

# **English 103**

## **Course Reader**

**Nsu Book Shop**

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*Introduction to  
the Paragraph*

What is a paragraph? You probably know that a paragraph is a group of sentences and that the first sentence of this group is indented; that is, it begins a little bit more to the right of the margin than do the rest of the sentences in this group. But it is not enough to say that a paragraph is a group of sentences. How do these sentences relate to each other? How does a paragraph begin, and where does it end? What constitutes a good paragraph? These are the questions we answer in this first unit.

## The Topic of a Paragraph

To begin with, a *paragraph* is defined as a group of sentences that develops one main idea; in other words, a paragraph develops a topic. A *topic* is the subject of the paragraph; it is what the paragraph is about. Read the following paragraph, which is *about* the habit of smoking cigarettes.

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit. Considering that the average price per pack of cigarettes is about two dollars, people who smoke two packs of cigarettes a day spend \$4.00 per day on their habit. At the end of one year, these smokers have spent at least \$1,460.00. But the price of cigarettes is not the only expense cigarette smokers incur. Since cigarette smoke has an offensive odor that permeates clothing, stuffed furniture, and carpet, smokers often find that these items must be cleaned more frequently than those belonging to nonsmokers. Although it is difficult to estimate the cost of this additional expense, one can see that this hidden expense does contribute to making smoking an expensive habit.

**EXERCISE 2-1** Study the following paragraphs to find their topics. Write the topic for each paragraph in the space provided.

1. A final examination in a course will give a student the initiative to do his or her best work throughout the course. Students who are only taking notes and attending classes in order to pass a few short tests will not put forth their best effort. For instance, some of my friends in drama, in which there is no final examination, take poor notes, which they throw away after each short test. Skipping classes also becomes popular. Imagine the incredible change a final examination would produce. Students would have to take good notes and attend all classes in order to be prepared for the final examination.

—Suzanne Gremillion

This paragraph is about \_\_\_\_\_.

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

2. Another reason why I like the beach is its solitary atmosphere. At the beach I have no witness but the beach, and I can speak and think with pleasure. No one can interrupt me, and the beach will always be there to listen to everything I want to say. In addition, it is a quiet place to go to meditate. Meditation requires solitude. Many times when I am confused about something, I go to the beach by myself, and find that this is the best place to resolve my conflicts, solve problems, and to think.

—M. Veronica Porta

This paragraph is about \_\_\_\_\_

3. Some seeming English-Spanish equivalents are deceptive. Their forms are similar, but they have developed different shades of meaning in the two languages. These are sure to cause trouble for Spanish speakers learning English. The Spanish word *asistir* looks like the English word *assist* but has none of the latter's meaning of "help." Instead, *asistir* means "to attend" or "to be present." Thus, Spanish English speakers will say that they assisted a class when they mean that they were present at it. *Actual* in Spanish means "present," not English "actual"; *desgracia* means "misfortune" not "disgrace," *ignorar* means "not to know" instead of "to ignore."<sup>\*</sup>

This paragraph is about \_\_\_\_\_

4. When we make attributions about ourselves or about others, we tend to attribute the behavior in question to either *internal* or *external* forces. When you see someone crash his car into a telephone pole, you can attribute that unfortunate piece of behavior either to internal or external causes. You might conclude that the person is a terrible driver or emotionally upset (internal causes), or you might conclude that another car forced the driver off the road (external cause). If you fail an exam, you can attribute it to internal causes such as stupidity or a failure to study, or you can attribute it to external causes such as an unfair test or an overheated room.<sup>†</sup>

This paragraph is about \_\_\_\_\_

*The Paragraph**Prewriting: Planning* ↗

When you are assigned topics to write about, they will often be too general to be developed adequately in one paragraph. Therefore, you will need to *restrict* your topic; that is, you will need to narrow down your topic to a more specific one. For example, suppose that you are asked to write about your favorite place and you choose a country such as Mexico. Although you could easily write several sentences naming all the things you like about Mexico, it would be more interesting for your reader if you narrowed down the topic *Mexico* to a particular place in Mexico, such as the Great Temple in the Aztec ruins. Your topic should be narrowed down as much as possible. Look at how the topic *Mexico* is narrowed here:

M E X I C O

MEXICO CITY

Historical Sites

Aztec Ruins

The Great  
Temple

Of course, there are many other ways to narrow the same topic. For example:

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

M E X I C O

YUCATAN PENINSULA

The City of Progreso

The Beach  
South of  
Progreso

D R U G S

Marijuana

Effects of Smoking  
MarijuanaEffect on  
Memory

This paragraph will discuss one of the effects of smoking marijuana: memory loss. Like most topics, this one can be narrowed down in several ways. Observe

*The Paragraph***M A R I J U A N A****Reasons People  
Smoke It****Peer Pressure  
As a Reason**

This paragraph will discuss one of the reasons people smoke marijuana: peer pressure.

 **EXERCISE 2-2.** Fill in each line that follows by narrowing down the topics given. For the last one, select your own topic and then narrow it down.

1. Cigarettes

Effects of Smoking CigarettesEffects on HealthEffects on Lungs

2. Cigarettes

Cigarette SmokersTypes of Cigarette Smokers

3. Technology

ComputersThree Uses of Computers

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

Fatal Diseases

Cancer

5.

My Hometown

6.



## The Topic Sentence

The topic of a paragraph is usually introduced in a sentence; this sentence is called the *topic sentence*. However, the topic sentence can do more than introduce the subject of the paragraph. A good topic sentence also serves to state an idea or an attitude about the topic. This idea or attitude about the topic is called the *controlling idea*; it controls what the sentences in the paragraph will discuss. All sentences in the paragraph should relate to and develop the controlling idea. To illustrate, look at the following topic sentence to identify the topic and the controlling idea:

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit.

In this sentence, the topic is the *habit of smoking cigarettes*; the controlling idea is that smoking can be *expensive*. A paragraph that develops this topic sentence

*The Paragraph*

should demonstrate that smoking cigarettes can indeed be an expensive habit. Reread the paragraph on page 15 and see if it develops the idea of expensive.

Of course, there are many other controlling ideas one could have about the topic of smoking cigarettes. Indeed, one of the most popular is that smoking is hazardous to health. See how this idea is developed in the following paragraph:



Smoking cigarettes is hazardous to your health. Several years ago, a United States government study was released that linked the intake of tar and nicotine, found in cigarettes, with the development of cancer in laboratory animals. The evidence was so overwhelming that the United States government required cigarette manufacturers to put a warning on the outside of each package of cigarettes, which says, "Warning: The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is hazardous to your health." Aside from the most serious and feared disease, cancer, cigarette smoking also can aggravate or promote other health problems. For example, smoking can increase the discomfort for people with asthma and emphysema. It can give one a "smoker's cough" and contribute to bronchitis. Finally, recent studies have shown that cigarette smokers are more susceptible to common colds and flu. Whether you get an insignificant cold or the major killer, cancer, smoking cigarettes is hazardous. Is it worth it?

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

 **EXERCISE 2-3** Study the topic sentences that follow. Circle the controlling idea and underline the topic in each sentence. Note: The controlling idea and the topic may be expressed in more than one word. The first one is done for you.

1. Another way to reduce the rate of inflation is to balance the federal budget.
2. Einstein's unsuccessful attempt to get nuclear weapons banned was disappointing to him.
3. Savings bonds are also a safe investment.
4. Another problem for students is finding a part-time job.
5. A properly planned science fiction course should include a unit on political implications.
6. Some seeming English-Spanish equivalents are deceptive.
7. Another reason air pollution is hazardous is that it damages the Earth's ozone layer.
8. Although bright, Maria is a very shy girl.
9. A final advantage Martina Navratilova has on the court is her constant aggressiveness.
10. One of the biggest problems with athletic scholarships is that more attention is paid to sports than to education.

## IMPROVING THE TOPIC SENTENCE

As indicated, a topic sentence introduces the topic and the controlling idea about that topic. However, it is not enough merely to have a topic and a controlling idea. The controlling idea should be clear and focused on a particular aspect. For example, consider the following topic sentence:

Drinking coffee is bad.

This sentence has a topic—*drinking coffee*—and a controlling idea—bad—but they are vague. In what way is coffee bad? For whom or what is it bad? Is drinking only a little coffee bad, or is drinking a lot of coffee bad? As you can see, this topic sentence opens a lot of questions that probably cannot be answered effectively in one paragraph. The sentence needs more focus, and that focus can come from the controlling idea:

Drinking over four cups of coffee a day can be harmful to pregnant women.

*The Paragraph*

In this version, the topic itself is narrowed down some more and the controlling idea is more precise.

**25 EXERCISE 2-4** Study the following groups of sentences. Circle the number of the better topic sentence in each pair. The first one is done for you.

1. There are many things that make learning the English language difficult.
2. What makes English particularly difficult to learn is pronunciation.
3. Enrolling in college is not an easy task.
4. Registration at State College is a painful process.
5. *Gone with the Wind* may be an old movie, but it is still a good movie.
6. The acting in *Gone with the Wind* was superb.
7. The wide variety of merchandise makes Sears convenient.
8. The home-repair department in Sears is convenient.
9. The architecture in Chicago reflects trends in modern design.
10. Chicago is an interesting city because of its history, architecture, and sports activities.

**25 EXERCISE 2-5** Read the following weak topic sentences. Rewrite each one to make it more specific. You can narrow down the topic and/or the controlling idea. The first one is done for you.

1. The Honda Civic is an excellent automobile.

*The Honda Civic is economical to maintain.*

---

2. My hometown is a wonderful place.
- 

3. Many improvements are needed at this school.
- 

4. Exercise is good for you.
-

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

5. Driving a car can be hazardous.

---

6. Computers are useful.

---

7. There are many interesting things to do at the park.

---

8. Watching television is bad for you.

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## RECOGNIZING THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence serves to introduce the topic and the controlling idea. But where should the topic sentence be placed in the paragraph? Generally, because the topic sentence does introduce, it is a good idea to place it at or near the beginning of the paragraph. However, depending on the kind of paragraph it is in, the topic sentence may be placed near the middle of the paragraph or even at the end. Sometimes neither the topic nor the controlling idea is explicitly stated in one sentence; however, this does not mean that a topic and controlling idea are not present. In this kind of paragraph, the topic and controlling idea are implied; that is, they are clearly suggested in the development of the paragraph. Nevertheless, it is usually a good idea to state topic sentences clearly, not only to be certain that the idea is clear but also to help control the development of the paragraph.

 **EXERCISE 2-6** Study the following paragraphs. In the space provided, write out the topic sentence for each paragraph, underlining the topic and circling the controlling idea. If the topic sentence is implied, write one out.

1. In 1944 the United States signed a treaty with Mexico guaranteeing that country 1.5 million acre-feet of Colorado River water a year. But the big division of the Colorado's precious water had occurred in 1922 under the Colorado River Compact, signed by the seven states along the river and the federal government. What makes the agreement shaky—some describe it as "a house of cards"—is that it is based on an overly optimistic estimate of the river's average flow. About 15 million acre-feet of water were originally apportioned to

*The Paragraph*

the states; actually, the average annual supply is only 13.8 million. In addition, the Compact did not take into account Mexico's right to any Colorado River water at all, so the 1.5 million acre-feet later guaranteed to Mexico widen the gap between demand and supply. The Colorado is, in short, overbooked.\*

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Sagebrush covers 58,000 square miles of Wyoming. The biggest city has a population of 50,000, and there are only five settlements that could be called cities in the whole state. The rest are towns, scattered across the expanse with as much as 60 miles between them, their populations 2000, 50 or 10. They are fugitive-looking, perched on a barren, windblown beach, or tagged onto a river or a railroad, or laid out straight in a farming valley with implement stores and a block-long Mormon church.†

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Anyone who saw him once never forgot his nose and his body. The first time anyone saw him, they were very surprised. The second time, they looked at his nose with admiration, as if it were a valuable treasure. His nose, which was longer than Barbra Streisand's, occupied most of his face. When he smiled, nothing but his nose was visible. He was recognized by it even in a crowd. The treasure made one think that in his previous life he had been a collie or an ant-eater. In addition, his nose was as thin as a razor. If he had flown like a jet, he could have divided the clouds. His body was also very skinny. He looked as if he had not eaten for ten days. He was a heavy eater, but one couldn't imagine where he kept food in his body. Finally, on a windy day, he was blown away and gone, like Mary Poppins.

— Nobutaka Matsuo

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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\* Adapted from David Sheridan, "The Colorado: An Engineering Wonder Without Enough Water," *Smithsonian* 13 (February 1983): pp. 46—7.

† Gretel Ehrlich, *The Solace of Open Spaces* (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 4.

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

4. We write because we want to understand our lives. This is why my closets are filled with boxes and boxes of musty old journals. It is why I found pages of poetry under my stepdaughter Kira's mattress when she went off to camp. It is why my father tells me he will soon begin his memoirs. As John Cheever explains, "When I began to write, I found this was the best way to make sense out of my life."<sup>\*</sup>

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Sometimes on Friday, our Sabbath day, my father would take us to the Old City, marked by the Bab el-Metwalli, or Gate of the Holy Man, named after the Sufi sheikh who reportedly sat there centuries before, performing miracles for passersby. For all that Cairo is my hometown, I never ceased to marvel at the sights and the exotic history that made up my city. The streets of the Old City, far too narrow for automobiles, were choked instead with the traffic of horses, donkeys and even people laden down with loads of fresh vegetables, firesticks, vases of copper and brass to be sold in the bustling Khan el-Khalili bazaar. Cairo had been the greatest trading center in the world for centuries, and it was here in the caravanserai of the Khan el-Khalili that medieval traders from all over the Arab world had unloaded their camel trains. It was near here also that the Fatimid sultans had kept a zoo for the giraffes, ostriches and elephants sent to them as tribute from kingdoms in Africa.<sup>†</sup>

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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## FORMULATING THE TOPIC SENTENCE

### Prewriting: Generating Ideas

Thus far you have been given topics and controlling ideas to recognize and improve, but often you must find your own controlling idea. Once you have found a manageable topic for a paragraph, you need to examine that topic more closely to determine your feelings or attitudes about it.

\* Lucy McCormick Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Writing* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986), p. 3.

† Jahan Sadat, *Woman of Egypt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 42.

*The Paragraph*

To decide on the controlling idea and what you want to say about a topic, begin by using one or more of the prewriting techniques for generating ideas you learned in Chapter One. For example, suppose you are asked to write about a place in your country and you narrow that broad topic down to a certain resort. The following is one example of a brainstorm on the topic:

Topic: Lehai Resort

Notes:

- Pretty sandy beaches, palm trees along the shore, clear turquoise water, gorgeous mountains
- Tourists swarming everyplace, new hotels cropping up every month; one hotel blocks the view of the sea from the road, many tourist shops
- Resort provides many jobs, brings in \$1 million in revenue from tourists, has attracted some new companies to the city

Of course, the list could be expanded. Once you have brainstormed your ideas, look through the list for something striking. For example, you might realize that the resort has provided economic benefits to the local area. Or you might find that you want to write about the beauty of the resort area. Several ideas could emerge from this brainstorming session. Here are a few:

Lehai Resort is set in one of the most scenic coastal areas in the world.

Lehai Resort has been ruined by the excessive influx of tourists.

Lehai Resort has brought direct and indirect economic benefits to our area.

**EXERCISE 2-7.** Choose one of the following topics or one of your own and brainstorm the topic. After writing everything that comes to mind on the topic, sort through the list and choose an idea that interests you. Write a topic sentence that has a controlling idea. In the space provided, write your topic sentence, underline the topic and circle the controlling idea. If necessary, narrow down the topic further. If your teacher suggests, you may repeat this process for one or more of the other topics.

superstitions

pollution

an interesting custom

your major

a memorable teacher

an important decision

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

## Support

### Prewriting: Planning

Once you have generated ideas and formulated a controlling idea about your topic, the next step is to get from your prewriting notes the material you can use to develop the paragraph. This material is used to support the opinion or attitude expressed in your topic sentence. It serves to back up, clarify, illustrate, explain, or prove the point you make in your topic sentence. Most often we use factual detail to support a point. Such detail may include facts from resource material, such as magazines, journals, and books, or details about things you or others have observed. Basically, support comes from the information you use to arrive at the view you express in your topic sentence.

When you are examining your notes to find support for your topic sentence, you may find it necessary to add material to your notes. At this point you will want to use another invention technique to help you discover material. Let's take as an example this topic sentence: "Lehai Resort has nearly solved our local employment problem." From the notes on this topic, we might get "Lehai Resort provides many jobs" and "has attracted some new companies to the city." These two bits of information can serve as the basis for more notes and support. To generate more notes at this stage, you may find it useful to ask WH- questions (see Chapter One, p. 9), such as "What are the companies that have opened up? How many jobs have they brought to our city? How else has the resort provided jobs? What are those jobs? What was the employment situation before the resort opened? What is the employment rate now?" The answers to these questions will serve as a foundation for the support for your paragraph. Your revised notes might read as follows:

Unemployment rate in 1980 = 35%; in 1990 = 8%

Hotel jobs—Statler Hotel, 100

Modern Inn, 50

New Wave Spa, 35

Five new shops on Beach Highway for tourists—fifteen new jobs

New companies (since 1982)—Jones Batiking

Mary's Dollworks

Julio's Tour Guide Service

J & M Corporation

Menk's Manufacturing Company

*The Paragraph*

Now you are ready to write the support out as sentences and list them under your topic sentence in outline form, grouping related details together. For example, for the Lehai Resort , your paragraph outline might look like this:

Topic Sentence:

Lehai Resort has nearly solved our local employment problem.

Support:

1. The unemployment rate has dropped from 35% in 1980 to 8% in 1990.
2. The tourist industry has created many jobs.
  - a. Three new hotels have opened up.
    - (1) The Statler Hotel employs 100 local residents.
    - (2) The Modern Inn hired fifty.
    - (3) The New Wave Spa has thirty-five new workers.
  - b. Five new shops have opened on Beach Hwy., for a total of fifteen jobs.
  - c. Tourist-related industries have opened up: Jones Batikking, Mary's Dollworks, and Julio's Tour Guide Service.
3. The resort has attracted two nontourist companies: J & M Corp. and Menk's Mfg. Co.

Such an outline is useful in two ways: It provides a means for quickly checking your sentences to see if they deal with the topic, and it serves as a guide for checking whether the sentences are logically arranged. Here is an outline of the paragraph on page 16:

Topic Sentence:

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit.

Support:

1. Cigarettes cost about two dollars a pack.
2. The average smoker smokes two packs a day.
3. The annual expense for this smoker is \$1,460.00.
4. The smoker must also pay for extra cleaning of carpeting, furniture, and clothes.

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

Obviously, not all the sentences in the original paragraph are listed or recorded verbatim. For example, the sentence "But the price of cigarettes is not the only expense cigarette smokers incur" is omitted here. This sentence certainly relates to the topic and the controlling idea, but its main function is to provide a link in the sentences; it joins the section discussing the price of cigarettes with the section dealing with the hidden expense of cigarette smoking. This type of sentence is called a *transition*. Also omitted from the outline is the last sentence: "Although it is difficult to estimate the cost of this additional expense, one can see that this hidden expense does contribute to making smoking an expensive habit." This type of sentence, which summarizes the main idea in the paragraph, is called the *concluding sentence*. Not all paragraphs need concluding sentences, but they are useful for smoothly ending the development of the support.

How you organize your sentences within a paragraph will depend on your topic and purpose. In the following chapters, you will learn how to support various kinds of topics and how to organize that support. At this stage, it is important to understand that the material you use to write the sentences in your paragraph should be directly supportive of the view you express in your topic sentence.



**EXERCISE 2-8** Study the paragraph about cigarette smoking on page 22. In the space provided here, write the topic sentence, circle the controlling idea, and outline the support given in the paragraph. Write the concluding sentence if there is one.

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Support:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

*The Paragraph*

**EXERCISE 2-9** Using the material you brainstormed in Exercise 2-7, write the topic sentence and circle the controlling idea in the space provided below. Then study your notes and decide on relevant support. If you do not have enough support, generate more by using another prewriting technique—for example, WH-questions. Then list the support in sentence form.

Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Support:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_



Each sentence within a paragraph should relate to the topic and develop the controlling idea. If any sentence does not relate to or develop that area, it is irrelevant and should be omitted from the paragraph. Consider the topic sentence discussed earlier in this chapter:

Smoking cigarettes can be an expensive habit.

If a sentence in this paragraph had discussed how annoying it is to watch someone blow smoke rings, that sentence would have been out of place, since it does not discuss the expense of smoking.

A paragraph that has sentences that do not relate to or discuss the controlling idea lacks *unity*. Note the following example of a paragraph that lacks unity:

Another problem facing a number of elderly people is living on a reduced income. Upon retiring, old people may receive a pension from their company or Social Security from the government. The amount of their monthly checks is often half the amount of the checks they received when they were

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

employed. Suddenly, retirees find that they can no longer continue the life-style that they had become accustomed to, even if that life-style was a modest one. Many find, after paying their monthly bills, that there is no money left for a movie or a dinner out. Of course, sometimes they can't go out because of their health. Maybe they have arthritis or rheumatism and it is painful for them to move around. This can also change their life-style. Some older people, however, discover that the small amount of money they receive will not even cover their monthly bills. They realize with horror that electricity, a telephone, and nourishing food are luxuries they can no longer afford. They resort to shivering in the dark, eating cat food in order to make ends meet.

The topic of this paragraph is "another problem facing a number of elderly people," and the controlling idea is "living on a reduced income." Therefore, all the sentences should deal with the idea of the problem of living on a reduced income. In the paragraph, however, there are three sentences that do not discuss this particular topic: "Of course, sometimes they can't go out because of their health. Maybe they have arthritis or rheumatism and it is painful for them to move around. This can also change their life-style." These sentences should be taken out of this paragraph and perhaps developed in another paragraph.

**EXERCISE 2-10** Read the following paragraphs. Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph and cross out any sentences that do not belong in the paragraph. There may be one or more irrelevant sentences.

1. Since the mid-1960s, there has been a tremendous increase in the popularity and quality of Latin and South American novelists; in fact, some call this literary movement "El Boom." Mexico has produced, for example, Carlos Fuentes, who wrote *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. The 1967 Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Ángel Asturias. Argentina has given us numerous impressive writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Luisa Valenzuela, and Manuel Puig, whose *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was made into a film. William Hurt won the Oscar for Best Actor for his role in that movie. Another recent novelist who has impressed the world is Chile's Isabelle Allende (*The House of the Spirits*). The list could go on, but probably the biggest name associated with this movement is Gabriel García Márquez, a Colombian whose enormously popular *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, published in 1967, helped him earn the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature.
2. Despite their reputation, some workers in American factories take pride in helping their companies. A good example of this is the 14,400 employees of the Lockheed-Georgia Company who submit ideas to management to help reduce production costs. In one year, these ideas, ranging from a new way to

*The Paragraph*

recharge a dead battery to a more efficient way to paint airplane wings, saved the company \$57.5 million. Since 1979, employee suggestions have resulted in savings of over \$190 million. While we might think that workers submit ideas in order to receive large rewards, this is not the case. According to Executive Vice President Alex Lorch, the financial benefit is minimum. The employee with the best idea each year receives only \$100. The employees, Lorch says, submit ideas because they are motivated by a desire to do a good job. Japanese workers, on the other hand, are generally considered the best example of workers loyal to their company.\*

3. The most obvious problem with being unemployed is not having the money you need for daily life. Most people need money just for the necessities—paying the rent and buying food. And even though buying clothes may not be a necessity, it is still important. If you don't have a job, who is going to give you the money for rent and food? Maybe you have an uncle or a cousin who will let you borrow a little bit of money for a month or two, but most people can't afford to pay for other people's rent. So if you don't have a job, you will have trouble paying the rent and buying food.
4. I would not want to live to be five hundred years old if I was the only really old person, if everyone else died at the normal time. One reason is that people would always keep coming to me and asking questions about the past. They would want to know when this happened and that happened and did such-and-such really happen. They would keep bothering me. I think now sometimes old people do not like being bothered. The other reason is that it would be too sad. If everyone else died at the normal time, I would have to watch all my friends and family die. I would not want to see my children die or my grandchildren. I would be like a freak.

## Coherence

We have seen that a paragraph must have a topic and controlling idea, support, and unity. Another element that a paragraph needs is coherence. A coherent paragraph contains sentences that are logically arranged and that flow smoothly.

Logical arrangement refers to the order of your sentences and ideas. There are various ways to order your sentences, depending on your purpose. For example, if you want to describe what happens in a movie—that is, the plot—your sentences would follow the sequence of the action in the movie, from beginning to end. If, on

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\* Information from *The Times-Savoyne*, 27 May 1984, sec. 7, p. 7.

*Introduction to the Paragraph*

the other hand, you want to describe the most exciting moments in the movie, you would select a few moments and decide on a logical order for discussion—perhaps presenting the least exciting moments first and the most exciting last to create suspense. (In the following chapters, we study the various principles for ordering ideas and sentences.)

A paragraph can be incoherent even when the principle for ordering the ideas is logical. Sometimes, as students are writing they remember something that they wanted to say earlier and include it as they write. Unfortunately, this sentence often ends up out of place. Study the following paragraph, in which one or more sentences are out of order:

Although Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fairly small town, it offers much to amuse summer visitors. They can go rafting down the Rogue River. They can go swimming in the Applegate River. Lots of people go hunting for wild berries that grow along the roadsides. Campers will find lovely campgrounds that are clean. There are several nice hotels. Tourists can browse through a number of interesting shops in town, such as antique stores. One fun activity is shopping at the open market where local folks sell vegetables grown in their gardens. Grants Pass has a lot of places to eat, ranging from a low-calorie dessert place to lovely restaurants. Some of these restaurants offer good food and gorgeous views. One store to visit is the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood. Fishing in the area is also a popular activity. Water sports are by far the main attraction. As you can see, Grants Pass offers a lot to do in the summer. If you want to give your family a nice, wholesome vacation, try visiting Grants Pass.

The paragraph seems to have a principle of organization: The first half is devoted to activities in the areas just outside of the city itself, and the last half discusses activities within the city. However, toward the end of the paragraph the writer seems to throw in a few sentences as an afterthought. Three sentences—"One store to visit is the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood," "Fishing in the area is also a popular activity," and "Water sports are by far the main attraction"—are out of place. This paragraph could be revised as follows:

Although Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fairly small town, it offers much to amuse summer visitors. Water sports are by far the main attraction. Visitors can go rafting down the Rogue River. They can go swimming in the Applegate River. Fishing in the area is a popular activity. Lots of people go hunting for wild berries that grow along the roadsides. Campers will find lovely campgrounds that are clean. There are several nice hotels. Tourists can browse through a number of interesting shops in town, such as antique stores. One store to visit is the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood. One

*The Paragraph*

fun activity is shopping at the open market where local folks sell vegetables grown in their gardens. Grants Pass has a lot of places to eat, ranging from a low-calorie dessert place to lovely restaurants. Some of these restaurants offer good food and gorgeous views. As you can see, Grants Pass offers a lot to do in the summer. If you want to give your family a nice, wholesome vacation, try visiting Grants Pass.

The order of the sentences in this revised version is improved, but it is still not completely coherent, for the sentences do not always flow smoothly.

*Smooth flow* refers to how well one idea or sentence leads into another. Smooth flow can be achieved through sentence combining and through the use of certain expressions, called transitions, that provide the links between ideas. Some transitional expressions are *for example*, *to begin with*, *in contrast*, *however*, and *also*; there are many others that we will cover throughout this text. Note how the addition of some expressions and the combining of some sentences improve the coherence of this paragraph:

Although Grants Pass, Oregon, is a fairly small town, it offers much to amuse summer visitors. Water sports are by far the main attraction. Visitors can go rafting down the Rogue River or swimming in the Applegate River. Fishing in the area is another popular activity. Lots of people also go hunting for wild berries that grow along the roadsides. In addition, there are lovely, clean campgrounds where campers can park their vehicles. For those who prefer to stay in town, Grants Pass offers several nice hotels. In town, tourists can browse through a number of interesting shops, such as antique stores and the shop that sells items made from Oregon's beautiful myrtlewood. Another fun activity is shopping at the open market where local folks sell vegetables grown in their gardens. And finally, Grants Pass has a lot of places to eat, ranging from a low-calorie dessert place to lovely restaurants, some of which offer good food and gorgeous views. As you can see, Grants Pass offers a lot to do in the summer. If you want to give your family a nice, wholesome vacation, try visiting this charming town.

The expressions *another*, *also*, *in addition*, and *finally* bridge the gaps in ideas. Some of the sentences have been combined as well. Combining sentences and adding transitions make the ideas and sentences easier to follow.

If the sentences are not logically arranged or if they do not connect with each other smoothly, the paragraph is *incoherent*. Coherence is an important quality of writing.

*Introduction to the Paragraph***EXERCISE 2-11** Study each of the following paragraphs, in which one or more sentences are out of order. Revise these paragraphs for greater coherence by arranging the sentences in logical order.

1. In the hotel business, computers ease the load at the front desk. With a computer, a clerk can make a reservation easily and quickly, without the use of cards, racks, or registration books. So when guests come in to register, their reservations can be checked and they can be given available rooms without much fuss or bother. The hotel business is just one type of enterprise that has profited by the invention of computers. And with a computer, the clerk can get an instant update of the room status. This tells the clerk which rooms are available to guests.
2. Political conventions in America attract all kinds of people besides delegates. You are sure to see an artist or two doing chalk portraits of the candidates on the sidewalks. Groups who wish to attract attention to their political and social causes demonstrate outside the convention halls. The pro-life people, the pro-choice groups, the supporters of nuclear energy, those against nuclear energy, and the pro-gays and anti-gays are probably the most common groups. Others just like to poke fun at the candidates. For instance, at most conventions you will find at least a couple people wearing masks of their favorite or least favorite candidates. Others dress in costumes and carry signs with outrageous comments about the candidates or the political process. Another social-political group is the one advocating more civil rights and better economic opportunities for minorities. No matter who they are or what their reasons are for going to the conventions, these people always add color to the sometimes boring conventions.
3. An example of this kind of prejudice happened to me when I was in the fourth grade. I remember one time when all the students were being allowed to choose a book they wanted to read. When it was my turn to choose a book, she laughed at me and said, "Oh, that one is too hard for you. I'll choose one for you." I was so embarrassed. I thought that she should not embarrass me in front of the class like that. My teacher treated me as if I was about two grade levels below my classmates. My family had just moved here from California, and she did not think I was up with the rest of my class.

# From Paragraph to Essay

## A. EXPANDING THE PARAGRAPH

As you know, a paragraph consists of three parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences (body), and a concluding sentence. Similarly, an essay is composed of three sections: an introductory paragraph, supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

Some paragraphs can be expanded quite simply to essay length. Look at the paragraph from Chapter 2 about personal computers which is reprinted below. Put boxes around the three parts of this paragraph. (See page 19 for a paragraph with similar boxing.)

### Example 1

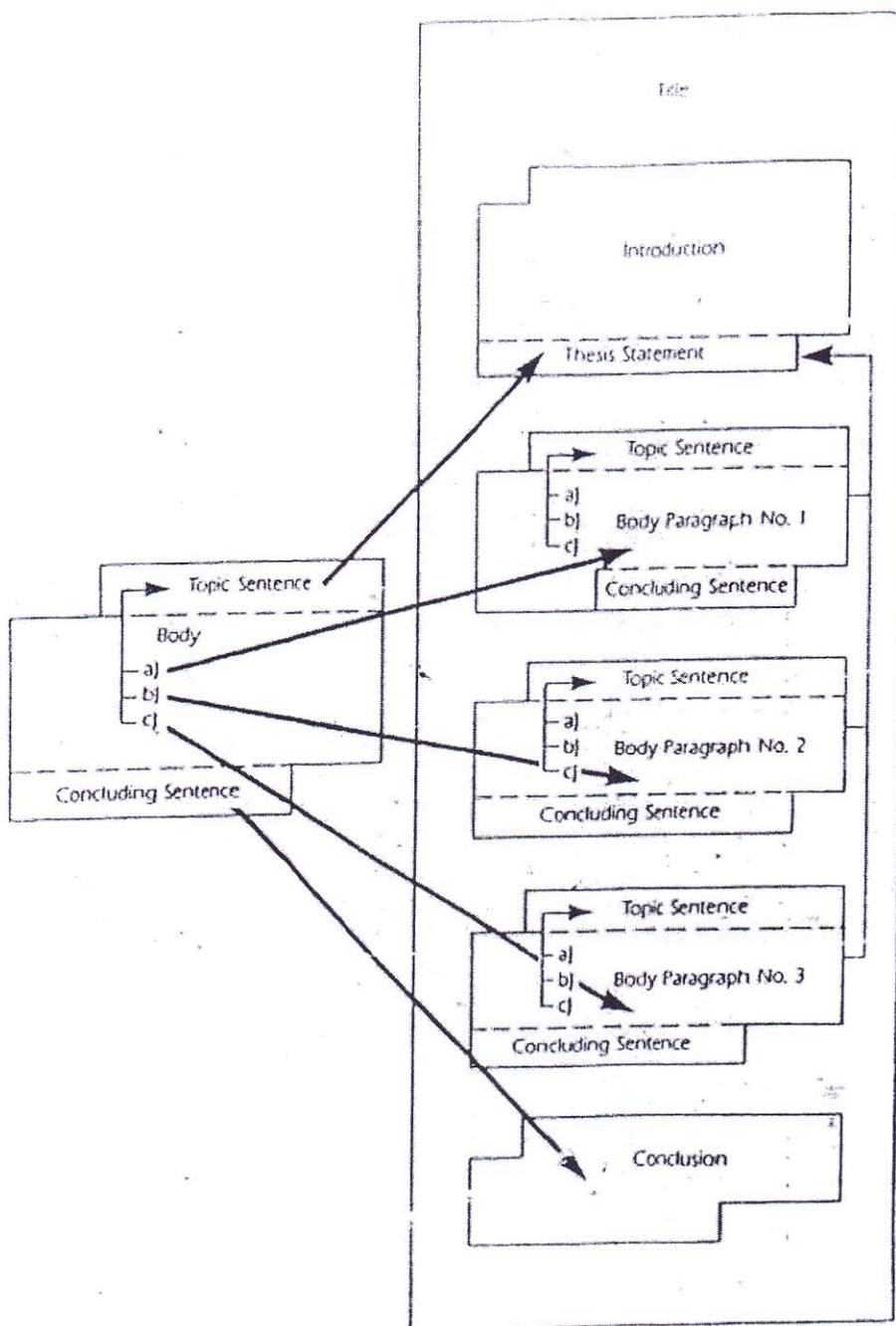
### Personal Computers

A personal computer consists of three main components which have different functions. The first is the central processing unit, or CPU. This is the brain of the computer. This unit contains the memory of the machine and the micro-chips which make the computer able to perform its functions. The CPU has one or more disk drives, where we can put program diskettes to make the machine add numbers, do word-processing, or play games. The second component is the monitor. This looks much like a small TV, but of course it doesn't have any channel buttons. On the monitor screen we can observe what we are telling the computer to do, such as move words, draw figures, or shoot down space aliens. The third component is the keyboard. It has the shape of a typewriter keyboard with letters and numbers, but, in addition, it also contains specialized keys for computing: function keys, cursor movement arrows, and command keys. We use the keyboard to write and edit the text we want. With a CPU, a monitor, and a keyboard, we have a complete computer.

Now look at the following diagram to see how a paragraph such as this can be expanded into an essay. The topic sentence of the paragraph becomes the THESIS STATEMENT of the essay at the *end* of the introductory paragraph. The paragraph body with its description of the three parts of a computer is divided into three separate supporting paragraphs in the essay. Finally, the concluding sentence is expanded and made into a concluding paragraph.

Two other aspects of the diagram are important to note. First, see how each body paragraph mirrors the construction of the original paragraph. Just as the paragraphs you have written so far have a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence, so does each body paragraph. Second, notice how the body paragraphs support the essay thesis statement as the supporting sentences in a paragraph support the topic sentence.

- You're In Charge



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From Paragraph to Essay —

The following essay is an expansion of the paragraph about personal computers. First, draw boxes around the three components of the essay (introductory paragraph, supporting paragraphs, and concluding paragraph). Next, using another color pen, underline the topic and concluding sentences in each body paragraph.

Example 2Personal Computers

Of all modern technological inventions, the computer is probably the most useful. There are many kinds of computers, from large mainframes to small laptop machines, but most people are best acquainted with the personal computer. A personal computer consists of three main components which have different functions.

The first component is the central processing unit, or CPU. This is the brain of the computer. It contains the memory of the machine and the microchips which make the computer able to perform its functions. By memory we mean storage capacity, that is, the amount of space the machine has internally to store information. Most CPUs also have one or more disk drives, where we can put program diskettes to make the machine add numbers, do word-processing [writing], or play games. The CPU is, in fact, that part of the computer which "computes."

The second component is the monitor. This looks very much like a TV, but of course it doesn't have any channel buttons. Monitors come in basically two kinds: black and white and color. The monitor has a screen just like a TV, and on this screen we can observe what we are telling the computer to do, such as move words around, draw figures and charts, or play video games. Although the monitor isn't necessary to make the computer work, it sure helps to see what you are doing. The monitor is, for me, an essential component of the computer.

The third component is the keyboard. It has the shape of a typewriter keyboard with letters and numbers, but, in addition, it also contains specialized keys for computing: function keys, cursor movement arrows, and command keys. The function keys usually have numbers such as F1, F2, etc. Combined with the command keys, they can create as many as 40 different functions. Some of these functions are underlining the text, setting the margins, or listing the files you have on a disk. The cursor movement arrows move the little blinking light up or down, right or left. With these you can edit your work at any point. Command keys are keys with special built-in functions such as setting capital letters, printing, adding, or deleting. We use this keyboard to create and change the text we want.

With a CPU, a monitor, and a keyboard, we have a complete computer. Once you are familiar with these three components, you can learn to use any personal computer. Perhaps you should type your next essay on a computer?

*The Essay*

The emphasis thus far has been on writing paragraphs with good, detailed support. Since a paragraph develops only one idea, the topics being developed are necessarily quite limited. Often, however, topics are too complex or too broad to be developed in a single paragraph. In this case, it is necessary to write an essay. An essay is a group of paragraphs that develops one central idea. How are the paragraphs organized in an essay? How many paragraphs are there in an essay? How does an essay begin and end? These are questions this unit will answer.

Unlike the paragraph, the essay is a more formal composition. Each paragraph in an essay has a designated function:

1. *Introduction.* The introduction is usually one paragraph (sometimes two or more) that introduces the topic to be discussed and the central idea (the thesis statement) of the essay.
2. *Developmental paragraphs.* These paragraphs develop various aspects of the topic and the central idea. They may discuss causes, effects, reasons, examples, processes, classifications, or points of comparison and contrast. They may also describe or narrate.
3. *Conclusion.* This paragraph concludes the thought developed in the essay. It is the closing word.

How many paragraphs an essay contains depends entirely on the complexity of the topic; some essays have only two or three paragraphs, whereas others may have twenty or thirty. However, for most purposes, the essays written in class for most first-year college English courses contain from four to six paragraphs, with an introductory paragraph, several developmental paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

## *The Thesis Statement*

The essay, like the paragraph, is controlled by one central idea. In the essay, the sentence containing the central idea is called the *thesis statement*. The thesis statement is similar to the topic sentence in that it contains an expression of an attitude, opinion, or idea about a topic; unlike the topic sentence, however, the thesis statement is broader and expresses the controlling idea for the entire essay. In fact, each of the developmental paragraphs should have a controlling idea that echoes or relates to the controlling idea—the central idea—in the thesis statement.

Here are a few points to remember about the thesis statement:

1. *The thesis statement should be expressed in a complete sentence.* Since the thesis statement is the main statement for the entire essay, it should express a

*Introduction to the Essay*

complete thought; therefore, it should be expressed in a complete sentence. And since it makes a statement, it should not be written as a question.

Not a thesis statement:

*My fear of the dark.*

Thesis statement:

*My fear of the dark has made my life miserable.*

2. *A thesis statement expresses an opinion, attitude, or idea; it does not simply announce the topic the essay will develop.*

Not a thesis statement:

*I am going to discuss the effects of radiation.*

Thesis statement:

*The effects of radiation are often unpredictable.*

3. *A thesis statement should express an opinion; it should not express a fact. Since the thesis statement expresses an attitude, opinion, or idea about a topic, the thesis statement is really a statement that someone could disagree with. Therefore, the thesis statement is a statement that needs to be explained or proved.*

Not a thesis statement:

*Cows produce milk.*

Thesis statement:

*The milk cows produce is not always fit for human consumption.*

Not a thesis statement:

*There are many advantages and disadvantages to going to college. (This is not an arguable point.)*

Thesis statement:

*The advantages to going to college far outweigh the disadvantages.*

*The Essay*

4. A thesis statement should express only one idea about one topic; if a thesis statement contains two or more ideas, the essay runs the risk of lacking unity and coherence.

Not a thesis statement:

Going to college in the Midwest can be fun, and I have found that living in a suburb of a large city is the best way to live while at college.

Thesis statement:

Going to college in the Midwest can be fun.

**25 EXERCISE 6-1** Study the following statements carefully. If the statement is a thesis statement, write *yes* in the blank; if it is not a thesis statement, write *no*.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The advantages of majoring in engineering.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I would like to discuss my views on the Olympic Games.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Students should be allowed to manage the bookstore.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ When I first came to the United States, I wasn't used to eating in fast-food places, and I was amazed at the shopping centers.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Why do I want to be a lawyer?
6. \_\_\_\_\_ The differences between Mandarin and Hunan dialects.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Knowing a foreign language can be beneficial to anyone.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ This advertisement attempts to appeal to the reader's sense of patriotism.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I am going to describe my home.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ There are many similarities and differences between New York and Hong Kong.

**26 EXERCISE 6-2** Study the following statements, which are not thesis statements. Rewrite each of the sentences to make it a thesis statement. The first one is done for you.

*Introduction to the Essay*

1. I am going to explain why I decided to go to college.

*Choosing to go to college was a difficult decision.*

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2. The hazards of storing chemical wastes.

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3. There are many similarities and differences between life in the country and life in the city.

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4. New York City is the largest city in the United States.

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5. Universities in the United States. Should require more humanities courses; they should also have more social activities.

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 *The Introduction* 

The thesis statement is the main statement for the entire essay. But where should the thesis statement be placed? Although there is no law that requires the thesis statement to be placed in any particular place in the essay, it is usually in the introductory paragraph. After all, the thesis is the statement that the developmental paragraphs are going to explore. But where in the introduction should it be placed? Before we answer this question, let us look at the characteristics of an introductory paragraph.

*The Essay*

1. *An introductory paragraph should introduce the topic.* Do not forget that the introductory paragraph is the first thing that a reader sees. Obviously, this paragraph should inform the reader of the topic being discussed.
2. *An introductory paragraph should indicate generally how the topic is going to be developed.* A good introductory paragraph should indicate whether the essay is going to discuss causes, effects, reasons, or examples; whether the essay is going to classify, describe, narrate, or explain a process.
3. *Generally speaking, an introductory paragraph should contain the thesis statement.* This is a general rule, of course. In more sophisticated writing, the thesis statement sometimes appears later in the essay, sometimes even at the end. In some cases, too, the thesis is just implied. For college essays, however, it is a good idea to state the thesis clearly in the introduction.
4. *Ideally, an introductory paragraph should be inviting; that is, it should be interesting enough to make the reader want to continue reading.* Since the introductory paragraph functions to introduce the topic and since the introductory paragraph should be inviting, it makes good sense not to put the thesis statement right at the beginning of the introductory paragraph. Not only should you introduce the topic before you state an opinion about it (the thesis statement), but you should also try to entice the reader to continue after reading the first sentence. Stating an opinion about something in the first sentence is not usually very inviting; in fact, if readers disagree with the opinion, it may very well discourage them from reading your essay. Therefore, it is generally a good idea to place the thesis statement at or near the end of the introductory paragraph.

*Prewriting; Planning* ↗

Since the introduction is the first paragraph the reader reads, it is often the first paragraph the student plans and can therefore be the most difficult. There are many ways to begin an essay. In this unit we discuss four basic types of introductions: (1) the "Turnabout," in which the author opens with a statement contrary to his or her actual thesis (Chapter Nine); (2) the "Dramatic Entrance," in which the author opens with a narrative, description, or dramatic example pertinent to the topic (Chapters Ten and Eleven); (3) the "Relevant Quotation," in which the writer opens with a quotation pertinent to the topic (Chapter Eleven); and (4) the "Funnel."

The Funnel approach is perhaps the most common type of introductory paragraph. It is so-called because the ideas progress from the general to the specific just as a funnel is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. The approach is to open with a general statement about the topic and then work toward the more specific

*Introduction to the Essay*

thesis statement at or near the end of the introduction. Not only should the opening statement be general, it should be congenial as well: Do not alienate the reader. See how this technique is applied in this introductory paragraph:

Traveling to a foreign country is always interesting, especially if it is a country that is completely different from your own. You can delight in tasting new foods, seeing new sights, and learning about different customs, some of which may seem very curious. If you were to visit my country, for instance, you would probably think that my people have some very strange customs, as these three examples will illustrate.

In this introductory paragraph, the writer introduces the general topic of "traveling to a foreign country" in the first sentence and narrows down that topic to a more specific aspect—the customs in the writer's country. The thesis statement comes at the end, with the central idea being "strange." Illustrations should appear in the developmental paragraphs.

Just how general should the introductory paragraph be? One way to avoid beginning too generally or too far back is to have one key word in the first sentence reappear in the thesis statement, or if not the word itself, a synonym of the word or an idea. In the preceding paragraph, *visit* echoes *traveling*, and the word *country* appears both in the first and the last sentence.

Here is another example of this type of introduction, taken from a popular science magazine:

America is a throwaway society. From both industrial and municipal sources, the U.S. generates about 10 billion metric tons of solid waste per year. Every five years the average American discards, directly and indirectly, an amount of waste equal in weight to the Statue of Liberty. Municipal solid waste alone accounts for 140 million metric tons per year. The municipal solid waste produced in this country in just one day fills roughly 63,000 garbage trucks, which lined up end to end would stretch 600 kilometers, the distance from San Francisco to Los Angeles. The repercussions of our waste habits, however, stretch to every city. Let us demonstrate by example.\*

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\* P. O'Leary, P. Walsh, and R. Ham, "Managing Solid Waste," *Scientific American* 6 (Dec. 1988): p. 36. Copyright ©1988 by Scientific Am. Inc. All rights reserved.

*The Essay***25 EXERCISE 6-3** Study the following introductory paragraphs. Underline the word or words that appear in the first sentence and are restated in the thesis statement.

1. Computers are advanced machines that can store and recall information at very high speed. Computers are easy and interesting to use; however, some people are afraid of computers. I used to be afraid of computers, too, because of the fear of failure and because I know nothing about programming. But actually I have learned that the procedures of working on computers are very easy.

—Nader Alyousha

2. When we were very young, we believed that parents could do no wrong. Indeed, they seemed to us to be perfect human beings who knew all the answers to our problems and who could solve any problems that we had. However, as we grow older, we find that parents can make mistakes, too.

3. We live in an era where television is the national pastime. Since the invention of the television set, people have been spending more of their free time watching television than doing anything else. Many of the television addicts feel that this particular pastime is not a bad one; indeed, they argue that people can learn a great deal watching television. I am sure that if you look long and hard enough, you can probably find some programs that are educationally motivating. But, for the most part, I say that watching television is a waste of time.

—Pamela Moran

4. Today's children are our future men and women. They will become the dominant force one day. If they receive proper guidance and have a nice childhood, they will contribute immeasurably to our society after they have grown up. In other words, today's children are going to have a significant impact on our society in the future; therefore, parents should not neglect the proper conditions that children need during their childhood.

—Chun Lee

5. When we see a blind person nearing a street corner or a door, many times we try to help by opening the door or taking the person's arm and guiding him or her across the street, and while we do that, some of us talk to the blind person in a loud voice, as if the blind person is not only helpless but also deaf. Rushing to help a blind person without asking if that person needs help and speaking loudly are just two of the inappropriate ways people react to blind people. If you want to help a blind person whom you perceive as in need of help, you should bear in mind the following tips.

*Introduction to the Essay*

**25 EXERCISE 6-4** On page 126 are the characteristics of a good introductory paragraph. Using those characteristics, evaluate the following introductory paragraphs. Does the paragraph introduce the topic? Does it indicate how the topic is going to be developed? Does it contain a thesis statement? Is it inviting? If one or more of these are missing, write the missing element in the space provided. Some of the paragraphs may be good introductory paragraphs.

1. We are all familiar with the image of the fat, jolly person, right? Unfortunately, this is an inaccurate stereotype. Fat people are not always so happy.
- 
- 

2. "We are moving to the city!" These are the words of many villagers today. When they are asked to give reasons for their movement, they simply reply that life in the city is more developed than that in the village. In the city, there are communication, transportation, education and medical services. Also there are more chances for jobs. I positively agree with these people, but have these people thought about their lives and health? Have they thought about the danger that might happen to their children? It might not be during the first six months of living, but in the future when the city becomes more inhabited by different people of different nationalities and when the streets get crowded with cars. Although the village is lacking some of the services mentioned above, it is still the best type of environment for me to live in.

—Habeeb Al-Saeed

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3. I would like to tell you about my hometown, Hlatikulu, Swaziland. It is a small town of only 8,000 people. The main industries there are farming and working for the government, since it is the capital of the southern region.
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4. Last year, my cousin, Julio, went to a bank to apply for a job. As you know, when you apply for a job, you must be ready to answer a lot of ambiguous

*The Essay*

questions. Some of the questions that an interviewer may ask you include: educational background, previous jobs, and salaries you earned. The problem with Julio was that he wasn't prepared for the questions. The interviewer asked Julio a lot of things that he couldn't answer. Because Julio wasn't prepared for the interview, he didn't get the job. If you do not want to be in that situation, you may want to follow these steps.

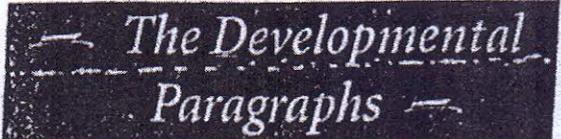
—Mauricio Rodriguez

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**EXERCISE 6-5** Writing Assignment. Here are six possible thesis statements. For each, use one of the prewriting techniques given in Chapter One and generate some information on the topic. Then choose the three topics you like best and write introductory paragraphs.

1. My country has some of the most beautiful sights you will ever see.
2. Speaking more than one language is a great advantage.
3. The AIDS virus is a worldwide problem.
4. Watching television is not a waste of time.
5. I can suggest several improvements needed at this school.
6. The New Year is one of the happiest occasions. (You may choose a favorite holiday in your country.)



*The Developmental  
Paragraphs*

Developmental paragraphs, which range in number in the typical student essay from about two to four, are the heart of the essay, for their function is to explain, illustrate, discuss, or prove the thesis statement. Keep in mind these points about developmental paragraphs:

1. *Each developmental paragraph discusses one aspect of the main topic.* If, for example, you were asked to write a paper about the effects of smoking cigarettes on a person's health, then each paragraph would have as its topic one effect.

*Introduction to the Essay*

2. *The controlling idea in the developmental paragraph should echo the central idea in the thesis statement.* If your thesis statement about the effects of smoking cigarettes is "Cigarette smoking is a destructive habit," then the controlling idea in each paragraph should have something to do with the destructiveness of the effect.
3. *The developmental paragraphs should have coherence and unity.* The order of your paragraphs should not be random. As you have seen in the last three chapters, there are various ways to order the sentences in a paragraph; similarly, there are various ways to order your paragraphs. The same principles apply as you learned in Chapter Five, and additional strategies will be presented in this chapter. Just as your sentences need to flow smoothly, the train of thought at the end of one paragraph should be picked up at the beginning of the next paragraph. This can be achieved through the use of transitions. Again, much attention will be devoted to transition use in this text.

*Prewriting: Planning* ↗

In Chapter Two, you learned how to formulate a restricted topic sentence from your prewriting notes. The same technique can be used to arrive at a thesis statement; you need simply to remember that the thesis statement is more general than a topic sentence. After all, each developmental paragraph does discuss an aspect of the main topic expressed in the thesis statement. Once you have decided on your thesis, you need to break the thesis down logically into topics for your paragraphs. In essence, these topics are supporting points for your thesis. Let us say, for example, that you wanted to write about the beautiful sights in your country—perhaps to persuade people to visit there or simply to inform your reader about your country. After you have taken considerable notes on the topic, you might come up with this thesis statement: "My country has some beautiful sights." The main topic of the essay is "sights in my country," and the central idea is "beautiful." The main topic then needs to be broken down into topics for paragraphs, perhaps two to four. Logically, the topics would be sights, with one sight discussed per paragraph, and the controlling idea for each of these topics should be something akin to "beautiful," such as "charming," "lovely," "enchanting," and "glorious." We could illustrate this breakdown as follows for an essay about beautiful sights in Mexico:

MEXICO HAS SOME BEAUTIFUL SIGHTS
----------------------------------

=	beach at Progreso	+	Aztec Ruin	+	Monument
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*The Essay*

Just how you break down your thesis into topics depends on your thesis statement. There are several principles for logically breaking down your thesis. You can break it into topics according to causes, effects (benefits, advantages, disadvantages, results), steps in a process, types (kinds, categories, classes), examples, points of comparison and contrast, and reasons; these are the basic principles and the ones that we will cover in depth in this text. One way to break your thesis down logically into topics is to turn your thesis statement into a question, keeping in mind what your topic and central idea are. The answers to this question might help you come up with possible topics for your developmental paragraphs; they can also help you determine a strategy for organizing your essay. (These strategies, or patterns of organization, are discussed in great detail in subsequent chapters.) Here are some thesis statements and possible breakdowns into topics for the developmental paragraphs:

**1. Thesis Statement:**

The village is the best environment for me to live in.

**Question:**

What makes it a good environment?

**Answers:**

The cooperation among people.

Its lack of pollution.

Its security.

The central idea in the thesis statement is *best environment*, so this is a logical basis for the breakdown. Each paragraph would discuss a different element of the environment that is attractive to the writer.

**2. Thesis Statement:**

In order to make a good impression at a job interview, you should prepare well for the interview.

**Question:**

What should you do to prepare for the interview?

*Introduction to the Essay***Answers:***Plan your answers to the possible questions.**Plan and prepare what you are going to wear.**Make sure you arrive on time.*

The central idea in the thesis is *prepare well*. Here the writer chose to break down the thesis into the steps of a process.

**3. Thesis Statement:***Watching television is not a waste of time.***Question:***Why isn't it a waste of time?***Answers:***Because it is a valuable educational tool.**Because it cheers us up.**Because it provides something for our family to discuss.*

With the central idea of *not a waste of time*, the writer's approach here is to discuss the reasons television is not a waste of time, in other words, to discuss the advantages of having television.

**4. Thesis Statement:***New York and Hong Kong are more alike than people think.***Question:***In what ways are they alike?***Answers:***They are both enormous.**They both have lots of different ethnic groups.**They are both port cities.*

In this breakdown, the writer selected points of similarity to develop the thesis.

*The Essay*

## 5. Thesis Statement:

Students should be allowed to manage the bookstore.

## Question:

Why should they be allowed to manage it?

## Answers:

Because it would benefit the students.

Because the bookstore would benefit.

Because the school would benefit.

Here, the student discusses the reasons for allowing students to manage the bookstore, and in this case the reasons are the benefits.

**EXERCISE 6-6** The following are thesis statements, each with two supporting topic sentences. Study the thesis statements and their supporting topics sentences to determine the logic or the principle behind the breakdown. Then fill in a topic sentence for each one.

## 1. Thesis Statement:

The city is the place for me to live.

## Topic Sentences:

1. I like its excitement.

2. I like the availability of resources.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Thesis Statement:

Smoking cigarettes is harmful to your health.

## Topic Sentences:

1. Heavy cigarette smoking can cause throat diseases.

2. Smoking can damage the lungs.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Introduction to the Essay*

## 3. Thesis Statement:

Jogging isn't the only way to improve your circulation.

## Topic Sentences:

1. Many have found cycling an excellent aerobic exercise.

2. Another way to improve your circulation is to swim.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Thesis Statement:

A foreign student enrolled at an American university often finds that his or her life isn't such a happy one.

## Topic Sentences:

1. The complex registration procedure is frustrating.

2. It is difficult to make friends.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Thesis Statement:

Taking a foreign language should be required in high school.

## Topic Sentences:

1. Students can learn about other cultures.

2. It can help in business in the future.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**EXERCISE 6-7** Study the following thesis statements. On a separate sheet of paper, brainstorm on two of them. Then write out at least three possible topic sentences for the two thesis statements.

1. Learning English isn't so easy.

2. My country has some of the most beautiful sights you will ever see.

3. Being unemployed can cause people to lose their self-respect.

4. You can see some unusual people on the bus.

*The Essay*

5. Logging on to the computer is not a difficult task.
  6. Students whose native language is not English may face many problems that English speakers do not encounter.
  7. People go to shopping centers for many reasons.
  8. Athletic teams bring universities a number of advantages.
- 

Read the following student essay about sights to see in Quebec, Canada. Try to find the central idea for the essay; then try to find the controlling idea for each of the developmental paragraphs.

#### MY FAVORITE SIGHTS

In each country in the world, there are always some beautiful sights to see. They might be a monument, a garden, or a cathedral. Every country is proud of them, and everyone is interested in talking about them. In my country, three important points of interest attract a great number of tourists all year. No portrait of these sights is complete without mentioning their historical and seasonal aspects. Because of these aspects, Quebec is a place where you can find some of the most interesting sights you will ever see.

Old Quebec City is the living witness of our history. The first example is the church Notre-Dame des Victoires. Located at the bottom of Cap Diamant, this

*Introduction to the Essay*

church was the first one built in North America. It commemorates the establishment of Quebec in 1608. It is a modest and charming church, constructed of stones and dominated by a single belfry from where you can still hear authentic chimes ringing. Another example is the Ramparts. Originally, they were long fortifications all around the city with three main doors to enter in. Now, the three doors are renovated and part of the fortifications is preserved, offering a harmonious blend of history and innovation. Finally, the focal point of Old Quebec City is the Plaines d'Abraham. It is a very large hill from which we can have a scenic view of the Saint Lawrence River and the city. It was on this site that our founders won many battles, but unfortunately, lost the most important one. Nevertheless, the spot is now a wonderful park where is still present, with its many cannons, a past which is not so far away. Regardless of the season, those three points are colorful: red in autumn, white in winter, light green in spring, and dark green in summer.

From the Plaines d'Abraham, it is easy to discover the majestic Saint Lawrence River. This beautiful broad river was the open door for our founders. Traveling in canoes, they established the first three cities in the lands drained by the Saint Lawrence: Quebec, Montreal, and Trois-Rivières. They must have been impressed with the clear, sweet water, the tree-studded islands, and the banks lined with pine and hemlock. Today, the river is an exceptional waterway extending 1,500 miles into the interior. Like the Mississippi River, it is, in every season, the location for great activities. Although the most important one is commercial, pleasure and sport are considerable; for example, boating, water-skiing, and fishing. These are particularly popular in summer. Furthermore, even though there are three to five feet of ice on the river in the winter, the Saint Lawrence is still navigable.

On the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River, five miles from Quebec, the famous Montmorency Falls are located. These beautiful falls were discovered by a French explorer in the sixteenth century. About 350 feet high, and with frothing, foaming sheets of water, they are the highest falls in North America. During the summer, it is popular to go to one of the huge park areas near the falls to admire their cascades. At night, it is possible to hear and see a lovely sound and light show. During the winter, the main activity is at the bottom. The small drops of vapor in the air form a huge, round block of ice at the bottom of the falls which becomes bigger and bigger. This strange sight draws a lot of children and adults who spend time climbing up and down.

Is it possible to find a country where the beauty, the history, and the variety in the scenery are combined in such perfect harmony? Of course, our four seasons mean four different aspects of the same sight. I don't know if it is because I am far from my country, but I am convinced that Quebec has some of the most beautiful sights that I have ever seen.

—Louise le Caron

*The Essay***25 EXERCISE 6-8** On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions about the preceding essay.

1. What is the main topic of the essay? What is the central idea?
2. What are the subtopics? What are the controlling ideas for the subtopics?
3. Are the paragraphs descriptive, narrative, expository, or are they a combination?

In general, *interesting* is considered rather vague and general for a controlling idea; however, in "My Favorite Sights," Caron clarifies what she means by *interesting*: interesting for its history and beauty during the seasons. When choosing *interesting* as a controlling idea, restrict its meaning by clarifying what you mean by this word.

Sometimes the writer chooses to present part of the thesis statement in the introduction and the rest of it later in the essay, often in the conclusion. This approach is useful when the writer wants to build up to a point rather than stating it prematurely. The following essay is an example of this approach. The writer gives a generalized thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph and specifies what the generalized thesis statement means in the conclusion. As you read the essay, underline the two parts of the thesis statement.

### WHY PEOPLE SAVE BOOKS

Many people who like to read also save the books they have read. If you walk into any home, you are likely to see anywhere from a single bookshelf to a whole library full of all kinds of books. I know a family whose library has shelves reaching up to their ceiling; they keep a ladder for climbing up to the high books. Obviously, they have collected books for many years, and though they rarely actually open the books again, they keep them on the shelves, dusted and lined up neatly. Why do people save their books? There may be several reasons, but three stand out.

One reason people save their books is to use them as reference materials. People whose job training included studying a lot of textbook material may save some of those books for future reference. For instance, a doctor may keep his *Gray's Anatomy* and his pharmacology books; an English teacher will hold on to *The Norton Anthology of British Literature* and other anthologies and novels for reference; a lawyer usually keeps her case books. But it isn't only the professionals who save their books. People who like to cook keep recipe books. Those interested in electronic equipment hold on to their books about stereos, computers, videotape machines, and the like. Many families keep encyclopedias and almanacs handy for their children to use for school. Having your own reference book available is so much more convenient than running to the library every time you want to check a fact.

*Introduction to the Essay*

Another reason some people save books is to make a good impression. Some think that a library full of literary classics, dictionaries, and books about art, science, and history make them look well read and therefore sophisticated. Of course, this impression may be inaccurate. Some have never bothered to read the majority of those books at all! In fact, a few people even have libraries with fake books. Also, some people like to reveal to visitors their wide range of tastes and interests. They can subtly reveal their interests in Peruvian art, Indian music, philosophy, or animals without saying a word.

While some people may keep books for practical reference and for conveying an impression, I suspect that there is a deeper reason. People who enjoy reading have discovered the magic of books. Each book, whether it's *The Treasury of Houseplants* or *Murder on the Orient Express*, has transported the reader to another place. Therefore, each book really represents an experience from which the reader may have grown or learned something. When I sit in my study, I am surrounded by my whole adult life. *The Standard First Aid and Personal Safety* manual, in addition to providing information, reminds me of the first-aid course I took and how more assured I felt as a result. Bulfinch's *Mythology* brings the oral history of Western civilization to my fingertips, reminding me of my link with other times and people. Of course, all of the novels have become part of the mosaic of my life. In short, saving books makes me feel secure as I hold on to what they have given me.

In fact, if you think about it, security is at the bottom of all these reasons. It's a secure feeling to know you have information at hand when you need it. There is a kind of security, even though it may be false, in knowing you make a good impression. Finally, books that you've read and kept envelop you with a warm and cozy cloak of your life.

**EXERCISE 6-9** On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions about the preceding essay.

1. What is the main topic of the essay?
2. The generalized thesis can be stated as "People save books for three reasons." What is the central idea about those reasons?
3. What are the subtopics (reasons)? What are the controlling ideas for the subtopics?
4. What kind of paragraph is each developmental paragraph?
5. Identify specific details in each of the developmental paragraphs.

*The Essay*

## ← *The Conclusion* →

Just as the introductory paragraph functions to open the essay discussion by introducing the topic and the central idea (thesis), so the concluding paragraph wraps up the discussion, bringing the development to a logical end. If the developmental paragraphs have done their job—that is, developed the thesis—then the conclusion should follow logically.

But what does one say in the conclusion? What is said depends entirely on what was developed in the essay. However, there is a standard approach to writing concluding paragraphs. Here are some points about conclusions:

1. *A conclusion can restate the main points (subtopics) discussed.* This restatement should be brief; after all, you have already discussed them at length.
2. *A conclusion can restate the thesis.* Generally, to avoid sounding repetitious, it is a good idea to restate the thesis in different words. The restatement of the thesis is really a reassertion of its importance or validity.
3. *A conclusion should not, however, bring up a new topic.*

For example, an essay about the most interesting places to visit in Mexico could conclude as follows:

There are, of course, many more things to visit while you are in Mexico, but the beach at Progreso, the Aztec ruin, and the famous monument represent some of the more significant and beautiful sights to see. When you go to Mexico, visit these sights and you will be guaranteed a fond memory after you go home.

A concluding paragraph about allowing students to manage the bookstore might look like this:

Providing jobs for students, jobs that would help cut the cost of managing the bookstore and provide on-the-job experience—which can only enhance the university's reputation for graduating knowledgeable students—are excellent reasons for allowing students to manage the bookstore. In fact, it is amazing that such a system is not in practice now.



**EXERCISE 6-10** Reread the essay "My Favorite Sights" by Lorraine Caron on pages 136–137. Then answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

*Introduction to the Essay*

1. Are the main points in Caron's essay mentioned in the conclusion?
2. If not, does the conclusion seem appropriate anyway? Why?
3. If yes, what are the main points she restates?

**EXERCISE 6-11**

The following are thesis statements, their supporting topic sentences, and conclusions. Study each conclusion to determine if it is logical. If the conclusion is not appropriate, write *not good* in the blank and also write the reason it is not good. If the conclusion is appropriate, simply write *logical* in the blank.

**1. Thesis Statement:**

Watching television is not a waste of time.

- a. It is a valuable educational tool.
- b. It provides entertainment to cheer us up.
- c. It provides something our family can have in common to discuss.

Critics of television will continue to put down the "boob tube." But, because of its educational value, its entertainment value, and its supply of things we can discuss together, our family is going to continue watching television for a long time, and so should others. Indeed, watching television is a good way to spend one's time.

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**2. Thesis Statement:**

Communicating in a foreign language can create some embarrassing misunderstandings.

- a. Mispronouncing words can lead to real embarrassment.
- b. Misunderstanding what someone says to you can create amusing problems.
- c. Misusing vocabulary words can really make you blush.

*The Essay*

Everyone who speaks a foreign language is bound to have misunderstandings from time to time. What you need to do is go to the laboratory as often as you can to improve your language skills. The people there are very nice, and they will help you with your grammar and pronunciation.

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**3. Thesis Statement:**

Television commercials are entertaining.

- a. The Coca-Cola commercial is a good example of an entertaining commercial.
- b. The Chevrolet commercial is as good as any situation comedy.
- c. The Fritos commercial is particularly amusing.

If you do not have a television, you are certainly missing out on the fun of commercials. There are also a lot of entertaining programs to see. In addition, the news programs can keep you informed about the world. Indeed, everyone should have a television set.

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**4. Thesis Statement:**

My reasons for coming to State University center around the services it provides.

- a. State University offers a superior program in my major.
- b. In addition, the university has high-quality academic resources.
- c. State also offers quality student services.
- d. The recreational activities make State even better.

*Introduction to the Essay*

The challenge of a diversified and excellent program, the academic resources, the student services, the recreational activities, and the low tuition are the reasons I decided to come to State University. I really think I made a wise decision. If you are looking for a quality education at a reasonable price, then consider State as the place to enroll.

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**5. Thesis Statement:**

In order to make a good impression at a job interview, you should prepare well for the interview.

- a. The first thing you should do is plan your answers to the possible questions the interviewer might ask.
- b. Then you should carefully plan and prepare what you are going to wear.
- c. Finally, you should make sure that you arrive on time.

As you can see, it is necessary to be well prepared for the job interview. Having the answers ready, being properly dressed, and being on time can all help to make a good impression on the interviewer. If you follow these steps, you will find yourself sitting behind the desk at that coveted job in no time at all.

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## *The Outline*

**Prewriting: Planning**

One way to determine if an essay is well organized and if the paragraphs discuss the thesis statement is to outline the essay. In Unit One, the paragraph outlines were essentially topic sentences with the supporting sentences written out on separate

*The Essay*

lines. In outlining an essay, however, you do not need to write out all the sentences in the paragraphs. An outline is the skeleton of the essay; it is the structure around which the details and explanations are organized.

There are many ways to write outlines for essays. It is not necessary to follow any strict outline form. For example, in an outline if there is a 1 there must be a 2 and if there is an "A" there must be a "B." When you are asked to write formal outlines for formal papers, you should follow this rule; but for most other purposes, an outline can be informal. Here is a suggestion for an outline form for planning your essay:

## Thesis Statement:

Write out the thesis statement in a complete sentence.

## I. Write out the first developmental paragraph topic sentence.

A. Identify the support. This can be a detail or an idea that the paragraph will discuss.

1. Mention any additional detail about "A."

2. If appropriate, mention another detail about "A."

B. If you have another detail or example you are going to discuss in this paragraph, mention it here.

## II. Write out the next topic sentence.

A. Support.

B. Support.

## III. Write out the next topic sentence.

A. Support.

1. Detail if necessary.

B. Support.

A quick glance at such an outline should reveal if the paragraphs are unified and coherent. Study the following outline of Caron's essay:

## Thesis Statement:

Because of these aspects, Quebec is a place where you can find some of the most interesting sights you will ever see.

*Introduction to the Essay*

I. Old Quebec City is the living witness of our history.

A. Historical aspects.

1. Notre-Dame des Victoires.
2. Ramparts.
3. Plaines d'Abraham.

B. Seasonal aspects—beautiful in all seasons.

II. From the Plaines d'Abraham, it is easy to discover the majestic Saint Lawrence River.

A. Historical aspects.

1. Open door for our founders who established cities.
2. Today, the river is an exceptional waterway.

B. Seasonal aspects.

1. The location for great activities in every season, particularly boating, water-skiing, and fishing in summer.
2. The river is navigable in winter.

III. On the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River, five miles from Quebec, the famous Montmorency Falls are located.

A. Historical aspects.

1. Discovered by a French explorer in the sixteenth century.
2. Highest falls in North America.

B. Seasonal aspects.

1. During the summer.
  - a. Go to park to admire falls.
  - b. Sound and light show.
2. During the winter—play on the block of ice.

Supporting details can be expressed in words or phrases in an outline.

 **EXERCISE 6-12** Reread "Why People Save Books" on pages 138–139 and write an outline using the form given on page 144.

*The Essay***EXERCISE 6-13**

The following are some topics for your final essay in this chapter. Using one of the prewriting techniques you learned in Chapter One, generate a great deal of material on your chosen topic. Then find a central idea on which to base your thesis statement, and decide on supporting points. Write an informal outline and then the first draft of your essay. Use the Revision Checklist at the end of the chapter to evaluate your essay.

1. What are some noteworthy or interesting (unusual, beautiful, historically significant) sights in your country or hometown?
2. What are some of the areas where computers are being used? Write about some of the uses of computers. Or discuss another important invention, such as satellites.
3. Write an essay explaining why you think people save books or some other objects. For example, many people save stamps, coins, dolls, and even toys!



## *Composition Skills*

### REVISION

#### *Peer Review Checklist*

When you have finished writing the first draft of your essay, give it to a classmate to read and review. Use the following questions to respond to each other's drafts.

Writer \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is the introduction inviting?



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9. Do you have any suggestions about the first developmental paragraph?

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10. Answer questions 7, 8, and 9 about the remaining developmental paragraphs.

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11. Is the conclusion logical? Is it interesting?

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13. What is the best part of the essay?

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14. What part needs the most attention?

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*Revision Checklist for the Essay*

1. Is your introduction inviting? Does it introduce the topic?
2. Does your essay have a clear thesis?
3. Do your topic sentences support the thesis?
4. Does the support in your paragraphs support the topic sentences?
5. Does your conclusion end the discussion logically?
6. Is your essay coherent? Unified?

*Introduction to the Essay*

2. Does the introduction introduce the topic?

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State the thesis?

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3. Do you have any suggestions about the introduction?

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4. What is the thesis for the essay? Write it here:

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5. Is the thesis clear and sufficiently narrowed down?

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6. Do you have any suggestions about the thesis?

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7. Does the first developmental paragraph support the thesis? Explain how;

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8. Does the first developmental paragraph have a topic sentence? Write it here:

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## THE DESCRIPTION APPROACH TO WRITING ESSAYS

**D**escriptions—whether short, long, or essay length—are used all the time. You will find descriptions in nonfiction and fiction books, magazine and newspaper articles, product literature, and user manuals for appliances or computer software. Descriptions help the reader form a mental image or picture so that he or she can understand the writer's point. The reader may simply enjoy the description, as with a profile of a famous person, or use the product, as with an appliance or piece of machinery. You will include description when you feel the reader needs to understand the physical aspects in your writing.

### SUCCESS WITH THE DESCRIPTION APPROACH TO ESSAYS

The description approach to writing essays is one that describes a physical person, place, or object in detail. To *describe* generally means to give information about a noun to create a mental picture in the reader's mind. From your description the reader should be able to experience your topic with the five senses.

Description often takes on expanded meanings in conversation. For example, you might say you will describe a person, place, object, concept, event, or function. In this book, however, describing is used for physical nouns: a person, place, or object. Other approaches are necessary to discuss abstract ideas or processes. For example, to write about a concept or idea—an abstract noun—you write a definition. To write of an event, situation, or story, you write a narration. The steps of an operation or task are written as a

process analysis. Each of these different writing approaches involves a different way of thinking about the topic, which translates into a different approach to writing the essay. Your approach to a topic will depend on your assignment's requirements.

In this chapter, you will learn how to describe a noun with physical properties: dimension, color, shape, size, and texture. You will describe the object using as many of the five senses as possible: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. To find enough material to fill an entire essay, you must list many specific details about the noun.

To describe a person, you might include sight details: facial expressions, hair color, height, weight, body shape, ethnic background (for skin color, eye color, facial features, bone structure, and body description). You might include hearing details: how the person sounds when talking, walking, crying, or laughing. You might include smell: how the person smells in certain situations, body odor, perfume or aftershave used, smell of clothes worn. You might include how the person feels to touch: dry skin, soft skin, fluffy hair. You probably will not include taste, although you could in certain writing situations.

To describe a place, include sight details: the environment, the people there, the vehicles, and animal life. You might include hearing details: the sound of a rushing river, snow falling, or ocean waves crashing on a shore. You might include smell: the smell of a redwood forest, a new car, a downtown street, or the interior of a new apartment or house. Include details of touch: what a tree feels like or a handful of sand, cold river water, an old brick building's walls, the counter of a coffee shop. Include taste associated with the place: a fresh doughnut, buttered popcorn at the theater, a cold can of soda pop on a hot day.

To describe an object of some kind, you might include sight: the size, shape, color, dimensions; and hearing: what does it sound like when it's working or when it's broken? How does the world react to this sound? You might include smell: does the object have a typical odor or aroma: sweet, sour, dead, poisonous (as with gas fumes)? You might include touch or texture details: grainy, slimy, smooth, bumpy, gravelly. You might include taste: sweet or tart, bitter or sour.

In this essay, student writer Genevieve Valentine describes Mount St. Helens in Washington. Note how she gives the reader detailed information and uses the five senses in her description.

## MOUNT ST. HELENS

Genevieve Valentine

Mountains dominate many landscapes, rising above the ocean and landforms around them. Mountains can be classified as beautiful pieces of natural art, which keep the human in awe. But the eye fails to see the vicious devastating potential within some of these pieces of art. Volcanoes are special kinds of mountains, in that they sustain the continuing primeval process that originally made the surface of the earth. Mount St. Helens looks the way most mountains look: smooth sides, pointed crest, and snow capped. It is a scene made for calendars and postcards, yet is still one of the most destructive volcanoes of all time.

Mount St. Helens is located in southwestern Washington, about 50 miles northwest of Portland, Oregon. It is one of the several lofty volcanic peaks that dominate the Cascade Range of the Pacific Northwest. Mount St. Helens and her Cascade Range sisters—Lassen, Shasta, Hood, Rainier, and Baker—are part of a chain of volcanoes stretching from northern California to southern British Columbia, which is one part of what geologists call the "Ring of Fire." This Ring of Fire is a notorious zone that produces frequent, often destructive, earthquakes and volcanic activity (Tilling 3). The Cascade volcanoes date back more than one million years. They are all relative newcomers to their surroundings. Among the latecomers to this geographic scene is Mount St. Helens. The entire visible part of the mountain has been built up since 500 B.C. Even in human terms, that's not very old; in geological terms, it's hardly a tick on the clock. Though being the youngest of the Cascades, some geologists say "she is more powerful than the elders surrounding her" (Boly 7).

Mount St. Helens is a composite or "stratovolcano." These volcanoes are made up of alternating layers of lava and fragment material, and their particles conceal the remains of older volcanoes, which a scientist dated back 37,000 years. Composite volcanoes are formed by the most viscous lava. The composite volcano forms a steeper, conical hill by a variety of eruptive processes: blasts of debris that include everything from large blocks to minute pieces of ash, hot avalanches, viscous, sticky magma, and hot lava flows.

Geological records show that Mount St. Helens has been an explosive performer, going off every 100 years for the past millennium. The mountain's first well-documented eruption occurred in the 19th century. This eruption carried south and eastward to the Dallies in Oregon, some 65 miles away. These kinds of fireworks lasted intermittently for 15 years. The peak apparently quit for about three years, and

the last report of activity was in 1857. After that, the volcano fell into a deep sleep from which it would not awaken for 123 years.

The magnitude of a 4.2 earthquake on the Richter scale at 3:47 P.M., Thursday, March 20, 1980, preceded by several smaller earthquakes, was the first indication that Mount St. Helens was awaking from her slumber. Yet no one realized that the eruption of Mount St. Helens was underway (Tilling 7). Many scientists failed to acknowledge her awakening, but within two months Mount St. Helens was at full force. On May 18, 1980, two record earthquakes over 5.0 on the Richter scale, at 8:30 and 8:32 A.M., were the triggers of the eruption. The volcano exploded with a force equivalent to more than 27,000 atom bombs. Instead of bursting straight up, which is most common for eruptions, this eruption followed the lateral lines—sideways to the north. "The shock wave from the eruption focused like a rifle shot by the intact semi-circle of the crater to the south, east and west, slammed across the miles of forest and county lakes of the north" (Boly 21). A billion feet of timber fell like pieces of straw. In the course of a few hours, 234 square miles of forest land were destroyed and virtually all life on the mountain ceased to exist. Mount St. Helens killed more than 60 people that day, some of them 18 miles away, 300 families lost their homes, seven of eight bridges were washed away, and 5,000 acres of farmland disappeared, as well as the town of Castle Rock. This flood of lava reached 1000+ Fahrenheit degrees.

Gray bumps, the ghosts of once-lush hills, stand in the swath of destruction that fans north of Mount St. Helens. Lumpy mats of mud, miles wide and hundreds of feet deep, trail down the valley west of the mountain. There are steam bubbles popping out here and there. This is the way the day after the blast looked. Nearly 20 years later, parts of the valley still resemble this. In late May 1980, President Carter flew over it and called it "indescribable and hellish" (Tilling 52).

The amount of land destroyed in the eruption was not that vast when viewed in context. It amounted to less than 0.7 percent of the forest land in Washington, though the psychological impact was much larger. The eruption changed the way people structured their lives. People were made painfully aware that nature can be unpredictable and deadly. According to Reverend Arthur Morgan, "If the Holocaust didn't do it, the blast of this mountain would have flattened any remnant of faith based on the natural world" (Boly 101).

The question is asked constantly: Is Mount St. Helens going to erupt again? In the long term, the answer is yes. Mount St. Helens will erupt again, as it has for 40,000 years and as some of its ancestors in the Cascade Range have done for ten to fifty million years. Scientists are

getting better at the guesswork needed to predict volcanic activity, but when will Mount St. Helens erupt again? No one is certain when she will reawaken from her slumber.

#### WORKS CITED

Boly, William. *Fire Mountain*. Portland, OR: Catheo Publishing, Inc. 1981.

Tilling, Robert. *Eruptions of Mount St. Helens: Past, Present, and Future*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984.

#### Questions for Analysis

1. What sense does Valentine use primarily in this piece?
2. What other senses could have been used in the essay and where?

## TOPIC CRITERIA AND SELECTION

Topics for an essay using the description approach include any noun that is of a physical nature. However, the noun must be of a size and complexity that can be described in the length required for the assignment. If you must keep the essay to a few hundred words (one to two pages typed), then you need to find a simple object, such as a hammer or door—something that can be fully described in a short length. If, on the other hand, you have a thousand words or so (about four typed pages), then you should pick a noun that has more to it than a few details, one that can be divided into subtopics. For example, describing a person would take more space than describing a nail (hopefully). The description of a person might be divided into main ideas: physical body, physical appearance, and mannerisms or behaviors, with each main idea described in one paragraph. Some topics suggestions for a description essay are given in Table 7.1.

**TABLE 7.1** *Topic Suggestions for Description Essays*

Person	a favorite person, a relative, a famous person you admire or despise, a childhood playmate, a person displaying a strong emotion, yourself
Place	your bedroom, your personal sanctuary, your house or apartment, a favorite vacation spot, your school, your classroom, a favorite hiding place, a mall or shopping area, a cave, a beach, a ship
Object	the thing you use in your hobby, your mode of transportation, a birthday or holiday present you got as a child, a lucky charm or favorite small object, a piece of clothing, something very old

**TRY-IT****EXERCISE**

Determine if each of the following topics is appropriate for an essay using the description approach.

1. making a basket
2. a pen
3. a butterfly
4. love

The first topic describes a process. Topics two and three are physical objects, so they are appropriate. The final topic is a concept, so you should use the definition approach.

**PRACTICE****EXERCISE 7-1****IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE TOPICS**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Identify appropriate topics for a description essay. Put a Y for yes or an N for no on the line provided.

**EXAMPLE:** Y a dog

1. \_\_\_\_\_ computer mouse
2. \_\_\_\_\_ freedom
3. \_\_\_\_\_ ghost
4. \_\_\_\_\_ campground
5. \_\_\_\_\_ peach tree in full bloom
6. \_\_\_\_\_ fixing a tire
7. \_\_\_\_\_ talk-show host
8. \_\_\_\_\_ earthquake
9. \_\_\_\_\_ school campus
10. \_\_\_\_\_ a blueprint for a house
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Washington, D.C.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ book about hurricanes
13. \_\_\_\_\_ friendship
14. \_\_\_\_\_ grandma
15. \_\_\_\_\_ making a cake
16. \_\_\_\_\_ horse
17. \_\_\_\_\_ democracy
18. \_\_\_\_\_ calculator
19. \_\_\_\_\_ coffee bean
20. \_\_\_\_\_ airplane ride

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

**PRACTICE****EXERCISE 7-2****TOPIC DEVELOPMENT**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Pick one of the ideas shown in Table 7.1 (or your own) and think of at least ten sensory details for each of two topics.

**EXAMPLE:** Topic: at the seashore

Details: *the feel of the water; the smell of the salt air over the ocean; the sound of waves crashing along shore; the feel of different armstrokes used while swimming; the feel of sand underfoot; the look of small pebbles and shells that have washed ashore; the sound of sea-gulls and other birds; the smell of fish; the sight of fishers with their poles and buckets; the sound of the wind rustling through beach grass.*

1. Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Details:

2. Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Details:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

## STRUCTURE FOR A DESCRIPTION ESSAY

The description approach to essays uses the standard keyhole structure discussed in Chapter 5. This approach has an introduction with thesis statement, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Remember to focus on the physical characteristics of the person, place, or object being described.

The introduction paragraph in a description essay grounds the reader in the general topic so that the reader can understand the specific physical noun being described. For example, if you describe a hammer, your introduction might start by discussing hand tools. With each sentence, your paragraph will contain more specific details until you reach your thesis statement.

Each body paragraph focuses on one main idea about your topic. One paragraph might discuss different sizes of hammers, while another paragraph might describe different materials used to make hammers. Within the paragraph, your information should be presented in a logical manner, one that makes sense to you and the reader, using generalizations and details to prove your point.

The conclusion paragraph wraps up the essay, bringing the reader to a conclusion.

<b>TRY-IT</b>
<b>EXERCISE</b>

Fill in the following information for a topic for each paragraph.

*Topic:*

*Introductory paragraph's general topic:*

*Thesis Statement:*

*Body paragraph 1 topic sentence:*

*Body paragraph 2 topic sentence:*

*Body paragraph 3 topic sentence:*

*(and so on, until . . .)*

*Conclusion:*

Here is one outline with a stapler as the object for description:

*Topic:* a stapler

*Introductory paragraph's general topic:* discuss typical desk or office equipment

*Thesis statement:* A stapler comes in a variety of sizes and styles but performs the same function—to push a piece of metal through pieces of paper so they are attached together.

*Body paragraph 1:* desk staplers are larger, more stable, and come in a variety of colors, sizes, and textures.

*Body paragraph 2:* handheld staplers are lighter but rarely sit well on a flat surface.

*Conclusion:* What would we do without staplers?

**PRACTICE****EXERCISE 7·3****SELECT APPROPRIATE THESIS  
STATEMENTS**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Identify appropriate thesis statements for a description essay. Put a Y for yes or an N for no on the line provided.

**EXAMPLE:** Y My childhood memories of trips to Disneyland are filled with wonderful sights, delicious foods, and nauseating rides.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A diamond is a multi-faceted stone with many uses.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom impacts every aspect of modern life.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Beauty changes with each generation and age.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The cafeteria offers a myriad of sensations.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ My grandpa's cane fascinated me with its many badges from exotic lands.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Love comes in many flavors.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ A can of soda pop right out of the refrigerator satisfies many needs.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ My pet terrier Max bounces around all day.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Yosemite National Park offers the visitor a variety of sights.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The oak tree on the village green is magnificent.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

**PRACTICE****EXERCISE 7.4****STRUCTURE A DESCRIPTION  
PARAGRAPH**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Pick a topic from Table 7.1 or one of your own and create an outline for an essay.

**EXAMPLE:** Topic: *My truck*

Introductory paragraph's general topic: *Various modes of transportation*

Thesis statement: *My truck is not much to look at.*

Body paragraph 1: *Exterior*

Body paragraph 2: *Interior*

Body paragraph 3: *Truckbed and camper.*

Conclusion: *My truck may look a bit worn, but I like it.*

1. Topic:

Introductory paragraph's general topic:

Thesis statement:

Body paragraph 1:

Body paragraph 2:

Body paragraph 3:

Conclusion:

2. Topic:

Introductory paragraph's general topic:

Thesis statement:

Body paragraph 1:

Body paragraph 2:

Body paragraph 3:

Conclusion:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

A profile is a description of a person. In this profile, Harrison describes many aspects of Oprah Winfrey, the famous talk-show host. This essay is an abbreviation (a shortened version) of a much longer essay.

Note the many physical details used to describe this person. Watch for how the author uses a section with several paragraphs to discuss one main idea. You might want to jot down each paragraph's topic in the margin as you read the essay. Also, some of the paragraphs are quite short; your paragraphs will be longer and more fully developed.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING OPRAH

Barbara Grizzuti Harrison

Looking at pictures of herself as a young girl—"a *nappy*-haired little colored girl"—Oprah Winfrey sees herself on a porch swing, "scared to death of my grandfather. I feared him. Always a dark presence. I remember him always throwing things at me or trying to shoo me away with his cane. I lived in absolute terror."

"I slept with my grandmother, and my job was to empty the slop jar every morning. And one night my grandfather came into our room, and he was looming over the bed and my grandmother was saying to him, 'You got to get back into bed now, come on, get back in the bed.' I thought maybe he was going to kill both of us. I was four. Scared. And she couldn't get him to get back in his room. And there was an old blind man who lived down the road, and I remember my grandmother going out on the porch screaming 'Henry! Henry!' And when I saw his light going on I knew that we were going to be saved. But for years I had nightmares that he would come in the dark and strangle me."

The girl who emptied out the slop jar is the woman who now wears Valentino, Ungaro, Krizia clothes: powerful, glamorous, rich. She doesn't know what got her from there to here. How does one make a self? Why? Oprah Winfrey's rushed headlong to get the answers, sometimes in advance of framing the questions.

Her audiences are co-creators of the self and the persona she crafts. Her studio is a laboratory. She says hosting a talk show is as easy as breathing.

Here she is, an icon, speaking: "I just do what I do—it's amazing. . . . But so does Madonna. . . . Everybody's greatness is relative to what the Universe put them here do (sic) do. I always knew I was born for greatness."

"If it's not possible for everybody to be the best that they can be, then it has to mean that I'm special, and if I'm special then it means

the Universe just goes and picks people, which you know it doesn't do. . . . I've been blessed—but I create the blessings. . . . Most people don't seek discernment, it doesn't matter to them what the Universe intended for them to do. I hear the voice, I get the feeling. If someone without discernment thinks she hears a voice and winds up being a hooker on Hollywood and Vine, it is meaningful for the person doing it, right now. She is where the Universe wants her to be . . .

"According to the laws of the Universe, I am not likely to get mugged, because I am helping people be all that they can be. I am all that I can be. . . . I am not God—I hope I don't give that impression—I'm not God. I keep telling Shirley MacLaine, 'You can't go around telling people you are God.' It's a very difficult concept to accept."

She brings her audiences into her life. No one who watches Oprah Winfrey—and an estimated 16 million people do—does not know about her weight loss—by her reckoning, 67 pounds on a 400-calories-a-day liquid diet (Optifast), not her meanest achievement—or about her hairdresser, her seamstress, her history of childhood abuse, her golden retriever, her boyfriend, Stedman Graham. There appears to be no membrane between the private person and the public persona.

The woman herself embodies a message, and a sanguine one. It says: You can be born poor and black and female and make it to the top.

In a racist society, the majority needs, and seeks, from time to time, proof that they are loved by the minority whom they have so long been accustomed to oppress, to fear exaggeratedly, or to treat with real or assumed disdain. They need that love, and they need to love in return, in order to believe that they are good. Oprah Winfrey—a one-person demilitarized zone—has served that purpose.

Last year, Oprah Winfrey made \$25 million. Her production company, Harpo Productions Inc., gained ownership and control of her top-rated television talk show; she secured the unprecedented guarantee that ABC would carry "The Oprah Winfrey Show" on its owned and operated stations for five additional years. She also bought, reputedly for \$10 million (including partial renovation costs), an 88,000-square-foot studio in Chicago, which, when renovated, will provide facilities for producing motion pictures and television movies, as well as her talk show. It will, says Harpo's chief operating officer, Jeffrey Jacobs, be "the studio between the coasts, the final piece in the puzzle" that will enable Winfrey to do "whatever it is she wants to do, economically, and under her own control." It is also in the path of Chicago real-estate development.

Winfrey, whose television production of Gloria Naylor's "The Women of Brewster Place" won its time-period ratings on two successive nights, owns the screen rights to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and to

*Kaffir Boy*, the autobiography of the South African writer Mark Mathabane. She has bought a 162-acre farm in Indiana. She is part-owner of three network-affiliated stations. She has an interest in The Eccentric, a Chicago restaurant which she often works three nights a week, going from table to table, shaking every hand. She says she entered into partnership because she "wanted a place to dance."

Winfrey embodies the entrepreneurial spirit; she is a Horatio Alger for our times. Salve to whites' burdened consciences? She shoves the idea aside. Role model for black women? For all women, she says, her aim being to "empower women."

An active fund-raiser, not necessarily for glamorous causes, she is philanthropic and fabulously generous. She set up a "Little Sisters" program in Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing projects, to which she devotes time. She annually endows ten scholarships to Tennessee State University, her alma mater. The story that she made her longtime and best friend Gayle King, a newscaster in Hartford, a millionaire with a Christmas check of \$1,250,000 is part of the Oprah legend.

Oprah Winfrey's weight concerns viewers as much as her nuptials. She is now a size 8, down from a high of over 200 pounds—"but I was always shapely," she says with a forgivable vanity. When she amiably carted 67 pounds of animal fat on her show in a little red kiddie wagon to illustrate her weight loss, Stedman called in to say, to millions of viewers, that her not being fat made it easier for them to walk into a crowded room. That was a bad moment for Oprah. She says now that he was misunderstood. He now says, "The only problem I had with her weight was that she had problems with it."

When Winfrey was fat, she hugged and touched her studio guests a lot. She practically cuddled. Now that she is slim and awfully glamorous, she maintains a far greater distance. The touch of a woman with perceived sexual allure is scarier, more charged, dangerous. Paradoxically, her body seemed more loose, her movements more flowing, when she was fat. When she is with Stedman, her body regains its comfortable eloquence. She vamps.

She wakes up at 5 or 5:30. She runs six miles along Lake Michigan or works out in a gym daily. She gets to the studio about 8. As she is prepared for the camera by her hairdresser and makeup man, she has a "talk session"—which she terms "redundant"—with her producer. By 9, she is in front of the cameras.

She will have prepared for her show the night before for less than an hour. "She wings it," says Debra DiMaio, her executive producer. "She gets on camera and asks the questions ordinary people would ask."

She has survived a nightmare childhood, things it bruises the mind to think of. She hasn't accomplished her own creation yet. One wishes Oprah Winfrey well at the task—for her sake, and for the sake of the millions of viewers who, lonely and uninstructed, draw sustenance from her, from the flickering presence in their living rooms they call a friend.



#### Questions for Analysis

1. Overall, how does Harrison feel about Oprah Winfrey?
2. How does Harrison portray the audience of Winfrey's shows?

## ◆ CREATING A DESCRIPTION ESSAY USING THE WRITING PROCESS

Use the step-by-step process below to write an essay using the narration approach.

### PLANNING

1. Select a topic by finding a person, place, or object of interest to you.
2. Gather and organize information.
3. Create an outline that lays out the skeleton of the essay.

### DRAFTING

4. Using your outline as a guide, write a first draft of the essay.
5. Simmer.

### REVISING

6. Revise, revise, revise.
7. Edit for grammar, punctuation, and other mechanical errors.
8. Print and turn it in.

**ASK YOURSELF ABOUT THE DESCRIPTION APPROACH TO ESSAYS**

- Does your topic have physical aspects or characteristics that need to be explained?
- Is your topic the right size and complexity for the essay's assigned length?
- Is your thesis statement located at the end of the introduction?
- Do your topic sentences introduce or sum up the paragraph's main idea?
- Can your topic sentences combine to prove the thesis statement?
- Have you included enough specific details so the reader can experience your topic?
- Have you used as many of the five senses as possible in your essay?
- Have you structured your essay well?
- Have you taken enough time to revise and edit to create the best essay possible?

**COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES**

1. In groups, think up possible topics for an essay using the description approach. Take one idea from this list and outline it. Put your outline on the classroom board for all to see and comment on (if your instructor decides to do this).
2. In pairs, take a walk outside around the campus. Pick an object and have each person think out loud about its physical properties while the other takes notes. Return to the classroom and draft a paragraph describing the object. Present your object and writing to the class.
3. Write a description of a fairly common object but without naming the object in the writing. Then read your piece to the class and see if they can guess what the object is. How soon into the writing did they know?

## Student Essays to Consider

### Family Portrait

My great-grandmother, who is ninety-five years old, recently sent me a photograph of herself that I had never seen before. While cleaning out the attic of her Florida home, she came across a studio portrait she had had taken about a year before she married my great-grandfather. This picture of my great-grandmother as a twenty-year-old girl and the story behind it have fascinated me from the moment I began to consider it.

The young woman in the picture has a face that resembles my own in many ways. Her face is a bit more oval than mine, but the softly waving brown hair around it is identical. The small, straight nose is the same model I was born with. My great-grandmother's mouth is closed, yet there is just the slightest hint of a smile on her full lips. I know that if she had smiled, she would have shown the same wide grin and down-curving "smile lines" that appear in my own snapshots. The most haunting feature in the photo, however, is my great-grandmother's eyes. They are an exact duplicate of my own large, dark brown ones. Her brows are plucked into thin lines, which are like two pencil strokes added to highlight those fine, luminous eyes.

I've also carefully studied the clothing and jewelry in the photograph. Although the photo was taken seventy-five years ago, my great-grandmother is wearing a blouse and skirt that could easily be worn today. The blouse is made of heavy eggshell-colored satin and reflects the light in its folds and hollows. It has a turned-down cowl collar and smocking on the shoulders and below the collar. The smocking (tiny rows of gathered material) looks hand-done. The skirt, which covers my great-grandmother's calves, is straight and made of light wool or flannel. My great-grandmother is wearing silver drop earrings. They are about two inches long and roughly shield-shaped. On her left wrist is a matching bracelet. My great-grandmother can't find this bracelet now, despite our having spent hours searching through the attic for it. On the third finger of her left hand is a ring with a large, square-cut stone.

The story behind the picture is as interesting to me as the young woman it captures. Great-Grandmother, who was earning twenty-five dollars a week as a file clerk, decided to give her boyfriend (my great-grandfather) a picture of herself. She spent almost two weeks' salary on the skirt and blouse, which she bought at a fancy department store downtown. She borrowed the earrings and bracelet from her older sister, Dorothy. The ring she wore was a present from another young man she was dating at the time. Great-Grandmother spent another chunk of her salary to pay the portrait photographer for the hand-tinted print in old-fashioned tones of brown and tan. Just before giving the picture to my great-grandfather, she scrawled at the lower left, "Sincerely, Beatrice."

When I study this picture, I react in many ways. I think about the trouble that my great-grandmother went to in order to impress the young man who was to be my great-grandfather. I laugh when I look at the ring, which was probably worn to make him jealous. I smile at the serious, formal inscription my great-grandmother used at this stage of the budding relationship. Sometimes, I am filled with a mixture of pleasure and sadness when I look at this frozen long-ago moment. It is a moment of beauty, of love, and—in a way—of my own past.

### The Diner at Midnight

I've been in lots of diners, and they've always seemed to be warm, busy, friendly, happy places. That's why, on a recent Monday night, I stopped in a diner for a cup of coffee. I was returning home after an all-day car trip and needed something to help me get through the last forty-five miles. I'd been visiting my cousins, whom I try to get together with at least twice a year. A diner at midnight, however, was not the place I had expected—it was different, and lonely.

Even the outside of the diner was uninviting. My Focus pulled to a halt in front of the dreary gray aluminum building, which looked like an old railroad car. A half-tit neon sign sputtering the message "Fresh baked goods daily," reflected on the surface of the rain-slick parking lot. Only half a dozen cars and a battered pickup were scattered around the lot. An empty paper coffee cup made a hollow scraping sound as it rolled in small circles on one cement step close to the entrance. I pulled hard at the balky glass door, and it banged shut behind me.

The diner was quiet when I entered. As there was no hostess on duty, only the faint odor of stale grease and the dull hum of an empty refrigerated pastry case greeted me. The outside walls were lined with vacant booths that squatted back to back in their black vinyl upholstery. On each black-and-white checkerboard-patterned table were the usual accessories—glass salt and pepper shakers, ketchup bottle, sugar packets—silently waiting for the next morning's breakfast crowd. I glanced through the round windows on the two swinging metal doors leading to the kitchen. I could see only part of the large, apparently deserted cooking area, with a shiny stainless-steel range and blackened pans of various sizes and shapes hanging along a ledge.

I slid onto one of the cracked vinyl seats at the Formica counter. Two men in rumpled work shirts also sat at the counter, on stools several feet apart, smoking cigarettes and staring wearily into cups of coffee. Their faces sprouted what looked like a day-old stubble of beard. I figured they were probably shift workers who, for some reason, didn't want to go home. Three stools down from the workers, I spotted a thin young man with a mop of curly black hair. He was dressed in new-looking jeans and a black polo shirt, unbuttoned at the neck. He wore a blank expression as he picked at a plate of limp french fries. I wondered if he had just returned from a disappointing date. At the one occupied booth sat a middle-aged couple. They hadn't gotten any food yet. He was staring off into space, idly tapping his spoon against the table, while she drew aimless parallel lines on her paper napkin with a bent dinner fork. Neither said a word to the other. The people in the diner seemed as lonely as the place itself.

Finally, a tired-looking waitress approached me with her thick order pad. I ordered the coffee, but I wanted to drink it fast and get out of there. My car, and the solitary miles ahead of me, would be lonely. But they wouldn't be as lonely as that diner at midnight.

**About Unity**

1. In which supporting paragraph of "The Diner at Midnight" does the topic sentence appear at the paragraph's end, rather than the beginning?
  - a. paragraph 2
  - b. paragraph 3
  - c. paragraph 4
2. Which sentence in paragraph 1 of "The Diner at Midnight" should be eliminated in the interest of paragraph unity? (*Write the opening words.*)

---

3. Which of the following sentences from paragraph 3 of "Family Portrait" should be omitted in the interest of paragraph unity?
  - a. Although the photo was taken fifty years ago, my great-grandmother is wearing a blouse and skirt that could easily be worn today.
  - b. It has a turned-down cowl collar and smocking on the shoulders and below the collar.
  - c. My great-grandmother can't find this bracelet now, despite our having spent hours searching the attic for it.
  - d. On the third finger of her left hand is a ring with a large, square-cut stone.

**About Support**

4. How many separate items of clothing and jewelry are described in paragraph 3 of "Family Portrait"?
  - a. four
  - b. five
  - c. seven
5. Label as sight, touch, hearing, or smell all the sensory details in the following sentences taken from the two essays. The first one is done for you as an example.

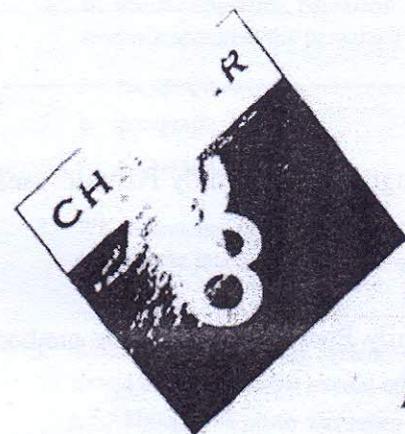
<i>sight</i>	<i>smell</i>
a. "As there was no hostess on duty, only the faint odor of stale grease and <i>hearing</i> <i>sight</i> the dull hum of an empty refrigerated pastry case greeted me."	
b. "He was staring off into space, idly tapping his spoon against the table, while she drew aimless parallel lines on her paper napkin with a bent dinner fork."	
c. "The blouse is made of heavy eggshell-colored satin and reflects the light in its folds and hollows."	
d. Her brows are plucked into thin lines, which are like two pencil strokes added to highlight those fine, luminous eyes.	
6. What are three details in paragraph 3 of "The Diner at Midnight" that reinforce the idea of "quiet" expressed in the topic sentence?

### About Coherence

7. Which method of organization does paragraph 2 of "Family Portrait" use?
  - a. Time order
  - b. Emphatic order
8. Which sentence in paragraph 2 of "Family Portrait" suggests the method of organization? (*Write the opening words.*)
9. The last paragraph of "The Diner at Midnight" begins with a word that serves as which type of signal?
  - a. time
  - b. addition
  - c. contrast
  - d. illustration

### About the Introduction and Conclusion

10. Which statement best describes the introduction to "The Diner at Midnight"?
  - a. It starts with an idea that is the opposite of the one then developed.
  - b. It explains the importance of the topic to its readers.
  - c. It begins with a general statement of the topic and narrows it down to a thesis statement.
  - d. It begins with an anecdote.



## THE NARRATION APPROACH TO WRITING ESSAYS

**N**arration is a skill you learn early in childhood. You tell your friends what you did during your vacation, or you tell why you were late to school, or you tell how your new puppy just chewed up your homework. You use narratives to relate your life experiences, both in spoken and written language.

### SUCCESS WITH THE NARRATION APPROACH TO ESSAYS

The narrative approach to essays involves telling short stories taken from personal experience, which might be funny or serious. A narrative involves a series of events told in chronological order. It usually ends by discussing the revelation, insight, lesson, or understanding that resulted from the experience. You should know your purpose for using a narrative before picking one to write about. This purpose is usually stated in the writing assignment given to you by your instructor and will direct your topic search. With your purpose in mind, you can evaluate the appropriateness of your chosen narrative.

Using the narrative approach means that you will prove your topic through personal experiences or narratives. The story's events or lesson will relate directly to the topic. The essay may be one long narrative, or it might have points illustrated with shorter narratives. You must decide which way is most effective for your writing situation.

## ELEMENTS OF A NARRATIVE

A narrative is composed of several different elements. A story has a title and is told through one point of view using one tense; it involves characters in action or conflict; it uses dialogue and details to tell the story. These elements must be used correctly in order for the story to work.

### Title

Generally, you need a title for your story. The title might come from the assignment ("A Scary Experience"), or it might be specific to your story ("A Night in a Real Haunted House"). You may have the title as you begin the story, or your title may come to you during the writing. Try taking a cliché or saying and turning it around for your own purposes. Change words to make it relevant to your story but still recognizable as that cliché or saying. For example, you might change "Once Upon a Time" to "Once Upon a Football Field."

### Point of View

One of your first decisions, after finding a story to tell, is to decide the right point of view to use. Point of view for narratives can be first person (I) or third person (he/she/they/one/it). Many personal narratives use first-person point of view. Reading a story with the narrator using "I" gives the reader a feeling of immediacy and closeness to the story, so the reader feels part of the action. However, if you are telling someone else's story, you will use third person. This distances the reader from the story, as if the reader were watching the story with the rest of the audience.

You might also choose to write your own story in the third person if you want to distance your reader from the story because the story is horrendous or scary, or if you want to make the story sound more objective. If you decide on the objective view, you must be careful not to report details that cannot be seen by the character whose viewpoint you are using. For example, if Mary is your main character, you cannot tell Brian's thoughts but only the actions that Mary sees.

### Tense

Narratives can be written in one of two tenses: past tense, which is the most common, or present tense. Each has its advantages. Narratives usually are told in past tense since the story has already happened. However, using present tense brings the story to the reader as if it is happening right now. This can be an effective choice, but you must make sure you maintain present

tense throughout the story; slipping into past tense is all too easy to do. During revision, read for tense consistency.

## Characters

All stories have characters. Narratives use real people in real conflicts, with real feelings, goals, and fears. Readers read stories so they can identify with the characters and their problems. The details of these characters are used to make the story more real and exciting for the reader. Reveal characters through dialogue and action.

## Action or Conflict

Each narrative has one major action or event. All discussion leads up to the final, climactic scene, the final explosion or insight. All good stories involve conflict. Without conflict, the story is boring. The story can have the character in conflict against someone else, against himself or herself, against society, or against nature. The conflict keeps our attention and interest alive because we are cheering for the main character.

## Dialogue

Dialogue between characters—or having characters talk to themselves—brings the story alive for the reader. Dialogue, however, is not real, everyday conversation. Spoken language often stops in mid-sentence, makes all kinds of grammatical errors, shifts direction of thought. Spoken language is less formal than written language because we use contractions and slang, clichés and jargon, and incomplete sentences. Spoken language varies according to the speaker's level of education, socioeconomic status, and intelligence. Your dialogue, on the other hand, must make sense but still read well.

Your dialogue must be grammatically correct. Many beginning writers assume that if they record the exact words of someone, they will be fine. If the speaker does not stop talking between sentences, then a period is not required—but this idea is wrong. A conversation in dialogue must be grammatically correct because it is written. For example, in this line of dialogue, the first is written as heard, while the second is written for the printed page:

- ▲ **SPOKEN:** "Like your hair. You'll be a hit Saturday night."
- ▼ **WRITTEN:** "I really like the way your hair looks. You'll be a hit Saturday night."

The spoken example shows a fragment. The written example corrects this error. The contraction is correct because people do use them in conversations, and their presence makes the dialogue sound more natural.

## Details

The details for a narrative will make or break the narrative. Narratives should be as descriptive as possible, so think about how you can use all five senses to make the writing come alive. Find details that help tell the story but that will not bore your readers.

You can also have too many details, often irrelevant to the story. Elmore Leonard, a famous novelist, once said, "I try to leave out the parts people skip." This sounds funny, but this advice is important for writers to understand. You must keep the audience in mind; include only those details relevant for the reader to create correct mental images of the story's setting and events.

How do you know which details are most important to include and which can be safely left out? You must understand your story and audience. Do not include mundane details everyone knows, unless these details are special to the story. For example, we all know what most people do when they get up in the morning; you do not need to repeat these details unless they show something special about your character or story. You must ask yourself about each detail: is it really important for the reader's understanding? If not, delete it because too many unnecessary details will bog down the reader. Put in only those important details that are essential for that mental image and understanding of the story.

One of the ways to eliminate unnecessary details is to start your story at the right place. Start right before the action of the story begins. If you start too soon, the reader will ask, "Where is the story?" or "Why is this important?" If there is an explosion in your story, start right before someone lights the fuse—not when the employees arrive for work hours before.

## TOPIC CRITERIA AND SELECTION

The best ideas for a narration essay are those that tell a story of a personal event that allows you to teach a lesson or share a revelation. For the essay, use a story that is large enough to fill an entire essay, or a series of experiences (as done in the student essay) that help explain the topic and prove the point. In addition, you need to find one with a lesson learned. Table 8.1 gives some topic suggestions for narration essays.

**TABLE 8.1 Topic Suggestions for Narration Essays**

Argue a point	schools should encourage creativity in children (relate an experience about childhood creativity), danger can show us what we value most
Teach a lesson or insight	an experience taught a valuable lesson about fear, love, friendship, learning, or another important aspect of life
Childhood memory	when you were teased or humiliated by other kids at school
A scary experience	a roller coaster, a near loss of life, Halloween as a child
When you were a hero	when you saved someone's life or property, helped someone who was in trouble
An embarrassing event	about a holiday, journey, class, school event, relationship, a relative, meeting a famous person
A prank or practical joke	describe the experience of pulling or having pulled on you a practical joke or prank
Your first . . .	kiss, date, car, day at kindergarten, day at a new school
On the job	a job interview, the first day of work, an experience with a co-worker
Accomplishment	one you are especially proud of, one that you struggled to achieve, an award earned

<b>TRY-IT</b>
<b>EXERCISE</b>

Pick a topic and fill in the details requested. Do this on a separate piece of paper.

*Purpose:*

*Narrator/point of view:*

*Tense:*

*Main character:*

*Main character's goal:*

*Other characters:*

*Action/conflict:*

*Lesson learned:*

Here is one answer, "Saturday Morning at the Farmer's Market."

*Purpose:* To illustrate a family outing.

*Narrator/point of view:* Myself/first person

*Tense:* Past tense.

*Main character:* Myself at age 10 or so.

*Main character's goal:* To help Dad with shopping; to get the missile popsicle.

*Other characters:* Dad and two sisters.

*Action/conflict:* Being essentially a lazy kid, I did not want to walk all over the Farmer's Market because I got tired, I wanted the popsicle now, but Dad really enjoyed shopping and talking with the farmers.

*Lesson learned:* You have to be patient if you want to get what you want.

**PRACTICE****TOPIC SELECTION****EXERCISE 8-1**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Pick two topics from Table 8.1 and jot down notes about the experience.

**EXAMPLE:**

Purpose: *to inform*

Narrator/point of view: *first person*

Tense: *past*

Main character: *me*

Main character's goal: *to get the best deals at the after-Christmas sales*

Other characters: *two friends, LaTonya and Norma*

Action/conflict: *The stores were so crowded that we couldn't get to the items we wanted to buy.*

Lesson learned: *some deals are better left alone.*

1. Purpose:

Narrator/point of view:

Tense:

Main Character:

Main Character's goal:

Other characters:

Action/Conflict:

Lesson learned:

2. Purpose:

Narrator/point of view:

Tense:

Main Character:

Main Character's goal:

Other characters:

Action/Conflict:

Lesson learned:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

**PRACTICE****TOPIC DEVELOPMENT****EXERCISE 8.2**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Pick one of the narrative ideas you outlined in Practice Exercise 8.1 and think about more details, using descriptive language.

**EXAMPLE:**

Topic/Narrative: *shopping after Christmas sales*

Details: *Crowded parking lot; people standing in line for hours; difficulty finding anything because the shelves are disheveled; holiday music playing over the loudspeakers; some people being nice and friendly, others crabby and greedy.*

Topic/Narrative: \_\_\_\_\_

Details:

Topic/Narrative: \_\_\_\_\_

Details:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

## STRUCTURE FOR A NARRATION ESSAY

The narration essay has a structure of its own. First, the thesis statement can begin the introductory paragraph (unlike any other approach described in this book). You might start the essay with a statement such as this: *When I was thirteen, I experienced the scariest roller-coaster ride of my life.* Readers know up front what they will be reading, that this is a real life experience. Or you can begin the essay with general information, as with other approaches, and end the introductory paragraph with your thesis statement telling readers about the narrative to come. Either way is acceptable.

A narration is structured in the following manner, with each element essential to the telling of the narrative.

1. Start with a character who has a goal. Describe both the character and the goal.
2. Something happens to prevent the character from achieving that goal. This is called the **central conflict**. Without this central conflict, the character's life would be unchanged, and there would be no story.
3. Someone or something opposes the main character, creating problems and conflicts to prevent the accomplishment of the goal.
4. Obstacles and more obstacles stand in the character's way.
5. Finally, the character achieves the goal; or not, but there is a final result.
6. The conclusion states the lesson learned from the experience.

Use this sequence to make sure all of the important events of the story are included.

Most narratives are structured in chronological sequence, written in the order in which the events actually happened. Sometimes authors get fancy and use flashbacks, but if these flashbacks are not done right, they will only confuse the reader. For your narrative essays, use a chronological sequence. Do not leave out huge chunks of the story because this leaves huge gaps in the time sequence. State all major and relevant events of the story. As for the use of transitions, try to find other ways to indicate a next step or event, other than "first this happened, then that happened."

<b>TRY-IT</b>
<b>EXERCISE</b>

Think of an experience you would like to recount as a narrative. Fill in the essential details of the structure, using the following guides.

*Character:*

*Goal:*

*Central conflict:*

*Opposing force(s):*

*Obstacle 1:*

*Obstacle 2:*

*Obstacle 3:*

*(and so on until . . . )*

*Result (get the goal or not)*

*Lesson learned:*

Here is one example, continuing the Farmer's Market story.

*Characters:* Myself, my dad, my two sisters.

*Goal:* To finish shopping and get the popsicle.

*Central conflict:* Dad decides to spend more time talking to the farmers.

*Opposing force(s):* Dad, the large area to cover (endless aisles of leafy stalls).

*Obstacle 1:* Dad wants to go down each aisle.

*Obstacle 2:* My feet hurt after the fourth aisle is finished; only a thousand more.

*Obstacle 3:* My sisters are being pains so I have to chase them around

*(and so on until . . . ).*

*Result (get the goal or not):* We finally finish shopping and buy the popsicles.

*Lesson learned:* Patience eventually earns the reward.

**PRACTICE****EXERCISE 8-3****SELECT APPROPRIATE THESIS  
STATEMENTS**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Identify appropriate thesis statements for a narration essay. Put a Y for yes or an N for no on the line provided.

**EXAMPLE:** Y When I was young, I was terrified of anything furry—until I got a kitten.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ To change a tire, first you need a bunch of tools.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ My first pet was a guinea pig called Squeaker.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Flooding is often caused by mistakes farther up the river.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Mistakes in calculations with the floodgates caused the floods of 1998.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The first day of kindergarten can be a terrifying experience.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ My first sale is engraved forever on my memory.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Writing an essay about experiences can be a complicated effort.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ History is full of stories about people making a life for themselves.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ One event in American history is especially telling.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The idea of family life involves many activities and emotions.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

**PRACTICE****EXERCISE 8-4****STRUCTURE THE NARRATIVE ESSAY**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Pick a topic from Table 8.1 or one of your own. Structure the topic in the narrative approach.

**EXAMPLE:** *Writing a paper.*

Character: *Me.*

Goal: *To write a good paper, on time.*

Central conflict: *Family vacation took me away from my writing.*

Opposing force(s): *Family members involved in vacation.*

Obstacle 1: *Vacation scheduled for the week before the paper is due.*

Obstacle 2: *Family members want me to stay on vacation longer.*

Obstacle 3: *I'm having a good time on vacation and don't really want to go home.  
(and so on until . . . )*

Result (get the goal or not): *I worked on my paper in the mornings and had fun  
in the afternoons. I got my paper done and had a good time, too.*

Lesson learned: *Compromise often works.*

Title:

Character:

Goal:

Central conflict:

Opposing force(s):

Obstacle 1:

Obstacle 2:

Obstacle 3:

(and so on until . . . )

Result (get the goal or not):

Lesson learned:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTOR \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS TIME \_\_\_\_\_

In this essay, Elizabeth Wong examines her experiences and struggles while growing up in a Chinese household. Even if you are not Chinese, think about how you have struggled with conflicts between your parents' expectations and the world you live in.

## THE STRUGGLE TO BE AN ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

Elizabeth Wong

It's still there, the Chinese school on Yale Street where my brother and I used to go. Despite the new coat of paint and the high wire fence, the school I knew ten years ago remains remarkably the same.

Every day at 5 P.M., instead of playing with our fourth- and fifth-grade friends or sneaking out to the empty lot to hunt ghosts and animal bones, my brother and I had to go to Chinese school. No amount of kicking, screaming, or pleading could dissuade my mother, who was solidly determined to have us learn the language of our heritage.

Forcibly, she walked us the seven long, hilly blocks from our home to school, depositing our defiant tearful faces before the stern principal. My only memory of him is that he swayed on his heels like a palm tree, and he always clasped his impatient twitching hands behind his back. I recognized him as a repressed maniacal child killer and knew that if we ever saw his hands we'd be in big trouble.

We all sat in little chairs in an empty auditorium. The room smelled of Chinese medicine, an imported faraway mustiness. Like ancient mothballs or dirty closets. I hated that smell. I favored crisp new scents. Like the soft French perfume that my American teacher wore in public school. There was a stage far to the right, flanked by the American flag and the flag of the Nationalist Republic of China, which was also red, white, and blue but not as pretty.

Although the emphasis at the school was mainly language—speaking, reading, and writing—the lessons always began with an exercise in politeness. With the entrance of the teacher, the best student would tap a bell and everyone would get up, kowtow, and chant, "Sing san ho," the phonetic for "How are you, teacher?"

Being ten years old, I had better things to learn than ideographs copied painstakingly in lines that ran right to left from the tip of a *moc but*, a real ink pen that had to be held in an awkward way if blotches were to be avoided. After all, I could do the multiplication tables, name the satellites of Mars, and write reports on *Little Women* and *Black Beauty*. Nancy Drew, my favorite book heroine, never spoke Chinese.

The language was a source of embarrassment. More times than not, I tried to disassociate myself from the nagging, loud voice that followed me wherever I wandered in the nearby American supermarket outside Chinatown. The voice belonged to my grandmother, a fragile woman in her seventies who could outshout the best of the street vendors. Her humor was raunchy, her Chinese rhythmless, patternless. It was quick, it was loud, it was unbeautiful. It was not like the quiet, lilting romance of French or the gentle refinement of the American South. Chinese sounded pedestrian. Public.

In Chinatown, the comings and goings of hundreds of Chinese on their daily tasks sounded chaotic and frenzied. I did not want to be thought of as mad, as talking gibberish. When I spoke English, people nodded at me, smiled sweetly, said encouraging words. Even the people in my culture would look and say that I'd do well in life. "My, doesn't she move her lips fast," they would say, meaning that I'd be able to keep up with the world outside Chinatown.

My brother was even more fanatical than I about speaking English. He was especially hard on my mother, criticizing her, often cruelly, for her pidgin speech—smatterings of Chinese scattered like chop suey in her conversation. "It's not 'What it is,' Mom," he'd say in exasperation. "It's 'What is it, What is it, What is it!'" Sometimes Mom would leave out an occasional "the" or "a," or perhaps a verb of being. He would stop her in mid-sentence: "Say it again, Mom. Say it right." When he tripped over his own tongue, he'd blame it on her: "See, Mom, it's all your fault. You set a bad example."

What infuriated my mother most was when my brother cornered her on her consonants, especially "r." My father had played a cruel joke on Mom by assigning her an American name that her tongue wouldn't allow her to say. No matter how hard she tried, "Ruth" always ended up "Luth" or "Roof."

After two years of writing with a *mac but* and reciting words with multiples of meanings, I finally was granted a cultural divorce. I was permitted to stop Chinese school.

I thought of myself as multicultural. I preferred tacos to egg rolls; I enjoyed Cinco de Mayo more than Chinese New Year.

At last I was one of you; I wasn't one of them.

Sadly, I still am.

**EXERCISE 3-3** Comprehension/Discussion Questions

1. What did Elizabeth Wong and her brother do every day after school?
2. What was their attitude about this activity? How do you know?
3. Who wanted them to do this? Why?
4. According to Wong, what kind of man was the school principal?
5. Wong compares the smells of the Chinese school with those of the public school. What smells does she remember of each? How do these smells suggest her attitude toward each?
6. Wong compares what she learns at each school. What does she learn at Chinese school? At public school? In her opinion, which is more important? Why?
7. According to Wong, what was her grandmother like? What was Wong's attitude toward her? Why?
8. What was her brother's attitude about speaking English?
9. How did Wong's brother treat his mother when she spoke English? How do you account for this behavior?
10. Explain the problem Wong's mother had with her American name, Ruth.
11. Wong sees herself as multicultural. What does she mean? What examples does she give to prove this? Are these examples surprising? Why?
12. Who are the "you" and "them" in paragraph 14?
13. Explain the significance of the last sentence. As an adult, what is Wong's attitude toward Chinese school?
14. Wong and her brother resented being forced to attend Chinese school. Do you think their mother was right in making them go? Why?
15. Wong describes the clash of two cultures and the conflicts that can occur from it. Do you think it is possible for someone to maintain connections with his or her original culture and at the same time become an "all-American"? What does one gain or lose in becoming completely Americanized?



**EXERCISE 3-4** Vocabulary Development. When you read, you often do not know the meanings of all the words in the essay. Even so, you may not always look up words in your dictionary but instead try to guess at the meanings of the words from the context, the words and sentences surrounding the unknown word.

In this exercise, you will practice guessing at the meaning of words in context.

- A. The following is a paragraph from Elizabeth Wong's essay. First, underline all the words you do not know and choose five to write on the blanks below. Then read the paragraph again and guess the meaning of each word. In the blank, write what you think the word means. Finally, check with your classmates and/or the dictionary to confirm your guesses. The first one is done as an example:

Forcibly, she walked us the seven long, hilly blocks from our home to school, depositing our defiant tearful faces before the stern principal. My only memory of him is that he swayed on his heels like a palm tree, and he always clasped his impatient twitching hands behind his back. I recognized him as a repressed maniacal child killer, and knew that if we ever saw his hands we'd be in big trouble.

1. defiant      *angry, resistant*  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
5. \_\_\_\_\_

- B. Now use each of your words in a sentence of your own.

**Questions for Analysis**

1. What points does Wong make in her essay?
2. How are these points supported by narratives?

## ◆ CREATING A NARRATION ESSAY USING THE WRITING PROCESS

Use the step-by-step process below to write an essay using the narration approach.

**PLANNING**

1. Select a topic by finding a personal story of interest to you.
2. Gather and organize information.
3. Create an outline that lays out the skeleton of the essay.

**DRAFTING**

4. Using your outline as a guide, write a first draft of the essay.
5. Simmer.

**REVISING**

6. Revise, revise, revise.
7. Edit for grammar, punctuation, and other mechanical errors.
8. Print and turn it in.

**ASK YOURSELF ABOUT THE NARRATIVE APPROACH TO ESSAYS**

- Have you told the events in chronological order?
- Have you started the narrative just as the story really gets exciting?
- Have you crossed out all unnecessary details?
- Have you kept the point of view consistent: all in first person or third person? Is the tense consistent?
- Have you named all the characters and kept their behavior and dialogue consistent?
- Does the narrative have a conflict?
- If possible, have you included dialogue?
- Does the narrative have a lesson learned?

**COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES**

1. Have each member of the group present a written narrative. The group's job is to question the storyteller in order to stimulate more ideas and details to fill in gaps. The storyteller should write down these questions and the ideas they generate.
2. As a group, think about the stages of life you have gone through so far. Divide the years into stages. You might pick the decade marker (0-9, 10-19, 20-29, and so on), or another grouping (child, teenager, young adult, adult, middle-aged, senior). For each stage in life, remember narratives about the toys or entertainments you enjoyed. Were teddy bears big in your life? When did you replace teddy bears with another toy, such as a skateboard, or even a car? Write down the ideas generated from this discussion

### A Night of Violence

According to my history instructor, Adolf Hitler once said that he wanted to sign up "brutal youths" to help him achieve his goals. If Hitler were still alive, he wouldn't have any trouble recruiting the brutal youths he wanted; he could get them right here in the United States. I know, because

I was one of them. As a teenager, I ran with a gang. And it took a frightening moment for me to see how violent I had become.

The incident was planned one Thursday night when I was out with my friends. I was still going to school once in a while, but most of my friends weren't. We spent our days on the streets, talking, showing off, sometimes shoplifting a little or shaking people down for a few dollars. My friends and I were close, maybe because life hadn't been very good to any of us. On this night, we were drinking wine and vodka on the corner. For some reason, we all felt tense and restless. One of us came up with the idea of robbing one of the old people who lived in the high-rise close by. We would just knock him or her over, grab the money, and party with it.

The robbery did not go as planned. After about an hour, and after more wine and vodka, we spotted an old man. He came out of the glass door of the building and started up the street. Pine Street had a lot of antique stores as well as apartment buildings. Stuffing our bottles in our jacket pockets, we closed in behind him. Suddenly, the old man whipped out a homemade wooden club from under his jacket and began swinging. The club thudded loudly against Victor's shoulder, making him yelp with pain. When we heard that, we went crazy. We smashed our bottles over the old man's head. Not content with that, Victor kicked him savagely, knocking him to the ground. As we ran, I kept seeing him sprawled on the ground, blood from our beating trickling into his eyes. Victor, the biggest of us, had said, "We want your money, old man. Hand it over."

Later, at home, I had a strong reaction to the incident. My head would not stop pounding, and I threw up. I wasn't afraid of getting caught; in fact, we never did get caught. I just knew I had gone over some kind of line. I didn't know if I could step back, now that I had gone so far. But I knew I had to. I had seen plenty of people in my neighborhood turn into the kind of people who hated their lives, people who didn't care about anything, people who wound up penned in jail or ruled by drugs. I didn't want to become one of them.

That night, I realize now, I decided not to become one of Hitler's "brutal youths." I'm proud of myself for that, even though life didn't get any easier and no one came along to pin a medal on me. I just decided, quietly, to step off the path I was on. I hope my parents and I will get along better now, too. Maybe the old man's pain, in some terrible way, had a purpose.

What sentence in paragraph 3 of "A Night of Violence" should be omitted in the interest of paragraph unity? (Write the opening words.)

- 
2. What sentence in the final paragraph of "A Night of Violence" makes the mistake of introducing a new topic and so should be eliminated? (Write the opening words.)