THE DISCURSIVE ESSAY

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2016-2017
IN THIS LESSON, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

➤ define the purpose of discursive writing.

➤ identify expository, argumentative, and discursive prompts.

➤ understand the expository prompt.

➤ brainstorm ideas for a discursive prompt using General Paper strategies, such as the Hand Approach.

➤ Time: 45 minutes
WHAT IS A DISCURSIVE ESSAY?

➤ **Discursive** (adj) [dis-ker-siv]:
  ➤ talking or writing about things that are not highly organized
  ➤ moving from topic to topic without order
  ➤ passing aimlessly from one topic to another
  ➤ SYNONYMS: rambling, digressive, erratic, long-winded

➤ Think of discursive as a **BLEND** of **expository** and **argumentative** because it uses elements from both:
  ➤ it **explains** the issue’s pros and cons WITHOUT bias
  ➤ it uses **point-counterpoint** at time, when reasoning through a point
  ➤ it can **argue** in favor of one angle or it can stay **neutral**
  ➤ it **seamlessly transitions**
  ➤ it observes **logical progression of thought**
  ➤ it **analyzes** and **draws conclusions** based on these analyses
Discursive prompts tend to utilize the following trigger words/phrases/clauses in the prompt to initiate such a discussion:

- How far do you agree...
- To what extent do you agree...
- How fair is the comment that...
- Evaluate....
- Discuss...
- Assess...
- Assess the ability of..
- Examine the value of..

These prompts will ALMOST always indicate that it is a discursive prompt— make sure you take into consideration the entire prompt and what it is asking!!!!!!!
PROMPT PRACTICE

➤ Have a look inside the prompt and tell where they belong!

➤ In the next activity, fill in the blanks to sort each prompt as either Expository, Argumentative, or Discursive!
Label each prompt from various GP released tests as either Expository, Argumentative, or Discursive:

➤ To what extent should a nation try to forget its past?

➤ Consider the view that ‘conservation of wilderness and wildlife should be the priority of all nations’.

➤ Given the misery in both human and personal history, is it possible to believe in compassionate Divinity?

➤ To what extent do our genes determine our future?

➤ Is it democratically acceptable not to vote in elections?

➤ Which foreign culture appeals most to you? Give reasons for your choice.

➤ Choose two well-known people and assess their importance in the culture of our times.
To what extent should a nation try to forget its past?
- **Discursive**

Consider the view that ‘conservation of wilderness and wildlife should be the priority of all nations’.
- **Discursive**

Given the misery in both human and personal history, is it possible to believe in compassionate Divinity?
- **Argumentative**

To what extent do our genes determine our future?
- **Discursive**

Is it democratically acceptable not to vote in elections?
- **Argumentative**

Which foreign culture appeals most to you? Give reasons for your choice.
- **Expository**

Choose two well-known people and assess their importance in the culture of our times.
- **Expository + Discursive**
STRUCTURE OF A DISCURSIVE ESSAY

➤ Unlike expository and argumentative, there is no set structure for a discursive essay

➤ However, you can follow this general guideline:

➤ Introduction:

➤ Body Paragraphs should:

➤ either begin or end with a transitional statement, such as a point/counterpoint statement or transitional word/phrase

➤ each paragraph should evaluate and address one claim (and/or counterclaim), providing evidence in support (or refutation) of that claim

➤ keep an objective tone by avoiding logical fallacies, opinion, and personal pronouns

➤ Conclusion: The conclusion should either: A) remain neutral and short up points made OR B) choose a side

- GENERAL STATEMENT ABOUT ESSAY TOPIC
- 1 to 3 SENTENCES THAT INDICATE SHIFTS PERSPECTIVE
- THESIS
TIPS FOR WRITING A DISCURSIVE ESSAY

➤ Tip #1: Unpack the Prompt
  ➤ Star the directive or command (this tells you whether it’s expository, argumentative, or discursive)
  ➤ Underline constraints (i.e., time, location) and tasks
  ➤ Circle the key words that you should use in your thesis

➤ Tip #2: Brainstorm!
  ➤ So a level of brainstorming is clearly in order before attempting this style (or any style for that matter)—it’s not an entirely untamed form. But students aren’t expected to know the answer upfront, and they aren’t encouraged to be overly assertive in tone either because they are supposed to reason THROUGH the topic rather than demand the reader’s allegiance or protest against it.
    ➤ Whaaa?? Don’t treat this like an argumentative essay. Yes, you will employ point/counterpoint, but in a more rhetorical way rather than an agree-with-my-point way. Remember that you don’t get to choose a side until the conclusion. EACH POINT AND COUNTERPOINT IS GIVEN EQUAL WEIGHT.

➤ Tip #3: YIKES! Avoid Rambling, Circumlocution, and Digression
  ➤ Keep topically related paragraphs near one another — this makes seamless transitioning easier
  ➤ Avoid talking about the environment in paragraph #1, then remembering something about it just after paragraph #4 and doubling back (“…like I said earlier in this essay…” or “back to my point earlier about…”)
### NCE/GP Rubric: Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Band 1 | 18-20 | “Excellent”
Fully operational command
- Very few slips/errors
- Highly fluent
- Very effective use of expressions and idioms
- Excellent use of vocabulary; (near) faultless grammar
- Excellent sentence structure and organization of paragraphs
- Excellent spelling/punctuation |
| Band 2 | 14-17 | “good-very good”
Effective command
- Few slips/errors
- Fluent
- Effective use of expressions/idioms
- Good use of vocabulary; sound grammar
- Good sentence structure/well-organized paragraphs
- Good spelling/punctuation |
| Band 3 | 10-13 | “average”
Reasonable command
- Some slips/basic errors but acceptable standard overall
- Reasonably fluent/not difficult to read
- Generally appropriate use of expressions/idioms
- Fair range and apt use of basic vocabulary
- Acceptable grammar
- Simple/unambitious sentence structure
- Reasonable spelling/punctuation |
| Band 4 | 6-9   | “flawed but not weak”
Inconsistent command
- Regular and frequent slips/errors
- Hesitant fluency/not easy to follow at times
- Some inappropriate expressions/idioms
- Limited range of vocabulary; faulty grammar
- Some flawed sentence structure/paragraphing
- Regular spelling/punctuation |
| Band 5 | 0-5   | “weak-very weak”
Little/no effective communication
- Almost every line contains (many) errors of all kinds
- Little/no fluency/difficult (almost impossible) to follow
- (Very) poor use of expressions/idioms
- (Very) poor range of vocabulary; (very) poor grammar
- (Very) poor sentence structure
- (Very) poor spelling and punctuation |

(Bracketed descriptors denote 0-2 range of marks)

### NCE/GP Essay Rubric: Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Band 1 | 26-30 | “Excellent”
Very good and comprehensive knowledge/understanding of the topic |
- Comprehensive coverage, totally relevant material, interesting, perceptive, analytical |
- Thoughtful, enlightening illustration using local, national, and international examples where applicable |
- Coherent and engaging discussion, displaying sensitivity, sophistication, awareness and maturity |
- (Very) well structured; logical progression of ideas |
| Band 2 | 20-25 | “good-very good”
Good knowledge/understanding of the topic |
- Totally (near totally) relevant, well focused but less analytical and perceptive than Band 1 |
- Major points well developed/balanced |
- (Very) good range of examples/illustration |
- Logical and systematic discussion |
- Effectively structured |
| Band 3 Upper | 16-19 | “average”
Sound knowledge/understanding of the topic |
- Competent; major points adequately developed |
- Largely relevant and remains focused on the question throughout |
- Reasonable range of examples/illustration to support key points |
- Reasonably structured; ideas are sufficiently balanced |
| Band 3 Lower | 13-15 | “fairly average”
Fair knowledge/understanding of the topic |
- Obvious points mentioned but not adequately developed; some ideas go undefined in scope |
- Some digression, but generally sticks to the question |
- Does not always support major points with apt/well-suited illustration |
- Tendency to assert/generalize rather than argue/discuss in detail |
- May lack focus |
- Partially imbalanced in presentation; inconsistent organization |
| Band 4 | 7-12  | “flawed but not weak”
Limited knowledge/understanding of the topic |
- Restricted material/scope; rather pedestrian; lacks distinctive/imaginative ideas |
- Some relevance but may be implicit/hidden in translation |
- May be subjective/tangential at times |
- Prone to unsubstantiated, sweeping statements; ideas vague and/or lacking sustained development; can be digressive and wander off topic |
- Limited illustration and/or factual inaccuracy |
- May be incomplete in organization |
- Insufficient focus; essay offloads everything known about the particular topic without adequate reference/connection to the prompt |
| Band 5 | 0-6   | “weak-very weak”
Poor/very poor knowledge/understanding of the topic |
- (totally) inadequate with little/no substance; (very) vague and confused ideas |
- Question largely (completely) misinterpreted/misunderstood |
- Very limited/(total) irrelevance |
- Very limited/(no) appropriate illustration |

(Bracketed descriptors denote 0-2 range of marks)
DISCURSIVE WRITING:

Guide to Introductions
Quite a few candidates used the introduction to give unnecessary and sometimes lengthy history/background of the topic instead of focusing immediately on the wording of the questions and exploring the arising issues.

-Examiner’s Report, Paper 11, October/November 2012
Essay intentions and organization should be customized according to the key terms in the prompt!

Prompt: To what extent does a country both benefit and suffer from where it is situated?

To help you craft this element of the essay, remember that introductions should:
- Immediately connect to the language of the prompt. What words might you use from this prompt?
- Clearly introduce the topic; no need for lengthy histories or to outline each part of your arguments. Keep it simple!
- Clarify any terms that could be interpreted in different ways (i.e. ‘art,’ ‘history,’ ‘knowledge,’ etc.). Attempt to convey these definitions as concretely as possible. For instance, instead of leaving it at ‘art’, note that you will only be concerned with traditional painting and sculpture, not photography and graphic design. Let them know what to expect HERE!
- Use the thesis statement to make the style of the essay clear: discursive, argumentative, or expository intentions should be conveyed before beginning the argument.
IN YOUR NOTES...

➤ Take a look at the four sample introductions taken from AICE General Paper 8001/8004 Example Candidate Responses document. With a partner, write down the elements that each introduction has in common.

➤ Beginning: Record similarities between essays for the first sentence of each discursive essay.

➤ Middle: What do the second or third or fourth sentences of these introductions have in common?

➤ End (thesis): What are the similarities between the four essay thesis statements?
With your partner, write a thesis statement for three of the following prompts:

➤ To what extent should a nation try to forget its past?

➤ Consider the view that ‘conservation of wilderness and wildlife should be the priority of all nations’.

➤ Given the misery in both human and personal history, is it possible to believe in compassionate Divinity?

➤ To what extent do our genes determine our future?

➤ Is it democratically acceptable not to vote in elections?

➤ Which foreign culture appeals most to you? Give reasons for your choice.

➤ Choose two well-known people and assess their importance in the culture of our times.
Example:

Will renewable resources ever meet our energy needs?

There are relatively **simple ways** people can decrease their carbon footprint, from simply switching off the lights when exiting a room, to installing solar paneling on their rooftops to replace that energy bill altogether. **However**, being energy efficient is not always as easy as it seems. Large-scale projects cost thousands, if not millions of dollars, and the current economic decline makes it harder to pay for these projects. **Thus, the question arises as to whether or not** renewable resources can ever meet our energy needs.

**THESIS:**
Balanced, unbiased; A direct reflection of the prompt

**Generally opens up the topic of energy**

**Signals a SHIFT in perspective; Counts with the existence of CONS as well...reader is now engaged!**

**Entices the reader by briefly proving that PROS to the issue exist**
The Hand Approach

**PROMPT:** To what extent does a country both benefit and suffer from where it is situated?
DISCURSIVE WRITING:

Guide to body paragraphs
“Answers which offered opinion...but offered no local or international illustration to support their argument were adjudged too generalized or vague...support examples with examples from different countries!”

In what way does a country both benefit and suffer from where it is situated?

When it comes to political matters, the United States draws clear benefits from where it is situated on the map. This country allows its citizens the right to vote, and the Constitution governs the land as supreme law. The country believes in the separation of power between three branches, which are judicial, legislative and executive. This separation ensures that no branch has an advantage over the others, so as to avoid corruption. The citizens of the U.S. also have amendment rights, the first ten, for example, being the Bill of Rights. These amendments protect the societies rights as Americans such as freedom of speech, press, and religion. These amendments also protect citizens from unlawful searches and seizures, and cruel and unusual punishment.
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While America’s western location has helped empower it politically, the same cannot necessarily be said for U.S. geography when it comes to environmental issues. In the last decade, the United States has seen more natural disasters than it has ever seen before. Wiping out infrastructure, razing communities to the ground, wiping out entire populations, the devastation reaches every corner of our country. In the southeast, states like Florida lie vulnerable to the destructive path of hurricanes each summer. For instance, while Hurricane Katrina only whispered its way across the state in 2005, it picked up speed in the Gulf of Mexico and bombarded the shores of Louisiana a few days later. Deemed a
national emergency, it left nothing but wreckage and human loss in its wake. Meanwhile, the Midwest is a breeding ground for tornadoes, and the west coast is most prone to earthquakes and brush fires that threaten the homes of humans and animals alike. Therefore, the geographical location of a single country like the U.S. can be both beneficial and detrimental, depending upon the way we look at its unique circumstances.
WHAT TO INCLUDE IN BODY PARAGRAPHS:

➤ Topic Sentence: What is a topic sentence? What is its purpose?

➤ Student Logic: Give an example of fact-based reasoning from your sample essay.

➤ Concrete Examples: specific and fact-based, these help to support student logic. Outline one example from your sample essay.

➤ Point/Counterpoint: not necessary in every paragraph, but you want to be sure to stay balanced and unbiased by presenting both sides an equal amount.

➤ Transitions: Although this may include transitional words or phrases, this also refers to the more sophisticated style of seamless transitions. Underline words or phrases that are used in one paragraph and then repeated in the transitional sentence of the proceeding paragraph.
GATHERING EVIDENCE

➤ Use your audience assignment notes and the posters located in the classroom to help you!
## GATHERING EVIDENCE: TO WHAT EXTENT DOES A COUNTRY BOTH BENEFIT AND SUFFER FROM WHERE IT IS SITUATED?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
<th>SUFFERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>bordered by democratic countries of Mexico and Canada, allowing for friendly political ties</td>
<td>vast land lends to vulnerability from various types of storms - tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCURSIVE WRITING

Guide to conclusions
Less effective conclusions merely listed points from the essay, rather than arriving at a clear, personal point of view.

-Examiner’s Report, Paper 12, May/June 2012
THE DISCURSIVE CONCLUSION SHOULD:

1. Provide some sort of **TRANSITION** to trigger the essay’s closing, but do not necessarily use the traditional ‘in conclusion’ format
   ➤ *Clearly, Evidently, It appears, Therefore, Ultimately, etc.*

2a. Briefly **summarize the main points** you’ve covered in the essay without going overboard on detail reiteration
   ➤ develop parallels or highlight direct contrasts if possible
   ➤ **limit this to 1-3 sentences**

2b. **Draw conclusions** based on the bigger picture ideas/themes addressed in your essay.
   ➤ *from a cultural perspective, (the prompt) holds true, but from a political perspective (the prompt) does not apply.*

3. Determine a final direction:
   ➤ maintain **NEUTRALITY**, if you feel the topic is highly circumstantial OR you don’t feel strongly about the topic.
   ➤ **PICK A SIDE**, if you feel that more often than not, one side holds true over the other OR you feel very strongly about one side

4. **LOOK TO THE FUTURE**, if the prompt permits you to, or simply **END** on an **OPTIMISTIC** note.

5. As always, include **PROMPT LANGUAGE** as you wrap up your address of the topic.
Look to the future:

“...in this way, it is more likely that future citizens will live healthier, longer lives, and today’s animals and other organisms will be able to exist centuries from now instead of being on the verge of extinction.”

“...clearly, as a result of the modern trends that continue to shape our world towards a more open, collaborative, and (ideally) more peaceful society, national borders have simply decreased in importance, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.”

End optimistically:

“...and as Martin Luther King, Jr. believed, at the center of nonviolence stands the supreme principle of love.”
‘Violence is the only effective means of securing change among those who are oppressed.’ Discuss.

After close consideration, one can easily infer that peaceful protest is the more effective technique for political change. Although violence may be the basic instinct of mankind, and though it may have yielded success in the past, it is not the only, nor the ideal, way to secure change. Abraham Lincoln once said that “force is all-conquering, but its victories are short-lived.” The magnanimous words of a political figure who governed the United States through one of the most violent wars in American history demonstrate that even he believes in peace over conflict. Possibly, in future political struggles, violence will take a backseat to the superceding ways of nonviolence; only then might humanity, for once, become a more peaceful race.
“Violence is the only effective means of securing change among those who are oppressed.” Discuss.

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As a class, let’s craft the introduction for this prompt! Use your notes and t-chart to help guide suggestions.

Prompt: *To what extent does a country both benefit and suffer from where it is situated?*
With your group, make an outline for body paragraphs using the evidence you’ve gathered. Your essays could be organized as follows:

- related pro and con of a country
- either pro or con of a country
- by topic (weather, resources, etc.)

Remember that, with discursive, there is no one way to do this. Choose the path that makes most sense for you!
MY CONCLUSION

- Using your notes and our class writing as your guide, craft your own conclusion.
➤ For more information on all things GP, go to The Global Pen at https://theglobalpen.com OR go to Jill’s new EdPioneer page at https://www.facebook.com/blazethetrail/.

➤ If you want to use this in another class, you may want to switch out the hand approach and use the lens essay approach instead:
  ➤ http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/davis-grant/UWShandbook/lens%20essay%20assignments.pdf
  ➤ https://harvardwritingcenter.wordpress.com/2010/03/30/the-four-parts-of-a-lens-essay-argument/
  ➤ https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/722/01/
  ➤ http://research.pomona.edu/writingcenter/files/2012/06/Writing-a-Lens-Essay.pdf

➤ Questions? Constructive Criticism? You can reach me at laci.cedeno@browardschools.com
CREDITS:


➤ Example Candidate Responses. N.p.: Cambridge International Examinations, 16 Feb. 2016. PDF.
