

## Classification Essay

Classification is the process of grouping together people or things that are alike in some way. A simple classification would be to classify cars in terms of their body size: full-size, mid-size, compacts, and sub-compacts, or Portland Community College in terms of its different campuses. These groups or categories, are helpful in letting you see relationships among people or objects. They help you to organize information and compare it.

However, these categories often do not exist in the real world; they may exist only in your mind. You create them using some criterion or organizing principle. For example, you can classify college students by looking at their study habits: those who schedule study time, those who cram before a test, and those who hardly study at all. The organizing principle for classifying students in the example above is the different ways that they study. On the other hand, you could just as easily have classified students according to their age, their grade point average, or their religion. You could just as easily have classified cars according to their cost, their gas mileage, or their body style.

If you want your categories to be clear and consistent when you create a classification, make sure that you follow these two rules:

1. Use only one criterion or organizing principle so that everyone or everything fits into only one category, for example:

Group people according to income, or intelligence, or industriousness-- but not according to income and intelligence, or intelligence and....

2. Create categories that allow room for everyone or everything you are classifying

## Topic selection

Classification essays are commonly used in business, science, advertising, and editorials. However, at this level, a classification essay can be subjective. Sometimes classification essays are humorous or sarcastic. Choose a topic of interest to you and your audience. Use your imagination. Have fun, be creative, and be original -- the structure is straightforward.

You will have to write a thesis statement which you will then have to support in the details of the essay. An example of an appropriate thesis statement might be:

**Girls have various ways of choosing boyfriends based on their desire for money, love or common interests.**

The body of the essay should explore the qualities of each category, with clear examples and anecdotes.

Suggestions for topics:

- People:** husbands, wives, in-laws, teachers, students, friends, enemies, bosses, co-workers, doctors, nurses, patients, babies, ex-wives, ex-husbands, grandparents, teenagers, mothers, fathers, lawyers, secretaries, T.V. news announcers, hairstylists, book lovers, ice-cream eaters, umbrella users, disco dancers, market vendors, Beanie Baby collectors, etc.
- Places:** vacation spots, campgrounds, tutoring centers, college campuses, airports, freeways, back yards, front porches, parks, gardens, vegetable plots, video game arcades, movie theaters, Chinese restaurants, car washes, hiking trails, etc.
- Habits:** lunch habits, morning routines, test-taking, jogging, T.V. watching, bus riding, letter writing, dishwashing, house cleaning, house painting, playing, changing diapers, taking a shower, etc.
- Occasions:** weddings, funerals, birthday parties, Christmas celebrations, dinner parties, commencements, company meetings, family picnics, Mother's Day celebrations, vacations, reunions, etc.

Your instructor will probably set you a topic area from which you need to make your own topic selection.

**Some advice:**

1. At this level, don't choose topics that are already obvious to the reader. For example, don't write about the four levels of college students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) or the three branches of government (legislative, executive, judicial). You should try to be original and creative in your selection of a topic.
2. Remember that you should have a rationale for your categories. Think about your life experiences. Do you want to make a social comment or give advice? For example, imagine that you just got out of the hospital after a long stay. You noticed that there was a wide range in the quality of nursing care, so you decide to categorize nurses according to the way they treat their patients; or you have worked for various lawn service companies, so you are able to categorize them for the reader.
3. Make sure that your categories can be clearly labeled, for example: "helpful husbands, unhelpful husbands, and reluctant husbands" **NOT** "helpful husbands, unhelpful husbands, and the ones in the middle."

### Examples of Classification essay outlines

Topic	Organizing principle	Categories
<b>Rhythmic gymnasts on the team in Maringa, Brazil</b>	Their interest in joining the team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Some were addicted to practice and hard work.</li><li>2. Others liked the social aspect.</li><li>3. The others wanted to travel.</li></ol>
<b>Hiking trails</b>	Their condition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Some are maintained regularly.</li><li>2. Some get intermittent care.</li><li>3. Others are kept open only by other hikers.</li><li>4. The others have been abandoned.</li></ol>
<b>Residents of an adult foster care home</b>	Their attitudes about exercising	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Some refuse to exercise and rely on their medications.</li><li>2. Others exercise only when they need to “cure” a problem.</li><li>3. The others take exercise very seriously.</li></ol>
<b>Children’s birthday parties</b>	Types of entertainment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The children are left to play by themselves.</li><li>2. Parents and other adults organize games.</li><li>3. An entertainer is hired to come to the party.</li><li>4. The party is held at a location which has many activities that cost money.</li></ol>
<b>Cleaning the house</b>	Thoroughness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The total cleaning – everything top to bottom</li><li>2. The vacuum job only</li><li>3. Spot cleaning: only the places that look dirty</li></ol>
<b>Homestay families</b>	Why they want foreign students to stay with them	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Some do it just for the money.</li><li>2. Others are really interested in helping and learning from a foreign student.</li><li>3. The others are lonely and want a companion.</li></ol>

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Classification Essay: Peer Review**

(You may use this exercise to review your own essay, one of your classmate's essays or one of the essays on pp. 45-48)

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Writer:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Write the thesis statement below. What are the categories the author is describing?
  
2. Does the writer give equal space to each category or group? If not, please comment.
  
3. Is each body paragraph developed with sufficient detail?
  
4. In your opinion, what is the best part of this essay, and why?
  
5. Which part of this essay is the least effective? How would you suggest that the writer change it?

## Classification Essay: Example #1

### Many Ways to Turn a Page

People say that one can understand a lot about someone's personality just by looking at his shoes. The way people take care of their shoes reveals a lot about their characters. Similarly, the way people treat their books can be definitive about a reader's personality. Therefore, most readers could fall into one of five groups: the perfectionist, the teacher, the antiquarian, the collector, and the aesthete.

If one happens to be in a bookstore and sees someone asking the bookseller for a copy that has never been opened before, this person must be a perfectionist. People in this category are usually very fastidious about everything, including their books. Book lovers in this category are most likely to go to a shelf in a bookstore and spend hours exploring the contents of books before they choose one. After they choose a book, they will ask for an immaculate copy – if it is possible, never touched by a hand – and for sure they will check for misprints, folded pages and may ask that the tag with the price be peeled off (if there is one). They use their books in the same manner. They probably read their books at a 45-degree angle, so that they look as if they have never been read. A perfectionist will never write on his books, and he will shelve them in perfect thematic order. Of course, his shoes always look blindingly polished.

The next category of readers is the teachers. People in this category are usually life-long readers and use books as a tool for gaining knowledge. For them, the book as an object doesn't have as much value as the book as a source of information, knowledge, and ideas. The teacher most likely will write on his books, since for him they are not sacred objects of adoration, but just useful tools for sharing ideas. His beliefs, ideas, and positions can be seen in the remarks made in the margins. Usually people from this category have a very accurate ability to distinguish significant things from marginal ones. Like the perfectionist, the teacher will put his books in thematic order, but he will always care more about the knowledge inside them instead of the books themselves. The teacher is a kind of reader who easily will share his books with other people because he actually enjoys sharing ideas. Moreover, he wouldn't care if some of his books were lost, since he has already read them.

The third category is the antiquarian. This category is very specific. People who have an antiquarian interest in books should be called book lovers, rather than readers. Of course, they like to read books, but their main attitude toward books is expressed generally in the possession of books as objects with commercial value. These people have a wide bibliographic knowledge about books. For example, they know about publishers, different editions, years of publication, copies, and reprints. People in this category are "book hunters". Sometimes they dedicate their whole life to the passion of finding rare books; as a result, they make this interest about books their profession. Most of them are bookstore owners since they evaluate books mainly as objects with a high commercial value. The antiquarian reminds me of a *souteneur* (a pimp) : he loves books, but more than that, he loves the money he gains from them.

The collectors are a different group of book lovers. How is this category different from those already mentioned? On the one hand, it looks pretty close to the antiquarian; on the other hand, it has a lot in common with the teacher. Thus, it seems that this category of people is somehow in between these two others. While the antiquarian likes to collect books with a commercial interest, the collector has a 100% personal interest. This is the main difference. The collector, like the teacher, evaluates books according to the knowledge he can find through them. However, instead of gaining this knowledge, he buys books with the idea to read them later, at some future moment. This way he makes huge collections of books that he doesn't read for years, sometimes even never. The collector enjoys reading, but since he doesn't have time to read, he develops a dependence on the possession of books. In other words the collector is "a put-off-teacher" and not a real antiquarian.

Finally, the last category of book lovers is the aesthete. People from this category can be called "readers" only in a formal sense. Actually, they don't like to read at all, but they have specific attitudes toward books. These are people who see books as a nice way to add comfort, a good look or the "last detail" to their magazine-style interior. Books in their world exist along with vases, family pictures, boxes, and candles. The most important quality that book can have in such a world is a pretty cover matching the interior style. For the aesthete, books have value only as a decoration. They are nothing more than a needed accent, so that the interior vision looks complete. For example, the aesthete often buys book collections only to fill the empty shelves, so the room can look cozy. The aesthete will rarely open a book, but will regularly clean the dust from it as a part of the furniture.

In conclusion, it can be seen that books are like signs reflecting people's personalities; indeed, books are a very significant factor expressing someone's personal values. Since the scripts of antiquity until today, books have changed their image many times, but they have always had a significant role as cultural icons. Maybe soon books will have mostly a virtual existence; however, the attitude toward reading will still reveal one's personal philosophy.

**Andriana Yovcheva**

## Classification essay: Example #2

### First Families

"My host family took me to the beach yesterday. It was so nice!"

"Really? I envy you! My host family doesn't even feed me well!"

There are sometimes these kinds of conversations among the international students. Many international students, especially those who stay in America for a short time, prefer to stay with an American host family because they can experience American culture, and it is helpful to improve their English. However, not all international students get to stay with a pleasant host family. Having talked about host families with several of my acquaintances, I realized that there are different reasons why American host families invite an international student.

The first type of American host family is the host family who invites an international student because of money. Of course, this is one of the basic reasons why most American host families invite international students. However, this type of host family's purpose is only to earn money from an international student. When I studied in a private English academy, I met a student who was living with that kind of host family. She paid more than \$500 per month, but they'd never offered her good food. They always gave her only a slice of bread or a small portion of frozen food. She'd never seen milk or fruit in her host family's house. When she asked her host mother to give one more slice of bread, her host mother even answered no. Another student whom I met was living in a bad environment. For example, there was no lamp in his room and no telephone in his house. Of course, this type of host family doesn't treat its host students well, and they don't try to take care of their host students.

The second type of American host family is the host family who really wants to help international students. In the city where I am living now, there is a Christian group organized to help international students. All members in this Christian group try to help international students by offering a volunteer tutoring service or making a party for international students. Also, some members invite host students, and most of the students who find their host family in this group are satisfied with their family. Because their main goal is to help international students, these families don't receive much money from their students. They treat their students well, and try to help their host students to live in America, which is a very strange country for them. In my case, I also found a host family by contacting this group, and they were very helpful people. They gave me a lot of information about the area, like the locations of important buildings or the way to use public transportation. Also, they tried to make me experience American culture, so my host parents took me to a potluck party or invited me to a family dinner. Whenever I asked about English expressions, American customs, or my homework, they tried to help me in any way they could.

The third type of host family is the family who invites international students to stay out of their own loneliness. This is usually a family consisting of a retired couple or a single person. Some people feel lonely after retirement and have nothing to do, especially if their house is an empty nest. Therefore, therefore they host an international student and treat

the international student like their real daughter or son. This also applies to people who live alone. One of my friends who came to America to learn English lived with this kind of host mother. The host mother was divorced, and she wanted to host a student because she was lonely living alone. Therefore, she treated my friend like a real daughter. She took my friend everywhere she went and introduced my friend whenever they met new people. When my friend returned to her home after class, she and her host mother made dinner together, watched TV and talked for a long time.

Living with an American host family has many advantages. Especially for foreign students, having the experience of living with a host family is a huge support. However, whether the experience is pleasant or not depends on the attitudes of the students as well as the attitudes of the families themselves. Therefore, I hope international students living in America can meet host families who will enrich their experiences in this country and leave them with pleasant memories.

**Hae Yeon Cho**