

**DR. TIM'S GUIDE
TO EXPOSITORY WRITING
(read this carefully!)**

I. Basics. Tradition holds that there are three types of writing: expressive, persuasive, and expository. Each clearly has elements of the other, but each is also a separate kind of writing. Expressive writing tells readers how the author feels (in a broad sense of the term) on a topic. Persuasive writing attempts to induce the reader to accept the author's position on a topic. Expository writing explains the position of another on a topic in as clear, thorough, and fair a manner as possible.

Many times these forms of writing are confused with one another. "Artsy" students often confuse exposition with expression. Students with strong religious or ideological perspectives confuse persuasion with exposition. The central problem with both confusions is this: you cannot tell us how you feel about an author's position if you do not first understand it. Conversely, you can neither agree nor disagree with a position you do not first understand. Understanding, then, is the foundation for *all* forms of writing, and this achieved through nurturing the art of exposition. This art is much harder than most people (especially journalists!!!) think. Experts at it make frequent mistakes. They often give extremely persuasive expositions only to have equally persuasive critiques of their expositions. Exposition is important for (at least) two reasons: it is the only way information is correctly transmitted, and, it entails a basic respect for the Other, for, to do it properly, we must learn to *listen* to people other than ourselves.

II. Techniques. The basic method of expository writing is to quote or cite a text. It is part of an ethics of expository writing that the writer give the exact source of their citations. Citations are like data in an experiment. For others to check your results, they have to have access to that data. There are many different systems for referencing citations. For purposes of this class, we are going to adopt a rather informal system. All you need to do is the following (see Sample Essay and Correction of Sample Essay for full illustrations):

1. Exposition of single-author text (or short paper in our class): first citation: (Author's last name, page number). If you do not use a text other than those assigned for class, all you need do is put the author's last name (Tillich) in parentheses, followed by a comma, followed by a single space, then the page number, the close the parentheses and put whatever punctuation is needed, a period or comma usually (do not use semi-colons!). Example: "God is being-itself, not *a* being" (Tillich, 237). All of this is done *in* the text--no footnotes, unless you want to add a "side bar" discussion or refer to another work, issue, etc. Footnotes are better for this than are endnotes, though endnotes are fine (they are usually MUCH easier to format!).
2. Second citation: just put the page number in parentheses: (238).
3. Exposition of multiple-authors: same method, but when you switch discussion from one author to another you **MUST** note that in the citations: (Tillich, 237) (238) (Cobb, 55) (56) (Tillich, 237) (Harvey, 88) (Tillich, 239).
4. If you cite works other than those assigned for the course, which I do not encourage to do (nor do I forbid you), you *must* give a full footnote reference on the first citation and full bibliographic references for all works cited. Footnote: (1)Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Louisville: Westminster Press,), 99. Bibliography: Tillich, Paul. 1953. *The Protestant Era*. Louisville: Westminster Press.

5. Do not rely on excessive paraphrase--you must work *through* the text.
6. Make your quotes do something in the development of your exposition. Do not just “throw them in.” That kind of quote sticks out in a paper like a sore thumb.

III. House of Style. The actual piece of paper is what a reader and a grader have before them, not a chunk of your mind, soul, or heart. How that piece of paper looks and “works” is going to effect how well you are understood. In the spirit of the ethics of dialogue, which fundamentally underlies the idea of writing in both the Liberal Arts and in democratic culture, the following points are of use in facilitating good papers and therefore good communication:

1. Use an introduction which sets up both the issue in a general way, and, the plan of your paper. If the reader is surprised by a turn in the exposition, this is not a good thing. It is also not a good thing if, on say page 3, the reader thinks to themselves: “this all fine and good, but *why* is the author telling me all of this”? Not so good! Have an answer to the question, “yeah, so...?” or, “and your point is...?”
2. Respond to the argument. Develop a thoughtful, if brief (you may go over the page limit) response.
3. Use a conclusion which summarizes both the issue in general, the exposition, and where you as an author wish to leave us, in an intellectual sense, with both.
4. Please use a cover sheet. This allows for more discretion in making first-page annotations.
5. NUMBER your pages. I don’t care how, just number them so they can be cross-referenced in annotations.
6. Do not use semicolons. 99.9% of all uses of semicolons are incorrect. James Joyce can use them for weird effects. Leave those effects to Joyce, *et al.* Misuse of semicolons also makes you write bad sentences.
7. Use paragraphs! New idea, new paragraph.
8. Italicize book titles and non-English words, except for very commonly used Latin phrases. Italicize: *consummatum est*, but not i.e., per se, etc.
9. Tone is important. You can do a lot to turn the reader against you with tone. Do not be too cool and distant, do not be a hothead, do not be snide and condescending or sarcastic. All of these things come off in print (which is VERY different than the voice inside your head!) as sophomoric and sloppy. Furthermore, they undermine the credibility of the authorial voice. The reader immediately suspects and resists everything “it” says.
10. Address your essays to a general readership, i.e., people who are informed and intelligent but do not necessarily know a lot about the subject you are writing about. Imagine reading this paper in front of the class, for instance. Do not write them to me, the grader or teacher, and do presume that you do not need to say things because “you already know that.” It is *far* better to be too explicit than not to be explicit enough.
11. You MUST use non-gender exclusive terms in your own prose. Wrong: “man is a rational animal.” Right: “humans are both rational and animal.” Do not correct texts you cite--that they are written from such a perspective is an important fact and should not be obscured or forgotten. I use the ungrammatical convention of the plural third person: “an author can be wrong about themselves. They have no more a privileged perspective on their work than do the readers.”

12. REWRITE!! At least twice. First drafts scream out like the blood of Abel. Have a friend read you back your paper and make changes.
13. PROOF-CHECK! Do not over-rely on Spellcheck--it is a machine, not a human writer.
14. In formal writing we do not use contractions. Wrong: don't. Right: do not. (Key: its ≠ it's, etc.) Use apostrophes for possessives: Tillich's argument is not the same as Tillich's argument.

IV. The Argument. The primary object of your exegesis in this class will be the *argument* an author makes for a position they take on a topic. For the full analysis and understanding of thought, it is never enough to say what the author says. We must know their reasons for holding such a view. A few points on this:

1. By "reason" I do NOT mean psychological motivations, I mean logical, or discursive arguments *in* the text. What we find *in* the text is our ONLY object of explication. Perspective, bias, non sequiturs, evasions, all of these are fair game if they can be found *in* the text.
2. You will do a much better job explicating the argument of a text if you avoid the excessive use of subjective terms and clauses such as, "Tillich says," "Tillich believes," "Tillich feels," etc. If you look at the Sample Essay and the Corrections, you will see that I eliminated all but the first subjective identification. Once we know who we are talking about, then it is not important to refer back to them all of the time. The *logic* of what they have to say to us is what matters ultimately, not that such and such a *person* said it. By eliminating subjective clauses wherever possible, it forces us to focus on the issue the writer is writing about, not the writer themselves. Subjective clauses make your style clunky.
3. Explicate the argument, do not narrate it. Do not say, "then he says," then he claims," "Next, he" "After that, he" and so forth. An argument is syllogistic or propositional, and, as such, is very different from a narrative. Narrative is a notoriously bad linguistic vehicle for conveying argumentation. Narrating arguments also makes your style clunky. It lacks crispness and bite.

*Disciplining the mind is good for it.
Discipline is the groundwork for ecstasy.
(Trust me.)*