
UNIT 4 EXPOSITORY COMPOSITION

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall discuss the nature of expository composition and the methods of developing it. By the end of this unit, you will understand the various techniques of exposition such as

- explanation of a process,
- use of examples,
- reasons in support of a statement,
- comparison and contrast,
- classification,
- restatement, and
- analysis.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The word 'exposition' refers to an act of explaining something or making it clear. The purpose of expository writing is not primarily to narrate, describe, or persuade; it is mainly to explain something — facts, ideas, or beliefs. It explains, analyses, defines, compares, and illustrates. It answers questions like *what? why? how? like what? unlike what?* In this unit we shall illustrate the various methods of developing an expository composition.

4.2 DEVELOPMENT OF AN EXPOSITORY COMPOSITION

4.2.1 Explanation of a Process

Often expository composition describes and explains a process, that is, a set of actions leading to a desired result.

Example 1

The process of writing varies from person to person, but most writers seem to follow certain steps. First, the writer must choose something meaningful to say, either for herself or for others. Then she considers the topic either mentally or on paper. This is the state often called pre-thinking or pre-writing. It is during this stage that most creative and original thought takes place. With the preliminary thinking in mind, the writer then begins to write, sometimes with an outline to help with organization. Perhaps the most demanding stage in writing follows: revision. During revision the writer polishes, embellishes, deletes, and reorganizes as necessary. This stage may continue over a period of time since time gives some objectivity. Finally, the writer prepares her final draft—a copy she feels effectively develops the topic for her audience.

(Susan. S. Johnston et al: *Keys to Composition*)

Analysis. Notice that the opening sentence directly states the topic and leads to the various steps in the process of writing. The steps are then given in the order in which they are to be followed by a writer. Transitional expressions of time are used throughout the paragraph; for example, *first, then, follows, finally*. The concluding sentence states the purpose of this process of writing— to write effectively for one's audience.

Example 2

How to Change a Tire

A flat tire can upset and frighten a driver, but if a few simple steps are learned, the tire can be quickly and easily changed. First, park the vehicle on flat ground, and firmly set the hand brakes. Second, be sure to block the wheel diagonally opposite the flat tire with two rocks or a piece of heavy wood to prevent the car from slipping. Third, remove the wheel cap, and slightly loosen the wheel nuts with a wrench. Next position the jack under the frame of the car, and raise the vehicle until the tire clears the ground. Now, completely remove the wheel nuts and the wheel, install the spare, retighten the nuts, lower the vehicle, and replace the wheel cap. With these easy instructions almost anyone with the strength to lift a wheel can independently change a tire.

(from Susan S. Johnston et al : *Keys to Composition*)

Glossary

tire : American spelling of *tyre*

'clears the 'ground : is raised above the ground

Self-check Exercise 1

1 Fill in the blanks in the following description of the process explained in the paragraph given above.

Topic sentence

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.....
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Steps

- i) Park the vehicle on flat ground, and.....
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- ii)
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- iii)
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iv) Place the jack under the frame of the car.

v)

vi) Remove the wheel nuts and the wheel.

vii)

viii)

ix) Lower the vehicle.

x) Replace the wheel cap.

Conclusion

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2 Make a list of the transition words indicating the sequence of the steps.

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3 What is the purpose of explaining this process?

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4 When we explain a process, our aim is often to teach the reader *how to do* something. Rewrite the following titles using the words *how to*:

i) Making bread

ii) Preparing the soil for the garden

iii) Making a long distance telephone call

iv) Finding a place to live in near the University

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4.2.2 Use of Examples

A statement that is supported by examples is readily accepted.

Example 3

Gadgets such as electric fans, mixers, toasters, drills, and flashlights have been common for a long time. Nowadays gadgets are becoming even more imaginative. There are gadgets to rock a baby to sleep, shine shoes, start a charcoal fire, and prepare fresh coffee in the morning before an alarm clock radio rouses a household. Gadgets can open and close garage doors, make ice cubes in a home refrigerator, and turn lights on at nightfall without help of a human hand. Housekeepers now have electric brooms, electric can openers, electric knives, doughnut makers, juicers, popcorn makers, and food processors — machines that will knead dough, chop onions, grind meat, and slice vegetables for salad. An up-to-date refrigerator has a gadget that dispenses a selection of drinks and ice—available to anyone without opening the refrigerator door! Electric gadgets brush teeth, wash mouths, dial telephones, and warm seats. These are but a few examples of the many uses of new gadgets.

(from Susan S. Johnston et al : *Keys to Composition*)

Glossary

'gadgets : electrical tools for the home, which often have only one function

'rouses : awakens

Self-check Exercise 2

Complete this summary of the passage given above :

Topic sentence :

Examples

- a) baby rockers
- b)
- c)
- d) coffee makers
- e) alarm clock radios
- f)
- g)
- h) light switches
- i)
- j)
- k)
- l)
- m) juicers
- n)
- o) food processors to
 - i)
 - ii)
 - iii)
 - iv)
- p) up-to-date refrigerators, with
.....
- q) electric gadgets to
 - i)
 - ii)
 - iii)
 - iv)

4.2.3 Reasons in Support of a Statement

A writer often uses reasons in support of the statement he has made in the topic sentence.

Example 4

Desert regions, even if they had an abundance of rain, could never be truly green. The most important contributing factor is that desert soil is either too porous or too impermeable to hold water. Any rainfall that does occur quickly runs off and is lost, adding the danger of flash floods in barren areas. In fact, the environment is so hostile that only the hardiest of plants can survive. Because of the soil, the temperatures are extreme—hot under the sun and cold at night, for the soil reflects heat rather than absorbs it. Furthermore, the plant life that sustains humidity in lush regions is missing in the desert. Therefore, the air and soil remain dry and unlikely to change.

(from Susan S. Johnston et al : *Keys to Composition*)

Glossary

- 1 an a' bundance of : a lot of, much
- 2 'porous : unable to hold water as if full of holes
- 3 im' permeable: not permitting water to go through; water-resistant; impenetrable
- 4 'hostile : enemy-like
- 5 'lusher : greener

Self-check Exercise 3

1 What is the topic sentence in the above paragraph?

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2 List the causes and effects that seem to have a logical relationship.

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3 Give three reasons why we should have cars that consume less petrol.

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

4.2.4 Comparison and Contrast

In expository composition the technique of comparison and contrast is often resorted to. When we compare two things, we state the points of likeness and difference between them. When we wish to indicate the contrast, we try to make the differences clear.

Example 5

Alligators and crocodiles have much in common; the differences, if any, are minor. First of all, both alligators and crocodiles have the same reptile appearance. Looking like huge lizards, they bask in the sun all day long and hunt in the rivers, swamps and marshes of tropical areas at night. Both have long thin bodies with squat legs, webbed feet and strong tails. They also have thick hides that have commercial value. Both are dangerous to human beings. The alligator differs from the crocodile in that its snout is much broader and a little shorter. Also the fourth tooth of an alligator fits into a different place in the upper jaw. In general crocodiles are more active and more dangerous.

(from Susan S. Johnston et al : *Keys to Composition*)

Glossary

bask : sit lazily

swamp : soft wet land

marsh : land that is soft and wet because of its low position

squat : short and fat

Self-check Exercise 4

1 What are the two animals being compared in the above passage?

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2 Are they being compared as wholes, or are only certain aspects chosen for comparison?

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3 What is the purpose of this comparison?

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4 Are any other techniques of development used here?

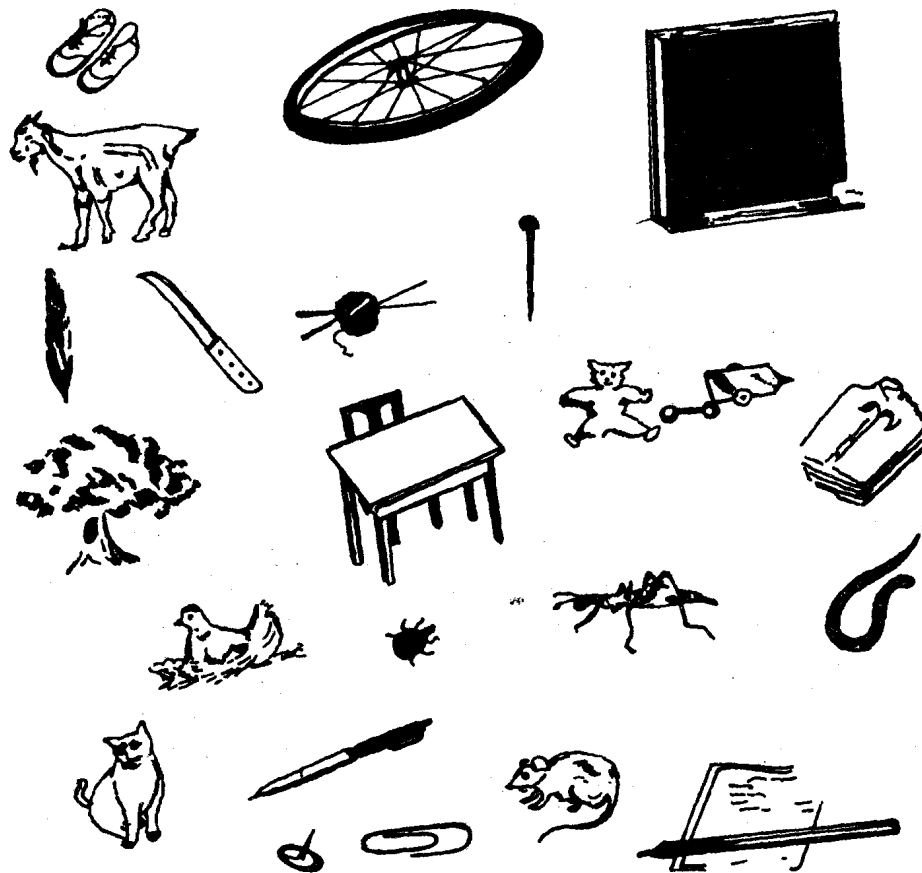
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4.2.5 Classification

In expository composition classification is used to place things into groups or classes. There is always a basis for such grouping. Classification is a useful tool when we analyse something and describe the various components.

Self-check Exercise 5



1 Some objects are shown in this picture. Can you classify them in a general way?

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2 Can the general classes be further divided into sub-classes?

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4.2.6 Restatement

Restatement involves nothing more than saying again, perhaps in different words, what you have already stated. It is a common device used to emphasise a particular point in an expository paragraph.

Example 6

American men don't cry. Only Sissies cry. Crying is a "weakness" characteristic of the female, and no American male wants to be identified with anything in the least weak or feminine. No one likes a crybaby, and crying is disapproved even in children. In a land so devoted to the pursuit of happiness, crying is rather un-American.

(from Ashley Montague : *The Oxford Guide to Writing : A Rhetoric Handbook for College Students*)

Self-check Exercise 6

1 Which is the topic sentence in this paragraph?

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2 Which other words and sentences in the paragraph restate the topic?

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Self-check Exercise 7

1 In the following paragraph which words in the opening sentence establish the topic?

No other animal is so deliberately cruel as man. No other creature intentionally imprisons its own kind, or invents special instruments of torture for the sole purpose of punishment. No other animal keeps its own brethren in slavery; so far as we know, the lower animals do not commit anything like the acts of pure sadism that figure rather largely in our newspapers. There is no torment, spite, or cruelty for its own sake among beasts, as there is among men. A cat plays with its prey, but does not conquer and torture smaller cats. But man, who knows good and evil, is cruel for cruelty's sake; he who has a moral law is more brutal than the brutes, who have none; he alone inflicts suffering on his fellows with malice aforethought.

(from Susanne K. Langer : *The Oxford Guide to Writing*, Oxford University Press, 1983.)

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2 Which expressions elsewhere in the paragraph restate the topic?

4.2.7 Analysis

At the end of this section on the development of an expository composition, we need to mention **analysis**. In a broad sense all expository compositions are analytical. Analysis refers to the specific technique of developing a subject by distinguishing its components and then discussing each in turn. The techniques discussed already—giving reasons in support of a statement, comparison, contrast and classification—are all used as tools of analysis.

4.3 A MODEL COMPOSITION

The following composition is presented here as a model. It serves two purposes:

- i) It tells you about the importance of learning English;
- ii) It reviews some of the techniques for developing expository paragraphs presented earlier in this unit.

Speech Communities

English is a useful language. The people who speak English today make up the largest speech community in the world. A speech community is similar to other kinds of communities. The people who make up the community share a common language. Often they live side by side as they do in a neighbourhood, a village, or a city. More often they form a whole country. Many nations are composed of a single major speech community, for example Italy, Sweden, and Japan. National boundaries, however, are not always the same as the boundaries of a speech community. Some nations (for example, Russia and India) are made up of many speech communities. Some speech communities (for example, Arabic, Spanish, and English) extend across national boundaries. A speech community, then, is any group of people who speak the same language, no matter where they happen to live.

We may say that anyone who speaks English belongs to the English speech community. For convenience, we may classify the speakers into two groups: one in which the speakers use English as their native language, the other in which the speakers learn English as a second language for the purposes of education, commerce, and so on. In the former group we, obviously, would include England, Canada, the United States, Australia and Newzealand. In the latter group we include, among many others, India, Denmark, Kenya, Burma, Turkey, Ethiopia, and the Philippines. Not all these countries use English for the same purpose or to the same extent, but each uses English for important social and commercial activities.

English serves as a functional language in many nations of the world which use it as an international second language. It has been adopted as the language of aviation and air traffic. English has continued as one of the important languages of commerce. The use of English in international diplomacy is strengthened by its acceptance as one of the

official languages of the United Nations. And as a final example, English is the language of the majority of published materials in the world, so that education, especially higher education, has come to rely on an understanding of English very heavily.

Learning a second language extends one's vision and expands the mind. Looking at the world or oneself through a different language system shows the limits of one's own perception and adds new dimensions to familiar objects or events. A second language teaches us different ways of labelling and organising our experience. Learning English as a second language provides another means of communication through which the window of the entire English speech community becomes a part of your heritage.

(from M. Imhoof and H. Hudson : *From Paragraph to Essay*, Longman Group, U.K. Ltd.)

Self-check Exercise 8

- 1 State the techniques of paragraph development used in the above passage.

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- 2 What is the topic sentence in this passage?

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- 3 Is the concluding sentence a restatement?

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4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have told you about the nature of expository compositions and the methods used to develop the exposition of a subject. With the help of a number of paragraphs and a model composition, we have illustrated some of the techniques talked about in this unit.

4.5 KEY WORDS

a¹nalysis : breaking up something into its parts

cl¹assifi¹cation : arrangement into classes

de¹velopment : growth; fuller presentation

- ex'ample** : something taken from a number of things, which shows the usual quality of the rest or shows a general rule
- expla'nation** : giving the meaning; making something clear
- intro'duction** : making someone familiar with something
- 'process** : a set of actions to reach some result
- 'reason** : the explanation for an action
- 'statement** : something that is expressed in words

4.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Exercise 1

- 1 *Topic Sentence* : A flat tire can upset and frighten a driver, but if a few simple steps are learned, the tire can be quickly and easily changed.

Steps

- i), and firmly set the hand brakes.
- ii) Block the wheel diagonally opposite the flat tire with two rocks or a piece of heavy wood to prevent the car from slipping.
- iii) Remove the wheel cap, and slightly loosen the wheel nuts with a wrench.
- v) Raise the vehicle until the tire clears the ground.
- vii) Install the spare.
- viii) Retighten the nuts.

Conclusion : With these easy instructions, almost anyone with the strength to lift a wheel can independently change a tire.

- 2 First, second, third, next, now.
- 3 To teach the reader how to change a tire.
- 4 i) How to make bread
- ii) How to prepare the soil for a garden
- iii) How to make a long distance telephone call
- iv) How to find a place to live in near the university.

Exercise 2

Topic Sentence : Nowadays gadgets are becoming more imaginative.

Examples:

- b) shoe shiners
- c) charcoal fire lighters
- f) garage door openers
- g) ice cube makers
- i) electric brooms
- j) electric can openers
- k) electric knives
- l) doughnut makers
- n) popcorn makers
- o) i) knead dough,
- ii) chop onions,
- iii) grind meat, and
- iv) slice vegetables

- p) drink dispensers
- q) i) brush teeth,
ii) wash mouths,
iii) dial telephones, and
iv) warm seats.

Exercise 3

- 1 Desert regions, even if they had an abundance of rain, could never be truly green.
- 2 a) There is scarcity of greenery in desert regions as
 - i) the soil is dry,
 - ii) there is the danger of floods, and
 - iii) there are extremes of temperature.
- b) The desert soil is dry, because it is either too porous or too impermeable to hold water.
- 3 i) The world's store of petroleum is rapidly decreasing.
- ii) The cost of petrol is going up.
- iii) Cars that consume more petrol cause more pollution.

Exercise 4

- 1 Alligators and crocodiles.
- 2 Taken as wholes; and certain aspects of them are also compared.
- 3 To explain that alligators and crocodiles have a lot in common between them.
- 4 Transitional devices much as *first of all, both, also* are used to give the description a sequence.

Exercise 5

- a) Yes. The general classification can be **living** and **non-living**. The **living** would include the goat, the tree, the cat, the hen, the mouse, the locust, the snake, and the bug. All the rest are non-living things.
- b) Yes. The living can be further classified into two groups : plants and animals. The animals can be further classified as mammals and non-mammals. The non-living things can be classified on the basis of their use, such as stationery, articles of dress, classroom objects, etc.

Exercise 6

- 1 American men don't cry.
- 2 i) Only sissies cry.
- ii) Crying is a characteristic weakness of the female.
- iii) No one likes a crybaby.
- iv) Crying is rather un-American.

Exercise 7

- 1 No other animal is so deliberately cruel as man.
- 2 i) No other creature intentionally imprisons its own kind.
- ii) ... invents special instruments of torture for punishment.
- iii) No other animal keeps its own brethren in slavery.
- iv) acts of pure sadism
- v) torment, spite, ... cruelty
- vi) torture
- vii) cruel, ...brutal, ...inflicts suffering ...with malice.

Exercise 8

- 1
 - i) Reasons in support of the statement (that English is a useful language)
 - ii) Definition (of a speech community)
 - iii) Classification (of speakers of English into two groups)
 - iv) Examples of
 - a) nations with a single major speech community,
 - b) nations made up of many speech communities,
 - c) speech communities extending across national boundaries,
 - d) countries where English is the native language,
 - e) countries where English is learnt as a second language,
 - f) the use of English as a functional language.
 - v) Restatement (That a second language extends one's vision and expands the mind is restated in later sentences.)
- 2 English is a useful language.
- 3 Yes.