

Essay Tips

The easiest type of essay for most students is either the personal narrative (telling a story about something that happened to you) or the discursive essay (discussing a topic and giving your opinion on it).

The short story option, while it may seem attractive, is best avoided unless you have been practising this type of writing for at least a year and have been achieving high grades in the stories you have submitted to your teacher.

There are a number of recurring themes and titles which you would do well to think about before the exam:

1. The difficulties facing young people in Ireland today
2. Social media / mobile phones / technology in general – advantages and disadvantages
3. Things /places you like and which make you happy / relax you
4. Things you dislike or which make you angry
5. Your friends and what their friendship means to you
6. The old reliable ‘A Day I Will Never Forget’. You would be amazed how many times you can use this essay if you have prepared it in advance. Just be ready to change a paragraph or two to fit the title you are given on the day.

Things you should consider:

1. Avoid writing a ‘list’ essay. By this I mean that if you are asked what is most important in your life, you should not just throw down a random collection of things: iPod, phone, computer, pet, chocolate, friends, hurling, Call of Duty... etc. You must find something to link all of the things together. So, for example, you might look at your list and you might decide that the most important things in your life are those which don’t cost any money: friends, family, sport, walking your dog... Or you might decide that the most important things are all connected to technology. Is the internet your lifeline? Is it where you work and play? Do you do most of your chatting to friends on Skype etc.? It doesn’t matter what the thread is that holds all your points together, as long as you have one. That will form the basis of your introduction.
2. Avoid writing the same thing as every other boy in your class. Imagine how you would feel as an examiner if you picked up the tenth essay in which a student assured you that they could not live without their mobile phone. Try to be original. Think around the title a little. Had you an essay prepared on the importance of sport, and did the title ask you to talk about your most useful possessions? Well, why not say that your most useful possessions are your football boots, for example, and then take it from there, using most of the material you had prepared for an essay on the

importance of sport.

3. Don't forget to link your essay to the title. This is vital. You can do this in the introduction and the conclusion. Say, for example, that you had decided to do the football essay under the title of 'My Most Useful Possessions'. You would have to link it back to the title again at the end. You could do it like this:

Whenever I see my boots thrown in the hall or – even more unacceptable in my Mum's eyes – abandoned beside the couch in the living room, I remember that my most important possessions are not necessarily the flashiest or the most expensive things I own. To anyone else, they just look like a normal pair of fairly grubby, grass-stained, muddy football boots. To me, however, they are symbols of some of the best days of my life.

4. Don't worry that your story is not the most exciting one in the world. Think about it for a moment. You will be writing approximately three pages of foolscap. That's not an awful lot of space! You only have time to discuss one thing in some detail, and it will make a far better impression on the examiner if your story is real and believable than if it is a rather scrappy rewrite of a ninety minute film (which would take you around two to three hundred pages to write...)

5. Beware....

I have read the following essays more times than I care to remember:

You won the County Final

You went sailing and a storm blew up and you got into difficulties

You went to see a football / rugby match

You went to a concert in the O2 in Dublin

You went to a party at a friend's house and Things Went Wrong (the house burned down, people behaved badly etc.)

6. Try to...

Make your introduction interesting. If you are telling me about your pet, for example, you might want to introduce the topic like this:

'He's only five, but he's my best friend. Admittedly, he's not perfect. He has an annoying habit of stealing my food if I turn my back for a moment, and he never, ever takes a bath if he can help it...'

7. Please don't...

State the obvious. If you went somewhere, I am capable of imagining that you got up that morning, ate your breakfast and got dressed. There is no need to tell me about it. How often did you see James Bond washing his teeth or putting out the recycling? Get straight to the action! (I probably shouldn't have mentioned James Bond, as you are NOT advised to write a spy thriller in three pages, but you get the idea.)

