

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

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Formalt essay

(_sjanger, _sakprosa) Et formalt essay er en kritisk-resonnerende tekst. Forfatterens personlige stemme holdes i bakgrunnen (i motsetning til det informale essay, skapt av Montaigne). Lewis Turco kaller det formale essay er en “disquisition” (som på norsk kan bety både undersøkelse og avhandling) om et spesielt emne (Turco 1999 s. 111). Språket er resonnerende og argumenterende. Ordet essay kommer fra fransk, og betyr “forsøk”, “undersøkelse”, “prøve”. Formalt essay blir også kalt formelt essay, saksessay og vitenskapelig essay. Sjangeren har noen likhetstrekk med en artikkel.

Teksten i et formalt essay er mer systematisk drøftende og argumenterende enn i det informale essayet. I denne typen essay er saken viktigere enn personen. Det formale essay er forholdsvis systematisk, objektivt, faktaorientert og saklig. Likheten med det informale essayet er blant annet at forfatteren må overveie en sak eller et emne fordomsfritt, og ikke komme med forhastete konklusjoner. Hva som oppdages og kommer i fokus, er avhengig av metoden forfatteren bruker, og denne metodeavhengigheten gjør at resultatet av undersøkelsene ikke kan sies å være den fulle sannhet. Resultatene er alltid foreløpige, provisoriske (Leenhardt og Józsa 1999 s. viii).

Det formale essayet skal skape oversiktighet og systematikk, med en tilnærmet vitenskapelig grundighet. “Tends to be removed from the subject and appears to be objective; tends to hold emotions in check and express concerns through strong arguments and powerful rhetorical devices; Academic and often instructional [...] The purpose of the formal essay is to write about a significant subject by focusing on the ideas rather than the person speaking. Definite structural patterns are associated with different forms of the formal essay (literary essay, classical essay, research essay, report, review). The formal essay is tightly focused on significant subject matter that may be highly specialized or universal. A definite introduction–development–conclusion pattern is used with carefully organized paragraphs to present a thesis, discuss it, and end with a clear conclusion. It is designed to appeal mostly to an audience that is articulate and concerned. The voice of the writer may be strong to subdued, objective to subjective, individualistic to universal. The

language used is specialized, controlled, precise, sophisticated and even artistic.”
(<http://assets.openstudy.com/>; lesedato 26.02.15)

Det formale essay ble skapt i renessansen av briten Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon var med på å utvikle en vitenskapelig tankegang, der han søkte sannheten for dens egen skyld. Han beundret Montaignes essay, men ville tilpasse sjangeren til vitenskapelige behov. Bacons tekster skulle gjøre vitenskap tilgjengelig for allmennheten.

Bacons essay har blitt oppfattet som didaktiske, maksimelignende og “tørre” sammenlignet med Montaignes essay (Hugo Friedrich gjengitt fra Zima 2012 s. 51). Dessuten var Bacons målgruppe antakelig hoffmenn og politikere. Tekstene innebærer for Bacon å formulere brukbare erkjennelser i ofte en tese- eller aforismelignende form (Zima 2012 s. 51-52). Hans definisjoner innbyr ikke til motsigelser. Å skrive essay er ikke, som for Montaigne, en sannhetssøken med usikkert utfall. I sammenligning med Montaigne framstår Bacon som monologisk og systematisk, men likevel finnes det sannhetsavveininger hos Bacon, f.eks. ved at to sannhetspåstander holdes opp mot hverandre.

Bacon som forfatter er “dogmatic, impersonal, systematic and expository” (Thomas E. Recchio sitert fra Zima 2012 s. 53). Det er lite plass til personlig tvil eller selvironi. Hans tilnærming til sine temaer er filosoferende og moraliserende, og han kan komme med råd til sine lesere. Ikke sjelden inneholder essayene aforistiske sammenligninger: f.eks. “Fortune is like the market, where many times, if you can stay a little, the price will fall.” (“Of Delays”), “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.” (“Of Studies”), “Base and crafty cowards are like the arrow that flieth in the dark.” (“Of Revenge”).

“Sir Francis Bacon wrote essays to persuade the reader to accept his opinions. Bacon’s essays are *formal*; that is, they are highly structured and written in a serious, impersonal style using formal language. To get across his points, however, Bacon sprinkles his essays with *aphorisms*, brief statements that express general observations about life in a witty, pointed way that makes them memorable for his reader.” (https://www.knomi.net/fileServer/textbook/English/britishLit/data/u2_essays_bacon_se.pdf; lesedato 28.05.14)

“The germs of the *Essays* [av Bacon] are to be found in those Antitheses of Things of which Bacon gives forty-seven sets in his Latin *Advancement*, and of which he there speaks as follows: “I would have in short all topics which there is frequent occasion to handle (whether they relate to proofs and refutations, or to persuasions and dissuasions, or to praise and blame) studied and prepared beforehand; and not only so, but the case exaggerated both ways with the utmost force of the wit, and urged unfairly, as it were, and quite beyond the truth. And the best way of making such a collection, with a view to use as well as brevity, would be to contract those

commonplaces into certain acute and concise sentences; to be as skeins or bottoms of thread which may be unwinded at large when they are wanted.”

As a specimen of these Antitheses, may be given no. xli, *Delay*, which should be compared with *Essay* xxi:

DELAY

<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
<p>Fortune sells many things to him that is in a hurry, which she gives to him that waits.</p> <p>While we hasten to take hold of the beginnings of things, we grasp shadows.</p> <p>While things are wavering, watch; when they have taken their direction, act.</p> <p>Commit the beginnings of actions to Argus, the end to Briareus.</p>	<p>Opportunity offers the handle of the bottle first, and afterwards the belly.</p> <p>Opportunity is like the Sibyl: she raises the price as she diminishes the offer.</p> <p>Speed is Pluto’s helmet.</p> <p>Things that are done betimes are done with judgment; things that are put off too late, by circuit.</p>

A little study of these Antitheses and of the Essay in which they receive literary dress will show what Bacon meant by an *essay*. It was to be literally an attempt, a trial (Latin *exagium*, “a weighing, balance”), an estimate of pros and cons, a debate which should determine the practical worth of motives and qualities and characters. The word had recently been used by Montaigne, whose *Essays* appeared in 1580. “The word,” says Bacon, in the cancelled dedication to Prince Henry, “is late, but the thing is ancient. For Seneca’s Epistles to Lucilius, if one mark them well, are but essays, – that is, dispersed meditations, though conveyed in the form of epistles.”

Thus the *Essays* were to constitute a series of useful observations on life and character; a handbook of the most practical wisdom, which should “come home to men’s business and bosoms.” Human nature was to be dealt with, not as it ought to be or might become, but as it was. To act wisely men must have a knowledge of both good and evil arts, that they might use the former and shun the latter. Bacon does not invariably counsel us to shun the evil arts; if one would work a man, one must know his defects as well as his virtues; and there are times when Bacon justifies dissimulation and falsehood. Moreover, there is a too constant reference to self-interest for our approval today. [...] Indifferent to literary finish, the author is bent on applying a homely common sense to some every-day problems. The mood of exalted style is out of the question. In the second edition a distinctly higher level is reached, both in the character of the new subjects treated and in the style. The consideration of such subjects as goodness, beauty, empire, death, and the greatness of kingdoms could not fail to elevate the thought and perhaps induce a statelier and more measured style. In the third edition the practical point of view is still maintained; but Bacon occasionally rises to philosophic heights, as when he speaks

Tore Janson: *Romerinner og romere: Livet i Romerriket* (på norsk 2006) – en samling korte essays

Et formalt essay kan være et bokessay, dvs. fylle en hel bok på flere hundre sider. Eksempler på dette er:

John Locke: *An essay concerning human understanding* (1690)

Harry Redner: *The ends of philosophy: An essay in the sociology of philosophy and rationality* (1986) – 423 sider

Norbert Elias: *Time: An essay* (1992) – 216 sider

Gunnar C. Aakvaag: *Frihet: Et essay om å leve sitt eget liv* (2013) – over 380 sider

Bokessay kan ha tydelige subjektive innslag. Göran Rosenbergs *Det tapte landet* (på norsk 1998) er både et personlig preget essay i lengde som en hel bok og en idéhistorisk og politisk gjennomgang av Israels utvikling. Det er også mange personlige innslag i Harald Berntsens *Det lange friminuttet: Et essay om ungdom i 1960-åra* (1998).

Finn Fuglestadts bok *Vekstøkonomi: Et globalhistorisk essay* (2010) er på 302 sider. “Finn Fuglestadts “globalhistoriske essay” svarer leseren med en kronologisk-strukturell reise gjennom historien. Boken kan leses som et forsvar for tesen om at vekstøkonomi er årsaken til at verden i dag “går så det suser”, og som en tilbakevisning av det forfatteren kaller “avleggs” teorier. [...] Forfatteren tillater seg å velge ut områder som han ønsker å fremheve, og hoppe over andre. Det er interessant å følge hans jakt gjennom historien etter faktorer som må være til stede for at en vekstøkonomi skal kunne utvikle seg. [...] Ifølge forfatteren blir det færre og færre som er fattige og flere og flere som får ta del i velstanden. Forfatteren tar også sjansen på å tilbakevise en rekke katastrofescenarier, som miljø- og klimakatastrofer, demografiske og medisinske katastrofer og politiske trusler. Det er vel på det rene at ikke alle vil skrive under på at alt dette vil løse seg like enkelt som Fuglestad antyder, men i tråd med essayets hypotese, så mener altså forfatteren at vekstøkonomien er det beste verktøyet man har til rådighet for å hankses med katastrofer. [...] Nå er Fuglestad også klar over at saken har mange sider, også negative, noe han ikke forsøker å skjule. Teknikken er likevel å vise hva motsatsene kan være, før han går over til en historisk redegjørelse. [...] Han leter etter den underliggende samfunnslogikken ved å fremheve de mental-religiøse, kulturelle forholdene, samtidig som han også redegjør for den materielle utviklingen. [...] Dessuten nyanserer han bildet av at byene er spydspissen i fremveksten av en vekstøkonomi. Ifølge nyere forskning er landsbygda vel så viktig. Essayets tese er altså at mange forhold må være på plass samtidig for å få til en vekstøkonomi.” (Mathilde Fasting i <http://2001-10.prosa.no/artikkel>; lesedato 04.03.15)

Et akademisk essay skrives vanligvis som ledd i undervisning/oppl ring, for   bidra til kvalifisering innen en utdannelse. Studentene f r r d om framgangsm ten, f.eks. disse: "An academic essay usually presents an argument or case, or reviews a subject. It should consider only one issue, so be clear about your subject area." (Wilson 1998 s. 54-55)

"The argumentative essay[:] Most academic essays will require you to present an argument through reasoning and the use of evidence. In the process of planning and drafting your essay, you will need to respond to the assigned question by thinking, reading and writing your way to a considered position/stance, or thesis statement. The thesis statement is expressed as one or two sentences in the introductory paragraph of your essay, and supported in the body of the essay by a series of topic sentences, one in each paragraph. Each topic sentence is in turn supported by evidence and examples from your readings and research, reflection, observation and analysis. Your essay should connect your thesis/focus statement and the major points you make to support it (your topic sentences). It should also connect the topic sentences with the evidence and examples you use to develop and illustrate them. Failing to provide an adequate, workable thesis/focus statement or failing to support it or 'stick to it' are two of the more common mistakes made by undergraduate essay writers. [...] Formulating a coherent and logical argument takes time and thought. To produce an essay you will need to write a number of drafts – more than two. Professional writers understand the necessity of drafting. Your first draft is unlikely to persuade your reader as to the logic of your argument. This is because you are still writing to work out what you think about a subject. Give yourself plenty of time to plan, draft, redraft, revise and edit your work.

Between your first thoughts on a topic and the finished essay is a lengthy and interesting process of:

- conducting research, analysing, engaging with, synthesising and arranging information;
- 'trying on' (and kicking off) propositions and ideas;
- writing and refining your thesis statement and topic sentences;
- selecting examples and illustrations;
- playing with paragraph order; and
- using transitions to make the relationship between ideas clear.

[...] Your essay will need the following:

An introduction which:

- sets out the context/background of your argument;
- introduces the content of the essay;
- introduces the theoretical perspectives you will be using;
- may define key terms (alternatively you can do the work of definition in the second paragraph);
- sets out your thesis statement/line of argument/central contention; and
- explains how the essay will be organised (order of points).

A body containing a number of paragraphs each of which will:

- present a topic sentence or central idea supporting your thesis statement/line of argument/central contention;
- contain developing sentences which extend on or amplify the topic sentence;
- give evidence/examples/references which support/relate to your topic sentence; and
- provide a concluding/linking sentence;

A conclusion which:

- restates your thesis statement/line of argument/central contention;
- summarises the points and evidence you provided to support your thesis; and may suggest areas for further research/investigation.

Style

There are a number of academic stylistic conventions you should follow when writing: [...]

- Write in the third person unless otherwise directed.
- Avoid slang terms, clichés and colloquial expressions.
- Avoid gender bias and sexist language.
- Avoid emotive language.
- Be direct – use the active rather than the passive voice.

- Be concise.”

(https://intranet.ecu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/20609/essay.pdf; lesedato 09.03.15)

Angloamerikanske bokutgivelser med “the reader” eller “a reader” i tittelen (*The Communication Theory Reader*; *Joseph Beuys: The Reader* og lignende) inneholder vanligvis formale essay, artikler og utdrag fra bøker. Bokutdragene fungerer i antologien ofte som formale essay. En “The Reader”-bok kan sjangermessig ofte kalles en essaysamling med formale essay.

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>