

Ways to Expand (& Improve) an Essay

Often writing assignments have a minimum length. It can be frustrating when you're struggling to make an essay longer. This handout gives you seven concrete ways to expand an essay while also making it more detailed, descriptive, and analytical.

Expand individual paragraphs

1. Ask **how** and **why** questions. Read through each sentence and see if there is more to say about any statements or claims you are making. A good observation or idea is rarely explained in one sentence. Asking these questions, even when you think you've explained yourself, will help you be detailed, descriptive, and more analytical. *(TIP: Give yourself a goal of adding 2 or 3 sentences to each existing paragraph. You'll be surprised at what you discover to say!)*
2. Add (more) **concrete examples and evidence**. Making an argument is all about supporting it with evidence. A good way to do this is to show your argument in action in an example. The more complex or complicated the idea, the more examples you'll need.
3. Expand the **introduction and/or conclusion**. Now that you have a full draft of your essay, ask yourself what are some main ideas or concrete examples you use in the body of the essay that you could put in the intro to help give the reader a full picture of the main point(s) of your essay? You may even be able to write a brand new introduction now that you have your main points of the essay.
4. Add a sentence or two at the **end of each paragraph** summarizing (and/or refuting) the arguments presented in that paragraph. The last sentence of each paragraph should relate the paragraph's main idea back to the essay's thesis and explain how the paragraph supports or advances the argument of the essay.¹

Write new paragraphs

1. Look for paragraphs that contain **more than one idea**. If you have a paragraph with three different ideas, then these ideas are usually underdeveloped. Break each idea into its own paragraph and use the tools above to expand them into fully formed paragraphs.

¹ Taken directly from Dr. Shelly Reid's "30 Things to do with your essay in the up draft(s)":
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/resources-template.php?id=62>

2. Write a paragraph **addressing opposing views**. Try to think of one or two objections that your audience might have to your essay's argument, and then write a paragraph defending your argument from those opposing views.
3. Look for **key terms or other information** in your essay that your readers might not be familiar with. Write a paragraph that serves as an extended definition of those terms or provides background information that help your audiences better understand your subject and argument.

Works Consulted

Reid, E. Shelley. "30 Things to do with your essay in the up draft(s)." *The Writing Center*. The Writing Center at George Mason University, 2007.
issuu.com/gmuwritingcenter/docs/30-things-to-do-with-your-essay-in-the-up-drafts.
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