

ACADEMIC ESSAYS

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1. Thinking about academic essays

1. Are the following sentences about academic research essays true (T) or false (F)?

	T	F
1. Academic writing is different than other kinds of essay writing.	—	—
2. You should start your research before you start your writing.	—	—
3. You should focus on a <i>wide</i> topic when you write a research paper.	—	—
4. You should focus on a <i>narrow</i> topic when you write a research paper.	—	—
5. It's okay to use Wikipedia as a reference in an academic essay.	—	—

2. Three important points to remember about academic writing:

- 1) Academic writing is writing done by academics (not journalists) for other academics.
- 2) Academic writing uses topics and questions that are interesting to the academic community.
- 3) Academic writing should present the reader with an argument (usually a thesis statement).

3. What is the Japanese word for the following essay-related words?

thesis statement	evidence
sources	logical
reference	specific
research	statistics
argument	
reliability	
relevance	

2. Deciding (and narrowing) a topic

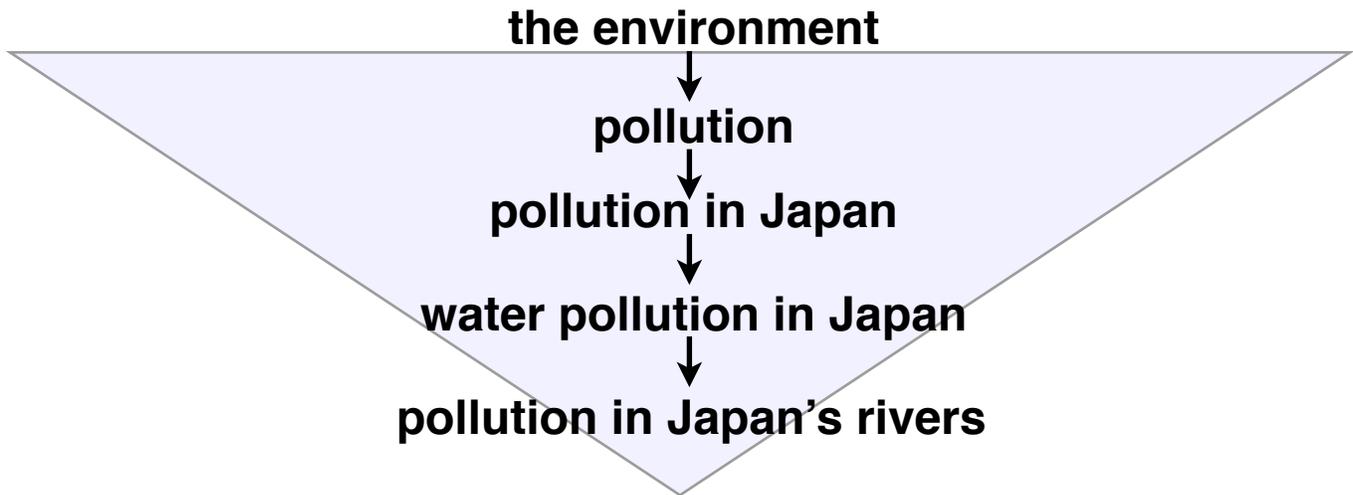
Before you start your research and writing, you must decide on a general topic. Of course, this topic should be something that interests you.

1) Look at the list of possible topics below. Which interest you? Rate the topics from 1 to 5.

1 very interesting 2 interesting 3 a little interesting 4 not very interesting 5 not interesting at all

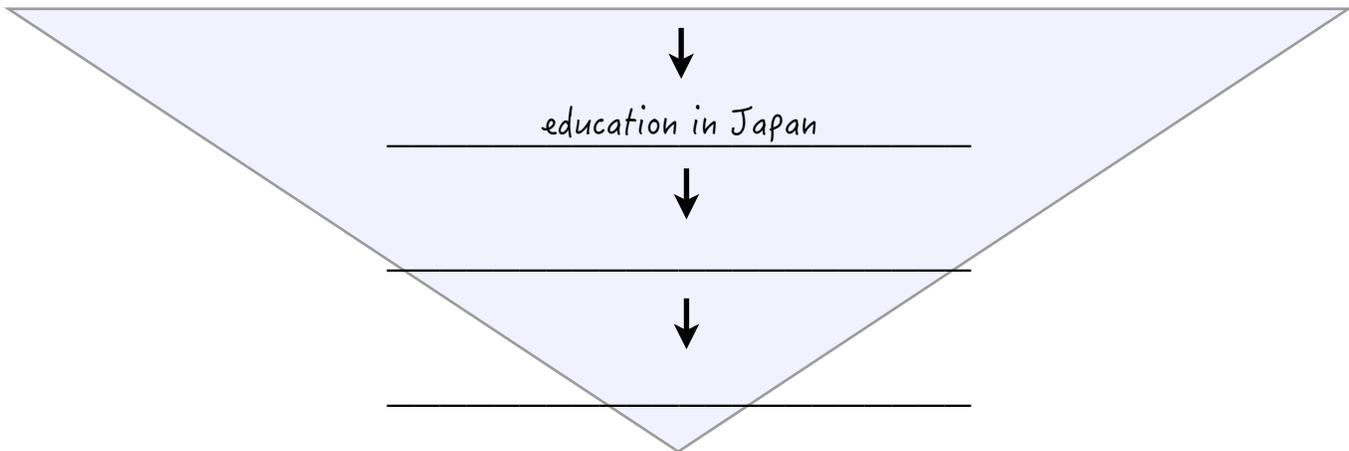
___ environment ___ education ___ drugs ___ law	___ crime ___ international relations ___ movies & television ___ sports	___ music ___ health ___ Japanese society ___ video games
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A topic such as “the environment” is much too large for a short research paper. The topic must be narrowed. Look at the diagram below which shows how a general topic can be narrowed to something more specific.

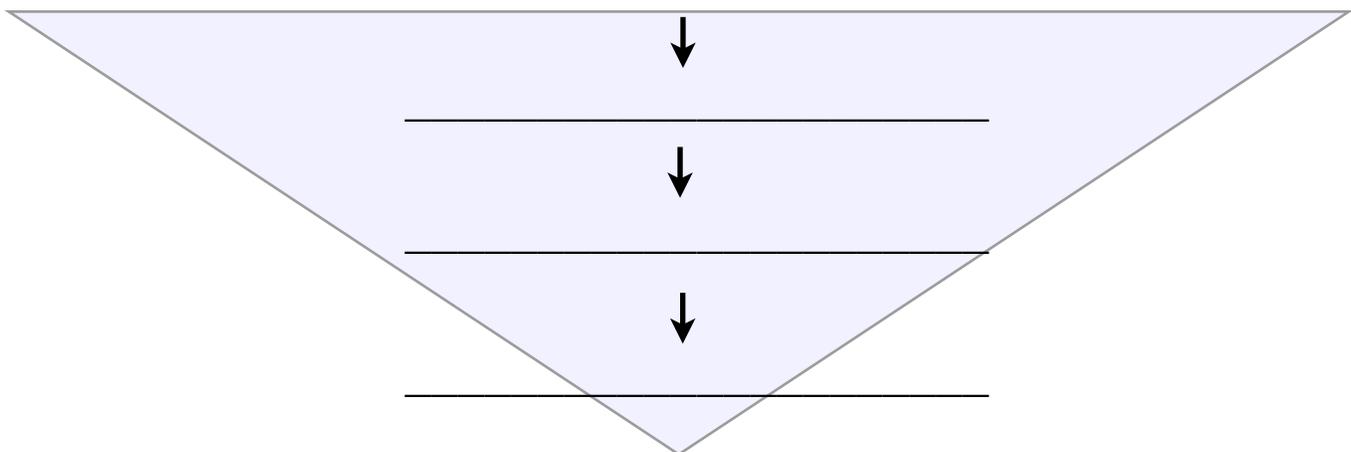


2) Look at the two general topics below. Narrow them both to a specific topic that you could focus a research paper on.

education



drugs



After you have decided your general topic, you will have to *narrow your focus* before you finally choose a *thesis statement* (see next section).

3. Your thesis statement

After you decide on a specific topic, you must decide your **thesis statement**. The thesis statement tells the reader what point you will be making. Now you must look at your ideas about the topic and decide what point you want to make. A thesis statement is usually made of two parts:

The first part states the topic.

- *Violent video games...*
- *Global Warming...*
- *Computer education...*

The second part states the point of the essay.

- ...should not be played by children under 14 years old*
- ...is caused by nature, not man*
- ...should start in elementary school*

...so a complete thesis statement looks like this:

- *Violent video games should not be played by children under 14 years old.*
- *Global warming is caused by nature, not man.*
- *Computer education should start in elementary school.*

One method you can use to write a good thesis statement is to write a list of opinions you have about your topic. Use the phrase “I think...” when you are making this list.

I think _____

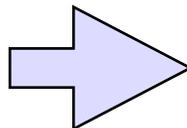
I think _____

I think _____

Three things to think about when choosing your thesis statement:

1. Your thesis statement should represent a topic you are interested in. Look at the scores you gave the topics above. What topics did you give a 5 or 1 to? These topics might provide good thesis statements for you.
2. It is possible to make a thesis statement that is the opposite of one of the statements above:

Computer education should start in elementary school.



Computer education should **not** start in elementary school.

3. How much English research do you want to do? If you want to do most of your research in Japanese, you should choose a thesis statement that is “Japan-specific”.

Here are four important points to remember while you are writing your own thesis statement.

1. A thesis statement must be an opinion, not a fact.

If a thesis statement is a fact, then you can't really discuss or debate it. A thesis statement should be an argument which you can develop through your paper.

Factual Statements

- ✗ Many factories pollute the environment.
- ✗ Japan's population is growing older.

Thesis Statements

- ✓ Pollution from factories is the main cause of global warming.
- ✓ Japan's aging population will create a crisis in health care.

2. A thesis statement shouldn't be too highly opinionated or emotional.

Your thesis statement should be an opinion, but it shouldn't be an overly strong one. You don't want to make your reader uncomfortable.

Highly Opinionated Statements

- ✗ The American government is too arrogant.
- ✗ The Academic Writing course in GMS is useless.

Thesis Statements

- ✓ The American government should...
- ✓ Improvements must be made to the Academic Writing course.

3. A thesis statement shouldn't be too general.

The more general a thesis statement is the more you have to write to cover it. Thesis statements should be specific.

General Statements

- ✗ Japan's education system needs to be changed.
- ✗ Drunk Driving needs to be stopped.

Thesis Statements

- ✓ English teachers in Japanese high schools need more training.
- ✓ Drunk Driving laws must be enforced more than they are now.

4. A thesis statement shouldn't be an announcement.

Don't make "an announcement" about your topic and forget to give your opinion.

Announcements

- ✗ I will write about gun control in America.
- ✗ My essay will discuss pollution made by factories in Japan.

Thesis Statements

- ✓ America needs stricter gun control laws to reduce crime.
- ✓ Pollution made by Japanese factories is not a major contributor to global warming.

1) What are the problems with the following thesis statements? Are they facts instead of opinions (F)? Are they too opinionated (TO)? Are they too general (TG)? Are they announcements (A)?

- ___ I want to discuss why capital punishment should be abolished.
- ___ Racism is a problem in the world.
- ___ Abe has been the worst Prime Minister in Japan’s history.
- ___ Drugs are bad.
- ___ American movies influence Japanese movies.
- ___ Students should learn Chinese in school.
- ___ Children today watch too much TV.
- ___ Yoga is a relaxing hobby.
- ___ FC Barcelona is the greatest soccer team in the world.
- ___ Global warming is causing some problems.

2) Using two of the topics above, write two appropriate thesis statements:

1) _____

2) _____
