

Week 3

Comm 1133

Writing Strategies

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Warm-up

1. She was an interesting talker. A woman who had travelled all over the world and lived in half a dozen countries.
2. My part-time job is excellent, it pays well, provides good experience, and offers a real challenge.
3. The man with all the dogs walk down my street.

Plan for today

- Mechanics:
 - shift in point of view or person
 - Illogical shift in verb tense
- Organization:
 - Introductions
 - Body paragraphs
- Time given for exercise

Point of view

- There are three points of view, and each can be either singular or plural. We refer to them using pronouns:
 - 1st person
 - I, me (singular)
 - We, us (plural)
 - 2nd person
 - You, you (singular)
 - You, you (plural)
 - 3rd person
 - She, her (singular)
 - He, him (singular)
 - One, one (singular)
 - They, them (plural)

Shift in point of view

- Problems are glaring when the sentence involves specific actors:
 - Once upon a time there was a girl named **Cathy**, and **I** liked to write stories.
 - **The panda bear** sat in the corner of the cage, and **they** ate the bamboo leaves listlessly.

Shift in point of view

- Problems are subtler when the pronoun is a *stand-in* for a *generic* actor:
 - If **one** wants to improve **oneself**, **you** should make improvements to **your** body, mind, and soul.
- Revised:
 - If **one** wants to improve **oneself**, **one** should make improvements to **one's** body, mind, and soul.

Shift in point of view

- Faulty:
 - When **you** finish such a great book, **one** will have a sense of achievement.
- Revised:
 - When **you** finish such a great book, **you** will have a sense of achievement.
- Faulty:
 - **One** should sift the flour before **they** make the pie.
- Revised:
 - **One** should sift the flour before **one** makes the pie.

Practice: shift in point of view

1. People should keep themselves politically informed; otherwise, you will not be living up to your democratic responsibilities.
2. When one is being stalked by a bear, you should not snack on sardines.

Introductions



Broad focus

Narrowing
focus

Thesis

Example:

We Americans love our automobiles, no question. But why is next year's new model always front-page news? Cars were once merely a way to get from point A to point B faster than by foot or horse or buggy. Henry Ford's Model T's all looked identical, like boxes on wheels, all painted black. People bought Model T's for basic transportation, not to make a fashion statement. In the twenty-first century, however, automakers cater to our desire to "do our own thing." We love their attention, and they know it. Today's self-centered consumers demand cars that satisfy their craving for individuality.

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Inviting readers in and setting the tone

- First-person plural (**we, our**) invites us to look at ourselves.
- Amusing images (**horse and buggy, boxes on wheels**) and deliberate clichés (**front-page news, do our own thing**) signal the writer's intention to have fun with the essay.
- If the only goal were to lead directly into the main discussion, the writer might have started like this:
 - We love our cars because they enhance our sense of individuality.

Placing the thesis

- Sometimes it can be effective to begin with the thesis, especially if the topic is controversial:
Single-sex schools offer distinct advantages over coeducational schools. Coeducational classrooms inhibit student participation and tend to ignore gender-specific learning styles. Single-sex classrooms not only encourage participation but also allow for the kinds of gender-based teaching strategies that promote effective learning.

Selecting an opening strategy

- Questions for analyzing audience and purpose:
 - Are my readers likely to be interested in the topic?
 - How can I make them want to read on?
 - Are they likely to react defensively?

You could open with an anecdote

- An anecdote is a brief, personal story:
 - I change my name every time I place an order at Starbucks.
 - When I was in the eighth grade I couldn't read.
 - I almost didn't live through September 11th, 2001.
 - I had never seen anyone get so excited about mitochondria.

O'Shaughnessy, L. (2011). 10 Great Opening Lines from Stanford Admissions Essays. *CBS Moneywatch*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/10-great-opening-lines-from-stanford-admissions-essays/>

You could open with a question

What do you do when you find yourself in the produce room cooler with your manager and he nonchalantly wraps his arm around your waist? Or how about when the guys you work with come out with a distasteful remark that makes you seem like a piece of meat? These are just a couple of problems you might face as the only female in a department. There are, however, ways of dealing with this kind of harassment.

You could open with examples

Privacy in America is disappearing. New technologies enable users to unearth anyone's health, credit, email, and legal records with a few keystrokes. Beyond these computerized records, our telephones, our television sets, and even our trash can be monitored by government agencies, banks, businesses, political groups—or just plain nosy people. Current United States law does disturbingly little to protect our right to privacy.

You could open with a quotation

“I hope you have not murdered too completely your own and my child.” So wrote Darwin to Alfred Russel Wallace, the biologist who had independently discovered natural selection. What prompted the purple prose? Darwin and Wallace were mutual admirers, so like-minded that they had been inspired by the same author (Malthus) to forge the same theory in almost the same words. What divided these comrades was the human mind.

Suggestions

- The introduction can be the hardest part to write. Many writers complete it last.
- Remove qualifiers like “It is my opinion that...,” “I believe that...,” and “In this paper, I will...”
- Don’t open with a cliché, especially “In today’s society...”. I’ve seen this literally hundreds of times.

Illogical shift in verb tense

- Broadly, there are three verb tenses:
 - Past
 - I walked to the bus stop.
 - You ate a sandwich.
 - Present
 - I walk to the bus stop.
 - You eat a sandwich.
 - Future
 - I will walk to the bus stop.
 - You will eat a sandwich.

Illogical shift in verb tense

- There are many other subtle ways to conjugate:
 - I am walking to the bus stop.
 - I was walking to the bus stop.
 - I will be walking to the bus stop.
 - I have walked to the bus stop.
 - I will have walked to the bus stop.
 - I will have been walking to the bus stop.

Illogical shift in verb tense

- Sometimes a shift in verb tense is needed:
 - I **will walk** to the bus stop tomorrow. When I get there, I **will have walked** for the previous ten minutes.
 - You **are eating** a sandwich. I'm not surprised, because you **eat** a sandwich every day.

Illogical shift in verb tense

- Sometimes a shift in verb tense is illogical:
 - She **delivered** the blueprints, **inspected** the foundation, **wrote** her report, and **takes** the afternoon off.
- Revised:
 - She **delivered** the blueprints, **inspected** the foundation, **wrote** her report, and **took** the afternoon off.

Illogical shift in verb tense

- Faulty:
 - Last semester, the professor **assigned** a lengthy culminating essay in which we **have** to make mention of all the texts read in the course.
- Revised:
 - Last semester, the professor **assigned** a lengthy culminating essay in which we **had** to make mention of all the texts read in the course.

“Consistent Verb Tenses.” (2013). *Grammarly Handbook*. Grammarly Inc. Retrieved from <http://www.grammarly.com/handbook/sentences/shifts-writing/2/consistent-verb-tenses/>

Practice: illogical shift in verb tense

1. As soon as he walked into his dorm room, George sees the mess left by his roommate.
2. If the weather would just warm up a little bit, we can go on a picnic.
3. The instructor explains the diagram to students who asked questions during the lecture.

Body paragraphs

Is it enough to write clear sentences?

The northern United States and Canada are places where herons live and breed. Spending the winter here has its advantages. Great Blue Herons live and breed in most of the northern United States. It's an advantage for herons to avoid the dangers of migration. Herons head south when the cold weather arrives. The earliest herons to arrive on the breeding grounds have an advantage. The winters are relatively mild in Cape Cod.

Pinker, S. (2014). *The Sense of Style*. New York: Penguin.

A demonstration

Half of the room, close your eyes.

The purpose/topic:

Making and flying a kite

You'll be shown a passage, and you'll have
30 seconds to try to memorize as many
of the sentences as possible.

- A newspaper is better than a magazine.
- A seashore is a better place than the street.
- At first it is better to run than to walk.
- You may have to try several times.
- It takes some skill but it's easy to learn.
- Even young children can enjoy it.
- Once successful, complications are minimal.
- Birds seldom get too close.
- Rain, however, soaks in very fast.
- One needs lots of room.
- If there are no complications, it can be very peaceful.
- A rock will serve as an anchor.

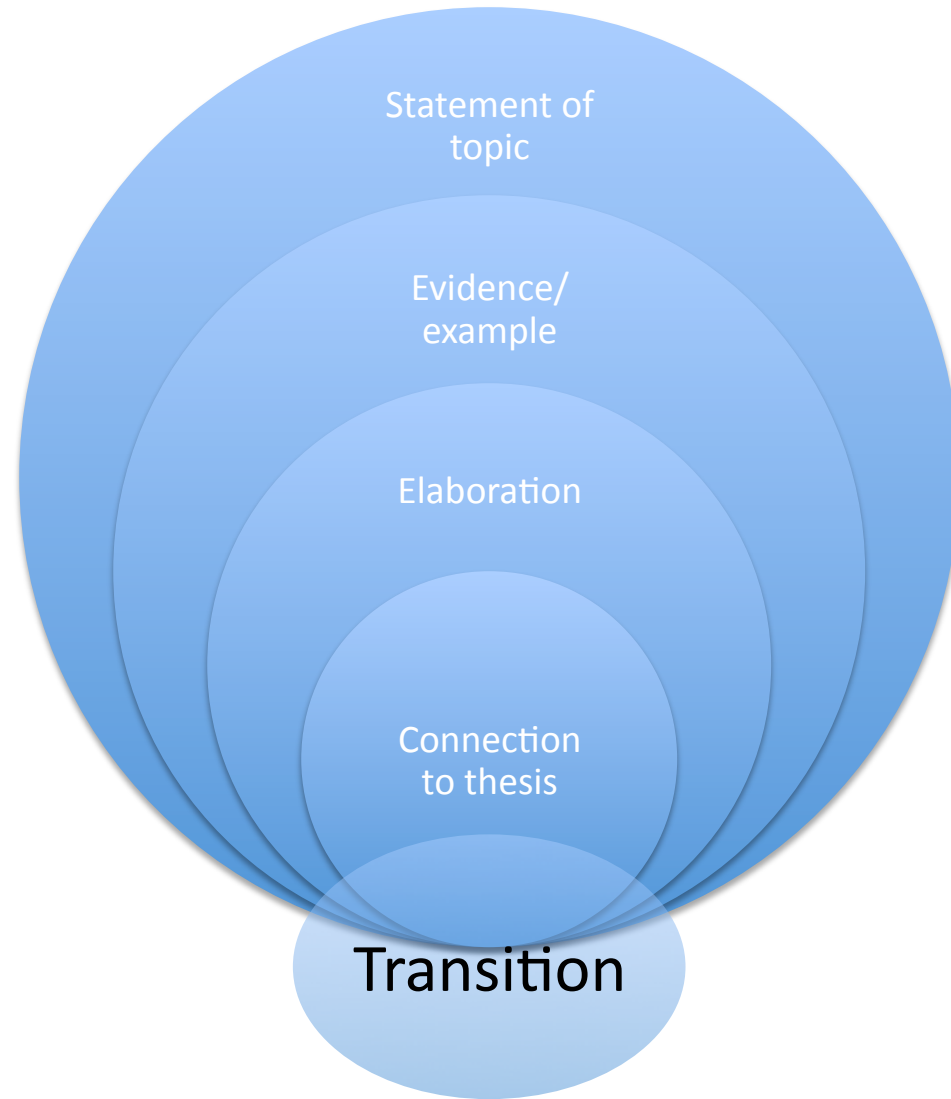
Write down everything you can
remember from the passage.

- A newspaper is better than a magazine.
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Topic sentences

- Should come first.
- Will help orient the reader, so they can place new information in context.
- Usually function as subsidiary conclusions (theses) in the overall argument of the essay. E.g.
 - P1. Socrates is a man.
 - P1. Socrates has a beard.
 - P2. Socrates is a father.
 - **C3. Socrates is a man.**
 - P2. All men are mortal.
 - P1. No man has ever survived longer than 100 years.
 - **C2. All men are mortal.**
 - C3. Socrates is mortal.

Body paragraphs: SEEC + transition



Our model of a coherent paragraph

- From a newspaper column that responds to readers' questions about birds.
- The question being answered:
 - “A heron showed up at a bog near my house and is unable to feed because the bog has frozen over. Should I be worried?”

Great Blue Herons live and breed just about anywhere in the northern United States and most of Canada. When the cold weather arrives, the herons head south. A few come to Cape Cod where the winters usually aren't too bad. Most of these herons are either inexperienced young birds or lost adult males too stubborn to ask for directions south. Spending the winter here has its advantages, and I'm not talking about the free off-season parking in Provincetown. Herons are able to avoid the dangers of migration, plus they can be one of the earliest to arrive on the breeding grounds.

Topic: herons.

- Topic has a second meaning:
 - The “topic” or “subject” is the noun phrase at the heart of the sentence. It’s the thing doing the main action.
 - E.g.
 - **The monkey** climbed the tree.
 - Whenever it rains, **the grass** gets wet.

Great Blue Herons live and breed just about anywhere in the northern United States and most of Canada. When the cold weather arrives, **the herons** head south. **A few** come to Cape Cod where the winters usually aren't too bad. **Most of these herons** are either inexperienced young birds or lost adult males too stubborn to ask for directions south. **Spending the winter** here has its advantages, and I'm not talking about the free off-season parking in Provincetown. **Herons** are able to avoid the dangers of migration, plus they can be one of the earliest to arrive on the breeding grounds.

passage topic = sentence topic

Great Blue Herons live

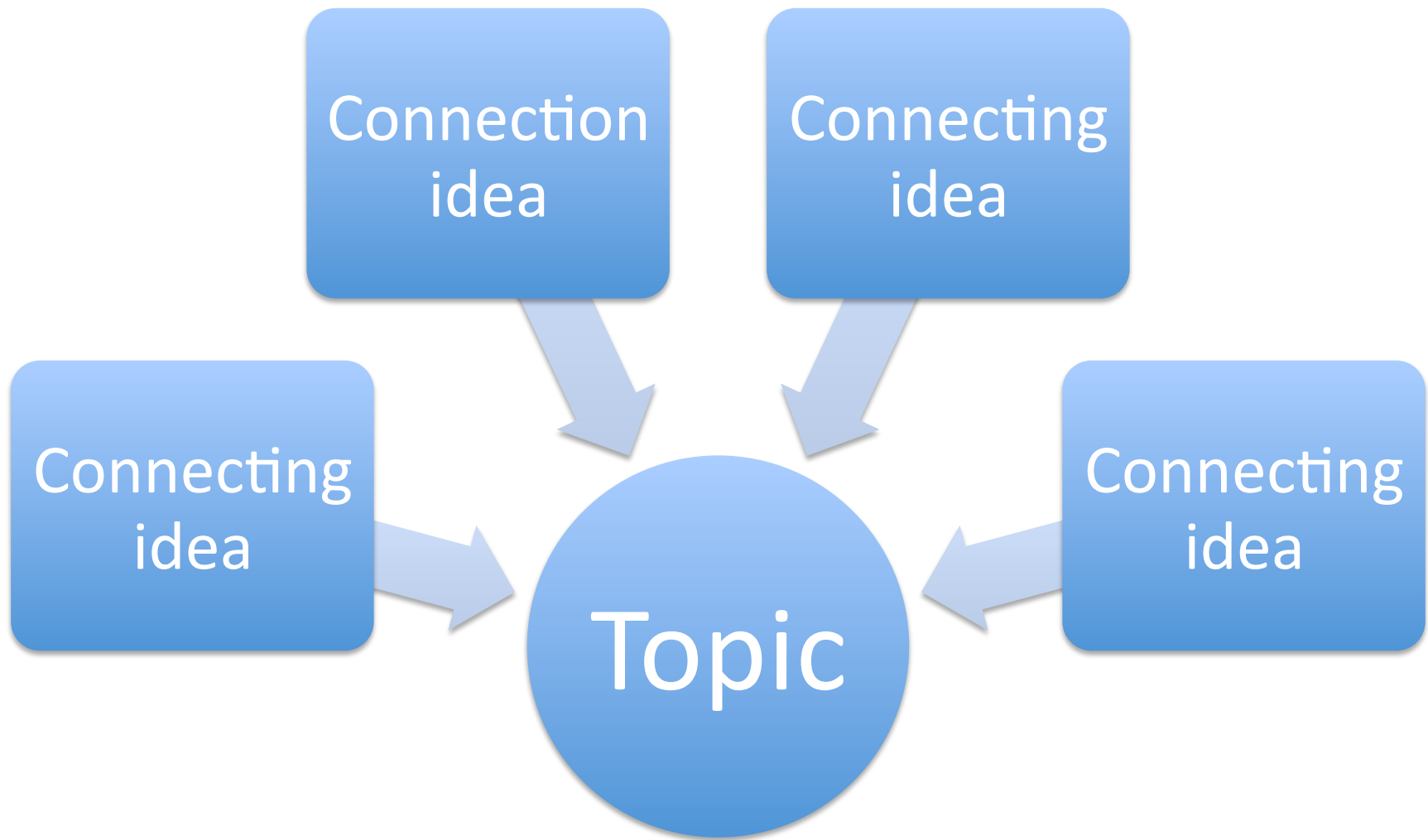
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Transitions: how can ideas be related?

- Three main ways:
 - Categories
 - Sequences
 - Causes & Effects

Categories

Similarity

- Herons live in the United States. Herons live in most of Canada.
- *and, similarly, likewise, too*

Contrast

- Herons have one thing in their favor: they are opportunistic hunters. Herons have one thing not in their favor: they defend a fishing hole even when it is frozen.
- *but, in contrast, on the other hand, alternatively*

Categories

Elaboration

- Herons have one thing in their favor: they are total opportunists.
- : (colon), *that is, in other words, which is to say, also, furthermore, in addition, notice that, which*

Exemplification

- Herons are total opportunists. When the fish are frozen out, they'll eat other things, including crustaceans, mice, voles, and small birds.
- *for example, for instance, such as, including*

Categories

Generalization

- When the fish are frozen out, herons will eat other things, including crustaceans, mice, voles, and small birds. They are total opportunists.
- *in general, more generally*

Exception: generalization first

- Cape Cod winters are often mild and pleasant. Then there is this winter, the winter that never ends.
- *however, on the other hand, then there is*

Exception: exception first

- This winter seems like it will never end. Nonetheless, Cape Cod winters are often mild and pleasant.
- *Nonetheless, nevertheless, still*

Sequences

Before-and-after

- The cold weather arrives and then the herons head south.
- *and, before, then*

After-and-before

- The herons head south when the cold weather arrives.
- *after, once, while, when*

Causes & Effects

Result (cause-effect)

- Young herons are inexperienced, so some of them migrate to Cape Cod.
- *and, as a result, therefore, so*

Explanation (effect-cause)

- Some herons migrate to Cape Cod, because they are young and inexperienced.
- *Because, since, owing to*

Transitions

- At the end of one paragraph, or at the beginning of the next, show how the ideas of the two paragraphs are related.
- See worksheet:
 - Insomnia, however, is not the only side-effect of Zantrex-3.
- The location and explicitness of the transition will depend on the complexity of the argument.
- For simple arguments, transitions are often implied.

Warm-up

- One might think all politicians are liars and cheats. But you would be wrong.
- I would have gone to class, but then I can't hang out with my friends.
- One should always do your best.

Plan for today

- Mechanics:
 - Unclear pronoun reference
- Organization
 - Conclusions
- Time given for exercise

Unclear pronoun reference

- Pronouns (**she, it, his, their**, and so on) must clearly refer to the nouns they replace. In most cases, this is straightforward:
 - **Luke** pulled out his lightsaber. **He** prepared himself for the duel.
 - With **her** car packed to the brim, **my sister** drove off into the sunset.

Unclear pronoun reference

- When there are several actors in the sentence, problems can sometimes arise:
 - **Our patients** enjoy the **warm days** while **they** last.
 - *Are the patients or the warm days on the way out?*
- Clear:
 - While these warm days last, our patients enjoy them.
 - Our terminal patients enjoy these warm days.

Unclear pronoun reference

- Ambiguous:
 - Sally told Sarah that she was obsessed with her job.
- Clear:
 - Sally told Sarah, “I’m obsessed with my job.”
 - Sally told Sarah, “I’m obsessed with your job.”

Practice: unclear pronoun reference

1. The mother called the daughter back to clean up her mess.
2. Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged.
3. The problem with our defective machinery is only compounded by the new operator's incompetence. This annoys me!

Conclusions

- What it should do:
 - Refocus on the thesis
 - Argue for the *significance* of the thesis
 - “So what?” factor
 - Leave a final and lasting impression on the reader
- What it should not do:
 - State the obvious:
 - “I have just discussed my views on the role cars play in our lives.”
 - Apologize:
 - “Although some readers might disagree, this is how I see it.”

Potential closing strategies

- A call to action
- A quotation
- An explanation of significance

Call to action

Just imagine yourself eating a salad of crisp green lettuce, juicy red tomato chunks, firm white slices of cucumber, and crunchy strips of green pepper—all picked fresh from your own garden. If this picture appeals to you, begin planning your summer garden now, and by July the picture of you eating the salad will become a reality. *Bon appétit!*

A quotation

I agree with Ellen Goodman's assertion that there is "something malignant about some of the extremists who make a public virtue of their health." The cancer is in the superior attitudes of the "healthy elite"—an attitude that actually discourages exercise and healthy habits by making average people feel too intimidated and inferior even to begin a fitness program.

An explanation of significance

A growing amount of so-called private information about American citizens is collected daily. And few laws protect our right to be left alone. In the interest of pursuing criminals, government too often sacrifices the privacy of innocent people, and new technology is making old laws obsolete. Huge collections of data are becoming available to your insurance company, to prospective employers, to companies doing mass mailings, and even to your neighbor. The invasion continues, and no one seems to know how to stop our world from fulfilling the prophecy in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Time given for exercise