

Writing Rhetorically

The Writing Process

The first rule of writing a composition is “Don’t panic.” The task of writing does not have to be a dreadful undertaking, but neither should it be taken too casually. Instead, view it as an opportunity to express your ideas. Even if you presently lack the confidence to take on such a task comfortably, you will discover that it is within your abilities if you understand the general principles of what constitutes good, effective writing. Most of your assignments will require observations, feelings, or opinions. This explanation is the general substance of expository writing. In addition, you may be asked to defend your opinions or observations or to attempt to convince your readers of your opinions, that is, to use persuasive writing. Knowing the fundamental components of each of these types of composition will reduce much of your tendency toward panic and will, at the same time, provide you with the proper tools to begin your writing assignment. Finally, you may be asked to write a critical analysis, i.e., your interpretation of observations about an essay. This project, too, requires the basic components of expository and persuasive writing.

Writing is a recursive process: each step overlaps another step. You may begin and proceed through the process in several ways. However, a logical approach is to follow certain prewriting steps to get started.

THE BEGINNING

Finding a Topic

Beginning an essay can be extremely frustrating when you have the freedom to choose your own topic. Coming up with a fresh, original subject and having something unique to say about it can be overwhelming. Finding a topic does not have to be stressful, however; it can be turned to your advantage. It will allow you to focus on what you know, what you have experienced, and what you would prefer to discuss. Your own experiences are your best sources, whether you decide to write a narrative of your harrowing experiences during registration or you have to argue your views on the irrelevancy of the grading system.

No matter what the assignment is, first consider what you know the most about— yourself. Your own experiences and perceptions will always play a major part in your writing. Maybe your career or studies toward a career can provide some interesting topics. Perhaps you have just read a book or seen a play or movie that deals with a subject that intrigues you. Perhaps you want to make known your views about a particular controversial issue that is important to you. Sources for potential topics are all around you, but you must be observant. Many instructors prefer that you keep journal entries to record your experiences as they occur. This practice not only provides you with personal explorations and possible source material for your essays, but it also affords you the chance to practice your writing skills. Finally, your general reading research will provide supplementary information for your opinions and observations. Your preparation for writing depends on how involved you are with the world around you.

Brainstorming/Gathering Details

Whether your topic is assigned or you have a choice of subjects, you should first brainstorm to help you determine what you want to say about your subject. First, select a topic you find interesting or one with which you are most familiar. If you are undecided as to what to write about, brainstorm two or three possible topics and then see which subject generates the most ideas. One advantage of brainstorming is that it is graphic: it reveals to you the topic about which you know the most. Once you have settled upon a topic and a general approach, determine for whom you will be writing your essay—your audience. This decision is crucial before you brainstorm further because it will determine what to include in and exclude from your discussion.

An essay about the benefits of attending college that is to be read by a college professor will include quite different information than would the same essay aimed at an audience of graduating high school seniors. Be aware of your audience: it determines your approach. In a writing course, however, you must realize that you are writing for two audiences: your designated reader and your instructor. Therefore, even though your designated reader may vary with each assignment, you always have to keep in mind the requirements of your other reader—your instructor.

Finally, clarify your purpose. Ask yourself, “What do I want to accomplish?” “What do I want my audience to do or to understand?” Purpose is largely dependent upon audience. If you are discussing the advantages of attending college for an instructor, chances are your purpose is to inform. But if the essay will be read by a high school senior, your purpose is probably to persuade. Without knowing your purposes before you organize your ideas, you risk misdirection and increased frustration, not to mention the loss of precious time and energy.

Once you have gone through this initial exercise, begin brainstorming. Brainstorm alone or with others and write down as quickly as you can anything—any random fragments, words, or sentences—that relate even remotely to your subject. Do not pause to consider the relevance of any item that surfaces, its spelling, grammar, or level of importance; that step will come later. Anything jotted down at this stage is relevant and valid and, even though you might ultimately reject some ideas, they might possibly generate other useable thoughts. The example below is a brainstorming exercise on the assigned topic “The Qualities of a Good Teacher.” The student determined that his audience would be a group of his peers on the occasion of a teacher awards ceremony, and his purpose would be to inform them of what he believes constitutes excellence in teaching.

Qualities of a Good Teacher

has high expectations of students
 competent
 shows relevance of field of study
 patience w/students
 stimulates interest
 prepared and organized
 accessible after class
 rarely absent
 fair, unbiased
 flexible
 doesn't patronize
 doesn't speak down

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loves subject & enjoys it
considerate clear instructions
asks questions
interested in students' ideas
keeps up to date in field
never uses yellow lecture notes
no favorites
never embarrasses students
variety of teaching styles
can answer any question
can “tell stories”
Mr. Carver’s stories
drives a Corvette
young
wide knowledge, not just of subject
no spoonfeeding
praises good work
not monotone
encourages critical thinking
organized notes
command of language
creative
enthusiastic
open-minded
brings ideas to discussion not in textbook
tactful
listens to opposing views
clear expectations
grades consistently / fairly
interesting lectures
doesn’t repeat readings
values student contributions
motivates, inspires
prompt
fair tests
Mrs. Jones—history
attractive
single

Obviously not everything from this list will make its way to the final draft of the essay. Much will be cut and much will be incorporated into more general topics. You can see from this list that “good teachers” is a topic that produces a wealth of material.

Once your brainstorming session seems to have exhausted itself, group together those items that share some common characteristics. After forming these tentative groups, eliminate everything that does not fit into any of these groups. Now these groups and the details that remain should help shape an approach that will eventually become the focus of your thesis. Notice how the details from our original brainstorming of “good teachers” are grouped in the following example:

I. Relationships with students

has high expectations of students
no spoonfeeding
praises good work
patience with students
doesn't patronize
doesn't speak down
considerate
tactful
listens to opposing views
interested in students' ideas
provides additional help if needed
accessible after class
fair, unbiased
flexible
open-minded
values student contributions
motivates, inspires
no favorites
doesn't ridicule or embarrass students

II. Style of teaching

sense of humor
loves subject and enjoys it
stimulates student interest
asks questions
not a monotone
encourages critical thinking
creative
clear expectations & instructions
grades consistently
interesting lectures
doesn't repeat readings
fair tests
enthusiastic
variety of teaching styles
can adapt methods spontaneously

III. Knowledge of subject

competent
prepared and organized
command of language
brings ideas to discussion not in text
keeps up to date in field
doesn't lecture from yellow notes
wide knowledge, not just of subject
shows relevance of field of study
can "tell stories"

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knows incidental information
can answer almost any question

Grouping shows that the details we save can be sorted into three general groups: relationship with students, teaching style, and knowledge of the subject matter. However, if we had to deal with all three subtopics, we would have quite a long essay, much longer than what is required for a typical writing assignment. We can pick any of these three groups and use it alone as the topic for our essay. Since most of our brainstorming ideas fall into the category of relationships with students, we choose that as the narrowed topic of our essay.

At this point in the writing process you have a specific subject, an audience, a purpose, and a general idea of what you want to discuss. The next step is to construct a statement that will incorporate your primary ideas into a workable thesis.

Formulating a Thesis Statement

Many beginning writers make the mistake of underestimating the importance of a thesis statement or of confusing it with the topic or a statement of purpose of the essay. The thesis is an explicit statement, usually a single sentence that expresses the central point the writer wishes to make. It is the summary of all the individual elements in your paper that relate to your topic. The thesis is what holds the essay together and gives it direction. Without a good thesis you will likely have a poorly organized essay. The steps suggested below should help you formulate a thesis statement that will work to your advantage by giving focus, coherence, and organization to your essay.

Step One

After you have discovered your topic and have brainstormed it thoroughly, as in the earlier exercise regarding good teachers, you now must state what is a key component of the thesis statement—the subject. The subject of your thesis sentence states the narrowed, restricted topic of your essay. It tells what your essay will be about. The subject part of the thesis sentence says, simply, that you will discuss, not just “teachers,” but “good teachers.” Putting a subject in a thesis statement is easy by now since by brainstorming you have already arrived at a fairly restricted subject. However, that is not to say that you cannot further revise the subject at this stage. Remember that we limited our topic further to “the relationship good teachers have with their students.” Be sure that the subject you choose is restricted enough to give the reader a clear and thorough treatment of it in the length of the essay required. Too broad a subject will result in a discussion that is too general and superficial, while too narrow a subject will leave you with nothing to say after one or two sentences.

Step Two

The other key component of a thesis statement, the focus, is usually the predicate portion of your sentence, that portion which asserts exactly what you intend to say about your subject. The focus is not as easy to formulate as the subject, and many beginning writers tend to neglect it. This oversight is a fatal mistake. Imagine an essay that begins, “There are many good teachers at my school.” The reader, right before falling asleep or throwing the paper into the trash, will reply, “So what?” It is not enough to say that there are good teachers out there; you must be able to say something about them: “The best teachers have three qualities in common,” or, “Mrs. Jones, the best teacher I ever had, cared about her students both in and out of the classroom.”

To arrive at a focus, let’s take another look at our subtopic “Relationship with students” and see how we can group the details there.

Motivation/Inspiration

- has high expectations of students
- no spoonfeeding
- praises good work
- motivates, inspires
- makes class interesting

Respect for students

- patience with students
- doesn't patronize
- doesn't speak down
- considerate
- tactful
- listens to opposing views
- fair, unbiased
- flexible
- open-minded
- values student contributions
- no favorites
- doesn't ridicule or embarrass students

Personal interest in students

- provides additional help if needed
- accessible after class
- interested in extra-curricular activities

As well as helping to restrict your subject, the groupings furnish you the specific terms with which to compose a tentative thesis statement. From the groupings above we can formulate the following thesis sentence: A good teacher respects students, has a personal interest in them, and motivates them to do their best. Now that you have a specific subject and a clearer focus in front of you, you are better prepared to organize and present your material. You have taken your random thoughts and formed them into a cohesive whole.

Step Three

Because you have identified a specific audience that may not be easy to convince, make certain your thesis is precise, concise, and unified. By being precise, you make certain that no word is ambiguous or unclear. Say clearly what you mean and what you intend to discuss. Don't tell your reader that "Mrs. Jones, my favorite teacher, was interesting and nice," although she probably was both. Even if your audience is the least bit interested in this insightful observation, the point will be almost impossible to prove. How does one define "nice"? Was she friendly? polite? cheerful? caring? "Nice" means all of these things and none of them. And the word "interesting" runs the gamut from being able to tell the best jokes of anyone on the faculty to having an extensive collection of World War II artillery shells. Use specific, concrete words rather than vague general terms. Being concise comes from taking the time to choose the most precise words and phrases, those that say exactly what you want to say and that will be easy to develop in the body of the essay. In addition, you must state succinctly what your intention is and no more. Consider this thesis sentence: "Mrs. Jones was the best teacher I ever had because she cared for her students; that is, she always had a kind word for everyone and she helped us study for the tests." After a

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thesis like that, there will be little left to discuss in the rest of the paper. Remember, although your purpose in the essay is to present, explain, or argue an idea, the thesis statement is not the place to begin your argument or explanation. It is only to sum up or to defend your position, sometimes referred to as the “method of approach.” “Mrs. Jones was the best teacher I ever had because she cared for her students” indicates what you are going to discuss, but does not reveal the whole essay in the opening paragraph.

Finally, unless your essay is a lengthy one, make certain your thesis statement contains a single issue or idea; otherwise, the scope of your essay will be too broad and your supporting examples too general to be convincing. A unified thesis statement reduces the possibilities of unity violations in the body of the essay. “Mrs. Jones, the best teacher I ever had, cared about her students: that is, she always had a kind word for everyone, even though she never had much to say to my friend Hortense.” Aside from being wordy and too precise, this sentence violates unity in that it wanders off to the subject of Hortense. A well-focused thesis statement reduces the ever-present potential for violations of unity in the body of the essay.

A final word about the thesis statement.

Here are a few suggestions to make your thesis sentence work for you and not against you:

1. Avoid the obvious. While you want to make it clear to your audience what you intend to do, never say, “In this paper I will” Statements like this are dull, plodding, and unsubtle. Make your wording original and fresh.
2. Be direct and forceful in stating your opinion without alienating the reader. Make it clear that you are taking a stand and are allied with a certain position.
3. Do not, however, say, “It is my opinion that” The reader will know that the opinions in the essay are yours. Phrasing a sentence thus only makes for another dull and plodding sentence. If the ideas are not yours, they must be correctly documented.
4. Make sure that your thesis sentence indicates the organization of your paper. If you have three characteristics of excellence in teachers to discuss, mention each briefly in the thesis sentence and mention them in the order you wish to discuss them in the body of the paper. This method of organization creates confidence in the reader regarding your ability to be clear, logical, and organized from the outset.
5. Make certain the length of your sentence is appropriate for the length of your paper. A 45-word thesis statement is too long for a 600-word essay. Your introductory paragraph should not consist only of a thesis. This paragraph introduces your thesis as well as the entire essay.
6. The thesis statement should be ONE SENTENCE ONLY. A compound sentence is okay, but do not make it merely a string of independent clauses. Selective wording will eliminate a “rambling” sentence.
7. Finally, never hesitate to revise your thesis statement at any stage in drafting your essay if you feel you can improve it. Even though it may mean additional adjustments in the body of the essay, your extra effort will usually pay off. You should make at least two revisions.

THE MIDDLE

Now that you have a thesis statement to control the essay, you must organize the body of your discussion. To begin this process, look back at your notes from your brainstorming once again and notice the way you grouped the details. Why did you group certain things together? What did they have in common? What “heading” could you give each group? Each of the groupings

that you made in your brainstorming now will become a main element in the body of your essay and will be mentioned in your thesis statement. Next, formulate the ideas generated in each of the brainstorming categories into a working statement that summarizes all the ideas in the category. This sentence will serve as your topic sentence for each category; it will be formed eventually into a paragraph composed of subtopics and examples. This topic sentence functions as the controlling idea of the paragraph. Just as your thesis statement states your purpose for the entire essay, your topic sentence directs your audience's attention to the single idea you will discuss in each particular paragraph. Each topic sentence, just like the thesis statement, has a subject and a focus. This focus will signal to the reading audience precisely what you intend to illustrate in the course of that paragraph and how it relates to the thesis. The same rules of clarity, conciseness, and unity required of your thesis statement apply to the topic sentence as well, for, regardless of its length and complexity, the paragraph should contain only one central idea.

Outlining/Developing a Plan

While the word outline itself provokes scurrilous mutterings and utter contempt from most composition students, it need not be treated as an adversarial force to be conquered or endured. It must, however, be done before you write the essay, not after. Once you become familiar enough with the benefits of outlining, you may discover it is the most critical step in all the pre-writing stages. The outline functions much like the blueprints of an architectural project. It is the framework on which to build your essay. You must overcome the tendency to resist this key step in the stage of writing, for, regardless of which rhetorical mode you select for your essay, good planning is essential. Likewise, poor planning is quickly evident. The value is endless for the writer as well as the reader. Consider the following advantages:

1. For the writer, the outline encourages brevity.
2. It can keep you from violating unity by indicating that an idea does not belong. At the same time, the outline will often suggest that some additional idea might be included.
3. The outline can ensure that important ideas are placed in the appropriate places according to relative value.
4. Its format allows you to check for stylistic consistency, continuity, and clarity.
5. It keeps you focused on the separate ideas and lets you actually **visualize** the level of generality among your ideas. Your ideas in the outline format are simply easier to see.
6. Finally, the outline will provide you with a psychological boost. Having succeeded in organizing your ideas logically, you enjoy a sense of accomplishment that should allow you to move on to the next writing stage with increased confidence.

There are two basic outline forms—the topic outline and the sentence outline. Regardless of the assignment, you will want to consider using both forms at strategic stages in the prewriting phase. Now that your purpose is clear, your audience is designated, and you have a workable thesis clearly in mind, it is time to impose the standard outline system of organization on your thoughts. The following system is the universal format for outlining ideas:

THESIS

I. [First topic related to discussion of thesis]

- A.
 - 1.

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- a.
- b.
- c.
- 2.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
- B.
 - 1.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - 2.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
- II. [Second topic related to thesis statement]
 - A. [etc.]

(Note: the old adage “If you have a 1, you must have a 2,” is a valid point. The same holds true of any subheading or level of development. A good rule to remember is that a pair is the required minimum.)

Topic Outline

The topic outline is helpful in the preliminary organization of the essay when you want to determine the main points of your discussion and the order in which you will discuss them. Each entry in a topic outline is just what the term implies: a topic heading, much like a title, not a complete sentence, but a “bare bones” phrase. The topic outline delineates the areas to be discussed but does not yet deal with what specifically will be said about them. Even at the topic outline level, however, you should be grammatically consistent. If you want to use nouns, nouns plus a verb form, or prepositional phrases, make certain you use them at each letter or number level in order to create a parallel structure. This consistency will assist you later when transforming your topic outline to the body paragraphs of the essay.

GOOD TEACHERS

Thesis: A good teacher respects students, has a personal interest in them, and motivates them to do their best.

- I. Respect for students
 - A. Considerate
 - Tactful
 - Non-ridiculing
 - Patient
 - Non-patronizing
 - B. Fair
 - Flexible
 - Fair in testing
 - Objective in grading
 - No favoritism
 - C. Values students’ contributions
 - Compliments students’ work
 - Praises student involvement

Sentence Outline

Whether it is used initially or instead of the topic outline, the sentence outline requires more effort. You will still be required to list, categorize and order your ideas by relative importance. This time, however, you must write your thoughts in **complete sentences**. The first stage of a sentence outline might look like this:

GOOD TEACHERS

Thesis: A good teacher respects students, has a personal interest in them, and motivates them to do their best.

- I. A good teacher respects her students.
 - A. She is considerate of her students.
 - She criticizes them tactfully.
 - She does not ridicule them or embarrass them.
 - She is patient with them.
 - She never patronizes her students.
 - B. She treats her students fairly.
 - She is flexible and open-minded.
 - Her tests are fair.
 - She grades objectively and consistently.
 - She does not have favorites.
 - C. She shows that she values the contributions of everyone in the class.
 - She compliments her students on their work.
 - She praises them for their involvement even when she disagrees with them.
- II. (etc.)

A hint about outlining. Regardless of which outline form you use, it is a good idea to write down all the headings/sentences for the Roman numerals before going on to the capital letters and all the capital letter headings before going on to the next level. Doing so helps keep the levels of development, the subtopics and details, clear. With this systematic organizational plan behind you, you can now concentrate on the next phase: development.

THE PARAGRAPH

The standard paragraph is made up of a topic sentence, subtopic headings, and various levels of specific examples. The topic sentence functions in the paragraph just as the thesis statement functions in the essay. The topic sentence also supports the thesis statement by offering a main point in the discussion and announces what specifically will be discussed in the paragraph. Likewise, each subtopic heading (the A, B, etc., of the outline) will support the specific focus of the paragraph.

Finally, the examples under each subtopic heading offer illustrations that support the assertions of the subheading. Thus, in a well-organized paragraph, the relationship of every detail to the topic sentence is obvious, and, in turn, the connection with the thesis is obvious. Remember that the paragraph is a miniature essay. Mastering the principles of paragraph form offers greater assurance toward mastering the essay. This mastery involves being familiar with unity, development, coherence, and continuity within the paragraph.

Paragraph Unity

For a paragraph to have unity, each sentence in a body paragraph must directly relate to the purpose indicated in the topic sentence. The paragraph must hang together as a whole, creating an unmistakable sense of oneness. Any departure from the single purpose of the paragraph violates paragraph unity. For example, if you were to bring into your discussion of good teachers the idea that teachers' salaries need to be raised, you would be shifting the focus away from the main idea, thus breaking the unity in the paragraph. Stick to your topic sentence! Keep in mind that a paragraph is, by definition, a unified statement of a particular idea. A way to test paragraph unity is to try to link each sentence to a word or phrase in the topic sentence. Draw lines and arrows if you must. Any sentence that you cannot obviously link to the topic sentence is probably irrelevant and, therefore, will undermine the effectiveness of your paper.

Paragraph Development

Just because you have said in your thesis statement that a good teacher respects her students, shows interest in them, and motivates them, that does not mean that your readers have to accept your viewpoint automatically. You must convince your audience that what you have to say is sound, sensible, and well-supported. In other words, even if you are informing, you are still persuading your readers. You must explore your main idea explicitly, concretely, and thoroughly, and you must strive to include enough supporting evidence in each paragraph to present your point convincingly. Inadequate paragraph development is one of the most serious weaknesses of beginning writers. No matter how organized and unified your ideas are, if they are not developed fully, you will have failed to communicate to your audience. Supporting evidence or examples come from your own experiences, from hypothetical examples, research material, authoritative evidence, facts, or from just about any sound, reliable source.

Many students ask, "What is enough support?" The answer is arbitrary, but some general guidelines apply. You want enough support to convince your audience of the soundness of your argument. Whose opinion, for example, is more likely to be accepted in a court of law: a defense attorney's claim that her client is innocent because the defendant's family and friends know he is innocent or the prosecuting attorney's claim that the defendant is guilty because of fourteen eyewitnesses and extensive forensic evidence? Valid evidence is convincing and supports opinions and observation. The same is true of paragraph development. You must provide enough information to convince them of the soundness of your argument. As a rule, the average length of a paragraph in a college-level essay might run approximately three-fourths of a typed page. While striving arduously for quantity, however, NEVER forget that quality is more important. The fact that Aunt Zona Gail believes men make better teachers than women is not the strong evidence you want to support your contentions about good teachers. But surveying students or speaking with teachers who have won awards or recognition for excellence in teaching would serve as appropriate proof. In moving from topic sentence to supporting evidence in a paragraph, you are moving from general to specific. The order and progression of this movement is essential to effective paragraphs, and the outline is the most efficient method of making certain this progression occurs logically. This order ranks and demonstrates the levels of generality in a paragraph. For example:

Thesis: Igor often failed to live up to his expectations. LEVEL ONE

I. [topic sentence—general statement] Igor was a poor student. LEVEL TWO

A. [subtopic—less general] He was not conscientious. LEVEL THREE

1. [example—specific] He never handed in assignments on time. LEVEL FOUR

- a. [more specific] He handed in his first English composition two weeks late. LEVEL FIVE

These levels constitute the arrangement of ideas in the paragraph, from general statement to specific examples. Always develop your ideas in the outline of your paragraph at least to level four. The logic behind this recommendation is that you most likely will have to reach level three before you can provide examples that are specific and concrete enough to persuade your readers of your general assertion (level one). In addition, the ideal number of level two or level three statements is three; that is, A, B, C and 1, 2, and 3. If you offer only two examples, you could risk sounding dogmatic and inflexible. Four or more examples under the same subtopic, however, suggests you wish to appeal emotionally to your readers. Some readers might cry out “Enough already!” There is such a thing as overkill, especially if your examples tend to be repetitious. You will not always be able to provide three examples, but the goal is a worthy one. Make sure you understand and can recognize the different levels so you can create good, effective outlines and, consequently, good paragraphs.

Thesis: Good teachers have certain qualities in common. LEVEL ONE

I. A good teacher respects her students. LEVEL TWO

A. She is considerate of her students. LEVEL THREE

1. She criticizes them tactfully. LEVEL FOUR

- a. She always tells them something positive about their work along with suggestions on how to improve it. LEVEL FIVE

Finally, if your paragraph is a long one, you might consider including a summary sentence, a “clincher,” to close your paragraph. The inclusion of such a sentence serves at least two purposes. First, it brings closure to the main idea of the paragraph, especially if you have provided extensive examples. Closure helps your audience by returning them to your central idea and reminding them of your specific intention in the paragraph. Second, the summary sentence is on the same level of generality as your topic sentence; therefore, it will make your task of bridging the connection between this paragraph and the next easier than it would be if you had to move from a very specific level of generality, a minor support statement, to a new topic sentence in a new paragraph. This final summary sentence “clinches” the discussion and emphasizes the main idea. Some writers prefer to provide in this final sentence some notion of what is to come in the next paragraph through some kind of transition device.

Continuity in the Paragraph

Continuity means literally “holding together.” It is achieved through good organization and unity, as we have seen, and also by the language you use to illustrate to your readers how your ideas fit together. The language you use will serve as transitions, devices that link sentences to each other. Transitions are also used to connect paragraphs, thus linking your ideas together in a smooth, logical order.

Transitional devices include pronouns and demonstrative adjectives, repetition of key words, the use of synonyms, transitional expressions, and parallel construction.

1. Pronouns and demonstrative adjectives—When their antecedents are clearly understood, pronouns (they, it, she, he) help the reader recognize that the phrase or sentence in which

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they appear is linked to the preceding idea. Example: “Steinbeck is fascinated by the animal motivation behind human behavior. Frequently in his fiction, he equates human and animal conduct to show their similarities.”

Demonstrative adjectives also clearly link the sentence containing them with the preceding sentences. These adjectives are words like *that*, *this*, *these*, and *those*. Notice how the demonstrative adjective links the following two sentences: “Recognition of the unity of all life is the basis for John Steinbeck’s artistic use of nature. One of the major expressions of this unity is the kinship that man feels with the land.”

Repetition of key words and use of synonyms. The important rule here is to repeat key words, those words that keep your focus in the minds of your audience. Notice how the word *unity* is repeated in the example above. Be careful, however, that you do not rely too heavily on this transitional technique; too much repetition becomes monotonous. If you feel you are repeating the same word too often, substitute a synonym. Instead of *unity*, try *oneness* or *harmony* occasionally if it fits the context of your meaning.

Transitional words—The most recognizable and most effective transitional words include “furthermore,” “moreover,” “likewise,” “similarly,” “nevertheless,” “on the other hand,” “conversely,” “first,” “second,” “third” and so on. Each of these words has a definite function, whether it is to show logical order or to indicate logical relationships between ideas and sentences. Without these expressions, your sentences would make little sense and certainly would not fit together to develop your idea. A word of caution, however: be sure the transitional expression you choose does precisely what you want it to do. Do not simply close your eyes and select a transitional word from the list. Use an appropriate term for the meaning or connection you wish to convey. Never use “furthermore” when “however” is what you need to alter the direction or to qualify a statement.

Consult your handbook or thesaurus for additional help.

4. Parallel construction—This transitional device links your sentences and ideas by repeating a grammatical structure, thereby forcing your audience not only to keep the focus in mind but to realize fully the connection between your ideas. Note, for example, President Lincoln’s use of parallel construction in his famous “Gettysburg Address” and the power of its connected ideas to hold his audience:

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

All transitional devices assist you, the writer, in avoiding dull repetition by making the expression of your ideas more interesting and more varied. These devices keep you and your reader from having to leap from one idea to another because they offer convenient and persuasive bridges which add to the coherence and logic of your ideas. Most writers find that they naturally include the transitional devices within paragraphs, but additional editing might be required during revising to make certain that there is adequate bridging between paragraphs.

The following excerpt is written with the transitional devices italicized. Notice how the transitional devices make the argument easy to follow and make the writing style more fluid.

Kinship between man and the land is only one aspect of Steinbeck's celebration of the unity of all life. As man is one with the land, so is he one with the animal life that inhabits the land. Man is part of nature, and his social and biological behavior is not unlike the lower forms of animal life. Furthermore, the biologist who observes the living habits of animals can correctly apply his observations to human nature. Steinbeck the biologist is fascinated by the animal motivation behind human behavior. Frequently in his fiction, he equates human and animal conduct to show their similarities.

Steinbeck uses *animal life* symbolically in three ways. *First*, he frequently describes the *human community* with the image of a many-celled organism, a “group-man” whose individual cells contribute to *his* total function. *This image* is a basic one and it's the foundation of much of Steinbeck's social theorizing. *Second*, many of his individual characters display obvious *animal* characteristics and are closely associated with, and often symbolized by, particular *animals*. *Third*, he uses animals to *symbolize* many of the human problems, emotions, and activities appearing in the novels and the short stories. Both the *human community* and the *individual, then*, are related to *animal life*.

From Paragraph to Essay

When you understand the principles that constitute a good paragraph, you will understand the general organization of the essay. Remember that a paragraph is a miniature essay. Only the scope of a paragraph changes to meet the requirements of the following essay. The system remains the same, but the form expands. Consider the diagram below and note the simple changes that occur when the components of the paragraph are converted to the essay.

I. Topic sentence	<i>becomes</i>	Thesis statement
A. Subtopic	<i>becomes</i>	I. Topic sentence
1. Example	<i>becomes</i>	A. Subtopic
2. Example	<i>becomes</i>	B. Subtopic
B. Subtopic	<i>becomes</i>	II. Topic sentence
1. Example	<i>becomes</i>	A. Subtopic
2. Example	<i>becomes</i>	B. Subtopic
C. Subtopic	<i>becomes</i>	III. Topic sentence

What is needed now in the essay is an additional level of development. Under the subtopics in the above essay format, you would add specific, supporting examples to complete the essential skeleton of the essay (i.e., add 1., 2., 3. under A. and B., etc.). In general, most of your writing will have an introductory paragraph, usually three or more body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Regardless of the length of the essay, the principles of organization remain the same.

THE END

Now you are ready to conclude the writing process by putting the finishing touches on your essay. This stage of your writing actually includes several steps. Not only does it involve the concluding paragraph, but it also includes constructing the introductory paragraph and a title for the essay. Having completed the heart of your thoughts in your body paragraphs (the middle), you now need to introduce those thoughts in an opening paragraph that includes your thesis and to conclude your discussion by offering closure. Although the techniques vary considerably regarding these two paragraphs, the primary function is to provide the framework for the ideas you convincingly present to your audience. This stage completes the writing phase.

Introductory Paragraph

Because the opening paragraph is the audience's first contact with you and with what you have to say, it is of utmost importance. Traditionally, however, writers have discovered that this paragraph is the most difficult to write, perhaps because of its importance and uniqueness or perhaps because of the "mental block" associated with the dreaded "blank page syndrome." There are at least two options in putting your introductory paragraph together. Some writers prefer to write their opening paragraph first, knowing what they intend to discuss in the body paragraphs and what their thesis statement is. If they feel that the introductory paragraph needs to be altered after having written the essay, they simply revise it accordingly. However, some writers prefer to wait until the essay is complete before they tackle this paragraph. Perhaps it is easier to explain to someone where you are going if you have already been there. Since you have had your thesis in mind throughout the organizing and writing stages, and since you now know what ground you have traveled in your body discussion, you can more confidently address the issue of putting an introduction of your ideas together, capped, of course, by your thesis statement. You now must show your audience precisely which path you will travel together.

To begin, you must keep in mind the four primary functions of the introductory paragraph:

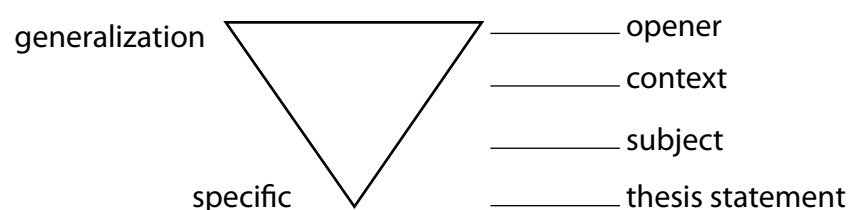
- to get the reader's attention;
- to set the tone for the rest of the essay;
- to show the audience why they should continue to read your essay;
- to make a commitment, to take a stand that tells the audience what to expect from your discussion in the essay.

To help you determine what kind of opening paragraph you need, you must remind yourself of your audience and purpose. When you write an essay, you make a commitment to your audience. You are obligated to live up to your commitment; therefore, you want to fulfill that obligation by explaining and supporting your ideas with as much information as you can. By learning what your commitment and purpose are in your opening paragraph, your readers know what to expect. If you fail to interest them in the introductory paragraph or renege on your obligation, your audience might decide to read no further. In short, you want your audience to read all the way through your discussion; therefore, you want to do what you said you would do.

The opening paragraph also sets the tone for the rest of the essay. If your topic is a serious one, the opening paragraph should be sufficiently serious. Conversely, if your essay is humorous, the opening should establish a light tone. Nothing is more disconcerting to a reader and self-defeating to a writer than inconsistency in tone.

The introductory paragraph for an average college-level essay usually will require no more than five or six sentences, depending upon how specific you are in your opening comments. The paragraph moves from a general statement introducing the subject to a specific thesis statement. The organization might be diagrammed as an inverted pyramid, thus:

FIGURE 2-A



The thesis is the most specific statement in the paragraph and generally will appear as the last sentence of the paragraph. In the following introductory paragraph, notice how the writer moves from a general statement about the treatment of minor medical emergencies, to the independent emergency clinic, to her own experiences with such a clinic, to her thesis that the independent clinic will soon replace the hospital emergency ward:

In the past several years, a new concept in the treatment of minor medical emergencies has emerged. The independent emergency clinic is devoted to the patient with minor problems. In the past, I have had the misfortune of seeking minor emergency care in the hospital emergency ward. Even though I always received excellent medical care, I did encounter some disadvantages. Upon visiting this new type of facility as both observer and patient, I found the medical care equal to the hospital without many of the disadvantages. The independent clinic may very well replace the hospital emergency ward in the treatment of minor medical emergencies in the future.

Even though you will move in the paragraph from general to specific, you should avoid beginning with too broad a generalization. The more general you are at first, the longer it will take you to get around to your thesis and the more you risk losing your audience's attention. A first sentence about the quality of health care in the United States today would have been much too broad for the introductory paragraph on independent clinics.

Begin with a sentence that is not so general that it fails to get the readers' attention but that gets them involved in your discussion. There are several effective methods of achieving this goal:

1. Use a relevant anecdote or personal narrative. The writer of the paragraph on independent clinics could have had a much more compelling introduction if she had recounted one of the times when she had to go to an emergency ward. The anecdote might include the "attention-getter" sentence, or it can follow a separate "attention-getter" sentence.
2. Ask a question. "In this day of rising medical costs, what can the consumer do to get the best emergency health care at the best price?"
3. Offer a startling opening statement: "Medical technology has advanced as never before, yet more than 20% of Americans cannot afford even the most basic health care."
4. Use an analogy or comparison. "Many health care professionals scornfully refer to the independent clinic as 'Doc-in-the-Box' or 'Quack Shack.'"
5. Offer an informal definition. Without referring to the dictionary (denotative) definition, state your own meaning of a term that will allow you to introduce your subject and its discussion.

No matter which of these methods you select, make certain your beginning is interesting and says something important and relevant to your subject. Make sure that your opening anecdote, analogy, or startling statistic fits smoothly into the rest of your introductory paragraph and leads logically to your thesis statement. Too many beginning writers come up with an attention-getting first sentence but then fail to tie it in smoothly to the rest of the opening paragraph; such a failure stops the reader cold.

The suggestions listed above certainly do not exhaust the possibilities. As you develop as a writer, you will discover other methods of introduction that might be even more suitable to your own taste, style, or technique. But never lose sight of the general purpose and function of the introductory paragraph.

Concluding Paragraph

While your final paragraph is not as important as your introductory paragraph, it is vital to your purpose because it is your last chance to make an impression on your audience. This paragraph should achieve at least the following goals:

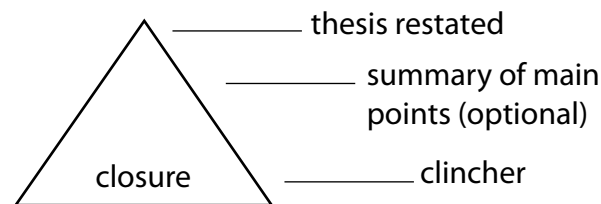
Restate the thesis but reword it this time;

Summarize the key topics presented in the discussion (This goal is optional. Inquire about your instructor's preference.);

Suggest larger implications than you could have offered before you presented all your evidence, especially in persuasive writing;

Give the audience a sense of closure. Do not just stop writing!

FIGURE 2-B



You want to realize that much of what your readers will remember about your discussion is what you present in your concluding paragraph. You have kept their attention long enough to bring them to your closing remarks; don't lose them now! Offer something that is memorable. What you have said in the body paragraphs has surely taken your readers beyond the boundaries of your thesis statement. Now you must relate to your audience what your purpose and thesis imply. Do not, however, claim more than your presentation justifies or you can deliver. Make your point and close. Never give the impression that you have simply stopped writing. The readers desire and expect a sense of closure—an end or conclusion. Never mention a new idea in your conclusion that could or should have been discussed earlier in the essay. Not much can be added at this point that might convince readers if it has not already been said in the body paragraphs. Close while you still have their attention, avoiding platitudes, overused generalities, or noble-sentiment endings. Sometimes the methods suggested earlier for opening your introductory paragraph can work for the closure of your final paragraph as well. Do not, however, merely repeat your opening sentence or your thesis. Make your closure interesting, provocative, informative, or inspiring. Whatever works for you, use it.

Titles

Most writers prefer to consider a title after they have completed their entire draft. Now that your subject and focus, your tone, and your audience and purpose are all clearly determined and you have the full picture of what you have said in the essay, you might try to capture the essence of this writing in a few words. After all, the title is the first thing your audience sees of your essay; therefore, why not establish an initial greeting that captures your whole discussion? Be accurate and specific in your title, providing more than the mere subject of your essay. The title should let the reader see the link between what it promises and what the essay delivers. You might include

a key word from the focus of your discussion, but never let a sentence be your title. Be consistent with the tone; a serious essay is undermined by a flippant title. In short, use your imagination and be creative; strive to get the attention of your audience. Instead of titling your essay “Good Teachers,” why not “How Good Teachers Treat their Students,” or better yet, “Good Teachers: Respect Begetting Respect.”

Revising the Draft

Revision is the third and final phase of constructing a good essay. Its importance lies in the fact that it is your final involvement with the essay; therefore, you need to make sure you have corrected all the problems and put the finishing touches to your draft. Many students neglect this “polishing” step for one reason or another, but the difference between an excellent essay and a mediocre one can depend on how thoroughly you proofread and revise your ideas.

Once you have completed your first draft, you should allow some time to pass before you begin to revise it. If you wait until you are fresh and a bit removed from your essay, you will be able to detect the problems in it more easily. Some writers have found that if they transfer their hand-written draft to a typed or printed form (or from screen to hard copy), they can more readily recognize and correct their errors. Typing allows you to view the essay more objectively. Because there are so many areas to be reviewed, you should plan to read your draft several times, determining in advance what specific potential problems you are searching for and correcting. You should also consider reading the draft aloud. You will be surprised to discover that your ears will detect an awkward sentence or phrase that your eyes overlooked.

Next, proofread your essay with the following checklist in mind. Examine your draft for effectiveness in these four areas: (1) subject matter, (2) organization, (3) style, and (4) mechanics and grammar.

ON THE NET

The Writing Process. MIT (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Sections on Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, and Editing. <http://web.mit.edu/writing/Writing_Process/writingprocess.html>

The Writing Process. Cleveland State University. The Writing Center. <<http://www.csuohio.edu/writingcenter/writproc.html>>

Starting the Writing Process. The On Line Writing Lab at Purdue. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/587/01/>>

Principles of Composition: The Writing Process. Capital Community College. <<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/composition/composition.htm>>

CHECKLIST

1. Subject matter
 - a. Are your examples valid? Do they contribute to the validity of your opinions?
 - b. Have you provided an adequate number of examples to develop each topic sentence?
 - c. Does each topic sentence directly relate to the thesis statement?
 - d. Do your paragraphs maintain unity? Have you taken out any material that is irrelevant, unnecessary, or vague?

The Writing Process

2. Organization

- a. Is your purpose clearly implied, and is your thesis statement specifically stated?
- b. Are your paragraphs in logical order?
- c. Do your transitions function effectively? Do your ideas flow smoothly and logically from one sentence to the next? from one paragraph to the next? Do your transitional devices eliminate vagueness?
- d. Does your introductory paragraph get the readers' attention, does it establish the context for your subject, and does your thesis statement have a limited subject and a restricted focus?
- e. Have you summarized your main points (if you are required to do so) and provided effective closure in your final paragraph?

3. Style

- a. Have you offered a variety of sentence constructions (i.e., simple, compound, complex sentences)? Could some sentences be combined through modification or subordination for more effective expression? Can you improve sentence structure for better emphasis or focus?
- b. Are your language and examples appropriate for your specified purpose and audience? Have you selected the best word for the meaning you wish to convey?
- c. Have you removed all "deadwood," those phrases or words that are unnecessary or fail to contribute directly to your purpose? Remember that more is not always better. For example, rather than saying "Due to the fact that," simply say "Because."
- d. Is your diction consistent with the tone you want to convey? Have you avoided jargon and slang expressions?
- e. Are your ideas clear, appropriate, and interesting?

4. Mechanics and Grammar

- a. Always check for the following:

spelling errors

subject-verb agreement errors

sentence fragments

fused sentences

comma splices

punctuation errors

pronoun reference agreement errors

dangling or misplaced modifiers

verb tense inconsistencies

clichés

Make minor corrections in the text of your draft if they can be done neatly; otherwise, retype or rewrite the essay.

- b. Is your handwritten draft legible? Is it neat? If not, make it so.
- c. If your essay is a research assignment, have you complied with the MLA style form? Consult your handbook for specific guidelines and procedures.
- d. Are you convinced that this essay represents you and your best ideas? Can you submit it to your instructor with pride and certainty? Remember that the final draft suggests

to your reader that it is the best you can do. Is it? If not, revise further. Rumor has it that when asked why he revised the last page of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times, Ernest Hemingway replied “Getting the words right.” This many revisions might be a little extreme for a freshman essay. Nevertheless, when you are satisfied with the essay and you feel you cannot improve upon it any more (and by now you are probably sick of the whole thing anyway), turn it in for evaluation, and feel confident that you have accomplished what you set out to do in the beginning.