

From the New York Writers Workshop

Questions to ponder:

I. Beginning

1. What's new in your essay worth paying attention to?
2. What's the idea?
3. Does the beginning set up a context, a search?

II. Middle

1. Does the middle build and grow, broadening a context? Is each piece of evidence of illustration essential?
2. Is the evidence and illustration in service to the main idea, and does each piece support the idea in a different way?
3. Is the narrative providing smooth links—transitions between scenes, illustrations, and evidence?
4. Is there enough reflection? Is the writer putting things in a framework, a context? Are the connections logical, emotional, or associative?

III. End

1. What has changed?
2. Is that the change understood by the end?
3. Do the reader and/or writer come to be in a slightly different emotional place, or have an altered understanding of things by the end?

“Didn’t we all learn the joys of the five-paragraph essay in college or high school? You remember the formula: There’s an introduction, which houses the thesis (the main idea) and sets out three points to be covered; and then there are three paragraphs, each explicating one aspect of that original idea: and then there’s a conclusion. In effect, you tell your readers what you’re going to say, then you say it. . . and then you tell them what you’ve already told them. . .and the reader glazes over at the regurgitated ideas and falls back asleep.”