

# Essay Writing Tip

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## Failure to restate the topic

We see a lot of essays that start like this:

**Yes, I agree wholeheartedly with this point. This issue is a very important one, and I agree with it for several important reasons.**

**First, ...**

Can you figure out why this essay introduction is not good? It sounds pretty good. The grammar is good. So what's wrong with it?

This introduction is not good for the TOEFL because it does not introduce the reader to the topic. In other words, after we read this introduction, we are not sure what the essay is going to be about.

The person who writes an essay introduction like this is probably thinking that the reader already knows the essay prompt (the "question" or topic of the essay) and doesn't think that she needs to restate the topic.

For the TOEFL essay, it is most certainly true that the reader of your essay does know what the essay prompt is, but the TOEFL test taker must still introduce the topic of the essay in the introduction.

The rule of thumb in English (our English teachers tell us this over and over) is that we should write the essay as if the reader had no previous knowledge of the topic we are writing about. This means that you should be sure to restate the essay

prompt (it's best to paraphrase the prompt, not copy it word for word) and to explain the things in the essay that the average reader would not know about.

Let's look at the simplest way to do this.

Imagine that our TOEFL essay topic is something like "**do you agree or disagree that learning about the past is not important?**"

In a perfect world, you would paraphrase (restate in your own words) the essay prompt when you wrote your introduction, something like this:

**Although many believe that we should live in the present, I strongly believe that the past holds valuable lessons for everybody to learn.**

**First, ...**

However, for some people, doing this may be difficult, especially if they are still learning English. (Actually, we're all still learning English, but you know what I mean.)

So, if you need something simpler, the easiest way to restate the topic would be to copy the words exactly as they appear in the essay prompt, but make them fit in your introduction:

I strongly disagree that learning about the past is not important. This issue is a very important one, and I disagree with it for several important reasons.

First, ...

This intro is not great writing, but it at least tells us what the essay is going to be about.

That's it for this tip. I hope it helped!

*A Writing Professor from US*