

English 95

Developing an Essay

Frequently, writers hear that they need to “develop” their ideas more, but often no one explains what it means to develop one’s ideas. In this class we will explore many ways to develop essays. For now, we will consider the three primary ways of expanding and developing an essay: detail, argumentation, and example.

Using Detail

Here’s a simple example of how the addition of a few facts can help make a more general statement clearer and more effective:

Inadequately Developed	Well Developed
Students shouldn’t have to take more classes. It already takes too long to graduate.	Students shouldn’t have to take any more required courses. Each student is already burdened with numerous general education courses, and many majors are adding requiring courses as well. The four year degree is no longer possible for most students. Even those going to school full-time often take six or seven years now to graduate, and I read recently in the <i>University Times</i> that it takes an average 5.3 years for a full-time student to graduate from CSLA.
Sometimes softness is best like when we have to deal with people who have more power than we do. However, we still have to stand up for our rights.	Softness is best in situations when others have more power than we do, though we still have to stand up for our rights and beliefs. It doesn’t make any sense to be hard and inflexible when dealing with your boss, who can fire you at any time. However, that doesn’t mean we should put up with mental or verbal abuse, harassment, or unfairness. We need to pick our fights carefully.

Using Argument

You use argument to develop and clarify your ideas. Frequently, the first draft of an essay will consist of a series of statements, which, while probably true, are unclear. The problem is often that the writer has already argued out the point for him or herself and doesn’t recognize that the reader needs to know how the writer did this. The writer needs to *show the reader the steps* used by the writer to arrive at some idea or statement. Remember, if the goal is to convince the reader of some particular idea or interpretation, the writer needs to show reader how any reasonable person would arrive at the same conclusion.

Inadequately Developed	Well Developed
The system is to blame for cheating. The way the whole thing is set up makes it easier for students to cheat than study.	While students are responsible for their own actions, the education system at American universities must also share some of the blame for cheating. At many major universities, students are given a second-rate education with classes taught by graduate students. Professors are encouraged to do research and seek grants and are not rewarded for teaching. This system leads to little emphasis being placed on classroom instruction. Professors focus on “getting through” material, and students focus on “getting through” courses. The result is inevitable: students do whatever it takes to pass, and professors look the other way.
It seems to me that both softness and hardness are necessary. Different situations require different responses.	Both softness and hardness are necessary. Because different situations require different responses, we cannot expect to solve every problem with only one solution. We must choose the right tools to deal with the situation. Only a foolish gardener would use a shovel to mow grass, for this is using the wrong tool for the job. We must know the situation, and know with whom we are dealing, for as an old Chinese proverb says only a fool plays a lute to a cow.

Using Cases

The single most important and effective step you can take right now is to use examples (or cases) to support the key points of your essay. An example (or case) illustrates a key point by giving the reader a specific and real instance of some more general statement. Often a specific case looks like a “little story,” where the details of the story relate directly to the general argument the writer is making. Later this quarter, we will investigate specific cases in more detail and differentiate between three types of cases:

- hypothetical (general scenarios of what might (or will) happen)
- anecdotal (stories known from personal experience)
- textual (stories, ideas from another writer).

For now, here are some examples of anecdotal cases used as evidence to support some general observation.

Inadequately Developed	Well Developed
<p>No matter how much we try to pretend that our race is not that important in today’s society, our race really does matter. Though we try to get past race, we really haven’t yet.</p>	<p>No matter how much we try to pretend that race is not that important in today’s society, race really does matter. I consider myself to be very open-minded and free of prejudice, but I have learned that I am not as free of racial biases as I thought. Alan, my good friend of many years, has been recently denied a promotion at Taco Bell corporate headquarters where he’s worked for the last ten years. Alan, who is black, was furious and believed that his race was involved. I was surprised at my own anger over Alan’s statement. I realized that for many years now I had assumed that Alan got the job in the first place because he was black. My first thought was that if Alan’s race had gotten him the job, then he shouldn’t be upset over his race affecting his promotion chances. Why did I believe that Alan was hired only because of his race? He graduated at the top of our high school class and got his BA and MA from USC. He was heavily recruited after getting his BA and Taco Bell paid for him to get his MA. Though he has been my friend for years, and though I know he has earned everything he has got, still somewhere in my mind I thought his race was an advantage. Though we try to get past race, we really haven’t yet.</p>
<p>While we need to be hard sometimes to stand up for our beliefs and principles and to keep others from taking advantage of us, sometimes we need to be soft and understanding in order to solve problems. This is especially true of family relationships. Sometimes, you need to show patience in a family.</p>	<p>While we need to be hard sometimes to stand up for our beliefs and principles and to keep others from taking advantage of us, sometimes we need to be soft and compromise in order to solve problems. This is true of family relationships, especially when you are dealing with family members that you see everyday. Last week my sister was being very difficult about everything. She was rude to all of us and didn’t do the family chores that she was supposed to do. One night I asked her politely if she was going to clean the kitchen after dinner. She gave me a very hard look and said, “I have enough to do without thinking about that.” She got up from the table and went and sat in front of the TV. I wanted to shout at her and tell her that it was her turn to clean up, but I let her go. I started clearing the table and washing the dishes. I thought she would eventually come and help me, but she never did. The next morning, my sister left a note for me. She apologized for the previous night, but offered no explanation. When she got home from school that night, she told me about her problems, how her boyfriend was seeing someone else, and how her boss had told her that she might be laid off in a month or two. She thanked me for being understanding and accepting of her and for giving her time to think about her situation. If I had been hard on her, she might have reacted very negatively. Sometimes you need to show patience in a family to show that you care.</p>