

ESSAY STRATEGIES

SECTION 4

In the previous section, we reviewed some general strategies for structuring an ISEE essay in response to any prompt. In this section, we will explore in greater detail the different types of prompts you might see on the ISEE, and specific strategies for approaching these prompts. Make sure that you have a solid understanding of basic essay structure before you approach these more advanced strategies.

The ISEE essay prompts might ask different types of questions. You might be asked to **describe** a person or event, or define characteristics or qualities. You might be asked to take a side on an issue and **persuade** the reader of your opinion. Finally, you might be asked to **consider the causes and effects** of a particular issue. Continue reading for more information about these types of questions.

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY STRATEGIES

Some ISEE prompts will ask you to describe a person or event, or define characteristics and qualities. For example, the prompt might ask:

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- What three qualities make for a good teacher?
- What is your favorite subject in school? What characteristics make this subject appealing?

To answer these types of prompts, you will want to use the following **descriptive writing** strategies. First, stick to topics you know. The topics are defined broadly, so the specific subject matter is largely up to you to decide. For example, if you are asked to write about your favorite subject in school, it makes sense to choose a subject you know well.

Before you start writing, choose two or three qualities you can use to describe your subject, and think of the reasons why you chose these. Some prompts will specify how many characteristics or qualities you are required to describe: in some cases, you'll be asked to identify two qualities, and in some cases, you'll be asked to identify three qualities. In your

body paragraphs you'll want to explain the importance of the qualities you select and explain how these qualities relate to your topic.

The following chart offers one way you can structure a descriptive essay in response to the following prompt:

Which three qualities make a good teacher?

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY APPROACH	
Introduction Paragraph	Establish the three qualities you'd like to discuss: <i>I admire teachers who set ambitious goals. Teachers who show expertise and organization place their students in a position to succeed.</i>
Body Paragraph 1	Establish why one of these qualities is important: <i>A teacher must have expertise. Joshua Bell developed mastery of the violin by learning from the expert violin master, Josef Gingold ...</i>
Body Paragraph 2	Establish why the second of these qualities is important: <i>In order to learn, we must be organized. Watson and Crick's discovery of DNA was the result of the scientists' attempt to organize and understand the work of other scientists ...</i>
Body Paragraph 3	Establish why the third of these qualities is important: <i>Teachers should set ambitious goals. Had John F. Kennedy not set the ambitious goal of sending people to the moon, the Apollo missions would never have taken place ...</i>
Conclusion Paragraph	Summarize your description: <i>While there are other important qualities that make a good teacher, the most important qualities, in my view, are ambition, organization, and expertise.</i>

Exercise #1: For each prompt below, identify your position, some qualities you'd like to discuss, and why each quality is important. Have a trusted reader evaluate your work.

1. What do you want to be when you grow up?

Identify your position (name what you want to be when you grow up):

One reason why I aspire to this goal:

Explain why this is important:

Second reason why I aspire to this goal:

Explain why this is important:

2. What is your favorite subject in school? What characteristics make this subject appealing?

Identify the subject:

Name one characteristic:

Explain why this is important:

Name a second characteristic:

Explain why this is important:

3. What three qualities define a good student?

Name one quality of a good student:

Explain why this is important:

Name another quality of a good student:

Explain why this is important:

Name a third quality of a good student:

Explain why this is important:

4. What is the most meaningful book you have read recently, and why was it meaningful to you?

Identify your position (name the book you want to discuss):