

How Do I Write an Example/Illustration Essay?

The example/illustration essay is the most simple, straightforward essay form you will encounter. It is also the one you will **always** continue to use in writing your future essays, because **all essays, whether argumentative or informational, need the support that good illustrations provide.**

Example

Say you're providing examples of racial stereotyping on television. Your thesis ought to indicate simply that you will be giving examples of racial stereotyping. Save your analysis of the types of stereotyping for a classification essay, your analysis of the causes of racial stereotyping for a cause-effect essay, and your analysis of the differences between racial stereotyping on television and in the movies for a comparison/contrast essay. All you're "proving" in the example essay is that racial stereotyping on television exists.

Things to Watch for

Although this is a very basic paper, there are still detours and dead ends to avoid.

- ✓ Examples without a point do not help your essay. A long anecdote from your personal experience isn't necessarily relevant just because it's an essay written about you; make sure that your example has a point, and that the point is the one you're trying to make.
- ✓ Beware of piling on too many examples. An example essay for a 105/110-level course probably needs no less than two and no more than four examples to support its thesis statement, unless you have been specifically assigned to use only a single extended example (sometimes called a "narrative essay").
- ✓ Lack of an initial thesis statement to give the example or examples some sense of purpose can make a paper self-destruct before you begin. **Remember that your thesis statement is not so much arguing a position in the example essay as arguing that a certain condition or phenomenon exists.**

- ✓ Beware, too, of lack of transitions between examples. Be particularly wary of the phrase, “For example.” How many times can you reasonably use this phrase in an example essay before it becomes repetitive or redundant? That’s up to you—but repetition is often an indication of a lack of imagination, and it certainly won’t endear you to your reader.

Example/Illustration Structure

I. Introduction

- States general idea to be proved (thesis statement)

II. Body

- Provides example(s) or illustration(s), which support(s) the thesis

III. Conclusion

- Restates the thesis and draws some conclusion from the paper; in the case of our example of racial stereotypes on television, the conclusion might suggest that television also offers many positive racial models, and that viewers must simply use discretion in absorbing what they see and hear on television.