qc.ca

Neil Briffett (B.A., M.A. Concordia) has been the JAC Read/Write Specialist since 2009. He is a long-time marker of the English Exit Exam and gives workshops each semester on how to pass it. He is also an English teacher at both John Abbott and Dawson’s New School. neil.briffett@johnabbott.qc.ca
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A List of CEGEP Contacts Regarding Questions About EEE Eligibility

Centre Collégial de Développement de Matériel Didactique (CCDMD)
(Additional information and resources on the EEE including previously-used texts and sample student essays)


John Abbott College Academic Success Centre Website
(http://www.johnabbott.qc.ca Under "Services to Students")

Québec Government Site Regarding the English Exit Exam
(Resources, exam schedule, information about getting a grade review or copy)

Style and Substance by Renée Lallier
(Available at the JAC Bookstore, an indispensable guide to college-level essay writing)