

UNIT 3: WRITING SKILLS

English Degree Entrance Preparation compiled by Carrie Molinski & Sue Slessor.

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ACADEMIC WRITING

Introduction

What is academic writing?

Academic writing is the type of writing that is done for academic purposes. When students write academic papers of any kind, they express and present ideas in response to some type of prompt or assignment from their professor. This kind of writing follows some certain expectations when considering organization, sequencing, logic, elaboration, support, and format.

While there are many types of academic writing, for example, case studies, reviews, research papers, etc., this writing unit will focus on the elements and skills needed to write a short essay. These skills are transferrable to other types of academic writing, for instance to research essay writing, which is done in the EDE course.

Why is academic writing important?

The ability to write academically is central to success in post-secondary education and in many professional careers. Academic writing is important because it is an effective method to making ideas known in a way that can convince others (including your professor) that these ideas are solid, rational, and objective. Academic writing is powerful and can be used to make real changes in the world around us.

Learning Objectives

- Understand academic writing and its importance.
- Learn about common writing assignments and the steps involved in the writing process.
- Reflect on how writing will help you attain your goals as well as how it may be challenging at times.
- Learn where to get extra help in the writing process.

To Do List

- Read “Writing for College”, in *Communication Essentials for College*.
- Visit the “Georgian Resources & Services” from the Georgian College Library Website.
- Read “The Writing Process in 7 Steps” handout.

- Complete the Writing Centre Assignment in Blackboard.
- Complete the Reflection Assignment in Blackboard.

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WRITING FOR COLLEGE

Common Writing Assignments

College writing assignments serve a different purpose than the typical writing assignments you completed in high school. In high school, teachers generally focus on teaching you to write in a variety of modes and formats, including personal writing, expository writing, research papers, creative writing, and writing short answers and essays for exams. Over time, these assignments help you build a foundation of writing skills.

In college, many instructors will expect you to already have that foundation.

Your college communications courses will focus on writing for its own sake, helping you make the transition to college-level writing assignments. However, in most other college courses, writing assignments serve a different purpose. In those courses, you may use writing as one tool among many for learning how to think about a particular academic discipline.

Additionally, certain assignments teach you how to meet the expectations for professional writing in a given field. Depending on the class, you might be asked to write a lab report, a case study, a literary analysis, a business plan, or an account of a personal interview. You will need to learn and follow the standard conventions for those types of written products.

Finally, personal and creative writing assignments are less common in college than in high school. College courses emphasize expository writing, writing that explains or informs. Usually, expository writing assignments will incorporate outside research, too. Some classes will also require persuasive writing assignments in which you state and support your position on an issue. College instructors will hold you to a higher standard when it comes to supporting your ideas with reasons and evidence.

The following activity describes some of the most common types of college writing assignments. It includes minor, less formal assignments as well as major ones. Which specific assignments you encounter will depend on the courses you take and the learning objectives developed by your instructors.

Check Your Understanding: Common Types of Post Secondary Assignments

Common Types of Post Secondary Assignments (Text version)

Match the assignment types listed below to the numbered descriptions.

Assignment types: Literature review, Personal response paper, Problem solution paper, Critique, Research paper, Research journal, Position paper, Laboratory report, Summary, Case study

Descriptions:

1. Expresses and explains your response to a reading assignment, a provocative quote, or a specific issue; may be very brief (sometimes a page or less) or more in depth (eg: Writing about videos on ineffective management for a business course).
2. Restates the main points of a longer passage objectively and in your own words (eg: a one-page precis of a research article).
3. States and defends your position on an issue (often a controversial issue) (eg: an essay agreeing with or disagreeing with capital punishment).
4. Presents a problem, explains its causes, and proposes and explains a solution (eg: a plan for a crisis communication strategy).
5. States a thesis about a particular literary work and develops the thesis with evidence from the work and, sometimes, from additional sources (eg: an essay that explains the purpose of a poem).
6. Sums up available research findings on a particular topic (eg: an examination of all the studies about violent media).
7. Investigates a particular person, group, or event in depth for the purpose of drawing a larger conclusion from the analysis (eg: a report on the successful treatment of a cat with kidney disease).
8. Presents a laboratory experiment, including the hypothesis, methods of data collection, results, and conclusions (eg: the results of a study on nutrition in rats)
9. Records a student's ideas and findings during the course of a long-term research project (eg: a reflection of the process of research, maintained over time).
10. Presents a thesis and supports it with original research and/or other researchers' findings on the topic; can take several different formats depending on the subject area (eg: a deeply researched examination on the success of seat belt laws).

Check your answers:¹

Activity source: "Table 1.2 Replacement" by Brenna Clarke Gray is based on the content from "Chapter 1. Post-secondary Reading & Writing" In *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian HSP Edition* by Tara Harkoff & [author removed], licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Writing at Work

Part of managing your education is communicating well with others at your college. For instance, you might need to e-mail your instructor to request an office appointment or explain why you will need to miss a class. You might need to contact administrators with questions about your tuition or financial aid. Later, you might ask instructors to write recommendations on your behalf.

Treat these documents as professional communications. Address the recipient politely; state your question, problem, or request clearly; and use a formal, respectful tone. Doing so helps you make a positive impression and get a quicker response.

Attribution & References

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Notes

1. 1. Personal response paper, 2. Summary, 3. Position paper, 4. Problem solution paper, 5. Critique, 6. Literature Review, 7. Case study, 8. Lab report, 9. Research journal 10. Research paper

GEORGIAN RESOURCES & SERVICES

When writing, students sometimes face some challenges that make it difficult to move forward in the process. While this course is helpful, it may not include everything you need.

Here are some suggested sources of help:

1. Your teacher
2. Your peers
3. Georgian College's Writing Centre in the Georgian Library

Check out the details on the Georgian College webpage. There are a variety of services and resources available to Georgian College students!

Library Resources & Services

There are a variety of [library services \[New Tab\]](#) and resources available to Georgian College students!

Looking for resources for your assignments?

You can access the [Georgian Library and Academic Success \[New Tab\]](#) (<https://library.georgiancollege.ca/welcome-online>) website and [Page 1+ \[New Tab\]](#) (https://georgian.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01OCLS_GEORG:GEORG&mode=advanced) to search for resources for your assignments.

Getting ready to research

Video tutorials [\[New Tab\]](#) (<https://library.georgiancollege.ca/c.php?g=4009&p=3777540>) are available you to learn more about doing research, evaluating resources, plagiarism, and what peer-reviewed means.

Unsure of where to start your research?

Research Guides [New Tab] (<https://library.georgiancollege.ca/guides>) are available for program areas and can help students get a direction for their research.

Need help with research?

The library staff is here to help! Research help [New Tab] is available at the library online through askON or in-person at the library.

You can also contact the library via email at: library@georgiancollege.ca

Academic Success Services

Looking for writing help?

The Writing Centre [New Tab] (https://library.georgiancollege.ca/writing_centre) is here to help! The Writing Centre works to help students become more confident with their writing and APA; it is not an editing service.

The Language Help Centre [New Tab] (https://library.georgiancollege.ca/writing_centre/LanguageHelp) is also a great support which helps students to learn how to use proper grammar, write clear sentences and prepare a presentation.

APA Workshop videos [New Tab] (https://library.georgiancollege.ca/writing_centre/apa_screencasts) are available for quick reference and to help guide you with formatting your APA title page and paper, APA references and in-text citations and developing your understanding of APA.

The APA Guide [New Tab] (<https://library.georgiancollege.ca/citing>) can be used as reference to structure APA references and in-text citations.

Looking for tutoring services?

Tutoring services [New Tab] (<https://library.georgiancollege.ca/tutoring>) are available free to Georgian students.

Looking for math help?

The Math Centre [New Tab] (https://library.georgiancollege.ca/math_centre) is here to help! The Math Centre offers free math tutoring service for all Georgian students.

The Math Centre offers a number of math videos [New Tab] (<https://youtu.be/lj0M8yatwT4?list=PLiHDZlctTIUT8uVBle-QUgEPoS-hC8dgr>) to help students with a variety of math topics.

Summary

In this module, you were introduced to academic writing and its relevance in your academic career and beyond. Writing is an important way to communicate what you know in an organized manner. While writing is not quick or easy, there are structures, steps, and methods that can help, and you will learn about these in the upcoming modules. Remember to reach out for help from your teacher, peers, friends, and the Georgian Writing Centre when needed.

Attribution & References

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PRE-WRITING

Introduction

This module explains some of the techniques and strategies you can use before you begin writing paragraphs and essays, or any academic writing. Brainstorming, freewriting, idea-mapping, and journalist style questioning are explained, but there are other prewriting techniques that you will read about in the digital text provided (Communication Essentials for College).

Learning Objectives

- Understand the purposes of different prewriting methods such as brainstorming, mind-mapping, freewriting, and questioning.
- Learn to use prewriting methods to generate ideas and details that can be used in first draft writing.

To Do List

- Read “Apply Prewriting Models” in Communication Essentials for College.
- Read about freewriting, brainstorming and mind-mapping, and questioning.
- Read the document called “Better Brainstorming Tipsheet.”
- Complete the Brainstorming Assignment in Blackboard.
- Review the section on “Questioning.”
- Complete the Questioning Assignment in Blackboard.

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BRAINSTORMING TIP SHEET

Brainstorming

Brainstorming (Text Version)

Brainstorming is process of creative thinking that is used to generate ideas and/or solutions to a problem. Here are eight tips to help you improve your brainstorming process.

1. Define your topic. Be sure you understand your assignment. What have you been asked to write about and why? These questions will help you focus on the purpose of your writing.
2. Understand your audience. Who are your potential readers? Think about the type of information they will be looking for and what will interest them.
3. Become familiar with the topic. What do you already know? What are your immediate ideas and reactions to this topic? Make a note of your thoughts.
4. Determine what you need to find out. What areas are you still unfamiliar with? Create a list so your research is focused; this will also break the process down into smaller steps so that it's less time consuming.
5. Try to select a topic based on personal interest. Researching and writing your assignment will be more enjoyable if you choose to write about something you are interested in.
6. Plan your objective. What is the goal of your writing? If you are presenting research, choose a topic that you have great interest in and one that you can find sufficient information about. If you are arguing a point, choose a side you can strongly defend.
7. Talk about your writing. Telling someone about the topic of your writing allows you to hear your ideas and prompts you to clarify your points. Feedback from your listener can also help you refine your ideas.
8. Share your writing. Working with others often results in more good ideas than working on your own. If you are working on a group assignment, start by writing your ideas on a piece of paper, then pass the paper to each of your group members so they can write their ideas down.

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APPLY PREWRITING MODELS

Prewriting is the stage of the writing process during which you transfer your abstract thoughts into more concrete ideas in ink on paper (or in type on a computer screen). Although prewriting techniques can be helpful in all stages of the writing process, the following four strategies are best used when initially deciding on a topic:

1. Using experience and observations
2. Reading
3. Freewriting
4. Asking questions

At this stage in the writing process, it is OK if you choose a general topic. Later you will learn more prewriting strategies that will narrow the focus of the topic.

Choosing a Topic

In addition to understanding that writing is a process, writers also understand that choosing a good general topic for an assignment is an essential step. Sometimes your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, and other times your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own. A good topic not only covers what an assignment will be about but also fits the assignment's purpose and its audience.

In this chapter, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she prepares a piece of writing. You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself *why* you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and *for whom* you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter.

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

Using Experience and Observations

When selecting a topic, you may also want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

Tip

Have you seen an attention-grabbing story on your local news channel? Many current issues appear on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. These can all provide inspiration for your writing.

Reading

Reading plays a vital role in all the stages of the writing process, but it first figures in the development of ideas and topics. Different kinds of documents can help you choose a topic and also develop that topic. For example, a magazine advertising the latest research on the threat of global warming may catch your eye in the supermarket. This cover may interest you, and you may consider global warming as a topic. Or maybe a novel's courtroom drama sparks your curiosity of a particular lawsuit or legal controversy.

After you choose a topic, critical reading is essential to the development of a topic. While reading almost any document, you evaluate the author's point of view by thinking about their main idea and their support. When you judge the author's argument, you discover more about not only the author's opinion but also your own.

Tip

The steps in the writing process may seem time consuming at first, but following these steps will save you time in the future. The more you plan in the beginning by reading and using prewriting strategies, the less time you may spend writing and editing later because your ideas will develop more swiftly.

Prewriting strategies depend on your critical reading skills. Reading prewriting exercises (and outlines and drafts later in the writing process) will further develop your topic and ideas. As you continue to follow the writing process, you will see how Mariah uses critical reading skills to assess her own prewriting exercises.

Freewriting

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write freely about any topic for a set amount of time (usually three to five minutes). During the time limit, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you get stuck, just copy the same word or phrase over and over until you come up with a new thought.

Quickly recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic. When writing quickly, try not to doubt or question your ideas. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you even more.

Look at Mariah's example. The instructor allowed the members of the class to choose their own topics, and Mariah thought about her experiences as a communications major. She used this freewriting exercise to help her generate more concrete ideas from her own experience.

Last semester my favourite class was about mass media. We got to study radio and television. People say we watch too much television, and even though I try not to, I end up watching a few reality shows just to relax. Everyone has to relax! It's too hard to relax when something like the news (my husband watches all the time) is on because it's too scary now. Too much bad news, not enough good news. News. Newspapers I don't read as much anymore. I can get the headlines on my homepage when I check my email. E-mail could be considered mass media too these days. I used to go to the video store a few times a week before I started school, but now the only way I know what movies are current is to listen for the Oscar nominations. We have cable but we can't afford the movie channels, so I sometimes look at older movies late at night. UGH. A few of them get played again and again until you're sick of them. My husband thinks I'm crazy, but sometimes there are old black-and-whites on from the 1930s and '40s. I could never live my life in black-and-white. I like the home decorating shows and love how people use colour on their walls. Makes rooms look so bright. When we buy a home, if we ever can, I'll use lots of colour. Some of those shows even show you how to do major renovations by yourself. Knock down walls and everything. Not for me – or my husband. I'm handier than he is. I wonder if they could make a reality show about us!

Watch It: Freewriting

Watch Freewriting (2 minutes) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/400EMX0nnl4>)

Check Your Understanding: Freewriting

Freewrite about one event you have recently experienced. With this event in mind, write without stopping for five minutes. After you finish, read over what you wrote. Does anything stand out to you as a good general topic to write about?

Asking Questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? In everyday situations, you pose these kinds of questions to get more information. Who will be my partner for the project? When is the next meeting? Why is my car making that odd noise?

You seek the answers to these questions to gain knowledge, to better understand your daily experiences, and to plan for the future. Asking these types of questions will also help you with the writing process. As you choose your topic, answering these questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

When Mariah reread her freewriting notes, she found she had rambled and her thoughts were disjointed. She realized that the topic that interested her most was the one she started with: the media. She then decided to explore that topic by asking herself questions about it. Her purpose was to refine media into a topic she felt comfortable writing about. To see how asking questions can help you choose a topic, take a look at the following chart that Mariah completed to record her questions and answers. She asked herself the questions

that reporters and journalists use to gather information for their stories. The questions are often called the 5WH questions, after their initial letters.

Table 1 – Asking Questions

Questions	Answers
Who?	I use media. Students, teachers, parents, employers and employees—almost everyone uses media.
What?	The media can be a lot of things. Television, radio, email (I think), newspapers, magazines, books.
Where?	The media is almost everywhere now. It’s in homes, at work, in cars, even on cell phones!
When?	Media has been around for a long time, but seems a lot more important now.
When?	Hmm. This is a good question. I don’t know why there is mass media. Maybe we have it because we have the technology now. Or people live far away from their families and they have to stay in touch.
How?	Well, media is possible because of the technology inventions, but I don’t know how they all work!

Tip

Prewriting is very purpose driven; it does not follow a set of hard-and-fast rules. The purpose of prewriting is to find and explore ideas so that you will be prepared to write. A prewriting technique like asking questions can help you both find a topic and explore it. Freewriting may not seem to fit your thinking process, but keep an open mind. It may work better than you think. Perhaps brainstorming a list of topics might fit your personal style. Mariah found freewriting and asking questions to be fruitful strategies to use. In your own prewriting, use the 5WH questions in any way that benefits your planning.

Check Your Understanding: Answering the 5WH questions

Choose a general topic idea from the prewriting you completed in “Exercise 1” of this chapter. Then read each question and use your own paper to answer the 5WH questions. As with Mariah when

she explored her writing topic for more detail, it is OK if you do not know all the answers. If you do not know an answer, use your own opinion to speculate, or guess. You may also use factual information from books or articles you previously read on your topic. Later in the chapter, you will read about additional ways (like searching the Internet) to answer your questions and explore your guesses.

5WH Questions

1. Who?
2. What?
3. Where?
4. When?
5. Why?
6. How?

Watch It: Choosing a Research Topic

Watch Tutorial: Choosing a research paper topic (4 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/ZiF34aNdkzM>)

Now that you have completed some of the prewriting exercises, you may feel less anxious about starting a paper from scratch. With some ideas down on paper (or saved on a computer), writers are often more comfortable continuing the writing process. After identifying a good general topic, you, too, are ready to continue the process.

Tip

You may find that you need to adjust your topic as you move through the writing stages (and as you

complete the exercises in this chapter). If the topic you have chosen is not working, you can repeat the prewriting activities until you find a better one.

More Prewriting Techniques

The prewriting techniques of freewriting and asking questions helped Mariah think more about her topic, but the following prewriting strategies can help her (and you) narrow the focus of the topic:

- Brainstorming
- Idea mapping
- Searching the Internet

Narrowing the Focus

Narrowing the focus means breaking up the topic into subtopics, or more specific points. Generating lots of subtopics will help you eventually select the ones that fit the assignment and appeal to you and your audience.

After rereading her syllabus, Mariah realized her general topic, mass media, is too broad for her class's short paper requirement. Three pages are not enough to cover all the concerns in mass media today. Mariah also realized that although her readers are other communications majors who are interested in the topic, they may want to read a paper about a particular issue in mass media.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is similar to list making. You can make a list on your own or in a group with your classmates. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer document) and write your general topic across the top. Underneath your topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and the list items as things that fit in that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next, creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic.

The following is Mariah's brainstorming list:

Mass media

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Broadcasting
- Radio
- Television
- DVD
- Gaming/video games
- Internet
- Cell phones
- Smart phones
- Text messages
- Tiny cameras
- GPS

From this list, Mariah could narrow her focus to a particular technology under the broad category of mass media.

Idea Mapping

Idea mapping allows you to visualize your ideas on paper using circles, lines, and arrows. This technique is also known as clustering because ideas are broken down and clustered, or grouped together. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using idea mapping, you might discover interesting connections between topics that you had not thought of before.

To create an idea map, start with your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Then write specific ideas around it and use lines or arrows to connect them together. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.

In addition to brainstorming, Mariah tried idea mapping. Review the following idea map that Mariah created:



Figure 1. Mariah’s image map starts with Mass media, and branches off to radio and TV. Radio branches off to music, downloads vs. CDs and piracy. TV branches off to DVDs and Blu-ray as well as cable, digital recording and high definition.

Notice Mariah’s largest circle contains her general topic, mass media. Then, the general topic branches into two subtopics written in two smaller circles: television and radio. The subtopic television branches into even more specific topics: cable and DVDs. From there, Mariah drew more circles and wrote more specific ideas: high definition and digital recording from cable and Blu-ray from DVDs. The radio topic led Mariah to draw connections between music, downloads versus CDs, and, finally, piracy.

From this idea map, Mariah saw she could consider narrowing the focus of her mass media topic to the more specific topic of music piracy.

Watch It: Brainstorming and Prewriting

Watch Brainstorming and prewriting (3:32 minutes) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/isznFoDh3eg>)

Searching the Internet

Using search engines on the internet is a good way to see what kinds of websites are available on your topic.

Writers use search engines not only to understand more about the topic's specific issues but also to get better acquainted with their audience.

When you search the internet, type some key words from your broad topic or words from your narrowed focus into your browser's search engine (many good general and specialized search engines are available for you to try). Then look over the results for relevant and interesting articles.

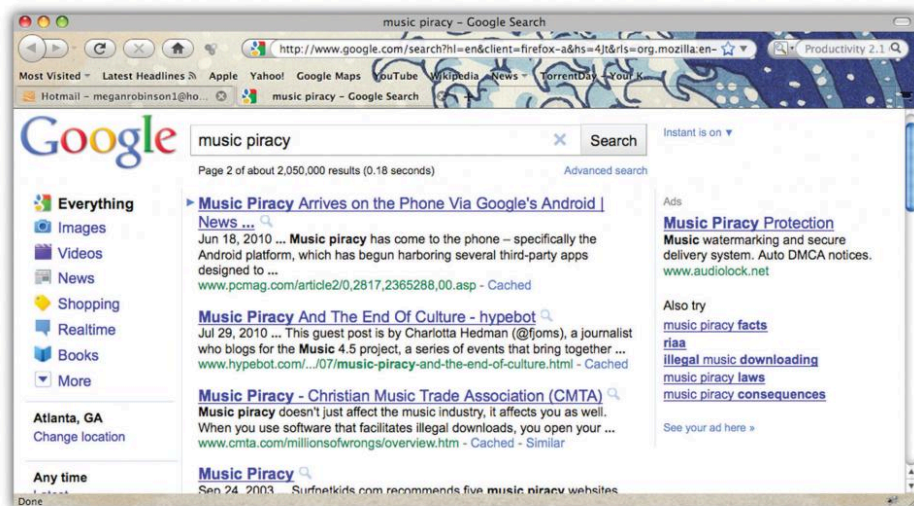
Results from an internet search show writers the following information:

- Who is talking about the topic
- How the topic is being discussed
- What specific points are currently being discussed about the topic

Tip

If the search engine results are not what you are looking for, revise your key words and search again. Some search engines also offer suggestions for related searches that may give you better results.

Mariah typed the words *music piracy* from her idea map into Google.



Retrieved from
<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=4Jt&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&q=music+piracy&start=10&sa=N!>>

Figure 2. Mariah's Google search revealed websites about music piracy from magazines, hypebot and trade associations.

Not all the results online search engines return will be useful or reliable. Give careful consideration to the reliability of an online source before selecting a topic based on it. Remember that factual information can be verified in other sources, both online and in print.

The results from Mariah’s search included websites from university publications, personal blogs, online news sources, and lots of legal cases sponsored by the recording industry. Reading legal jargon made Mariah uncomfortable with the results, so she decided to look further. Reviewing her map, she realized that she was more interested in consumer aspects of mass media, so she refocused her search to media technology and the sometimes confusing array of expensive products that fill electronics stores. Now, Mariah considers a paper topic on the products that have fed the mass media boom in everyday lives.

Check Your Understanding: Prewriting

In the last exercise, you chose a possible topic and explored it by answering questions about it using the 5WH questions. However, this topic may still be too broad. In this exercise, choose and complete one of the prewriting strategies to narrow the focus. Use either brainstorming, idea mapping, or searching the Internet.

Prewriting strategies are a vital first step in the writing process. First, they help you first choose a broad topic and then they help you narrow the focus of the topic to a more specific idea. An effective topic ensures that you are ready for the next step.

Topic Checklist—Developing a Good Topic

The following checklist can help you decide if your narrowed topic is a good topic for your assignment:

- Am I interested in this topic?
- Would my audience be interested?
- Do I have prior knowledge or experience with this topic? If so, would I be comfortable exploring this topic and sharing my experiences?

- Do I want to learn more about this topic?
- Is this topic specific?
- Does it fit the length of the assignment?

With your narrowed focus in mind, answer the bulleted questions in the checklist for developing a good topic. If you can answer “yes” to all the questions, write your topic on the line. If you answer “no” to any of the questions, think about another topic or adjust the one you have and try the prewriting strategies again.

My narrowed topic: _____

Attribution & References

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THE WRITING PROCESS IN 7 STEPS

Below is an infographic that explains the writing process in 7 steps. It is attached below if you would like to save or print it. Read though the steps, and think about which ones will be the most enjoyable for you. Do you see any steps that might be challenging? Why do think so?

The Writing Process in 7 Steps

The Writing Process in 7 Steps (Text version)

1. **Prewriting:** Brainstorming, mind-mapping, researching, questioning, and thinking are the first steps in the writing process. These are referred to as prewriting techniques or methods. Also, make sure you understand the assignment.
2. **Outlining and Organizing:** After ideas are generated, they can be organized to create an outline for a written assignment like an essay or research paper. A thesis can start to be developed and paragraph topics selected. Research can be done if necessary.
3. **First Draft:** Next, a first draft can be started. This is the first version of the written piece. It can be done with pen and paper, but usually the computer is ideal since changes can be made easily and it can be shared if needed.
4. **Revision:** Once the first version is drafted, major revisions can take place. This may involve subtracting substantial sections, reordering paragraphs, or adding more content. After the revision the second draft is created.
5. **Editing:** The second draft needs to be fine-tuned by checking for spelling and grammar errors as well as structural problems or formatting issues. Double-check that you have followed instructions and included all the elements.
6. **Sharing:** If possible, have a peer or mentor read your final draft to get some input. Most colleges, including Georgian, have [Writing Centres \[New Tab\]](#) where you can get some input at any stage of the writing process.
7. **Submission:** Finally, submit your writing for evaluation or prepare it for publishing. Give yourself a pat on the back for completing the writing process. It is a lot of work but very satisfying to finish a good piece of writing.

Source: "Writing Process in 7 Steps" by Joanne Pineda, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

Summary

This module explained some of the techniques and strategies that you can use before you begin writing paragraphs and essays, or any academic writing. Brainstorming, freewriting, idea-mapping, and journalist style questioning will be used in the next module as you start to write some paragraphs.

Attribution & References

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PARAGRAPHS

Introduction

Now that you have learned some prewriting methods to generate topics and ideas, you will learn how to structure these into paragraphs. Paragraphs are about one central idea and can be just one sentence long, but for the purposes of academic writing, they are usually 8 to 12 sentences in length. Paragraphs can stand alone, but in academic writing, multiple paragraphs are used to write compositions, for example, an essay, research paper, or a review.

In this module you will learn about the typical structure and organization of a paragraph in academic writing. You will practice your skills by completing paragraph outlines, rough drafts, and final drafts of your paragraphs.

Learning Objectives

- Discover the elements and organization of an academic paragraph.
- Identify different types of writing: descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive.
- Use outlines and organization tools to create a first draft of a paragraph.
- Write a first draft of a paragraph by following the first three steps of the writing process.
- Use APA 7 (American Psychological Association) to format a paper and create a title/cover page.
- Write a final draft of a paragraph by following all seven steps of the writing process.

To Do List

- Read “Developing Paragraphs” in *Communication Essentials for College*.
- Explore “Descriptive, Narrative, Expository, Persuasive Paragraphs”.
- Review the sample APA sample cover page and sample paragraph assignment.
- Complete the First Draft Assignment in Blackboard.
- Complete the Final Draft Assignment in Blackboard.

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DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

Now that you have identified common purposes for writing and learned how to select appropriate content for a particular audience, you can think about the structure of a paragraph in greater detail. Composing an effective paragraph requires a method similar to building a house. You may have the finest content, or materials, but if you do not arrange them in the correct order, the final product will not hold together very well.

A strong paragraph contains three distinct components:

1. **Topic sentence:** the topic sentence is the main idea of the paragraph.
2. **Body:** the body is composed of the supporting sentences that develop the main point.
3. **Conclusion:** the conclusion is the final sentence that summarizes the main point.

The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay (see [Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement](#) for more information about thesis statements) and guides the reader by signposting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.

This section covers the major components of a paragraph and examines how to develop an effective topic sentence.

Developing a Topic Sentence

Pick up any newspaper or magazine and read the first sentence of an article. Are you fairly confident that you know what the rest of the article is about? If so, you have likely read the topic sentence.

An effective topic sentence combines a main idea with the writer's personal attitude or opinion. It serves to orient the reader and provides an indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph. Read the following example.

Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many provinces.

This topic sentence declares a favourable position for standardizing math and English education. After reading this sentence, a reader might reasonably expect the writer to provide supporting details and facts as to why standardizing math and English education might improve student learning in many provinces. If the purpose of the essay is actually to evaluate education in only one particular province, or to discuss math or English education specifically, then the topic sentence is misleading.

Tip

When writing an essay draft, allow a friend or colleague to read the opening line of your first paragraph. Ask your reader to predict what your paper will be about. If they are unable to guess your topic accurately, you should consider revising your topic sentence so that it clearly defines your purpose in writing.

Main Idea versus Controlling Idea

Topic sentences contain both a main idea (the subject, or topic that the writer is discussing) and a controlling idea (the writer's specific stance on that subject). Just as a thesis statement includes an idea that controls a document's focus, a topic sentence must also contain a controlling idea to direct the paragraph. Different writers may use the same main idea but can steer their paragraph in a number of different directions according to their stance on the subject. Read the following examples.

- Marijuana is a destructive influence on teens and causes long-term brain damage.
- The antinausea properties in marijuana are a lifeline for many cancer patients.
- Legalized marijuana creates a higher demand for Class A and Class B drugs.

Although the main idea—marijuana—is the same in all three topic sentences, the controlling idea differs depending on the writer's viewpoint.

Check Your Understanding: Identifying Main & Controlling Ideas

Identifying Main & Controlling Ideas (Text version)

Identify the **main idea** in the following topic sentences.

1. Raising the legal driving age to 21 would decrease road traffic accidents.
2. Exercising three times a week is the only way to maintain good physical health
3. Dog owners should be prohibited from taking their pets on public beaches.

Identify the **controlling idea** in the following topic sentence.

4. Sexism and racism are still rampant in today's workplace.
5. Owning a business is the only way to achieve financial success.

Check your answers: ¹

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Characteristics of a Good Topic Sentence

Five characteristics define a good topic sentence:

1. A good topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.

Weak example. People rarely give firefighters the credit they deserve for such a physically and emotionally demanding job. (The paragraph is about a specific incident that involved firefighters; therefore, this topic sentence is too general.)

Stronger example. During the October riots, Unit 3B went beyond the call of duty. (This topic sentence is more specific and indicates that the paragraph will contain information about a particular incident involving Unit 3B.)

2. A good topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea or opinion.

Weak example. In this paper, I am going to discuss the rising suicide rate among young professionals. (This topic sentence provides a main idea, but it does not present a controlling idea, or thesis.)

Stronger example. The rising suicide rate among young professionals is a cause for immediate concern. (This topic sentence presents the writer's opinion on the subject of rising suicide rates among young professionals.)

3. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.

Weak example. In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or nonacademic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but both are buried beneath the confusing sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary. These obstacles make it difficult for the reader to follow.)

Stronger example. Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline. (This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow.)

4. A good topic sentence does not include supporting details.

Weak example. Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year. (This topic sentence includes a supporting detail that should be included later in the paragraph to back up the main point.)

Stronger example. Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for many reasons. (This topic sentence omits the additional supporting detail so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph.)

5. A good topic sentence engages the reader by using interesting vocabulary. **Weak example.** The military deserves better equipment. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but the language is bland and unexciting.) **Stronger example.** The appalling lack of resources provided to the military is outrageous and requires our immediate attention. (This topic sentence reiterates the same idea and controlling thesis, but adjectives such as *appalling* and *immediate* better engage the reader. These words also indicate the writer's tone.)

Watch It: How to Write a Topic Sentence

Watch How to write a topic sentence (2 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/2R-9T9TgGnE>)

Check Your Understanding: Topic Sentence strength

Read each of the examples below and decide whether it is a strong or weak topic sentence based on the criteria listed above. Then click on the sentence to find out if you are on the right track.

The growth of e-sports will benefit parks and recreation departments by increasing the use of services by hard to reach audiences.

Weak! This topic sentence has both a topic (the growth of e-sports) and a controlling idea (it will benefit parks and recreation departments), but it also includes unnecessary supporting detail. The way e-sports will be a benefit should be explained in the paragraph's body. It does not need to be stated in the topic sentence itself.

Contrary to common fears, automation creates new jobs, many of which are far more glamorous than their predecessors.

Strong! This topic sentence contains a topic (automation), a controlling idea (it creates new jobs), and it uses interesting and engaging vocabulary that makes the reader want to know more.

A key factor of McDonald's' success has been the company's worldwide creation of employment opportunity.

Strong! This topic sentence leaves no doubt what the paragraph will discuss. It will explain how McDonald's has been successful (topic) in part because of the creation of employment opportunity (controlling idea). Not a lot of room for confusion here!

Periodontal disease effects the gums and tissues surrounding the teeth, and people who use tobacco may present with bleeding and gum pain after eating, brushing and flossing.

Weak! This topic sentence is not very easy to follow. It has a topic (periodontal disease) and a controlling idea (the disease affects tobacco users), but the idea is not clearly stated nor connected to the topic. It could be clarified by saying, “Periodontal disease is prevalent in tobacco users.”

This paragraph will discuss the history of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Weak! This sentence has a topic (the history of the Commission) but not a controlling idea. What point is the paragraph going to make? Using a phrase like “This paragraph will...” or “In this essay, I will...” means that a point has not been established. Improve the sentence by saying something like, “Establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was an important first step in healing the trauma created by the residential school system.”

Activity Source: “Is the topic sentence WEAK or STRONG?” by Emily Cramer is licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Check Your Understanding: Effective Topic Sentences

Effective Topic Sentences (Text version)

Choose the most effective topic sentence from the following sentence pairs.

1. a. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the Liberals need to listen to public opinion. OR
b. This paper will discuss the likelihood of the Liberals winning the next election.
2. a. Union workers are crippling the economy because companies are unable to remain competitive as a result of added financial pressure. OR
b. The unrealistic demands of union workers are crippling the economy for three main reasons.
3. a. Authors are losing money as a result of technological advances. OR

- b. The introduction of new technology will devastate the literary world.
4. a. This essay will consider whether talent is required in the rap music industry. OR
b. Rap music is produced by untalented individuals with oversized egos.

Check your answers:²

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Check Your Understanding: Creating Topic Sentences

Using the tips on developing effective topic sentences in this section, create a topic sentence on each of the following subjects. Remember to include a controlling idea as well as a main idea. Write your responses on your own sheet of paper.

1. An endangered species
2. The cost of fuel
3. The legal drinking age
4. A controversial film or novel

Writing at Work

When creating a workplace document, use the “top-down” approach—keep the topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph so that readers immediately understand the gist of the message. This method saves busy colleagues precious time and effort trying to figure out the main points and relevant details.

Headings are another helpful tool. In a text-heavy document, break up each paragraph with

individual headings. These serve as useful navigation aids, enabling colleagues to skim through the document and locate paragraphs that are relevant to them.

Developing Paragraphs That Use Topic Sentences, Supporting Ideas, and Transitions Effectively

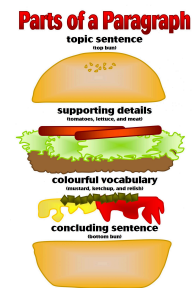
Learning how to develop a good topic sentence is the first step toward writing a solid paragraph. Once you have composed your topic sentence, you have a guideline for the rest of the paragraph. To complete the paragraph, a writer must support the topic sentence with additional information and summarize the main point with a concluding sentence.

This section identifies the three major structural parts of a paragraph and covers how to develop a paragraph using transitional words and phrases.

Identifying Parts of a Paragraph

An effective paragraph contains three main parts: a topic sentence, the body, and the concluding sentence. A topic sentence is often the first sentence of a paragraph. This chapter has already discussed its purpose—to express a main idea combined with the writer’s attitude about the subject. The body of the paragraph usually follows, containing supporting details. Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It reminds the reader of the main point by restating it in different words.

Figure 2.2 Paragraph Structure Graphic Organizer



Imagine the parts as a burger: topic sentence is the top bun, supporting details are the burger toppings (lettuce, tomato, meat), colourful vocabulary are the condiments (mustard, ketchup, relish), and concluding sentence is the bottom bun. Photo (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vblibrary/6123923301/in/gallery-78108369@N07-72157632019968814/>) by Enokson is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

Paragraph Structure Graphic Organizer

Topic Sentence
(main idea + personal opinion)

Body

Supporting Sentence

Supporting Sentence

Supporting Sentence

Supporting Sentence

Conclusion
(summary of main idea + personal opinion)

Concluding Sentence

Download/Access a text version of this worksheet [Word file] (<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/2886/2023/03/COMMESS-2.5-ParagraphStructureOrganizer.docx>)

Read the following paragraph. The topic sentence (the first one in the paragraph) is underlined for you.

After reading the new TV guide this week I had just one thought—why are we still being bombarded with reality shows? This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of viewer favourites, we are to be cursed with yet another mindless creation. *Prisoner* follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for the purposes of this fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums associated with reality television. I dread to think what producers will come up with next season, but if

any of them are reading this blog—stop it! We've had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!

It tells the reader that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer's distaste for these shows through the use of the word *bombarded*.

Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about a specific reality television show. The final sentence is the concluding sentence. It reiterates the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows by using different words from the topic sentence.

Paragraphs that begin with the topic sentence move from the general to the specific. They open with a general statement about a subject (reality shows) and then discuss specific examples (the reality show *Prisoner*). Most academic essays contain the topic sentence at the beginning of the first paragraph.

Now take a look at the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

Last year, a cat traveled 130 kilometers to reach its family, who had moved to another province and left their pet behind. Even though it had never been to their new home, the cat was able to track down its former owners. A dog in my neighborhood can predict when its master is about to have a seizure. It makes sure that he does not hurt himself during an epileptic fit. Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.

The last sentence of this paragraph, “Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.”, is the topic sentence. It draws on specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures) and then makes a general statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (animals’ senses are better than humans’). In this case, the supporting sentences are placed before the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is the same as the topic sentence.

This technique is frequently used in *persuasive* writing. The writer produces detailed examples as evidence to back up his or her point, preparing the reader to accept the concluding topic sentence as the truth.

Sometimes, the topic sentence appears in the middle of a paragraph. Read the following example.

For many years, I suffered from severe anxiety every time I took an exam. Hours before the exam, my heart would begin pounding, my legs would shake, and sometimes I would become physically unable to move. **Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety—breathing exercises.** It seems so simple, but by doing just a few breathing exercises a couple of hours before an exam, I gradually got my anxiety under control. The exercises help slow my heart rate and make me feel less anxious. Better yet, they require no pills, no equipment, and very little time. It's amazing how just breathing correctly has helped me learn to manage my anxiety symptoms.

In this paragraph, the sentence in bold, “Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety—breathing exercises.”, is the topic sentence. It expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to their main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how the writer used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The last sentence is the concluding sentence and restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing. If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through the paragraph carefully to make sure that it contains only one major topic.

Check Your Understanding: Identifying Topic, Supporting & Concluding Sentences

Identifying Topic, Supporting & Concluding Sentences (Text version)

Read the following passage:

The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a minuscule amount of water. Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats

into moisture. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

1. Identify the topic sentence:

- a. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating.
- b. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

2. Identify one example of a supporting sentence:

- a. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.
- b. The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt.
- c. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool.

3. Identify the concluding sentences:

- a. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a minuscule amount of water.
- b. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Check your answers:³

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Supporting Sentences

If you think of a paragraph as a hamburger, the supporting sentences are the meat inside the bun. They make up the body of the paragraph by explaining, proving, or enhancing the controlling idea in the topic sentence. Most paragraphs contain three to six supporting sentences depending on the audience and purpose for writing. A supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

- **Reason Sentence:** The refusal of the baby boom generation to retire is contributing to the current lack of available jobs.

- **Fact**

Sentence: Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.

- **Statistic**

Sentence: Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in the United States.

- **Quotation Sentence:** “We will not allow this situation to continue,” stated Senator Johns.

- **Example Sentence:** Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.

The type of supporting sentence you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. Read the following example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. **(Topic sentence)**

First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. **(Supporting sentence 1: statistic)**

Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. **(Supporting sentence 2: fact)**

Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. **(Supporting sentence 3: reason)**

Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. **(Supporting sentence 4: example)**

“It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas powered vehicles I’ve owned.” **(Supporting sentence 5: quotation)**

Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future. **(Concluding sentence)**

To find information for your supporting sentences, you might consider using one of the following sources:

- Reference book
- Website
- Biography/autobiography
- Map
- Dictionary

- Newspaper/magazine
- Interview
- Previous experience
- Personal research

To read more about sources and research, see “[Unit 4: Research Skills](#)”.

Tip

When searching for information on the internet, remember that some websites are more reliable than others. Websites ending in .gov or .edu are generally more reliable than websites ending in .com or .org. Wikis and blogs are not reliable sources of information because they are subject to inaccuracies.

Concluding Sentences

An effective concluding sentence draws together all the ideas you have raised in your paragraph. It reminds readers of the main point—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Using the hamburger example, the top bun (the topic sentence) and the bottom bun (the concluding sentence) are very similar. They frame the “meat” or body of the paragraph. Compare the topic sentence and concluding sentence from the previous example:

Topic sentence: There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Concluding sentence: Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future.

Notice the use of the synonyms *advantages* and *benefits*. The concluding sentence reiterates the idea that owning a hybrid is advantageous without using the exact same words. It also summarizes two examples of the advantages covered in the supporting sentences: low running costs and environmental benefits.

You should avoid introducing any new ideas into your concluding sentence. A conclusion is intended to

provide the reader with a sense of completion. Introducing a subject that is not covered in the paragraph will confuse the reader and weaken your writing.

A concluding sentence may do any of the following:

- Restate the main idea.

Example: Childhood obesity is a growing problem in Canada.

- Summarize the key points in the paragraph.

Example: A lack of healthy choices, poor parenting, and an addiction to video games are among the many factors contributing to childhood obesity.

- Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.

Example: These statistics indicate that unless we take action, childhood obesity rates will continue to rise.

- Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.

Example: Based on this research, more than 60 percent of children in Canada will be morbidly obese by the year 2030 unless we take evasive action.

- Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.

Example: Childhood obesity is an entirely preventable tragedy.

Check Your Understanding: Self Practice

Check Your Understanding: Self Practice (Text version)

1. The concluding sentence is a good place to introduce a new idea, because readers find that engaging. True or False?
2. Fill in the missing words to complete the metaphor.
If a paragraph is a hamburger, the topic sentence is the (a)_____ bun and the concluding sentence is the (b)_____ bun. This makes the body of the paragraph the (c) _____ (unless you prefer a veggie burger).
3. Match the type of concluding sentence (A) to the best example (B)
 - A. Type of sentence:
 - a. Restate the main idea.

- b. Summarize the key points in the paragraph
- c. Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.
- d. Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.
- e. Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.

B. Examples:

- 1. These examples from recent research show how criminalizing drugs has not protected communities or served individual drug users.
- 2. The war on drugs has not resulted in a reduction in suffering.
- 3. Given all we know about outcome of failed drug policy, the next step is to consider decriminalization.
- 4. The war on drugs has damaged society because it has resulted in a more dangerous drug supply and a criminalized population.
- 5. The traumas and violence inflicted by the war on drugs could have been prevented.

Check your answers:⁴

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Transitions

A strong paragraph moves seamlessly from the topic sentence into the supporting sentences and on to the concluding sentence. To help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another, writers use transitional words and phrases. A transition is a connecting word that describes a relationship between ideas. Take another look at the earlier example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the litre than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil

fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. “It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I’ve owned.” Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future.

Each of the underlined words (*first*, *second* and *because*) is a transition word. Words such as *first* and *second* are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer’s ideas by showing that he or she has another point to make in support of the topic sentence. Other transition words that show order include *third*, *also*, and *furthermore*.

The transition word *because* is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they do not require gas). Other transition words of consequence include *as a result*, *so that*, *since*, or *for this reason*.

To include a summarizing transition in her concluding sentence, the writer could rewrite the final sentence as follows:

In conclusion, given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future.

The following lists provide some useful transition words to connect supporting sentences and concluding sentences.

Examples of transition words

For Supporting Sentences:

- above all, but, for instance, in particular, moreover, subsequently, also, conversely, furthermore, later on, nevertheless, therefore, aside from, correspondingly, however, likewise, on one hand, to begin with, at the same time, for example, in addition, meanwhile, on the contrary...

For Concluding sentences:

- after all, all things considered, in brief, in summary, on the whole, to sum up, all in all, finally, in conclusion, on balance, thus...

Check Your Understanding: Practice What You've Learned About Paragraphs

Practice What You've Learned About Paragraphs (Text version)

For this exercise, you will draft a paragraph after spending some time reflecting on the criteria for good paragraphs that you learned about in this chapter. You can choose any topic you like for your paragraph—maybe there's something you're thinking about for this or another class that would benefit from some time to do some writing about—but if you need help with a prompt, consider writing about one of the issues in this chapter or answer one of these questions:

- Can online friendships be as meaningful as offline ones?
- Is college or university always the right decision for people leaving high school?
- What can people do to manage their stress levels?

You don't need to do research to approach this exercise (though you are welcome to, if you wish!). Instead, your own personal experience will be sufficient here.

Remember:

- The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay and guides the reader by signposting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.
- Most paragraphs contain three to six supporting sentences depending on the audience and purpose for writing.
- An effective concluding sentence draws together all the ideas you have raised in your paragraph. It reminds readers of the main point—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Using the hamburger example, the top bun (the topic sentence) and the bottom bun (the concluding sentence) are very similar. They frame the “meat” or body of the paragraph.

Key paragraph details

Here you will reflect on what makes a good paragraph before you take a run at it yourself.

Remember, a good paragraph has the following criteria:

- A topic sentence (that makes a claim/states an opinion!).
- A concluding sentence.
- Appropriate supporting details.
- Use of transitional words/phrases.

In the exercise below, click on the “criteria” button and make notes for yourself about how you can address the key criteria for paragraphs. Try make four points: one for each key element your paragraph needs to have.

Paragraph composition

Based on the criteria you outlined on the previous page, draft a paragraph.

Review criteria and details

Rate how well you’ve achieved each of the criteria, and reflect on how you can strengthen the thesis statement.

- Doesn’t meet criteria.
- Meets criteria partially.
- Strongly meets criteria.

Save your file and consider sharing with a classmate for feedback.

Activity source: “Self Practice 3.14” by Brenna Clarke Gray (H5P Adaptation) *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Harkoff & [author removed], licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Writing at Work

Transitional words and phrases are useful tools to incorporate into workplace documents. They guide the reader through the document, clarifying relationships between sentences and paragraphs so that the reader understands why they have been written in that particular order.

For example, when writing an instructional memo, it may be helpful to consider the following transitional words and phrases: *before you begin, first, next, then, finally, after you have completed*. Using these transitions as a template to write your memo will provide readers with clear, logical instructions about a particular process and the order in which steps are supposed to be completed

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this section is adapted from “[2.5 – Effective Means For Writing A Paragraph](#)” In *Communication Essentials for College* by Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). An adaptation from “[6.2 Effective means for writing a paragraph \(https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/chapter/6-2-effective-means-for-writing-a-paragraph/\)](#)” In *Writing for Success* ([https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/](#)) by University of Minnesota licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). / Adaptations include updates for accessibility and images for visual appeal.

Notes

- | | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | 1. Legal driving age | 5. Financial success | meat/patty, 3. (c), |
| | 2. Exercising | 6. 1. a, 2. a, 3. a, 4. b | 3. 1 (d), 2. (a), (b), 5. (e). |
| | 3. Dog owners | 7. 1. a, 2.c, 3. b | |
| | 4. Still rampant in today's workplaces | 8. 1. False 2. a. top, b. bottom, c. | |

DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS

A descriptive paragraph provides a vibrant experience for the reader through vivid language and descriptions of something. Unlike narrative paragraphs, which must include personal thoughts, feelings, and growth, descriptive paragraphs do not need to be personal in nature. Instead, descriptive paragraphs must focus on vividly and objectively describing something to the reader. In order to provide this vivid detail, the writer must use language that appeals to the reader's five senses: sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. To appeal to these senses, the writer must use descriptive language, usually in the form of adjectives, that describes the sensations felt by the senses. For instance, examine the differences between the descriptions below:

Sentence 1: The tree was tall and green.

Sentence 2: The soft and damp pink flowers of the dogwood tree smelled sweet in the cool spring air as the wind whistled through its yellow-green leaves.

How do these descriptions compare? If these two sentences both describe the same tree, which sentence provides a better picture for the reader? Why?

While the first description does provide some detail (that the tree is both “tall” and “green”), it does not help the reader picture the tree. Saying that the tree is “tall” and “green” does not help separate the tree being described from any other tree. The second sentence, however, provides the reader with descriptive information that makes the tree unique. Unlike the writer of the first sentence, who only vaguely describes how the tree looked, the writer of the second sentence appeals to at least four of the reader's five senses. This writer describes how the tree feels (soft and damp), how the tree smells (sweet), how the tree sounds (it whistles), and how the tree looks (pink and yellow-green). Through these descriptions, the reader can see, hear, feel, and smell the tree while reading the sentence. However, in some instances, not all of the senses will be applicable for the description. In this case, most descriptions of trees would not include a sense of how the tree tasted, especially when so many trees are inedible or poisonous!

Table 1: Words associated with each of the five senses

See	Hear	Smell	Taste	Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> colours (green, blue, red) contrast (light vs. dark) depth (near vs. far) texture (rough, pebbly, smooth) shape (round, square, triangular) dimensions (height, width, length) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> loud grating metallic atonal melodic euphonious discordant screeching gravelly harmonious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sweet pungent acrid delicious disgusting appetizing fresh stale fruity tantalizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> delicious sour sweet savoury salty spoiled bitter earthy spicy bland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> soft creamy rubbery firm cool/hot unctuous porous/smooth knobby sticky dry/moist

Providing good details in a descriptive paragraph also rests on the idea that a writer must *show* and not *tell* the reader. While good details in a paragraph are important, the most essential part of a descriptive paragraph is the reason for writing the paragraph. Since descriptive paragraphs should explain to the reader the importance of what is being described, in addition to helping the reader picture it, the author must show the reader how and why something is significant rather than simply telling the reader. A good writer helps the reader picture what they are describing; however, a better writer shows the reader the purpose or reason for describing something. Consider the differences between the sentences below:

Example 1: Ever since grade school, I have always been nervous during tests.

Example 2: Staring blankly at my exam, I tapped my pencil rapidly on the side of my desk and desperately tried to focus. Mustering up some courage, I wrote an answer to the second question. Just as quickly, I erased the answer frantically, not wanting to leave a trace of it on the blank white paper. As the teacher announced that time was almost up, I remembered the taunt of my evil grade-school teacher: “You’ll never pass this test. Just give up already.” The memory of her words paralyzed my mind. Even more panic-stricken than before, I stared wildly at my blank test, trying to remember what the teacher had said in class last week or what I had read in the textbook.

While the first example does not explain how the narrator is nervous, it also fails to show why this nervousness is important. Ultimately, the first example tells and does not show the reader how the narrator is nervous or why this reaction is important. Meanwhile, the second example not only shows how the narrator expresses this nervousness (tapping the pencil on the desk, erasing answers, etc.), it begins to show why this is significant by relating it to earlier experiences in the narrator’s life. Through this connection, the writer is beginning to develop the description and the importance of the test-taking nervousness. The second example describes the experiences from grade school that led to this current bout of test-taking anxiety.

By showing and not telling the reader and by using descriptive language that appeals to the five senses, descriptive paragraphs provide the reader with a detailed account and the significance of something. Thus,

this something being described is the most important aspect of the descriptive paragraph. Generally, descriptive paragraphs describe one of four things: a person, a place, an object, or an event.

Person

Like any other descriptive paragraph, the most important aspect of a person paragraph is the reason for writing it. Have you ever read a book or article for school wondering what the point is? Perhaps even feeling disinterested because of what you felt was a lack of point or reason for reading or even writing the book, poem, article, etc.? Essentially, the same can be true for your own paragraphs if you do not write with a purpose. In choosing the person you want to write about, you have a reason for the choice you have made. It is your job as the writer to show the reader your point. Why have you chosen this person instead of another? What makes them interesting? You must draw your readers into your paragraph just as every other author draws their readers into their work, even if your only audience is your instructor. Remember, instructors do not like reading pointless writing any more than you do!

Thus, whenever writing a descriptive paragraph about a person, you must ask yourself: Why did I choose this person? What makes this person special? Is it a memory? Which of this person's characteristics has inspired me to write about them? In answering these questions, you not only find the reason or purpose for writing your paragraph, but you also inadvertently discover how to format your paragraph as well. Generally, paragraphs can be formatted in a number of different ways. The formatting of a paragraph rests almost entirely on what you are trying to do or say within your writing. For instance, let us consider the answer to some of the questions provided above.

Imagine that you have decided to write your descriptive paragraph about your aunt because you spent your summers with her when you were younger. Let's say that, during one of your visits, she taught you how to swim in the lake behind her house, and this is one of the fondest memories from your childhood. In this case, your descriptive paragraph would be a chronological account of this experience. You would organize your paragraph around the experience by having an introductory and concluding sentence that indicate the topic and purpose of your paragraph while detailing the event in the body of the paragraph. For instance, in a descriptive paragraph about your aunt, the introductory and concluding sentence would indicate that this memory was the highlight of your childhood while the body sentences would describe the event in chronological order. Since this is a descriptive paragraph about a person and not an event, you must be sure to centre your discussion of the event on the person involved; the person who made the event special.

However, you could also write a descriptive paragraph about your aunt that details some of your favourite characteristics about her. Perhaps you want your paragraph to describe a few reasons why your aunt is your favourite relative. In this paragraph, you would focus on the several characteristics that show why your aunt is so important to you. To do so, you may choose to explain briefly an event that supports one characteristic. For instance, if you want to show that your aunt is spontaneous and that this is one of your favourite things about her, you may choose to describe a day when she woke you up early to go on an unplanned, spur-of-the-

moment trip to the beach. Through describing this event in one of your body sentences, you help support your claim that your aunt is spontaneous.

Table 2 Examples of different ways to organize information about a person

Focus of the paragraph	What will the paragraph talk about?	How to organize the paragraph
An event	The summer your aunt taught you to swim is one of your fondest childhood memories.	You would organize your paragraph around this event and how it has made your aunt more important to you.
Personal characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. spontaneous 2. fun-loving 3. easygoing 	You would organize your paragraph around the main reasons why your aunt is your favourite relative with each of these characteristics serving as a sentence.

Place

Much like a person descriptive paragraph, the most important aspect of a descriptive paragraph about a place is your reason for writing it. Consider all of the places you have been to in your life—not only the places you have visited on vacation, but also those that you visit in everyday life. Every day, or at least during the school week, how many different places do you go? After leaving home, do you stop to get breakfast or coffee along the way, or do you stop and pick up a friend? Do you spend the majority of your day at school? If so, do you leave campus to get lunch? How about after later in the day? Do you go straight home? Go to the gym? Pick your kids up from school? Considering all the places you visit in one day, which would you pick to write about and why? These are the most important questions to answer when writing your place descriptive paragraph, and answering them will help you decide the organization of your paragraph.

The organization of a descriptive paragraph about a place is much like that of a descriptive paragraph about a person. Thus, there are two main organizational schemes that you can choose from when composing a descriptive paragraph about a place: one that focuses on certain characteristics of the place, or one that focuses on a specific event (or set of events) related to the place. For instance, for the first type of organization, you would focus on the reasons—or characteristics—why you like or dislike a place. For the second type, you would focus on the events that explain why this place is important to you. For example, if you were writing a descriptive paragraph about Barkerville, Table 3 describes the two ways in which you could organize your paragraph.

Table 3 Examples of different ways to organize information about a place

Focus of the paragraph	What will the paragraph talk about?	How to organize the paragraph
An event	A high school trip you took with your grade 11 history class to learn about the history of the gold rush in British Columbia.	You would organize your paragraph around this event and how it sparked your interest in museums.
Characteristics of a place	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Actors 2. Story telling 3. Historic buildings 	You would organize your paragraph around the main reasons why you enjoyed Barkerville with each of these characteristics serving as a body sentence.

While it may not matter which type or organization you choose, you must always make the place the focus of your paper. Thus, be sure the events or characteristics you describe in the paragraph do not outshine the importance of the place they are describing. For instance, following the example above, when talking about listening to the actors at Barkerville, do not focus too much on tours you have experienced at other museums. While comparing the use of actors to give tours at Barkerville does stress how much better they are, do not let tours at other museums distract from your discussion of Barkerville. Additionally, remember to stress why the place being described is important to you regardless of the organizational scheme you choose.

Object

By now, you may have noticed a pattern when it comes to organizing a descriptive paragraph. As you remember, you organize a descriptive paragraph about a person or place based either upon the characteristics of the subject or an event associated with it, and an object descriptive paragraph is no exception to this pattern. When writing a descriptive paragraph about an object, you must first decide why you have chosen this specific object to write about. In answering this question, you will know how to organize your paragraph. If you decide that an object is important to you because of the characteristics the object possesses, then you would organize the body of your paragraph around these characteristics or reasons. However, if an object is important to you because it was part of a significant event in your life, then you would produce body sentences that explain the event in chronological order.

For instance, imagine you wanted to write a descriptive paragraph about a tree at a local park. Consider the two ways of organizing this paragraph described in Table 4.

Table 4 Examples of different ways to organize information about an object

Focus of the paragraph	What will the paragraph talk about?	How to organize the paragraph
An event	You shared your first kiss with your current partner under this tree.	You would organize your paragraph around this event and how it has made this tree more important to you.
Characteristics of an object	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. good for climbing 2. has a tire swing 3. displays the change in seasons 	You would organize your paragraph around the main reasons why this is your favourite tree with each of these characteristics serving as a body sentence.

Although the organizational scheme you choose rests solely on the content you intend to include, the object must be the focus of the paragraph. Make sure the characteristics of an object or the retelling of an event do not overshadow the impact of the object being described. For example, when describing the event of your first kiss, you would need to make sure that you did not spend too much of your paragraph focusing on your partner. Additionally, when writing about an event connected to the object, be sure to connect the event to the significance of the object so that the event itself does not outshine the object being described. In focusing on not only the organization of the paragraph but also the significance of the object, the object descriptive paragraph that you compose will stress both the description and importance of the object being described.

Event

Although the three previous types of descriptive paragraphs follow the same two organizational schemes, event descriptive paragraphs differ slightly. While other descriptive paragraphs either describe the person, place, or object in question or detail an event connected to it, event descriptive paragraphs chronologically describe an event from the past or from the future. Thus, descriptive paragraphs that focus on an event can either detail a memory that is significant or your hopes about an upcoming event. For instance, your event descriptive paragraph about a past event would describe a memory that is in some way important to you, be it positively or negatively. However, your event descriptive paragraph about a future event would describe something to occur in the future that you hope for or that you dread.

While the other descriptive paragraphs also employ organizational schemes that outline events connected to the subject, a descriptive paragraph about an event must focus on the event itself. For example, one could write a descriptive paragraph detailing the event of their high school graduation that could be based on a person, place, object, or event. If they wanted to stress a person through this event, they could write a paragraph that details how their graduation was important because it was the first time they saw their grandparents in ten years. If they wanted to stress a place, they could write a paragraph that details how important the park where the graduation took place is to them. If they wanted to stress an object through the event, they could write a paragraph that describes how important their high school diploma is to them.

However, if they wanted to stress the importance of the graduation, or the event itself, they could write a paragraph that describes how all the things listed above—their grandparents, the park, and their diploma—all make the event significant. The different approaches they could take to a paragraph about the graduation are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5 The significance of each paragraph type

Paragraph Type	Person	Place	Object	Event
Significance of Paragraph	Their grandparents are important to them because they came to the graduation.	The central park in their hometown is important to them because they graduated there.	Their diploma is important to them because it symbolizes their graduation.	Their graduation itself is important because it was the first time they saw their grandparents in ten years, at the central park in their hometown, and when they received their diploma.

Hence, while in the other descriptive paragraphs, you must never let the event overshadow the significance of the person, place, or object being described, in an event descriptive paragraph, you should focus on how the people, place, and objects surrounding the event make it important. In this way, an event descriptive paragraph is a lot like the person, place, and object paragraphs. Thus, think of the objects, people, and place of an event as the characteristics that make the event important to you whenever you are constructing an event descriptive paragraph.

Check Your Understanding: Writing Ideas

Person

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about a person in your family following one of the organizational schemes listed.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about an important person in history using the event organization. Instead of indicating how the person is important to you, indicate how the person is important or significant within history.

Place

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about your hometown. Describe the town and indicate why it is important either to you or to society as a whole.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about one of the original Coast Salish settlements at the time of first contact with European explorers. Describe the location and environment, paying close attention to how the structure of the settlement was a response to the coastal environment.

Object

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about a gift you received on your birthday. Remember you can arrange your paragraph according to the characteristics of the object or by detailing the event at which you received it.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about the provincial flower, the trillium. Be sure to indicate why the flower is important to the province.

Event

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about a commemorative event that you attended or that you plan to attend in the future (wedding, memorial, graduation, etc.). Remember to include the people, location, or objects that make the event significant.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about the next or last federal election, focusing on why this election is significant in Canada.

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “[3.1 Descriptive Paragraphs](#)” In *Building Blocks of Academic Writing* by Carellin Brooks, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). Change title of Review Questions to Writing Ideas.

NARRATIVE PARAGRAPHS

Unlike descriptive paragraphs—which strive to explain why a person, place, object, or event is important—a narrative paragraph demonstrates the development of a person through the chronological retelling of an important event. In addition, a narrative paragraph should indicate how a person has changed or learned from this experience. The experience should unfold much like the plot of a novel or short story, beginning with the individual facing a problem and ending in the resolution of the problem and subsequent growth of the individual. Thus, the action of the problem should unfold as the telling of the event unfolds, much like the action of a short story builds as the plot progresses.

However, just as in descriptive paragraphs, you must describe the event that is progressing, effectively drawing your readers into the development of the individual. Think of how invested—or perhaps uninvested—you become in the stories you read. Why do you connect with certain characters and not with others? Often, you connect with characters you feel you can relate to in some way or with events that you can imagine experiencing. Thus, it is essential to clearly and concisely indicate the action of the event being described. Your readers must be able to imagine being at and participating in the event. However, you must keep in mind that you can provide too much information to the reader. Make sure all the details you provide are relevant to the narration. For instance, when narrating an event, you do not need to include details that do not add to the feeling of an event. Otherwise, the readers will feel unconnected to and uninterested in the development of the individual.

While describing the event is crucial to the reader's understanding and interest, the subject's feelings, thoughts, desires, or insights are integral to creating the sense of personal growth. Without these components, the reader will be unable to track the person's development and change. Essentially, in order for the reader to see that the individual has transformed, you must present the inner thoughts, desires, and feelings of the person before and after the alleged transformation. This way, the reader can compare the thoughts and feelings from before the change with those after and ultimately evaluate the personal growth of the individual on their own.

Since the personal growth in the narrative is the most essential component, choosing the individual and experiences is an important decision. As a writer hoping to engage the reader, you must carefully consider both the events and the individual that you choose. Not only must you choose an event that points toward eventual personal growth, but you must also choose an individual who is compelling. Generally, a narrative paragraph can either be autobiographical or biographical in nature. That is, the narrative can be written by you and about you, or the narrative can be written by you and about someone else. Moreover, in choosing to write about yourself or about someone else, you decide the organization of your paragraph.

Autobiographical Narrative

An autobiographical narrative is one of the most personal types of paragraphs. Not only are you writing a paragraph that expresses your own views and thoughts, but autobiographical narratives are based upon your own life experiences.

Thus, it follows that the organization of the paragraph will also be more personal in nature. Unlike a narrative paragraph based on another individual, an autobiographical narrative will always contain your personal thoughts, desires, and motivations. While it is hard to know the motives of other individuals when writing a biographical narrative (unless you know the individual well), you always have access to the motivations for your own personal development. Hence, when you organize your autobiographical narrative, you must organize your paragraph around the event that promotes your personal growth and the feeling you experienced before, during, and after this event.

There are several ways to incorporate your thoughts, feelings, and motivations into the organization of your paragraph. First, you can consider integrating your description of certain events with your motives and thoughts for the events. This way, you present the event and your motivations both in chronological order and simultaneously. This means that you are describing the event and your feelings as they occurred, or at the same time. Second, you can consider blocking your description of your event and your feelings, providing a set of sentences describing the event followed by a set of sentences describing your motivations. You could also reverse this blocking format to first provide your motivations and then the description of the event.

Integrated description and motivations

Today, I stepped into a new stage of my life by moving into my own apartment. I am so excited because I have always lived with roommates, and this will be my first time living alone. I was able to find a great used couch on Facebook Marketplace that I have set up in the living room. My friends think living by myself will be lonely, but I am really enjoying setting up my place exactly how I want it. After we got everything moved in, I spent the afternoon rearranging furniture, putting dishes away, and hanging pictures.

Blocked descriptive and motivations

Today, I moved into my new apartment. We got up at 6 a.m. to load up the truck up with all of my stuff and drop it off at my new place. That took most of the morning. I was also able to find a used couch on Facebook

Marketplace, which we picked up and brought over. I spent the afternoon rearranging furniture, putting dishes away, and hanging pictures.

It was a very exciting day. I have always lived with roommates, so this will be my first time living alone. My friends think living by myself will be lonely, but now I can set up my place exactly how I want it. It feels like I am entering a new stage.

How do these two examples compare? Although they both narrate the same event, is one more effective than the other? Generally, the first organizational scheme (when you integrate description and motivations together) is the most seamless. By incorporating the two together, you provide the reader with a more complete picture of the event—as if the reader is experiencing the event as it unfolds in your narration. However, sometimes this formatting does not work, specifically with complicated events. If you feel that the event you are narrating is too difficult to explain or clarify, then you should consider separating your description and thoughts. However, you do need to be aware of how this affects the story you are telling. Do you want the importance of the event to be at the end? In doing so, you make the event seem more suspenseful, and you can make the reader more compelled to finish your narrative. Nevertheless, organizing your paper in this way places more of a burden on you as a writer because you must clearly connect the separate ideas in the paragraph.

Regardless of the organizational scheme you choose, you must properly describe your personal growth. In order to do so, you must organize your paragraph around one significant event. If your paragraph centres around one main event that helped shape your personal growth, the majority of the body should describe the one event while the introductory and concluding sentences should include your thoughts and feelings from before and after the event to help clarify how the occurrence helped shape you.

Biographical Narrative

Unlike the much more personal autobiographical narrative, a biographical narrative tends to be more formal and less personal. While you can easily include how you felt or what you thought during events in your own life, it is harder to indicate how others thought or felt during action in their own lives. Sometimes, if you are writing a biographical narrative about a close friend or relative, or if you have interviewed the individual you are writing about, you can include specific insights and motivations. If you do have access to the person's thoughts and feelings, you can easily organize your biographical narrative as you would an autobiographical one. However, usually, you will have to infer how a person felt or what they thought from their actions in certain events.

If you must write a biographical narrative about someone you do not know or someone you cannot interview, you must suggest the person's motivations through analyzing actions. For instance, if someone apologizes for past behaviour, then you can infer that they feel regret about the incident. You could then analyze the events following this apology to see if the individual's apology was genuine. In other words, you could see if the individual's behaviour changed after the apology or if the individual changed their actions in

significant ways. In order to vocalize the analysis in your paragraph, you must suggest to your reader that the individual started acting and behaving differently in response to a past experience. For example, you would need to stipulate that the good behaviour following the apology means that the individual regrets past actions. On the other hand, if an individual's actions after an apology do not change (if the person continues to make the same mistake, for instance), you can infer that the person does not regret or feel sorry for past actions.

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “3.2 Narrative Paragraphs” In *Building Blocks of Academic Writing* by Carellin Brooks, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). Adapted to remove review questions.

EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPHS

The main aim of an expository paragraph is to provide an effective explanation of a topic. While a descriptive paragraph strives to describe a subject and a narrative paragraph seeks to show personal growth, an expository paragraph tries to explain a topic or situation. Thus, expository paragraphs are written as if the writer is explaining or clarifying a topic to the reader. Since an expository paragraph is trying to clarify a topic, it is important that its sentences provide the categories or reasons that support the clarification of the topic. Moreover, these categories and reasons also provide the framework for the organization of the paragraph.

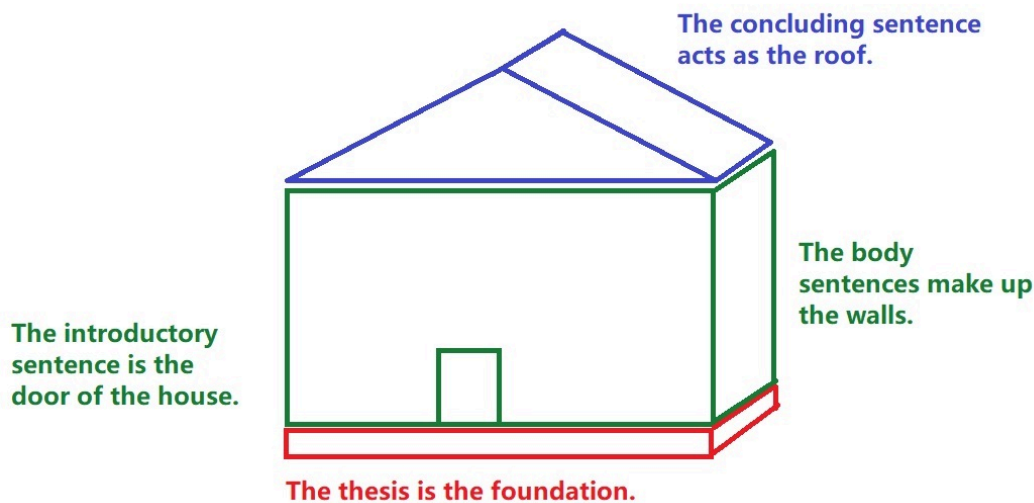


Figure 1: Components of the expository paragraph as the parts of a house.

Much like the categories are essential to clarifying the topic, organization is the key to any well-developed paragraph. When composing your paragraph, think of its organization as a house, with each major part of a house representing a component of a paragraph. Just as the foundation provides support on which a house can be built, a thesis represents the foundation upon which to build a paragraph. The introductory sentence then functions as both the door and the framework for an expository paragraph. Like a house door, the introductory sentence must allow the reader to enter the paragraph. Additionally, just as walls are built upon the framework of a house, the body sentences of a paragraph are organized around the framework or the organizational scheme that is presented in the introductory sentence. The body sentences, much like the walls of a house, must be firm, strong and complete. Finally, a paragraph must include a concluding sentence that tops off the paragraph, much like a roof completes a house. As the roof cements the structure of the house and helps hold the walls in place, the concluding sentence must sum up the point of your body sentences and complete the paragraph.

Although the overall organization of an expository paragraph is important, you must also understand the

organization of each component (the introductory, body, and concluding sentences) of your paragraph. The sections below identify the essential parts of each component of your paragraph, explaining the necessary information for each type of sentence.

While the guidelines listed below may feel constrictive, they are merely meant to guide you as a writer. Ultimately, the guidelines should help you write more effectively. The more familiar you become with how to organize a paragraph, the more energy you can focus on your ideas and your writing. As a result, your writing will improve as your ability to organize your ideas improves. Plus, focusing your energy on your argument and ideas rather than the organization makes your job as a writer more exciting and fun.

Introductory Sentences

A strong introductory sentence is crucial to the development of an effective expository paragraph. Unlike a persuasive paragraph, which takes a stand or forms an opinion about a subject, an expository paragraph is used when the writer wishes to explain or clarify a topic to the reader. In order to properly explain a topic, an expository paragraph breaks it into parts, explains each component in relation to the whole, and uses each component to justify the explanation of the topic. Thus, when writing an introductory sentence, it is crucial to include the explanation or clarification of the topic and the categories or components used to produce this explanation.

Introductory sentences

- Introduce the issue.
- Present the topic and its explanation or clarification.
- Provide the categories used to explain the topic.
- Provide the thesis statement.

Since the success of the paragraph rests on the introductory sentence, it is important to understand its essential components. Usually, when expository paragraphs fail to provide a clear explanation, it is not because the writer lacks explanations or clarifications, but rather because the explanations are not properly organized and identified in the introductory sentence. One of the most important jobs of an introductory sentence is that it introduces the topic or issue. Most explanations cannot be clarified without at least some background information. Thus, it is essential to provide a foundation for your topic before you begin explaining. For instance, if you wanted to explain what happened at the first Olympic Games, your introductory sentence would first need to briefly mention how the first games happened. In doing so, you

ensure that your audience is as informed about your topic as you are, and thus, you make it easier for your audience to understand your explanation.

Below, the main jobs of the introductory sentence are described and explained in detail.

The purposes of introductory sentences

Introductory sentences introduce the topic and suggest why it is important.

Example: An analysis of the essay exam results of the new English class shows that the new class format promotes close reading and better essay organization.

This sentence tells the reader both that the topic of the paper will be the benefits of the new English class and that the significance of these benefits is the improvement of close reading and essay organization.

Introductory sentences outline the structure of the paragraph and highlight the main ideas.

Example: Considering the results of the high school exit exam, it is apparent that the school curriculum is not properly addressing basic math skills, such as fractions, percentages and long division.

This sentence indicates the main ideas (fractions, percentages and long division) of the paragraph and indicates the order in which they will be presented in the body sentences.

Introductory sentences state the thesis.

Example: University and college work experience programs will require all students to take a résumé and cover letter writing workshop in order to better prepare them for employment.

This thesis statement indicates the explanation of the paragraph.

In addition to introducing the topic of your paragraph, your introductory sentence also needs to introduce each of the points you will cover in your body sentences. By providing your audience with an idea of the points you will make in your paragraph, your introductory sentence serves as a guide map, not only for your audience, but also for you. Including your main points in your introductory sentence not only allows your audience to understand where your paragraph is headed, but also helps you as a writer remember how you want to organize your paragraph. This is especially helpful if you are not writing your paragraph in one sitting, as it allows you to leave and return to your paragraph without forgetting all of the important points you wanted to make.

Table 1: Dos and don'ts of introductions

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture the interest of your reader. • Introduce the issue to the reader. • State the problem simply. • Write in an intelligible, concise manner. • Refute any counterpoints. • State the thesis, preferably in one arguable statement. • Provide each of the arguments that will be presented in each of the body sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologize: Do not suggest that you are unfamiliar with the topic. (Example: <i>I cannot be certain, but ...</i>) • Use sweeping generalizations. (Example: <i>All men like football ...</i>) • Use a dictionary definition. (Example: <i>According to the dictionary, a humble person is ...</i>) • Announce your intentions: Do not directly state what you will be writing about. (Example: <i>In this paper, I will ...</i>)

Most importantly, when writing an introductory sentence, it is essential to remember that you must capture the interest of your reader. Thus, it is your job as the writer to make the introduction entertaining or intriguing. In order to do so, consider using a quotation, a surprising or interesting fact, an anecdote, or a humorous story. While the quotation, story, or fact you include must be relevant to your paragraph, placing one of these at the beginning of your introduction helps you not only capture the attention of the reader, but also introduce your topic and argument, making your introduction interesting to your audience and useful for your argument and paragraph.

Body Sentences

In an expository paragraph, the body sentences are where the writer has the opportunity to explain or clarify their viewpoint. By the concluding sentence, the writer should adequately clarify the topic for the reader. Regardless of a strong thesis statement that properly indicates the major subtopics of the paragraph, paragraphs with weak body sentences fail to properly explain the topic and indicate why it is important. Body sentences of an expository paragraph are weak when no examples are used to help illuminate the topic being discussed or when they are poorly organized. Occasionally, body sentences are also weak because the quotes used complicate rather than simplify the explanation. Thus, it is essential to use appropriate support and to adequately explain your support within your body sentences.

In order to create a body sentence that is properly supported and explained, it is important to understand the components that make up a strong body sentence. The bullet points below indicate the essential components of a well-written, well-argued body sentence.

Body sentences

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Support the argument with useful and informative quotes from sources such as books, journal articles, expert opinions, etc.
- Briefly explain each quote and indicate its significance.
- Ensure that the information provided is relevant to the thesis statement.
- Transition into the next body sentence.

Just as your introduction must introduce the topic of your paragraph, the first body sentence must introduce the main subpoint for that sentence. For instance, if you were writing a body sentence for a paragraph explaining the factors that led to Canadian conscription in World War II, one body sentence could discuss the impact of Canada's relationship with Britain on the decision to conscript Canadian men. To do so, you would begin by explaining why Canada felt obliged to come to Britain's aid. Your audience now knows what the paragraph is explaining, and you can also keep track of your ideas.

Following the topic sentence, you must provide some sort of fact that supports your claim. In the example of the World War II paragraph, maybe you would provide a quote from a historian. After your quote or fact, you must always explain what the quote or fact is saying, stressing what you believe is most important about your fact. It is important to remember that your audience may read a quote and decide it is indicating something entirely different than what you think it is explaining. Or, maybe some of your readers think another aspect of your quote is important. If you do not explain the quote and indicate what portion of it is relevant to your clarification, then your reader may become confused or may be unconvinced by your explanation. Consider the possible interpretations for the statement below.

Example: While Canada's involvement in World War II did not lead to as many young men dying as in Britain, a generation was still deeply affected.

Interestingly, this statement seems to be saying two things at once: that Canada's young men were not killed in the same numbers as those of other Allied countries, and that the number of deaths nonetheless marked a generation. On the one hand, the historian seems to say that the two outcomes are not directly linked. On the other hand, the historian also indicates that the two outcomes are linked in that the deaths caused Canada to be impacted by the war. Because of the tension in this quotation, if you used it for your World War II paragraph, you would need to explain that the significant portion of the quote is the assertion that links the outcomes.

In addition to explaining what this quote is saying, you would also need to indicate why this is important to your explanation. When trying to indicate the significance of a fact, it is essential to try to answer the "so

what.” Imagine you have just finished explaining your quote to someone and they have asked you “so what?” The person does not understand why you have explained this quote, not because you have not explained the quote well, but because you have not told them why they need to know what the quote means. This—the answer to the “so what”—is the significance of your paragraph and is essentially your clarification within the body sentences.

Concluding Sentences

The concluding sentence of an expository paragraph is an author’s last chance to create a good impression. Hence, it is important to restate the thesis statement at the beginning of the sentence in order to remind the reader of your topic and explanation. Since it is at the end of the paragraph, the concluding sentence also should add a sense of closure and finality to the clarification of the paragraph. It is important to re-emphasize the main idea without being repetitive or introducing an entirely new idea or subtopic. While your concluding sentence can suggest further research or investigation, do not make this question the focus of the sentence. Thus, you should briefly and concisely reiterate the strongest clarifications of the paragraph, reminding the reader of the validity of your thesis or explanation and bringing closure to your paragraph.

The following is an example of a paragraph that describes why graduating from college is harder than graduating from high school. The paragraph has been broken up to describe the purpose of each sentence (or group of sentences).

Table 2: An example paragraph

Purpose	Example
Topic sentence	There are several reasons why graduating from college is harder than graduating from high school; however, the most important reason is the lack of support.
Introduce and explain one major point that supports your topic sentence. Be sure to provide adequate information to both explain the point and connect the point to your topic.	While in high school, the school and the teachers monitor and enforce a student's attendance, yet in college, a student's attendance is not monitored and they can decide whether or not to attend class. As a result, many students may choose to go to the beach or to the mall rather than school.
Introduce and explain the second major point that supports your topic sentence. Be sure to provide adequate information to both explain the point and connect the point to your topic.	Though a college student's grades may suffer from missing a scheduled class meeting, high school students are given detention or other forms of punishment. To many college students, this lack of consequences seems freeing, yet it actually reflects a lack of support. Without the college or professors supporting a student's attendance, the student must make these decisions on their own.
Introduce and explain the third major point that supports your topic sentence. Be sure to provide adequate information to both explain the point and connect the point to your topic.	This situation can also be exacerbated by a lack of nearby family and friends. A large number of college students move away from home to attend college, whereas most high school students still live with their parents. Due to this, college students may not have the same support system as high school students.
A body paragraph can contain as many points as needed to explain and support the topic sentence.	What is more, some college students may be the only individual from their high school to attend a university. Thus, in addition to leaving their family, a student may find themselves friendless.
Concluding/transition sentence	Despite the hazardous effects that this lack of support may produce, there are also several other factors that affect a college student's ability to succeed.

Concluding sentences

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Briefly summarize the main points of the paragraph.
- Provide a strong and effective close for the paragraph.

Table 3: Dos and don'ts of conclusions

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the importance of the thesis. • Include a brief summary of the main idea. • Be concise. • Provide a sense of closure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rework your introduction or thesis statement. • Use overused phrases. (Example: <i>In summary ...</i> or <i>In conclusion ...</i>) • Announce what you have written in the body of the paragraph. (Example: <i>In this paragraph, I have emphasized the importance of ...</i>) • Apologize. (Example: <i>Although I do not have all the answers ...</i>) • Make absolute claims. (Example: <i>This proves that the government should ...</i>)

You may feel that the concluding sentence is redundant or unnecessary. However, do not forget that this is your last chance to explain the significance of your argument to your audience. Just as your body sentences strive to present the significance of each fact or quote you use, your concluding sentence should sum up the significance of your argument. Thus, you should consider making a bold statement in your concluding sentence by evoking a vivid image, suggesting results or consequences related to your argument, or ending with a warning. Through using these strategies, you not only make your concluding sentence more exciting, but you also make your paragraph and your argument more important.

Writing Ideas

- Write an expository paragraph about your favourite movie or book, paying special attention to why a certain book or movie is your favourite. Be sure to briefly but adequately summarize the movie or book in order to provide a concise and comprehensible explanation. Additionally, be sure to use concrete details and examples to explain why you enjoy the book or movie you are writing about. Simply summarizing the plot will not explain to the reader why the book or movie is entertaining to you.
- Write an expository paragraph about a historical event, indicating at least three factors that contributed to its development. For instance, you could discuss how factors such as residential schools led to the reconciliation movement. A factor could be an event, an individual, or a movement that is historically significant. In order to properly show how certain factors caused or contributed to a specific event, you must clarify both the factors and the event itself.

Attribution & References

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PERSUASIVE PARAGRAPHS

The main aim of a persuasive paragraph is to make an effective argument. Thus, persuasive paragraphs are written as if the writer is attempting to convince their audience to adopt a new belief or behaviour. While expository paragraphs strive to explain or clarify a topic, persuasive paragraphs take a stand on an issue. However, simply having an argument or viewpoint about a topic is not enough. In persuasive paragraphs, writers must also support their claims. Typically, persuasive paragraphs support their arguments through the use of appropriate evidence, such as quotations, examples, expert opinions, or other facts. Nevertheless, simply having a viewpoint and supporting evidence is still not enough to write a strong persuasive paragraph. In addition to these two things, a writer must also have strong organization.

Organization is the key to any well-developed paragraph. When composing your paragraph, think of its organization as a set of blocks balanced between two triangles (see Figure 1). Each block represents the main arguments of your paragraph, while the two triangles stand for your introductory and concluding sentences, respectively. Just as the top triangle comes to a point before leading into the blocks, your introductory sentence should make your thesis before your paragraph jumps to the supporting sentences. These supporting sentences, as the blocks suggest, should be full of information and logically solid. Just as the stability and balance of the shapes rests on the solidity of the blocks, the stability of the paragraph's argument rests on the success of the body sentences. Much like the introductory sentence that precedes it, your concluding sentence should restate your thesis statement and the main argument of your paragraph, allowing your paragraph to end on a firm base.

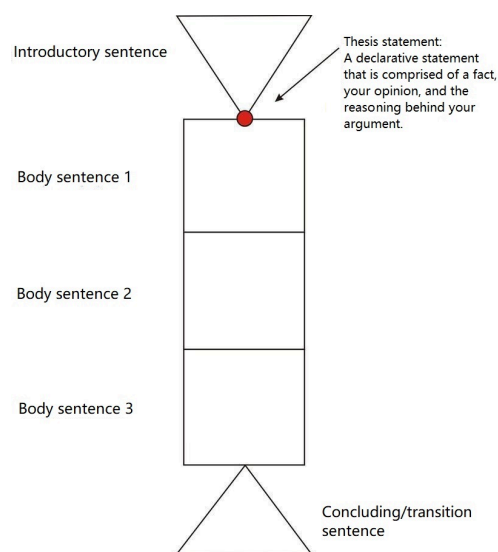


Figure 1: A representation of the organization of a persuasive paragraph.

The sections below identify the major components of each part of a persuasive paragraph. Keep in mind that these guidelines are not meant to hinder your voice as a writer, but rather to strengthen your effectiveness as a writer. Though you may sometimes feel constricted by this organizational framework, it is essential to compose a paragraph that contains all of these parts in order to make a strong argument. Plus, once you get acquainted with how to organize a persuasive paragraph, you will be able to use your creative juices in the actual writing of the paragraph. Rather than focusing on where to put an idea, you can focus on how to express or explain, which makes your job as a writer easier and more exciting.

Introductory Sentences

A strong introductory sentence is crucial to the development of an effective persuasive paragraph. Without an introductory sentence that properly introduces both the topic *and* the writer's argument, persuasive paragraphs fail to convince the reader of the validity of the argument. Since the introductory sentence contains the thesis statement, or the core argument and purpose of the paragraph, introductory sentences are essential to the overall success of the paragraph.

Introductory sentences

- Introduce the issue.
- Preview the argument that will appear in the body.
- Provide each of the arguments that will later appear in each body sentence.
- Refute any counterpoints to the argument.
- Provide the thesis statement.

Since the success of the paragraph rests on the introductory sentence, it is important to understand its essential components. Usually, when persuasive paragraphs fail to make a clear argument, it is not because the writer's ideas or opinions are wrong, but rather because the argument is not properly explained in the introduction. One of the most important jobs of an introductory sentence is to introduce the topic or issue. Most arguments cannot be made without at least some background information. Thus, it is essential to provide a foundation for your topic before you begin explaining your argument. For instance, if you wanted to argue that the animation in the movie *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is innovative, your introductory sentence would first need to provide background information about movie animation. By doing so, you ensure that your audience is as informed about your topic as you are, and thus, you make it easier for your audience to understand your argument.

Below, the main jobs of the introductory sentence are described and explained in detail.

The purposes of introductory sentences

Introductory sentences introduce the topic and suggest why it is important.

Example: An analysis of the Vancouver Island University Writing Centre survey answers reveals that a significant portion of tutees improved their writing skills, and this has correlated to an improvement on their essay scores.

This sentence tells the reader both that the topic of the paragraph will be the benefits of the Writing Centre and that the significance of these benefits is the improvement of essay scores.

Introductory sentences outline the structure of the paragraph and highlight the main ideas.

Example: Considering the dropout rate of high-schoolers in Canada, it is apparent that schools are not addressing the social conditions that lead students to fail.

This sentence provides the main ideas of the paragraph and indicates the order in which they will be presented in the body sentences.

Introductory sentences state the thesis.

Example: Kwantlen Polytechnic University should require all students to enrol in Creative Writing courses in order to better prepare them for employment.

This thesis statement indicates the argument of the paragraph.

In addition to introducing the topic of your paragraph, your introductory sentence also needs to introduce each of the arguments you will cover in your body sentences. By providing your audience with an idea of the points or arguments you will make later in your paragraph, your introductory sentence serves as a roadmap not only for your audience but also for you. Including your main subpoints in your introduction not only allows your audience to understand where your paragraph is headed, but also helps you as a writer remember how you want to organize your paragraph. This is especially helpful if you are not writing your paragraph in one sitting, as it allows you to leave and return to your paragraph without forgetting all of the important points you wanted to make.

Another common—though often forgotten—component of an introductory sentence is the refutation of counterarguments. In order for your argument to appear strong, and in order for your audience to know that you considered the arguments against your claim, it is essential to refute or disprove counterarguments (arguments against your thesis) in your introductory sentence. The most common error writers make when dealing with counterarguments is to not refute them. Sometimes, a writer forgets to show how the counterarguments are wrong and how their argument is correct. To avoid this error, consider using the sentence constructions in the list below that help refute counterarguments. By using words such as “while,”

“although,” “yet,” or “however” in compound sentences, you can be sure that you are properly refuting any counterarguments to your argument while supporting your own claims.

In the examples listed below, *X* is the counterargument and *Y* is the writer’s argument:

- While most people believe *X*, *Y* is true.
- Although people argue *X*, *Y* is correct.
- This expert claims *X*, yet this expert in the same field argues *Y*.
- This book says *X*; however, this book indicates that *Y* is true.

There are also some important dos and don’ts when it comes to writing introductory sentences. It is crucial when writing your persuasive paragraph to avoid apologizing or using sweeping generalizations, since both undermine your argument. If you continue to apologize in your paragraph, you make your argument seem weak, and thus your audience is unconvinced. Likewise, if you base your argument on a generalization or stereotype—something which your audience will likely disagree with—your entire argument will lose credit or validity. Also, it is important not to rely too heavily on dictionary definitions, especially in your thesis. A thesis must be composed of a fact and a viewpoint. Thus, if you base your argument on a definition, which is an irrefutable fact, your thesis is no longer a point of view but a truth.

Table 1: Dos and don’ts of introductions

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture the interest of your reader. • Introduce the issue to the reader. • State the problem simply. • Write in an intelligible, concise manner. • Refute any counterpoints. • State the thesis, preferably in one arguable statement. • Provide each of the arguments that will be presented in each of the body sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologize: Do not suggest that you are unfamiliar with the topic. (Example: <i>I cannot be certain, but ...</i>) • Use sweeping generalizations. (Example: <i>All men like football ...</i>) • Use a dictionary definition. (Example: <i>According to the dictionary, a humble person is ...</i>) • Announce your intentions: Do not directly state what you will be writing about. (Example: <i>In this paper, I will ...</i>)

Most importantly, when writing an introductory sentence, it is essential to remember that you must capture the interest of your reader. Thus, it is your job as the writer to make the introduction entertaining or intriguing. In order to do so, consider using a hook, or a quotation, a surprising or interesting fact, an anecdote, or a humorous story. While the quotation, story, or fact you include must be relevant to your paragraph, placing one of these at the beginning of your introduction helps you not only capture the attention of the reader, but also introduce your topic and argument, making your introduction interesting to your audience and useful for your argument and paragraph. However, after using a hook, you must transition from the quote, fact, or story that is used into the main topic of your paragraph. Often, writers include

interesting hooks that they do not connect to their topic or argument. In these instances, the hook detracts from rather than supports the introductory sentence.

Body Sentences

In a persuasive paragraph, the body sentences are where the writer has the opportunity to argue their viewpoint. By the concluding sentence, the writer should convince the reader to agree with the argument of the paragraph. Regardless of a strong thesis, paragraphs with weak body sentences fail to explain why the argument of the paragraph is both true and important. Body sentences of a persuasive paragraph are weak when no quotes or facts are used to support the thesis or when those used are not adequately explained. Occasionally, body sentences are also weak because the quotes used detract from rather than support the paragraph. Thus, it is essential to use appropriate support and to adequately explain your support within your body sentences.

In order to create a body sentence that is properly supported and explained, it is important to understand the components that make up a strong body sentence. The bullet points below indicate the essential components of a well-written, well-argued body sentence.

Body sentences

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Support the argument with useful and informative quotes from sources such as books, journal articles, expert opinions, etc.
- Explain each quote and indicate its significance.
- Ensure that the information provided is relevant to the thesis statement.
- End with a transition which leads into the next body sentence.

Just as your introduction must introduce the topic of your paragraph, the first body sentence must introduce the argument. For instance, if you were writing a body sentence for a paragraph arguing the animation in the movie *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is innovative, one body sentence may begin, “*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* has produced the most surprising animation of any movie so far this decade.” Following this sentence, you would go on to support this one statement by indicating how the movie does this. When you place this statement as the opening of your sentence, not only does your audience know what you are going to argue, but you can also keep track of your ideas.

Your sentences must provide some sort of fact that supports your claim. In the example of the *Spider-Verse*

paragraph, maybe you would provide a quote from a movie critic or a prominent animator. After your quote or fact, you must always explain what the quote or fact is saying, stressing what you believe is most important about your fact. It is important to remember that your audience may read a quote and decide it is arguing something entirely different than what you think it is arguing. Or, maybe some of your readers think another aspect of your quote is important. If you do not explain the quote and indicate what portion of it is relevant to your argument, then your reader may become confused or may be unconvinced of your point. Consider the possible interpretations for the statement below.

Example: While I did not like the storyline of the movie, I enjoyed the surprising animation in the film. Without the surprising animation, the storyline would have been boring and the characters would have been unoriginal.

Interestingly, this statement seems to be saying two things at once: that the movie is bad and that the movie is good. On the one hand, the person seems to say that the storyline and characters of the movie were both bad. On the other hand, the person also says that the animation more than makes up for the bad storyline and unoriginal characters. Because of this tension in the quotation, if you used this quote in your *Spider-Verse* paragraph, you would need to explain that the animation in the movie is so good that it makes a boring movie exciting.

In addition to explaining what this quote is saying, you would also need to indicate why this is important to your argument. When trying to indicate the significance of a fact, it is essential to try to answer the “so what.” Imagine you have just finished explaining your quote to someone, and they have asked you “so what?” The person does not understand why you have explained this quote, not because you have not explained the quote well, but because you have not told them why they need to know what the quote means. This—the answer to the “so what”—is the significance of your paragraph and is essentially your argument within the body sentences. However, it is important to remember that, generally, a body sentence will contain more than one quotation or piece of support. Thus, you must repeat the quotation-explanation-significance formula several times within your body sentences to argue the one subpoint indicated in your topic sentence.

Concluding Sentences

The concluding sentence of a persuasive paragraph is an author’s last chance to create a good impression. Hence, it is important to restate the thesis statement at the beginning of the sentence in order to remind the reader of your argument. Since it is at the end of the paragraph, the concluding sentence should also add a sense of closure and finality to the argument of the paragraph. It is important to re-emphasize the main idea without being repetitive or introducing an entirely new idea or subtopic. While you can end your concluding sentence by suggesting a topic for further research or investigation, do not make this question the focus of the sentence. Thus, you should briefly and concisely reiterate the strongest arguments of the paragraph, reminding the reader of the validity of the thesis and bringing closure to your paragraph.

Concluding sentences

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Briefly summarize the main points of the paragraph.
- Provide a strong and effective close for the paragraph.

The following is an example of a persuasive paragraph that argues for the importance of paragraph organization. The paragraph has been broken up to describe the purpose of each sentence (or group of sentences).

Table 2: An example persuasive paragraph

Purpose	Example
Topic sentence	The strength of a body paragraph lies in its organization.
Quote/Support #1	According to <i>The Bedford Handbook</i> , “the body of the essay develops support for [the] thesis, so it’s important to have at least a tentative thesis before [one starts] writing” (Hacker 38).
Explanation (1 to 2 sentences)	As this quote suggests, it is hard for a writer to support his or her thesis in a body paragraph before the thesis has even been developed. Thus, it is crucial to decide upon a thesis before starting to compose the body, or support, of an essay.
Significance (1 to 3 sentences)	Writing an essay in this order will ensure that the body paragraph argues the point which the writer is trying to make.
Quote/Support #2	What’s more, it is always important to “sketch a preliminary outline” and “draft the body of [the] essay by writing a paragraph about each supporting point listed in the planning stage” (Hacker 38).
Explanation (1 to 2 sentences)	In creating both an outline and a draft, the writer will begin creating his or her body paragraphs before the final draft is even begun.
Significance (1 to 3 sentences)	Moreover, this process will ensure that the writer never forgets any of his or her key points since they have already been written down. Hence, the writer can leave and revisit his or her work without fear of forgetting or losing any of the key arguments of the paper.
Concluding/Transition sentence	Although organization is essential to the effectiveness of a body paragraph, there are other factors which contribute to its overall strength.

Table 3: Dos and don'ts of conclusions

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the importance of the thesis. • Include a brief summary of the main idea. • Be concise. • Provide a sense of closure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rework your introduction or thesis statement. • Use overused phrases. (Example: <i>In summary ...</i> or <i>In conclusion ...</i>) • Announce what you have written in the body of the paragraph. (Example: <i>In this paragraph, I have emphasized the importance of ...</i>) • Apologize. (Example: <i>Although I do not have all the answers ...</i>) • Make absolute claims. (Example: <i>This proves that the government should ...</i>)

You may feel that the concluding sentence is redundant or unnecessary; however, do not forget that this is your last chance to explain the significance of your argument to your audience. Just as your body sentences strive to present the significance of each fact or quote you use, your concluding sentence should sum up the significance of your argument. Thus, you should consider making a bold statement in your concluding sentence by evoking a vivid image, suggesting results or consequences related to your argument, or ending with a warning. Through using these strategies, you not only make your concluding sentence more exciting, but you also make your paragraph, and your argument, more important.

Writing Ideas

- Write a persuasive paragraph arguing for or against a community service requirement that high school students must fulfill in order to graduate. If you are arguing for the requirement, be sure to specify what the requirement entails (i.e., how many hours or where it needs to be completed) in addition to supporting the use of the requirement. If you are arguing against the requirement, be sure to address counterpoints in addition to supporting your claims fully.
- Write a persuasive paragraph about the impact of one type of media—such as social media, video games, television, movies, or magazines—on high school aged (15–18) and junior high school aged (12–14) children. Should parents regulate both age groups' access to these forms of media? Or should only one group be monitored? If so, which? Do social media, video games, television, magazines, etc., affect one group more than the other? Use specific examples to support your ideas.

Attribution & References

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ESSAYS

Introduction

In this module, you will learn how to arrange your ideas and paragraphs into an essay. An essay is usually a written, non-fiction composition that discusses a central topic, and there are many types and sizes of essays. While some essays are quite short, like the five-paragraph essay (300–500 words), some, like university research essays, can be long (1500–2500 words or more). Just like the paragraphs, essays can have different purposes; some may try to persuade the reader to a certain point of view while others may narrate, compare, etc. Essentially, an essay is a format and structure for writing in an organized manner with a certain predictability.

Learning Objectives

- Discover the overall structure and components of an essay.
- Identify different types of essays (expository, persuasive, and narrative).
- Write a strong and clear thesis statement.
- Write body, introductory, and concluding paragraphs.
- Create a detailed essay outline.
- Write a five-paragraph essay using the seven (7) steps of the writing process.

To Do List

- Read “Expository Essays” in *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian HSP Edition*
- Explore three types of common writing types: expository, persuasive, and narrative.
- Read and take notes about “Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement” in *Communications Essentials for College*.
- Complete the Thesis Statement Assignment in Blackboard.
- Read “Writing Body Paragraphs” in *Communications Essentials for College*.
- Complete the Body Paragraph Assignment in Blackboard.
- Read “Creating an Outline for an Essay” in *Communications Essentials for College*.
- Create an outline using the template in Blackboard.
- Complete the Short Essay Assignment (without research) in Blackboard.

Attribution & References

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EXPOSITORY ESSAYS

An Expository essay explains a writer's ideas by defining, explaining, informing, or elaborating on points to allow the reader to clearly understand the concept.

Many of your future academic workplace writing assignments will be expository—i.e., explaining your ideas or the significance of a concept or action. An expository essay allows the writer the opportunity to explain his or her ideas about a topic and to provide clarity for the reader by using:

- Facts
- Explanations
- Details
- Definitions

It may also include the writer outlining steps of a procedure in a way that is straightforward for the reader to follow. It is purely informative and often contains elements of summary.

Imagine you need to verbally explain a concept to your classmates, maybe a behavioural theory. What are the key elements on which you would focus? How would you organize the information? You could explain who came up with the theory, the specific area of study to which it is related, its purpose, and the significant details to explain the theory. Telling these four elements to your classmates would give them a complete, yet summarized, picture of the theory, so they could apply the theory in future discussions.

Although you did this verbally, you were still fulfilling the elements of an expository essay by providing definition, details, explanations, and maybe even facts if you have a really good memory. This is the same process that you would use when you write an expository essay. You may actually be doing this all the time; for example, when you are giving someone directions to a place or explaining how to cook something. In the following sections of the chapter, you will practise doing this more in different expository written forms.

The Structure of an Expository Essay

Sections versus Paragraphs

Before looking at the general structure of an expository essay, you first need to know that in your post-secondary education, you should not consider your essay as writing being constructed with five paragraphs as you might have been used to in high school. You should instead think of your essay in terms of sections (there may be five), and each section may have multiple paragraphs.

To understand further why you need to think beyond the five-paragraph essay, imagine you have been asked to submit a six-page paper (approximately 1,500 words). You already know that each paragraph should be roughly 75 to 200 words long. If you divide the required word count by five paragraphs (1,500 by 5), you end with 300 words per paragraph, way above the number you should have in a paragraph. If your paragraphs are too long, they likely have too many ideas and your reader may become confused. Your paragraphs should be two-third of a page at most, and *never* longer than a page.

Instead, if you think of your essays being divided into sections (with possibly more than one paragraph per section), your writing will likely be more organized and allow your reader to follow your presentation of ideas without creating too much distance between your paragraph's supporting points and its topic sentence.

Some essay forms may require even more than five paragraphs or sections because of how many points are necessary to address. For the rest of this chapter, the term *paragraph* will also imply section.

Sections of an Expository Essay

An expository essay, regardless of its purpose, should have at least five sections, which are:

- Introduction
- First body section/paragraph
- Second body section/paragraph
- Third body section/paragraph
- Conclusion

The **introduction** should state the topic of your paper: your thesis statement as well as brief signposts of what information the rest of the paper will include. That is, you only want to mention the content of the body paragraphs; you do not want to go into a lot of detail and repeat what will be in the rest of the essay.

The **first body section** or **paragraph** should focus on one of your main points and provide evidence to support that point. There should be two to three supporting points: reasons, facts, statistics, quotations, examples, or a mix of these. Both the **second** and **third body sections** should follow the same pattern. Providing three body sections with one point each that supports the thesis should provide the reader with enough detail to be convinced of your argument or fully understand the concept you are explaining. However, remember that some sections will require more explanation, and you may need to separate this information into multiple paragraphs.

You can order your sections in the most logical way to explain your ideas. For example, if you are describing a process, you may use chronological order to show the definite time order in which the steps need to happen. You will learn about the different ways to organize your body paragraphs in the next chapter.

The **concluding paragraph**, or conclusion, can be a little tricky to compose because you need to make sure you give a concise summary of the body paragraphs, but you must be careful not to simply repeat what

you have already written. Look back at the main idea of each section/paragraph and try to summarize the point using words different from those you have already used. Do not include any new points in your concluding paragraph.

Consider Your Audience: How Much Do They Know?

Later in this chapter, you will work on determining and adapting to your audience when writing, but with an expository essay, since you are defining or informing your audience on a certain topic, you need to evaluate how much your audience knows about that topic (aside from having general common knowledge). You want to make sure you are giving thorough, comprehensive, and clear explanations on the topic. Never assume the reader knows everything about your topic (even if it is covered in the reader's field of study). For example, even though some of your instructors may teach criminology, they may have specialized in different areas from the one about which you are writing; they most likely have a strong understanding of the concepts but may not recall all the small details on the topic. If your instructor specialized in crime mapping and data analysis for example, he or she may not have a strong recollection of specific criminological theories related to other areas of study. Providing enough background information without being too detailed is a fine balance, but you always want to ensure you have no gaps in the information, so your reader will not have to guess your intention.

Check Your Understanding: Expository Essays

Let's take a moment to see how much you already know about types of expository essays. Match the type of expository essay to the most correct description.

Expository Essays (Text Version)

Descriptions:

1. _____ the art of storytelling
2. _____ to show or demonstrate something clearly
3. _____ writing that appeals to our senses
4. _____ to break down broad subjects into smaller parts
5. _____ to explain how to do something or how something works
6. _____ establish the way in which people communicate ideas

7. _____ analyze two subjects in relation to each other
8. _____ to determine how various phenomena relate

Expository Essay Type:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| A. Process analysis | D. Description | G. Narrative |
| B. Illustration | E. Cause and effect | H. Classification |
| C. Compare and contrast | F. Definition | |

Check your answers¹

Activity source: “Pre-Test Chapter 4” by Brenna Clarke Gray (H5P Adaptation) is based on *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Harkoff, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). / Interactive content extracted to plain text.

Rhetorical modes refers simply to the ways to communicate effectively through language. As you read about these modes, keep in mind that the rhetorical mode a writer chooses depends on his or her purpose for writing. Sometimes writers incorporate a variety of modes in any one essay. In this chapter, we also emphasize the rhetorical modes as a set of tools that will allow you greater flexibility and effectiveness in communicating with your audience and expressing your ideas.

When asked to write an expository essay, think about which types of expository essays are easier and which are more challenging for you. You may want to explore a mode you find more challenging than the others in order to ensure you have a full grasp on developing each type. However, it is up to you. As you work through the sections, think about possible topics you could write an expository essay about, and visualize possible brainstorm ideas as you work through the self-practice exercises.

Watch It: Expository Writing

Watch Expository writing: Writing to explain (3 minutes) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/c5lPrxafggQ>)

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “4.1 Expository Essays” In *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian HSP Edition* by Tara Horkoff, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#). Adaptations include removing the last paragraph and adding the Expository Writing Video.

Notes

- | | | | |
|----|------|------|------|
| 1. | 1. G | 4. H | 7. C |
| | 2. B | 5. A | 8. E |
| | 3. D | 6. F | |

THE STRUCTURE OF A PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Writing a Persuasive Essay

You first need to choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction.

Next, you must acknowledge and explain points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. You should also state the limits of your argument. This helps you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may naturally be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay.

Be sure to make your appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated. Also, write in a style and tone that is appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice. Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis.

Structuring a Persuasive Essay

You may already be familiar with the formula below for organizing a persuasive essay. It will present a convincing argument to your reader because your discussion is well rounded and thorough, and you leave your audience with your point of view at the end. Remember to consider each of these components in this formula *sections* instead of *paragraphs* because you will probably want to discuss multiple ideas backing up your point of view to make it more convincing.

When writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading. For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case.

Some key transitional words you should use with this method of organization are: *most importantly*, *almost as importantly*, *just as importantly*, and *finally*.

The Formula

You will need to come up with objection points, but you will also need to think of direct rebuttals to each of those ideas. Remember to consult your outline as you are writing because you may need to double-check that you have countered *each* of the possible opposing ideas you presented.

Section 1: Introduction

- Attention-getter
- Thesis (showing main and controlling ideas)
- Background
- Signposts (make sure you outline the structure your argument will follow)

Section 2: (Multiple) Ideas in Support of Claim

- Give a topic sentence introducing the point (showing main and controlling ideas)
- Give explanations and evidence on the first point
- Make a concluding statement summarizing the point discussion (possibly transitioning to the next supporting idea)
- Repeat with multiple ideas in separate paragraphs

Section 3: Summary of (Some) Opposing Views

- Give a topic sentence explaining that this paragraph will present opposing points of view as part of providing a thorough, convincing argument
- Present a general summary of some opposing ideas
- Present some *generalized* evidence
- Provide a brief concluding sentence for the paragraph—transitioning into the next rebuttal paragraph

Section 4: Response to Opposing Views

- Give a topic sentence explaining/indicating how this paragraph/section **connects to or expands on the previous paragraph**
- [Here, you *may* recognize the validity of some of the points; then you need to] Present how your ideas are stronger
- Present evidence **directly countering/refuting** ideas mentioned in the previous section

- Give a concluding statement summarizing the **countering** arguments

Section 5: Conclusion

- Restate your thesis
- Summarize your discussion points
- Leave the reader with a strong impression; do not waiver here
- May provide a “call for action”

Tip

In a persuasive essay, the writer’s point of view should be clearly expressed at the beginning of each paragraph in the topic sentence, which should contain the main idea of the paragraph and the writer’s controlling idea.

Watch It: How to Write an Argumentative Essay with Example

Watch How to write an argumentative essay with example (3 minutes) on YouTube

(<https://youtu.be/VZKUeEBryOk>)

Video source: Literacy In Focus. (2023, February 1). *How to write an argumentative essay with example* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/VZKUeEBryOk>

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “10.2 The Structure of a Persuasive Essay” In *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian H5P Edition* by Tara Horkoff, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. /

Adaptations include the addition of the [How to Write an Argumentative Argument Essay with example video](#).

NARRATION

The Purpose of Narrative Writing

Narration refers to the art of storytelling, and the purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Anytime you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration.

A narrative can be factual or fictional. A **factual story** is one that is based on, and tries to be faithful to, actual events as they unfolded. A **fictional story** is made up or imagined; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as they see fit. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories; novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

Tip

Because the line between fact and fiction can often blur, it is helpful to understand what your purpose is from the beginning. Is it important that you recount history, either your own or someone else's? Or does your interest lie in reshaping the world in your own image—either how you would like to see it or how you imagine it could be? Your answers will go a long way in shaping the stories you tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. You want your audience to be moved by your story, which could mean through humour, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly you tell your story, the more emotionally engaged your audience is likely to be.

Check your Understanding: Narrative Writing Practice

Narrative Writing Practice (Text version)
Exercise Preamble

For this exercise, you will be writing a rough plot summary of a narrative-style expository essay. We will use the freewriting strategy, where you set a timer (this time for five minutes) and write as freely as you can, trying not to worry too much about what is on the page but instead just working to get your ideas on paper. Don't censor yourself—you can always edit later.

Choose one of these topics, or select something else you find more interesting:

- Childhood
- School
- Adventure
- Work
- Love
- Family
- Friends
- Vacation
- Nature
- Space

Before you start, you'll need to decide if your narrative will be factual (true story) or fictional (made up). Either is fine!

Set your timer for **five minutes** and write without distraction until it goes off. (If you would prefer not to type, you can of course do your freewriting on paper.)

Organize Freewrite

1. Look back at your freewriting and think about whether your narrative makes sense **chronologically**. Revise your freewriting into a rough draft that uses transitions in order to show the relationship between the events and express time.
Share your rough draft here.
2. Remember to use transitions! In fact, let's make note of the transitions you used above, and what they did for your draft (how did they help you explain the chronology of your narrative?).

Activity source: “Self-Practice 4.1” by Brenna Clarke Gray (H5P Adaptation) is based on *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Harkoff is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

The Structure of a Narrative Essay

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in **chronological order**, the order in which events unfold from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events are typically organized by time. Using transitional words and phrases help to keep the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed below.

Transitional Words and Phrases for Expressing Time

- after/afterward
- as soon as
- at last
- before
- currently
- during
- eventually
- meanwhile
- next
- now
- since
- soon
- finally
- later
- still
- then
- until
- when/whenever
- while
- first, second, third

The following are the basic components of a narrative:

- **Plot**—The events as they unfold in sequence.
- **Character**—The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the protagonist.
- **Conflict**—The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.
- **Theme**—The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

Writing at Work

When interviewing candidates for jobs, employers often ask about conflicts or problems a potential employee has had to overcome. They are asking for a compelling personal narrative. To prepare for this question in a job interview, write out a scenario using the narrative mode. This will allow you to troubleshoot rough spots as well as better understand your own personal history. It will make both your story and your presentation of it better.

Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, start by asking yourself if you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then freewrite about topics that are of general interest to you.

Once you have a general idea of what you will be writing about, sketch out the major events of the story that will compose your plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically and climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as you describe the events and characters in your narrative. You want the reader to emotionally engage with the world that you create in writing.

Tip

To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. You want your reader to be immersed in the world you create, so focus on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your narrative.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook your reader into wanting to read more. Try opening the essay with an interesting event that helps to get the story going. Finally, your conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon your reader the ultimate theme of the piece.

Watch It: How to Write a Narrative Essay

Watch How to write a narrative essay (2:30 minutes) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/Pf7ywwfCJUo>)

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “4.2 Narration” In *Fraser Valley India’s Writing for Success for LMS* by Tara Horkoff, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). Adaptations include adding the How to Write a Narrative Essay video and removal of one sentence with Appendix reference.

DEVELOPING A STRONG, CLEAR THESIS STATEMENT

Have you ever known a person who was not very good at telling stories? You probably had trouble following their train of thought as they jumped around from point to point, either being too brief in places that needed further explanation or providing too many details on a meaningless element. Maybe they told the end of the story first, then moved to the beginning and later added details to the middle. Their ideas were probably scattered, and the story did not flow very well. When the story was over, you probably had many questions.

Just as a personal anecdote can be a disorganized mess, an essay can fall into the same trap of being out of order and confusing. That is why writers need a thesis statement to provide a specific focus for their essay and to organize what they are about to discuss in the body.

Just like a topic sentence summarizes a single paragraph, the thesis statement summarizes an entire essay. It tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point. It is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

Elements of a Thesis Statement

For every essay you write, you must focus on a central idea. This idea stems from a topic you have chosen or been assigned or from a question your teacher has asked. It is not enough merely to discuss a general topic or simply answer a question with a yes or no. You have to form a specific opinion, and then articulate that into a controlling idea—the main idea upon which you build your thesis.

Remember that a thesis is not the topic itself, but rather your interpretation of the question or subject. For whatever topic your professor gives you, you must ask yourself, “What do I want to say about it?” Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a thesis that is precise, forceful and confident.

A thesis is one sentence long and appears toward the end of your introduction. It is specific and focuses on one to three points of a single idea—points that are able to be demonstrated in the body. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how you will organize your information. Remember that a thesis statement does not summarize an issue but rather dissects it.

Watch It: How to Write a Thesis Statement

Watch How to write an essay: Thesis statements (5 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/TotaRoYh60Y>)

A Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities.

Specificity—A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.

Precision—A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic is individuals without employment benefits, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that all employers should be obligated to provide certain benefits. You must further pinpoint what you are going to discuss regarding these required benefits, such as what types should be required.

Ability to be argued—A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.

Ability to be demonstrated—For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.

Forcefulness—A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.

Confidence—In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as *I feel* or *I believe* actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

Tip

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as *in my opinion* or *I believe*. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

Check Your Understanding: Writing a Thesis Statement

On a separate sheet of paper, write a thesis statement for each of the following topics. Remember to make each statement specific, precise, demonstrable, forceful and confident.

Topics

- Texting while driving
- The legal drinking age in Canada
- Steroid use among professional athletes
- Free speech
- Racism

Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
- Precision
- Ability to be argued
- Ability to be demonstrated
- Forcefulness
- Confidence

1. Educating newcomers to Canada about historical Indigenous treaties is an important way to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action.
2. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.
3. J. D. Salinger's character in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.
4. Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.
5. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.
6. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

- A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.
Weak thesis statement: My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.
- A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side.
Weak thesis statement: Religious radicals across Canada are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.
- A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end.
Weak thesis statement: Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.
- A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.
Weak thesis statement: The life of Sir John A. Macdonald was long and challenging.

Tip

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Check Your Understanding: Strong Thesis Statements

Strong Thesis Statements (Text version)

Match the terms following terms (a-f) to the correct phrase (1-6).

- a. an ability to be demonstrated
- b. confidence
- c. precision
- d. specificity
- e. forcefulness
- f. the ability to be argued

Phrases:

1. Phrases like “I believe” or “I feel” actually weaken your argument. Instead, take a stance with _____ which encourages readers to support your position.
2. Stating a fact is not enough. A thesis statement must have _____.
3. A strong thesis statement must have _____, which means a general topic is narrowed down and made unambiguous.
4. Your tone should have _____ which shows readers you are making an argument that could be opposed.
5. Your argument must remained focused on the overall topic while making a specific point. This is known as _____.
6. Any claim that is made in your thesis must be able to be supported by reasons and examples. This is know as _____.

Check your answers:¹

Activity source: “Thesis statements” by Emily Cramer, licensed under [CC BY](#) from “4.1–Developing A Strong, Clear Thesis Statement” In *Communication Essentials for College* by Amanda Quibell & Emily Cramer, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

Check Your Understanding: Identifying Strong Thesis Statements

Identifying Strong Thesis Statements (Text version)

Read the following thesis statements and identify each as weak or strong.

1. The subject of this paper is my experience with ferrets as pets.
2. The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.
3. Edgar Allan Poe was a poet who lived in Baltimore during the 19th century.
4. In this essay, I will give you a lot of reasons why marijuana should not be legalized in British Columbia.
5. Because many children's toys have potential safety hazards that could lead to injury, it is clear that not all children's toys are safe.
6. My experience with young children has taught me that I want to be a disciplinary parent because I believe that a child without discipline can be a parent's worst nightmare.

Check your answers: ²

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Writing at Work

Often in your career, you will need to ask your boss for something through an e-mail. Just as a thesis statement organizes an essay, it can also organize your e-mail request. While your e-mail will be shorter than an essay, using a thesis statement in your first paragraph quickly lets your boss know what you are asking for, why it is necessary, and what the benefits are. In short body paragraphs, you can provide the essential information needed to expand upon your request.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing.

Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

Tip

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

1. Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as *people*, *everything*, *society*, or *life*, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

Working thesis: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.

Revised thesis: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.

2. Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

Revised thesis: The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

A joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for

the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for *joke*. The writer should ask himself or herself questions similar to the 5WH questions—*Who, What, Where, When, Why* and *How*. By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines their stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

3. Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: Simcoe County school teachers are not paid enough.

Revised thesis: Simcoe County District School Board cannot afford to pay its educators enough, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, “Why are they not paid enough?” But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask themselves questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered “enough”?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results?

4. Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

Working thesis: Today’s teenage girls are too sexualized.

Revised thesis: Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman’s worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.

It is true that some young women in today’s society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?
- What constitutes “too” sexualized?
- Why are they behaving that way?
- Where does this behavior show up?
- What are the repercussions?

Writing at Work

In your career you may have to write a project proposal that focuses on a particular problem in your company, such as reinforcing the tardiness policy. The proposal would aim to fix the problem; using a thesis statement would clearly state the boundaries of the problem and tell the goals of the project. After writing the proposal, you may find that the thesis needs revision to reflect exactly what is expressed in the body. Using the techniques from this chapter would apply to revising that thesis.

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this section is adapted from “[4.1 – Developing A Strong, Clear Thesis Statement](#)” In *Communication Essentials for College* by Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). An adaptation from “[9.1 Developing a strong, clear thesis statement \(https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/chapter/9-1-developing-a-strong-clear-thesis-statement/\)](#)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). / Adaptations include updates for student friendly language, attribution and topics, etc. Adapted to remove an exercise.

Notes

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | 1. b) confidence | 3. d) specificity | 5. c) precision |
| | 2. f) an ability to be argued | 4. e) forcefulness | 6. a) an ability to be demonstrated |
| 2. | 1. Weak | 3. Weak | 5. Strong |
| | 2. Strong | 4. Weak | 6. Weak. |

ORGANIZING YOUR WRITING

The method of organization you choose for your essay is just as important as its content. Without a clear organizational pattern, your reader could become confused and lose interest. The way you structure your essay helps your readers draw connections between the body and the thesis, and the structure also keeps you focused as you plan and write the essay. Choosing your organizational pattern before you outline ensures that each body paragraph works to support and develop your thesis.

This section covers three ways to organize body paragraphs:

1. Chronological order
2. Order of importance
3. Spatial order

When you begin to draft your essay, your ideas may seem to flow from your mind in a seemingly random manner. Your readers, who bring to the table different backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideas, need you to clearly organize these ideas in order to help process and accept them. A solid organizational pattern gives your ideas a path that you can follow as you develop your draft.

Chronological Order

Chronological arrangement has the following purposes:

- To explain the history of an event or a topic
- To tell a story or relate an experience
- To explain how to do or make something
- To explain the steps in a process

Chronological order is mostly used in expository writing, which is a form of writing that narrates, describes, informs, or explains a process. When using chronological order, arrange the events in the order that they actually happened—or will happen, if you are giving instructions. This method requires you to use words such as *first*, *second*, *then*, *after that*, *later*, and *finally*. These transition words guide you and your reader through the paper as you expand your thesis.

For example, if you are writing an essay about the history of the airline industry, you would begin with its

conception and detail the essential timeline events up until present day. You would follow the chain of events using words such as *first*, *then*, *next*, and so on.

Check Your Understanding: Using Chronological Order

Using Chronological Order (Text version)

Put the statements in the correct chronological order by numbering them in the order you believe they should be organized into a paragraph.

1. When I have the shot pulled, I use a milk steamer to steam one cup of milk.
2. Every morning I make my coffee in the same way for maximum flavour.
3. Next, I use an espresso machine to pull an espresso shot directly into my coffee cup.
4. And that's how I start my day with my perfect latte!
5. First, I freshly grind my espresso beans.
6. Finally, I slowly pour the steamed milk into my espresso.

Check your answers: ¹

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Keep in mind that chronological order is most appropriate for the following purposes:

- Writing essays containing heavy research
- Writing essays with the aim of listing, explaining, or narrating
- Writing essays that analyze literary works such as poems, plays, or books

Tip

When using chronological order, your introduction should indicate the information you will cover and in what order, and the introduction should also establish the relevance of the information. Your body paragraphs should then provide clear divisions or steps in chronology.

Order of Importance

Order of importance is best used for the following purposes:

- Persuading and convincing
- Ranking items by their importance, benefit, or significance
- Illustrating a situation, problem, or solution

Most essays move from the least to the most important point, and the paragraphs are arranged in an effort to build the essay's strength. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to begin with your most important supporting point, such as in an essay that contains a thesis that is highly debatable. When writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading.

For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case.

Some key transitional words you should use with this method of organization are *most importantly*, *almost as importantly*, *just as importantly*, and *finally*.

Writing at Work

During your career, you may be required to work on a team that devises a strategy for a specific goal of your company, such as increasing profits. When planning your strategy you should organize your steps in order of importance. This demonstrates the ability to prioritize and plan. Using the order of importance technique also shows that you can create a resolution with logical steps for accomplishing a common goal.

Check Your Understanding: Using Order of Importance

Using Order of Importance (Text version)

Put the statements in the correct order of importance by numbering them in the order you believe they should be organized into a paragraph.

- a. Most importantly, it prevents unexpected harm from coming to the dog or to the people and animals he encounters.
- b. Almost as important, though, is the bond that it helps create between the dog and his caretaker.
- c. And finally, dogs love the sense of achievement they feel when they master simple tasks.
- d. For all of these reasons, proper dog training is important and should not be overlooked.
- e. Adequate training is critical to the success of a relationship between a person and their dog.

Check your answers:²

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Spatial Order

Spatial order is best used for the following purposes:

- Helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it
- Evoking a scene using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
- Writing a descriptive essay

Spatial order means that you explain or describe objects as they are arranged around you in your space, for example in a bedroom. As the writer, you create a picture for your reader, and their perspective is the viewpoint from which you describe what is around you.

The view must move in an orderly, logical progression, giving the reader clear directional signals to follow from place to place. The key to using this method is to choose a specific starting point and then guide the reader to follow your eye as it moves in an orderly trajectory from your starting point.

Pay attention to the following student’s description of her bedroom and how she guides the reader through the viewing process, foot by foot.

Attached to my bedroom wall is a small wooden rack dangling with red and turquoise necklaces that shimmer as you enter. Just to the right of the rack is my window, framed by billowy white curtains. The peace of such an image is a stark contrast to my desk, which sits to the right of the window, layered in textbooks, crumpled papers, coffee cups, and an overflowing ashtray. Turning my head to the right, I see a set of two bare windows that frame the trees outside the glass like a 3D painting. Below the windows is an oak chest from which blankets and scarves are protruding. Against the wall opposite the billowy curtains is an antique dresser, on top of which sits a jewelry box and a few picture frames. A tall mirror attached to the dresser takes up most of the wall, which is the color of lavender.

The paragraph incorporates two objectives you have learned in this chapter: using an implied topic sentence and applying spatial order. Often in a descriptive essay, the two work together.

The following are possible transition words or phrases to include when using spatial order:

- Just to the left or just to the right
- Behind
- Between
- On the left or on the right
- Across from
- A little further down
- To the south, to the east, and so on
- A few yards away
- Turning left or turning right

Check Your Understanding: Using Spatial Order

Using Spatial Order (Text Version)

Put the statements in the correct spatial order by numbering them in the order you believe they should be organized into a paragraph.

- a. The rest of the area within the gate is a meadow of clover and flowers.
- b. Reflecting on this space reminds me that it's nice to have somewhere to go that is so calm and soothing.
- c. The farmyard is a peaceful and familiar space.
- d. When you first enter the property through the farm gate, there is a red barn to the right.
- e. To the immediate left of the red barn is a pig pen and a chicken coup.
- f. Across the farmyard from the animals is the farmhouse, which has a duck pond in the backyard.

Check your answers: ³

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[4.0](#)./ An adaptation from ” [9.3 Organizing your writing \(https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/](#)

[chapter/9-3-organizing-your-writing/\)](#)” In *Writing for Success* by University of Minnesota licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

Notes

1. Correct order is 2., 5., 3., 1., 6., 4.
2. 1. e, 2. a, 3. b, 4. c, 5. d.
3. 1. c, 2. d, 3. e, 4. f, 5. a, 6. b

WRITING BODY PARAGRAPHS

If your thesis gives the reader a roadmap to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement.

The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

Select Primary Support for Your Thesis

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be convincing. Primary support can be described as the **major points** you choose to expand on your thesis. It is the most important information you select to argue for your point of view. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write. Your primary supporting points are further supported by supporting details within the paragraphs.

Tip

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about a topic in order to understand its implications before writing about it.

Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

In order to fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information you choose must meet the following standards:

- **Be specific**—The main points you make about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon your general ideas. These types of examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. General examples, while they convey the necessary information, are

not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.

- **Be relevant to the thesis**—Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.
- **Be detailed**—Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. The body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

Prewrite to Identify Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

When you prewrite, you essentially make a list of examples or reasons why you support your stance. Stemming from each point, you further provide details to support those reasons. After prewriting, you are then able to look back at the information and choose the most compelling pieces you will use in your body paragraphs.

Check Your Understanding: Prewriting

Choose one of the following working thesis statements. On a separate sheet of paper, write for at least five minutes using one of the prewriting techniques you learned in the [Pre-Writing module](#).

1. Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.
2. Students cheat for many different reasons.
3. Drug use among teens and young adults is a problem.
4. The most important change that should occur at my college or university is:

Select the Most Effective Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

After you have prewritten about your working thesis statement, you may have generated a lot of information, which may be edited out later. Remind yourself of your main argument, and delete any ideas that do not directly relate to it. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that you will use only the most convincing information in your body paragraphs. Choose at least three of only the most compelling points. These will serve as the topic sentences for your body paragraphs.

Check Your Understanding: Selecting Effective Primary Supporting Points

Refer to the previous exercise and select three of your most compelling reasons to support the thesis statement. Remember that the points you choose must be specific and relevant to the thesis. The statements you choose will be your primary support points, and you will later incorporate them into the topic sentences for the body paragraphs.

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence. Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance. The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research:

1. **Facts**—Facts are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, some facts may still need explanation. For example, the sentence “The most populated state in the United States is California” is a pure fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.
2. **Judgments**—Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic.
3. **Testimony**—Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who has direct experience with a subject; they add authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on either facts or judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.
4. **Personal observation**—Personal observation is similar to testimony, but personal observation consists

of your testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you have experiences and have formed either opinions or judgments about them. For instance, if you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child's social development, you could use your own experience to support your thesis.

Check Your Understanding: Types of Supporting Facts

Types of supporting facts (Text version)

Determine whether the supporting points are facts, judgements, personal observation, or testimony.

1. The most populated province in Canada is Ontario.
2. I don't think Mr. John will be able to complete the marathon.
3. Mrs. Marshall saw Mike eating the last piece of cake.
4. My dad loves to eat his steak well done.

Check your answers:¹

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Writing at Work

In any job where you devise a plan, you will need to support the steps that you lay out. This is an area in which you would incorporate primary support into your writing. Choosing only the most specific and relevant information to expand upon the steps will ensure that your plan appears well thought out and precise.

Tip

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your assertions. Use any of the following sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, which are periodicals that address topics in a specialized field.

Watch It: Evaluating Sources for Credibility

Watch Evaluating sources for credibility (4 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/v8DfTTmdQ04>)

Choose Supporting Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph contains a topic sentence that states one aspect of your thesis and then expands upon it. Like the thesis statement, each topic sentence should be specific and supported by concrete details, facts, or explanations.

Each body paragraph should comprise the following elements:

topic sentence + supporting details (examples, reasons, or arguments)

Topic sentences indicate the location and main points of the basic arguments of your essay. These sentences are vital to writing your body paragraphs because they always refer back to and support your thesis statement. Topic sentences are linked to the ideas you have introduced in your thesis, thus reminding readers what your essay is about. A paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement.

Tip

Unless your teacher instructs otherwise, you should include at least three body paragraphs in your essay. A five-paragraph essay, including the introduction and conclusion, is commonly the standard for exams and essay assignments.

Consider the following the thesis statement:

Author J.D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority of his works.

The following topic sentence is a primary support point for the thesis. The topic sentence states exactly what the controlling idea of the paragraph is. Later, you will see the writer immediately provide support for the sentence.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced themes in many of his works.

Check Your Understanding: Writing Topic Sentences

In the last exercise, you chose three of your most convincing points to support the thesis statement you selected from the list. Take each point and incorporate it into a topic sentence for each body paragraph.

Supporting point 1:

Topic sentence:

Supporting point 2:

Topic sentence:

Supporting point 3:

Topic sentence:

Draft Supporting Detail Sentences for Each Primary Support Sentence

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence.

The writer drafts possible supporting detail sentences for each primary support sentence based on the thesis statement:

Thesis statement: Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.

1. **Supporting point 1:** Dogs can scare cyclists and pedestrians.

Supporting details:

1. Cyclists are forced to zigzag on the road.
2. School children panic and turn wildly on their bikes
3. People who are walking at night freeze in fear.

2. **Supporting point 2:** Loose dogs are traffic hazards.

Supporting details:

1. Dogs in the street make people swerve their cars.
2. To avoid dogs, drivers run into other cars or pedestrians.
3. Children coaxing dogs across busy streets create danger.

3. **Supporting point 3:** Unleashed dogs damage gardens.

Supporting details:

1. They step on flowers and vegetables.
2. They destroy hedges by urinating on them.
3. They mess up lawns by digging holes.

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the primary support sentence (the topic sentence—the very first one in the paragraph), which is underlined.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, “You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live.” His short story “A Perfect Day for a Bananafish” details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released from an army hospital for psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short story, “For Esmé – with Love and Squalor,” is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger’s only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, he continues with the theme of posttraumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.

Check Your Understanding: Writing Supporting Details

Using the three topic sentences you just composed for the thesis statement in “Exercise 3”, draft at least three supporting details for each point.

Thesis statement:

Primary supporting point 1:

Supporting details:

Primary supporting point 2:

Supporting details:

Primary supporting point 3:

Supporting details:

Tip

Print out the first draft of your essay and use a highlighter to mark your topic sentences in the body paragraphs. Make sure they are clearly stated and accurately present your paragraphs, as well as accurately reflect your thesis. If your topic sentence contains information that does not exist in the rest of the paragraph, rewrite it to more accurately match the rest of the paragraph.

Attribution & References

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Notes

1. 1. fact, 2. judgement, 3. testimony, 4. Personal observation

WRITING INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

Picture your introduction as a storefront window: You have a certain amount of space to attract your customers (readers) to your goods (subject) and bring them inside your store (discussion). Once you have enticed them with something intriguing, you then point them in a specific direction and try to make the sale (convince them to accept your thesis).

Your introduction is an invitation to your readers to consider what you have to say and then to follow your train of thought as you expand upon your thesis statement.

An introduction serves the following purposes:

1. Establishes your voice and tone, or your attitude, toward the subject
2. Introduces the general topic of the essay
3. States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs

First impressions are crucial and can leave lasting effects in your reader's mind, which is why the introduction is so important to your essay. If your introductory paragraph is dull or disjointed, your reader probably will not have much interest in continuing with the essay.

Attracting Interest in Your Introductory Paragraph

Your introduction should begin with an engaging statement devised to provoke your readers' interest. In the next few sentences, introduce them to your topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. As you move deeper into your introduction, you gradually narrow the focus, moving closer to your thesis. Moving smoothly and logically from your introductory remarks to your thesis statement can be achieved using a funnel technique, as illustrated in the diagram in Figure 1.

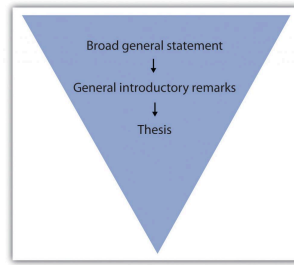


Figure 1. Using the funnel technique, a broad general statement is funnelled down to general introductory remarks, and then to a more specific thesis.

Check Your Understanding: Writing Introductory Remarks

On a separate sheet of paper, jot down a few general remarks that you can make about the topic for which you formed a thesis in [Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement](#).

Immediately capturing your readers' interest increases the chances of having them read what you are about to discuss. You can garner curiosity for your essay in a number of ways. Try to get your readers personally involved by doing any of the following:

- Appealing to their emotions
- Using logic
- Beginning with a provocative question or opinion
- Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact
- Raising a question or series of questions
- Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
- Opening with a relevant quotation or incident
- Opening with a striking image
- Including a personal anecdote

Check Your Understanding: Capturing Attention

Capturing Attention (Text version)

Imagine you are writing an essay arguing for domesticated cats to be kept indoors. What follows is a list of potentially attention-grabbing first sentences for the introductory paragraph. Match the kind of appeal (a-i) in the list below to the sample sentence (1-9) that provides the best example.

Appeal

- a. Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
- b. Opening with a relevant quotation or incident
- c. Including a personal anecdote
- d. Using logic
- e. Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact
- f. Raising a question or series of questions
- g. Appealing to their emotions
- h. Opening with a striking image
- i. Beginning with a provocative question or opinion

Sample Sentences

1. A little girl weeps at the untimely death of her beloved cat; an elderly neighbour misses the company of the neighbourhood songbirds.
2. Most people love neighbourhood wildlife and most pet owners love their pets; a mutually beneficial strategy for keeping both safe is to keep cats indoors.
3. Cats are cute, but they are also murderous killing machines bent on destroying your neighbourhood.
4. Every year, cats kill between 100 million and 350 million birds in Canada alone; 38% of those birds are killed by domesticated cats.
5. If you knew there was one single behavioural change that would improve your neighbourhood for generations, would you do it?
6. The purpose of this essay is to protect neighbourhood wildlife from cats, and to protect cats from the hazards of this neighbourhood.
7. "Curiosity killed the cat," goes the famous adage.

8. Imagine the sight of a beloved family cat who has been struck by a car on the highway.
9. When I was a child, our family cat loved to roam free in the neighbourhood. I never wondered why there were no birds in our backyard, like my friends enjoyed and experienced.

Check your answers:¹

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Tip

Remember that your diction (word choice), while always important, is most crucial in your introductory paragraph. Boring diction could extinguish any desire a person might have to read through your discussion. Choose words that create images or express action.

Previously, you followed Mariah as she moved through the writing process. In this chapter, Mariah writes her introduction and conclusion for the same essay. Mariah incorporates some of the introductory elements into her introductory paragraph, which she outlined earlier. Her thesis statement is underlined.

Play Atari on a General Electric brand television set? Maybe watch *Dynasty*? Or read old newspaper articles on microfiche at the library? Twenty-five years ago, the average college student did not have many options when it came to entertainment in the form of technology. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, and the digital age has digital technology, consumers are bombarded with endless options for how they do most everything—from buying and reading books to taking and developing photographs. In a society that is obsessed with digital means of entertainment, it is easy for the average person to become baffled. Everyone wants the newest and best digital technology, but the choices are many and the specifications are often confusing.

Mariah's thesis statement, "Everyone wants the newest and best digital technology, but the choices are many and the specifications are often confusing", is located at the end of the paragraph.

Tip

If you have trouble coming up with a provocative statement for your opening, it is a good idea to use a relevant, attention-grabbing quote about your topic. Use a search engine to find statements made by historical or significant figures about your subject.

Writing at Work

In your job field, you may be required to write a speech for an event, such as an awards banquet or a dedication ceremony. The introduction of a speech is similar to an essay because you have a limited amount of space to attract your audience's attention. Using the same techniques, such as a provocative quote or an interesting statistic, is an effective way to engage your listeners. Using the funnel approach also introduces your audience to your topic and then presents your main idea in a logical manner.

Check Your Understanding: Mariah's Strategies for Capturing Attention

Mariah's Strategies for Capturing Attention

Below you will see the text of Mariah’s introduction. Match the appropriate phrase in the introduction (1-4) to the attention-capturing strategy (a-d) used.

Introduction

1. Play Atari on a General Electric brand television set? Maybe watch *Dynasty*? Or read old newspaper articles on microfiche at the library?
2. Twenty-five years ago, the average college student did not have many options when it came to entertainment in the form of technology. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, and the digital age has revolutionized the way people entertain themselves.
3. In today’s rapidly-evolving world of digital technology consumers are bombarded with endless options of how they do most everything — from buying and reading books to taking and developing photographs. In a society that is obsessed with digital means of entertainment, it is easy for the average person to become baffled.
4. Everyone wants the newest and best digital technology, but the choices are many and the specifications are often confusion.

Strategies

- a. Using logic
- b. Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
- c. Raising a question or series of questions
- d. Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact

Check your answers:²

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Writing a Conclusion

It is not unusual to want to rush when you approach your conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade. But what good writers remember is that it is vital to put just as much attention into the conclusion as in the rest of the essay. After all, a hasty ending can undermine an otherwise strong essay.

A conclusion that does not correspond to the rest of your essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle your readers and raise doubts about the entire essay. However, if you have worked hard to write the introduction and body, your conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

The Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

Keep in mind that the ideas in your conclusion must conform to the rest of your essay. In order to tie these components together, restate your thesis at the beginning of your conclusion. This helps you assemble, in an orderly fashion, all the information you have explained in the body. Repeating your thesis reminds your readers of the major arguments you have been trying to prove and also indicates that your essay is drawing to a close. A strong conclusion also reviews your main points and emphasizes the importance of the topic.

The construction of the conclusion is similar to the introduction, in which you make general introductory statements and then present your thesis. The difference is that in the conclusion you first paraphrase, or *state in different words*, your thesis and then follow up with general concluding remarks. These sentences should progressively broaden the focus of your thesis and maneuver your readers out of the essay.

Many writers like to end their essays with a final emphatic statement. This strong closing statement will cause your readers to continue thinking about the implications of your essay; it will make your conclusion, and thus your essay, more memorable. Another powerful technique is to challenge your readers to make a change in either their thoughts or their actions. Challenging your readers to see the subject through new eyes is a powerful way to ease yourself and your readers out of the essay.

Tip

When closing your essay, do not expressly state that you are drawing to a close. Relying on statements such as *in conclusion*, *it is clear that*, *as you can see*, or *in summation* is unnecessary and can be considered trite.

Tip

It is wise to avoid doing any of the following in your conclusion:

- Introducing new material
- Contradicting your thesis
- Changing your thesis
- Using apologies or disclaimers

Introducing new material in your conclusion has an unsettling effect on your reader. When you raise new points, you make your reader want more information, which you could not possibly provide in the limited space of your final paragraph.

Contradicting or changing your thesis statement causes your readers to think that you do not actually have conviction about your topic. After all, you have spent several paragraphs adhering to a singular point of view. When you change sides or open up your point of view in the conclusion, your reader becomes less inclined to believe your original argument.

By apologizing for your opinion or stating that you know it is tough to digest, you are in fact admitting that even you know what you have discussed is irrelevant or unconvincing. You do not want your readers to feel this way. Effective writers stand by their thesis statement and do not stray from it.

Check Your Understanding: Writing a Conclusion

On a separate sheet of a paper, restate your thesis from earlier in this section and then make some general concluding remarks. Next, compose a final emphatic statement. Finally, incorporate what you have written into a strong conclusion paragraph for your essay.

Mariah incorporates some of these pointers into her conclusion. She has paraphrased her thesis statement in the first sentence.

In a society fixated on the latest and smartest digital technology, a consumer can easily become confused by the countless options and specifications. The ever-changing state of digital technology challenges consumers with its updates and add-ons and expanding markets and incompatible formats and restrictions—a fact that is complicated by salesmen who want to sell them anything. In a world that is increasingly driven by instant gratification, it's easy for people to buy the first thing they see. The solution for many people should be to avoid buying on impulse. Consumers should think about what they really need, not what is advertised.

Tip

Make sure your essay is balanced by not having an excessively long or short introduction or conclusion. Check that they match each other in length as closely as possible, and try to mirror the formula you used in each. Parallelism strengthens the message of your essay.

Writing at Work

On the job you will sometimes give oral presentations based on research you have conducted. A concluding statement to an oral report contains the same elements as a written conclusion. You should wrap up your presentation by restating the purpose of the presentation, reviewing its main points, and emphasizing the importance of the material you presented. A strong conclusion will leave a lasting impression on your audience.

Summary

In this module you learned how to use all of the skills, strategies, and techniques learned to create a five-paragraph essay from prewriting to submission. In the next module, you will learn how to do research and learn more about APA, which are critical skills for writing research essays in university or college.

Attribution & References

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Notes

1. 1. g, 2. d, 3. i, 4. e, 5. f, 6. a, 7. b, 8. h, 9. c.
2. 1. c, 2. d, 3. a, 4. b