

How to Add 300 Words to Your Essay in 15 Minutes

...and enjoy doing it

Here's the problem: you've typed a page or so, which amounts to about 250 words or thereabouts. Maybe more. And now you're staring at the screen, thinking to yourself:

- Why do I have to write this stupid essay?
- I'm not even a Writing major – why do I have to do this?
- Why can't the word requirement be one page - what, there's not enough out there in the world for my professor to read?
- When am I ever going to finish this?

Hey, if you have any additional thoughts, please feel free to share and email me at tutorphil@tutorphil.com. I collect these (just kidding).

How do I know? Well, I've been there, and that's how I know. And, luckily for myself and now for you, I have figured out how to handle essay writing, especially when I don't feel like writing anything at all. And I'm going to share a technique with you that you can use right now to add lots of words to your essay, while improving your essay's quality without being wordy. Okay – let's dive right in.

Now, a word of warning. You may think that this technique will work only for college freshmen or in the basic English 101 course. Well, let me tell you - I teach it to my adult students all the time, and I used it repeatedly while writing my own Master's thesis. It is deceptively simple, but it works on any level, trust me.

The name of the technique is:

Zooming In

That's right – Zooming In. What do I mean by that? If you've sat down to write a paper and you have some material, but don't know what else to write, then chances are that in your paper you haven't exactly been going from more general to more specific, which is a vitally important skill to have in order to eliminate all pain associated with writing a paper. And,

although you don't have to be a master of this skill in order to use the skill of Zooming In, you need to understand it on a basic level.

So, let's take a look at the following statements that came from one essay:

- "Holidays can be fun times."
- "Thanksgiving is a great holiday because of all the food and the chance to see some of the distant family you've missed."
- "Last Thanksgiving was very interesting because we had almost all of our family over."
- "It was so funny when my uncle Fred cut his finger while trying to slice the turkey."

Let me ask you a question: as we went from the very first sentence to the last, what have we been doing? Answer: we've been **Zooming In**.

What else have we been doing? Answer: we've been Going from More General to More Specific.

Look at the sentences again. Which is the most general statement?

"Holidays can be fun times."

Why is it the most general? Because no details whatsoever are given. All we know is that holidays can be fun times – a pretty simple statement anyone could make.

Now what about the next one:

"Thanksgiving is a great holiday because of all the food and the chance to see some of the distant family you've missed."

Now we're getting into more detail; now it's becoming a little more interesting because now we have some details – the exact holiday (Thanksgiving) and what's so great about it. As

it turns out, it's great because of a chance to eat some good food and to see some long-missed relatives. But it's still a little too general to be interesting.

Do you see where I'm going with this? We're **Zooming In**, bit by bit. Now you're probably asking: "How in the world can understanding this help me add hundreds of words to my essay!" Well, stay focused and pay attention.

Let's look at the next statement. Here we're getting even more specific, because now we're talking about not just holidays in general, and not even Thanksgivings in general, but we're talking about a specific Thanksgiving that happened in a certain year in a specific family – in the family of the author:

"Last Thanksgiving was very interesting because we had almost all of our family over."

Now we have really **Zoomed In** on something. But taking it a step further brings us to the meat and potatoes of any essay – *the example*:

"It was so funny when my uncle Fred cut his finger while trying to slice the turkey."

Now this one is the bull's eye. We zoomed in pretty much as much as we could, and now we are inside a specific place in space and time, and we're focusing on a particular incident that happened to a particular person.

And now that we've **Zoomed In** as much as we could while trying to prove a point about holidays in general – that is, that holidays can be fun times – now you can go crazy and let your imagination run wild and write as much as you please, describing what exactly happened to your uncle Fred.

Why is this easier now? Because now your essay has become so specific that you have a little story going, with a funny character about whom it's fun to write. Suggestions? Here you go:

You could describe in detail:

- How even before he undertook to slice the turkey, uncle Fred boasted how good he was with knives, and how he sharpens them himself.
- How his wife, your aunt, was trying to prevent him from trying to slice the turkey because she knew something bad would happen.
- How he yelled at her, and everyone laughed.
- How he made a mistake and cut his finger.
- How he screamed and scared the little children around the table and they started to cry.
- How he tried to pretend that it was nothing, and that was the funniest part.
- And finally, how after having a good laugh at uncle Fred's expense, all other tensions between the members of the family were gone, and the rest of the evening was a complete success.

And now please notice several things. First, one sentence of about ten words turned into a whole story.

Second, by **Zooming In** like this on a small incident, instead of killing ourselves and trying to come up with more general stuff, we focused all of our attention on one exact thing and that's how we were able to expand.

Third, notice that we haven't even written out the whole incident in detail yet, but created a kind of an outline. And by having done just that, a 10-word sentence expanded into a 134-word story. And it is completely up to us how much to write about it. I hope you can see that you could write a lot if you follow this method.

Fourth, note that the quality of the essay improves if more examples are given. It becomes more fun to read and, therefore, increases in value and quality. Your professor will not hold it against you that you're providing examples. No – this is exactly what professors want! Unfortunately, very few students understand this.

So, let's write out this funny little episode in full just to make sure that we can turn it into 300 words:

"Last Thanksgiving turned out to be the most fun Thanksgiving ever. We had uncle Fred and his wife Betty over, and my mom prepared a perfect turkey. We were all sitting at the table in anticipation as uncle Fred was getting ready to do the honors and slice the turkey – this was and still is the ritual in our family.

We knew something interesting was about to happen at the table, but just didn't know what exactly. This is because uncle Fred was known for his practical jokes, but this year he had done nothing yet. Also, usually his jokes resulted in my father becoming angry with him. But just watch what happened instead.

As soon as he was done sharpening the knife, my uncle Fred grabbed the turkey in an unusually awkward way and sank the knife in. The next thing we saw was a gush of blood bursting from my uncle's finger. He cut himself so badly that his blood was not only all over the turkey but over a small dish with gravy as well.

When my little sister and her little cousin Annie saw that, they started crying, and my mom had to take them away. The funniest part was when uncle Fred grabbed his cut finger with his arm and squeezed it to stop the blood, at the same trying to keep a poker face, pretending that he was just fine and saying: "So... turkey anyone?"

He was so afraid of looking bad because the whole thing was too embarrassing. And he tried to keep his cool for a few seconds until he started to grow really pale. That's when my father rushed to him and led him away into the bathroom to wash the finger and put on a bandage.

Then, after the whole incident was over and my uncle was sitting at the table again, my father was slicing the remaining turkey this time, quietly glancing towards uncle Fred, as if saying: 'That's right. No practical jokes this year, Freddy.' And that was the most fun I'd ever had at the Thanksgiving table."

Okay – this example is exactly 350 words. Now, it may not be a masterpiece of essay writing, but it did the job. I just added 350 quality words to my essay on the topic "Holidays can be fun times." Just to let you know, I was going a little overboard and had to stop myself

from writing too much. This is how easy it is to add words when you're having fun writing. Examples are everything!

Also, note that:

- This example supports the main point that 'holidays can be fun times.'
- It is a specific example from the author's life and doesn't need validation.
- You can write one, two, three, or more of these in your essay if you still haven't met the word or page count requirement.
- Each example could belong in a separate section. This means that you don't have to give multiple examples of one concept or argument. Provide one example to illustrate one point, and then another example to illustrate another point.
- You can use this technique anywhere in your paper where you feel you've been too general and could use some zooming in.
- If you think that over 300 words are too much for one example, just write two examples 150 words each – you'll be able to do it easily now that you know exactly what to do!
- It took me about 15 minutes to write this once I knew what my example would be about. Words flow when you zoom in on a specific person, place, and time!

Of course a little caveat is due here. Don't go overboard and write two thousand words on that incident alone without writing anything else to support your thesis. Don't **Zoom In** too much. **Zooming In** is a powerful weapon – use it wisely!

Success to you,

Tutor Phil