

General Guidelines for Drafting Essays

Note: These general guidelines apply to the writing of a variety of genres or text types. Specific elements or characteristics of expository essays, persuasive essays, and personal narratives are included as separate handouts. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. They are not meant as a strict sequence for writing an essay. Writing is a recursive process, and a student may choose to write the body of the essay before writing the introduction or may even start by writing the conclusion.

Beginning of the Essay: Drafting the Introduction

The introduction is the author's chance to grab the reader's attention, show why ideas are worth considering, and give a brief overview of the subject/topic/argument. There are, of course, many ways to write an introduction, and some types are better suited than others for certain essays.

Sometimes, introductions are not as effective as they need to be. Students' essays will get off to a good start when they include the following:

- A "hook" to get the reader's attention
- Background information the audience may need about the topic
- A thesis statement—a central or controlling idea

Begin with a concise, yet intriguing, first sentence.

Remember, the introduction is just an introduction—not the entire essay. Start with something interesting rather than just summarizing the essay.

Be specific.

Being too general can affect the overall quality of the essay. If you generalize, the development of ideas will be weak or minimal. A good essay presents specific and well-chosen ideas and examples that substantially support the main points and the argument/position.

Don't restate the prompt or question.

For most prompts and assignments with specified topics, the reader more than likely knows what the prompt is. Restating it only takes up space and can be interpreted as a lack of creativity.

Avoid using clichés.

Clichés are overused expressions that often are considered boring and uncreative, and may even result in the reader not wanting to read the rest of the essay.

Stay away from dictionary definitions to introduce the topic.

Using a dictionary definition is often a sign that the author is having difficulty beginning the essay. The dictionary also may not be considered an appropriate source for some topics.

Avoid extraneous information on the subject.

Throwing in irrelevant information signals that the author is just filling up the required number of paragraphs or page(s).

Don't drive the reader away.

The introduction should make the reader want to read the rest of the essay. For instance, although beginning an essay with, "This essay is about. . ." may appear straightforward and to the point, it falls short of motivating anyone to read on. Wordiness and simple grammar errors can also leave a poor first impression.

Revisit the introduction after drafting the entire essay.

Have students reread the introduction. As writers develop their ideas and craft essays or texts, their understanding of the topic may have changed. Teach students to make adjustments to the first paragraph and/or thesis, if necessary.

Middle of the Essay: Drafting the Body

In the body of the essay, authors develop ideas that are focused on the topic and the thesis or central/controlling idea. Teach students to fully develop and sustain this focus throughout the essay. Usually, there is no set number of paragraphs that authors need to write.

Here are some tips for writing clear and concise paragraphs and using meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections.

Vary the length of the paragraphs.

A general suggestion for the length of a paragraph is roughly three to five sentences. There is not, though, a set number of sentences. Often for a paragraph to be well developed, it needs more than five sentences; sometimes a one-sentence paragraph is appropriate.

Teach students to consider the white space on the page when writing. Try to break down the thoughts as much as possible. A series of long paragraphs can be intimidating to readers and can make it more

difficult for them to process the argument. Vary the length of paragraphs to make the essay more reader-friendly. Balance the paragraphs according to the length of the essay.

Focus and develop one idea in each paragraph.

A well-written paragraph becomes its own independent “chunk” of writing. Teach students to introduce a thought with an opening sentence, develop it throughout the paragraph, and then wrap it all up in a concluding sentence.

Vary sentence length within the paragraphs.

Avoid entire paragraphs of choppy, simple sentences or lengthy, rambling, complex sentences filled with commas and conjunctions. Teach students to intersperse long and short sentences in their writing. The result will make reading the essay more interesting.

Use meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections.

Meaningful transitions help to establish logical connections between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs in the essay. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of the essay by clearly showing the relationships among the ideas. Transitions also help the reader understand those relationships. A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph.

Although transitions are not a substitute for good organization, they can make the organization clearer and easier to follow. Transitions help to bind the essay into a unified, coherent, well-developed whole. Transitions help readers connect with what has come before in a sentence, paragraph, or section and help readers anticipate and better comprehend what they will be reading next.

Examples of Different Types of Transitional Words and Phrases

Transitions that mean “to add”	<i>and, furthermore, in addition to</i>
Transitions that mean “to compare”	<i>also, likewise, as well</i>
Transitions that mean “to contrast”	<i>but, however, alternatively</i>
Transitions that mean “to prove”	<i>consequently, thus, therefore</i>
Transitions that mean “to show relationships in time”	<i>first, second, third, finally, then</i>
Transitions that mean “to give an example”	<i>for example, for instance</i>
Transitions that mean “to summarize, conclude”	<i>finally, in conclusion</i>

End of the Essay: Drafting the Conclusion

Good conclusions can be tricky to write. They are designed to provide closure and also function as a review of anything that needs reviewing. Conclusions need to accomplish these tasks without being boring, redundant, or off topic. A concluding paragraph supports the thesis or central/controlling idea.

Sometimes, conclusions are not as effective as they need to be. The following list of tips can help your students write a strong conclusion and leave a lasting final impression with the reader/audience.

Don't stretch to fit the page requirement.

Stretching the conclusion until you meet the page limit results in irrelevant fluff that only weakens the essay. If the essay is not long enough, go back and further develop the content by elaborating on the main points. Always add to and strengthen the evidence or idea development rather than simply extending the conclusion.

Avoid adding new information and leaving loose ends.

Teach students not to introduce new information in the conclusion. They will have little time for adequate development and can leave the audience hanging. It's usually best not to bring up something at the end that hasn't been previously discussed or even mentioned. Instead, take the thesis or central/controlling idea a step further (i.e., discuss its implications, reemphasize the significance and relevance of your topic/position/argument).

Don't repeat the thesis or central/controlling idea.

Because the reader has already read the thesis or central/controlling idea statement, it doesn't need to be repeated verbatim. The conclusion should state the thesis in a new way or further develop it. Teach students that they can sum up the important points they made throughout the essay, but for short essays this usually is unnecessary. Students should ask themselves: *Will readers be able to remember what I've said, or do I need to remind them?*

Avoid resorting to clichés.

The conclusion should be memorable. Adding clichés (i.e., old metaphors and tired phrasing such as "In conclusion") often accomplishes just the opposite effect. Clichés typically make the essay sound unoriginal. As a result, a reader may discount what the author has to say. Instead, use vivid images and colorful language that will leave an impression on the readers. Because these are the last words the audience will read, make them count.

REFERENCE: Virgil Undergraduate Writing Center, 2001–2005.

Expository Essay Elements

ELAR TEKS Glossary Definition

Expository essay: a type of informational text that clarifies or explains something

Elements

An expository essay is a multiparagraph essay that conveys information about a topic. The number of paragraphs is not predetermined. The essay includes a beginning, a middle, and an end. The writer explains, describes, and informs the reader about a topic using facts, details, and examples in a clear and concise way.

1. Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement

The thesis is typically stated in the first paragraph of the expository essay. To narrow the focus or topic, writers need to determine which aspect of a topic they will write about. For example, if the topic is music, the writer needs to ask, "What kind of music?" Then, the writer asks, "What do I want my readers to know about that kind of music?"

Common approaches for developing a thesis or controlling idea statement include the following:

- **Make a connection.** Compare your topic/subject with something else that you've learned or studied in class or that you know a lot about. Consider making a connection that the reader might not normally make.
- **Refute an accepted idea.** Try to present new evidence or interpret existing evidence in a new way.
- **Find something new.** Look at a topic/subject from a new perspective. Think of an aspect that's been overlooked.
- **Define.** Offer a definition of a key term that will get readers to see a controversial issue in a new way.
- **Evaluate.** Make an assessment about something's quality or utility.
- **Argue cause and effect.** Explain how something happened or will happen because of something that was done.
- **Propose a change.** Suggest that something needs to be done that has never been tried before.

2. Specific supporting details

Supporting details are included to support the thesis and to help explain the topic. These details are specific; add substance to the essay; and are presented in a logical, organized way. Writers may use their own unique experiences or view of the world as the basis for writing or to connect their ideas in interesting ways.

Details are often brainstormed before the author begins to write. These supporting details help the writer to determine the main points or ideas in the essay that support the thesis and which organizational structure would best suit the topic.

Types of supporting details include the following:

- Examples
- Facts/statistics
- Reasons
- Causes/effects
- Incidents
- Definitions
- Comparisons/contrasts
- Definitions
- Steps in a process

Supporting details are often then grouped into categories based on commonalities. The groupings or categories typically become the main points or ideas that the writer will fully explain in the essay.

Each paragraph should be limited to the explanation of one general idea. This ensures clarity throughout the essay.

Keep the content focused on the thesis. Include paragraphs (no set number) that have topic sentences directly related to the thesis, as well as details that present the following:

- Main ideas that develop or support the thesis statement
- Evidence from the text (embedded quotations) to support these ideas, including examples, illustrations, statistics, and so forth.
- Analysis of the evidence and central ideas in which you integrate your own ideas, values, beliefs, and assumptions

The type of evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal) varies. Because students are often required to write expository essays with little or no preparation, the essays typically may not have a great deal of statistical or factual evidence.

Writers should include enough details to fully explain each piece of information. Writers should also try to “show and not tell.” They should not assume that the reader has prior knowledge or understanding of the topic of their essays. Writers should try to use words that clearly explain and describe in detail what they are talking about rather than just stating their ideas. They should leave no question that their readers might ask unanswered.

Writers should keep their writing interesting and not focus only on “the formulaic nature” of expository writing. Their goal should be to leave their readers with a better understanding and lasting impression of their topic.

There should be no inconsistencies or extraneous information. The details should support the main points or ideas to fully explain the thesis statement.

3. Clearly organized structure

Expository essays need an organizing structure that logically presents the main ideas and supporting details related to the thesis statement. Writers should select the structure that is best suited to a thoughtful and engaging explanation of their topic.

Common expository organizational patterns include the following:

- **Description:** The writer describes a topic by listing characteristics, features, and examples.
- **Sequence:** The writer lists items or events in numerical or chronological order.
- **Comparison/contrast:** The writer explains how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.
- **Cause and effect:** The writer lists one or more causes and the resulting effect or effects.
- **Problem and solution:** The writer states a problem and lists one or more solutions for the problem. A variation of this pattern is the question-and-answer format, in which the author poses a question and then answers it.
- **Proposition and support:** The writer first asserts an idea or opinion and then provides information to support the idea or opinion.

The writer also uses meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections to enhance the logical movement of the essay and clearly show the relationships among ideas, making the writer’s train of thought easy to follow.

4. Strong introduction

Expository essays need an introduction that grabs the reader’s attention. The introduction should show why your ideas are worth considering and provide a brief overview of your topic.

Common ways to introduce expository essays include the following:

- **Solve a problem.** Problem solving will almost always grab your reader’s attention, especially in an academic context. It is also a good way to set up your thesis statement, which will then help the reader better understand it. This type of introduction can also set up your conclusion by allowing you to return to the same problem and show how the things you’ve said in your essay solve the problem or could still need further inquiry.
- **Start with an anecdote, a quotation, a question, or an interesting fact.** This form of introduction often will appeal to a reader’s emotions. Interesting anecdotes, quotations,

questions, and facts can quickly interest readers and make them want to read more. Try to think of an interesting/shocking/weird fact about your topic.

- **Acknowledge what others have said on the subject.** For some topics, the amount of literature available can be overwhelming. If you are writing on a popular topic, it's best to acknowledge in your introduction that much has been written on the subject. Your introduction needs to convey why your essay is important and how it is different from all the other literature that already exists on the subject.
- **Point out an irony or a paradox.** Paradoxes are logic puzzles, seemingly contradictory statements. They're great to use in introductions as a way to get the reader's attention.
- **Use an analogy.** If your topic is a bit obscure or abstract, try connecting it to something more familiar to your reader.
- **Jump into the content.** This strategy is good for audiences who don't like to read anything they don't have to. Sometimes it can be more dramatic to just start with your thesis.

5. Strong conclusion

The conclusion should not simply restate the thesis, but rather readdress it based on the evidence provided. Because this is the part of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the reader, it should be effective and logical.

Do not introduce any new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize and resolve the information already presented in the body of the essay.

Writers use many types of conclusions. Below is a list of ideas for how you can bring closure to your essay. You can incorporate more than one of these types into a conclusion.

Common types of conclusions:

- **Summary:** Sums up all of your main points. This is the most basic and popular type of conclusion, but be careful not to repeat your thesis.
- **Link to beginning:** A nice companion for an introduction that features anecdotes, quotes, problem solving, and so forth. Tying the ending to your beginning gives readers a satisfying sense of closure. You might refer back to a certain image or phrase in your introduction. Keep in mind that this method works better in some essays than in others. In other words, if you try too hard to connect your conclusion to your introduction, it may come off as contrived and artificial.
- **Larger context:** Good for obscure and abstract topics where the details may have caused the readers to lose sight of the main point. This type of conclusion reminds your readers of the big picture, which means that you're answering the following questions: Why does my topic matter? What are the consequences of what I'm suggesting or proposing?
- **Call to action:** Common approach for proposal essays that ask your readers to respond to your position/argument with a specific action.

6. Purposeful and precise word choice

The writer's word choice in an expository essay should be accurate, concise, clear, and concrete. Effective word choice reflects a keen awareness of the expository purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the purpose and audience. Writers often focus on word choice to improve their first drafts.

Examples of how word choice can improve writing include the following:

- Replacing overused words with stronger, more powerful ones
 - Action verbs
 - Adjectives
 - Adverbs
- Inserting phrases and sensory details that describe, explain, or provide additional detail and connections

7. Varied sentence structure

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. The ways sentences are constructed affect the fluency or the flow of the writing. Expository essays are enhanced when the writer uses purposeful sentences that are varied in both length and structure.

Examples of how writers can vary sentences to improve their writing include the following:

- Using a variety of sentence patterns: simple, compound, and complex
 - Combining short sentences with prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, or participial phrases
 - Combining short sentences by linking items of equal importance with a coordinating conjunction
 - Combining short sentences containing ideas that are of unequal importance with a subordinating conjunction
- Varying sentence beginnings by starting sentences in different ways
 - With an adverb
 - With a phrase (i.e., prepositional, participial, or infinitive)
 - With an introductory clause
- Breaking up long, rambling sentences (often run-on sentences) into two or three shorter sentences

Expository Essay Elements Mini-chart

- Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement
- Clearly organized structure
- Strong introduction
- Specific supporting details
- Strong conclusion
- Purposeful and precise word choice
- Varied sentence structure

Analyzing Expository Essays Tool

Note: The questions below are useful when teaching students to read mentor texts like a writer. As the essay is analyzed, help students notice how the author crafts the different elements and how these elements might be used in their own writing.

TITLE:

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's main thesis or central/controlling idea?	
Which approach (make a connection, refute an accepted idea, find something new, define, evaluate, propose a change) did the author use in building this thesis? Elaborate.	
Is this approach effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, why not?	

Expository Elements		Analysis and Responses	
Strong introduction			
What type of introduction does the author use?			
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?			
Specific supporting details			
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each one limited to the explanation of one general idea?			
List some of the supporting details and explain whether they are effective in supporting the author's thesis. If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?			

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clearly organized structure	
<p>Is the essay well organized? Describe the type of organizational pattern that the author uses.</p>	
<p>Are the transitions effective in forming connections among ideas and sections of the essay? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what could improve them?</p>	
Strong conclusion	
<p>What type of conclusion does the author use?</p>	
<p>Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?</p>	

Expository Elements		Analysis and Responses	
Purposeful and precise word choice			
Is the author's word choice effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?			
Varied sentence structure			
What types of sentences does the author use?			
Is the author's use of sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?			
Author's style or craft			
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next essay?			

Solidarity and Support

Susan Newman is a social psychologist, a blogger for *Psychology Today Magazine*, and the author of *“Under One Roof Again: All Grown Up and (Re)learning to Live Together Happily.”*

December 26, 2011

Not since the Great Depression have so many young adults turned to their immediate relatives as an economic lifeline. In the 1960s, for example, independence was the strived-for virtue; returning home, “unthinkable.” If children didn’t grow up, find jobs and live independently, parents were seen as enablers, the children as failures. That stigmatized view has faded fast during the recession.

Family of origin has become a lifeboat for roughly one in five 25- to 34-year-olds who move in with parents to wait out the economic storm. Sure, there are potential complications and emotional minefields left over from the parenting years, but once the kinks are sorted out, the benefits for young and old are clear.

Some argue that living with parents stunts development and prolongs adolescence. I see the camaraderie as an opportunity to get to know each other in ways not possible when living together as parent and child. Delayed maturity in young adults happens only if parents continue to cater to their adult children’s needs as if they were still 10-year-olds. Living with parents as young adults provides the chance to know parents as people and similarly for parents to see their adult children as grownups with ideas, skills and talents to admire.

Bunking in with parents allows struggling young adults to save for an apartment or house, to hold out until they find a meaningful job, or to start to pay down student loans — the average being \$24,000, but soaring over \$100,000 for some. In return, most adult children assist parents in-kind.

Rather than having a negative effect, the recession has renewed values with the emphasis on family solidarity and support. The advantages of the multigenerational family, a model immigrant families have always practiced, will keep more parents and young adults together. Even when young adults can afford a place of their own, many say, “I’m still here.” Money will be saved on housing but will be spent on consumer goods, aiding the economy. However, living under the same roof for the long or short haul will remain a configuration that defines American families in the foreseeable future.

REFERENCE: Newman, 2011. Reprinted with permission from *The New York Times*.

Model Lesson: Analyzing Expository Essays Tool

Note: The questions below are useful when teaching students to read mentor texts like a writer. As the essay is analyzed, help students notice how the author crafts the different elements and how these elements might be used in their own writing.

TITLE: Solidarity and Support

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's main thesis or central/controlling idea?	Newman's overall thesis seems to both observe a trend and argue that the trend is positive: "That stigmatized view [of adult children living at home] has faded fast during the recession."
Which approach (make a connection, refute an accepted idea, find something new, define, evaluate, propose a change) did the author use in building this thesis? Elaborate.	Newman reveals her plan to refute an accepted idea in the second paragraph when she chooses her side in the debate. She writes: "Sure, there are potential complications and emotional minefields left over from the parenting years, but once the kinks are sorted out, the benefits for young and old are clear." So, in a sense, she is dismissing what some people expect to come out of living under one roof ("complications and emotional minefields") and arguing that, in reality, "the benefits for young and old are clear."
Is this approach effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, why not?	I do think this approach is effective. The author takes a topic that many people feel anxiety about and gives reasons for hope.

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Strong introduction	
What type of introduction does the author use?	The author jumps into the content by immediately introducing the recent shift in U.S. living arrangements.
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	I like the way the introduction puts the topic in its historical context. I do think, however, that more specifics might have made it even stronger. The author also could have hooked the reader with an anecdote, possibly outlining one family's circumstances.
Specific supporting details	
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each one limited to the explanation of one general idea?	Yes. The author uses each paragraph to approach a different element of the larger topic of multigenerational living.
List some of the supporting details and explain whether they are effective in supporting the author's thesis. If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	The author uses specifics as evidence to back up her points. In the second paragraph, she says, "Family of origin has become a lifeboat for roughly one in five 25- to 34-year-olds who move in with parents to wait out the economic storm." And later in the essay, she discusses the average student loan debt. These facts and figures make her argument more convincing.

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clearly organized structure	
<p>Is the essay well organized? Describe the type of organizational pattern that the author uses.</p>	<p>It is well organized. Each paragraph tackles a specific issue. In the third paragraph, for example, the author directly addresses critiques of her argument. In the fourth, she explores the financial effects of the topic. In the fifth, she presents her conclusion, summing up her argument and projecting into the future.</p>
<p>Are the transitions effective in forming connections among ideas and sections of the essay? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what could improve them?</p>	<p>While the author's organization makes the essay fairly easy to read, she doesn't rely on many transition words or phrases. Her essay's readability might be improved if she inserted more transition language between her various points.</p>
Strong conclusion	
<p>What type of conclusion does the author use?</p>	<p>She concludes with a summary and the larger context.</p>
<p>Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?</p>	<p>The conclusion is effective at summing up her argument and projecting it into the future when the author writes that "living under the same roof for the long or short haul will remain a configuration that defines American families in the foreseeable future."</p>

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Purposeful and precise word choice	
Is the author's word choice effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	The author uses strong and powerful words to explain why she thinks multigenerational living arrangements are beneficial. She uses words such as <i>stigmatized</i> , <i>lifeboat</i> , <i>economic storm</i> , <i>camaraderie</i> , <i>bunking in</i> , <i>renewed values</i> , and <i>configuration</i> . These words are effective because they help convince the reader that her position has merit.
Varied sentence structure	
What types of sentences does the author use?	The author uses a majority of complex sentence structures. The sentences are rather long and rambling. She does not vary the length.
Is the author's use of sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	The author's use of sentences is not that effective. Their complex structure and her overuse of dependent phrases and clauses make it difficult to read and understand. She needs to simplify the structure and provide both long and short sentences.
Author's style or craft	
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next essay?	I plan on incorporating the use of specific evidence into my work. I also liked how the author used counterarguments to directly address critiques of her argument.

The Whole Family Under One Roof?

Introduction



A Victorian family circa 1860 (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

If you're like many Americans, you have just spent a few days in close quarters with your parents, grandchildren, siblings, etc. You're ready to go home, or ready for them to go home. But for a growing number of families in which adult children can't afford to live on their own, this is the new normal.

These "boomerang" children have been the butt of jokes on late-night television and even in commercials, but what's so bad about moving back in with your parents? Could extended families under one roof — a common arrangement in years past — be the way of the future?

The Only Faithful Human Institution

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December 27, 2011

I live on a cul-de-sac in Irvine, Calif., that includes eight 2,500-plus-square-foot homes. When we moved into the neighborhood 27 years ago, six of those homes included two baby-boom parents with children and two couples with empty nests. Now there are no longer children on our street, although adult kids are still living in two of the homes. In my house we now have three spare bedrooms — we keep the doors and the heating vent shut to conserve energy.

Houses like mine are a root of the current world financial crisis. In 2006, housing prices in the United States began to crash. That's about when our last daughter left for college. Our house, along with millions of others across the country, literally became worth less when the last kid moved out. The demand for big houses declined even while the new home builders were madly adding more square feet. Circa 2012 housing in the U.S. has lost about a third of its value, down from \$25 trillion to \$16 trillion by some estimates. This sharp decline in value of the American housing stock has catalyzed a worldwide restructuring of our economic systems. And just wait until 2020 when the full burden of baby-boomer retirement and decrepitude is recognized.

The cure for this demographic disaster is the pooling of resources across generations that we are already seeing in America. The idea of the nuclear family is now obviously obsolete. We are all reverting to the old reliance on the extended family that anthropologist Margaret Mead correctly described as the only faithful human institution. The government won't be there to help on this one. Boomerang kids are actually a blessing in disguise. They're allowing us to relearn how to live in multigenerational arrangements as humans almost always have. Yes, the lessons for balancing proximity and privacy are tough, but such learning is essential for all of us in the 21st century.

I'm Not Seeing a Boomerang

Michael J. Rosenfeld, an associate professor of sociology at Stanford University, is the author of *"The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions and the Changing American Family."*

December 26, 2011

One of the stories parents like to tell ourselves is that our young adult children want to move back in with us. Our 20-somethings are referred to as the Boomerang Generation, noted for their failure to launch. There is just one problem with the story of the Boomerang Generation: It is not true.

Census data show that what is really new about young adulthood is the percentage of young adults who live on their own. From 1880 to 1970 the percentage of U.S. born women in their twenties who lived on their own (not with parents and not with a husband) was always less than 15 percent. By 1980, the percentage of young adult women who lived on their own had risen to 27 percent, and to 33 percent in 1990, to 39 percent in 2000, and to 42 percent today. The delay of marriage and the extension of singleness can make it appear as if young people are more likely to return to the parental nest. If one examines single people in their twenties, who are the people who have the option of living with their parents, the percentage who live with their parents is now about 45 percent. That may seem high but it isn't: in the past single people in their 20s nearly always lived with their parents.

The Great Recession has actually had no effect whatsoever on the percentage of young adults living with their parents in the United States. This is not so surprising; the (even greater) Great Depression did not affect family structure much, and neither did the Industrial Revolution. Family structure changes slowly over time. Economic ups and downs have little effect on who lives with whom.

A Sensible Use of Spare Rooms

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December 27, 2011

The direct consequence of the turn of the century residential building boom is that now, in 2012, there are a lot of spare rooms in all those houses. Indeed, the chances are the greatest in the last 50 years that an adult family member is now living in your spare bedroom.

Multigenerational living is ahead for all of us. Baby boomers will be living with their kids as they begin to experience the infirmities of old age. By 2020 they'll need help with their disabilities, and the most sensible helpers will be members of the extended family living close by. The practice now of living together as adults across generations will be a big help.

Boomerang kids and baby boomers are learning about the balancing act between proximity and privacy that will be required in the modern families of the remainder of this century. Both physical structures and financial arrangements are being developed to accommodate such changes. For example, approximately one-third of American homes can be remodeled to include an accessory apartment with a separate kitchen and entrance. The major home builders have finally begun to experiment with such designs as well. Cross-generational financial agreements are burgeoning including shared real estate investments and adult children moving back home while saving money to repay college loans (which are exempt from bankruptcy proceedings).

Extended family members are already creatively designing a new future in these tough times. Indeed, now is the time to get ready for the coming changes in the American family.

REFERENCE: Essay series printed with permission from *The New York Times*, 2011.

Activity: Analyzing Expository Essays Tool

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Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's main thesis or central/controlling idea?	
Which approach (make a connection, refute an accepted idea, find something new, define, evaluate, propose a change) did the author use in building this thesis? Elaborate.	
Is this approach effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, why not?	

Expository Elements		Analysis and Responses	
Strong introduction			
What type of introduction does the author use?			
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?			
Specific supporting details			
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each one limited to the explanation of one general idea?			
List some of the supporting details and explain whether they are effective in supporting the author's thesis. If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?			

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clearly organized structure	
<p>Is the essay well organized? Describe the type of organizational pattern that the author uses.</p>	
<p>Are the transitions effective in forming connections among ideas and sections of the essay? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what could improve them?</p>	
Strong conclusion	
<p>What type of conclusion does the author use?</p>	
<p>Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?</p>	

Expository Elements		Analysis and Responses	
Purposeful and precise word choice			
Is the author's word choice effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?			
Varied sentence structure			
What types of sentences does the author use?			
Is the author's use of sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?			
Author's style or craft			
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next essay?			