Definition: **essay** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

(Fr. *essai*, 'attempt') Usually short, non-fictional prose composition, written expressing a personal point of view. The essay form originated with the 16th-century French writer Montaigne. British essayists include Francis Bacon, Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith and Charles Lamb. Noted US essayists include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Thurber, George Santayana, and Dorothy Parker.

Summary Article: **essay**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Short piece of non-fiction writing, often dealing with a particular subject from a personal point of view. The essay became a recognized form with the publication of *Essais* (1580) by French writer Montaigne and *Essays* (1597) by English politician, philosopher, and writer Francis Bacon. Today the essay is a part of journalism; articles in the broadsheet newspapers are in the essay tradition.

**History**

English essayist Abraham Cowley, whose essays appeared in 1668, brought a greater ease and freedom to the genre than it had possessed before in England, but it was with the development of periodical (weekly and monthly) literature in the 18th century that the essay became a widely-used form. Great essayists include the English Joseph Addison and Irish Richard Steele, who wrote the English newspapers *Tatler* and *Spectator*, and later, English Samuel Johnson and Irish Oliver Goldsmith. In North America the politician and scientist Benjamin Franklin was noted for his essay style.

**Critical essays**

The English writer Charles Lamb wrote a series of essays for the *London Magazine* under the pseudonym 'Elia' from 1820; to the same period belong the English Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, and Thomas De Quincey in England, French C A Sainte-Beuve, and US Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau. From the 19th century the essay was increasingly used in Europe and the USA as a vehicle for literary criticism. The English writer William Hazlitt may be regarded as the originator of the critical essay, and his successors include English Matthew Arnold and Edmund Gosse. The English writer Thomas Macaulay, whose essays began to appear shortly after those of Lamb, presents a strong contrast to Lamb with his vigorous but less personal tone.

**Revival**

There was a revival of the form during the closing years of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, in the work of Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson, US Oliver Wendell Holmes, French Anatole France and Théophile Gautier, and English Max Beerbohm. The literary journalistic tradition of the essay was continued by US writers James Thurber, Mark Twain, H L Mencken and Edmund Wilson, and English Desmond MacCarthy, among others, and the critical essay was continued by English writers George Orwell, Cyril Connolly, and F R Leavis, and US writers T S Eliot (later a British citizen), Norman Mailer, John Updike, and others.

**essays**

Role of introduction and conclusion in a formal essay

Use of quotations in essays

Essay writing skills

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