**Characteristics of an Essay**

First of all, an essay is not be confused with the kind of essay you write about a fiction or non-fiction text. That is an analytical essay. A classic essay is something else. Here are some of the characteristics of a classic essay.

1. The essay genre belongs to the category of non-fiction.

2. It a relatively short piece of prose that you should be able to read in one sitting.

3. The essay expresses the writer’s subjective examination of a topic. The topic of an essay could be anything. There is usually only one topic, but this topic is examined from many different angles.

4. The essay is a subjective genre, which means that a writer often expresses his/her own thoughts, experiences and ideas, but it is important to emphasize that while the essay should **be personal**, it should **not** **be** **private**. Anecdotes and personal experiences illuminate the topic that is discussed.

5. Instead of being closed and conclusive, the essay is often open and inquisitive. There might be something playful about the way the topic is approached, and instead of preaching to the reader, the essay wants the reader to think about the topic. The purpose is not to give any definitive answers.

6. Since it is personal genre, the personal pronoun “I” is often used and the essay might include anecdotes and the writer will try to examine his/her personal connection to the topic, but at the same time invites the reader on a journey of discovery.

7. There is a close attention to language in the essay and room for creative and literary flourishes like metaphors. The essay is a genre where the creative voice of the writer is felt.

8. The essay sometimes includes different sources: quotes from authors, scientists and academics mixed with everyday observations and knowledge about history and culture.

**Analysing an Essay:**

1. Start out by presenting the author and the text. The essay is a personal genre so this a case where biographical knowledge about the writer is actually relevant.

2. Find the topic(s) that is/are examined in the essay and find examples of the different angles that are used. What does the writer say about the topic(s)? Bring in quotes.

3. Examine how the writer makes the text personal and find examples of the characteristics of the essay genre in the text. Bring in quotes.

4. Discuss the sources and knowledge that are used in the essay. How is the balance between general knowledge and specific examples, and how does writer bring forth his/her arguments and opinions?

5. What kind of portrait emerges of the writer in the text? How does he/she present himself/herself? Look at the tone in the text and the use of language, anecdotes and other texts.

6. Sum the up the ways in which the topic(s) is/are examined and discuss whether the writer succeeds in involving the reader in the thought process without giving any solutions or whether he/she ends up drawing conclusions.