

**Advanced Composition for Non-Native  
Speakers of English  
by  
Erlyn Baack**

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Advanced Composition for Non-Native Speakers of English

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## INTRODUCTION

### What is Advanced Composition?

Advanced Composition is for university students who have already achieved a 550 TOEFL score. The focus of this course will be on the structure of academic essays, specifically the five paragraph essay, so by the end of the course, class participants will be able to succeed in any college or university classes in English that require the writing of essays in English.

Basically, there are two aspects of writing which I call *global* and *local*. The global aspect of writing has to do with topic, purpose, organization, and audience, and this is the part that receives the most attention throughout the course. I believe that organization of ideas is the most important ingredient for successful communication in English composition.

The local aspect of writing has to do with writing at the sentence level. Writing at the sentence level includes identification of simple, compound, and complex sentences, adjective clauses, noun clauses, appositives, parallel structure, topic sentences, supporting details, etc. We will review these local aspects both in general and in detail.

The writing load itself will be enormous! However, this course will be held in computer rooms with computers containing both spell check and grammar check in English, which means the great majority of teaching and learning can take place IN CLASS, which is why active participation (or good attendance) in this class is required.

**Organization of ideas is the most important ingredient for successful communication in English Composition. Always remember to (1) tell your readers what you are going to tell them, (2) then tell them, and (3) then tell them what you told them. Err on the side of clarity!**

In the first half of this semester, participants will write a series of short academic essays in quick succession about topics of their choice. These will be essays of about 350-375 words of the following genres: Giving Instructions, Cause/Effect, Comparison/Contrast, and Persuasion. These essays will be reviewed by colleagues in class before they are turned in. Then, after each essay is turned in for grading, I will review and revise each essay in detail, sometimes making many suggestions, so class participants can revise and refine these essays still more.

In this course, class participants will read and respond to other classmates' essays and ideas. Through these activities, class participants will practice fluency in writing for an academic audience and develop their own writing voice.

The *product* of this composition class, therefore, is a collection of original essays and responses to other class participants' essays that class members will be able to hold up and say, "This is what I accomplished in this Advanced Composition class."

## Writing in English - Organization of Ideas

First of all, thanks a lot for joining this composition class! I hope you find the review of the grammar structures worthwhile, your reading and writing assignments completely manageable, and your responses to and reviews of each others' comments a lot of fun! And I also hope by the end of these sixteen weeks, you will be able to say, "I feel more comfortable expressing my ideas in English than I did when this course began." If you can do that, you will have accomplished a lot.

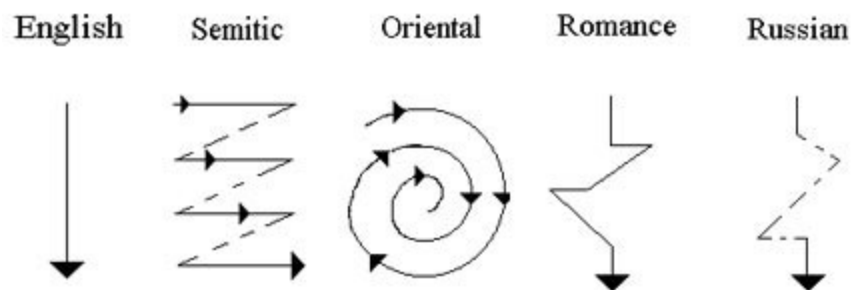
### Areas of Opportunity

As a writing teacher, I see two main problems when learning to write in English, which I call local and global. Local problems are "small" problems such as errors in articles, prepositions, pronouns, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, etc. These are generally minor problems which may annoy the reader but problems which usually do not interfere with meaning.

Global problems, on the other hand, do interfere with meaning. Global problems have to do with purpose, development of paragraphs, organization and support of ideas, etc. These are the types of problems that cause the reader to pause at the end of an essay and wonder, "What was that all about?" So, I believe that focusing on writing at the global level is extremely important, which is the main focus of this composition course.

Organization of ideas within essays is often the greatest weakness of many beginning writers, and it's interesting to note that most beginning university composition courses focus specifically on organization, even among native speakers of English.

For non-native speakers of English, organization of ideas within essays is even more problematic because different cultural backgrounds use different organizational patterns. Robert Kaplan has written extensively on the organizational differences among a variety of cultural groups which he represents as follows:



(Kaplan)

The classic organizational pattern that readers of English expect is a straight line of development which includes introductions, main ideas, topic sentences, supporting details, conclusions, etc. This organizational pattern can be stated simply: "Tell your audience what you are going to tell them; then tell them; then tell them what you told them." Although the organizational patterns of the cultures such as those identified above are all valid, in order to succeed when writing for an

English speaking academic audience, it is necessary to adapt to their expectations.

However, adapting to the cultural expectations of the US academic audience is not an easy task. A Japanese writer, for example, will often begin by writing about a variety of items surrounding a topic before arriving at the main point which is stated in the conclusion. A typical comment that a reader of an essay written by a Japanese writer might be "When is he/she going to get to the point?" and the Japanese writer might respond, "But I do not like to be so direct; it is not the Japanese nature to be so direct." Likewise, a Mexican writer will often begin with a brief introduction and then write about one side of an issue and then another—often with much adornment—before coming to the main point in the conclusion. A typical comment that a reader of an essay written by a Mexican writer might be "But I don't understand his/her main point; it's never really stated, and it's not clear." The Mexican writer might respond, "But I would like you to understand all the possibilities and the context so you can get involved in what I have to say."

Although adapting to the cultural expectations of the US academic audience may not be an easy task, it is a necessary one, especially if one wants to be heard.

What about those writers who succeed in adapting to the organizational expectations of the US academic audience? Do they lose their ability to write in their native language? Answer: They can. There is the story of the Korean who earned his Doctorate in the United States after eight years of study. When he wrote a scholarly article in Korean about his area of concentration, the article was rejected because it was "not good Korean." Thus, if a writer adjusts to the expectations of a foreign audience, it is important to remember that a similar "readjustment" will be necessary when reverting back to writing in the native language (Kaplan).

### **A Final Reason for Conforming to the Organizational Expectations of a US Academic Audience—The Social, Economic, and Political Aspect**

Finally, an important reason for writing, especially for non-native speakers of English, is to influence one's social, economic, or political environment. Thus, meaningful writing often challenges the existing power structures. Researchers in education who are committed to changing the power structures that exist between those who have power and those who have little or no power (native English speakers vs. non-native English speakers in many cases) say that "Students should understand the power realities" (Delpit 293), and that teachers should teach the "communicative codes of the powerful" including ways of writing (Delpit, by Villegas 23). Only by adapting to the communicative codes of the powerful will writers strengthen their capacity to be heard. Perhaps through writing that meets the expectations of the US academic audience, non-native speakers of English can influence social, economic, and political developments to conform to *their* vision of a better world.

## **Rationale for the Five-Paragraph Essay**

The rationale for teaching non-native English speakers the structure of the "traditional" five paragraph essay is very convincing, and I would like to begin with a personal anecdote. When I was teaching English composition in community colleges in the US and attending meetings between the "regular" English departments and the English as a Second Language Department, we discussed the greatest weakness among non-native English writers on several occasions, and the response of mainstream English teachers was always the same: The greatest weakness of non-native speakers of English is organization of ideas! Since then I have discovered that most teachers outside English departments can easily overlook grammar errors like subject-verb agreement, article errors, etc., but only if they have an idea what the non-native English speaking student is trying to say, which they *can* understand if essays are organized. If teachers can't understand what the student is trying to say, on the other hand, they believe the student is not ready for college level work!

It's my contention, therefore, non-native speakers of English first need to focus on organization. More, I believe the five paragraph essay is the most effective foundation for all writing skills because its organization makes it easy for the reader to understand what the writer is trying to say.

## **The Five-Paragraph Essay Verses the "Let Them Write What They Want" Approach**

There is a debate, however, between using this "traditional" approach and another approach which I'll call the "let them write what they want" approach. Some teachers believe that restricting the format to a five paragraph essay inhibits the student's free and creative expression. Not all ideas lend themselves to full development in five paragraphs. Some ideas may require four or six paragraphs they say. A web page from the University of Southern California contains reasons why the five paragraph essay should be avoided, listing reasons that (1) the format is entirely artificial, (2) it depends on a categorical theme that merely divides any topic into three sections, and (3) it stifles the writing process and encourages poor writing habits. It is interesting to note, however, that the above page presupposes the student's ability to write a five paragraph essay. When they say "Because the five paragraph essay is so widely taught in American high schools, and because it can be so limiting in college writing tasks, . . ." it is clearly not in reference to non-native speakers of English who do not know the five paragraph essay format.

The justification for teaching the five paragraph essay can be approached from two additional perspectives. First, I insist that my composition students know how to write a five paragraph essay, and what they do with their writing after they leave the composition course is up to them. But when I talk to former students about their academic writing, they say their writing is more sophisticated than just five paragraphs, but they still use the five paragraph essay as an organizational principle, even when writing in Spanish! I am always surprised to hear when students continue using the five-paragraph essay as an organizing principle because I actually warn against it. However, I think it shows that the five paragraph format is a very effective organizational tool.

## The Five-Paragraph Essay's Equivalent in Art

Finally, an analogous situation occurs in the teaching of art. Although I am not an art critic, I will relay an incident that occurred soon after I began teaching English composition. I don't remember the magazine or the author, but I recall reading about the differences between the modern art of Dali and Picasso and the modern art of many of today's young modern artists. The gist of the article was that the modern art of Dali and Picasso is superior to that of many of today's artists because Dali and Picasso were trained in the classic, *realistic* painting while many of today's artists are not. That is, Dali and Picasso could draw a realistic hand or a face or a body, and many of today's young artists cannot. Thus, the quality of today's artists is inferior, a lamentable condition according to the author of the article I read.

In terms of an English composition class, I believe the five paragraph essay is analogous to the "traditional" training of artists. It is like a realistic drawing of a hand or a face or a body, and likewise, I believe the five paragraph essay is an excellent foundation for future creative writing. Out of an interest in knowing whether my "theory" made any sense at all from the perspective of art, I wrote to Mark Harden, owner of the web site, The Artchive, and professor of art at the University of Texas. In short, I asked, "Does this theory make sense?" and here is his response in full:

Erlyn,

This makes PERFECT sense. In fact, I have recently drafted up an essay on a similar theme. I wanted to display the early, realistic, conventional art school artwork produced by Modernists such as Picasso. The point was to show people that artists such as he COULD have easily produced realistic (academic) work, but found it an inadequate means of visual expression. Dali of course is an even more plausible model, since his superb technique was displayed throughout his career, only the subject matter was "different" from academic works.

Again, one of the saddest facts of almost all contemporary artists is that precisely this background in formal training is sorely lacking. It is quite likely that, just as there are no longer humans capable of doing the stonework which was done on Gothic Cathedrals, we will soon, given the abandonment of formal art training, reach a point where the skill to produce such works as were done by Michelangelo, Rubens, Rembrandt . . . will be lost forever.

Mark

As a result of Mark Harden's support from a theoretical perspective, I researched his web site to find representative works by Dali and Picasso to support these ideas, five works by each artist, available online in color and full-screen sized at [http://eslbee.com/5\\_paragraph\\_essay.htm](http://eslbee.com/5_paragraph_essay.htm).



The first row of slides shows Dali, from the "classical" to "modern" followed similarly by the works of Picasso in the second row. Would Dali and Picasso have been able to distinguish themselves to the level they did had they not had their "traditional" or "realistic" training? This is a pertinent question.

In practical terms, I believe the five paragraph essay structure is exactly where ESL composition students need to begin. Many non-native speakers of English will write the ETS Test of Written English (TWE), which is what most US colleges require of non-native speakers of English before matriculation, and the ability to use the five paragraph structure will serve well for that. In addition, the effectiveness of "models" as a "focus of instruction" has already been supported by George Hillocks, Jr., in his book, Research on Written Composition, New Directions for Teaching.

Finally, while there is an honest debate among teachers on both sides of this issue, I believe those most opposed to the five paragraph essay in reality presuppose that students already know its structure and merely reject the *continuation* of its use. At least I would like to think so.

### **The Five Paragraph Essay's Equivalent in Music**

The criticism most often leveled against the use of the five paragraph essay is that it is simple, overused, and boring, but it need not be!

Consider the simple song, *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, for example. Everyone knows the tune. It's simple; it's well over 200 years old. It was probably well known to Mozart (1756-1791), for the simple notes motivate and inspire his 12 Variations on the theme throughout.

This is the point: While the simple notes provide the foundation, Mozart's genius provides a magical touch that pushes the tune far beyond "simple," "overused," and "boring."

A streaming file of Mozart's Variations is available here: <http://eslbee.com/ttls.m3u>



## WRITING ESSAYS

### Writing Giving Instructions Essays

A Giving Instructions essay is an essay in which you explain how to do something. One is often required to explain how to do something in writing. Essays explaining how to set up a campsite, how to get a passport, how to win a marathon, how to choose the right bicycle, or how to conduct an experiment are all Giving Instructions essays. When writing a Giving Instructions essay, it is necessary to keep the following points in mind.

1. Use chronological order. Many Giving Instructions essays must be written in chronological order. If you are explaining how to patch a tube to fix a flat tire on a bicycle, for example, all the necessary steps must be written in chronological order, or the reader will not succeed in fixing the flat tire. Or, if you are explaining how to drive to Teotihuacan from Querétaro, for example, the directions must be in chronological order, or the reader may end up in Pachuca.
2. Keep your audience in mind. If you are explaining how to send an attachment with an e-mail message (or how to download an MP3 and convert it to WAV, something even more complicated) to someone who has limited computer experience, it is necessary to explain it simply so it can be easily understood. If you are explaining an intricate, highly specific procedure that is related to your career (whether architecture, business, or agronomy), and it cannot be understood by a general academic audience, then do not write it for this class. The audience for whom you write in this class should be a general academic audience. It is helpful when you finish writing your essay to try to read it from the perspective of your audience. Then ask yourself how your Giving Instructions essay would look from their perspective.
3. Stick to the point. When explaining how to change a tire on a car, for example, don't discuss where to buy cheap tires or how long new ones should last. Such details may interest the reader, but they won't help in changing the tire.
4. State your organization. Tell your audience what you are going to tell them; then tell them; then tell them what you told them. While this may sound childish or even simplistic to the non-native English speaker, it is not simplistic. Instead, it is the organizational pattern that readers of English expect, and, most important, you will never go wrong if you err on the side of clarity. State your organization clearly.
5. Use a straight line of development. It was stated earlier that the US academic audience expects a straight line of development. A straight line of development within the essay includes the following: In the first paragraph, write an introduction that grabs your reader's attention. State the main idea and controlling statement. Also include the three main points you intend to discuss. In the body of the essay (paragraphs two, three, and four) begin each paragraph with the main point (topic sentence) followed by supporting detail(s). Finally, in the conclusion, be sure to restate your main idea, restate the main points you covered, and, finally, leave the reader with a good impression. The above concepts applied to a Giving Instructions essay can result in a five-paragraph essay that is organized as follows:

Paragraph 1: Introduction. Get the reader's attention. Introduce your main idea and controlling statement. State the three main points that you intend to discuss. (A five paragraph essay will contain three main points.)	This is where you "tell your readers what you are going to tell them."
Paragraph 2: State the first main point (topic sentence). State the supporting detail(s).	This is where you "tell them." (Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4)
Paragraph 3: State the second main point (topic sentence). State the supporting detail(s).	
Paragraph 4: State the third main point (topic sentence). State the supporting detail(s).	
Paragraph 5: Conclusion. Restate your main idea. Restate your main points. Leave the reader with a good impression.	This is where you "tell your readers what you told them."

Finally, to see the “rules” from the organizational chart above, it may be helpful to read two “Giving Instructions” essays by other ESL students. The first essay, *You Have Made It*, was written on the last day of class several semesters ago when students were asked to write letters to younger students following them into the composition course. While their assignment was not necessarily to write "Giving Instructions" essays, the writer below applies the organizational concepts above to his short “Giving Instructions” essay which follows. This is the essay he wrote; it is completely unedited.

### **You Have Made It**

Well, you've made it to the last English course. You'll see it can be a lot of fun and very interesting. What you have to do to enjoy this course is to write things that are interesting for you, follow the structure given to you, and see your writing as a way to express yourself.

A key aspect to your success in this class is to write about things that are interesting for you. When you do so, you enjoy the writing. You can easily write a very interesting essay when you do not see the class as a burden. Writing things that you like will make you learn, will make you grow.

A second clue that I can give you to succeed in this course is to follow the structure given to you. This will allow you to express the ideas that you care about clearly. It is also one of the things to which Erlyn pays more attention. The structuring habits that you get here will be with you in every writing you do. Try to make them good.

A final advice is to see your writing as a medium to express yourself. See your essays as a way to letting the other people know what you think. This will encourage you to do a good writing and will let the other know who you are. Do not see writing here as a tedious task that nobody will know of. A lot of people can learn from your writing if you let them.

I wish to you good luck. Remember that writing things that are interesting for you, following the structure given to you, and thinking of your writing as a way to express yourself will make you enjoy this course and learn.

(Last essay, 295 words, written in class in 1/2 hour)

#### Review Questions:

1. What does the writer do to get the reader's attention?
2. What is the main idea?
3. What is the controlling statement?
4. Does the reader state the three main points he intends to discuss?
5. Does he state the main points in the introduction? Write them using parallel structure.
6. Write the topic sentence of the second paragraph including the connector.
7. Write the topic sentence of the third paragraph including the connector.
8. Write the topic sentence of the fourth paragraph including the connector.
9. Write the three main points in the conclusion using parallel structure.
10. What does the author write to try to leave the reader with a good impression?
11. Does the essay work? What are its strengths? Weaknesses?

The essay that follows is another example of a “Giving Instructions” essay, this one having gone through peer review, teacher grading with some suggestions and/or corrections, and then a final revision. This essay could be titled, *How to Care for a Blind Dog*, but the author gives it a different title, *What Can I Do? My Dog is so Blind, He Cannot See, Even in His Dreams*. Does the new title work? Does the new title give the reader a good idea about what to expect of the essay?

#### **What Can I Do? My Dog is so Blind, He Cannot See, Even in His Dreams.**

“Did you hear that? It sounded like someone entered the house, it’s a burglar!”

“Take it easy; it’s Ruffo, my blind dog, bumping into all sorts of things!”

If you have ever had a blind dog, you might know all the daily problems it has to deal with. But don’t worry, it isn’t condemned yet. You can make your dog’s life a lot easier by removing

dangerous obstacles in your house, establishing reference points for your pet inside your home, and introducing it to its new environment.

The first thing you have to do is to clear your dog's normal walking path from dangerous objects, like pulled-out chairs or toys that children leave on the floor. Also, it's a good idea to put baby gates around secure areas to prevent your dog from falling down the stairs or getting lost in the closets.

Establishing reference points for your dog in your house is the next thing to do. These can be tactile or olfactory traces. Use tactile pathways in strategic places. You can use carpet runners on wood or tile floors and plastic mats on carpeted areas. It's useful to put oil-based scents on permanent obstacles to help your dog avoid them. Once the dog has learned where the obstacles are, you might stop using them, but remember to apply a new scent to any piece of furniture you add to your home.

Note: This essay is seven paragraphs including the two beginning paragraphs, each a single sentence. Do the single sentences work stylistically?

The topic sentence of this essay is "You can make your dog's life a lot easier..." by removing..., establishing..., and introducing...."

The use of parallel structure (in this case all gerunds) is changed within the essay itself to provide sentence variety.

In the conclusion, however, the author reverts back to the use of gerunds.

Last but not less important; introduce your blind dog to its new environment. Practice with your dog on a leash; apply gentle backward pressure on the leash when it starts to walk; meanwhile, give the command "e-e-easy." If it slows down say "good easy" and give the dog a snack or lots of praise. Repeat the command to warn it whenever it's about to bump into something. Don't punish or treat your dog badly because that can cause your dog to become more depressed.

Now you know, removing dangerous objects, establishing reference points, and introducing the dog to the new environment is what you have to do in order to help your blind dog overcome its difficult life. Dogs are good friends, so we can thank their loyalty with small things such as these.

## Summary

Personally, I am always impressed by the tight organizational style of these "giving instructions" essays. While both essays adhere to the strict "straight line" organization indicated in the chart on page ten, good sentence variety allows both authors to write outstanding short essays, each with obvious appeal to the reader.

## **Writing Cause or Effect Essays**

In this Advanced Composition course, it is important to understand that Cause/Effect compositions are not to be about both causes and effects. On the contrary, for the compositions you write for this class, you should focus on writing about either the causes or the effects, not both. The reason for this is as follows:

Consider a topic such as "Air Pollution in Mexico City" as an example. If you were to write a twenty-page, exhaustive study about air pollution in Mexico City, perhaps it would be possible to write about both the causes and effects, ten pages describing the causes of air pollution and then ten pages describing the effects of air pollution. However, when writing a short two page composition about "Air Pollution in Mexico City," it is necessary to limit your topic so you can cover it thoroughly. Using this topic as an example, it would be possible to develop either the causes or the effects of air pollution in Mexico City very thoroughly as follows:

What, for example, are the causes of air pollution in Mexico? Students in the past have said (1) exhaust from automobiles and trucks, (2) soot from industry smokestacks, (3) geography, (4) speed bumps, (5) corruption at emissions inspection stations, (6) more high pollution cars as a result of no-drive days, (7) insufficient low pollution public transportation, etc. Any of these ideas about the causes of air pollution can be developed into a two or three page essay. It would be possible to write about just one cause, the main cause, and explore it in depth, or it would be possible to write about the three main causes, for example.

On the other hand, what are the effects of air pollution in Mexico? Students in the past have said (1) poor visibility, (2) headaches, (3) emphysema, (4) allergies, (5) runny eyes and nose, (6) shorter life span for Mexico City's residents, (7) lower quality of life for Mexico City's residents, (8) necessity to stay indoors, (9) more sitting in front of the television, (10) destruction of wildlife, (11) negative world attention, (12) decrease in tourism, etc. Any of these ideas about the effects of air pollution can be developed into a two or three page essay. As above, it would be possible to write about just one effect, the main effect, or it would be possible to write about the three main effects.

### **Points to Remember When Writing a Cause or Effect Essay**

1. State your organization. In all your compositions for an academic audience, you should state your organization. Stating your organization means that you should (1) tell your audience what you are going to tell them, (2) then tell them, and (3) then tell them what you told them. Follow the five-paragraph organizational model on page 18.

2. List all of the causes or all of the effects, not necessarily in your essay, but before you begin to write your essay. On a piece of paper before beginning to write your essay, list as many causes or effects that you can think of. Using the above example about the effects of pollution in Mexico City, you may write your ideas as follows:

## Effects of Air Pollution in Mexico City

more sitting in front of the television	
necessity to stay indoors	destruction of wildlife
negative world attention	decrease in tourism
allergies	emphysema
headaches	lower quality of life
poor visibility	shorter life span

When looking at all these effects of air pollution in Mexico City—there are twelve of them—it is necessary to consider what you want to write about. Since it would be impractical to list them all in a short essay, it might be possible to categorize or classify some of them under a single heading such as "health effects." So, in the following space, list all the effects of air pollution in Mexico City that could be listed under health effects.

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Question: Is it possible to categorize any of the other effects of air pollution in Mexico City? Your goal should be to try to organize your information into three or four main points if possible so it can be presented to the reader clearly and concisely. If you were to write an essay about the effects of air pollution in Mexico, what are the three or four main categories that you would include? List them in the following spaces:

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
- (D.) \_\_\_\_\_

Other points to remember when writing a Cause or Effect essay are as follows:

3. Support all of the causes or effects with supporting details. If you believe, for example, that an important effect of air pollution in Mexico City is a lower quality of life for the city's residents, state your point clearly at the beginning of a paragraph and then explain *how* air

pollution causes a lower quality of life. In other words, always supply supporting details to help your reader understand how or why your assertions are true.

4. Save your most important cause or effect until last. There is often one major cause or effect that is most important. By saving it until last, you leave your reader with a very strong impression. Also, if you put your most important cause or effect first, your reader may not feel it is necessary to continue reading. Or, at least think about the order in which you present your information, and have a rationale for the order you choose.

5. Finally, maintain your focus. In a short cause or effect essay of 350-400 words, limit the range of your topic to either the causes or effects of something. A cause or effect composition doesn't recommend how to change the situation or give opinions about why the situation is good or bad. It simply examines the reasons for it.

## Student's Cause / Effect Essay

### The Causes of Poverty in Mexico

Are you aware that 20 million people in Mexico live on less than two dollars a day? Sixty million people, half the Mexican population, live in poverty, and 20 million of them live in extreme poverty. Most of the time, garbage is their food, and some days, they don't even eat anything. This critical situation in Mexico is caused by individual, geographic and political factors. The purpose of this essay is to analyze these three main causes of poverty in Mexico.

The first and immediate cause of poverty in Mexico is the individual condition. This cause refers to circumstances and characteristics of poor people. For example, the amount of education, skill, intelligence, health, and prejudice all have an influence on poverty. The lack of education is one of the most significant factors that contributes to poverty. There is no access to jobs for non-educated people.

The second cause of poverty has to do with geography. For example, statistics show that people who live in rural areas far away from the cities are poorer. This is caused by the lack of communication and transportation in remote rural areas. Because of this, governments can't provide essential services such as potable water, affordable

Note: This essay is five paragraphs containing 378 words. The first paragraph begins with a question to get the reader's attention. Does the question work for you? Does it get your attention?

The first paragraph ends with the topic sentence, "The purpose of this essay is to analyze these three main causes of poverty in Mexico." With the topic sentence clearly stated, do you know what this essay is going to be about?

The author had previously identified "individual, geographic, and political factors" (all adjectives) as causing poverty in Mexico. Each of these points is stated and supported in paragraphs two, three, and four.

Finally, in the fourth paragraph, the author attributes "the most important cause of poverty" to the political economy in Mexico, and he mentions the IMF and the World Bank. Does he support his point clearly enough, and do you agree or disagree?

food, primary health care, and education. People who live there are totally isolated from the rest of the society.

The third and most significant cause of poverty in Mexico is the political economy of the country. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank-prescribed structural adjustment policies have been applied in Mexico because the government doesn't carry out enough policies to encourage successful development. They cannot, for these international institutions lend money to Mexico on the condition that the nation open up its economy and cut social expenditures to repay the loans. The IMF and World Bank programs are supposed to reduce poverty, but actually they are increasing it.

Unless the Mexican government works on the causes of the poverty which are the individual condition, the geographic factor, and the political economy of the country, the problem is going to get worse. Nobody likes to see poor children eating out of garbage cans. Mexico needs a new political economy designed by Mexican economists and politicians, people who are committed to Mexico and to the future of its society.

### **Another Student's Cause / Effect Essay**

#### **The Effects of Standing Up Your Girlfriend on a Date**

Dating is a very common practice among teenagers, but some don't even know what to do or what not to do. This essay is directed to male teenagers that do not know what happens if you stand up your girlfriend on a date. The purpose is to discuss the three main effects of "standing up your girlfriend on a date."

The first effect of standing up a girl is that she will be waiting for you at least 20 minutes. During this period of time she may start thinking why you did not appear. Depending on the girl, she will think of good reasons why you did not appear, understand you, and forgive you. But most girls will go crazy and want to kill you slowly and painfully after the first ten minutes of waiting.

The second effect of standing up your girlfriend on a date would be that she may never talk to you again. This may be a very reasonable action after you stand her up; at least you should make a phone call to tell you are not going to be able to go. Sometimes even if you make a phone call, the girl may feel too offended to understand any reasons, and she may stop talking to you.

Note: This essay is five paragraphs containing exactly 400 words. The title alone grabs the attention of most young people, and according to the second sentence "The essay is directed to male teenagers..."

The topic of this essay is clearly stated: Standing up your girlfriend on a date. The controlling statement is also stated in the same sentence: "...the three main effects..." So the topic sentence in its entirety would be "The purpose of this essay is to discuss the three main effects of standing up your girlfriend on a date."

Although this author does not state the three main effects directly in the first paragraph, his topic sentence is stated explicitly, so after the reader finishes the essay, he/she will probably be able to both recall and explain the three effects of standing up your girlfriend on a date.



The most significant effect of standing up a girlfriend on a date is that she can have a bigger brother with very bad temper. In this case not only your possibilities of dating a girl again are in danger, but also your health. If by accident you stand up a girl on a date, explain to her why you could not go; that way at least she will be less angry. Be aware of this especially if she has a big brother. Many times getting stood up is such a big deal for the girl that she tells all her friends and family. If she has a bigger brother with a bad temper, run because this can be the last time you stand up.

The effects of standing up a girl on a date as you can notice are very dangerous affecting your further possibilities of dating again, so you better avoid it. Every time you are thinking of dating someone, plan to have a good date, and never stand up just because you want. Think about the consequences of standing up your girlfriend before you do it.

## **Writing Comparison or Contrast Essays**

A Comparison or Contrast essay is an essay in which you either compare something or contrast something. A comparison essay is an essay in which you emphasize the similarities, and a contrast essay is an essay in which you emphasize the differences. We use comparison and contrast thinking when deciding which university to attend, which car to buy, or whether to drive a car or take a bus or an airplane to a vacation site.

In this section, two classic organizational patterns of a comparison or contrast essay will be discussed. One is called block arrangement of ideas; the other is called point-by-point or alternating arrangement of ideas. Suppose you are interested in showing the differences between airplanes and helicopters. You will then write a contrast composition. One way to arrange your material is to use the block arrangement which is to write about airplanes in one paragraph and helicopters in the next. If you mention a particular point in the airplane paragraph, you must mention the same point in the helicopter paragraph, and in the same order. Study the following outline, which shows this kind of organization.

### **BLOCK ARRANGEMENT**

- I. Introduction in which you state your purpose which is to discuss differences between airplanes and helicopters
- II. Airplanes
  - A. Shape and design
  - B. Speed
  - C. Direction of takeoff and flight
- III. Helicopters
  - A. Shape and design
  - B. Speed
  - C. Direction of takeoff and flight
- IV. Conclusion

A second way to organize this material is to discuss a particular point about airplanes and then immediately discuss the same point about helicopters. This is called a point-by-point or alternating arrangement. An outline of this organization follows.

### **POINT-BY-POINT or ALTERNATING ARRANGEMENT**

- I. Introduction in which you state your purpose which is to discuss differences between airplanes and helicopters
- II. Differences between airplanes and helicopters
  - A. Shape and design
    - 1. Airplanes
    - 2. Helicopters
  - B. Speed
    - 1. Airplanes
    - 2. Helicopters
  - C. Direction of takeoff and flight
    - 1. Airplanes
    - 2. Helicopters
- III. Conclusion

## **APPLICATION**

Examine the short comparison or contrast essays that follow, and decide whether the author used block arrangement or point-by-point (or alternating) arrangement.

### **The Differences Between Airplanes and Helicopters**

Airplanes and helicopters are both important forms of air travel, but there are great differences between them.

The first major difference between airplanes and helicopters is their shape and design. Airplanes, for example, have long, slender bodies with wings while helicopters have round bodies and propellers rather than wings.

Another difference between airplanes and helicopters is their speed. Airplanes can travel extremely fast, reaching speeds of over 1,875 miles (3,000 kilometers) per hour. Helicopters, on the other hand are much slower than airplanes.

The final difference between airplanes and helicopters is their direction of takeoff and flight. Airplanes take off horizontally and can move in a forward direction only. They need a lot of space for takeoff and landing. Airplanes regularly carry several hundred passengers. Helicopters, however, take off vertically and can move in any direction. Helicopters require a very small takeoff or landing space, and most helicopters carry only two to five passengers.

Because of the great differences between airplanes and helicopters, each is used for a specific purpose. Airplanes and helicopters, therefore, are both important forms of air travel.

## **How to Support Your Point of View through Comparison or Contrast**

Because we use comparison and contrast thinking so often in our daily activities—deciding which university to attend, which car to buy, or whether to drive a car or take a bus or an airplane to a vacation site—writers often use comparison or contrast to support a personal point of view. Robert Persig, for example clearly states his preference between riding in a car and riding a motorcycle in his book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Here are just two paragraphs from his book, but his preference is clear.

### **Which do You Prefer?**

You see things vacationing on a motorcycle in a way that is completely different from any other. In a car you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it, you don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer, and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame.

On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming. That concrete whizzing by five inches below your foot is the real thing, the same stuff you walk on. It's right there, so blurred you can't focus on it, yet you can put your foot down and touch it anytime, and the whole thing, the whole experience, is never removed from immediate consciousness.

Like Persig, anyone can use comparison and contrast to serve a persuasive aim: to show the reader why they should adopt the writer's point of view.

## **Points to Remember When Writing a Comparison or Contrast Essay**

1. Know what organizational style you are using. Whether you use the block arrangement or point-by-point arrangement, you should be able to identify it. Being able to identify your organization will not only help you in the organization of your own writing, but it will also help your reader follow what you have to say.
2. State your organization. Remember that the "straight line of development" that was discussed in the introduction requires that you "tell your audience what you are going to tell them; then tell them; then tell them what you told them." An important objective in academic writing is clarity, and stating your organization will contribute significantly toward clarity.
3. Keep your audience in mind. You should always keep your audience in mind. After you finish writing, read your composition from the perspective of your audience. How will they respond to your writing? Will they understand what you have written? Will they agree with your point?
4. Say what you want to say. Reread Robert Persig's excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. In contrasting the difference between vacationing by car or motorcycle, his preference is clear. Make your preference clear in your comparison or contrast

essay. To further clarify how this can be done, consider how you could say what you want to say in a comparison or contrast essay on the following topics:

A. Vacationing in Paris or taking a three-week trip down the Amazon.

B. Growing up in a small town or growing up in a large city.

C. Working for large company or running your own business.

D. \_\_\_\_\_

E. \_\_\_\_\_

### Student's Comparison/Contrast Essay

#### Eating Fresh Foods Instead of Canned Foods

Eating is an activity that we as humans do at least two times a day. We live in a world where the variety of food is immense, and we are responsible for what we eat. We decide what we are about to eat and how it will affect our bodies. The purpose of this essay is to discuss the differences between eating fresh foods instead of canned foods. The three main differences are flavor, health benefits, and cost.

The most notable difference between fresh foods and canned foods is their flavor. Fresh foods have great flavor and taste because they keep all their natural conditions. Canned foods, however, lack a lot of their flavor characteristics because there are some other chemical products added to the natural foods. It is logical that the fresh foods will have a greater taste and flavor when consumed just because of the time in which they have been prepared.

Comparing both types of foods we notice another difference. There is a health factor that affects both of them. Canned foods lose some of the original fresh food nutrients when stored, and also it has to be tinned with many conservatives and chemical factors that prolong the shelf life and apparent freshness of the food but could also become toxic if consumed too often. Fresh foods, on the other hand, maintain all their original nutrients.

Yet another difference between these two types of foods is the cost. Canned foods are

Note: This essay is five paragraphs containing 358 words. The function of the introduction is to (1) get the reader's attention and (2) state the purpose of the essay. Does the author's statement about eating get your attention? Why or why not?

The topic sentence of this essay is clearly stated in the first paragraph. What is the topic? What is the controlling statement? What three differences will the author discuss?

Does the author use the conclusion to state his clear preference between fresh foods and canned foods? What is the author's preference? How do you know?

much more expensive than fresh foods. Here the benefit of buying tinned foods is that they are easier to find, for example, in a supermarket instead of the market like the fresh foods, and they require less work to prepare than fresh foods; just open and serve.

Here are the main three differences between buying fresh foods and buying canned foods. As we can see it comes down to a personal choice based on the time each person has, the money, and the importance he/she gives to his/her nutrition and health. Therefore, it is important that you consider your possibilities and choose the best type of foods for your convenience and lifestyle.

## **Another Student's Comparison / Contrast Essay**

### **Industrial Engineer or Administrator**

One of the most important decisions of your life is choosing a career. When you have two main options to study, you can compare them in order to see the advantages and disadvantages. The purpose of this essay is to examine differences between being an Industrial Engineer and being an Administrator. These are two similar careers, but each offers you different opportunities as a student and as a professional. Three main aspects comparing these two careers are the job opportunities, the specific skills you acquire, and the work areas.

One of the main aspects you should consider in selecting a career is the job opportunities. As an Industrial Engineer you have a very wide open field. You can work in many different areas. Industrial Engineers can work as administrators, manufacturers, and in departments such as human resources. As an Administrator you are more specialized, and the work field is more reduced. You can only work in departments such as human resources and economics but not in manufacturing or productivity departments.

Another very important difference is the knowledge you acquire. As an Industrial Engineer you will obtain more objective and specialized reasoning abilities. You will have to study subjects such as Physics and Mathematics, and you will obtain both a social and a mathematical perspective. As an Administrator you have subjects such as Finance and Private Rights. You will obtain a better social perspective, but not a very critical or specialized mathematical reasoning.

A third aspect to consider is what you would like to do after graduating. Both careers are good to be an entrepreneur. Engineers who are specialized in productivity are able to

Note: This essay is five paragraphs containing 400 words. Do you agree with the author's first sentence? To whom is this essay directed? The author states her topic sentence clearly in the first paragraph. What is it? What three aspects of the two careers does the author discuss?

For those who are familiar with both careers, does the author present information about both careers fairly?

What is the author's purpose? Is it to promote one career over another? Is it to present facets of both careers objectively so the reader can make the best personal choice?

Does the author succeed?

work in the manufacturing process in order to offer good quality. Administrators who are specialized in the financial aspects are able to work checking the economic and material resources in order to produce. It depends on which area you like the most.

Definitely, both careers are great options. Both are needed in industry and business. It is very important to analyze if you are more into business or if you are more into manufacturing. Engineers use a very high level of critical thinking and analysis regarding productivity. Administrators use specialized reasoning in economics and resources. Both are similar, but they focus on different aspects within the enterprise. It is a matter of knowing yourself and finding out what kind of student and professional you want to be.



## Writing Persuasion Essays

According to the authors of the book, Teaching ESL Composition, "Writing is a lifetime skill (that) serves four crucial, enduring purposes for the learner: communication, critical thinking and problem solving, self actualization, and control of personal environment" (Hughey). In writing to persuade, you are writing to control personal environment.

What does personal environment mean? For a student, personal environment may mean conditions in the family or school or neighborhood or city. Personal environment may even extend beyond these areas to include conditions in the state, country, or world community. The point is that by writing to persuade, writers have the opportunity to extend their ideas to influence others and thereby affect change.

A key point to remember is that when writing to persuade, your audience may not agree with you. Writing to persuade is, therefore, more demanding and more ambitious than many other types of writing. Your goal may be to change your readers' minds or move them to action. Your goal may be to sell a program, defend an idea, or refute an opponent. In all these instances, you should consider writing to persuade as an important method for shaping your environment toward *your* vision of better reality, whatever it is.

## Organization of Essays to Persuade

One type of essay to persuade refers to questions of fact. If you believe, for example, that drivers who consistently drive faster than the speed limit are harming Mexico, it would be a good idea to get evidence to support how they are harming Mexico. Suppose you could show that speeding causes increased mortality rates on Mexico's highways, increased gasoline consumption and, therefore, increased pollution. Suppose you believe as I do that speeding also contributes to more speed bumps, thereby augmenting problems two and three above. These are questions of fact which you could arrange topically. As you present your ideas, each main point presents a reason why someone should agree with you. More, each main point presents a reason for action—you are writing an essay to persuade drivers to respect speed limit laws. Such an essay could be organized as follows:

### I. Introduction

- A. Speeding causes higher mortality rates.
- B. Speeding causes increased gasoline consumption.
- C. Speeding causes increased pollution.
- D. Speeding causes a higher number of speed bumps aggravating B and C.

### II. Conclusion

Furthermore, if you wanted to link to authoritative websites to support these ideas with facts, it would be relatively easy to find support for points A, B, and C. After that, it would not be hard to support point D authoritatively as well.

Other questions of fact can be arranged spatially. Suppose, for example, that you believe that world citizens should do more to help preserve endangered species. By organizing your essay spatially, it might be possible to discuss leopards, cheetahs, and elephants in Africa, Bengal tigers and snow leopards in Asia, jaguars and swamp deer in South America, and bald eagles and timber wolves in North America. The organization of your essay might look as follows:

## I. Introduction

- A. Africa
  - 1. Leopards
  - 2. Cheetahs
  - 3. Elephants
- B. Asia
  - 1. Bengal tigers
  - 2. Snow leopards
- C. South America
  - 1. Jaguars
  - 2. Swamp deer
- D. North America
  - 1. Bald eagles
  - 2. Timber wolves

## II. Conclusion

Another type of essay to persuade refers to questions of questions of policy. Personal questions of policy arise in nearly everything we do. We choose what to do for our summer vacation, whether to buy a new VCR, or which telephone service we should use.

When you write about a question of policy, it usually requires the use of the word "should." How should I make the most effective use of my education? What should be done about the inept postal service in Mexico? Why should health care service providers provide free birth control to those who want it?

Of the essays to persuade that have to do with questions of policy, some are (1) to gain acceptance or passive agreement; others are (2) to move the reader to immediate action. There is a big difference between the two, and as a writer, you should know specifically what you are trying to persuade your reader to do. Are you writing to get the reader to accept your point of view, or are you trying to move the reader to action.

## **Types of Arguments in Essays to Persuade**



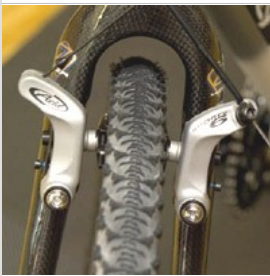
The two main types of arguments in essays to persuade are rational and emotional. If you are writing an essay against hunting, for example, an emotional appeal might begin as follows: "Every year hundreds of bloodthirsty killers go out and ruthlessly slaughter thousands of innocent, helpless animals...." Obviously, many of the words in that sentence are emotionally charged. A rational appeal against hunting, on the other hand, might begin as follows: "Every year sportsmen buy their hunting licenses and legally kill the state allotted limit of animals; however, evidence shows that this practice must be stopped because the annual "harvest" always exceeds the ability of nature to replenish the dwindling animal supply...."

Rational arguments are better when writing to persuade, especially when writing for an English academic audience. In the rational example above, for example, it would be possible to support your position with the number of licenses issued, the numbers of animals killed every year for the last five years, the estimated decline in animal populations, etc. Emotional arguments work best when writing for an audience that already agrees with your position; however, they are rarely successful in persuading someone who does not already agree. It is best to use emotional arguments for an academic audience very sparingly.

## **Using the *Attention, Benefit, Grabber Technique* in Sales and in Essays to Persuade**

A simple phrase often used to teach sales strategy is *Attention, Benefit, Grabber*. Essentially, new sales personnel are taught to internalize the strategy represented by the phrase, *Attention, Benefit, Grabber*, and to consciously apply these three items in their sales presentation as follows: First, the salesperson directs the client's attention to a specific feature of the product. Second, the salesperson explains the benefit of that feature. Third, the salesperson asks a question linking the specific benefit to the client's need, which is the grabber. This *Attention, Benefit, Grabber* methodology can work to increase sales in nearly all sales situations, and the same "three step methodology" can also work to make essays to persuade more convincing. First, note how *Attention, Benefit, Grabber* works in a sales situation with the product a thousand dollar mountain bicycle, for example. Second, below, note how the same principles can be applied to supporting details in an essay to persuade, especially through the use of transitions and connectors.

(chart follows)

	Attention	Benefit	Grabber
	This mountain bicycle has a triple chain ring.	This means that you have low enough gearing to go up steep mountain trails without having to get off and push your bike.	Wouldn't it be nice to keep up with your friends without having to get off your bike and push it up the steep hills? (nod <i>yes</i> with a smile)*  Or, wouldn't it be nice to ride up the hills with your friends without looking like a wimp? (nod <i>yes</i> with a smile)* (and laughter)**
	This mountain bicycle has quick release hubs.	This means that if you get a flat tire, you can easily remove the wheel to fix the flat tire.	Wouldn't it be nice to go anywhere and know that you can at least fix your own flat tires? (nod <i>yes</i> )*
	This mountain bicycle has cantilever brakes.	This means that you can safely control your speed and prevent crashes, even when going down steep rocky mountain trails.	Wouldn't it be nice to know your wife isn't going to have to go to the hospital to identify you after doing a face plant on a rocky mountain trail? (nod <i>yes</i> )* (and laughter)**
<p>*(nod <i>yes</i>) Selling and buying a thousand dollar bicycle should be a fun experience for both the salesperson and the bicycle buyer. In a face to face sales presentation, the salesperson should nod <i>yes</i> frequently, and especially after asking grabber questions, the goal to get the client to nod <i>yes</i> as well. When that happens, salespersons should consider that as a strong signal that the client is ready to buy.</p> <p>** (and laughter) Throughout the sales presentation, sales personnel should seek ways to break down barriers between salespersons and clients. The best sales personnel not only get their clients nodding yes, but they also get to know their clients well enough to get them laughing.</p>			

### ***Attention, Benefit, Grabber in Essays to Persuade***

The *Attention, Benefit, Grabber* strategy from the world of sales can also be applied to almost all essays to persuade with excellent results! The key for the writer is to make use of appropriate transitions and connectors, always clarifying, prodding, pushing, pulling, and drawing the reader into the both the simple and multi-layered logic of the argument.

Since almost all arguments are neither simple nor one-dimensional, use transitions and connectors such as *in other words...*, *this means that...*, *for example...*, *this is to say...*, *that is to say...* to move the reader to complete clarity of the depth of your rationale. See each connector

as another opportunity to draw the reader deeper into your rationale. If the reader clearly understands each point and the rationale supporting it, he/she will more likely understand and agree completely, at least much more so than if arguments are presented without transitions and connectors in a mere one-dimensional manner.

### **Important Points to Remember when Writing an Essay to Persuade**

1. State your organization. If you have been reading these pages, you have seen it repeatedly. "Tell your audience what you are going to tell them; then tell them; then tell them what you told them." Err on the side of clarity. If your audience cannot understand what you write, or if your readers cannot follow your ideas, you will, of course, not persuade anyone.
2. Use a straight line of development. You have also heard and applied this rule by now in this advanced composition class. If you have any doubts as to how to apply it to an essay to persuade, refer again to the organizational chart referred to on page 18. A straight line of development is what the U.S. academic audience understands and expects.
3. Anticipate possible objections. Remember that you may not be able to persuade everyone to accept your ideas. There may be individuals or groups opposed to what you have to say. Thus, you should anticipate their objections and deal directly with the reasons for their disagreement. Anticipate their criticism and deal directly with it.

## Student's Essay to Persuade

### Why You Should Not Smoke

I am sure that you know that smoking harms your body. Then why do you continue smoking? Maybe you do it because you haven't really become conscious about all the dangers of smoking. There are a lot of reasons why you shouldn't smoke. Some of them are that smoking affects your health, that you spend a lot of money on cigarettes, and that when you smoke you are not respecting people around you.

The first reason why you shouldn't smoke is that smoking affects your health. If you smoke, your physical condition will be negatively affected, so it will be very difficult for you to succeed in sports. Also, smoking produces lethal diseases like cancer and reduces the length and quality of your life. Maybe you don't notice all the physical effects of smoking immediately, but you surely will be sorry one day.

The second reason why you shouldn't smoke is because of all the money that you spend on it. Maybe you start smoking only when someone offers you a cigarette, but there will be a day when you will feel the need of a cigarette. By this time, you will pay whatever to smoke, and each time you will smoke more, so you will spend more money. All the money you spend on cigarettes could have been spent on something better, don't you think?

The last reason why you shouldn't smoke is out of respect for the people around you. When you smoke, you not only harm yourself, but you also harm all the people around you. So you mustn't be selfish; you should at least avoid smoking in front of people who don't smoke. Also, many people don't like the cigarette's smell, so they won't enjoy your company. Would you like that?

These are just several reasons why you shouldn't smoke, so I hope that now those of you who smoke are able to think a little and make a smart decision. In addition to all the reasons above, think about how much you love yourself and then whether you want to continue harming yourself. Think also about all the people who love you, those who don't want to see you suffering or sick. If you decide to continue smoking, what a pity. But if you decide to stop smoking, congratulations! Remember that "If you can dream it, you can do it."

Note: This essay about why you should quit smoking is five paragraphs containing 395 words. How persuasive is this essay? On a scale of one to ten with ten being the best, what score would you give this essay? Why?

What arguments does the author use to support not smoking? Are the arguments and their development primarily rational or emotional?

What is the objective of this essay? Is the author trying to get the reader to agree with her position or is she trying to move the reader to action?

With what impression does the author leave the smoker? The non smoker?

## Another Student's Essay to Persuade

### Why You Shouldn't Watch too Much Television

Watching television is an experience shared by most adults and children. It is cheap, appealing, and within the reach of the general public. In this way, TV has become an important mass media around the world. Sadly, this resource isn't used in a way that people could get the best possible benefits from it. The purpose of this essay is to persuade the reader that people shouldn't watch too much television because the content of many TV programs is not educational; it makes people waste time that could be used in more beneficial activities; and it negatively affects people's mental development.

The first reason why people shouldn't watch too much television is because the content of many TV programs is not educational. Nowadays, we can see movies, series, and shows that present scenes of violence, sex, and drugs. This has established wrong concepts among the audience that influence them into having a negative behavior. Moreover, the impact this tendency has on children is worse because they grow up with the idea of a world where women must be slender and blonde to stand out, where problems can only be solved with money and violence, and where wars are inevitable.

The second reason why people shouldn't watch too much television is because it makes people waste time that could be used in more beneficial activities. The time we spend watching TV could be applied to useful activities like exercise, reading, interacting with friends and family, activities that are a crucial for a healthy lifestyle.

The third reason why people shouldn't watch too much television is because it negatively affects people's mental development. According to several scientific studies, watching TV for prolonged periods of time has a negative effect over the intellectual development of children and leads to deterioration of the mental capacity in older people by causing both attention and memory problems in the long term.

In conclusion, people shouldn't watch too much television because the content of many TV programs is not educational; it makes people waste time that could be used in more beneficial activities; and it affects people's mental development. However, this doesn't mean that we should ban TV, but if we are going to watch it, we should do it with moderation. Television is a resource that we should learn to use through the right selection of programs by taking an active and critical attitude towards it.

Note: This essay about why you should not watch television is exactly five paragraphs of 400 words.

The author of this essay provides three reasons why children and adults should not watch too much television. Are there any other reasons the author may have overlooked? List them.

What is the objective of this essay? Is the author trying to get the reader to agree with her position or is she trying to move the reader to action?

With what impression does the author leave the reader?

## “LOCAL” ASPECTS OF WRITING

### Why is it important to know whether a sentence is simple, compound, or complex?

I believe a writer must know how to *define* simple, compound, and complex sentences before using them consciously. To me, that's so obvious it hardly needs stating.

Once a writer knows how to write a simple sentence, it is possible to apply strict mechanical "rules" for writing both compound and complex sentences. And with just these three sentence types, it is possible to write good essays, with good sentence variety, perfectly acceptable for academic work.

With this in mind, first, learn to *define* simple, compound, and complex sentences. After that, *develop the skill to create* sentence variety in your own writing to make your work more appealing to your academic audience.

### Sentences: Simple, Compound, and Complex

Experienced writers use a variety of sentences to make their writing interesting and lively. Too many simple sentences, for example, will sound choppy and immature while too many long sentences will be difficult to read and hard to understand.

This page contains definitions of simple, compound, and complex sentences with many simple examples. The purpose of these examples is to help writers identify sentence basics including identification of sentences in the short quizzes that follow. After that, it will be possible to analyze more complex sentences varieties.

### SIMPLE SENTENCE

A simple sentence, also called an independent clause, contains a subject and a verb, and it expresses a complete thought. In the following simple sentences, subjects are in yellow, and verbs are in green.

- A. Some students like to study in the mornings.
- B. Juan and Arturo play football every afternoon.
- C. Alicia goes to the library and studies every day.

The three examples above are all simple sentences. Note that sentence B contains a compound subject, and sentence C contains a compound verb. Simple sentences, therefore, contain a subject and verb and express a complete thought, but they can also contain a compound subjects or verbs.



## COMPOUND SENTENCE

A compound sentence contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinator. The coordinators are as follows: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*. (Helpful hint: The first letter of each of the coordinators spells *FANBOYS*.) Except for very short sentences, coordinators are always preceded by a comma. In the following compound sentences, subjects are in yellow, verbs are in green, and the coordinators and the commas that precede them are bold and underlined.

- A. **I** **tried** to speak Spanish, **and** my **friend** **tried** to speak English.
- B. **Alejandro** **played** football, **so** **Maria** **went** shopping.
- C. **Alejandro** **played** football, **for** **Maria** **went** shopping.

The above three sentences are compound sentences. Each sentence contains two independent clauses, and they are joined by a coordinator with a comma preceding it. Note how the conscious use of coordinators can change the relationship between the clauses. Sentences B and C, for example, are identical except for the coordinators. In sentence B, which action occurred first? Obviously, "Alejandro played football" first, so as a consequence, "Maria went shopping." In sentence C, "Maria went shopping" first. In sentence C, "Alejandro played football" because, possibly, he didn't have anything else to do, *for* or *because* "Maria went shopping." How can the use of other coordinators change the relationship between the two clauses? What implications would the use of "yet" or "but" have on the meaning of the sentence?

(Complex sentences are continued on the following page.)

## COMPLEX SENTENCE

A complex sentence has an independent clause joined by one or more dependent clauses. A complex sentence always has a subordinator such as *because*, *since*, *after*, *although*, or *when* or a relative pronoun such as *that*, *who*, or *which*. In the following complex sentences, subjects are in yellow, verbs are in green, and the subordinators and their commas (when required) are in bold and underlined.

- A. **When** he handed in his homework, he forgot to give the teacher the last page.  
B. The teacher returned the homework **after** she noticed the error.  
C. The students **who** are on the bus to the United States are studying English.  
D. **After** they finished studying, Juan and Maria went to the movies.  
E. Juan and Maria went to the movies **after** they finished studying.

Note the commas in sentences A and D. When a complex sentence begins with a subordinator such as sentences A and D, a comma is required at the end of the dependent clause. When the independent clause begins the sentence with subordinators in the middle as in sentences B and E, no comma is required. If a comma is placed before the subordinators in sentences B and E, it is wrong.

Note that sentences D and E are the same except sentence D begins with the dependent clause which is followed by a comma, and sentence E begins with the independent clause which contains no comma. The comma after the dependent clause in sentence D is required, and experienced *listeners* of English will often *hear* a slight pause there. In sentence E, however, there will be no pause when the independent clause begins the sentence.

## Sentence Combining Exercise

Exercise directions: Please combine the following simple sentences to create either compound or complex sentences using coordinators or subordinators. Please be ready to provide a rationale why you have made compound or complex sentences of these sentence pairs.

1. The thief ran into the alley.  
The police officer followed her.
2. The child ran a high temperature.  
His parents called his pediatrician.
3. Julio won the tennis match.  
He jumped over the net to congratulate his opponent.
4. Education is vitally important.  
All Americans must be concerned about quality education.
5. Immigrants come to the United States.  
Most of them become United States citizens.
6. The boat was old.  
The boat was still seaworthy.
7. I could protest.  
The dentist began to drill.
8. The fog covered the area.  
The pilot did not want to land the plane.
9. He had a part-time job.  
The college student had little free time.
10. Many soap operas are aired in the afternoon.  
Some college students schedule classes before noon.
11. Dave submitted his essay.  
He proofread it carefully.
12. It is important to study hard.  
Students need to enjoy their college years.
13. You invest now.  
You will have little for your retirement later.
14. Many Americans cannot afford health insurance.  
They are forced to see doctors only in emergencies.

## Conclusion

Recognizing and writing good simple, compound, and complex sentence is basic to writing effective essays in English. With just these three sentence types, practice sentence variety in your writing. These three sentence types are also the foundation for writing more complex sentences to follow, sentences including adjective clauses, appositives, noun clauses, etc.

A Google search on **sentences simple compound complex** (four words) yields over 1,000,000 results, so there is plenty of information available on writing effective sentences. If you add **quiz** to the search, you can see literally hundreds of quizzes about simple, compound, and complex sentences available online as well.

## Online Quizzes About Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentences

The information about Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentences on pages 40-42 above is also available online at <http://eslbee.com/sentences.htm>. This section is followed by three online “Sentence Identification Quizzes,” where once you answer all the quiz questions, you will see your score immediately. One of those practices quizzes follows. Note, first, however, that sentences in English are simple, compound, or complex **NOT** based on the complexity of the ideas within the sentence but by the subjects, verbs, coordinators, subordinators. Please study the supporting material, and learn the rules.

**DIRECTIONS:** Please identify each of the following sentences as either simple, compound, or complex. This “Identification of Sentences” quiz is based on the short story, *The Americanization of Shadrach Cohen*, by Bruno Lessing.

1. *The Americanization of Shadrach Cohen* is a short story about values by Bruno Lessing.

Simple

Compound

Complex

2. Shadrach Cohen had two sons, Abel and Gottlieb.

Simple

Compound

Complex

3. When Abel and Gottlieb moved to New York, they opened their own business in their father's name.

Simple

Compound

Complex

4. The business was successful, so Abel and Gottlieb told their father to join them in New York City.

Simple

Compound

Complex

5. When Shadrach came, he brought Marta, the family maidservant.

Simple

Compound

Complex

6. When the ship landed, Shadrach was met by two dapper-looking young men.

Simple

Compound

Complex

7. Each son wore a flashy tie with a diamond pin.

Simple

Compound

Complex

8. Shadrach's sons welcomed him to the new land, but they were amazed by his old fashioned appearance.

Simple

Compound

Complex

9. Shadrach looked like so many new immigrants that Gottlieb and Abel had ridiculed in the past.

Simple

Compound

Complex

10. Gottlieb and Abel first wanted to take their father to a barbershop to trim his beard to make him look more like an American.

Simple

Compound

Complex

11. Although Gottlieb and Abel already had a servant, Marta stayed with the family.

Simple

Compound

Complex

12. At their first meal together, Shadrach saw a wall between him and his sons.

Simple

Compound

Complex

13. Shadrach realized some change had occurred, and he was puzzled.

Simple

Compound

Complex

14. When the meal was over, Shadrach donned his praying cap and began to recite grace.

Simple

Compound

Complex

15. While Abel and Gottlieb thought their father would change after a few months, he didn't.

Simple

Compound

Complex

16. When Gottlieb told his father about the wedding, Shadrach wanted to meet the bride right away.

Simple

Compound

Complex

17. Because Gottlieb was ashamed of his father, he did not want to introduce him to his future bride.

Simple

Compound

Complex

18. Shadrach was upset and told Gottlieb to go straight to bed.

Simple

Compound

Complex

19. Shadrach then began running both the house and the business.

Simple

Compound

Complex

20. Shadrach dismissed two employees and told Abel and Gottlieb to take their places.

Simple

Compound

Complex

21. After Shadrach imposed new rules on the business, it began to improve.

Simple

Compound

Complex

22. Other businessmen in the community saw the business grow, and they began to respect and revere Shadrach.

Simple

Compound

Complex

23. While the sons were working for Shadrach, they were earning bread by the sweat of their brow.

Simple

Compound

Complex

24. After Shadrach earned their respect, Gottlieb wanted to bring Miriam, his bride to be, to meet his father.

Simple

Compound

Complex

25. Joy beamed in Shadrach's eyes when Gottlieb invited Miriam to meet his father.

Simple

Compound

Complex

26. When Miriam saw Shadrach, he looked like a patriarch from the Pentateuch.

Simple

Compound

Complex

27. Miriam seized Shadrach's hands and asked him to bless her.

Simple

Compound

Complex

28. Shadrach, along with Abel, Gottlieb, and Miriam prayed to give thanks after the meal.

Simple

Compound

Complex

Remember, that with the skill to write good simple, compound, and complex sentences, you will have the flexibility to (1) convey your ideas precisely and (2) entertain with sentence variety at the same time!

## Adjective Clauses

At a certain point in your writing in English, you should be able to identify every sentence you write as simple, compound, or complex. Additional structures such as adjective clauses, noun clauses, and appositives, will give you a much greater sentence variety within which to accomplish your writing objectives. This page contains a short review of adjective clauses along with just ten very difficult exercises. First, we will define what adjective clauses are and how they work.

An adjective clause is a dependent clause that modifies a noun. It is possible to combine the following two sentences to form one sentence containing an adjective clause:

**The children are going to visit the museum.  
They are on the bus.**

**The children who are on the bus are going to visit the museum.**  
| adjective clause |

In the sentence above, there are two other ways to write the sentence correctly using the second sentence as the adjective clause.

**The children that are on the bus are going to visit the museum.**

**The children     on the bus     are going to visit the museum.**

Some other sentences can be combined into a sentence using adjective clauses in a variety of ways, and they are all correct. Note the variety of ways in which the following two sentences can be combined.

The church is old.  
My grandparents were married there.

The church where my grandparents were married is old.  
The church in which my grandparents were married is old.  
The church which my grandparents were married in is old.  
The church that my grandparents were married in is old.  
The church my grandparents were married in is old.

In the sentences above, the adjective clauses are underlined. All answers are correct. Note how the uses of the words “where,” “which,” and “in” interact.



## **IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT PUNCTUATION IN ADJECTIVE CLAUSES**

Managing simple, compound, and complex sentences, and then adding adjective clauses into the mix can result in some confusing situations regarding punctuation. There are some specific rules when punctuation is permissible or required around adjective clauses (when the information in the adjective clause is non-essential information); however, in my composition classes, I insist that students NOT use commas around adjective clauses for several reasons.

First, non-essential information should generally be avoided in academic writing, at least in the short essays required for these composition classes. Thus, not including the commas will more often be right than wrong.

Second, many Spanish speaking students have a natural tendency to write long sentences using many commas inappropriately. By not using commas around adjective clauses, students can perhaps more readily recognize when a period is required.

Third, I believe it is easier to learn to apply commas later when they are required than the other way around. Indiscriminate use of commas is a hard habit to undue in my experience. Therefore do not use commas around adjective clauses, at least for these beginning exercises.

(quiz follows on next page)

## **Adjective Clauses Quiz**

(also available online at <http://www.eslbee.com/cgi-bin/quiztest.cgi?adjectiveclauses> where you can see your score immediately after writing the quiz.)

### **Directions: Please Read Carefully!**

1. Please combine the following pairs of sentences to create one complex sentence. Do not use commas in any of the completed sentences.
2. Make adjective clauses of the second sentence in every case. (Obviously, any of these sentences could be written using the first sentence as the adjective clause; however, making adjective clauses of the second sentence is harder because it requires knowledge of all the "rules" of writing adjective clauses.)
3. Spell correctly! This quiz is "graded" by computer (if you do the quiz online), so any spelling mistake or punctuation error, like forgetting a period at the end of a sentence or adding a comma, will be counted wrong.

1. **The man was wearing a blue shirt. He witnessed the accident.**
2. **The boy was studying in the library. I talked to him very quietly.**
3. **The book is about the history of Mexico. I bought it yesterday.**
4. **The house is still standing. Abraham Lincoln was born there.**
5. **The man reported the accident. His car was damaged.**
6. **The research paper must be finished by Friday. David is working on it.**
7. **The church is very old. My grandparents were married there.**
8. **1910 is the year. The revolution began then.**
9. **The people are very kind. I am staying in their house.**
10. **The students passed the exam. They studied hard.**

## Appositives

The use of appositives is another excellent tool to introduce sentence variety. An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that immediately follows another noun. An appositive explains or defines the noun it follows and is set off by commas.

Here are two examples of appositives, the first sentence containing one appositive and the second sentence containing two appositives:

1. Mexico City, the biggest city in the world, has many interesting archaeological sites.  
Mexico City = the biggest city in the world
2. Denver, the capitol of Colorado, is the home of the Denver Broncos, the best football team in the US.  
Denver = the capitol of Colorado  
Denver Broncos = the best football team in the US.

Each appositive in the examples above is set off by commas. Appositives are always set off by commas. Another interesting aspect of appositives is that they can always be exchanged with the nouns they modify as in these examples:

First, the simple sentences:

The altitude of Lhasa is over 12,000 feet.  
Lhasa is the capital of Tibet.

Now, the sentences containing appositives set off by commas:

The altitude of Lhasa, **the capital of Tibet**, is over 12,000 feet.

The altitude of the capital of Tibet, **Lhasa**, is over 12,000 feet.

In the examples above, the appositives are in bold. In each case the appositive and its commas could be omitted from the sentence completely leaving the original excellent sentences. Appositives, however, are an excellent way to add additional information using sentence variety..

When you understand the use and punctuation of appositives, take the “Appositives Quiz” below. This quiz is also available online at <http://eslbee.com/cgi-bin/quiztest.cgi?appositives>. When taking the quiz online, type correctly and add correct punctuation when required.

**Appositives Quiz Directions:** Please identify the appositives by underlining them and adding commas as required.

1. The car a 1989 Toyota was badly damaged.
  2. On Venus the closest planet to the earth there is no water.
  3. Atari a toy and game manufacturer came out with Pong the first video game in 1972.
  4. One of Mexico's most famous singers Luis Miguel lives in Acapulco.
  5. Luis Miguel one of Mexico's most famous singers lives in Acapulco.
  6. Teotihuacan the site of the largest pyramid in the world is a famous tourist attraction.
- (Did you find two appositives in one sentence above? The sentence requires four commas.)

## Subject-Verb Agreement

The explanation on Subject-Verb Agreement is brief because the subject-verb agreement "rules" can best be learned by working through the following quiz questions and referring to the rules for each question. Presented in this manner, you can work back and forth between the quiz questions and the clues to "figure out" the correct answers.

Directions: Circle the correct verb in the following sentences. If you have a doubt about the correct verb, refer to the clues on the following page.

1. The rhythm of the pounding waves is / are calming.
2. All of the dogs in the neighborhood were / was barking.
3. A high tax, not to mention unemployment, influence / influences votes.
4. My friends and my mother like / likes each other.
5. The team and the band was / were on the field.
6. Building a good marriage and building a good log fire is / are similar in many ways.
7. John or Doris write / writes to us regularly.
8. Neither Carol nor Ted is / are excluded from the meeting.
9. Either Patty or Tom was / were asked to lead the meeting.
10. Neither the basket nor the apples was / were expensive.
11. Neither the apples nor the basket was / were expensive
12. Either Maria or you was / were late for class.
13. Either you or Maria was / were late for class.
14. Hardest hit by the high temperatures and the drought was / were the farmers.
15. Neither of them like / likes going to the show.
16. Each of them has / have a good seat.
17. Everybody in the class has / have tickets.
18. Every silver knife, fork, and spoon has / have to be counted.
19. Each cat and each dog has / have its own toy.
20. The committee is / are meeting today.
21. Ten million gallons of oil is / are a lot of oil.
22. The jury vote / votes today.
23. The number is / are very small.
24. A number of students was / were absent.
25. Ten million gallons of oil was / were spilled.
26. The majority of us is / are in favor.
27. Statistics is / are an interesting subject. Statistics is / are often misleading.
28. The sheep stray / strays when the gate is left open. Sheep stray / strays when the gate is left open.

## CLUES TO ANSWERS ON SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Sentences: Clue (or rule):

- 1-2     Make the subject and verb agree when words intervene between them.
- 3       The grammatical number of the subject does not change with the addition of expressions beginning with such words as the following: *accompanied by, along with, as well as, in addition to, including, no less than, not to mention, together with*.
- 4-6     Subjects joined by *and* are usually plural.
- 7-9     Singular subjects joined by *or, either . . . or, neither . . . nor* take a singular verb.
- 10-11   If one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the nearer subject.
- 12-13   The verb also agrees with the nearer subject in person.
- 14       Do not let inverted word order cause you to make a mistake in agreement.
- 15-17   When used as subjects, such words as *each, either, one, everybody*, and *anyone* regularly take singular verbs.
- 18-19   *Every* or *each* preceding singular subjects joined by *and* calls for a singular verb.
- 20-23   Collective nouns take a singular verb when they refer to the group as a unit.
- 24-26   Collective nouns take a plural verb when they refer to individuals or parts of the group.
- 27-28   Some nouns (such as *athletics, politics, series, deer*, and *sheep*) can be either singular or plural depending on meaning.

## Subject - Verb Agreement Quiz

Directions: Please choose the correct verb in each of the following sentences.

1. Of all university courses, mathematics probably \_\_\_\_\_ the most fear.  
produce  
produces
2. Living in big cities almost always \_\_\_\_\_ stress because of traffic jams, too few parking spaces, and too many people.  
cause  
causes
3. The way of life in small villages far from big cities \_\_\_\_\_ mostly quiet because there are few people.  
is  
are
4. In many countries, governments \_\_\_\_\_ the mass media through censorship.  
control  
controls
5. Sometimes a government covertly \_\_\_\_\_ the general population by releasing disinformation through the mass media.  
influence  
influences
6. Ricky Martin, along with his support team and some close friends, \_\_\_\_\_ many key cities around the world every year.  
visit  
visits
7. Least considered in the latest bombing campaign \_\_\_\_\_ the innocent victims.  
was  
were
8. Each cat and each dog in this animal shelter \_\_\_\_\_ eventually placed in a good home.  
is  
are
9. The deer standing silently next to the large tree \_\_\_\_\_ not seen by the two hunters.  
was  
were
10. Neither the students nor the teacher \_\_\_\_\_ able to find the solution immediately.  
was  
were

## Topic Sentences

Before beginning writing any essay or even a paragraph, it is important to think, first, about the topic and then what you want to say about the topic. Most often, the topic is easy, but the question then turns to what you want to say about the topic which is the controlling idea. Topic sentences should always contain both (1) a topic and (2) a controlling idea.

Read the following topic sentences. Several contain a topic (in red) and a controlling idea (in green). When your introduction contains a clearly stated topic sentence such as one of the following, your reader will know what to expect and, therefore, understand your ideas better.

1. People can **avoid burglaries** **by taking certain precautions**.  
(The precautions for...)
2. **There are several advantages** to **growing up in a small town**.  
(The advantages of...)
3. **Most US universities require a 550 point TOEFL score** **for a number of reasons**.  
(The reasons for...)

**Directions: Please complete this exercise by identifying the topics and controlling ideas.**

4. Air pollution in Mexico City is the worst in the world for a number of reasons.  
(The causes of...) or (The effects of...)
5. Fixing a flat tire on a bicycle is easy if you follow these steps.  
(The steps for...)
6. There are several enjoyable ways to travel between the US and Queretaro.  
(The ways to...) or (The methods of...)
7. Animals in danger of becoming extinct come from a wide range of countries.  
(The different countries... [parts, kinds, types])
8. Effective leadership requires specific qualities that anyone can develop.  
(The qualities (or characteristics or traits) of...)
9. Industrial waste poured into Lake Michigan has led to dramatic changes in its ability to support marine life.  
(The effects of...)
10. In order to fully explore the wreck of the Titanic, scientists must address several problems.  
(The difficulties of...) or (The obstacles to...)



## Topic Sentences Summary

A carefully thought out topic sentence will serve two important functions. First, it will provide you, the author, the means to stay focused on your objective. It is a lot easier to write if you know what you are going to write about! Second, a clearly stated topic sentence will provide readers with the tools they need to clearly understand what you have to say. These are important reasons to carefully consider topic sentences before beginning writing.

## Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is one of the quickest and easiest ways to make a good impression on your readers, especially experienced readers and writers, because the use of parallel structure is always obvious. As a reader I always look for parallel structure at the end of the first paragraph in five-paragraph essay. Consider a topic such as "air pollution in Denver, Colorado, USA." If you want to write about the "causes of air pollution" (the controlling statement), your sentence at the end of the introduction could be "...so the objective of this paper is discuss the three main causes of air pollution in Denver which are (1) exhaust from automobiles, (2) soot from industry smokestacks, and (3) smoke from wood burning fireplaces." Exhaust, soot, and smoke are all nouns which is parallel structure, but in this case, parallel structure is even more effective because the nouns are all followed by prepositional phrases.

While the following examples require just one word and are relatively easy, look for parallel structure when you read because it is used frequently among experienced writers.

1. The children are energetic and noisy. = adjective + adjective  
The children are energetic, noisy, and \_\_\_\_.
2. She bought a skirt and a blouse. = noun + noun  
She bought a skirt, blouse, and \_\_\_\_.
3. He walked slowly and confidently to the witness stand. = adverb + adverb  
He walked slowly, confidently, and \_\_\_\_ to the witness stand.
4. Swimming and hiking are my favorite summer activities. = gerund + gerund  
Swimming, hiking, and \_\_\_\_ are my favorite summer activities.

Exercise: Complete the following sentences using parallel structure.

1. Having no job or \_\_\_\_\_, the student had to drop out of school.
2. Because I used a computer to do my research paper, I could easily correct spelling errors, move paragraphs around to achieve better organization, and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. While I was in college, I worked as a waitress, as a typist, and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. He is a man known for his integrity and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Because he was ill and \_\_\_\_\_, the auto worker left his job.
6. The professor walked through the door, looked at the students, and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. A farmer spends his life tilling the soil, sowing the seeds, and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. I was surprised to discover that in person the rock star was warm, friendly, unassuming and \_\_\_\_\_.

(More about parallel structure follows.)

## Parallel Structure Applied in Authentic Writing

With a brilliant imagination, a writer can make parallel structure analogous to poetry as in the paragraph below. This paragraph is from an editorial by Maureen Dowd in reference to an upcoming speech by President George W. Bush on the evening of September 7, 2003. The text is from the New York Times. First, the paragraph; then an illustration showing the parallel structure.

Tonight will be a stomach-churning moment for Mr. Bush, and he must be puzzling over how he got snarled in this nightmare, with Old Europe making him beg, North Korea making him wince, the deficit making him cringe, the lost manufacturing jobs making him gulp; with the hawks caving in to the U.N. and to old Saddam Baath army members who want to rebuild a security force; with Representative David Obey demanding the unilateral heads of Rummy and Wolfie, so that "Uncle Sam doesn't become Uncle Sucker"; with the F.B.I. warning that more Islamic terrorists who know how to fly planes may be burrowing into our neighborhoods.

Here is the same paragraph arranged to show the parallel structure:

Tonight will be a stomach-churning moment for Mr. Bush, and he must be puzzling over how he got snarled in this nightmare,

**with** Old Europe making him beg,

North Korea making him wince,  
the deficit making him cringe,  
the lost manufacturing jobs making him gulp;

**with** the hawks caving in to the U.N. and to old Saddam Baath army members who want to rebuild a security force;

**with** Representative David Obey demanding the unilateral heads of Rummy and Wolfie, so that "Uncle Sam doesn't become Uncle Sucker";

**with** the F.B.I. warning that more Islamic terrorists who know how to fly planes may be burrowing into our neighborhoods.

First of all, note that this paragraph is just one sentence that contains 107 words! Please do **NOT** try writing 107 word sentences unless you know what you are doing! Note how each prepositional phrase starting with **with** is followed by a noun clause that includes a gerund phrase. Also note the punctuation at the end of each prepositional phrase, a ; (semicolon). An interesting exercise is to read the sentence aloud (like poetry) placing different levels of stress and emphasis on each part.

While this paragraph is one of the most brilliant examples of parallel structure I have ever seen, and while most people could never approach this level of sophistication, it **IS** possible for ESL/EFL writers to begin to use parallel structure very effectively, even in short essays. The key is to start where you are and look for opportunities to use parallel structure at every level of writing.

## Noun Clauses

### Nouns and Noun Clauses Used as Subjects

A noun clause is a subordinate clause used as a noun. Noun clauses are clauses that can be used in a variety of ways. First, both nouns and noun clauses can be used as subjects. Examine the following three pairs of sentences. In each pair, the first sentence contains a single noun as a subject (underlined); the second sentence contains a noun clause as a subject (also underlined).

1. The teacher's report contained accurate information.  
What the teacher reported contained accurate information.
2. The student wants to graduate.  
What the student wants is to graduate.
3. The senator is wrong.  
What the senator said is wrong.

### Nouns and Noun Clauses Used as Objects

Both nouns and noun clauses can also be used as objects. Examine the following three pairs of sentences. In each pair, the first sentence contains a single noun as an object (underlined); the second sentence contains a noun clause as an object (also underlined).

1. The prisoner told his story.  
The television audience didn't believe what he said.
2. The husband prepared the meal.  
His wife liked what he had prepared.
3. The cat ate the mouse.  
The cat enjoyed what it had eaten.

### Nouns and Noun Clauses Used as Objects of Prepositions

Both nouns and noun clauses can also be used as objects of prepositions. Examine the following pair of sentences. In the first sentence, the preposition begins a simple prepositional phrase. In the second sentence, the preposition begins a noun clause.

1. President Bush talked to the television audience.  
He spoke about how war promotes peace.

(Information about noun clauses continues on the following page.)

### **Nouns and Noun Clauses in Answering Questions**

Both nouns and noun clauses can be used to answer questions. Noun clauses can begin with "question" words like who, what, when, where, why, how, and whose. Note how noun clauses are used in answering the following questions. The noun clauses are underlined.

1. Who is absent today?  
I don't know who is absent today.
2. What is she looking for?  
I don't know what she is looking for.
3. When is the president arriving?  
I don't know when the president is arriving.

(Noun clause quiz follows.)

## Noun Clause Quiz

**Directions:** Please choose the best answer to each of the following questions. Then write in the answer to the question about how the noun clause is used.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ was complete silence before the musicians began to play.  
A. Whatever the conductor would want      B. The conductor did want  
C. What did the conductor want              D. What the conductor wanted  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Car salesmen will talk \_\_\_\_\_ most important for safety.  
A. which options are                              B. to you which options are  
C. about which options are                      D. what options are  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is not important. What he does is!  
A. What the senator promises                  B. What the senator did promise  
C. That the senator promised                  D. Whenever the senator promises  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ was an excellent suggestion by a good friend.  
A. That should he take a vacation              B. He should take a vacation  
C. That he should take a vacation              D. What he should take a vacation  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The teacher doesn't know \_\_\_\_\_ that question.  
A. how she should answer                      B. how she should answers  
C. she should answer                              D. however she should answer  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ was anyone's guess.  
A. However, Alex did win first place              B. How Alex did win first place  
C. How did Alex win first place                  D. How Alex won first place  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Madonna is five minutes late for her performance, and the audience doesn't know \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. when will she appear                          B. when she will appear  
C. whenever she will appear                      D. which time she will appear  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
8. It is well known \_\_\_\_\_ because his court appointed attorney slept through it.  
A. that when the defendant lost the case      B. why the defendant lost the case  
C. that the defendant lost the case              D. when the defendant lost the case  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ is a historical fact.  
A. That most war victims are women and children  
B. Most war victims are women and children  
C. How most war victims are women and children  
D. Whenever there is a war, victims are women and children  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
10. In his book, On Writing, Stephen King \_\_\_\_\_ a world famous writer.  
A. wrote about how did he progress to become  
B. wrote about how he did progress to become  
C. wrote through his progression of becoming  
D. wrote about how he progressed to become  
The noun clause in this sentences is used as a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.