

Expanding Ideas

You have the first draft of your essay, but you find it is too short. Perhaps your instructor has told you to expand on your ideas.

You have done your brainstorming, maybe even made an outline. Your essay has all the points you want to make, but you know you need to say more about them.

Sometimes the answer is more research, more facts to support the points that you are making. But often what is lacking is more depth or analysis of what you have already gathered.

To find more to say, try...

- **Questioning yourself.** You have done your research, but what further questions do you have? Make a list to guide your search. Then go back and start looking for answers to those questions.
- **Talking it out.** Tell your ideas to someone else and ask them to bounce back ideas to you. Your friend's questions may be just what you need to help you see what you are missing.
- **Interviewing.** Find an expert you can check with about your topic.
- **Studying the models.** Pay attention to how writers of articles you admire develop their ideas. How do they back up their claims?

To take an idea and expand it, try...

Adding Details – Like a journalist, ask yourself the 5 W's – Who, What, Where, When, Why – and the How. Be specific and thorough.

- (*where*) Sitting in the overheated gym (*when*) the morning of (*what*) my final chance at the SAT, I gazed down at the first geometry problem (*how*) as though it were a hieroglyphic I needed to decipher. (*why*) How could I ever pass the math?

Amplification – Expand on an idea by staying with it for another sentence or two.

- The struggle for women's suffrage took shape at the 1848 Seneca Falls convention. *Women continued to fight for 72 years, and the effort suffered numerous setbacks before the final ratification in 1920.*

Analysis – Don't just present the facts. Reflect on the significance of the quotes, facts, ideas, and claims you are making. You want the reader to know why you think this is important.

- The women's suffrage movement had its own problems with racism, with white women often reluctant to accept the help of African American women in the struggle. *While this split allowed for the development of prominent African American women's groups such as the Alpha Suffrage Club founded by Ida B. Wells, it also weakened the overall power of the movement and may have impeded progress.*

Analogy – What can your argument be compared to? Readers can often understand a complex argument better if it is compared to a more common occurrence.

- Recruiting talent for a project team is like assembling a baseball team. A team needs a diversity of talents: pitchers, catchers, and so on. A project team needs the same diversity of talent to ensure the project's success.

Application – Put your idea in practice.

- If a teacher were to apply Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences to a lesson plan, they would offer students a variety of ways to demonstrate mastery of the unit. Students with logical/mathematical intelligence might construct a graph, while students with linguistic intelligence could write an essay or story on the concept.

Qualification – This technique helps you cover your bases when you are making a persuasive argument. Think of this as your "I'm not stupid, I do understand that many arguments have two sides" remark to concede that your idea may not apply everywhere.

- Of course, wearing a school uniform does not make every student a well-behaved scholar, but...

Appealing to Emotion – Done sparingly and with restraint, appealing to images, ideas, events, or memories can help fix an idea in the reader's mind.

- For a kindergartener, the first day of school, no matter how exciting, always involves a bit of fear. But in the world of Covid-19, this first day brings the extra challenges of masks and hand sanitizers.

Citing authority – What prominent authority figures support your argument? Remember to choose recognized authorities.

- The World Health Organization notes...

To find those places where you need to expand ...

Here's a quick way to find the weak places in your argument. Go through your essay and find all the *is/are* or *was/were* sentences. Those are places in the essay that almost always need more information. For example,

- Growing up in the Jim Crow South **was** a struggle. *Really? Why? How?*
- My mother's Thanksgiving meal **is** incredible. *What does she make?*