

Problems of Writing a Descriptive Essay for Thai Students

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Abstract

The present study aimed to problems of writing a descriptive essay for Thai students. Writing essays is a major part of many further education courses. In coursework assignments, dissertations and exams, a well-written essay can make the difference between a pass and a fail, and these essays provide you with the stepping stones that take you towards the degree, qualification and career that you desire. Nothing will expose your uncertainty or lack of knowledge more than a poorly written essay; what Essay Writing Skills does is let you know what is expected of you and how best to go about your research, thus allowing you to get on top of your workload quickly. Essay Writing Skills offers practical and proven ways to maximize your success in all aspects of essay writing. From planning your first essay to assessing primary and secondary sources, it will help you to write in a systematic way that presents a convincing and academically sound argument. A comprehensive guide, it provides guidance and advice on good research techniques, grammar and accuracy, creating an essay plan and correctly citing your sources. It also includes a range of real life example essays and insider knowledge on how your essays are assessed, Essay Writing Skills is an indispensable source of advice, making the writing process clear and manageable to help you improve the quality of your written work.

Keywords: Problems of Writing; Descriptive Essay

Introduction

Writing is an expression of the feelings, thoughts, desires, and plans into a paper. According to Hyland (2003:74), writing is a way used to express the intention indirectly. Writing requires high concentration and focus because beside needed to use good and correct grammar, the writer also needs to make the reader understood what is conveyed by the author. Writers should pay attention both on the goal of writing itself and the readers (Gebhard, 2000:62). Writing skills do not come off likes the ability to speak, hear, and see. It needs hard training and practiced to be able to write well and correctly. Beginning by recognizing letters and assembled into a sentence and assembled again into a paragraph up into a paper where the intent and purpose is to conveyed information to the reader. Starting from the lowest level as created a paragraph to a higher level such as write a scientific paper.

However, it seems that English department students struggle to write in English. It becomes hard to write is when writing becomes a crucial issue because there is a policy made



by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture requires students to write a research article on a journal as one of their requirements to graduate at their university. In fact, at the level of the university, writing is still a difficult subject. Because it needs to spend much energy to think to make a good paper and can be easily understood by the readers. Writing requires precision and broad understanding (Warburton, 2004:120). Because, apart from the author must be smart and correct in using the right choice of words, the author must also be true of structuring sentences. The author should have an idea that will be a serious problem in the writing of the paper because the authors had to found their own way to found these ideas. According to McCrimmon (2008:58), writing is an activity which should explore thoughts and feelings about a subject that is poured into a paper, determines how writing can be understood by the reader. But this is where the real understanding of the writing of a scientific paper.

In academic area, writing an essay is still as hard as writing in general. Students still need to think harder to make a good paper and can be easily understood by the reader. In the other side, the common problems frequently faced by the students came from internal and external factors. Internal factors that the students' problem may come from their own knowledge. It means that the students' knowledge is still limited. The students cannot choose a topic that they fully understood and comprehend. It may lack of preparation before they start to write, it may come from minim information about the source that they want to use as a topic. Thus, from external factors, it may come from the time limit and words limit. Students started to struggle when they know about the rules before started to write. The students will not feel confidence and they will not free to share their idea. It made the student not enjoying to writes and starts to write based on their assumption only. As a good essay paper, essay needs an own argument and also needs a reference to support the argument. It will make the essay become a trusted source.

Based on the researcher's experience in writing descriptive essay when taking a writing course, the researcher perceives as same as the explanation above about the common problems that come when starts to write the essay. The researcher perceives that writing an essay not only used own argument but also needs a reference to support the ideas. But, when the lecturer asked to wrote an essay, the researcher directly got stuck on the topic; what was the best topic to discuss. The researcher knows a good essay can be produced when the preparation is complete. But, it is impossible that at the same time, the researcher needs to write an essay and prepare the sources and references that support the essay. The researcher's friends also faced the same problems. They are confused about what they should write; because lack of preparation to collect the information.

For the students who think too far about the ideas of the essay, their minds directly become a thousand branch because full of consideration about the idea. The students who think simple about their ideas will be faster to start writing. It happens because the students didn't prepare the information before starting to write. All of the things that the students did

when thinking about the idea for their essays have advantages and also disadvantages. For the students who think too far, they will be more considerable to choose the topic and it will affect to the body of the paragraph of their essay. It means that they have thought about the body that related to their topics, so that is why their think too long about the idea. Meanwhile, the disadvantages of that, the students taking a long time just stuck on their opinion. For the students who think simply, they write the essay faster and do not take a long time to think about their opinion, but the disadvantages of that, the students will face the problems usually when they write the body paragraphs that related to the topic. They will stuck on that because in the first, they just only think about what is the best topic to discuss, didn't think far about the body paragraphs which related to the topic and also didn't think about the thesis statement that will support their essay. Sometimes, students don't recognize about their mistakes in writing an essay, because they are still lack of knowledge about the essay itself.

1. Essay writing

Essay writing is the heart of education. Students at every level need to be able to write clear and well-organized essays whether in the form of assignments, dissertations or examination answers. According to Warburton (2004:124), clear writing skills and develop the text and supporting arguments are the basics of all the non-fiction writing and may be useful for professional life after college. Some students fail to achieve their potential simply because they don't understand the basic principles of essay writing. They can be convincing in discussion and know the subject well, but when it comes to writing an essay they fall apart.

Some students have a talent in writing skills which make them able to write without having to think hard about what they are going to write. But for some students who do not have the talent will be very difficult to write even if only in the form of a simple writing. According to Warburton (2004:125), whatever the study, if can't write a good essay the students will never success on that study. All of these cases applied to all types of writing including writing essays.

Don't even think that writing an essay is quite simply by copying what is in mind. Some students assume that to write an essay can be done after all the content of the essay had been present in their minds. This is a mistake. That needs to be done before writing an essay is a well preparation. Essay writing required the author's own argument support by one or several theories from the experts. In writing an essay, it requires a bit of creativity, which is needed in order to make the essay become more interesting to read and it also can be understood by the reader. Some students often feel lack of creativity because they are not usual in doing writing. They are also often confused and don't understand what they are going to write. All these problems can be caused by a lack of preparation before writing. According to Warburton (2004:127), when going to write, need to see where it would do more research before can say anything interesting, true, and accurate. It shows that in essay writing needs something more



than just the own argument itself, which needs a bit of creativity to combine own argument with the opinion of the experts.

2. Types of Essays

The essay is a commonly assigned form of writing that every student will encounter while in educational environment. Therefore, it is wise for the students to be able to write both capably and comfortably. According to Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:86), Essays can be a rewarding and challenging type of writing and are often assigned either to be done in class, which requires previous planning and practice and a bit of creativity on the part of the student, or as homework, which likewise demands a certain amount of preparation. Many poorly crafted essays have been produced because of a lack of preparation and confidence. However, students can avoid the discomfort often associated with essay writing by understanding some common genres within essay writing.

Here are brief introductions to the following genres of essay writing:

1) Expository Essay

The expository essay is a genre of essay that requires the student to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner. It is also sometimes called “information writing” because it gives information about a person, place, thing, relationship or idea. An expository essay has same structure with another essay with an introductory paragraph which contain a thesis statement, main body paragraphs that help to prove the thesis statement and a conclusion paragraph that summarizes all the points of the essay. According to Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013), an expository essay is a form of writing which intends to define, inform, explain, elaborate, and expound the author’s subject to the reader.

The most important feature to remember when writing an expository essay is it will not need to write about the own personal opinions. An expository essay needs a clear thesis that establishes and sustains the focus, an opening paragraph that introduces the thesis, body paragraphs to illustrate the analytic points, linking paragraph to connect the ideas of paragraph in interesting way, and also a conclusion that conclude the whole idea without being repetitive.

2) Descriptive Essay

Descriptive essay is a kind of essay that used to describe something, like an object, person, experience, place and situation. This essay requires the students to be creative in making a description of things that will be discussed. Students need to use their creativity to make the explanation of the essay to be interesting to the reader. Students need to use a bit of creativity to make the description become interesting for the reader to know. By using the creativity, the author can make the reader curious about what is being described, even the reader has known about such info.

According to Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:52), with creativity in writing the description, change the point of view on the explanation. Just need to describe the unique and

strange things which they rarely or not at all have not studied because it was considered unimportant and not needed. In this way, those who already understood the general explanation of what is written will be attracted by the strange explanation that makes them curious to know.

3) Narrative Essay

A narrative essay is one that tells a story. Narrative essays use story telling elements to make their points. They look like short story rather than traditional academic essays. According to Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:54), good narrative essay can make the reader feels as though they experience the current events in the essay. When writing a narrative essay, one might think of it as telling a story. These essays are often anecdotal, experiential, and personal, allowing students to express themselves in a creative way.

In writing narrative essay, there are conventions need to keep in mind:

- Narratives are generally written in the first person, that is, using I. however third person (he, she, or it) can also be used.
- Narratives rely on concrete, sensory details to convey their point. These details should create a unified, forceful effect, a dominant impression.
- Narratives, as stories, should include these conventional stories; a plot, including setting and characters; a climax; and an ending.

4) Argumentative Essay

Argumentative essay is a kind of essay that requires students to investigate a topic that will be discussed by connecting with personal assumptions and arguments. The skill of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that giving an opinion is a simple one. But in another case, it will be a problem when some people don't agree with the opinion because as a human being, different people will also have different opinion.

According to Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:56), argumentative essay is the act of forming reasons, making inductions, drawing conclusions, and applying them to the case in discussion. In addition, argumentative is the process of reasoning from the known to the unknown. Without doing this, an argument will not appear. Argumentative essays are often organized in the following manner:

- They begin with a statement of own assertion, its timeliness, significance, and relevance in relation to some phenomenon.
- They review critically the literature about that phenomenon.
- They illustrate how an assertion is better than others, including improve methods that used to accumulate the data to be explained.

3. Problems in Writing Essay

Problems always happen in every level of education, for this study the problems happened in academic area which is in highest level of education, and the problem is come from writing. In the academic context (Ismail, 2011:57), point out that the students indicated



their needs to improve their writing proficiency in English as a guarantee for their future career. At the first, the students always feel pessimist in writing because they do not realize how good writing for their future career. After the students realized that writing was play an important role in their future career, they are start to learn writing and sometimes stuck because facing the problems of writing itself.

The students appeared to have many problems when writing in English, like not knowing how to organize their ideas, because it is a new experience for them. And may because lack of time in writing the essay. According to Warburton (2004:128), good writer just focus on the ideas in their mind and directly write to the point for a limited time. It means that if wanted to know whether the writer is good or not, just instruct his or her to write an essay with limited time.

In second course in writing, the students need to take a writing essay course. Whether it is a narrative, a persuasive piece or a research paper, writing an essay can be challenging. The writing process is often a long road of false starts and lengthy revisions. Where students must confront their assumptions of who they are as writers and dodge the bullets of writer's block and plagiarism. For students to succeed in a foreign language generally, and writing skills specifically, they need to surround themselves in a language learning environment. Difficulty starting an essay is often one of the first problems student writers run into.

According to Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:59), this is usually because they have launched into the project without pre-writing. Students can save time by first identifying the purpose of the essay, then brainstorming points they might make to achieve that goal. Many students struggle with insecurities about their writing abilities. Whether they just don't like to write or have had negative experiences in the past, they may be self conscious about expressing themselves. The Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:61), reminds students that the first draft will never be perfect and that it is merely a starting point. According to Warburton (2004:130), good writing is written to express, not impress. It means that when students produce a writing that expressed something, the students have reached a good writing. Based on the online article from Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:61), and from Electronic WikiBooks (2015:12), that discuss about problems in doing writing essay, the researcher has concluded the problems into the common problems that happened when students started to write an essay. Here are the very common essay problems both in terms of general and grammar:

1) Unstructured

Many essays are not structured, which makes them difficult for the readers to read. Without structure, reading an essay is like a discovery journey. The reader will have difficulty to see whether and how what the students write is relevant to the question set.

2) Not relevant

Unfortunately, many essays that are written are as such great essays, but include sub sections that are not relevant. The problem may become from the time limit to spending in planning the essay.

3) Unconnected

For the same reasons as in the above, essay may be unconnected. Make a good plan can be a good way to connect, make sure to know how the different bits link. When the students got problems of lack in structure for example, they will write the essay with they own argument which are not connected with the other statement of their essay.

4) Unclear

An essay can be well put together, and the reader still be left unclear about what exactly is being said. The problem is in most cases the lack of delimitation and definition. This means that the essay does not state what is and what is not written about and also that key terms are not defined. Much of unclarity can come from misunderstandings, the reader understanding terms in a different way from what the writer intended to mean.

5) Difficult

Essays that are difficult to read often suffer from one of the following symptoms: lack of illustrations, lack of conceptual clarity, or lack of guidance. Illustration may be an essential part of most essays. Think about the examples when plan the essay. Lack of conceptual clarity may come from the unprepared concept before start to write, it will make the students write the unclarity concept. And lack of guidance means that the readers will feel lost, not knowing where the essay will go next.

From some common problems above, students can do the most fatal mistakes and embarrassing in essay writing. Students may feel that writing is very tedious, difficult and troublesome. And it can make students to do plagiarism. Plagiarism is a very serious problem in writing. Plagiarism comes as a drug which can make students addicted. As a result of plagiarism, it can make students' creativity become limited and can make students become lazy to write, because students feel ease in writing with doing plagiarism (Harmer, 2004:45).

4. Strategies in Writing Essay

From the common problems in essay writing, the students can do a plagiarism. But before they do a plagiarism, they can do some steps to overcome the problems in writing an essay. There are two strategies to solve the problems in writing essays. First, the general strategies which include the strategies before start to write an essay. Second, the grammar strategies which include the strategies during and after writing essay.

According to McCrimmon (2008:74), students will always faced problems in making an essay. Students cannot make a good essay without faced the problems. It means that students need to revise their essays until their essays become a good essay. Some strategies need to make a good essay. Based on Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:58), students need to do a good preparation before making an essay. They must follow some steps in order to make a quality essay. The researcher read some article from Purdue Online Writing Lab (2013:59), and Electronic WikiBooks (2015:14), about problem solving-strategies in writing essays, and concluded the strategies based on the common problems that students faced in making a



descriptive essay. The common problems that students faced in making a descriptive essay will solve by following these strategies. Here are the general and the grammar strategies in writing essays:

1) General Strategies

General strategies will help the students to solve some problems before they start to write the essay. In general strategies include some strategies that can be followed by the students in making an essay before they start to write. According to Warburton (2004), an essay will be a good essay by making some preparation before starting to write it into a paper. It means that students need to make some preparation before they start to write, it will help the students rearrange what should do at first until the end in writing an essay.

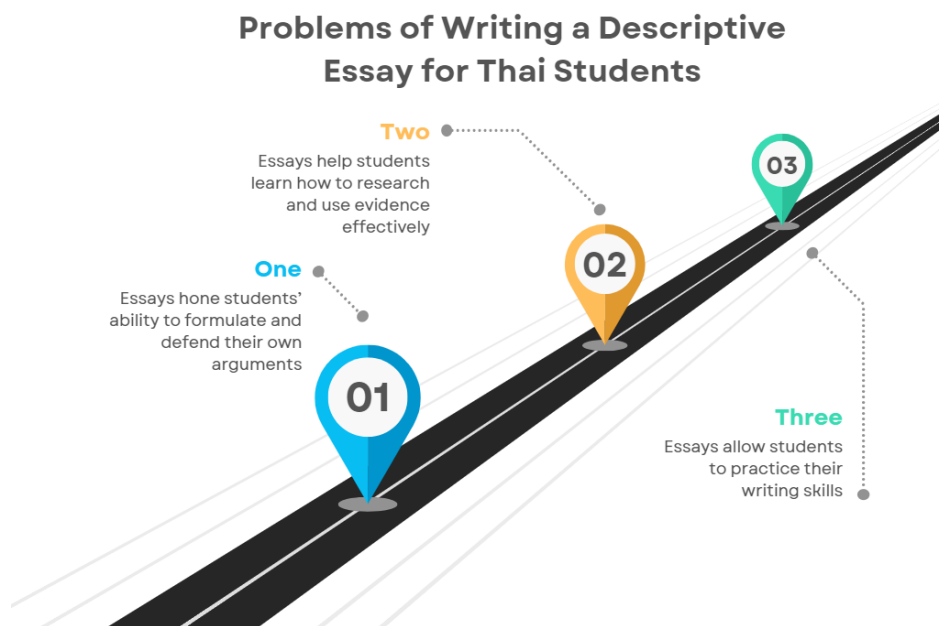
2) Grammar Strategies

According to Philips (1979:73), writing is a complex cognitive activity; essay writing, as a specialized form of language manipulation, requires the mastery of diverse and appropriate skills. In other words, when students write an essay, it means the students have tried to manipulate the forms of language. What is meant by manipulating in writing an essay is a change in the shape of a thought into an article which required special skills in writing, especially grammar. Grammar strategies include some strategies that can be followed by the students during and after writing an essay. It will help the students create an essay that is clear and well-directed. Before making a good essay, students need to understand how to use good and correct grammar in writing. Because by understanding how to use it, can help students determine whether they write in accordance with the context being discussed. In some essays writing, often encountered the author made a mistake in the use of verbs that do not fit with the context of the time in their essay such as, the use of verbs in the present, past, and future. Besides of that, there are many errors that occur are focused on grammar, such as the use of words and punctuation. There are still many problems that can be encountered on grammar, but in this study only focuses on the use when writing an essay which met most of the problems arise from the use of grammar in general. Good essay writing can make it easier for readers to understand because the grammar used in essay writing is easy to be understood by the reader. According to Philips (1979:94), good grammar will help the students to produce a high quality essays. Grammar strategies include some strategies in grammar ways such as, how to make a good structure, how to link the paragraph, how to make the clear explanation of each body paragraph, and also to make the consistent content with the essay topic.

Knowledge from the Study

Let's face it, writing academic papers can be daunting. Not only do you have to come up with an original and well-argued opinion on a topic of your choice, but you also have to ensure that your work is free of grammatical errors, flows well, and persuades the reader to see things from your perspective.

Despite the hurdles, writing essays can benefit students in multiple ways. Here are just three of the many benefits of essay writing for students:



I. Essays hone students' ability to formulate and defend their own arguments

One of the most important skills that students learn by writing essays is how to formulate and defend their own arguments. To write a good essay, students need to be able to express their own ideas clearly and persuasively.

This requires them to think critically about their claims and the evidence they are using to support those claims. By writing essays, students learn to develop and communicate their own ideas more effectively.

II. Essays help students learn how to research and use evidence effectively

To write a good essay, students need to be able to find and use relevant evidence. This involves locating appropriate sources of information and knowing how to critically evaluate those sources and incorporate them into their own arguments. By writing essays, students learn how to carry out effective research and use evidence to support their own claims.

III. Essays allow students to practice their writing skills

Writing essays provides an opportunity for students to practice their writing skills. By regularly producing well-written essays, students can improve their overall writing ability and become more confident in their own abilities.



In addition, essay writing can also be a good way for students to receive feedback on their writing from teachers or other experts. Overall, there are many benefits of essay writing for students.

By writing essays, students can learn how to formulate and defend their own arguments, use evidence effectively, and improve their overall writing skills. In addition, essay writing can also provide an opportunity for students to receive feedback on their work from teachers or other experts.

Conclusion

Currently, a mini-writing works, called an essay, has been becoming an increasingly common form of student work. Essay not only checks lexical and grammatical skills, but also allows evaluate the student's ability to think in a foreign language on difficult topics. Learning to write an essay is pretty difficult type of work, as it also requires the ability of creatively thinking, competently using speech constructions, following a clear presentation structure. Students experience difficulty in this form work both in our country and abroad, as noted by foreign researchers providers [Redman, 2017, p. one]. Therefore, abroad even exist so called writing centers to help students, and educators to improve their writing skills. (Robinson, 2013:29-48) Not surprising, that many domestic teachers are turning to the experience of educational institutions of the countries of the studied language in the field of developing skills of effective and productive writing.

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