

Teaching Students to Compose a Power Essay

The **Power Essay**, like the power paragraph, focuses on helping students understand the structure of a piece of expository writing. The "power" concept teaches students to organize their ideas according to levels of specificity and to differentiate between coordinate and subordinate ideas. It stresses the writing of a complete essay--one which includes a thesis paragraph, supporting paragraphs of specific detail, and a concluding paragraph. Students who already understand the power paragraph should have little trouble expanding the concept to a multi-paragraph paper.

We remind you **not** to overuse this structure. It reduces voice. Once students begin to see the importance of organization in an expository essay's rough draft, they can subsequently make stylistic revisions resulting in a more readable, stylistic piece. The power essay is by no means the only acceptable structure for an essay, and students should be encouraged to experiment with other methods of developing essays. The power essay is particularly useful for beginning essay writers and is also an effective way for students to approach writing assignments in other subject areas.

Ideas for teaching this structure:

- Provide students with a copy of a power essay and have them read it. A sample follows these directions.
 - Using the sample student essay, discuss the structure of the power essay (1-2-3-3-3-2-3-3-3-2-3-3-3-C) by filling in a transparency of a blank power-essay worksheet with your students as they fill in their own blank worksheets. Note that the worksheet does not account for every sentence of the essay; it is a plan of the most important ideas presented in the essay. (Students add 4th and subsequent powers and explanatory material as they compose the drafts of their essays.)
 - Have students look for words or phrases which tie one paragraph to another and write them in the transition blanks on the worksheet. [A completed student worksheet follows these directions.]
- Give students a power-essay worksheet and explain that the "power" number assigned to each idea shows its relationship to other ideas presented in the essay. A sample worksheet follows.

1st power idea = the main idea or thesis of the essay; the most general statement in the essay

2nd power idea = a major reason in support of the 1st power

3rd power idea = a reason or example which supports or explains a 2nd power idea

4th power idea = a specific example, piece of evidence, or direct quotation which supports a 3rd power idea

- Working together as a class or in small groups, have students fill out a power essay worksheet and write a draft of a power essay on one of the following topics or another topic which lends itself to development by reasons and examples.
 1. Monday is the worst day of the week.
 2. Summer is the best season of the year.
- Read and discuss the student essays to ensure that students understand the power-essay structure.
- Spend some directed time teaching the conclusion with this essay format. The concluding paragraph is more general than a 2nd power idea but different from the 1st power idea of the essay. It is the summary, the tying together, the significance of the thesis (1st power) as developed in the essay. The conclusion should explain to the reader why the author feels that his thesis is important, why he has bothered to make this point, why the reader should care about what he has to say. The concluding paragraph is the "so what?" of the essay.
- When your students are ready to begin writing their own Power Essays, Ask each student to choose a topic s/he feels strongly about and then cluster that topic for ideas
 - Using ideas from his/her cluster, each student should fill out a power essay worksheet. Some students may prefer to use a map rather than a worksheet to organize their ideas. [A sample student map follows these directions.]
 - Explain to students that not all essays have five paragraphs; some have more; some, less. All essays, however, contain a thesis paragraph, supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
 - From the worksheet or map, each student writes a rough draft of his power essay and continues through the writing process.

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Name: | Date: |
| Topic for my essay: | |

Power Essay: Planning Worksheet

Directions: After you have brainstormed ideas for your power essay, fill out this form before beginning your draft on a separate piece of paper.

1st Paragraph

1st Power _____

2nd Paragraph

Transition _____

2nd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Paragraph

Transition _____

2nd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Power _____

4th Paragraph

Transition _____

2nd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Power _____

3rd Power _____

5th Paragraph

Transition _____

So What? _____

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Name: <i>Kim C.</i> | Date: |
| Topic for my essay: <i>A Day No Pigs Would Die</i> | |

Power Essay: Planning Worksheet (Sample)

Directions: After you have brainstormed ideas for your power essay, fill out this form before beginning your draft on a separate piece of paper.

1st Paragraph

1st Power _____ *Robert grows from a boy to man in one year.*

2nd Paragraph

Transition _____ *In the first few chapters...*

2nd Power _____ *Robert is still a child at the beginning of the book.*

3rd Power _____ *He runs away from Ed Thatcher.*

3rd Power _____ *He doesn't realize how large Pinky will become.*

3rd Power _____ *He doesn't understand why his father thinks they are rich.*

3rd Paragraph

Transition _____ *As the book progresses...*

2nd Power _____ *Robert is gradually becoming a man.*

3rd Power _____ *He sees the hawk killing the rabbit.*

3rd Power _____ *He sees Hussy get weaseled.*

3rd Power _____ *He hears gossip about the Widow Bascom.*

4th Paragraph

Transition _____ *During the last chapters...*

2nd Power _____ *Robert definitely becomes a man.*

3rd Power _____ *He understands why Pinky must be killed.*

3rd Power _____ *He realizes that his father will die.*

3rd Power _____ *He realizes how rich his father really was.*

5th Paragraph

Transition _____ *Transformation from boy to man.*

So what? _____ *Robert learns about life and death. Kids grow up differently today.*

Student Sample Power Essay: A DAY NO PIGS WOULD DIE

by Kim C., ninth grade writer

The book, A Day No Pigs Would Die, is a true story about a boy, Robert Newton Peck, who is also the author, growing up in one year from a boy to a man. Robert must deal with situations not familiar to him and he gradually understands life with his father's guidance. It is a very touching story.

In the first few chapters, Robert is very much a boy. The book begins with Robert running away from the schoolyard and a schoolmate, Edward Thatcher. Edward has been teasing Robert about his "plain Shaker clothes." Robert's reaction is typical of the way any boy would respond. He can't face the teasing so he runs away from it. Later, Robert receives Pinky, a pig, from Mr. Tanner. Robert's dad, Haven, tells him that Pinky needs a pen. Robert doesn't understand why Pinky needs a pen since she is so small. Robert's naïveté replies, "Well, it won't have to be very big." He doesn't have the slightest idea that Pinky will grow up to be bigger than himself. Another example of Robert's boyish nature is when Haven is telling him how rich they are. Robert answers, "We're not rich, Papa. We're. . . ." Haven stops him. "Yes, we are, boy. We have one another to tend to, and this land to tend." In Haven's mind, they are rich. Maybe not rich in the pocket, but he is a millionaire in his heart.

As the book progresses, Robert is gradually becoming a man. Robert is walking in a meadow and sees a hawk circling above him. Suddenly he sees the hawk dive. Seconds later he hears a rabbit's cry; it is a death cry. Robert faintly thinks of the cry; then his thoughts are filled with the idea of offending the hawk's nest. Death is present in this scene, yet Robert doesn't realize it. The transformation Robert undergoes begins here. Haven has caught a weasel, and Ira Long has a dog he wants to weasel. Ira puts his dog, Hussy, and the weasel in a barrel together. The two fight, a horrible fight. After all is quiet, Haven opens the lid. Inside is a dead weasel and a nearly-dead dog along with a blood covered barrel. Robert, shaken up immensely over this, tells Ira angrily, "She's crazy with hurt. And if you don't kill her, I will." The difference between Robert's reaction to the rabbit's death and the dog's suffering is so great that it is evident that Robert is growing up. Days later, Robert hears his Aunt Carrie and his mother talking to Aunt Matty. Aunt Matty is gossiping about Widow Bascom and Ira Long living together--unwed. Robert thinks back to how nice Widow Bascom was to him. He still likes her no matter what Aunt Matty says. This is another definite example of Robert doing or saying what he believes in.

During the last chapters, Robert is definitely becoming a man. Haven and Robert have to kill Pinky--the only thing he has ever owned--because they are starving. After Pinky is dead, he says he hates his father. At that point, he is still a boy. Minutes later Robert realizes his father had to kill Pinky but hated it more. Robert then kisses his father's hand, "pig blood and all." Robert has now become a man. Robert's manhood does not stop here. He knows his father is going to die soon. Then the day comes. Robert finds Haven still in his bed early that morning. He doesn't even have to look at him; he knows. Robert does all the chores and then goes to tell his mom. He has no time to stop and cry. He is a man now and must act like a man. That is what he has been taught, and no matter how much it hurts, he doesn't cry at once. Robert expects five or six people at the most to come to the funeral. Those five or six show up, along with all the men Haven worked with and many other townspeople. Looking around at all the people, Robert realizes for the first time how rich his father was.

Robert undergoes a big transformation--a boy to a man--within a year's time. He experiences life and death situations which are filled with sadness and happiness. He accepts reality like a real man at the young age of thirteen. Robert must be mature and accept responsibility even if he isn't ready yet. He really has no choice. Growing up then and now has changed greatly over the years. Then, Robert had no choice. He had to face the responsibility of filling his father's shoes. Now, it is the parents holding their kids back instead of pushing. They want their children to experience life under their guidance. Children today are not expected to be mature enough to handle life as Robert did. Robert grew from a boy to a man in one year, and it takes most teenagers today eighteen years to be called adult, and even then, some still will never grow up.