Essay Writing

A Compendium of Techniques

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CHAPTER I

The Backdrop

A young person, with a spring in his or her stride; a glint of determination in the eye; a vision of scaling the bureaucratic bastion of Civil Services Examinations in the mind and a dream of a fantastic future in the heart, prepares to write the Civil Service Examinations. Success in the Civil Services prelims has proved to be the wind under his or her sails. The young aspirant now feels the goal drawing just a little nearer. The desire for success, as a result growing keener. The pace of the preparation grows faster, the material larger. Facts are cross-checked, figures memorized. Books, magazines, journals newspapers, everything is looked into, and no stone is left unturned to be prepared to be armed to the teeth to face the examination.

The young aspirant goes to write the compulsory essay paper. He or she is unfazed. After all the preparation is complete – the grammar portion has been brushed up, the technique of precis writing has been mastered. Now, what more is required?

The clock strikes, the bell rings, the examination commences. As soon as the candidate looks at the question paper, the first question that meets his or her eye is:

Write an essay on any one of the following:

Two words immediately catch the attention- **write** and **essay**.

Now there is nothing novel or unique about them; after all the young aspirants have written many an **essays** right through his or her school and college life. But does he/she really know what an **essay** is and how does one **write** it? The following discussion, is specifically based on the past experience of teaching exclusively for the Civil Services and it is hoped, would help in making the job of the student easier and methodical for writing an essay.

The Components of Writing

A quick brain storming session on this issue would probably reveal some of the following aspects:

1. Handwriting – or the mechanics of writing
2. Good spelling
3. Correct grammatical sentences put together
4. Paragraphs linked together
5. Ideas developed clearly in paragraphs
6. Arguments organized logically in paragraphs
7. Good expression

Writing is certainly all those things. We can say that all those things put together describe writing.

Two things can be highlighted about the writing in the beginning itself:

1. Writing is a rational activity
2. It must be communicative

To say that writing is rational means nothing more than that it is an exercise of mind requiring the mastery of techniques anyone can learn. Obviously, there are limits: One cannot learn to write like Shakespeare or Charles Dicknes.

But you don't have to be a genius to write clear, effective English. You just have to understand what writing involves and to know how to handle words and sentences and paragraphs. That you can learn. If you do, you can communicate what you want to communicate in words so that other people can understand. It

other words, if the essay topic in the examination has you stumped; there is hope for you. You **can learn** how to write good, effective essays that communicate your ideas on a given topic and get you good grades in return.

Writing is worth learning. It is of immediate practical benefit in almost any field. If you know how to write, you will get along faster and farther in your career. This is a more so in the case of bureaucratic circle that involves a lot of paper work.

There is another more profound value to writing. We create ourselves by words. Before we are business people or lawyers or engineers or teachers or bureaucrats, we are human beings. Our growth as human beings depends on our capacity to understand and to use language. Writing is a way of growing. No one would argue that being able to write would make you morally better. But it will make you complex and more interesting; in a word, more human.

Writing an Essay

Before we start discussing the specifics of writing an essay, we have to understand several ideas that go into making an essay.

A person faced with a topic in an essay examination is faced with two questions:

1. What shall I write on the topic?
2. How shall I write it?

What and How of Writing

The **what** of writing is basically a consideration of what goes into writing, or the content of writing. The **how** of writing involves the technique of writing-how to actually develop ideas, organize ideas and to critically review and revise writing.

Anyone attempting to write an essay in an examination would know that in order to gain marks, the candidates' essay should have both fluency and accuracy of writing. Knowing what to say is the first step, and writing accurately is a second one.

Coherence and Cohesion:

It naturally follows that a good essay should have both coherence and cohesion. Coherence is basically *clarity of ideas* expressed in writing. Whilst cohesion involves the use of linguistic connectives and linkers.

In order to achieve this coherence and cohesion a good essay writer should understand the complex relationship between languages and thought. The writer should know his or her own preference in order to avoid the "**writers block**". People generally complain that they have innumerable ideas in their minds but don't know how to put them on paper. This problem

arises out of their ignorance of the relationship between language and the thought.

Languages and Thought

Languages and thought are inextricably linked, and both develop together, generally speaking. However, for some people thought comes first, thought, which is expressed through good writing. For others, thought is ***developed through*** process of writing. The difficulty of establishing a relationship between language and thought is that, while thinking is not always linear or logical, writing has to have some sort of obvious ordering to make sense to the reader.

Sub-Skills of Writing

Understanding and discussing one's own preference about the relationship between language and thought does not, however, result in a good essay. After that one must learn the various sub-skills of writing effectively. Briefly, the sub-skills of writing are:

1. Developing ideas coherently.
2. Organization within paragraph, and between paragraphs.
3. Using markers and connectives (Cohesion).
4. Using language focus appropriately and correctly.
5. Using the functions of language appropriately.

I will return to these sub-skills of writing in subsequent chapters.

Types of Essays

Different people have different comfort level with different types of essays. Thereby such people should know which group of essay to be chosen for writing. Depending on the type or kind of writing they reflect, essays can be organized in the following categories:

1. **Descriptive:** Presents, the essence of something, or someone, in words; it draws the picture for the reader. This picture could be of objects, events, processes, institutions, agreements, etc.

2. **Narrative:** Tells about the sequencing of events and happenings; it moves the reader through time.

3. **Expository:** It explains and informs; that is, it gives an expose' of a subject, setting it out for view-with definition, classification, examples, etc.

4. **Argumentative:** It takes a point of view and supports it. It tells why something is good or bad, why something happened, or why something should or should not happen.

5. **Reflective:** Looks back on issues, events, activities and people and sees how opinions change.

6. **Persuasive:** Gets readers to change their views.

7. **Interpretive:** Gives the writer's perspective on an issue.

These kinds of essays can be seen as increasing or decreasing in difficulty in themselves. Descriptive, narrative and expository kinds of essays are far easier than argumentative or persuasive essays. The student as essay writer, therefore, should not move into argument, or persuasion, if simpler forms of description and narration have not been mastered.

CHATPER II

Four Pillars of Essay Writing

Before a person gets into the writing mode, he or she has to ascertain four basic parameters about writing essay:

- What am I writing about?
- Who I am writing for?
- Why am I writing?
- Style I am writing in.

These questions include the four essential components of essay writing: topic (What?), audience (Who?), purpose (Why?), and style (How?)

One can compare the elements essentials to a writing situation to the necessary preconditions for a fire. A fire won't start without four essential components: a source of heat, combustible material, oxygen and manner of producing fire. When the four get together, be prepared for flames. But if one component is missing, nothing will happen.

The Topic

In an examination situation, you are faced with several topics. The candidates is not supposed to create a topic but to choose one among many. Sometimes the given topics may include a general purpose, such as persuasion, or even a principle of organization, such as comparison and contrast, that will help you to narrow the field. Even then, however, you must find a specific topic. Probably your first inclination will be to pick the area you know the most about; that's a logical choice.

Let us assume that you chose to write on a general topic "**Energy**" Now what? Where do you begin?

First, you must move from the broad topic of energy to a particular aspect of it. It's possible that you already have a specific interest in the area, but if not, you will have to work at finding one. One technique for exploring the topic is to think of words that combine with the topic word in this case, energy- to from noun phrases:

Energy Crisis	Energy Outlook
Energy Consumption	Energy Demand
Energy Policy	Energy Sources
Energy Shortage	Energy Cost

Other nouns and noun phrases will describe kinds of energy:

Nuclear Energy	Solar energy
Coal Energy	Wind Energy
Oil Energy	Water Power
Natural Gas	Wood

Although these words do limit the subject somewhat, as topics for short essays (one to two thousand words) all of them are still much too broad.

You can narrow them further by asking yourself the six questions that essay writers usually asks: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Take the broad topic of nuclear energy, for example. How does who apply? First, consider the people involved in nuclear energy-its production and its regulations. Who are they? Well, there's the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. What sort of influence do they have? And who, exactly, are they? Are they experts-scientists and engineers? Or are they politicians? Do they make the decisions about building power plants? Who puts up the money for such Plants? Utility Companies? The Government? And who's responsible for accidents? And who else is involved besides the utility companies?

The **who** questions alone have led to many ideas about the topic of nuclear energy. The others will do the same. **What** is nuclear energy? **When** were nuclear power plants first built in this country? **Where** do they operate? Were there protestors at the time? **Why** is nuclear energy necessary? **How** can it be made safer? Or can it?

Another technique that leads you into and around a subject, producing questions, is to consider the subject in terms of the parts and the whole.

First, **what** are the parts of nuclear energy? That question may lead to technical aspects, such as the difference between fusion and fission. Depending on your own background, you may or may not be interested in such details. It could also lead to the social aspects of a nuclear power plant:

How does it affect the local economy? Has the prospect of a nuclear power plant caused a rift between the pro and con factions in the community? Are there evacuation plans in case of an accident?

Second, consider our nuclear industry as part of a larger entity. What is the **whole**? This question could direct your thoughts beyond our own country: What is the status of nuclear energy on a worldwide scale? How do other countries handle the decisions concerning power plants? Does nuclear energy have a place in the other developing countries?

Still another technique for generating possible topics is to think of nuclear energy along a **time line**: past/present/future. When was nuclear power first developed for peacetime uses? What is its present status? How many nuclear power plants are now operating or under construction? Will there be enough energy for the twenty-first century if we don't build more nuclear plants now? Will the protestors step up their efforts to delay construction?

The more questions you ask, the longer the list of possible topics grows; in fact, instead of getting easier, the task of deciding on a topic may seem to be getting harder. But remember that the reason for your exploring the subject in this way is to trigger a response in yourself, to hit on a topic that piques your interest. You can't write an essay that will be of interest to others if you are not interested in the idea yourself. And remember, too, that the list of questions and possible topics we have come up with so far is the result of exploring only one noun phrase: "nuclear energy" Of course, there will be some overlapping of ideas as you explore other noun phrases, such as "energy consumption", "energy policy", and "energy crisis", but the chances are certainly good that somewhere in the broad subject of energy you will find the topic that interests you.

The Audience

Finding about the audience and its attitude towards the topic under consideration is of utmost importance in planning and writing an essay. But in an examination the situation is simplified. One knows who the audience is: the person who marks your answer sheets is the audience of your essay. Try identifying the possible make up of the audience

- age group
- educational qualification
- attitude towards the essay
- the condition in which the essay is being examined

The Purpose

When a candidate attempts to write an essay in the examination, what is his or her purpose? It is clear that there are, in fact, several purposes working together. The obvious one is to provide information asked for thereby demonstrating his or her understanding of the subject matter thus proving that he/she deserves the grades he/she is hoping for. But the ease with which the candidate carries it out will depend on how clearly he or she can create a specific purpose for the essay and that purpose is bound with the audience. The purpose and audience will provide the guidelines of principles for not only selecting and organizing the details of the candidate's essay, but also the modes of presenting his materials.

The Style

Purpose, the end you are aiming at, determines strategy and style. Strategy involves choice-selecting particular aspects of a topic to develop, deciding how to organize them, choosing this word rather than that, constructing various types of sentences, building paragraphs etc. Style is the result of strategy, the language that makes strategy work.

Think of purpose, strategy and style in terms of increasing abstractness. Style is immediate and obvious. It exists in the writing itself; it is the sum of the actual words, sentences, and paragraphs. Strategy is more abstract, felt beneath the words as the immediate ends they serve.

Purpose is even deeper, supporting strategy and involving not only what you write about but also how you affect readers.

In its broadest sense, "style" is the total of all the choices, a writer makes concerning works and their arrangements. In this sense, style may be good or bad-good if the choice are appropriate to the writer's purpose, bad if they are not. More narrowly, "style" has a positive, approving sense, as when we say that someone has "style" or praise a writer for his or her style. More narrowly yet, the word may also designate particular way of writing, unique to a person or characteristic of a group or profession.

Here we use **style** to mean something between those extremes. It will be a positive term, and while we speak of errors in style, we don't speak of "bad style". On the other hand, we understand "style" to include many ways of writing, each appropriate for some purpose, less for the others. There is no one style, some ideal manner of writing at which all of us should aim. Style is flexible, capable of almost endless variations. But one thing style is not: it is not superficial fanciness brushed over the basic ideas. Rather than the guiding, style is the deep essence of writing. Style is influenced by attitude of writer about the topic.

Exploring attitude

Before you begin to write, you must answer one more question: What is your attitude towards the topic?

Your own attitude will make a big difference in how you write the essay:

- Is it **serious**, and depressing for example "Child Prostitution"?
- Is it **serious** to the point of being somber, as it would be in an essay on "World Hunger"?
- Is it **enthusiastic**, as it might be in an essay about the "Outlook for Solar Energy"?
- Is it **light-hearted**, as it would be in a narrative about "Your Most Embarrassing Moment"?
- Is it **tongue-in-cheek**, as it might be in a survey of attitude toward "Changing Value System in Urban Society"?
- Is it **Pessimistic**, as it might be about "Earthquake" or "Cyclone Calamity"?
- Is it **optimistic**, as it might be in exploring "Pollution Problems of Ganga River"?

One topic may have shades of more than one attitude, however, the transition of attitude has to be well planned and logical.

Get Cracking

What one has to keep in mind is difference between writing an essay in an examination and writing one in a more relaxed situation. Two important differences immediately come to mind. First, of course, your time is limited. You can't mull over the topic for a day or two, then write a first draft and let it simmer, then think it all through again, revise, and rewrite. In other words, the process is different.

The second difference, however, eliminates the needs for some of that mulling over. The writing situation is specified, with topic, purpose and audience all given.

So, in an examination situation, the candidate must get cracking at the outset. Keeping the entire above discussion at the back of your mind, get focussed on the sub-skills of writing mentioned earlier and **Plan well** within the time limit. Now you must be wondering that after so much discussion and planning, are we still at the planning stage?

When do we begin to actually **write** the essay? Where is the time for all this? What you have to realize is that the length of discussion above is to make you understand. In the examination, the moment you decide on a topic to write, all the above mentioned concepts should immediately leap to your mind. After that start writing. In a nutshell,

1. Use the time well by planning ahead carefully; there will be no time for re-writing and very little for proof reading.

2. Get right to the point with clearly stated ideas supported by specific evidence.

3. Assist the reader by using transitions.

4. Make the ending clear.

A few strategies and background techniques help you in achieving this goal. The following chapter discusses them before you start the actual writing of your examination essay.

Chapter III

The Beginning

An essay simply means a short prose piece. It does not claim scholarly thoroughness like a monograph, but it does exhibit great variety. Essays can be about almost anything; they can be speculative or factual or emotional; they can be personal or objective, serious or humorous. But whatever kind they are, structurally, they must have a beginning, a middle and a closing.

To write a good, effective essay, the beginning of the essay must do the following:

1. Announce and limit the subject.
2. Indicate a plan.
3. Catch the examiner's attention.
4. Establish an appropriate tone and point of view.

The length of beginning depends on the length and complexity of what is to be introduced. In a very short essay, a single sentence might be adequate. For most essay, a single paragraph is enough. Whatever their length, all effective openings fulfill some functions.

Announcing the Subject

In announcing a subject you have two choices: (1) whether to be explicit or implicit, and (2) whether to be immediate or to delay.

Explicit and Implicit Announcement

In explicit announcement you literally state in some fashion or other. "This is my subject". The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead begins **Religion in the Making** like this:

It is my purpose to consider the type of justification, which is available for belief in the doctrines of religion.

The word "it is my purpose" make this an explicit announcement. It would have been implicit had Whitehead begun:

Belief in the doctrines of religion may be justified in various ways.

This sentence does not literally tell readers what the subject is, but the subject is clearly implied.

Because of its clarity, scholars and scientists writing for their colleagues often use explicit announcement. On less formal occasions it may seem heavy-handed. A school theme, for instance, ought not to begin "The purpose of this paper is to contrast college and high school." It is smoother to establish the subject by implication. "College and high school differ in several ways." Implicit announcements may appear as rhetorical questions, as in this essay about historians.:

What is the historian?

The historian is he who tells a true story in writing.

Opening questions, however, can sound mechanical. While better than no announcement at all, or the clumsiness of "The

purpose of this paper is", rhetorical questions are not very original. Use them for announcement only when you can do so with originality or when all other alternatives are less attractive.

The same advice holds for opening with a dictionary definition; another way of announcing subjects implicitly. Nothing is inherently wrong in starting off with a quote from a reputable dictionary, but it is trite. Of course a cleaver or an unusual definition may make a good opening. John Dos Passos's definition of college as "four years under the ethercone" is certainly novel and provocative and might make a fine beginning.

When the purpose of an essay is to define a word or idea, it is legitimate to start from the dictionary. But these exceptions admitted, the dictionary quotation, like the rhetorical questions, has been overworked as a way of implying the subject.

Immediate and Delayed Announcement

Your second choice involves whether to announce the subject immediately or to delay. This opening line of an essay called "Selected Snobberies" by the English novelist Aldos Huxley falls into the first category:

All men are snobs about something

Letting the examiner in on the subject at once is a no-nonsense, business like procedure. But an immediate announcement may not hold much allure. If the subject is of great interest, or if the statement is **startling** or provocative, it will catch the examiner's eye. Generally, however, immediate announcement is longer on clarity than on interest.

So you may prefer to delay identifying the subject. Delay is usually achieved by beginning broadly and narrowing until

you get down to the subject. The critic Susan Sontag, for instance uses this beginning for an essay defining "Camp" (a deliberately pretentious style in popular art and entertainment):

Many things in the world have not been named; and many things; even if they have been named, have been described. One of these is the sensibility-unmistakably modern, a variant of sophistication but hardly identical with it-that goes by the name of "Camp".

Less commonly the subject may be delayed by focusing outward, opening with a specific detail or example and broadening to arrive at the subject.

Delayed announcement has several advantage. It piques readers curiosity. They know from the title that the opening sentences do not reveal the subject, and they are drawn in to see where they are headed. Curiosity has a limit, however; you cannot tease examiner too long.

A broad beginning can also clarify a subject, perhaps supplying background or offering examples. Finally, delayed announcement can be entertaining in its own right. There is a pleasure like that of watching a high-wire performer in observing an accomplished writer close in on a subject.

More immediate announcement, on the other hand, is called for in situation where getting to the point is more important than angling for readers or entertaining them. Such a situation is the examination.

Indicating the Plan of Essay

Another function of the beginning, is to clarify how the essay will be organized. The writer has the plan in mind when composing the beginning paragraph. The question is: Should the plan be revealed to the reader?

Establishing your plan in the beginning has several virtues. It eases the examiner's task. Knowing where he is headed, examiner can follow the flow of ideas. An initial indication of the organization also simplifies later problems of transition. When a writer can assume that readers understand the general scheme of the essay, it is easier to move them from point to point.

As with limiting the subject, one cannot set down clear-cut rules about when to reveal the plan. Generally it is wise to indicate something about the organization of composition that are relatively long and that fall into several well-defined parts. Shorter, simpler essays less often require their plan be established in the opening paragraph.

In most cases a limiting sentence or clause must follow the announcement of the subject. Few essays discuss all there is to say; they treat some aspects of a subject but not others. As with announcement, limitation may be explicit or implicit. The first-in which the writer says, in effect, "I shall say such and so"-is common in formal, scholarly writing.

On informal occasion one should limit the subject less literally, implying the boundaries of the essay rather than literally stating them; for example, writing about 'Children and TV'.

Parents, I am told are very worried about their children watching TV all the time. As an adult member of the society, I can

understand their fears. But I am not so sure that all of them are justified and that TV is altogether a bad influence on children.

Without literally saying so, the writer makes it clear that she/he will confine his interest in the "Children and TV" topic and talk about the good influence of TV on children.

Besides being explicit or implicit, limitation may also be positive or negative (or both). A short theme or essays with smaller word limit, however do not require much limitation. Readers learn all they really need to know by an opening sentence like this:

College is different from high school in several ways-especially in teaching, homework, and tests.

The final phrase conveys the limitation, following the announcement in the first clause of the sentence. The subject is a contrast between college and high school, the focus is on college, and the content are limited to three specific points of difference. That is limitation enough for a brief informal essay.

There is no rule to test whether you have limited a subject sufficiently. Just put yourself in the examiner's place and ask if it is clear (whether by direct statement or by implication) what the essay will do and what it will not do.

Catch the Examiner's Attention

Since in an examination the reader is the examiner and he is already interested in what the candidate has to say, the latter does not have to strive to interest the reader. But in order to make your essay stand out, to appear to be unique rather than a run of the mill stuff that every other candidate is also writing, some attempt should be made to interest the examiner. Several strategies for doing this are available.

Stressing the importance of the subject

Treat the reader as a reasonable intelligent person with a desire to be well informed and say, in effect: "here is something you may think about".

The American poet and critic John Peale Bishop begins an essay on Pablo Picasso with the sentence:

There is no painter who has so spontaneously, so profoundly reflected his age as Pablo Picasso.

Arousing Curiosity

This is usually a more effective strategy than stressing the importance of the subject. You may play upon curiosity by opening with a short factual statement that arises more questions than it answers.

Astronomer Sir Arthur Eddington begins a chapter in his book **The Philosophy of Science** with this statement.

I believe there are

15, 747, 724, 136,275, 502, 577, 605, 653, 691, 181, 555, 468,504, 717,914,527,116,709,366,231,425,076,185,631,031,296 *protons in the universe and the same number of electrons.*

It would be a curiously incurious reader who would not boggle at this and read on to learn how the writer arrive at so precise a figures.

A short step from such interest arousing factual openings in the cryptic beginning, that in a mysterious or not so clear statement. Charles Lamb opens an essay with

I have no ear.

We soon learn that he means "no ear for music", but for a moment we are startled.

To be effective a cryptic opening must not simply be murky. It must combine clarity of statement with mystery of intent. We know what it says, but we are puzzled about why. The mystery has to be cleared up rather quickly if the reader's interest is to be retained. For most of us curiosity does not linger; without satisfaction it goes elsewhere.

Carrying mystification a little further, you may open with a rhetorical paradox-a statement that appears to contradict reality as we know it. Hilaire Belloc begins his essay "**The Barbarians**" this way:

It is a pity true history is not taught in the Schools.

Readers who suppose true history is taught may be annoyed, but they are likely to go on.

Sometimes mystification takes the form of a non-sequiter, that is, an apparently non-logical sequence of ideas. An enterprising student began a theme:

I hate Botany, which is why I went to New York.

The essay revealed a legitimate connection, but the seeming illogic fulfilled its purpose of drawing in the reader.

Aside from arousing their curiosity, you may attract examiner by amusing him. One strategy is to open with a witty remark. Another variety of the entertaining opening is the anecdote. Still another entertaining opening strategy is the clever and apt comparison. It may be an analogy, a simile or metaphor. For instance, when writing about Politics, any of these techniques could be used to write a brilliantly tongue-in-cheek essay. However it has to be borne in mind that these kind of methods cannot be applied to just about any topic. Attempting to amuse the examiner while writing about a serious subject will definitely prove to be a disaster.

Appropriate Tone

A rapport has to be built with the examiner. The candidate must decide in the introduction and convey to the examiner the kind of tone it has subscribed to and examiner can prepare itself to be reading them.

When composing beginning, candidates who are inexperienced writers are likely a err at either of two extremes: doing too little or doing too much. In doing too little they slight the opening, jumping too suddenly into the subject and piling ideas and information in front of the examiner before he or she has time to settle back and see what all this is about.

In doing too much they make the beginning a precise of the essay and anticipate everything they will cover. The function of an opening is to introduce an essay, not to be a miniature version of it. To make it so is to act as the master of ceremonies at banquet who introduces the main speaker by anticipating everything he or she is going to say.

The effective beginning stays between those extremes. It lets the examiner know what to expect, but it leaves them with something to expect.

CHAPTER IV

Organizing the Middle

Here we talk about those sub-skills of writing that are essential in the organization of the essay as a whole, more particularly in creating a logical sequence between the beginning, the middle and the closing.

Building Paragraph

The paragraph is a mini-essay; it is also a maxi sentence. Here we will talk of "body paragraphs" i.e. paragraphs which are used to develop the main idea of the essay. Body paragraph are the blocks of thought that add up to prove the main points of the essay. Just by looking at a group of sentences clustered together in a paragraph, we get an idea that they belong together in some way. The topic sentence of the paragraph tells us just how the sentences belong together, how they all add up.

Focusing with a topic sentence

The topic sentences of a paragraph is a mini-thesis statement. It announces the main point of the paragraph, preparing readers for the sentences to come. Notice, for example, how well this student writer has focused our attention with a topic sentence:

The teacher had complete control over the class. When she was in the room, everyone was quite and worked in an orderly manner. When she left the room, noise would naturally pick up, but as

soon as she reappeared, order resumed. If you had a question or knew an answer, you raised your hand. You were not allowed to speak unless you were acknowledged. When your teacher left the room, you walked in an orderly line with your group, and talking was not permitted when passing other rooms.

The student's topic sentence has all of the characteristics of a good thesis statement: it is a generalization that needs to be supported by more detailed information; it is limited (not too broad)' and it is precisely focussed (not too vague).

The attract attention, a topic sentence can also be in the form of a rhetorical question:

What then is the relevance of old customs in the modern society?

Another eye-catching form of the topic sentence is the fragment, the grammatically incomplete sentences:

Holi. What a wonderful festival. The colours, the sweets, the joy-de-verve all combine to make it an unforgettable experience.

But the rhetorical questions and fragments are effective only if they are used with restraint. Most of the time the best topic statement is a strong, clear, grammatically complete, declarative sentence.

Like the student writer quoted earlier, generally one should put one's topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph, rather than in the middle or at the end. The topic sentence is designed to focus the reader's attention on the main point of the paragraph and to direct his or her attention to the supporting material that follows; the topic sentence should therefore come first. It makes no sense to prepare readers for a paragraph they have just finished. Another reason for putting one's topic sentence first is that readers tends to look for it at the beginning of a paragraph. So when the topic sentences is placed first, it fulfills reader's expectations, going along with their natural reading habits.

The Body Paragraph

The sentences of a good paragraph reflect a clear, rational analysis of the topic. Here is a brief example, this one by Bertrand Russell (the sentences have been numbered for convenience).

(1) The intellectual life of the nineteenth century was more complex than that of any previous age. (2) This was due to several causes. (3) First: the area concerned was larger than ever before; America and Russia made important contributions, and Europe became more aware than formerly of Indian philosophies, both ancient and modern. (4) Second: science, which had been a chief source of novelty since the seventeenth century, made new conquests, especially in geology, biology, and organic chemistry. (5) Third: machine production profoundly altered the social structure, and gave men a new conception of their powers in relation to the physical environment (6) Fourth: a profound revolt, both philosophical and political, against traditional systems of thought, in politics and in economics, gave rise to attacks upon many belief's and institutions that had hitherto been regarded as unassailable. (7) This revolt had two very different forms, one romantic, the other rationalistic. (8) (I am using these words in a liberal sense.) (9) The romantic revolt passes from Byron, Schopenhauer, and Nietzche to Mussolini and Hitler. The rationalistic revolt begins with the French philosophers of the Revolution, passes on, somewhat softened, to the philosophical radicals in England, then acquires a deeper form in Marx and issues in Soviet Russia.

Russell's nine sentences correspond to his steps in analyzing his topic:

Sentence	Idea
1.	Topic: increasing intellectual complexity
2.	Plan: list several causes

3. First cause: larger area
4. Second cause: science
5. Third cause: machine production
6. Fourth cause: Intellectual revolt.
7. Two forms
8. Qualification
9. Specification of the two forms

Examining whether the sentences of a paragraph correspond with its ideas is a good test of the coherence of the paragraph. The correspondence need not be as exact as in Russell's paragraph (and usually will not be). But if you cannot outline a generally clear relationship, the paragraph is probably confused and confusing.

The fact that a paragraph like Russell's reveals a coherent logical structure does not imply that the writer worked from an outline. One can proceed in this way, but in writing of any length an outline is tedious and time-consuming. Experienced writers adjust sentences to thought intuitively, without constantly thinking about when to begin a new sentence. Those with less experience must remain more conscious of the problem. Working up paragraphs from outlines provides good practice. But whether it is consciously thought out or intuitive, a well made paragraph uses sentences to analyze the subjects.

Having said that, the question that faces us is how do we go about it? That is to say, how should a "body paragraph" be build so that it uses sentences to analyze the subject. To answer this questions, asks yourself another one. Once you have focused

on a topic sentences, ask yourself how much evidence, and what kind of evidence is required to support the topic sentence. Most commonly, it is sufficient to simply provide details in support of your topic sentence. For example, talking about a visit to your favourite hill station, your topic sentence could be:

Manali, to my mind, is the most beautiful, serene, and enchanting place to all hill stations in India.

The rest of the paragraph would, then be about why you think so. That is to say, you would enumerate the various places, sites, scenery etc. That makes Manali "The most beautiful, serene and enchanting place."

Another way to fill out your paragraph would be to give a few well chosen example that would sufficiently illustrate your main point. For example; while writing about "Democracy Vs Dictatorship" if your topic sentences talked about the relatively higher failure rate of dictatorships, and the remaining paragraph gave illustrations of Hitler and Stalin your point would be sufficiently supported and would not require further explanations.

Sometimes, depending on your purpose, you can get by with slim paragraphs. But if your topic sentence is a major point in your whole essay, you will want to develop it with considerable detail. If the paragraph starts to look too long, you can break it at some convenient point without writing a topic sentence for the new paragraph.

Shaping Paragraph

As is clear now, the basic overall shape of a paragraph is quite simple: topic sentence plus supporting sentences. The most simply structured paragraphs are those in which every sentence directly supports the topic sentence. In the following paragraph, for example, the supporting sentences all have exactly the same direct relation to the topic sentence;

Throughout history, women have resorted to many extremes in order to attain the standard of beauty popular at the time. In China women's feet were bound, to keep them small because men admired tiny feet. A tribe in Africa measured the affluence of the husband by the wife's weight, so women put on so much weight they could not move. In England we don't have to look too far back to a time when women were prone to fainting spells because they had cinched their twenty-five inch waists down to a faishonable eighteen.

All three supporting sentences in this paragraph directly illustrate the writer's topic sentence.

But paragraph are not always so simply shaped. Sometimes a writer will want do develop some of the supporting sentences in a paragraph as if they were mini-topic sentences. In such a paragraph, some sentences will support to the topic sentences directly, and others will support it only indirectly.

Let's call a sentence which directly supports the topic sentence a "major support" sentence. Any sentence which in turn develop a major support we will call "minor support" sentences.

Here is a paragraph containing both major and minor supports. The first sentence is the topic sentence. The second sentence and all of the other italicized sentences are the major supports.

The rest of the sentences are minor supports.

A number of toys on the market provide safe and effective outlets for your child's aggressive feelings. For example, you can *buy a small punching bag for a small bully.* In the case of fighting brothers and sisters, *soccer boppers are quite effective.* Soccer boppers are primitive form of boxing gloves that protect the children from actually hurting each other, but allow them to keep on fighting until they feel better. *When you have a child who likes to throw things, the "small airplanes and animals are your answer.* With these toys not too much can get broken, because they are made of foam rubber. In the case of the child *who enjoys biting, a rubber hand might be appropriate.* You can always find these around Halloween. With a rubber hand children can satisfy their biting impulses without hurting anyone. *When you have a child with an uncontrollable amount of aggression, one solution is a padded room.* However, these are not yet on the market for home use.

As can be seen some of the major supports required more development than others, so the number of minor supporting sentences following each major support varies. The first major support required no development, so no minor support follow it.

Here we have talked only about two model shapes for a typical body paragraph: one simple and one more complex. When you are writing to prove a point, you will be surprised how often you can pour paragraphs into one of these two molds.

But don't expect every body paragraph you write to fit one of these models exactly. In reality there are hundreds of possible paragraph shapes. The ones that will work for you in a particular writing situation will be those which arrange your material clearly; which illustrate your point logically, and which accomplish your purpose of communication with your reader.

Linking of Paragraph

How can these paragraph be linked together? In other words, how can they be organized within an essay. It can be done in two ways, which are often used together. One is by signposts-words, phrases, sentences (occasionally even a short paragraph) which tells readers what you have done, are doing will do next. Or even will no do at all. The other way is by inter-paragraph transitions, that is, words and phrases that tie the beginning of a new paragraph to what precedes it.

Signposts

The most common signpost is an initial sentence that indicates both the topic and the general plan of treating it. For instance, a five paragraph section of a long essay on computers can be organized as: Computers are useful in everyday life in atleast five different ways:

In the first place.....

Secondly.....

Thirdly.....

Fourthly.....

Fifthly.....

However number words like first, second, third, must be handled cautiously, Overused, they confuse readers, losing them in a labyrinth of (1)s and (2)s and (a)s and (b)s.

Rather than using numbers, it is better, if possible, to set up an analysis by employing key terms. These identify the major points and can be repeated at the beginning of the appropriate paragraph or section. For example, talking about your favourite soap opera on TV, you may say:

Almost all dramatic tensions and moral conflict emerge from three basic sources: mating, marriage and babies.

The next paragraph then begins by picking up the key word "mating".

The mating process is the cornerstone of the tri-value system.

And the following paragraph by using the loose synonyms "domesticity" to link "marriage and babies".

If domesticity is a marital "good", aversion to it is a serious evil.

Signposts demand consistency. Once you begin using them you must carry through. Some writers make the mistake of starting off with something like this:

There were three reasons why the pact was not satisfactory. First.....

But then they fail to introduce the next two reasons with the obligatory second or third (or secondly, finally). The lack of signals may confuse the reader who fails to recognize the writer passing from one reason to another.

Aside from setting up a group of paragraphs, signposts may also anticipate future sections of an essay or make clear what will not be treated. Few subjects divide neatly into watertight compartments. As you develop one point, you touch upon another that you do not plan to discuss fully until later or perhaps not to discuss at all. When this happens you may wish to give a warning.

Signpost may also point backward, reminding of something treated earlier which bears upon the current argument. Thus a writer may say "As we saw earlier.....", "As mentioned above...".

The signposts we have looked at are intrinsic-that is, they are actually a part of the writer's text. Typography and design

convey extrinsic indications of organization: the indentation of paragraph beginnings and of quotations, the extra spacing between lines to signal a new major section, and occasionally the numerals (usually Roman) centred above the division of an essay.

Inter-paragraph Transitions

Transitions link a paragraph to what has immediately preceded it. They occur at or near the beginning of the new paragraph because it represents a turn of thought, needing to be linked to what has gone before. Transitions act like railroad switches, smoothing and easing the turn from one line to another.

The Repetitive Transition

The simplest type of transition repeats a key word. For example:

Behind Gandhi were the people, and the people wanted freedom. And with the people behind him, Gandhi marched towards freedom.

A repeated word makes a strong and simple connection. It works well when the key term leading into the new paragraph occurs naturally at the end of the preceding one. But it is awkward and artificial when the term is forced into the final sentences merely to set up the transition.

The Question- and-Answer Transition

A second way of linking paragraphs it to ask and answer a rhetorical question. Usually the question is placed at the end of the preceding paragraph and the answer at the beginning of the following one. For example, why do they do it? The answer is that.....

Less often the question appears at the opening of the new paragraph. For example: Why what went wrong? The answer is...

The question-and-answer transition makes a very strong tie, but as with the rhetorical question generally, it is too obvious a strategy to be called upon very often.

The Summarizing Transition

This link begins with a phrase of clause that sums up the preceding paragraph and then moves to the main clause, which introduces the new topic. (Unless idiom prohibits it, the elements of the transition should always be in that order; summary of old topic, statement of new one).

If-and while-clauses frequently carry such transitions.

If went through anguish in botany and economics-for different reasons gymnasium was even worse —*James Thurber*

Long summarizing transitions tend to be formal in tone. On informal occasion it may be better to avoid a full if or while clause and state the summary more briefly. As, for example moving from the topic of college teaching method to that of personal responsibility:

Because of these differences in teaching methods, college throws more responsibility upon the student.

A summarizing transition may take even briefer form, using pronouns, like this, that, these, those, or such to sum up the preceding topic. For example: *These are grave handicaps. But Rajasthan has many resources in compensation.*

Logical Transitions

Finally, you may link paragraphs by words showing logical relationship: *therefore, however, but, consequently, thus and so, even so, on the other hand, for instance, nonetheless, and many, many more.*

Logical connectives seldom provide the only link between paragraphs Actually, they work in conjunction with word repetitions, summaries, pronouns. In fact, all the various transitional strategies we have looked at commonly occur in some combination. But whatever its form, and inter-paragraph transition should be clear and unobtrusive, shifting readers easily from topic to the next.

CHAPTER V

Closing the Essay

Talking about the beginning of an essay, we laid emphasis on its proportion to the entire essay. Like the opening of an essay, the closing should also be proportional to the length and complexity of the whole piece. Several paragraphs, or only one, or even a single sentence may be sufficient. But whatever its length, a closing must do certain things.

Termination

The most obvious function of a closing is to say, "The end," There are several ways of doing this.

Terminal Words

The simplest is to employ a word or phrase like *in conclusion concluding, finally, lastly, in the last analysis, to close, in closing, and so on*. Adverbs showing a loose consequential relationship also work; then, and so, thus, Generally it is best to keep such terminal words unobtrusive. In writing the best technique hides itself.

Circular Closing

This strategy works on the analogy of a circle, which ends where it began. The final paragraph repeats an important word or phrase prominent in the beginning, something, the reader will

remember. If the strategy is to work, the reader has to recognize the key term (but of course, you cannot hang a sign on it- "Remember this"). You must stress it more subtly, perhaps by position or by using an unusual, memorable word. In an essay of any length it may be wise to repeat the phrase now and again, and sometimes writers emphasize the fact of completion by saying something like, "We return, then, to..."

Natural Closing

A final way of signaling the end is simply to stop at a natural point, one built into the subject. For example, in a biographical sketch of someone who is dead the obvious place to end is with the death scene.

Natural closing are not restricted to death-bed descriptions. Writing about your daily routine, you might well end with some variation of the phrase the diarist Samuel Pepys made famous; "And so to bed" Even when a subject does not have built-in closing, comparison or figure of speech can provide one.

These then, are some of the ways of making clear that you are through. The various techniques do not exclude one another; they are often combined. Nor are these the only devices of closing. Inventive writers tailor their endings to subject and purpose. The poet Dylan Thomas wittily concluded his essay "How To Begin a Story" by doing what inexperienced writers should not do simply stopping in mid-sentences:

I see there is little, or no, time to continue my instructional essay on "How To Begin a Story". "How to End a Storey" is of course, a different matter...One way of ending a story is.....

And Virginia Woolf closes an essay called "Reading" with this sentences:

Some offering we must make; some act we must dedicate, if only to move across the room and turn the rose in the jar, which, by the way, has dropped its petals.

It is difficult to say why this works. The rhythm is important. But so is the image. The flower that has dropped its petals is perhaps a metaphor of ending. And the seeming irrelevancy of the final clause also signals finality, like the gracious closing of a conversation. In any case, the passage ends the essay neatly and unmistakably. That is the important thing.

Summation and Conclusion

Termination is always a function of the closing paragraph or sentence. Sometimes, depending on subject and purpose, you may need to make a summary or to draw a conclusion, in the sense of a final inference or judgement.

Summaries are more likely in long, complicated essays. Usually they are signaled by a phrase *like in summary, to sum up, summing up in short, in fine, to recapitulate.* The label may be more subtle: "We have seen, then, that....," and subtlety is usually a virtue in such matters.

Logical conclusion or judgments may be necessary, even in short essays. Certain subjects made them obligatory.

On occasion it may not be the best strategy, or even be possible, to round off an essay with a neat final judgement. The novelist Joseph Conrad once remarked that the business of the storyteller is to ask questions, not do answer them. That truth applies sometimes to the essayist, who may wish to suggest a

judgement rather than to formulate one. The strategy is called an implicative closing. The writer stops short, allowing the reader to infer the conclusion. In effect the final sentences open a door instead of closing one. Here, for instance, is the ending of an essay about a teenage hangout.

The old lady who lives across the street from the place says that the most striking thing is the momentary silence which, now and again, break up the loud, loud laughter.

Post Script: Point of View, Persona, Tone

Point of View

Thus far we have looked at how to begin and end essays and how to help readers follow the flow of thought. It remains to consider several other aspects of a composition, more abstract but no less important. These are point of view, persona, and tone.

Point of view relates to how you present a subject. Two approaches are possible. In a **personal** point of view you play the role of writer openly, using "I", "me", "my". An **impersonal** point of view, on the other hand, requires that you avoid all explicit reference to yourself. The difference is not that in a personal point of view the subject is the writer, while in an impersonal one it is something else. Every subject involves, though it is not necessarily **about**, the writer. The difference is a question of strategy.

Whatever you select, establish it in the opening paragraph. You need not say, "My point of view will be personal [or impersonal]." Simply use "I" if you intended to write personally, or avoid it if you do not. (Such substitutes for "I" as "This observer", or "the writer" are wordy and awkward and best

avoided). To the best of possibility "I" may be substituted with "one".

Maintain point of view consistently. Don't jump back and forth between a personal and an impersonal presentation. At the same time, you can make small adjustment. For example, you may expand. "I" to "we" when you wish to imply "I the writer and you the reader". Whether writing personally or impersonally you may address readers as individuals by employing "you", and shift to "one", "anyone", and so on, when you are referring to no one specifically.

But such shifts in points of view should be compatible with the emphasis you desire, and they should be slight. Radical changes, nine times in ten, are awkward. It is good practice, then (1) to select a point of view appropriate to your subject, (2) to establish that point of view in the opening paragraph and (3) to maintain it consistently.

Persona

Persona derives from the Latin word for an actor's mask. As a term in composition, persona means the writer's presence in the writing. The derivation from "mask" may be misleading. It does not imply a false face, a disguise, behind which the real individual hides. A writer's persona is always "real". It is there, in the prose. The words you choose, the sentence patterns into which you arrange them, even the kinds of paragraphs you write and how you organize your essay, suggest a personality, which is, for that particular piece of writing, you.

But, you may object, a persona is not really the person who writes. (Person, interesting enough, comes from the same Latin Word). Of course, that is true, and it is true that the same writer

may assume different personas on different occasions. Still, the only contact readers generally have with a writer is through his or her words. For readers the persona implicit in those words is the real, existential fact about the writer.

The question to ask about any persona is not, is this really the writer? The questions are, is it really how the writer wants to appear? And, is it how he or she can best appear? To put the matter another way: is the persona authentic and appropriate?

Authenticity means that the personality readers sense in your words is the personality you want them to perceive. To say that persona is authentic does not necessarily mean that it is really you. We are all many different people, showing one face to friends, another to strangers, still another to the boss. Here authenticity simply means that how you appear in what you write is how you wish to appear. But authenticity is not enough. A persona must also be appropriate, efficacious in the sense that it achieves your ends. At the very least it ought not to get in the way.

Persona is a function of the total competition. It emerges not only from the meaning of word but also from the more abstract, less obviously expressive patterns of sentences and paragraph and from the overall organization.

While most obvious in autobiographies, persona is not confined to such writing. It exists in all compositions. Even when a writer uses and impersonal point of view, avoiding "I", "me", we sense personality.

Tone

If persona is the complex personality implicit in the writing, tone is a web of feelings stretched throughout an essay, feelings

from which our sense of the persona emerges. Tone has three main strands: the writer's attitude toward subject, reader, and self. Each of these determinants of tone is important, and each has many variations.

Tone, like persona, is unavoidable. You imply it in the words you select and in how you arrange them. It behooves you, then, to create an appropriate tone and to avoid those-pomposity, say, or flippancy-which will put the reader off.

Tone Towards Subject

Toward most subjects many attitudes are possible. Often tone is simple objectivity. But there can also be an angry tone expressed more subtly, beneath a surface of irony.

Tone Toward Reader

You may thing of your readers in widely different ways. Some writers tend to be assertive and dogmatic, treating readers as a passive herd to be instructed. At the other extreme a writer may establish a more intimate face to face tone, as though talking to a friend. A friendly informal tone need not be restricted to commonplace subjects. In much contemporary exposition, even of a scholarly sort, writers often relax the older convention of maintaining a formal distance between themselves and their audience. However, in an examination situation, one should not employ either of these two extreme. A more moderate middle of the road approach is called for.

Tone Toward Self

Toward himself or herself a writer can adopt an equally great variety of tones. Objective, impersonal exposition involves a negative presentation of the writer, so to speak. By avoiding personal references or idiosyncratic comments, he or she

becomes a transparency through which we observe facts or ideas.

On the other hand, writers may be more self-conscious and deliberately play a role. In exposition it is often a good tactic to present yourself a bit deferentially. An occasional, "it seems to me" or "I think" or "to my mind" goes a long way toward avoiding a tone of cocksureness and restoring atleast a semblance of two-way traffic on that unavoidably one-way street from writer to reader. It is here that total intelligence and sensibility, which constitutes the persona.

While the introduction of the essay is an important tool to present the image of the writer to the examiner conclusion is probably more vital component of the essay. It must be borne in the mind of the candidate that it is after reading the conclusion he or she is to be rewarded. It is thereby essential that extra care is given to this segment and some additional time is set aside while planning for the essay conclusion.