

Get the Writing Process Underway

Bonus
Chapter

In This Chapter

- Start with the first body paragraph
- Then write the second and third body paragraphs
- Finish by writing the introduction and conclusion
- Putting together the final essay

There are many ways you can attack the essay portion of the GED Test. Where to begin? Here is our recommended strategy.

As strange as it might seem, you will write a better essay if you do *not* begin with the very first, or introductory paragraph. You already know more or less the main idea, or thesis, of your essay. You've already jotted that down with your other notes. It doesn't make sense to introduce something specifically before you know exactly who or what that something is. Therefore, begin with one of the inside or body paragraphs, usually the first body paragraph. You can later introduce the ideas of your essay once you have developed your ideas more specifically in the body paragraphs.

Save the Best for Last

Just as it is important to make a good impression on someone new, you want the introduction to your essay to make the best possible impression on those folks reading it. You can accomplish this by writing your introduction *after* the body paragraphs. This way you can most accurately prepare the reader for what is to come in the body paragraphs of your essay. A logical presentation might be the following:

- We could begin with a paragraph on recycling. (This is a general topic that covers the basics.)
- Then we would add a paragraph about environmental awareness. You might want to present this from the viewpoint of what we as individuals might do to help the environment. (Notice, this topic is more specific than the recycling one.)
- The last paragraph could be about how we can make a better world by providing service to others. (This is the most specific paragraph, and probably the most personal and/or most important.)

First Body Paragraph

According to our rough outline, the first body paragraph will discuss recycling. After writing the first sentence, we need to provide detailed support to explain, demonstrate, and show the reader just what we mean. Here's how that first paragraph might look:

The easiest way that regular people can make the world a better place is to be more responsible recyclers. This is easy to do. Most public buildings now offer a variety of trash cans for trash, paper, and plastic and glass. We just need to look for such cans and then really use them. If buildings do not have such cans, maybe we could make the suggestion that they get a recycling trash can. Another way we can be better recyclers is to reuse our plastic water bottles. I know that I throw away way too many empty Dasani and Vitamin Water bottles. I could just use one bottle and continue to fill it once it's empty. Even if I get a new bottle once or twice a week, it would be better than throwing out two or three bottles a day. Individuals can also recycle simply by separating their trash into regular garbage and recyclable trash like paper, plastic, and glass. Most communities provide separate containers, so people really ought to use them. These are just a few ways that regular people can recycle and help to make the world a better place.

See how the final (concluding) sentence of this first body paragraph pulls everything together. Also, the mentioning of the water bottles that “I” throw away every day is a nice personal example of waste that can be corrected. Remember, paragraphs need a topic sentence to let the reader know what is coming. The topic sentence then needs several (two to four, maybe) details, examples, and specific instances to show the reader what exactly you mean. Finally, a last or concluding sentence pulls everything together. In the previous paragraph, the phrase “these are just a few of the ways” is a clear sign to the reader that the paragraph on recycling is ending.

Second Body Paragraph

The second body paragraph should discuss the responsibility we all have to be more environmentally aware.

It's okay to begin this paragraph by simply saying, “The second way we can make this world a better place ...” or “Another way that we can make this world a better place” Here's how the second paragraph might look:

Another way we can make the world a better place is if each of us is more environmentally aware. The easiest thing we can do is to make sure our casual trash gets into the can—gum wrappers and take-out bags need to make it all the way into the trash can. If we notice that someone else's trash missed the can, then it would be helpful if we just pick it up and toss it where it belongs. It is very important that we not pollute our sewers by pouring used car oil down them or by allowing harmful pesticides to wash into them. These harmful elements in the sewers eventually invade our lakes and streams, and this can affect our wildlife. We should be careful about wasting electricity around our homes. An easy way to help with this would be to replace our old electric lamp bulbs with the newer, more energy-efficient, squiggly ones. These are just a few things that we can do to be more environmentally responsible.

You can probably think of many other ideas about environmental awareness and responsibility. These are just a few. And it's okay if you can't remember the proper names of examples in your essay; of course there is a specific name for the new light bulbs (just for the record, it's "compact fluorescent lamps"), but without the ability to check any resources, describing it as "squiggly" gives the reader an exact description of what you mean.

It's best to limit paragraphs to three or four major points each. In this second body paragraph, trash is covered in two sentences, pollution of sewers has two, and the wasting of electricity has two. The paragraph has an opening sentence and a final sentence. This is a good spread of support for each of the major points made.

Third Body Paragraph

Our final idea about improving the world is on a more personal level. Here we decided that we should reach out as people to do service to help other people. Many ideas could be included here:

Finally, individuals can help better the world by being better, less selfish people. Perhaps we can just offer our services to others. Even if it is just taking Grandma out or shoveling our sick neighbor's walk in the winter, that would help. Working at a local humane society is a great service, and an enjoyable one for those who like animals. Other service organizations always need our help. Also, local soup kitchens and food pantries are always looking for volunteers. Sometimes meals need to be delivered to those who cannot get out. When my neighbor could no longer drive, Meals on Wheels delivered a main meal to him once a day. If someone has the muscles, perhaps he or she could work for Habitat for Humanity. In our community we had a very damaging tornado this past spring. Many people from all over our city came to the areas of destruction and helped with clearing and building. Others brought food and clothing and friendship for those whose homes were destroyed. Some even opened their homes to complete strangers who suddenly found themselves with no roof over their heads. That was a true example of improving the world.

Notice how this last paragraph is longer and more personal than the other two paragraphs. This is the paragraph with the most impact, the one we've been leading up to. That's why it's a good idea to save the best for last. This is what the reader remembers.

Introduction and Conclusion

What about the introduction and the conclusion, you may be wondering. Not to worry. The *introduction* is just that: You write one paragraph to introduce what you are going to be saying in your essay. For this topic you might want to mention the Anne Frank quote with an emphasis on "improving the world." But you don't even have to refer to the quotation. The topic is what sort of everyday things ordinary people can do to improve the world. Then you would mention the three areas you are writing about—recycling, environmental awareness, and personal service. The last sentence of your introduction might be something like this:

Of course, we can improve the world in many ways, but three ideas that I consider important include everyday recycling, environmental awareness, and personal service.

Let's refresh our memories by looking again at the original prompt:

How can ordinary people start improving their world? What are some everyday things that we can do to make the world better?

The complete introduction might look like this:

All of us can help to improve our world. Our efforts do not have to be something fantastic or extremely challenging, inconvenient, or expensive. We can help by doing ordinary, everyday things. I can think of three areas where I can actively help make the world better. I can help by making more of an effort to recycle, I can become more environmentally responsible, and I can also reach out to help my community and my family more.



GOOD IDEA

Introductions do not have to be lengthy or very involved. Introduce the main idea of the essay and explain how you intend to cover this main idea. The body paragraphs will tell the rest.

If you are taking the test on paper, you will be writing your GED essay on paper, not typing it on a computer. This does pose a challenge when you write the body paragraphs of your essay before the introduction and conclusion. This may seem a bit weird to you, but all you need to do is to leave room at the beginning of the pages on which you will be writing your essay. Yes, you might have a bit of extra space because you don't use all the lines for your introduction, or you may have to write smaller in order to get it all in.

If you are going to be writing the GED essay on a computer, adding an introduction and conclusion after the body paragraphs are written will be a piece of cake.



GOOD IDEA

If you find it necessary to add words or even sentences after your composition has been written, just clearly add words above the words on the line, using a caret (^) to indicate the addition. If your insert is long, make a notation such as an asterisk (*) at the site where you want the information and add that information, clearly marked, at the end of the essay.

Your *conclusion* is just that. It brings closure to the idea of helping make the world a better place by being more aware of the environment and the needs of those around us. It's always good in the conclusion not only to end your essay based on what you have just explained, but it is also good to add one or two "so what?" statements. Perhaps you might comment on the world being the only planet we have: "Even if we don't like everything that is going on, we should do all we can to make this world of ours a better place," or "It's important for individuals to do everyday things to help preserve what we've got." You get the idea.

Here is a possible conclusion for our essay:

Sometimes we look around our own little world, and we see a number of things that need fixing. The only way we can help to fix these things is for each of us to do our part, one person and one step at a time. It is the only world we have, so we need to treat it gently. One thing that I try to do is to be better about recycling my trash. Also, I am trying to become more

environmentally aware. Finally, I am trying to help others through service and friendship. I will, hopefully, become more aware of the needs of others and become less fixated on me. Each of us needs to actively make the world a better place.

Putting Everything Together

Now that we've dealt with all the parts, it's time to put everything together so we can see how it reads. Let's take a look at the total essay:

All of us can help to improve our world. Our efforts do not have to be something fantastic or extremely challenging, inconvenient, or expensive. We can help by doing ordinary, everyday things. I can think of three areas where I actively help make the world better. I can help by making more of an effort to recycle, I can become more environmentally responsible, and I can also reach out to help my community and my family more.

The first way that regular people can make the world a better place is to be more responsible recyclers. This is easy to do. Most public buildings now offer a variety of trash cans such as trash, paper, and plastic and glass. We just need to look for such cans and then really use them. If buildings do not have such cans, maybe we could make the suggestion that they get a recycling trash can. Another way we can be better recyclers is to reuse our plastic water bottles. I know that I throw away way too many empty Dasani and Vitamin Water bottles. I could just use one bottle and continue to fill it once it's empty. Even if I get a new bottle once or twice a week, it would be better than throwing out two or three bottles a day. Individuals can also recycle simply by separating their trash into regular garbage and recyclable trash like paper, plastic, and glass. Most communities provide separate containers, so people really ought to use them. These are just a few ways that regular people can recycle and help to make the world a better place.

Another way we can make the world a better place is if each of us is more environmentally aware. The easiest thing we can do is to make sure our casual trash gets into the can—gum wrappers and take-out bags need to make it all the way into the trash can. If we notice that someone else's trash missed the can, then it would be helpful if we just pick it up and toss it where it belongs. It is very important that we not pollute our sewers by pouring used car oil down them or by allowing harmful pesticides to wash into them. These harmful elements in the sewers eventually invade our lakes and streams, and this can affect our wildlife. We should be careful about wasting electricity around our homes. An easy way to help with this would be to replace our old electric lamp bulbs with the newer, more energy-efficient, squiggly ones. These are just a few things that we can do to be more environmentally responsible.

Finally, individuals can help better the world by being better, less selfish people. Perhaps we can just offer our services to others. Even if it is just taking Grandma out or shoveling our sick neighbor's walk in the winter, that would help. Working at a local humane society is a great service, and an enjoyable one for those who like animals. Other service organizations always need our help. Also, local soup kitchens and food pantries are always looking for volunteers. Sometimes meals need to be delivered to those who cannot get out. When my neighbor could no longer drive, Meals on Wheels delivered a main meal to him once a day. If someone has the

muscles, perhaps he or she could work for Habitat for Humanity. In our community we had a very damaging tornado this past spring. Many people from all over our city came to the areas of destruction and helped with clearing and building. Others brought food and clothing and friendship for those whose homes were destroyed. Some even opened their homes to complete strangers who suddenly found themselves with no roof over their heads. That was a true example of improving the world.

Sometimes we look around our own little world, and we see a number of things that need fixing. The only way we can help to fix these things is for each of us to do our part, one person and one step at a time. It is the only world we have, so we need to treat it gently. One thing that I try to do is to be better about recycling my trash. Also, I am trying to become more environmentally aware. Finally, I am trying to help others through service and friendship. I will, hopefully, become more aware of the needs of others and become less fixated on me. Each of us needs to actively make the world a better place.

Writing an essay under timed conditions is never an easy assignment. Even professional writers find the task a challenge. However, once you have practiced writing essays using the steps we've covered in this section, you will greatly improve your essay writing skills.