

## Easy Essay Ideas

The following creative writing ideas may be adapted into many more than just 66 essay assignments by changing the purpose, the audience, or key words.

1. To explore how times change, interview several people from your grandparents' generation and write an essay comparing and contrasting life today with life 40 years ago. Audience: members of the student writers' own generation who may not appreciate the major changes that have taken place in the past four decades. Purpose: to help readers see that, although technology may drastically change the world, the human condition remains the same from generation to generation because human nature remains constant.
2. From a utopian point of view, fantasize in a futuristic essay about what the educational system will be like in 20 years when your own children will be students. For purposes of this writing assignment, assume that advances in technology, social cohesion, teacher training, and genetic engineering make the high school of 2020 a much better educational experience than they have. Audience: members of the current education establishment. Purpose: to point out improvements that need to be made to afford every student the best possible education. Pre-writing: students describe a typical day in the life of a student attending an ideal high school two decades into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
3. Watch the movie *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* in which miniature people do battle with insects, house pets, and everyday objects of monumental proportions. Then think about how low self-esteem can make ordinary problems seem insurmountable and can lead to substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, sexual promiscuity, depression, violence, etc. Use these ideas to write an inspirational essay in which they address an audience of their peers who feel like Munchkins in the Land of Giants for the purpose of reminding them that life's challenges are life-size and can be overcome with the right amount of faith, hope, and dependence on family and friends. Thesis: Don't blow problems out of proportion, or they will blow you out of the water.
4. Use personification to explore the role that technology plays in everyday life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by assuming the persona of a favorite gizmo or gadget that makes life easier and writing a self-definition to show the audience that life is much better since its invention. For example, in one such essay, a student may pretend to be a smart phone to show how an electronic device can change daily life.
5. For an audience of teenagers who live so close to the edge that their life expectancy isn't much more than their shoe size, write a job description for an at-risk teenager's guardian angel. The job description becomes the introduction to an essay in which the writer traces a typical day in the life of a teen who drives too fast, drinks too much, hangs out with

violent people, abuses drugs, has unprotected sex, and generally courts danger. Audience: teens who don't realize how dangerous the world is. Purpose: to encourage readers to avoid a high-risk life style so they will live long enough to take their grandkids to McDonald's.

6. Students write an argumentative essay developed through exemplification in which they defend or attack the proposition that network television is a bad influence on young people. The supporting examples may be drawn from one TV series or from a variety of network programming.
7. Students write a complaint paper in which they rant about something that annoys them. Pre-writing: the teacher defines *pet peeve* and leads students in discussing their favorite things to complain about: rude motorists, inattentive waiters/waitresses, friends who borrow things and don't return them, vending machines that take your money but withhold the object of your desire, and people who call you at home during a meal, a shower, or an exciting ball game and ask, "Who is this?"
8. Read Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," and then brainstorm contemporary issues that lend themselves to satirical treatment (e.g. teens having children, pork barrel spending, texting while driving, etc.). Choose one that you feel strongly about, and write "Another Modest Proposal."
9. Brainstorm a list of blessings that you sometimes take for granted. Choose one and write an essay expressing gratitude for this blessing for an audience of readers who enjoy it but don't appreciate it as they should. The purpose of such an essay might be to garner support for a relief organization, encourage respect for law enforcement officers, etc.
10. Choose a favorite person from history, someone you admire and feel comfortable holding up as a hero or role model, and write a tribute to this person. In the course of the essay, explain why you believe the person you praise is worthy of honor and how the world is a better place for his or her having lived.
11. Choose a villainous person from history, someone whose actions you find despicable, and write an essay condemning this person's character and deeds. The purpose of the essay is to hold up this scoundrel as a negative example to the audience to steer readers away from wickedness.
12. Explain an American holiday or custom to an audience of readers from another country who are not familiar with American ways. The purpose: to help foreign visitors understand their host country.
13. Write a descriptive essay that evokes at least four of the five senses so powerfully that the

average reader will feel like he or she was actually there and experienced the subject firsthand. Choose a topic that lends itself to sensory language: a rodeo, a storm, a car wreck, a school cafeteria, a soccer game, a “haunted” house at Halloween, etc.

14. Write an argumentative essay defending or attacking the parental practice of lying to small children to protect them or to perpetuate fantasies like the tooth fairy, the Easter bunny, the existence of unicorns, etc. Audience: parents of newborns.
15. Write an essay narrating a memorable “ah ha!” experience in which you discovered something interesting or profound.
16. Invent and describe a new sport or game, one that does not involve any kind of ball, dice, or cards. Purpose: to entertain a general audience and/or to point out some of the shortcomings of popular forms of recreation that the writer finds undesirable or even repugnant.
17. Describe a common human activity, a pep rally, a funeral, a rock concert, a triathlon, from the point of view of someone who has never seen or heard of such an event, perhaps an extra-terrestrial’s point of view. Purpose: to make readers who are familiar with the subject appreciate it in a new way and/or to entertain them with a quirky perspective on an ordinary activity.
18. Propose, describe, justify, and defend a new national holiday, one so important and universal in its appeal that all public schools would certainly be closed in its observance. Purpose: to entertain students who live from one holiday break to the next.
19. Explain why you are glad to be alive. Audience: friends or classmates who may be contemplating suicide. Purpose: to remind them of how wonderful life is and of their potential. This may be developed through the cataloguing technique in which you list a series of simple pleasures that life affords to most people who will notice and appreciate them: a mockingbird’s song, a cool breeze on a hot day, an attentive waiter, a friend’s smile, an opportunity to help someone less fortunate, a scoop of Baskin-Robbins’ cherries jubilee, etc.
20. Describe the person you wish to become, intellectually, socially, physically, spiritually, vocationally, etc. Purpose: to inspire other teenagers to realize their full potential and to set high goals in life.
21. Describe in dramatic, poetic detail the place where you felt most secure when you were a child. Audience: the parents of young children. Purpose: to remind them what it was like to be young and helpless and to encourage them to provide safe places in which their

children can feel secure enough to develop into well-adjusted adults.

22. Subject: a broken promise. Purpose: to encourage readers to keep their promises. Approach: narrate a personal experience in which you broke a promise and hurt someone or one in which you discovered you could no longer trust a friend or relative because he or she broke a promise.
23. Write in King James English the Ten Commandments for Teens and discuss each one, supplying true-life examples to demonstrate how obeying these commands enriches life and/or how disobeying them can bring disaster. For example, “Thou shalt not betray thy best friend’s confidence,” “Thou shalt ignore thy siblings’ annoying habits until thou art pushed to the limits,” and “Thou shalt not envy thy neighbor’s new sports car, nor her handsome boyfriend, nor her unblemished complexion.”
24. Google “old sayings” until you find one with which you have had personal experience. Write an autobiographical narrative that illustrates the truth of the old saying or proves that it was not true in this particular situation. Here are some examples.
  - “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”
  - “A stitch in time saves nine.”
  - “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”
  - “A rolling stone gathers no moss.”
  - “United we stand; divided we fall.”
25. Brainstorm objects you would include in a time capsule to be opened by the students at your high school in 100 years to show students in the early 22<sup>nd</sup> Century what high school life is like today. Based on this list, describe high school life in an essay and predict how public schools will change over the next century.
26. Choose a controversial celebrity or public figure, and write an essay holding that person up to ridicule or defending that person’s behavior.
27. “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players.” *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene 7, 139). Shakespeare and other writers have tried to explain life to their readers through analogy. In this essay assignment, write an extended metaphor or analogy to explain your philosophy of life to a general audience for the purpose of helping readers make sense of life or to warn them of pitfalls. Suggested comparisons: life as a cross-country trip, life as a circus, life as a treasure hunt, life as a book, life as a puzzle, life as a river, etc.
28. Good writers are good observers. To exercise this truism, take eight or ten photographs of a common object you see often but take for granted: a traffic light, a tree, a monument

on the courthouse square, a dilapidated barn, an old bridge, a rocking chair, etc. Be sure to take pictures of the object from a variety of angles. Study the photos and write a poetic description of the object, using as many senses as possible. The resulting essay should show that even common objects can have dignity or generate interest when observed closely in context of their surroundings and functions. The built-in audience consists of readers who see but do not observe and who take everyday objects for granted.

29. Climb the “ladder of specificity” by writing an essay in which you spend the first part of the paper in a general description of the subject, the second in a closer look, and the third in a close-up--almost microscopic--description of the subject. Whether the topic is a person, a place, an animal, an object, or an activity like a football game, give the reader only a general impression of the subject’s appearance and personality in the introduction and then gradually focus this blurred image until it is crystal clear at the end of the essay.
30. Brainstorm specific instances in which you helped someone and felt good about yourself as a result. Select one of these ideas and develop it into a dramatic retelling of the incident in the form of a narrative/descriptive paper. Purpose: to encourage readers to help others by holding up a poignant personal experience as an example of what blessings accrue when we extend ourselves in someone else’s behalf.
31. Write a definition essay in which you explore the nature of an abstraction like cynicism or patriotism for the purpose of helping readers understand it at a very concrete level.
32. Play cultural anthropologist in your next essay by analyzing a particular social phenomenon and exploring its meaning for society. Possible topics: professional wrestling, raves, and body piercing. Purpose: to help a general American audience understand how what may appear to be a very bizarre behavior actually meets some basic human needs and may actually help society in at least indirect ways.
33. In a narrative/descriptive essay, recount the details of an accident or disaster that you experienced firsthand as either a witness or a victim. Then show how this negative experience actually had some beneficial results. Purpose: to help readers remember that humans have the capacity to draw strength and wisdom from even the worst experiences.
34. Write a narrative/descriptive essay in which you introduce yourself to an audience of new friends by giving them a vivid verbal tour of your closet. Sensory language and humor will enhance this kind of personal essay.
35. Write an essay using exemplification as the major development strategy and “Don’t judge a book by its cover” as the thesis. The audience: people who tend to pigeon-hole other

people based on first impressions without allowing themselves to make new friends.

36. Have you ever returned to a place that you knew as a child and found, upon returning, that the place had “shrunk”? If so, you know how dramatically your perspective changes between pre-school memories of places, people, and things and the current reality. The assignment: write an essay in which you compare and contrast your perception of a person, place, or thing when you were five years old with your current perception of that subject. Purpose and audience: to remind teen and adult readers that perspective alters reality and that the way we look at life, e.g. optimistically or pessimistically, is just as important as the hard reality of life.
37. Monuments play an important role in the life of a cohesive community. They remind us of important people, events, and accomplishments and bind us together as a group, whether it be as a church, a city, a state, or a nation. Witness Mount Rushmore, the Lincoln Memorial, the statue of a founding father in the city square, or the ancient altar in a church courtyard. As a form of pre-writing, brainstorm a list of monuments here and abroad. The assignment: choose your favorite monument and explain to an audience of outsiders why it means so much to you. A vivid word picture of the monument should be part of the essay. Your purpose may be inspirational or merely informational.
38. Write about the causes and/or effects of losing your temper and include an example from personal experience/observation to illustrate each cause or effect. Your purpose: to discourage readers from getting angry.
39. Practice trans-generational linguistics by writing an essay in which you help adults understand the latest teenage slang.
40. Recreational/educational travel has spawned many essays over the years, and these essays find a ready market because people like armchair travel almost as much as the real thing. Read some examples from travel magazines or the travel section of the Sunday paper, and then write a narrative/descriptive essay based on personal experience in which you take your readers to an interesting destination via graphic description and powerful prose.
41. One way that we make sense of a subject is to divide it into categories and then classify examples into that taxonomy. If we start with a clear principle of division, our classification system is a neat way to deal with the complexities of life. For example, we tend to classify new people that we meet into an informal set of pigeon holes somewhere in the back of our brain. Yes, we label them, either for good purposes like helping us understand who they really are or for evil purposes like objectifying someone whom we do not want to treat as human beings. Labels like Daddy’s Little Girl or Redneck or Slacker suggest this kind of division/classification. The assignment is to write an essay

in which you create a classification system for people based on a clear principle of division, such as the way they react in a crisis, the kind of TV programming they prefer, the way they treat the opposite sex, etc. Define each category in your classification system and illustrate each one anonymously with a friend or acquaintance.

42. Slow motion photography is sometimes used in movies to allow the audience to observe an action sequence in great detail. Writers employ “slow motion” when they relate an incident or event in such detail that it is easy for readers to imagine it in all of its complexity even though if it were seen in actual reality it would happen too fast for observers to appreciate. The assignment: write a narrative/descriptive essay about a personal experience that happened in a split second. Relate it in such great detail that readers can clearly see it happening in their mind’s eye. It could be a traffic accident, a winning touchdown, the release of an arrow that brings down a trophy buck, or a baby falling from a high chair. To slow the motion, analyze each tiny movement and describe it in sequence using specific action words, vivid sensory language, and the kind of sharp imagery that creative similes and metaphors generate.
43. Competition vs. cooperation. Which one makes society better? Take a position on this issue, and defend it in an argumentative debate, using personal experiences as illustrations.
44. Study Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, and write an essay that explains what “being smart” means to you. Target audience: a group of perfectionist parents who have a very narrow idea of intelligence. Purpose: to persuade them to encourage their children to develop whatever abilities they have without imposing unrealistic demands on them.
45. Brainstorm some of your most educational experiences that took place outside of a classroom setting. For example: what you learned about human relationships on your first job, what you learned about human nature when cultures clashed on a mission trip to Central America, what you learned about hard work growing up on a farm, etc. In a definition essay, explore the meaning of the word *education* in an essay that encourages readers to think of every new experience, positive or negative, as additional credit in Life 101.
46. At first glance, we may think that funerals are held for the deceased, but they are actually for the living. Write an expository essay in which you discuss how funerals, and the other rituals that surround the death of a loved one, benefit the people who attend them.
47. According to Will Durant, “Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.”

Write an essay in which you narrate a personal experience outside a school setting that illustrates this point.

48. Has technology helped or hurt boy/girl relationships? Take a position on this issue, and write an essay in which you defend your opinion through citing examples from your own experience and from those of your friends. To pre-write for this essay, interview some couples from your grandparents' generation to see how technology, or its absence, affected their courtship and marriage.
49. A visit to almost any large art museum will reveal the penchant of modern portrait artists to capture on canvas the likeness and personality of interesting people from everyday life. Gone are the days when artists painted only the high and mighty. In a descriptive essay, students may wish to paint such a picture with words of someone they know who looks interesting. The "portrait" may include gestures, facial expressions, the sound of the voice, eccentricities, and other features that suggest personality. The thesis for this essay will name the "model" and his or her dominant characteristics. The purpose will be to charm readers with a close look at someone really interesting and to remind readers of the almost infinite variations within the human species.
50. Paint a vivid word picture of that special place where you feel the most safe, the most comfortable, the most balanced; then speculate why. Your description should use sensory language and may include lighting, sounds, scents, color, furniture, etc. Use this description and rationale to defend the thesis that everyone needs a place, a refuge, an inner sanctum to achieve mental health, a place to which they can retreat when they are tired or discouraged and from which they can sally forth into the world refreshed and renewed to accomplish their mission in life.
51. Write a cause/effect essay on bullying for an audience of adults who are not aware of the problem. Feel free to illustrate with personal experiences or eyewitness accounts. Include some kind of call to action in the conclusion.
52. In an argumentative essay, assert that prospective parents should have to demonstrate certain knowledge, skills, and financial stability before being allowed to procreate, a kind of government-issued parenting license. In the body of the essay, list and discuss the qualifications that should be necessary to become eligible for such a license. In the conclusion, describe the penalties that should be inflicted on those who have children without the license. This essay can be deadly serious in its tone or written just for fun.
53. You may have noticed that the world is full of unhealthy ways to deal with stress—drugs, alcohol, violence, cults, gluttony, gambling, and compulsive shopping—to name a few, but not enough people cope with adversity in healthy ways. The assignment:

write a process analysis essay in which you explain how to handle pressure in positive ways. Potential strategies: keeping a diary, doing volunteer work, starting an exercise program, joining a special interest group, joining a prayer group, composing and/or playing music, raising livestock, starting a scrapbook, etc.

54. Discuss how character assassins operate and how their chief tool is gossip. Ask students to write an argumentative essay in which they condemn gossip as a harmful influence that should be discouraged. The target audience: high school students who think gossip is innocent fun. Encourage student writers to avoid a highly abstract treatment of this subject, preferring instead a down-to-earth treatment based on personal experience or eyewitness accounts.
55. You're stranded on a desert island with the perfect survival kit. What's in it? Write an essay in which you list all of the things most important to you in life and why you value these things. Audience: people who have mixed-up priorities. Purpose: to remind them of what is truly important in life. Optional approach: write to a general audience for the purpose of entertaining them by filling the survival kit with things that are obviously not important.
56. Strict comparisons point out the similarities between two subjects of the same class of things, such as two automobiles or two game shows. Fanciful comparisons point out the similarities between two subjects that are very different at first glance, such as politicians and jack-o-lanterns, hummingbirds and helicopters, telephones and gossips. Obviously, fanciful comparisons require more imagination and afford the writers and readers more fun. Assignment: write a fanciful comparison that explores the similarities between two subjects that are fundamentally different but that have some interesting points in common. Purpose: to help readers appreciate one or both of the subjects in new ways. This was Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' strategy when she wrote: "People are like stained glass windows; they sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light within."
57. Rugged individualism or teamwork? Which makes American society better? Take a position on this issue, and write an essay in which you defend your position through citing examples from history and from your own experience.
58. If you have enjoyed a guided tour through a house museum or just wandered through a historic home, write an essay that offers a written tour of the house, including a description of the building's exterior, a look at the main rooms and most interesting furnishings, and the kind of background information that paints a picture of how people lived in the house when it was still a home. Local examples: the William Faulkner house in Oxford, Mississippi; Villa Mare in Little Rock; the Rosalie in Natchez,

Mississippi; the Biedenharn Museum in Monroe, Louisiana; and the Ace of Clubs House in Texarkana.

59. According to Pablo Picasso, “Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” Write an essay that quotes Picasso and defends his idea by relating how art enhances our lives and helps us transcend the mundane.
60. Some social critics claim that we live in an age of incivility. According to this assessment, people are growing ruder and ruder in the way they treat each other. If you have strong feelings about this, write an argumentative essay in which you define rude behavior in particular settings like restaurants, cinemas, church, the school cafeteria, etc. and condemn it for an audience of people who have forgotten how dependent society is on common courtesy.
61. Good writers have excellent skills of observation. To practice this skill, observe some human activity at a discreet distance, one that you do not normally see every day; and then ask yourself what that activity tells you about human nature. Let the answer to that question become the thesis of an essay in which you first describe the activity in detail and then interpret it for your audience, a group of people who may have observed similar activity but without seeing the humanity in it.