

Writing of Critical Essays at English IV level at AU

By Ashutosh Dasgupta

English IV at AU is predominantly a Business Course – so quite relevantly includes training in writing Memo Reports, then proof reading and editing a sizeable paragraph with oft-repeated mistakes of grammar that Thai students are generally prone to. All this is fine and in keeping with the tradition and aspirations of this International University going global. But, what struck me recently of paramount importance and hugely worthy of mention is another component of English IV studies here, which requires students to be able to write a type of essay known as the argumentative or the critical essay. The importance of this type of essay on our English IV course loomed enormously significant especially in view of the 28th World Universities Debating Championship Contest held recently on the university's Suvarnabhumi campus.

Such a global event taking place in Thailand on our campus greatly enhances the need for our English IV students to understand and capture the spirit and technique involved in this essay genre – not only in being able to write this type of essay with a measure of success, but also being able to articulate the delivery part with eloquence. These very Thai students one day will take up the mantle of leadership and public speaking, and will be required to speak on a platform capable of debating and convincing people through the dynamic art of effective speaking- be it in the parliament, conferences or meetings.

Finding no concrete set of rules of organization guiding presentation, and also looking at confused writings, on paper in examinations or in class writings, I thought of a plausible and orderly way of presentation in writing. The emphasis on the content part lay in devising paragraphs with only one underlying idea – try and be clear and specific while delivering ideas or arguments in writing and the same thing will also be necessary if we have to give students oral delivery practice in class, of course – time permitting.

Let there be 4 paragraphs – each dealing with a definite aspect of the essay. If we plan to begin with a brief introduction, we certainly need to hammer out the precise nature of the contents or else as my experience reveals, in the absence of any guidelines, students are very much likely to go haywire. All sorts of jarring effects emerge such as a harsh piece of advice, unsavoury or uncalled-for comments, criticisms etc – I mean it could be anything and everything all mixed-up in a hybrid cocktail. So, in order to put an end to this kind of opinion blasting right at the beginning of the essay, I laid down in no uncertain terms a concrete and specific sort of guideline such as: i. explain the given topic briefly and ii. explain in some detail why the idea as the topic suggests has become a hot issue in the contemporary world or more specifically in your country as the case may be. Of course, it would require the student to be well-informed. For example, Thais eat out 13 times a week...a record for S.E. Asians....boosting fast food consumption...afflicting 12 million people with obesity problems – all these glaring facts of local newspapers go so very well to be served in the introduction part of the

essay if we choose to have a topic like - 'All fast food outlets in Thailand should be closed down.'

It's time now to make a declaration in unequivocal terms whether the writer agrees or disagrees with the given opinion sounded in the statement of the topic. Let it be categorically put forward in the very opening sentence of paragraph-2 and then in accordance with that opinion, the student needs to set out with reasons or arguments to substantiate his or her agreement or disagreement as required according to the first sentence of paragraph 2. The student needs to present arguments, reasons, facts, examples in order to justify the expressed opinion. 3 or 4 solid reasons should be enough for this paragraph.

After completing paragraph 2 in this manner, it's time to put forth what opinion the other side may have – I mean the opponents, who have altogether a contrary view. For example, my opponents are against closing down fast food outlets in Thailand because they think such outlets offer an excellent opportunity to busy office-going people to grab a quick lunch or whatever. So, paragraph 3 should begin somewhat like – 'some people have a different opinion' or 'certain groups of people don't agree with me' or 'my opponents think the opposite way' – whatever. Set forth 2 or 3 reasons why they think the other way around. Now it's time to put forward counter arguments for the writer pointing out asto where and how they go wrong in their thinking. At this point – let the sentence style of paragraph 3 be somewhat like – 'But, they are mistaken...' or 'But, they have gone wrong in their thinking...', and then supplement that with the writer's final rebuttal as to why or how they went wrong in their thinking.

Paragraph 4 is like coming to the end of the essay; so, it's like a wrap-up or conclusion. Preferably, to me it sounds appropriate if the first sentence of this paragraph begins somewhat like – 'After looking at both positive and negative aspects... or, 'After looking at both sides of the coin... I now conclude that...' obviously, the student needs to hold on to the same original opinion with which he or she started paragraph 2. Often, the student tends to drift away from his earlier opinion-then it sounds utterly confounding. For example, in paragraph 2 the student spelled out one opinion, while at the end in paragraph 4 supposed to be the conclusion part, it is just the opposite-which means the student changed his mind toward the end. In that case, the entire essay sounds confused-even messy.

A. Das Gupta had his education in India and the UK. After finishing his M.A. in English and Bachelor's degree in Education (B.Ed) he completed Post Graduate Certificate in the Teaching of English (PGCTE) from Hyderabad CIEFL, India and in 1984 he obtained his diploma in TEFL from Trinity College, London University.