

## ESSAY WRITING TRAINING AT MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY KOTABUMI

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### ABSTRACT

Essay writing training is one of the strategic efforts to enhance students' critical thinking and academic literacy skills. The background of this activity is the low skills in writing structured and argumentative essays among students of Universitas Muhammadiyah (UM) Kotabumi. The purpose of this training is to equip participants with conceptual understanding and practical skills in composing logical, systematic, and academically compliant essays. The training method was conducted through a workshop approach involving interactive lectures, discussions, writing exercises, and direct feedback. The results of the activities show an increase in participants' understanding and ability to write essays, both in terms of structure, clarity of arguments, and grammar. In conclusion, this training is effective in improving essay writing competence and is recommended for continuous integration into the academic development program.

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## INTRODUCTION

Essay writing skills are one of the important components in the development of students' academic literacy. Essays are not only a form of expression of critical thinking (Hidayati, 2009), but also an inseparable part of academic assignments in various courses. Writing skills are one of the aspects of language proficiency (Andini & Fadly, 2024) which is highly needed, especially in expressing ideas, thoughts, and feelings through writing, both fiction and non-fiction. In fact, human life is almost inseparable from the activity of writing (Afriana et al., 2016). Therefore, writing skills must be taught well to students (Juniarti, 2019). Students must be nurtured, equipped, and taught writing skills so that they can express ideas, thoughts, feelings, and concepts in various forms (Dessy Saputry, Amy Sabila, 2024).

Writing is a skill to express, convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings by putting sentences into written form (Nugraha et al., 2019). In line with that, Tatro et al., (2021) expresses that writing is a directed and conscious human activity to pour out ideas, concepts, thoughts, feelings, or experiences in the form of writing that is systematically organized using logical sentences, so that others can understand the intended message according to the writer's purpose. Writing also means the process of someone pouring their ideas into a piece of writing and directing it to the reader (Samini & Suendarti, 2020; Kurniawan, 2019). As expressed by, Khulsum et al., (2018) that writing is a communication activity in the form of conveying messages or information in writing to others using written language as the tool or medium. In line with that Susilowati (2013) saying that writing is a language skill used to communicate indirectly without face-to-face interaction with others. Thus, from several ideas about writing, it can be stated that writing

is a skill that needs to be honed by synergizing ideas, concepts, thoughts, and feelings according to the purpose that the writer wants to convey.

However, within the environment of Muhammadiyah University (UM) Kotabumi, various issues are still found in students' writing abilities, particularly in constructing logical arguments, organizing coherent essay structures, and using appropriate academic language. Based on initial observations and feedback from the course instructors, many students struggle to differentiate between opinion and argument, and often do not yet understand the basic framework of essay writing such as introduction, body, and conclusion. The low writing skills impact the quality of written assignments produced by students and hinder the development of critical thinking competencies that should be cultivated in higher education. This condition is exacerbated by the lack of specialized training focused on practical and systematic essay writing techniques outside of regular learning.

Based on these issues, the Essay Writing Training program is designed to provide support to UM Kotabumi students in improving their academic essay writing skills. The goal of this program is to equip students with understanding and practical skills in composing structured, argumentative essays that meet academic writing standards.

Writing essays is one of the academic learning methods that not only requires skills in composing text (Triadi et al., 2022), but also plays a role in enhancing critical thinking skills (Helaluddin, 2018). This paper aims to explore how essays function as a means of developing critical thinking capacity in students. Through a qualitative descriptive approach and literature review, it is found that essays can shape logical, analytical, and reflective thinking (Putri, 2024). In addition, the essay encourages students to express their opinions systematically based on relevant data or theories (Saumantri, 2024).

An essay is a piece of writing, a composition, analysis, or interpretation about something (Lubis, 2021). Usually, essays discuss fairly specific topics with flexible scope, style, and methods, although they can generally be read in one sitting. In other words, an essay is a piece of writing that is not too long. (Rasyidah & Antoni, 2014), stating that an essay is a longer piece of writing consisting of several paragraphs discussing a specific topic. A similar statement was also made (Rosadi & Utama, 2024; Janah et al., 2020) which explains that an essay is a form of writing that discusses an issue starting from presenting the problem, expressing imagination, and the author's personal opinion supported by facts and theories. In line with that, (Putra & Mariati, 2023; Anak Agung Putri Maharani, 2020) presenting an essay is a written work that outlines the author's opinion on a specific topic. This definition leads us to the content of the essay, which is an essay that discusses a subject or issue. Based on this, it can be concluded that an essay is a form of writing that is structured and consists of several interconnected paragraphs written based on the author's perspective on a problem, object, or event that they will write about (Lubis, 2019).

In general, an essay consists of three main parts: the introduction paragraph, the body paragraph, and the conclusion paragraph. These three parts are interconnected and form a unity to explain a topic. The opening paragraph, which is usually just one paragraph, contains an overview of the theme that will be discussed. After that, the body section elaborates on the main points that are the focus of the issues in the essay. The number of paragraphs in this section is adjusted according to the number of points in the statement found in the opening paragraph. Finally, the essay concludes with a closing paragraph that summarizes the discussion (Burhan et al., 2024).

Next, there are several types of essays, including:

1) Descriptive Essay

This type of essay can depict any subject or object that can attract the author's attention.

2) Tajuk Essay

This type of essay can be found in newspapers and magazines. This type of essay has a specific function, which is to describe the newspaper/magazine's views and attitudes towards a topic and issue in society.

3) Cukilan Watak Essay

This essay allows a writer to reveal some aspects of an individual's life to the readers.

#### 4) Personal Essay

This essay is almost the same as a character sketch essay. However, a personal essay is written by the individual themselves about themselves. The author will state, "I am who I am. I will tell you about my life and my views on life. He unveiled the curtain about himself.

#### 5) Reflective Essay

Reflective essays are written formally with a serious tone. The author expresses deeply, sincerely, and carefully several important topics related to life, such as death, politics, education, and the essence of humanity. This essay is intended for scholars.

#### 6) Critical Essay

In the critical essay, the author focuses on a description of art, such as painting, dance, carving, sculpture, theater, and literature.

In general, there are three stages in developing an essay: pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. (Helaluddin, 2017) outlining five steps in composing a piece of writing (essay), namely finding/discovering ideas, organizing ideas, writing the initial draft, revising the draft, and editing the language aspects used. Thus, the process of writing an essay is not a simple one.

Additionally, there is a supporting structure in the essay writing. That structure serves as a benchmark for evaluation by researchers. (Helaluddin, 2017) explaining that there are several essay structures, namely the mechanical part, content, organization, and sentence structure. In the mechanical structure, an essay must be written with correct and appropriate punctuation and spelling (Budiyono, 2012), this aims to make it easier for readers to understand the meaning of the sentences expressed by the author in their essay by others.

The purpose of writing is created by people with specific goals, whether it be journalistic works, literature, and so on. Suyitno (2007) expressing the purpose of writing as follows:

- 1) A piece of writing that is written due to an assignment, written not out of one's own volition. For example, a student is assigned to review a book or to write a short story.
- 2) Writing with an altruistic purpose means that the writer aims to please the hearts of their readers with the writing they produce. The writer believes that the reader is their lifelong friend and truly communicates an idea or concept for the benefit of the reader.
- 3) A persuasive writing means the writer wants to influence the reader to do something according to the writer's intention.
- 4) Informational, which means that the writing contains information to convey information to the reader so that the reader becomes aware of what the writer is conveying.
- 5) The writer, with their self-statement, aims to introduce themselves or express themselves to the readers. With that writing, readers can know and understand: "who" the writer is.
- 6) Creative writing means the writer pours their creativity into their writing. The author aims for their readers to gain artistic or aesthetic value by reading their writing.
- 7) The author aims to provide information and clarity to the readers on how to solve a problem.

Writing provides a number of benefits to the writer. Widagdo & Susilo (2018) explaining several benefits of writing, namely:

#### 1) Preventing Dementia

Writing is an activity that is closely related to brain work. Getting into the habit of expressing what you think through writing will keep our brains constantly working, especially when writing a scientific paper. Thus, the brain will not become senile later on because, just like a knife that is continuously sharpened and used, it will become better and sharper, just like our brain.

#### 2) Writing is a learning medium

Learning activities are not just about reading or listening. Writing is also a medium of learning because by writing, it encourages and demands us to absorb, explore, and gather as

much information as possible, whether in the form of facts or theories.

3) Forming a wise and polite personality

Indirectly, the writer's personality will become wiser and more polite because he has learned a lot and will continue to learn as he develops his writing.

4) Generating new ideas

Writing is an activity of thinking and developing the understanding and abilities of the writer, which will enable them to discover new ideas and concepts. New ideas will emerge, one of which is generated by thinking actively and continuously learning and studying.

5) As the best medium of communication

Writing can be a medium of communication with others to convey our ideas and invite others to think and grow.

6) Training oneself to be ready and criticized by others and practicing problem-solving

When our writing is read by others, not all readers will agree with what we have written. Among them, some may criticize and provide feedback, at which point the writer will be encouraged to seek solutions, delve deeper, and gather additional information to support their ideas.

7) And lastly, writing activities can be utilized as a medium to express ideas that are thought out for others to read.

The discussion regarding the essay has been conducted in the form of research activities or community service, as done by Kurniasih et al., (2024) which provides knowledge and skills to students so that they can express all their knowledge and creativity in written form, especially in fulfilling their academic assignments. The service material includes the understanding and purpose of essay writing, types of essays, steps in writing an essay, and the structure of essay writing. Next, the second researcher was conducted by Budiharso (2018) which reviews journal articles in the field of essay writing, for input into planning a new journal article. The third research was conducted by Rosyidatul et al., (2019) conduct research aimed at describing (1) student activities in essay writing lessons using a contextual approach and video media, (2) teacher activities in essay writing lessons using a contextual approach and video media, (3) student learning completeness in essay writing lessons using a contextual approach and video media, and (4) student responses in essay writing lessons using a contextual approach and video media in the classroom. The difference between the three community services and research and the research conducted by the researcher lies in the focus on the context of essay writing itself, in accordance with the structure and parts of the essay being carried out.

Based on that, through the essay writing mentoring training, it is hoped that it can provide knowledge about writing essays correctly and properly. Through the reinforcement of essays, the components of essay writing, the structure or stages of writing an essay, types of essays, essay examples, and direct mentoring by the instructor, the initial skills will be further honed for practicing essay writing.

## **IMPLEMENTATION METHOD**

The training method is conducted through a workshop approach that involves interactive lectures, discussions, writing exercises, and direct feedback. In the interactive lecture session, it is used to convey the basic theories and principles of essay writing, such as essay structure, types of essays, and characteristics of academic language. Next, a discussion process is conducted, where the aim of this stage is to train the ability to construct arguments, recognize different perspectives, and strengthen the main idea before it is put into writing. Next, writing practice, this is the core stage of the workshop activities, where students are asked to write a short essay based on the theme that has been discussed. This exercise is conducted individually, focusing on the development of ideas, paragraph cohesion and coherence, as well as the appropriate use of language. After writing, the student participants receive direct feedback from the instructor. Feedback is focused on the strengths of the writing as well as areas that need

improvement, both in terms of structure, logic, and language. Feedback is very important for the process of reflection and self-improvement.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The activity was conducted as a form of essay writing mentoring training, starting with an introductory session on understanding essay theory for students at UM Kotabumi. During the implementation of the activities in this training session, direct observation was conducted to provide deep insights into the dynamics of the participants. The instructor explored how students understood the material and the real challenges faced in writing practice. This observation was conducted by observing participant interactions during interactive lectures, discussions, writing exercises, and feedback sessions. In general, participants showed high enthusiasm when the discussion and practice sessions began. Participants appeared more engaged when given the opportunity to express their ideas verbally before writing them down. This shows that some participants are more accustomed to expressing their thoughts verbally rather than in formal writing. This active involvement is a positive indication that the training has successfully created a dynamic learning environment.

However, in its implementation, several common challenges experienced by participants were still found. Some participants still seem confused about starting the opening paragraph or structuring a logical and coherent argument. This indicates that although they understand the content conceptually, their technical writing skills still need further refinement. Observations from the speaker also indicate that some participants rely on informal verbal sentences and pay little attention to academic language rules.

Next, the feedback session provided immediately after the writing practice was very helpful for participants in understanding their mistakes concretely in essay writing. The instructor strives to provide constructive feedback and suggestions in opening and concluding the writing, so that the intended message of the written piece can be effectively conveyed. Additionally, the speaker strives to provide motivation to keep the participants enthusiastic about continuously learning to hone their writing skills.

1. Here are some documents from the essay writing training activities shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The speaker explained the structure of essay writing.

In figure 1, the speaker is explaining the structure of essay writing that participants need to pay attention to when writing their essays. After the speaker delivers the material, participants are asked to present their ideas verbally in the form of a discussion, followed by writing those ideas into an essay. After the students successfully expressed their ideas and concepts in the form of an essay, a representative from the attendees was asked to read the essay they had created, as shown in the following image shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Participants read their essay writing works.

In addition, based on the results of the participants who read their essay writings, the following is a written analysis to illustrate the participants' ability to write essays shown in Figure 3.

### Sample 1

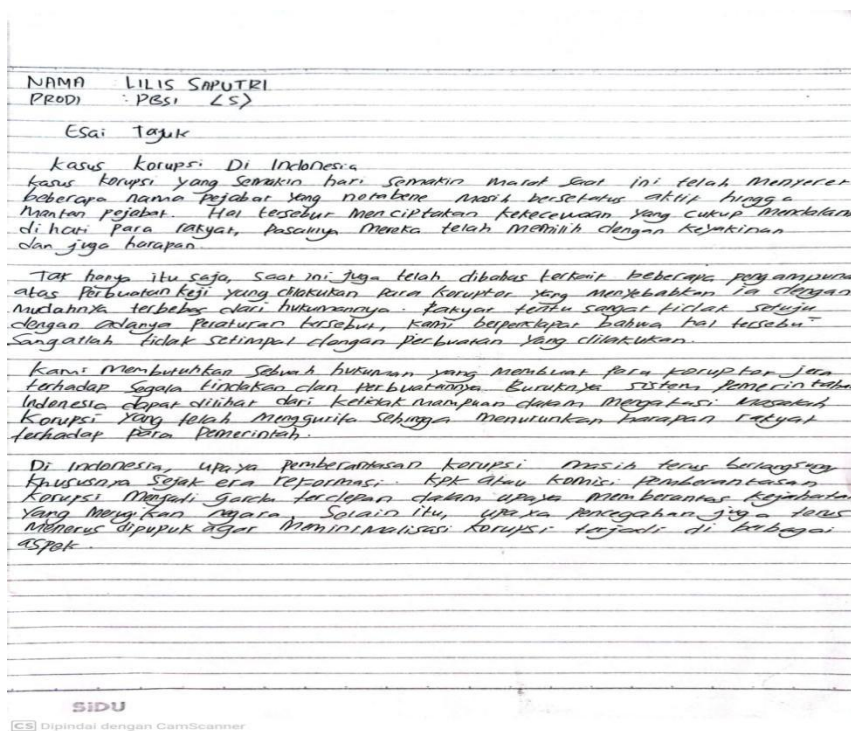


Figure 3. The result of the essay writing on the corruption case in Indonesia

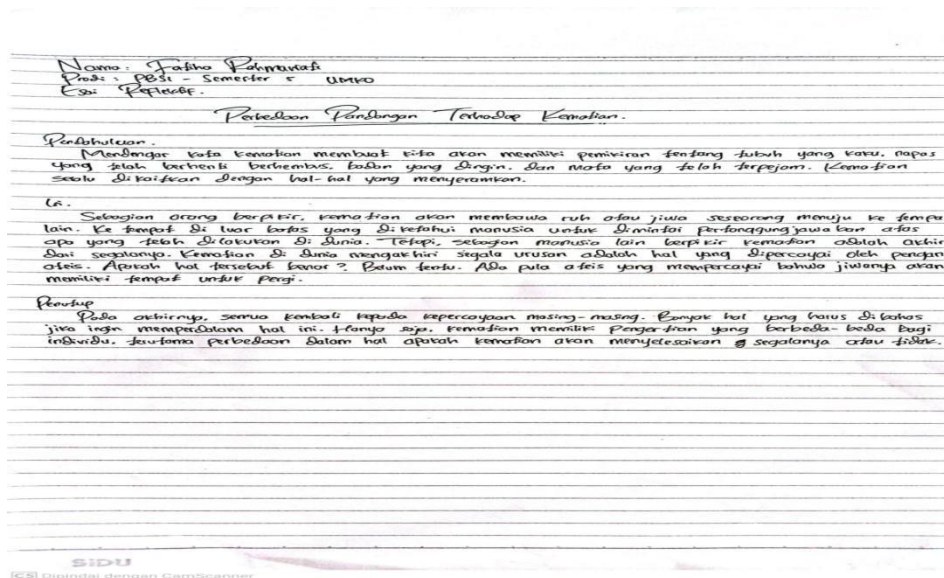
Based on the work displayed in Figure 3, it can be explained that the essay created by sample participant 1 is an editorial essay. Essays of this type can be found in newspapers and magazines. This essay has a specific function, which is to depict the views and attitudes of the newspaper/magazine towards a topic and issue in society. There are three parts of the essay that have been well presented by the participants, namely:

**First**, the introduction containing background information that identifies the subject matter and an introduction to the subject to be evaluated by the writer has been well conveyed. In this case, the participant wrote the introduction well, specifically about the rampant corruption cases among state officials that are very distressing and disappointing to the public.

**Second**, the body of the essay presents all the information about the subject. In this case, the participant wrote the body of the essay well, stating that there is no appropriate punishment for corruptors who have already committed corruption. The government has announced a pardon for corruptors. This is not in line with the punishment that corruptors should receive.

Third, it is the concluding part that provides a conclusion by restating the main idea, summarizing the body of the essay, or adding some observations about the subject evaluated by the writer. The participant wrote very well that the government's hope is to provide a deterrent effect on corruption cases by imposing appropriate punishments. This has become a special focus in the efforts to eradicate corruption in order to minimize its occurrence shown in Figure 4.

## Sample 2



**Figure 4.** The results of the participants' essays on differing views on death

Based on the essay presented in Figure 4, it can be explained that the essay written by the participant is a reflective essay. Reflective essays are written formally with a serious tone. The author expresses deeply, sincerely, and carefully, because some important topics related to life, such as death, politics, education, and the essence of humanity. In this case, the participants wrote essays about death. There are three well-articulated parts of the essay presented by the participants, namely:

**First**, the introduction contains background information that identifies the subject of discussion and an introduction to the subject that will be evaluated by the writer. The participant wrote the introduction well, which was about death associated with frightening things.

**Second**, the body of the essay presents all the information about the subject. The participants wrote the essay content well, which is divided into three viewpoints, namely the first viewpoint that death is the departure of the soul and spirit to another place where they will be held accountable. The second view explains that death is the end of everything. Lastly, there is the third view of atheistic religions, where the soul will have a place when death comes.

**Third**, it is the final part that provides a conclusion by restating the main idea, summarizing the body of the essay, or adding some observations about the subject evaluated by the writer. The

participant wrote a good conclusion that death is a concept of understanding for each individual that is fundamentally conceived shown in Figure 5.

### Sample 3

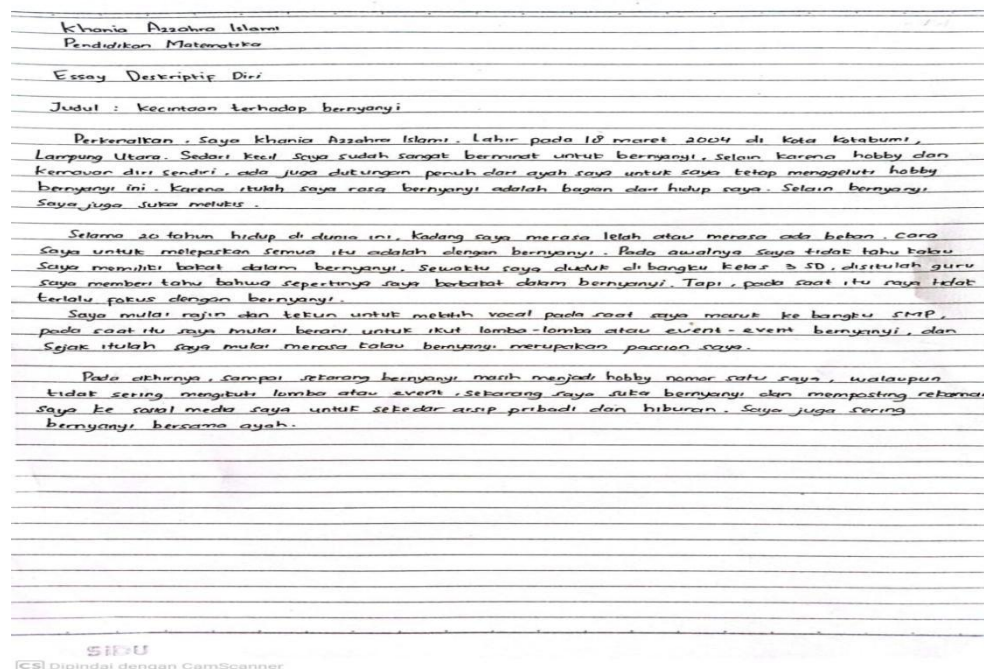


Figure 5. The essay written by the participant about their love for singing

Based on the essay writing results in Figure 5, it can be explained that the essay is a descriptive essay. This type of essay can depict any subject or object that captures the author's attention. In this case, the participants write a self-essay. There are three parts of the essay that have been well articulated by the participants, namely:

**First**, the introduction contains background information that identifies the subject matter and an introduction to the subject that will be evaluated by the writer. The participant wrote the introduction well, introducing themselves by clearly stating that their interests and hobbies are singing and painting.

**Second**, the body of the essay presents all the information about the subject. The participants wrote the essay content well, explaining that through the talent of singing, it brings many benefits to life, such as a more relaxed life and participation in various competitions.

**Third**, it is the concluding part that provides a conclusion by restating the main idea, summarizing the body of the essay, or adding some observations about the subject evaluated by the writer. The participants wrote the conclusion well; through the hobby of singing, we can record life's activities not only through a voice recorder but also with a wider reach according to our needs.

Participants wrote the conclusion well; through the hobby of singing, we can record life activities not only through a voice recorder but also more broadly according to our needs.

The essay writing training has been successfully conducted, and based on the results of three sample works from the participants, it shows positive outcomes, both in terms of participant engagement and the improvement in participants' understanding of the structure and techniques of effective essay writing. During the training, participants were able to show progress in organizing ideas logically, writing coherent paragraphs, and receiving and applying feedback constructively. The participants' engagement in discussions, enthusiasm in completing exercises, and openness to corrections are indicators of the success of this training.

Although the training has provided a strong foundation, the development of writing skills still needs to be carried out continuously. Participants are advised to regularly practice and write essays on various topics, read scholarly works or quality essays as references for writing style, and actively seek feedback from professors or peers. Additionally, forming study communities or small discussion groups can be an effective follow-up step to mutually support and enrich each other's insights in writing. Thus, it is hoped that the participants' writing skills will continue to improve independently and sustainably, in line with future academic and professional demands.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Essay writing training contributes positively to improving students' essay writing skills, especially in the UM Kotabumi environment. With a workshop approach that involves interactive lectures, discussions, writing exercises, and direct feedback, participants can understand the structure of essays more systematically and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing. Direct observation during the activities also showed that participants actively interacted with the training materials and were able to overcome various challenges in the writing process. These results indicate that the training has successfully enhanced awareness and basic skills in writing academically effectively.

Next, to support the sustainability of the training results, which can be suggested is: Participants continue to practice writing skills independently, by regularly writing essays and seeking feedback from lecturers or peers, The institution provides advanced platforms, such as study communities or writing clinics, to support students' development, Periodic evaluations are conducted on students' writing skills, so that the training program can be adjusted to the real needs and development of the participants, The training materials are gradually enhanced, including complex argumentation techniques and the use of academic references to improve the quality of students' scientific writing.

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