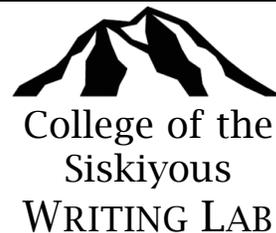


# USING RHETORICAL TOPICS TO DEVELOP YOUR ESSAY



**INTRODUCTION:** The **topics** or *topoi* are methods of invention using basic categories of ideas which can provide questions to help you to find things to say about a subject and to organize your essay.

**Description** *uses the senses to tell about the physical characteristics of a person, place, or thing.*

Taste. Touch. Smell. Sight. Hearing. What can be perceived about a subject? What does it look like? What are its characteristics? What dominant impression does it make? Should the description remain objective or should it include subjective responses?

**Narration** *tells a story, presenting events in a logical, orderly sequence.*

What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Who did it? Who else was involved? How was it done? How long did it take? Are flashbacks needed to provide background information? Do the verb tenses indicate the correct temporal relationships? Are transition words needed to help the story flow smoothly?

**Process narration** *explains how to do something.*

**Instructions** help the reader perform a process. Examples are recipes and operating manuals. **Explanations** help the reader understand a process. Are all steps included? Can the steps be divided into stages? What are the connections between the steps and stages? What materials are needed? Are there terms that need to be defined?

**Exemplification** *gives specific information to support a general idea.*

What are the specific instances? What are some particular cases? How do the particulars contribute to an understanding of the general idea? Do they explain or clarify? Illustrate? Add interest? Persuade? Are there a range of examples? Are there enough examples to support the thesis and conclusion?

**Cause and Effect** *examines the relationship between events to discover why something happens.*

Why did the event happen? Was one cause more important than others? What are the immediate causes? What are the more remote causes? Does one cause create a further chain of events? What are the effects? What effects can be predicted?

**Comparison and Contrast** *shows how two or more things are similar and different.*

To organize, choose a **point-by-point** or a **subject-by-subject** pattern. How is one thing like other things? How is it different from other things? What is the basis for comparison? What are the most important points to be selected for discussion? Will the most important point be first or last?

**Classification and Division** *identifies relationships by breaking large groups into smaller categories and organizing individual items into larger categories.*

What are its parts or types? How can its parts or types be separated or grouped? Do its parts or types fit into some logical order? Into what categories can its parts or types be arranged? On what basis can it be categorized? What are the most significant and relevant categories? Are the categories arranged in a logical order? Are transitions needed to show the relationships among categories?

**Definition** *explains what something is and examines its relationship to others in its class.*

What general class is it part of? How does it resemble other members of its class? How does it differ from other members of its class? Is a formal dictionary definition needed? How does the origin and development of the term affect its definition? What other appropriate patterns of development could expand the definition?