The unofficial guide on how to write an essay
And hopefully a good one at that
As told by Sooyeon Kim
(Hi guys.)

1. Introduction to the guide

Hey, Sooyeon reporting in. First of all, sorry about how unattractive this guide looks; I’m working with a Microsoft Word 2002 which has barely any editing tools. But hopefully the content will make up for it. Hopefully.

I don’t really think of myself as being qualified to write authoritative guides on how to write “good” essays. I’m still a (relatively) young student who just happens to like writing essays and short fictions, and thankfully those around me seem to appreciate my work. In this guide, I’ll just give you a few pointers and tips I use to write a coherent, strong, and entertaining argumentative essay.

If you have any additional questions, complaints, or just need obscure book/music suggestions, feel free to contact me at +82-10-5474-2173 (for those of you who have WhatsApp or can support international texts), https://www.facebook.com/seanitakim, or just follow @suprphreak327 on Twitter. Good luck!

2. Starting the essay (aka working on your outline)

When I start writing something, be it an essay, a novella, or a short surrealist piece of fiction, I usually start the process by beginning an outline. I usually use this step to brainstorm and set the overall tone and length of the essay. Writing a solid outline is a good way to keep your whole essay from swaying around topics or simply looking somewhat disheveled. It also helps to set the ambience (or writing voice, if you prefer) of your essay, making it seem more coherent.

For the sake of clarity, let’s imagine that we’re writing an essay on this topic:

Is the WSC as amazing as it seems to be?

Now you brainstorm. Which side of the argument do you endorse? Personally I’m all in for the Scholar’s Cup, and I believe that you are too, so I should probably think of how to convince people that it really is awesome. Here you should ideally think of two to three strong points, of which at least one should be a personal anecdote (because just
facts and hard evidence can be boring to read, and who doesn’t like a personal story?). I usually go for two logical points and one personal experience. Following this, I might conjure up these three points:

- you can learn a lot of things at the WSC that schools don’t normally teach
- the WSC introduces you to a much larger social scale than what you would expect from local schools
- participating in the WSC helped me gain a genuine interest in learning and even drove me to prepare more diligently for college

Now that we have our points, we start working on the outline.

An ideal essay (and by “ideal” I mean a standard, non-experimental essay) should be consisted of three parts: the introduction, the body paragraphs, and the conclusion. Now that you’ve gotten an idea of what to write in the body paragraphs, you want to start writing an outline. While doing this, you should decide on the overall tone of the essay. Will you write a biting, sardonic essay? Or maybe you want to write something that’s full of puns and is fun to read?

When I write an outline, I jot down sentences and points I want to include in each paragraph. After that, I determine the mood of the whole essay. In the case of our sample topic, I want my essay to be a playful, refreshing one and not one of those sarcastic biting pieces that I usually write. So I might write an outline like the one below:

**INTRO.**
- start with personal experience
- maybe that moment at talent show when cheering newly made friend rapping on stage?
- contrast with competitive Korean competitions point out how fun it is even though it’s an academic tournament
- emphasize all my new friends are from different countries/cultures

**BRIDGE**
- what is WSC?
- various subjects, different cultures
- joke about alpacas
- yeah so it’s cool, I get it, but is it truly AWESOME?

**BODY1: LEARN COOL STUFF**
- so much info
- various topics
- most of them -> don’t even get to learn at school (ex. musicals, films, etc)
"refreshing break from those austere textbooks"

joke contrasting boring school chemistry class to WSC material on "fainting goats"

**BODY2: SOCIAL EXPANSION**
- at school: only meet kids from that region
- even international schools: all in same area
- WSC: kids from all around the world
- learn to accept and respect different cultures
- also make good friends
- point on how WSC helped me overcome social isolation as a homeschooler

**BODY3: IT WAS AWESOME FOR ME**
- back to homeschooler point
- tfw isolated from peer group because no school
- lose motivation for studying/college/etc
- find WSC by sheer chance
- join, learn lots of things, meet great friends
- motivation for me to go through college preparation high school life ("as soon as I'm finished with my application essays, I can go off to the States for the ToC!")
- note to self: write this part really emotionally and sincerely

**CONCL.**
- joke on “pwaa” general WSC-related things
- inspired me, will inspire more kids to come
- best decision in my life
- joke be semi-serious about “WSC was boring said no one ever”
- everybody gets a chance, everybody learns something new
- joke on shiny medals/alpacas/the Daniel-Zack dance-off at the 2012 global rounds
- “brace yourselves, the alpacalypse is coming”

Yes, I wrote that in comic sans, get over it. Just remember to take as much time as needed when writing your outline, since it’s going to be the most important step of writing your essay. I usually use almost all my collaborative time writing the first draft of my essay. Then I show it to my teammates for proofreading, and then I spend an additional twenty minutes or so re-writing and fixing it as needed.
3. Filling it out

So you’ve finished your outline. Now what? We flesh it out, of course. Now that you have a solid structure you can safely start writing your essay. This is the easy part and usually takes about thirty minutes for me; while you were working on your outline, you already began forming sentences and structures inside your head, which you now just need to write out on paper.

Writing the introduction has always been the most challenging part of fleshing out the outline for me. There’s the pressure of having to make a good impression of your essay at the beginning. Writers have long acknowledged the importance of good introductions/first paragraphs; there are even competitions on the best first paragraph in each genre of writing! (I’m serious. Look it up.)

But don’t sweat it. We’re the mighty alpwaacas, aren’t we? Since you have a solid outline, writing it out will be as easy as giving candy to a baby. (Yes, I know, people usually say “as easy as stealing candy from a baby,” but have you ever tried to steal candy from a baby?!)?

Think of writing as a connect-the-dots game. You already have the basic outline of what you want to draw (or write, in our case). You just need to use your imagination to draw the lines between the dots to give life to your desired outcome. And always remember: hesitating only makes your lines shakier, and too much correction makes the drawing look smudged.

With the introduction outline given above, you might write something like this:

Just a year ago, I did not know that I would be sitting in an auditorium along with a thousand other students from countries I had only visited in my wildest dreams. I did not know that I would be hooting and clapping with a group of friends from Dubai like adrenaline-pumped hooligans. I did not know that I would be waving an alpaca plush doll in a gesture of encouragement to a newly made Indian friend who was yelling into the microphone on stage.

And I certainly did not know that all this would be taking place in what was supposed to be an academic tournament.

There we go. Of course, it could be much better, considering I just wrote that in less than a minute while flying over Italy.

Here’s another example:
The huge hall resonates with a thousand voices, a thousand different scents, a thousand eager souls soaring in excitement. Sweaty blonde mops of hair, Indian accents, Korean voices shouting. A single young scholar belts out his favorite lyrics as the cheering grows louder, louder, loud enough to send shudders of anticipation down every single heart in the room.

You think that’s exciting? Wait until you see our Debate Showcase.

Once you’re done with your introduction, the body paragraphs will follow suite easily. You just have to follow a few do’s and don’ts (I’ll get to those soon).

The conclusion is a tricky little rascal, though. Think of it as the evil half-brother of the introduction. You can get away with a mediocre introduction if your body paragraphs are great, but a weak, limp and spineless conclusion will drag down your amazing essay and make it seem much worse than it is.

When you’re writing the conclusion, either make it extremely witty or extremely emotionally powerful. Either way, just make sure that it’s the sort of ending paragraph that will resonate in the reader’s head for a long time after putting down your essay. Don’t be afraid to get experimental; the unusual, attention-grabbing ones are usually the best conclusions.

Here’s my example:

I remember the look on my mother’s face when I returned from the Scholar’s Cup global rounds last year. I remember how she helped me pick up my bags from the airport and loaded them into the car. “Look at you,” she had scolded, “you lost your flight back home and had to wait at that airport in Bangkok for three whole hours by yourself, your clothes are wrinkled and disheveled, and yet you’re grinning like a madman. What has that competition done to you?”

“It’s saved my life, mum,” I had said with the same grin on my face as I handed her my shiny round medals. “And I have the feeling it’s going to save many more lives.”

Now I am eighteen, waiting for college to start. I am no longer a socially awkward homeschooler with no idea on what or how to study. One thing hasn’t changed, though—the white, fuzzy alpaca plush doll still sits on my desk, keeping watch over me and my endeavors. It is a remnant of the most brilliant days of my high school career, and as long as the Scholar’s Cup continues its legacy I am sure that numerous other alpaca dolls will continue to be mounted lovingly on the desks of students everywhere.

Brace yourselves; the Alpacalypse is coming.
You could also add more personality to your essay by including a drawing of a ninja Alpaca at the bottom of your conclusion.

4. Do’s and Don’ts of writing the essay

DO:
- spend a lot of time brainstorming and writing your outline
- feel free to modify your outline until you’re pleased with it
- spend a bit of collaboration time proofreading each other’s outlines
- use legible handwriting
- leave a blank line between paragraphs. Makes it easier to read.
- use correct grammar and punctuation marks
- flesh out the outline swiftly and fluidly
- proofread
- proofread again
- correct any spelling mistakes
- use fancy words once in a while, like once every two paragraphs. Of course, only if the word fits perfectly in the context.
- drink lots of water before the start
- go to the bathroom after drinking all that water
- read lots of good books beforehand to get inspired, and by good books I mean ones that aren’t supernatural teen literature.
- listen to music with good lyrics. I mean, even if a song gets stuck in your head while you’re writing, “grab the leaf of the branch from the tree in the ground / where the roots claimed the earth many toiled / to a land that now stands under no one’s command / and her beauty let no man destroy” will inspire you much, much more than “I'm too sexy for my car, too sexy for my car / too sexy by far / and I'm too sexy for my hat, too sexy for my hat / what do you think about that?”
- feel free to get poetic, flowery, or passionate while writing
- use a lot of contrast in your points. Everybody likes contrasts.
- use lots of personal experiences
- be logical. The whole point of writing a “good” essay is to look smarter than you really are.
- have fun

DON’T:
- cross out the whole paragraph and start writing a new one if you’re not satisfied with it. You don’t have that much time, and a big fat “x” isn’t aesthetically pleasing. Just do your best to fix it up at the end.
- be verbose all the time, you’ll look like you’re trying too hard to be cool
- switch the mood of the essay in the middle. Don’t be that kid who wears pink Hello Kitty shirts and writes Emo poetry.
- be afraid to experiment with line breaks and wording—be a younger, slightly more orthodox version of David Foster Wallace!
- write a sequel to Infinite Jest, though
- make your essay too short. Perversely, don’t write a 12-page sermon. I usually write about five to seven pages.
- think that you have bad writing skills. Everybody has a sleeping Shakespeare in their heads; it’s just up to us to unleash him.
- try to write what you think the WSC crew will like. Write what you truly believe in. As long as you don’t believe that Real Madrid is better than FCB. Then I will probably hate you.
- try to be too witty (like this guide)
- start your body paragraphs with those awful “Firstly,” “Secondly” things. They’re the tackiest things ever in the history of writing. Who started using those, anyway?
- try to compete with your own teammates
- try to compete with anybody, really
- take yourself too seriously. The best writers are the ones who make jokes about themselves in their writing, a la Dave Eggers.

5. Do-It-Yourself

Of course, the best way to improve is to actually start writing. I occasionally challenge myself by picking a completely random topic and then writing an essay or a short fiction about it. It’s done wonders for me, so I guess it’s safe to say that you’ll probably profit from it, too.

I’ve come up with five random topics that you can practice on. If you need any feedback or comments, feel free to send your essays to me.

Topic 1: Should all people join at least one kind of SNS?
Topic 2: What are the similarities between Harry Potter and Twilight?
Topic 3: Should you or should you not block your ex from Facebook?
Topic 4: Are actual CD albums better than torrented albums?
Topic 5: Why is the alpaca the perfect mascot for the WSC?

Good luck. Live long and pwaasper. And buy me a piece of toast if this guide was of any help.