

10 Writer's Handbook for English Language Learners

Use this Writer's Handbook as a guide to help you write better essays in English. It covers the following topics:

- **Grammar:** explains key grammar rules and gives examples.
- **Usage:** explains important usage rules and gives examples.
- **Mechanics:** describes the basic mechanics rules and gives examples. Mechanics includes spelling and punctuation.
- **Style:** discusses key aspects of effective style.
- **Organization and Development:** gives advice about the writing process and the development of all parts of an essay.
- **Advice to Writers:** discusses different types of essays.
- **Revising, Editing, and Proofreading:** explains what to do in each stage of improving your essay.
- **Glossary:** presents definitions for terms.

Grammar

This section provides information on the following grammatical errors:

- Sentence Errors
- Word Errors
- Other Errors

Sentence Errors

Fragments

A fragment is an incomplete sentence. It does not express a complete thought, even though it starts with a capital letter and ends with a punctuation mark. It is missing either a subject or a verb or both.

Here are three examples of fragments:

Fragment: *Where there were mice and cockroaches.*

Fragment: *A movie that inspires deep emotions.*

Fragment: *Analyzing the characters' motives.*

These three groups of words cannot stand alone as complete sentences. They can be corrected in two ways. One way is to attach the fragment to a complete sentence.

Corrected sentence: Peter left the apartment where there were mice and cockroaches.

Corrected sentence: I went to see "The Silver Star," a movie that inspires deep emotions.

Another way to correct fragments is to add a complete subject, a complete verb, or other words that express a complete thought.

Corrected sentence: This is where there were mice and cockroaches.

Corrected sentence: A movie that inspires deep emotions is rare.

Corrected sentence: Analyzing the characters' motives is important.

Summary: Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. Sometimes readers can figure out the meaning of a fragment by rereading the sentences that come before and after it. However, turning fragments into complete sentences will improve the connections between ideas.

Run-On Sentences

Run-on sentences happen when we join sentences together without a conjunction or the correct punctuation. Run-on sentences can be very confusing to read. Here is an example: *My sister loves to dance she is very good at it.*

There are several ways to correct run-on sentences:

1. Divide the run-on sentence into two separate sentences.

Run-on sentence: *My sister loves to dance she is very good at it.*

Corrected sentence: *My sister loves to dance. She is very good at it.*

Run-on sentence: *Jim showed us his ticket someone gave it to him.*

Corrected sentence: *Jim showed us his ticket. Someone gave it to him.*

2. Connect the parts of the run-on sentence with a coordinating conjunction and a comma. These are the most common coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet*.

Run-on sentence: *My sister loves to dance she is very good at it.*

Corrected sentence: *My sister loves to dance, and she is very good at it.*

Run-on sentence: *She agreed to chair the meeting she didn't come.*

Corrected sentence: *She agreed to chair the meeting, but she didn't come.*

3. Connect the parts of the run-on sentence with a subordinating conjunction. These are the most common subordinating conjunctions: *after, although, as, because, before, if, since, unless, until, when, whereas, while*.

Run-on sentence: *My sister loves to dance she is very good at it.*

Corrected sentence: *My sister loves to dance because she is very good at it.*

Run-on sentence: *Maria and John like skiing Karen does not.*

Corrected sentence: *Although Maria and John like skiing, Karen does not.*

4. Separate the parts of the run-on sentence with a semicolon.

Run-on sentence: *Gordon laughed at Sandy's joke it was funny.*

Corrected sentence: *Gordon laughed at Sandy's joke; it was funny.*

Run-on sentence: *I thought he was here I was wrong.*

Corrected sentence: *I thought he was here; I was wrong.*

Summary: Run-on sentences are two or more sentences that have been joined together without a conjunction or the correct punctuation. You can usually correct them by using punctuation or conjunctions.

Word Errors

Noun Forms

A noun is usually defined as a *person, place, or thing*.

Person: *man, woman, waiter, John*

Place: *home, office, town, station, Hong Kong*

Thing: *table, car, apple, money, music, love, dog, monkey*

Learning a few basic rules will help you to use nouns effectively:

1. In English, some nouns are countable. That is, they are things that we can count. For example: *house*. We can count *houses*. We can have one, two, three, or more *houses*. Here are more examples of countable nouns:

dog, cat, animal, man, person, bottle, box, pound, coin, dollar, bowl, plate, fork, table, chair, suitcase, bag

Countable nouns can be singular or plural.

Singular: *I have a friend.*

Plural: *I have two friends.*

2. Usually, to make nouns plural, add -s, as in the preceding examples (*friend*, *friends*). However, there are special cases where you do not add -s.
 - When a word ends in -ch, -s, -sh, -ss, or -x, the plural is formed by adding -es. (*benches*, *gases*, *dishes*, *dresses*, *taxes*)
 - When a word ends in -y preceded by a consonant, the plural form is -ies. (*parties*, *bodies*, *policies*)
 - When a word ends in -y preceded by a vowel, the plural is formed by adding -s. (*trays*, *joys*, *keys*)
 - When a word ends in -o, the more common plural ending is -es (*tomatoes*, *potatoes*, *heroes*)
 - When the final -o is preceded by a vowel, the plural ending is -s. (*videos*, *studios*)
 - When a word ends in -f, the plural is formed in one of two ways:
 - either by adding -s (*beliefs*, *puffs*)
 - or by changing the -f to -v and adding -es (*wife*, *wives*; *leaf*, *leaves*; *loaf*, *loaves*).
 - When a word ends in -ex or -ix, the plural ending is usually -es. (*appendixes*, *indexes*)
 - In certain cases, the plural form of a word is the same as the singular. (*deer*, *sheep*, *fish*, *series*)
3. Some nouns are uncountable. They represent things that cannot be counted. For example, we cannot count *coffee*. We can count “cups of *coffee*” or “pounds of *coffee*,” but we cannot count *coffee* itself. Here are more examples of uncountable nouns:

music, art, love, happiness, advice, information, news, furniture, luggage, rice, sugar, butter, water, electricity, gas, money

We usually treat uncountable nouns as singular.

Incorrect: *These furnitures are beautiful.*

Correct: *This furniture is beautiful.*

4. Some uncountable nouns refer to abstract ideas or emotions. Abstract ideas may refer to qualities that we cannot physically touch. For example: *health, justice*.

We cannot count abstract nouns, so they are always singular.

Incorrect: *Healths are more important than wealths.*

Correct: *Health is more important than wealth.*

Incorrect: *Have funs at the reunion.*

Correct: *Have fun at the reunion.*

5. Some nouns can be countable *and* uncountable, for example: *paper, room, hair, noise, time*. With these nouns, the singular and plural forms often have different meanings.

Countable: *The Christmas lights make the mall very pretty.*

Uncountable: *This room does not get enough light.*

Countable: *Othello is one of Shakespeare's most famous works.*

Uncountable: *I have a lot of work to do tonight.*

6. Singular nouns that are countable usually come after an article or other determiner (*a, an, the, this, my, such*).

Incorrect: *His mother is doctor.*

Incorrect: *Boy standing over there is brother.*

Incorrect: *We saw child in playground.*

Correct: *His mother is a doctor.*

Correct: *The boy standing over there is my brother.*

Correct: *We saw a child in the playground.*

Summary: Nouns are important words in a sentence because they form the subjects or objects. Some nouns can be counted and some cannot. Learning a few rules will help you to use nouns effectively.

Verb Forms

Verbs are parts of speech that express action (*jump, show*) or a state of being (*are, was*). Here are a few tips that may help you to use verbs effectively:

1. Helping verbs (also called *auxiliary verbs*) precede the main verb. All of the following verbs may be helping verbs:

be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been, has, have, had, do, does, did, can, will, shall, should, could, would, may, might, must

Here are examples of sentences with helping verbs:

Many people don't know what they are going to do after college.

I am going to give you step-by-step instructions.

2. Words such as *might, must, can, would, and should* are also called modals. They express a wide range of meanings (ability, permission, possibility, necessity, etc.).

The following examples show one use of modals:

Tom might have gone to the party if he had been invited.

If I had a million dollars, I would buy a house for my parents.

This use of modals is called the conditional use. One event relies on another or it cannot take place. In the first example, Tom cannot go to the party without being invited. In the second example, I would buy a house for my parents only if I had a million dollars.

3. The infinitive form of the verb is formed by using the word *to* plus the simple form of the verb.

He is too tired to go to the barbecue.

The manager wants to hire a new secretary.

The infinitive can also be used as the subject or object of a sentence.

To invest now seems risky.

The teacher told him to leave.

In the first example, *To invest* is the subject of the sentence, while in the second example, *to leave* is the object.

We can use the infinitive to show an action that is occurring at the same time as, or later than, the action of the main verb.

We like to play video games.

My best friend wants to shop at that mall.

In the first example, the *liking* is happening at the same time as the *playing*. In the second example, the *shopping* is going to happen at a later time than the *wanting*.

4. Do not use *of* after a helping verb. In some verb phrases, there are two or more verbs being used (*should have happened*, *might be eaten*, *could have decided*). Here are examples in which the word *of* is used incorrectly:

Incorrect: *They would of stayed one more month if possible.*

Incorrect: *In that time, he could of finished the project.*

Correct: *They would have stayed one more month if possible.*

Correct: *In that time, he could have finished the project.*

Of is a preposition, not a verb, and in each of these sentences, *of* should be replaced with the helping verb *have*.

Summary: Verbs are very important parts of a sentence. There are a few rules that you can learn to make your use of verbs more effective.

Subject-Verb Agreement

In English, the subject and verb must always agree in number. Here are a few rules that will help you:

1. A singular subject takes a singular verb.

The teacher was happy with my answer.

My cell phone is not working.

In the first example, the singular subject *teacher* agrees with the singular verb *was*. In the second example, the singular subject *cell phone* agrees with the singular verb *is*.

2. A plural subject takes a plural verb.

My parents were happy with my grades.

Many television stations have reported that story.

In the first example, the plural subject *parents* matches the plural verb *were*, and in the second example, the plural subject *television stations* matches the plural verb *have*.

You should never have a plural subject with a singular verb.

Incorrect: *Many students thinks tomorrow is a holiday.*

This sentence can be edited to make the subject and verb agree.

Correct: *Many students think tomorrow is a holiday.*

Similarly, you should never have a singular subject with a plural verb.

Incorrect: *The student think tomorrow is a holiday.*

This sentence can be edited to make the subject and verb agree.

Correct: *The student thinks tomorrow is a holiday.*

3. Sometimes subjects and verbs are separated by a word or a phrase. When that happens, students sometimes forget to make them agree in number.

Incorrect: *Your suggestions about the show was excellent.*

Incorrect: *The use of cell phones during concerts are not allowed.*

Correct: *Your suggestions about the show were excellent.*

Correct: *The use of cell phones during concerts is not allowed.*

In the first example, since the subject of the sentence is *suggestions*, which is plural, the plural verb *were* is used. In the second example, the singular subject *use* needs the singular verb *is*.

4. A compound subject needs a plural verb.

When you proofread your work, correctly identify the subject in your sentences. For example, the following sentences have more than one subject:

The camcorder and the tripod were returned yesterday.

Both Chantel and Rochelle are nice names.

In the first example, the complete subject is a compound (*camcorder* and *tripod*), and so the verb must be plural (*were*). In the second example, the compound subject is *Chantel and Rochelle* and needs the plural verb *are*.

5. A collective noun must have a verb that agrees with it. Collective nouns are nouns that name a group (*committee, herd, board of directors*). In American English, collective nouns are usually singular.

Correct: *The committee is made up of twelve people.*

Correct: *The jury has not arrived at a verdict.*

When you use a collective noun to refer to a group acting as an individual unit, you should make the verb singular. In the first example, the subject (*committee*) is singular, so it takes the singular verb *is*. In the second example, the singular subject (*jury*) takes the singular verb *has*.

However, sometimes you might want to emphasize that the group acted as individuals, each for himself or herself. Then you could write the following:

Awkward: *The committee were divided in their opinions.*

Awkward: *The jury have been listening to the tapes for two days.*

In these examples, the individuals in the groups are emphasized, so the plural verbs are used. However, while correct, these sentences sound awkward. You might want to change the word *committee* to *committee members* in the first example, and the word *jury* to *jury members* in the second example.

Summary: A verb should always agree with its subject. A singular subject takes a singular verb, and a plural subject takes a plural verb. Sometimes a phrase separates the subject and the verb, making it hard to find the real subject.

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of one or more nouns. Pronouns are words such as *he, his, she, her, hers, it, they, their, them, these, that, this, those, who, whom, which, what, and whose*.

If we did not have pronouns, we would have to repeat a lot of nouns. We would have to say things like:

Do you like the new manager? I don't like the new manager. The new manager is too unfriendly.

With pronouns, we can say the following:

Do you like the new manager? I don't like him. He is too unfriendly.

Learning a few rules will help you to use pronouns correctly and effectively:

1. Pronouns must agree with the nouns they refer to. If your pronoun refers to a girl or woman, you use a feminine pronoun (*she, her, hers*). If your pronoun refers to a boy or man, you use a masculine pronoun (*he, his, him*).

Any pronoun you use must also agree in number with the noun it refers to. If you are using a pronoun to refer to a singular noun, you must use a singular pronoun; if you are using a pronoun to replace a plural noun, you use a plural pronoun.

Julia reminded us that she would not stay late.

Bob bought two computers and had them delivered to his office.

In the first example, the singular pronoun *she* is used to stand for *Julia*, a female person. In the second example, the plural pronoun *them* is used to refer to the plural noun *computers*.

2. Some indefinite pronouns are always singular. Indefinite pronouns such as *each*, *one*, *every*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *anyone*, *anybody*, *anything*, *someone*, *somebody*, *either*, *neither*, *nothing*, *nobody*, *none*, and *no one* are always singular, so other pronouns that refer to them must also be singular, as in these examples:

Neither of the boys sent in his report.

Everyone must buy her own ticket.

Note the construction of the second sentence, in which the writer decided to use the pronoun *her*. Some people would prefer the pronoun to be *his* or *her* to indicate explicitly that each person, regardless of gender, is purchasing a ticket. Some instructors consider *his* or *her* constructions awkward and allow *everyone* to be treated as plural (*Everyone must buy their own ticket.*). Other instructors consider the plural construction not acceptable in good writing.

3. Some indefinite pronouns are always plural. These include *both* and *many*. Other pronouns that refer to *them* must also be plural.

Both of them are here tonight.

Many of the managers have moved into their new offices.

In the first example, *both* is plural, and so the plural pronoun *them* is used. In the second example, the plural pronoun *their* is used because *many* is plural.

4. Some indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural. Indefinite pronouns such as *all*, *any*, *more*, *most*, *none*, and *some* can be singular or plural, depending on their meaning in a context.

Most of my time is spent reviewing for the test.

Most of the students have turned in their reports.

In the first example, *most* refers to *time*, a singular noun. It thus takes the singular verb *is*. In the second example, *most* refers to the plural noun *students*. This is why it takes the plural verb *have* and is referred to by the plural pronoun *their*.

5. Overusing pronouns can cause confusion.

Confusing: *The president informed the vice president that all of his supporters should be meeting with him.*

Whose supporters, the president's or the vice president's? Whom are they meeting with? This sentence needs to be revised to fix the confusion caused by the use of *him* and *his*. This can be accomplished by replacing the pronouns with the appropriate nouns.

Clear: *The president informed the vice president that all of the president's supporters should be meeting with the president.*

Excessive use of *it* weakens writing, especially when *it* is used to introduce a sentence, as in this example:

Confusing: *We were visiting the museum. I saw it. It was interesting and unusual. I was amazed by it.*

You can improve *it* by explaining what the first *it* refers to.

Clear: *We were visiting the museum. I saw the space exhibit. It was interesting and unusual. I was amazed by it.*

In this example, can you figure out what *it* stands for?

Although the car hit the tree, it was not damaged.

Does *it* refer to the car or the tree? You can make the sentence clear by rewriting it.

The car was not damaged, although it hit the tree.

6. When you have nouns joined by a conjunction (*and*, *or*, or *nor*), do not forget to make a pronoun that refers to them agree in number, as in these examples:

If Bob and Rick want to go, they will need to take the bus because I don't have room in my car.

Whether I buy a dishwasher or dryer, it will have to go in the kitchen.

In the first example, there is a compound noun, as *Bob* and *Rick* are joined by the conjunction *and*. So the plural pronoun *they* must be used. In the second example, the noun is singular (*dishwasher* or *dryer*). Thus the singular pronoun *it* is used.

7. You should know when to use *who*, *whom*, *which*, or *that*. *Who* and *whom* refer to people. *Which* refers to things, and *that* can refer to either people or things.

The committee interviewed all the candidates who applied.

Do you still have the magazine that I lent you last week?

Which courses should I take in the fall?

In the first example, *who* refers to a group of people (*candidates*). In the second example, *that* refers to a thing (*magazine*). In the third example, *which* refers to things (*courses*).

Summary: A pronoun is a word used to take the place of one or more nouns. Singular pronouns must be used to refer to singular nouns, and plural pronouns must be used to refer to plural nouns. Some indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, according to their meaning in the sentence.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are used to show possession or ownership. Here are a few rules that will help you to use possessive pronouns effectively:

1. When you are using possessive pronouns such as *his*, *hers*, *mine*, *theirs*, *yours*, or *ours*, make sure that the possessive pronoun agrees in number with the noun to which it refers.

Incorrect: *I have my car, and my husband has theirs.*

Incorrect: *This is the children's room. All those toys are hers.*

Correct: *I have my car, and my husband has his.*

Correct: *This is the children's room. All those toys are theirs.*

In the first sentence, the singular pronoun *his* should be used to show that the car belongs to the singular noun *husband*. In the second sentence, *theirs* should be used to show that the toys belong to the plural noun *children*.

2. Possessive pronouns do not take an apostrophe. *His*, *hers*, *its*, *ours*, *yours*, *theirs*, and *whose* are pronouns that already convey possession, so do not add an apostrophe to them.

Incorrect: *Each art room has it's own sink.*

Incorrect: *His' office is on the third floor.*

Correct: *Each art room has its own sink.*

Correct: *His office is on the third floor.*

In the first sentence, a possessive pronoun is needed (*its*) not *it's*, which means "it is." In the second sentence, the possessive pronoun *his* is needed; *his'* is never used.

Other Ways to Show Possession

Besides possessive pronouns, there are other ways to show possession, such as using an apostrophe and an -s (-'s).

My neighbor's house is bigger than mine.

Henry's cat likes to play with our baby.

Below are some rules for indicating possession:

1. When a noun ends in -s and the addition of -'s makes the word sound odd, some writers add only an apostrophe, as in these examples:

I like James' company.

This is Harris' wife, Anna.

2. Make sure you put the apostrophe in the right place. Put the apostrophe *before* the -s if the word is singular.

The teacher's desk is right in front. (one teacher)

My sister's haircut cost \$70. (one sister)

You will put the apostrophe *after* the -s only if it is a plural word.

We borrowed our parents' car. (more than one parent)

I went to a party at my friends' house. (more than one friend)

3. When two or more people share ownership, you use an apostrophe and -s on the last noun. When each person has separate ownership, you need to indicate that, as in these examples:

John and Jack's room is very messy. (John and Jack share one room.)

Ian's and George's dreams are very different, even though the two boys come from the same family. (Ian and George have different dreams.)

4. Do not use an apostrophe when you want to make a noun plural. An apostrophe shows possession, not the plural of a noun. These sentences are wrong: they should not have apostrophes:

The new student's look confused.

There are too many car's on our street's.

Summary: Possessive pronouns are used to show possession, or ownership. There are a few rules that can help you to use them correctly.

Prepositions

A preposition is a word that is used before a noun (or noun phrase) to give more information in a sentence. Prepositions are usually used to show where something is located or when something happened. Examples of prepositions include *in, among, between, across, at, with, beside, behind, in, into, from, during, before, and after*.

Prepositions are used to show place, time, and action or movement.

- Place:

The main office is in New York.

I'm meeting my colleagues at the coffee shop.

- Time:

Let's try to get there by 3:30.

Please do not talk during the show.

- Action or movement:

He jumped into the river.

We flew from Los Angeles to Toronto.

Some verbs and adjectives are usually followed by certain prepositions.

They always argue about money.

I borrowed a book from the library.

Here are more examples of words and prepositions that usually go together:

familiar with, afraid of, far from, close to, believe in, borrow from, lend to, absent from, nice to, argue with, made of, take off, turn on, happy with, sad about, famous for

The following sentences contain *incorrect* uses of prepositions:

Incorrect: *I am afraid at losing my textbooks.*

Incorrect: *The student argued at the teacher.*

Correct: *I am afraid of losing my textbooks.*

Correct: *The student argued with the teacher.*

The first sentence can be corrected by changing *at* to *of*. In the second sentence, the preposition that should go with *argued* is *with*.

Summary: Prepositions are used to show relationships between a noun and other parts of a sentence. There are a few rules that can help you to use prepositions correctly.

Other Errors

Wrong or Missing Word

When writing or typing quickly, people often use the wrong word or omit words. When you begin to revise, edit, and proofread, read carefully for wrong words or words that you have left out.

One of the most frequent problems is the use of *the* instead of *they*.

Incorrect: *The went to the store each Monday.*

The writer most likely intended the following:

Correct: *They went to the store each Monday.*

Another common error is a missing noun after the word *the*.

Incorrect: The go to the store each Monday.

Correct: The brothers go to the store each Monday.

Summary: Wrong or missing words commonly occur but are easy to correct. Proofread your sentences carefully.

Keyboard Errors or Typos

Sometimes while writing the first drafts of an essay, you might leave out letters or make keyboard errors. They might be grammatical, usage, or mechanics errors, or they could be omitted letters or typos. Proofread carefully to correct these errors when you edit and revise your writing.

Usage

This section provides information on the following usage errors:

- Article or Determiner Errors
- Confused Words
- Wrong Form of Word
- Faulty Comparison
- Nonstandard Verb or Word Form

Article or Determiner Errors

This section features rules and explanations for using articles and includes examples of how articles are used correctly when you are writing in English.

What Are Articles?

A, *an*, and *the* are called *articles*. These are words that come before a noun or its modifier. (A *modifier* is a word that makes a noun clearer or more specific. Modifiers tell how many or which one.)

<i>a</i> thinker	<i>an</i> apple	<i>the</i> house
<i>a</i> car	<i>an</i> old house	<i>the</i> newspapers

There are two types of articles in English. *A* and *an* are called indefinite articles. *The* is called a definite article.

When to Use *a* or *an*

A or *an* is used before a *singular* noun when the noun refers to *any* member of a group.

James must write *an essay* for his writing class today.

A newspaper is a good source of information on current events.

If the noun or the modifier that follows the article begins with a consonant sound, you should use the article *a*.

a basketball *a* new automobile

On the other hand, if the noun or its modifier begins with a vowel sound—*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*—you should use the article *an*.

an elephant *an* old truck

A/an is used before a noun if the noun can be counted. For example:

I received *a letter* from my sister.

Sending *an e-mail* is a fast way to communicate with classmates.

Sometimes a noun or a modifier can begin with a vowel *letter* but not a vowel *sound*. For example, here the vowel *o* in the word *one* sounds like the consonant *w* in *won*:

This will be *a* one-time charge to your account.

When to Use *the*

The is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is a particular or specific noun. Use the article *the* if you can answer the question “Which one?” or “What?”

The art class that I want to take is taught by a famous painter.

The students in Ms. Jones’s class do not want to participate in *the debate*.

In addition, *the* is used in the following ways:

- To refer to things known to everyone (*the* sky, *the* stars)
- To refer to things that are unique (*the* White House)
- To refer to time (*the* past, *the* present, *the* future)

When Not to Use an Article

A/an is not used before a noun if the noun cannot be counted.

I like to drink milk. (*Milk* is not counted.)

If a quantity of milk is specified, then the article would be used.

I like to drink *a glass of milk* before I go to bed.

Sometimes nouns used to represent abstract general concepts (such as anger, beauty, love, or employment) do not take *a* or *an* before them.

Love is a difficult emotion to describe in words.

Money alone cannot buy happiness.

The is not used when a plural noun is used in a general sense.

Computers are helpful tools for student writers. (*Computers* refers to the general concept of computers, not to specific computers.)

The computers in that classroom are used for writing class. (*The computers* refers to a specific set of computers.)

Other Determiner Errors

The adjectives *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* modify nouns that follow them by telling “which one.” These adjectives must agree in number with the nouns they modify. *This* and *that* are used to describe a singular noun. *These* and *those* are used to describe plural nouns.

Incorrect: *I would buy these house for those reason.*

Incorrect: *This kinds of technologies will affect people's behavior.*

Correct: *I would buy this house for that reason.*

Correct: *These kinds of technologies will affect people's behavior.*

Confused Words

This section explains how to avoid errors involving confused words such as homonyms and words with similar sounds and spellings.

Homonyms

Certain words are known as *homonyms*. These are words that sound the same but differ in meaning, spelling, or usage. Homonyms can be of two types: words that are spelled alike and words that sound alike. Words that are spelled alike but differ in meaning are called *homographs*. An example of a homograph is the word *bear*, which can mean a type of animal or the verb *bear*, which means “to carry.” Words that sound alike but differ in meaning and spelling are called *homophones*. The words *whole* and *hole* are homophones. *Whole* is an adjective meaning “complete,” and *hole* is a noun meaning “an empty place.” What follows are examples of some common homonyms. Always check your writing to make sure you are using the appropriate words.

here *adverb* meaning “in this place”

*We have been waiting **here** for an hour.*

hear *verb* meaning “to listen”

*Do you **hear** the birds singing?*

hole *noun* meaning "an empty place"

*The children dug a big **hole** in their sandbox.*

whole *adjective* meaning "with no part removed or left out; complete"

*Our **whole** project will involve cooperation from everyone.*

its *pronoun* possessive form of *it*

*The kitten hurt **its** paw.*

it's contraction of *it is*

***It's** not fair to leave her behind.*

know *verb* meaning "to feel certain, or to recognize"

*Do you **know** how to get to the subway?*

no *adverb* used as a denial or refusal

*The employee said **no** to the job offer.*

knew *verb* past tense of the verb *to know*

*The boy **knew** how to count to ten.*

new *adjective* meaning "not old"

*At the start of the school year, the students bought **new** books.*

desert *noun* meaning "a dry and sandy place"

*It rarely rains in the **desert**.*

desert *verb* meaning "to abandon"

*The officer commanded the troops to not **desert** their posts.*

dessert *noun* meaning "the final course of a meal"

*After a big meal, I enjoy a simple **dessert** of vanilla ice cream.*

to *preposition* meaning "toward"

*The man pointed **to** the sky.*

two *adjective or pronoun* meaning "the number 2"

*Five is **two** more than three.*

too *adverb* meaning "also"

*Tom and Eleanor wanted to go with them **too**.*

they're contraction meaning "they are"

***They're** both coming to the party.*

their possessive pronoun meaning "belonging to them"

*That is **their** blue house on the corner.*

there adverb meaning "at that place"

*Did you see anyone you knew **there**?*

through adverb meaning "completed, or finished"

*When she was **through** eating, she put her plate in the sink.*

threw past tense of the verb *throw*, meaning "tossed"

*The boy **threw** the ball to his sister.*

Other Confused Words

Besides homonyms, other words are confused in English because they are similar in spelling, sound, or meaning. Examples of some commonly confused words include *accept/except*, *advice/advise*, *affect/effect*, and *loose/lose*. Computer spell-checkers will not catch these words if you have misused them. When you review your work, proofread to see whether you have used the correct word. Even native speakers of English often make mistakes with confused words when they are writing, especially when they are in a hurry. Review the meanings of some commonly confused words.

accept verb meaning "to receive; to agree, or to take what is offered"

*I **accept** your kind invitation.*

except preposition meaning "other than, or leaving out; excluding"

*Everyone **except** Phil can attend the conference.*

advice noun meaning "an opinion given about what to do or how to behave"

*He has always given me valuable **advice** regarding my future plans.*

advise verb meaning "to recommend or counsel"

*I **advise** you to stay in school and study hard.*

affect verb meaning "to influence, or to produce an effect on"

*The weather can **affect** a person's mood.*

effect noun meaning "result"

*When students study for tests, they see a positive **effect** on their test results.*

effect verb meaning "to bring about"

*The governor can **effect** change in state education policies.*

loose *adjective* meaning “detached, not rigidly fixed; not tight”

*She lost her bracelet because it was too **loose** on her wrist.*

lose *verb* meaning “to be deprived, or to no longer have; to not win”

*If you don't pay attention to the signs, you might **lose** your way.*

quiet *adjective* meaning “not loud or noisy”

*Please be **quiet** when other people are speaking.*

quit *verb* meaning “to give up or abandon; to stop”

*The boys will **quit** their jobs the week before school starts.*

quite *adverb* meaning “to some extent”

*Moving to a new city will be **quite** a change for my family.*

sense *noun* meaning “consciousness, awareness, or rationality; the faculty of perceiving by means of sense organs”

*My brother had the good **sense** to keep out of trouble.*

*The doctor explained that my **sense** of smell is not functioning well.*

since *adverb* meaning “from a definite past time until now”; *conjunction* meaning “later than”

*Ginny has lived in the same house ever **since** she moved to town.*

*Karl has worked as an accountant **since** graduating from college.*

than *conjunction* used when comparing two elements

*Her puppy is smaller **than** mine.*

then *adverb* meaning “at that time, or next”

*First I will stop at the store, and **then** I will go home.*

These are just a few examples of words that are often confused in English. When you are unsure of the proper usage of a word, consult an English dictionary.

Wrong Form of Word

When you write quickly, sometimes you use a word form that is different from the one that you intended to use. One reason why this error occurs is that a word can be used in different ways in a sentence depending on its purpose.

When you revise, read your writing very carefully to find these errors. You can also get someone else to read your work and to help you see where you are not clear. Here are examples of wrong word forms that can occur:

Incorrect: *But certain types of businesses will continue to grow to an extend, he thinks.*

Extend is a verb, and this writer meant to use the noun *extent*.

Correct: *But certain types of businesses will continue to grow to an extent, he thinks.*

Here is another example of a wrong word form in a sentence:

Incorrect: *I want to work with children who are disable.*

This writer should revise *disable* to *disabled*.

Correct: *I want to work with children who are disabled.*

Learning the parts of speech can teach you how each functions in a sentence. Proofreading your own work can help you correct these errors as well.

Faulty Comparison

A faulty comparison error occurs when the word *more* is used within a comparison with a word that ends in *-er*, or when the word *most* is used within a comparison with a word that ends in *-est*.

Incorrect: *The boy with the red hair is more taller than the girl with the black hair.*

Incorrect: *James thinks that Mary is the most prettiest girl in school.*

To avoid making these kinds of errors in your writing, you should review the following rules:

When comparing one thing with another, add the ending *-er* to short words (usually of one syllable).

Correct: *The boy with the red hair is taller than the girl with the black hair.*

Correct: *Today it is hot, but yesterday it was even hotter.*

When comparing three or more things, add the ending *-est* to short words (usually of one syllable).

Correct: *The girl in the back of the room is the tallest girl in her entire class.*

Correct: *Yesterday was the hottest day ever recorded by the National Weather Service.*

In many cases, with words of two or more syllables, you do not add *-er* or *-est* to the word; instead, use the word *more* before the word when comparing two things, and use the word *most* when comparing three or more things.

Correct: *The judges must decide which of the two remaining singers is more talented.*

Correct: *Of the three new students, John is the most intelligent.*

Comparisons that are negative use *less* for comparisons of two things and *least* for comparisons of three or more things.

Correct: *The third-floor apartment is less costly than the first-floor apartment.*

Correct: *Of the three colleges that I've visited, this one is the least expensive.*

Nonstandard Verb or Word Form

The words you use in everyday conversation are often different from the words you use in standard written English. While a reader might understand these informal words—*gotta*, *gonna*, *wanna*, *kinda*—you should not write them in an essay. Here are two examples of nonstandard words used in sentences:

Nonstandard: *I told her I gotta go to school now.*

Correct: *I told her I have got to go to school now.*

Nonstandard: *Do you wanna go to college?*

Correct: *Do you want to go to college?*

Even though you can understand what the writer means, the words *gotta* and *wanna* do not exist in standard written English.

Mechanics

This section provides information on the following types of mechanics errors:

- Capitalization
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Other Errors

Capitalization

To *capitalize* means to use capital letters. Below are some guidelines for capitalization:

1. Capitalize the first word of every sentence.

He is the most famous director in Hollywood right now. No doubt about it.

Give it to me. It looks like mine.

2. Capitalize all proper nouns; for example, names of individuals, titles, and places.

Francis Lloyd Mantel lives on Moore Street.

The class is reading Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

In the first example, “Francis Lloyd Mantel” is the name of an individual, so it is capitalized. “Moore Street” is the name of a place, so it is also a proper noun. The second example contains the title of a book, so it is capitalized.

All names are proper nouns and must be capitalized. Other examples:

- Names of institutions, places, and geographical areas

She is a new faculty member at Stanford University.

Their main office is in New Delhi, India.

- Names of historical events, days, months, and holidays

Martin Luther King Day is a school holiday.

Classes don't meet until October.

- Names of languages and proper adjectives

He speaks Spanish and Italian fluently.

They teach Korean dances at the academy.

- The first-person pronoun *I* is always capitalized, even when it is in the middle of a sentence.

It is I who sent you that letter.

They told me that I should call for an appointment.

- Capitalize words such as *father*, *mother*, *aunt*, and *uncle* when used with proper names or when addressing a particular person.

Aunt Bessie and Uncle Jesse just bought a country house.

Yes, Mom, I'm going after dinner.

However, when these words are used with possessive pronouns, they are not proper names and therefore are not capitalized.

My father is not at home.

Their mother is my aunt.

In the above examples, *father*, *mother*, and *aunt* are not capitalized because they are used with the possessive pronouns *my* and *their*.

Summary: In English, the first letter of the first word in a sentence is always capitalized. You must also capitalize all proper nouns. Proper nouns include all names and titles. The first-person pronoun *I* is always capitalized too.

Spelling

English spelling rules are complex. Here are a few rules that may help you:

- Write *i* before *e* (fiery, friend, dried), except
 - after *c* (receive)
 - with syllables sounding like *a* as in neighbor (weigh, heir)

Note these examples:

All applicants will receive a response within three weeks.

The breakfast special is fried eggs and sausage.

Adding Endings to Words

2. If a word ends with a silent *-e*, drop the *-e* when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel (for example, the *-ing* suffix). However, do *not* drop the *-e* when the suffix begins with a consonant (for example, the *-ful* suffix).

I like to skate. I enjoy skating.

I could use a dictionary. A dictionary is very useful.

In the first example (*skate-skating*), the *-e* is dropped because the *-ing* suffix begins with the vowel *i*. In the second example, the *-e* is not dropped, because the *-ful* suffix begins with the consonant *f*.

3. When *-y* is the last letter in a word and the letter before *-y* is a consonant, drop *-y* and add *-i* before adding a suffix.

The beaches in Thailand are extremely beautiful.

They hurried to the gate because they were so late.

In both examples, the *-y* is replaced with *-i* (*beauty-beautiful*; *hurry-hurried*).

4. When forming the plural of a word that ends with a *-y* preceded by a vowel, just add *-s*. But if the letter before *-y* is a consonant, drop *-y* and add *-ie* before adding the *-s*.

FAO Schwartz is a famous toy store. It sells all kinds of toys.

Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

In the first example, the letter *o* (a vowel) comes before *-y*. So you need to add only *-s* to form the plural noun. But in the second example, in the word *lady*, the letter *d* (a consonant) comes before *-y*. You have to drop *-y* and add *-ies* to make the word plural.

5. When a word ends in a consonant preceded by one vowel, double the final consonant before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel.

The children swim at the community pool. They love swimming.

You should begin at the beginning. Start by writing the title.

In the first example, the word *swim* ends with the letter *m*. In the second example, the word *begin* ends with the letter *n*. Both *m* and *n* are consonants. When adding *-ing*, a suffix starting with a vowel, you just need to double the final consonant.

Remember: when the ending begins with a vowel and the word ends in an *-e*, do not double the consonant. Instead, drop the *-e* and add the ending.

Incorrect: *The children go skatting in the winter.*

Correct: *The children go skating in the winter.*

The following examples contain *incorrect* spelling:

Incorrect: *We visited the monkey house at the zoo. There were monkies from all over the world.*

Incorrect: *My neice is a student in your class.*

In the first sentence, the plural form of *monkey* is *monkeys*. This is because when forming the plural of a word that ends with a *-y* preceded by a vowel, you should just add *-s*. In the second sentence, *niece* is the correct spelling. Remember, “*i* before *e* except **after** *c*” is a very useful rule!

Correct: *We visited the monkey house at the zoo. There were monkeys from all over the world.*

Correct: *My niece is a student in your class.*

These are all useful rules for learning English spelling. However, there are also some exceptions that are not covered by these rules, so it is a good idea to learn a few strategies for spelling as well.

For example, there are times when we make mistakes because we type too fast. It is easy to make the following errors on the computer:

Incorrect: *A letter from her former neighbor came in the mail today.*

Incorrect: *Becuase I lost my homework, I had to do it again.*

Both sentences contain typos, or mistakes we make when we type. One strategy for dealing with typos is to use the spell-check function on the computer.

However, there are mistakes that will not be caught by the spell-checker. For example:

Incorrect: *Would you know weather he is at work today?*

Incorrect: *Are their any good Indian restaurants in this area?*

In these examples, although the underlined word is a correct spelling (of a homophone), it is not the correct spelling of the word intended in the sentence. The spell-checker will not be able to find such errors, so after spell-checking, you should check for these errors as you read each sentence for meaning.

Another strategy is to keep a list of words that you often misspell. Memorize as many as you can. Check your writing specifically for these words.

You could also use a dictionary while you write to check the spelling of words that you are unsure of.

Summary: English spelling is complex and may sometimes seem strange. There are rules that can be memorized and learned, and there are strategies that can help

you to spell better. For example, use a dictionary and the spell-check function on your computer.

Punctuation

Punctuation refers to the use of punctuation marks. Some punctuation marks, such as the *apostrophe*, are used with individual words. Some, such as *commas*, are used either to separate parts of sentences or to separate digits in numbers. Others, such as *periods*, *question marks*, and *exclamation points*, are used to separate sentences. They help us to make the meaning of our sentences clear.

Apostrophe

Use an apostrophe when you write a contraction. A contraction is the joining of two words by eliminating some letters and adding an apostrophe. It is a kind of short form. For example, *can't* is the contraction of *cannot*, *shouldn't* is the contraction of *should not*, and *let's* is the contraction of *let us*. Other contractions are *won't*, *it's*, *wouldn't*, and *couldn't*.

They won't be able to enter without their tickets.

We could hear them, but we couldn't see them.

In the first example, *won't* is the contraction of *will not*, and in the second sentence, *couldn't* is the contraction of *could not*.

Some people write contractions without the apostrophe. They are incorrect. The following sentence shows an incorrect use of a contraction:

Incorrect: Lets go to the park tomorrow.

Correct: Let's go to the park tomorrow.

Let's is the contraction of *let us*. Without the apostrophe, the word means "allows," as in this sentence:

Correct: She lets us use the computer when she's not using it.

In order to be used correctly, the apostrophe must be in the proper position. Below are examples of misplaced apostrophes:

Incorrect: We could'nt understand the lecture.

Incorrect: Students were'nt in school in the summer.

Correct: We couldn't understand the lecture.

Correct: Students weren't in school in the summer.

Note that the apostrophe should replace the vowel that is being deleted.

Summary: The apostrophe is used to show contraction and possession. For other uses of the apostrophe, refer to the section "Possessive Pronouns."

Comma

The comma is the most common form of punctuation within a sentence. It is a signal for the reader to pause. In fact, if you read the examples below carefully, you will notice a natural pause where the commas are situated.

Learning a few basic rules will help you to use the comma effectively:

1. Use a comma and conjunction (such as *and* or *but*) to join two clauses in a compound sentence.

The causes of the civil war were many, and the effects of the war were numerous.

The experiment was incomplete, but the lessons learned were important.

In the above examples, because the two clauses are independent clauses (or complete sentences) joined together by a conjunction, they need a comma between them.

2. Use a comma to connect words to the beginning or end of your sentence. We often add information to our sentences by attaching one or more words to the beginning or end. When you do that, you can use a comma to help your reader find your main message.

Last night, my friend and I celebrated his 58th birthday.

Many years ago, I studied French and German.

Each of these sentences begins with a phrase that indicates time. This information is separated from the main sentence by a comma.

3. Use a comma between each item of a list when you are listing three or more items in a sentence.

The flag was red, white, and blue.

I bought milk, bread, cheese, and butter.

The commas in the above examples clearly mark where one item on the list ends and the next one begins.

4. Use a comma between adjectives. If you have two adjectives together before the noun they describe, they must be separated by a comma.

The cold, wintry wind chilled me to my bones.

The complex, diverse cultures in the city add to its excitement.

In the above examples, the adjectives describing *wind* and *cultures* are placed before the noun, separated by commas.

5. Use commas to set off additional information in the middle of a sentence. Some information, often telling details about the subject of the sentence, needs to be distinguished from the rest of the sentence (the verb and object). We place commas before and after these groups of words.

Ms. Johnson, the company president, will announce the winner.

My brother Tom, who loves to read, uses the library every day.

In the above examples, if you take away the parts that are set off by commas, you still have a complete sentence.

6. Use commas to separate quoted matter from the rest of the sentence.

"Take a break," said the instructor.

Nancy announces, "I'm getting married tomorrow."

In each example, the quotation is set apart from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

7. Use commas to set off the name of a state or country when it follows a city, county, or equivalent.

The newspaper is based in Chicago, Illinois.

Her flight to Beijing, China, took twelve hours.

In the above examples, the comma is used to set off the name of a state or country from a city within it.

8. In written American English, use commas to set off numbers in groups of four or more digits and between the words for the day, month, and year of a date.

He won \$1,000,000 in the lottery.

The date is March 15, 2003.

In the first example, commas are used because of the numbers (of four or more digits). In the second example, it is used in a date.

The following sentences are missing commas:

Incorrect: *Conrad Redding the father of the bride cried at the wedding.*

Incorrect: *In conclusion I believe that technology will be the main factor affecting life in the twenty-first century.*

In the first sentence, "the father of the bride" should be set off by a pair of commas. In the second sentence, there should be a comma after "In conclusion."

Correct: *Conrad Redding, the father of the bride, cried at the wedding.*

Correct: *In conclusion, I believe that technology will be the main factor affecting life in the twenty-first century.*

Summary: Commas are used to separate parts of sentences and make meaning clearer. There are rules that can help you to use commas more effectively.

Hyphen

The hyphen is the punctuation mark used to join two words together to form a compound word. The most common uses of hyphens are as part of an adjective phrase, in numbers that are spelled out, and as prefixes.

1. Hyphens with compound adjectives. Use a hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single adjective *before* a noun. For example:

His uncle is a well-known author.

However, when compound adjectives come *after* a noun, they are not hyphenated. For example:

The author is well known for his mystery stories.

2. Hyphens with compound numbers. A hyphen should be used in fractions and in the numbers twenty-one and above.

The cup is three-quarters full.

Our teacher is sixty-three years old.

In the above examples, the compound numbers are joined with hyphens.

3. Hyphens with prefixes. A *prefix* is a syllable or word added to the beginning of another word to change its meaning. The prefixes *self-*, *ex-*, and *great-* always require a hyphen when they are added to words.

The instructions are self-explanatory.

The children are with their great-grandparents.

However, for prefixes such as *dis-*, *pre-*, *re-*, and *un-*, a hyphen is normally not used.

My aunt dislikes loud music.

The answer to that question is unknown.

Summary: We use hyphens to link some compound words, but not all compound words are hyphenated. In fact, American English is tending toward using fewer and fewer hyphens. Always check a recent dictionary to be sure you are hyphenating correctly.

Final Punctuation

There are a few punctuation marks that help us to end our sentences. These are the question mark, the period, and the exclamation point.

Question Mark

Use a question mark at the end of a direct question.

When did World War II begin?

What were the key stages in the Romantic Art movement?

Period

Periods are used to mark the end of a sentence that is not a question. A period is also used at the end of an indirect question.

I just completed the project.

Cindy asked me who would be taking notes at the meeting.

Exclamation Point

Use an exclamation point after a sentence that expresses strong feeling or requires emphasis. An exclamation point also serves to make a sentence stand out.

Correct: *That was utter nonsense!*

Correct: *What absolutely gorgeous flowers! Thank you!*

The following examples contain *incorrect* use of final punctuation:

Incorrect: *Have you called Ms. Han yet.*

Incorrect: *Oh, that's an amazing story?*

The first example is a question and needs a question mark. The second example should have either an exclamation point or a period, not a question mark.

Correct: *Have you called Ms. Han yet?*

Correct: *Oh, that's an amazing story!*

Summary: Question marks, periods, and exclamation points are used to end sentences. Use question marks to end direct questions, periods to end other sentences, and exclamation points when you want to express strong emotions or emphasis. Do not use too many exclamation points in your writing, or you may sound as if you are shouting!

Other Errors

Compound Words

A *compound word* is a word that has two or more parts. For example, the word *everywhere* is made up of two distinct words: *every* and *where*. But as a compound word, *everywhere* has a new meaning that is different from the meanings of *every* and *where*. Although there are times when experts cannot agree if a word should be a compound, in most cases there are clear rules. In the following sentences, you can see where student writers make mistakes when using compound words:

Incorrect: *I work to support my self and my family.*

Incorrect: *You can learn from every thing happening today.*

In each of these sentences, compound words have been written incorrectly as two separate words. The underlined words in each sentence should be written as one compound word.

Correct: *I work to support myself and my family.*

Correct: *You can learn from everything happening today.*

Summary: In English, words, especially adjectives and nouns, are sometimes combined into compound words in a variety of ways. Compound words have a meaning that is different from the meanings of the two words that form them. Not all words can be joined this way. When you are not sure whether a word is a compound, check your dictionary.

Fused Words

Sometimes writers fuse two words together to form an incorrect compound word. The sentences below show examples of fused words:

Incorrect: *Some people say that highschool is the best time of your life.*

Incorrect: *I like to play soccer alot.*

Each of the underlined fused words should be two separate words.

Correct: *Some people say that high school is the best time of your life.*

Correct: *I like to play soccer a lot.*

Summary: When you join words together incorrectly, you get fused words. When you are not sure whether two words should be compounded, check your dictionary.

Duplicate Words

When writing a first draft, you might make errors simply because you are thinking faster than you can write or type. As a result, you might write the same word twice. Sometimes you might write two words in a row that, though different, function in the same way. It is very common for writers to type two verbs, pronouns, or articles in a row in early drafts.

Incorrect: *Sally's older sister can may help her pay for college.*

Incorrect: *He was as silly as a the clown.*

In each sentence, one of the underlined words should be deleted.

Correct: *Sally's older sister can help her pay for college.* (meaning that the sister is able to help Sally)

Correct: *Sally's older sister may help her pay for college.* (meaning that the sister might decide to help Sally)

Correct: *He was as silly as a clown.* (meaning that he generally acts clownish)

Correct: *He was as silly as the clown.* (meaning that he acts like a specific clown)

Summary: You “duplicate” when you write the same word twice or when you use two different words that serve the same function. A real duplicate is easy to correct, as the spell-checker will usually identify it. But if you have typed two words that serve the same function and are not sure which to keep, check a dictionary to help you choose the word with the most appropriate meaning.

Style

This section provides information on how you can address the following kinds of problems in writing:

- Word Repetition
- Inappropriate Words or Phrases
- Too Many Passive Sentences
- Too Many Long Sentences
- Too Many Short Sentences
- Sentences Beginning with Coordinating Conjunctions

Word Repetition

Repeating some words to emphasize your key points is a good writing technique. However, repeating the same words or sets of words too often gives your writing an immature style. It can also make your essay seem boring.

To write more effectively, try using a variety of vocabulary. Here are a few ideas that can help you:

1. Use synonyms (words that have similar meanings) to replace repeated words. For example, instead of repeating a common verb such as *make*, where appropriate, use synonyms like these:

create, produce, perform, do, execute, bring about, cause, form, manufacture, construct, build, put up, set up, put together, compose

You can find synonyms in a thesaurus.

In the following paragraph, the noun *student* is repeated too many times:

Think about this situation. A student interviewed many students about what it is like to be an only child. If the teachers in charge of the school paper did not edit names of students from the paper or facts that would give that particular student away to other students, then serious problems could be caused for the students who gave their information.

We can improve this paragraph by using a variety of other words to refer to *student*. For example:

Think about this situation. A reporter interviewed many students about what it is like to be an only child. If the teachers in charge of the school paper did not edit the individuals' names from the paper or facts that would give each person away to the readers, then serious problems could be caused for the students who gave their information.

2. Use phrases such as *the former*, *the latter*, *the first one*, and *the other* to avoid repeating the same nouns. In the following paragraph, the same names are repeated several times:

Of the two sisters, Grace is confident and at ease with everyone. Lily is shy and cautious. Grace always gets what she wants. Lily waits patiently for whatever comes her way. Grace never misses a chance to show off her many talents. Lily never says a word unless someone asks her a question.

This paragraph can be improved by using a variety of phrases:

Of the two sisters, Grace is confident and at ease with everyone. Lily is shy and cautious. The former always gets what she wants. The latter waits patiently for whatever comes her way. Grace never misses a chance to show off her many talents. Her sister never says a word unless someone asks her a question.

Summary: When you look over your writing, think about how you can replace over-used words and phrases. You can use a thesaurus to help you add variety to your writing.

Inappropriate Words or Phrases

Language that is too informal, such as slang, is not appropriate for academic writing. It is not always easy to tell when an expression is too informal. Some expressions are used so often in spoken English that we may think it is all right to use them in academic writing too.

Too informal: *No way would I ever vote.*

Much better: *There is no way I would vote.*

Too informal: *People just need to get it all together and participate in democracy.*

Much better: *People need to consider their beliefs and opinions and participate in democracy.*

Summary: Written language is usually more formal than spoken language. Try to avoid expressions that are too informal when writing academic essays.

Too Many Passive Sentences

A sentence is active when the subject is the *doer* of the action. It is passive when the subject is the *receiver* of the action.

Active sentence: Two hundred million people saw the movie.

Passive sentence: The movie was seen by 200 million people.

In the above examples, the action is *seeing*. In the active sentence, the subject (*two hundred million people*) is the doer of the action. In the passive sentence, the subject (*the movie*) is the receiver of the action.

Because passive sentences are usually longer and harder to read, using too many passive sentences can make your writing slow and uninteresting. Many experts think that passive sentences should make up only about 5 percent of your writing.

Active sentences, on the other hand, generally are clearer, are more direct, and seem stronger. However, this does not mean that you should stop using passive sentences. Appropriate use of passive sentences can make your writing more powerful.

Here are a few suggestions about when to use passive sentences:

1. When the *action* is more important than the doer

The theater was opened last month.

New students are invited to meet the dean in Room 226.

In these sentences, the theater being opened and the new students being invited are more important than the “doers” (the people who opened the theater or invited the new students). In fact, the “doers” are not important enough to mention.

2. When the *receiver* of the action is more important than the doer

Everyone was given a key to the gym.

The letters were faxed this morning.

In the first sentence, we care more about the people who were given a key than the people who were doing the giving. In the second sentence, the letters that were faxed are more important than the person who did the faxing.

3. When the *result* of the action is more important than the doer

Our advice was followed by our clients.

The new computers were installed by the systems staff.

In the first sentence, the advice being followed is more important than the people giving the advice. In the second sentence, the installation of the computers is more important than the people who installed them.

4. When you do not know who did an action, do not care, or do not want your reader to know

Passive: *A mistake was made, and all the scholarship application files were lost.*

Passive: *This report was written at the last minute.*

The active forms of these examples would be as follows:

Active: *I made a mistake and lost all the scholarship application files.*

Active: *I wrote this report at the last minute.*

If you were the person who made the mistake in the first sentence, or the person who wrote the report in the second, would you choose the active or passive voice?

5. When you want to sound objective

Using passive sentences is a common practice in scientific and technical writing. When you are reporting the results of an experiment or describing a study, it helps to sound objective and fair. Thus reports are filled with sentences like these:

The pigeons were observed over a period of three weeks.

The subjects were divided into three groups.

The use of the passive voice in lab reports also keeps the reader focused on the experiment itself, rather than on the researchers.

Summary: When you look over your writing, think about whether you have used too many passive sentences. Passive sentences are longer and more difficult to read and understand, so use them only when they help you to emphasize something important.

Too Many Long Sentences

Experts believe that the average sentence length should be between 15 and 20 words. This length allows your reader to absorb your ideas more easily. For example, the following sentence may be confusing to read because of its length:

My favorite place to visit is my grandparents' house near the lake where we love to fish and swim, and we often take the boat out on the lake.

Breaking the sentence into two (or more) can make your writing clearer and more interesting.

My favorite place to visit is my grandparents' house near the lake. We love to fish and swim there, and we often take the boat out on the lake.

Good writers usually mix longer sentences with shorter ones to make their writing more effective. You may even want to try a short sentence (or a single-

word sentence) after a few long ones to help you to emphasize what you are saying.

Benjamin Franklin, who was one of America's Founding Fathers helped write the Declaration of Independence. He also invented many things such as bifocals and the Franklin stove, and he discovered electricity. Think about that discovery. Where would we be without electricity?

In the example above, the paragraph starts with long sentences and ends with short ones. This combination makes the paragraph more lively and effective. Compare it with the paragraph below, which is made up of only long sentences:

Benjamin Franklin, who was one of America's Founding Fathers helped write the Declaration of Independence. He also invented many things such as bifocals and the Franklin stove, and he discovered electricity, which became very important to modern life.

Which paragraph do you prefer?

Summary: It is a good idea to mix long sentences with short ones. A good combination of long and short sentences makes writing lively.

Too Many Short Sentences

You may have too many short sentences in your writing. Good writing usually contains a variety of sentence lengths to make the writing more interesting. Too many short sentences often make the writing sound choppy. You should combine some of your short sentences to make the writing smoother. Here is an example of a paragraph with too many short sentences:

I knew my friends would throw me a party. It was for my birthday. There was something in the air. I felt it for a whole week before that. I was nervous. I was also very excited. I got home that night. My friends didn't disappoint me. I walked in my house. All my friends yelled, "Surprise!"

The paragraph can be improved by joining some of the short sentences using sentence connectors:

Because it was my birthday, I knew my friends would throw me a party. There was something in the air for a whole week before that. I was nervous but excited when I got home that night. I wasn't disappointed. When I walked in my house, all my friends yelled, "Surprise!"

Summary: Good writing usually contains a variety of long and short sentences. A good mix of sentence lengths makes the writing more interesting. Too many short sentences often make the writing sound choppy.

Sentences Beginning with Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions are words such as *and*, *but*, *as*, *or*, *yet*, *for*, and *nor*. They link or join thoughts together in the middle of a sentence. For example:

I love pizza, so I eat it for breakfast.

Mother drove to town to buy groceries, but she came home with a present for me.

Coordinating conjunctions can also be used to begin sentences, as in these examples:

And I didn't like parties.

So I did not do well on that test.

When you have too many sentences beginning with coordinating conjunctions, your writing becomes choppy. To make your writing smoother, use coordinating conjunctions only when joining ideas within sentences.

In the paragraph below, the writer uses a lot of coordinating conjunctions to begin sentences:

Baseball is the great American sport. And, it is thought of as a summer pastime.

So as soon as the weather turns warm, all the neighborhood kids find a field to toss a ball around. And soon they form teams and play each other. But all summer, they always find time to listen to pro games on the radio. And they watch them on TV.

The paragraph can be improved by getting rid of beginning coordinating conjunctions:

Baseball, the great American sport, is thought of as a summer pastime. As soon as the weather turns warm, the neighborhood kids find a field to toss a ball around. Soon, they form teams to play each other, but all summer, they always find time to listen to pro games on the radio and to watch them on TV.

Summary: Coordinating conjunctions are very useful for joining thoughts together in the middle of a sentence. However, try to avoid using them to begin sentences in academic writing.

Organization and Development

The purpose of this section is to explain how a strong essay is typically organized and how to develop your ideas in an essay. It will provide answers to the following questions:

Introduction

- What is an introduction?
- How do I write an introduction?

Thesis

- What is a thesis?
- How do I make sure that my reader understands my thesis?
- Do I have enough main ideas to support my thesis?

Main Ideas

- Does each of my main ideas begin with a topic sentence?
- Have I discussed each main idea completely?
- Have I arranged my ideas in an orderly manner?

Supporting Ideas

- What are some ways to develop supporting ideas?
- Have I done my best to support and develop my ideas?
- Does each of my paragraphs support and develop/explain the main idea/topic sentence?

Transitional Words and Phrases

- Do I use transitional words and phrases to take the reader from one idea to the next?

Conclusion

- What is a conclusion?
- How do I write a conclusion?

Introduction

What Is an Introduction?

An introduction is the first paragraph or two of an essay. It tells the reader what the essay is about and provides background for the thesis (main idea).

A good introductory paragraph does several things:

- It makes the reader want to read the essay.
- It tells the reader the overall topic of the essay.
- It tells the reader the main idea (thesis) of the essay.

How Do I Write an Introduction?

Introductions can be written in many different ways. Here are some ideas you can use to write a good introduction:

- Background about the topic
- Narrative
- Quotation
- Dramatic statistics/facts

- Shocking statement
- Questions that lead to the thesis

The following are examples of these ideas. The essay's thesis sentence is highlighted in bold.

Background About the Topic

*Since the beginning of time, there have been teachers. The "classroom" teacher has many important tasks to do. A teacher has to teach information while keeping things interesting. She also sometimes has to be a referee, a coach, and a secretary. At times, a teacher has to be a nurse or just a good listener. **This career demands a lot, but it's a career I most want to have.***

Narrative

*My fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Vela, was not a big woman. She was about five feet tall and was no longer young. Even though she did not look very strong, she never had trouble controlling all her students. She could quiet us down with just a stare. We always wanted to make her happy because we knew how much Miss Vela cared about us. She expected us to do the best we could, and we all tried our hardest. **Miss Vela was the kind of teacher who made me know that I wanted to be a teacher.***

Quotation

*"Teaching is better than tossing a pebble into a pond of water and watching those ripples move out from the middle. With teaching, you never know where those ripples will end." I remember those words of my fourth-grade teacher. Miss Vela once told me that years after they left her class, her students would come back to tell how much she helped them. Miss Vela's students said that it was because of her that they learned to work hard and to feel proud of what they did. **I would like to teach because I would like to make that kind of difference.***

Dramatic Statistics/Facts

*Three out of four people said that they thought it didn't matter how many students were taught in one class. However, our class researched this and found that the opposite is true. Studies completed at a university show that having small class sizes, especially in the primary grades, makes a big difference in how much students learn. **Before we decide how many students to assign to a primary school teacher, we need to think more carefully about how important smaller class size is.***

Shocking Statement

*Some teenagers today say that they think that wives should earn money and that husbands should help with child care and other household tasks. Recent studies indicate that 13 percent of teenage boys would prefer a wife to stay at home, while 96 percent of the teenage girls surveyed wanted to work outside of the home. **However, couples who marry today may have grown up in very traditional households and therefore may find it difficult to accept wives of equal, not to mention greater, job status.***

Questions That Lead to the Thesis

*What exactly is "voice"? Is it a speaking voice or a singing voice? When people say that they have a voice in their head but no way to get it out, what does that mean? **"Voice" has less to do with throats and mouths than it has to do with being human, being alive.***

Thesis

What Is a Thesis?

The thesis statement tells the main idea—or most important idea—of the essay. It emphasizes the writer's idea of the topic and often answers the question, "What important or interesting things do I have to say?" Thinking about the thesis statement can help you decide what other information needs to be presented or omitted in the rest of the essay.

A good thesis statement

- gives the reader some hint about what you will say about the topic
- presents your opinion about the topic and is not just a fact or an observation
- is written as a complete statement
- does not formally announce your opinion about the topic

A good thesis statement gives the reader some hint about what you will say about the topic.

Weak thesis: *Mahatma Gandhi was an interesting man.*

Good thesis: *Mahatma Gandhi was a person of contradictions.*

Weak thesis: *Television is a total waste of time.*

Good thesis: *Parents should carefully choose appropriate, educational television shows for their children to watch.*

A good thesis statement presents your opinion about the topic and is not just a fact or an observation.

Weak thesis: *London is the capital of England.*

Good thesis: *For tourists interested in British history, London is an ideal travel destination.*

Weak thesis: *Many movies today are violent.*

Good thesis: *The violence in movies today makes children less sensitive to other people's suffering.*

A good thesis statement is written as a complete statement.

Weak thesis: *Should something be done about bad drivers?*

Good thesis: *Bad drivers should have to take a driving course before being allowed to drive again.*

Weak thesis: *There is a problem with the information on the Internet.*

Good thesis: *To make sure information found on the Internet is valid, Internet users must make sure the sources of the information are credible.*

A good thesis statement does not formally announce your opinion about the topic.

Weak thesis: *In my paper, I will write about whether schools should require uniforms.*

Good thesis: *Public schools should not require uniforms.*

Weak thesis: *The subject of this essay is drug testing.*

Good thesis: *Drug testing is needed for all professional athletes.*

How Do I Make Sure That My Reader Understands My Thesis?

Sometimes you might use a word in your introduction or thesis that you should define or explain. For example, if you are writing about “Who is a hero?” you should first explain what you think the word *hero* means. Is a hero a person who risks his or her life to save others? Is a hero a person whom you admire for any reason? People might have their own ways of thinking about a certain word. When you define the word, you help your reader better understand what you mean.

Do I Have Enough Main Ideas to Support My Thesis?

A main idea is a point that you feel strongly about. It is important to you, and you want the reader to understand this idea. Some writers like to give the reader three main ideas. However, the number of main ideas will vary among good essays. The important thing to remember is that your main ideas need to support your thesis adequately.

If you do not have enough main ideas, you may want to do some rethinking. Here are five suggestions for how to think of more ideas about your subject.

Ask yourself these questions to get you started again:

- **Who?**

Who in my life has influenced me to consider becoming a teacher?

- **What?**

What do teachers do?

- **When?**

When did I start thinking about becoming a teacher?

- **Where?**

Where are teachers needed the most?

- **Why?**

Why would a person want to become a teacher? Why do I want to become a teacher?

- **How? How much?**

How does a teacher learn how to teach?

How has my idea of becoming a teacher changed over the years?

How much does a teacher influence his or her students?

How much time does a teacher have to work outside of school?

- **What if? Why not?**

What if teachers do not have all of the materials they need?

Why teach in the classroom and not just over the Internet?

Talk to others about your topic.

Lots of people are happy to share what they know. Take good notes, because you may want to quote them in your essay.

- Other students in your school probably have opinions.
- A teacher who knows about the issue or subject could give you some opinions.
- Other people who are experts may have valuable information or opinions.
- Research your subject on the Internet or in a library.
- Send an e-mail to someone who may be an expert.

Think about the kind of writing you are doing.

Consider the questions below to help you figure out which ideas you need to add or how you should arrange those ideas.

- Are you explaining how things are alike (comparison) and different (contrast)? You can use this purpose when you are describing something (*such as how to teach primary school students compared with how to teach high school students*) or when you are analyzing different viewpoints (*such as whether children should go to school year-round*).
- Are you putting your ideas in categories? You might be able to describe something in general and then describe its particular qualities. *For example, you might want to talk about what it takes to be a good teacher and then talk about the unique qualities of a particular teacher you have had.*

- Are you giving reasons to show how a problem developed and what the effects of the problem are? *For example, if you were discussing how students' attitudes are affected by their environment, you might want first to describe what has caused a particular attitude to develop. Then you might want to discuss the effects of that attitude.*
- Are you trying to persuade someone to think like you or to do something that will improve a situation in the way that you want it to be improved? *For example, if you are trying to persuade a friend to think about an issue the way you think about it, you might want to start by saying what the issue is and why your ideas are the best.*

Start all over and see where you go this time with your writing.

Do not be afraid to start over. Lots of writers get new and better ideas when they write about something more than once.

Reread your draft.

Look at your previous draft and start where the writing is the most interesting or at the point that you think is your best statement.

- Try to write three more sentences to explain your best sentence.
- Review the three new sentences, pick the best one, and write three more sentences that explain the most important idea in that best sentence.

Main Ideas

Does Each of My Main Ideas Begin with a Topic Sentence?

Each main idea needs to be discussed fully. The main idea is part of a sentence that explains the idea. This sentence is called the topic sentence, and its goal is to help the reader think of questions about the topic.

Pretend that you are the reader of this topic sentence:

Not passing a test in fourth grade in Miss Vela's class made me think about what a teacher is.

What questions do you have?

Do you want to know more about what happened to this writer in fourth grade?

Do you think that you will learn what the writer thought or meant by the words "what a teacher is"?

Use your topic sentence to prepare the reader for understanding what is written in the essay.

You can review your sentences to see which words are the influential words. They are the words that seem more important in your sentence.

In this topic sentence, which words or phrases are important?

Teachers don't get paid for every hour that they work.

Would you say that "every hour that they work" are the important words?

Here are the other sentences in this paragraph:

Teachers sometimes do work even when they are not in the classroom. Sometimes my mother grades papers and projects all day on Sunday. Even though she does not get paid, she says that that is the only time she can grade all of her students' work. My neighbor spends three weeks of his summer vacation on a ship that does scientific experiments. He doesn't get paid for any of that work, but he says the things that he learns help him be a better teacher.

Use topic sentences to connect two paragraphs or two main ideas.

Here is a sample paragraph that begins with a topic sentence:

Teachers get many benefits in their careers. My neighbor has children and likes having the summer off when his children are home. Some teachers say their work is very enjoyable. At least that's what my mom says when she mixes up her magic bubble formula for science class. My mom also says that one of the benefits of teaching is that she is using her college education every day. She also gets paid to take refresher courses. But she works hard.

Can you see how the next topic sentence connects to another thought?

In fact, teachers don't get paid for every hour that they work, but the teachers that I know say that they love their work.

What do you expect the writer to tell you about in this paragraph?

Have I Discussed Each Main Idea Completely?

In good writing, you (the writer) and the reader feel as if all of your questions/concerns have been discussed. Remember that your reader needs to understand what you are writing, so discuss each idea completely.

Give each main idea its own paragraph.

Each main idea should be treated as a unit. However, if a main idea is very broad, it will need more than one paragraph, because it is too complicated to be discussed in a single paragraph.

Have I Arranged My Ideas in an Orderly Manner?

You can arrange your ideas in many different ways. You can organize your ideas in chronological order, which means the order in time in which they occurred. You can begin with the oldest point first and then use paragraphs to discuss what happened next or later.

Here are two main ideas that will be developed into paragraphs:

Idea 1

I have wanted to be a teacher ever since I failed a test in Miss Vela's class in fourth grade.

Idea 2

Then in eighth grade I had an assignment to teach a science lesson to a class in my former primary school, and that experience showed me how good I felt when the students didn't want the class to be over.

You can organize your ideas by importance, either most important to least important or the other way around.

TIP

If your writing assignment has to be completed in a short time, as in an essay test, you probably want to begin with the most important parts or reasons first.

Here are what two different writers think is their most important idea:

Writer 1

The most important reason to be a science teacher is to help the next generation learn about the Earth.

Writer 2

Getting to do fun activities is the reason why I want to be a science teacher.

Supporting Ideas

What Are Some Ways to Develop Supporting Ideas?

Supporting ideas help to convince your reader that your main idea is a good one. Here are some things that professional writers do:

- Tell a story that clarifies the main idea.
- Give examples of the main idea to explain what the paragraph is about.
- Give reasons that support the thesis. These can be facts, logical arguments, or the opinion of experts.
- Use details that are very specific so the reader can understand how this idea is different from others.
- Tell what can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, felt, or experienced.
- Try to see the idea from many different angles.
- Tell how other events, people, or things might have an influence on the main idea.
- Use metaphors or analogies to help the reader understand an idea by comparing it to something else.

Have I Done My Best to Support and Develop My Ideas?

Think of your reader as a curious person. Assume that your reader wants to know everything that you can say about this subject.

Here are some specific questions that are appropriate for certain types of writing:

- **If you are describing a problem or issue, you might want to consider the following:**

What type of problem or issue is it?

What are the signs that a problem or issue exists?

Who or what is affected by the problem or issue?

What is the history of the problem or issue—what or who caused it or contributed to it, and what is the state of the problem now?

Why is the issue or problem significant? What makes this issue or problem important or less important?

- **If you are arguing or trying to persuade your reader to agree with your opinion, consider the following:**

What facts or statistics could you mention as support?

What ideas could you discuss to prove your points?

What comparison could you make that would help the reader understand the issue?

What expert opinion would make your opinion more valid?

Could you support your point with some examples?

Could you describe the views of someone holding a different opinion?

TIP

Strong arguments are often made by discussing what is good in the opponent's view. You can use expressions such as "although that is a point well taken," "granted, while it is true that," or "I agree that" to discuss an opposite view.

- **If you are analyzing literature or writing a review of a story or movie, consider these questions:**

Can you summarize the story so that your reader knows what happens?

Can you give the details about the place or time so that your reader has a context for understanding the story?

What can you say about the main characters so that the reader can understand what makes them special or interesting?

Can you describe the point where the main character(s) is (are) in a crisis and must make an interesting choice?

Can you quote what characters say about each other or about what they are experiencing?

Does the story have a deeper theme that you could discuss?

Can you describe the style in which the story is told or the camera angles of the movie?

Are there interesting images or symbols?

- **If you are describing something or providing a definition, consider the following:**

Can you tell what the thing looks like or what its parts are?

Can you say what it does or means?

If what it does or means has changed over time, can you describe what it used to mean or used to do and what it now means or does?

If what you are describing has a different name or meaning, can you tell the reader the different name or meaning?

- **If you are telling how to do or make something, consider these points:**

Have you started at the right place—the first step—and proceeded logically?

Have you defined any terms that might be unfamiliar to your reader?

Have you given an example that might help your reader understand what you mean?

Have you tried to explain your instructions clearly? Have you numbered these instructions so that the reader knows the order in which it is best to do them?

TIP

You may want to think of a way to arrange your material so that your reader can understand it better. For example, in a recipe the ingredients are listed at the top and the instructions are in short paragraphs or are numbered as steps.

Does Each of My Paragraphs Support and Develop/Explain the Main Idea/Topic Sentence?

Paragraphs are a group of sentences about a thought or discussion. Each paragraph is about a main topic.

Some paragraphs are long and some are short. Some paragraphs are just one sentence, which can be a very interesting way to present information.

Some contain an interesting story that can take several sentences to tell.

Some paragraphs answer all of the topic issues. Others are more like transitions between two main ideas.

Here are some questions to help you evaluate your paragraphs:

- **Have you said enough so that each paragraph is complete?**

TIP

Try giving each paragraph a title and see if, read by itself, it could be something meaningful. If the reader asked you a specific question, would this paragraph be the answer? If some of the sentences do not fit as an answer, then you should probably delete them.

- **Have you used words that need to be explained or defined?** If you are trying to sound important and do not explain what you mean, your reader might feel frustrated. Try using more than one sentence to define or explain something. Three sentences might really explain your idea!
- **Have you provided evidence (proof)? Would an example show what you mean?** Use a good example to show that what you say is true. This is important.
- **Is there a personal experience or quotation from another source that would validate what you are trying to say?**

TIP

Personal experiences are appropriate in some essays but not in others. Make sure you understand the type of information that is expected in each essay you write.

TIP

If you are quoting from another source, make certain that you are quoting (reproducing the words) accurately. Also be sure that you are using quotation marks correctly.

Transitional Words and Phrases

Do I Use Transitional Words and Phrases to Take the Reader from One Idea to the Next?

Transitional words and phrases connect what a reader has already read to what the reader is going to read. They give the reader an idea of the relationships between the various ideas and supporting points. They also help to show the relationship between sentences.

You might think of your paragraph as a train and the sentences as cars (and the topic sentence as an engine). Do all the parts of the paragraph link or fit together? You can guide the reader as he or she reads an essay by using transitional words or phrases in paragraphs and sentences.

These words can help you talk about time and the relationship between events:

today, tomorrow, next week, yesterday, meanwhile, about, before, during, at, after, soon, immediately, afterward, later, finally, then, when, next, simultaneously, as a result

These words can help you show the order of ideas:

first, second, third, finally, lastly, most important, of least importance

These words can help you show location:

above, over, below, beneath, behind, in front of, in back of, on top of, inside, outside, near, between, beside, among, around, against, throughout, off, onto, into, beyond

These words can help you compare or demonstrate similarity:

also, as, similarly, in the same way, likewise, like

These words can help you contrast or demonstrate difference:

in contrast, however, although, still, even though, on the other hand, but

These words can help you add information:

in addition, for instance, for example, moreover, next, likewise, besides, another, additionally, again, also, in fact

These words can help you clarify a point:

in other words, for instance, that is, just to reiterate, in summary

These words can help you add emphasis to a point that you are making:

truly, in fact, for this reason, again, just to reiterate

These words can help you conclude or summarize:

all in all, lastly, as a result, in summary, therefore, finally

Conclusion

What Is a Conclusion?

The concluding paragraph is separate from the other paragraphs and brings closure to the essay.

- It discusses the importance of your ideas.
- It restates the thesis with fresh wording.
- It sums up the main ideas of the paper.
- It can also include an anecdote, a quotation, statistics, or a suggestion.

How Do I Write a Conclusion?

You might consider some of the following approaches to writing concluding paragraphs:

- Summarize main points.
- Provide a summarizing story.
- Include a provocative or memorable quotation.
- Make a prediction or suggestion.
- Leave the reader with something to think about.

Here are two different concluding paragraphs:

Good teaching requires flexibility, compassion, organization, knowledge, energy, and enthusiasm. A good teacher must decide when a student needs to be prodded and when that student needs mercy. Good teaching requires knowing when to listen and reflect and when to advise or correct. It requires a delicate balance of many skills, and often a different mix of approaches for different students and different situations. Is this profession demanding? Yes! Boring? Never! Exciting? Absolutely!

When I become a teacher, I want fourth graders like Ms. Vela's. We adored her and wanted to please her. But more important, I want to be a Miss Vela for my students. I want to challenge my students to become good citizens. When the river in our town flooded its banks and some classmates had to be evacuated, Ms. Vela asked us to think about what we could do. We came up with three decisions. We packed lunches for our classmates, we shared our books and pencils in class, and we gave them clothing. Later when we studied civics, we realized that we were taking care of our classmates the way the local or federal government does in a disaster. Ms. Vela was helping her fourth graders become more civic minded. I'm hoping to help my students think like that when I'm a teacher.

Advice to Writers

This section provides information about the different kinds of essays you may be asked to write.

- Persuasion
- Informative Writing
- Comparison/Contrast
- Description
- Narration
- Cause and Effect
- Problem and Solution
- Description of a Process ("How-to")
- Writing as Part of an Assessment
- Response to Literature
- Writing in the Workplace

Persuasion

When you write a persuasive essay, you are trying to make the reader agree with you. You thus have to offer good reasons to support your opinion, deal with opposing views, and perhaps offer a solution.

Here is how to start:

- List specific arguments for and against your opinion (the pros and cons).
- Decide whether you need to find more information (for example, *statistics* that support your argument, *direct quotes* from experts, *examples* that make your ideas concrete, *personal experience*, *facts*).
- Think of good arguments from someone who holds the opposite view. How could you respond to that person?

TIP

In this kind of writing, you might want to keep your best argument for last.

Summary: When you write a persuasive essay, you have to be clear and convincing. Any kind of writing improves with practice. Try to practice writing and revising, and expose yourself to as many good models of persuasive essays as you can.

Informative Writing

This kind of writing presents information that helps your reader understand a subject (for example, climate change, jazz music, pollution). Informative writing can be based on formal research (reading, interviews, Internet browsing). Sometimes you may also be asked to write about a personal experience or observation.

Here is how to start:

- Find a specific focus (for example, not *recycling in general* but *the recycling of paper*).
- Choose several important points to discuss (*how paper is recycled*, *what recycled paper is used for*).
- Think about the supporting details for each point. These details can be facts, observations, descriptions, and/or examples (*items that use recycled paper are paper towels, greeting cards*).

Comparison/Contrast

Writing a comparison/contrast paper involves comparing and contrasting two subjects. A comparison shows how two things are alike. A contrast shows how two things are different.

You can use comparison and contrast to describe, define, analyze, or make an argument—for, in fact, almost any kind of writing.

Here is how to start:

- Select two subjects that have some basic similarities or differences.
- Look for how these subjects are similar and different.
- Decide how you want to present your information. Choose one way and stick with it throughout your essay.
 - Do you want to discuss a point for one subject and then the same point for the second subject?
 - Do you want to show all the important points of one subject and then all the important points of the second subject?
 - Do you want to discuss how your two subjects are the same and then how they are different from each other?
- Remember to make clear to your reader when you are switching from one point of comparison or contrast to another. Use clear transitions. Some transition words that you may find useful are as follows:

For similarities: *similarly, likewise, furthermore, besides*

For differences: *in contrast, in comparison, on the other hand, although, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, whereas, yet*

Description

In descriptive writing, you write about people, places, things, moments, and theories with enough detail to help the reader create a mental picture of what is being described. You can do this by using a wide range of vocabulary, imaginative language, interesting comparisons, and images that appeal to the senses.

Here is how to start:

- Let the reader see, smell, hear, taste, and feel what you are writing about. Use your five senses in the description (for example, *The ancient driver nervously steered the old car down the red mud road, with me bouncing along on the backseat.*).
- Be specific (not *this dessert is good* but *the fudge brownie is moist, chewy, and very tasty*).
- Show the reader where things are located from your perspective (for example, *As I passed through the wooden gates, I heard a cough. A tiny woman came out from behind the trees.*).
- Decide whether you want to give a personal view (subjective) or a neutral viewpoint (objective).

TIP

What seems unusual or contradictory can make your subject more interesting (for example, “Martin Luther King probably contributed more than anyone else to changes in civil rights, but he hardly earned any money for his speeches and work.”).

Narration

This kind of essay offers you a chance to think and write a story about yourself, an incident, memories, and experiences. Narratives or stories usually include a plot, a setting (where something happened), characters, a climax, and an ending. Narratives are generally written in the first person, using *I*. However, as the storyteller, you can choose to “speak” like different people to make the story more interesting.

Here is how to start:

- If you are writing about a quarrel with a friend:
 - Think of what caused the quarrel.
 - Think of who is involved and how.
 - Think of how the quarrel developed, how it was settled, or whether you and your friend are talking now.
- Remember the details that make the event real to you (for example, what your friend said to you and the tone of voice your friend used).
- Try to answer the question, “What did this event mean to me?”
- Choose a way to begin; for example:
 - Build your story in scenes (the way you see in movies).
 - Summarize what happened and describe only the most important scene.
 - Begin at the ending and tell why this was such an important event.

Cause and Effect

Cause-and-effect essays are concerned with why things happen (causes) and what happens as a result (effects). In the cause-and-effect essay, it is very important that your tone be reasonable and that your presentation look factual and believable.

Here is how to start:

- Think about the event or issue you want to write about.
- Brainstorm ideas.
- Introduce your main idea.
- Find relevant and appropriate supporting details to back up your main idea. You can organize these details in the following ways:
 - *Chronological*, the order in which things/events happen
 - *Order of importance*, from least to most important or vice versa
 - *Categorical*, by dividing the topic into parts or categories

- Use appropriate transition words and phrases, such as the following:

because, thus, therefore, due to, one cause is, another is, since, for, first, second, consequently, as a result, resulted in, one result is, another is

Problem and Solution

A problem-solution essay starts by identifying a problem (or problems) and then proposes one or more solutions. It is usually based on topics that both the writer and the reader care about (such as the quality of cafeteria food).

Here is how to start:

- Think of all the reasons that the problem exists.
 - Why did it happen?
 - How did it begin?
 - Why does it exist now?
- List possible solutions to the problem.
- Evaluate your solutions—which ones will most likely work?
- Write the pros and cons of one or more good solutions, but give the most space in your essay to the best solution.
- Explain why the best solution is the one to choose.

Description of a Process ("How-to")

This kind of essay explains how to do something (for example, *how to bake your favorite cake*) or how something occurs (for example, *how movies are made*).

For how to do something, here is how to start, along with the pertinent questions:

- Think about all the equipment, skills, or materials needed.
- How many steps are there in the process? Put the steps in the right order. Why is each step important?
- What difficulties are involved in each step?
- How long does the process take?

TIP

Give any signs or any advice that can help the reader accomplish the step with success.

For how something occurs, here is how to start:

- Give any background that can help your reader understand the process.
- Tell what happens in the order that it happens.

TIP

Be sure to explain any terms that your reader might not understand.

Process essays are usually organized according to time: they begin with the first step in the process and continue until the last step. To indicate that one step has been completed and a new one will begin, we use transitions. Some common transition words and phrases used in process essays are as follows:

first of all, first, second, third, next, soon after, after a few hours, afterward, initially, at the same time, in the meantime, before, before this, immediately before, in the meanwhile, currently, during, meanwhile, later, then, previously, at last, eventually, finally, last, last but not least, lastly

Writing as Part of an Assessment

This kind of writing may be more difficult because you are trying to write your best in a certain place and a limited amount of time. There are a few strategies, however.

Here is how to start:

- Take a few moments to understand the question and to note down some ideas that come to mind.
- Before beginning to write, take a few moments to plan. How are you going to organize your main ideas and supporting details? Some students find making an outline to be a helpful strategy.
- During your writing, if other ideas come to mind and they feel right, use them.
- Keep track of your time, but do not panic.
- Revise. Look at the paper from the reader's point of view; reorganize and add explanations if necessary.
- Proofread if you have time.

TIP

As with any other kind of writing, writing on a test improves with practice. You can practice this skill by writing and revising essays while working within a set time limit.

Response to Literature

When you write about literature, you are telling why that work of literature (story, movie, poem, or play) is interesting and what makes it effective (for example, why it makes you laugh, why you care about the characters).

You can write about why the literary work seems true, you can analyze the characters or actions, or you can analyze how the literary work accomplishes its effect.

There are many ways to respond to literature, but here are a few ways to start, along with pertinent questions:

- Write for a while about your personal feelings about the literature. Are you most interested in the setting, the situation, the characters, or the atmosphere that the work creates? These are clues to what you can write about.
- What is the situation or the mood?
- What clues does the author give you about the true meaning of this story, poem, or movie? (For example, the many “Cinderella” stories in the world have the same meaning: kindness is rewarded no matter how poor you are.)
- Organize your thoughts and support them with examples from the literary work. Do not assume that your reader knows the story or movie that you are writing about!

Writing in the Workplace

Letters, memos, and reports are the kinds of writing that are most often done when we do business with each other. In this kind of writing, you want to make your points as quickly and clearly as possible. So try to be brief and direct.

Here is how to start:

- Organize your thoughts. Most business letters should take one page.
- Think about whether there is a special format you should follow.
- Decide if you want the reader to take action (persuasive), to understand a problem (informative), or to fix something (problem-solution). (*Refer to the relevant sections under this “Advice to Writers” heading.*)
- Write clearly and courteously.
- Include relevant quotations.
- Leave the reader with something to think about (for example, make a prediction or suggestion).

Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

The Writing Process

The writing process has several stages: planning, drafting, writing, revising, editing, and proofreading. Many writers and instructors maintain that improving your essay has three distinct stages: revising, editing, and proofreading. Review each column of the following chart to understand each stage completely.

As you write, you may wish to revise and edit your essay several times as you clarify and develop your ideas. The Writer's Handbook sections on Style, Organization and Development, and Advice to Writers can be very helpful as you

revise and edit your essay. When you have a final version of your essay, be sure to proofread it carefully.

	Revising	Editing	Proofreading
Purpose	See the complete concept. Decide if your essay says what you want it to say. Add ideas.	Correct grammar and usage. Make changes in word choice, style, and the way you explain your ideas.	Correct typos as well as spelling, punctuation, and formatting errors.
When	After you have written your first draft, do not do anything with it; then begin revising.	Begin when you have a complete draft of your essay.	Make this the final stage before you submit your essay.
What	Read your entire essay from beginning to end.	As you read each sentence, revise that sentence before you do the next sentence.	Read word by word and line by line to make corrections.
Strategies	Identify each part of the essay: introduction, thesis, main ideas, supporting ideas, and conclusion. Review carefully how the ideas are connected and the order of paragraphs. Do not be afraid to cut and paste, delete, or add new ideas. Ask a peer reviewer to say what is good and what could be better in your essay.	Ask your teacher, a peer editor, or a friend to give you ideas and advice. List the kinds of grammar and usage errors you make and look at those errors first. If a sentence seems right, do not revise it. Think about just the parts that seem to have problems. Use a handbook to help you correct errors and rewrite sentences.	Print a copy of your essay and make the changes on the paper copy. Read your essay aloud to your teacher or to someone who is more English proficient than you and circle identified errors. Have a peer reviewer who is more proficient in English read your essay backward. Start with the last sentence, then the second to the last, and so on. Use a dictionary, handbook, and spell-checker to help you correct errors.

Step 1: Organization and Development

Think about your topic and, if necessary, change the way your essay is organized and developed.

Step 2: Style

Read each sentence to see if your ideas are easy to understand.

Step 3: Grammar, Usage, Mechanics

Check each word and sentence for errors.

Step 4: Proofreading

Check for spelling and typing mistakes as you read your final draft.

Using a Computer to Write

Computers make the writing process much easier than handwriting. Computers let you do all of the following:

- Write faster than you can with a pen
- Save or delete ideas and drafts
- Move words, paragraphs, and sentences
- Try out new ways of expressing yourself
- Locate and correct mistakes

Always remember that the computer is a tool that lets you think about how to write. You will still have to make decisions about how to draft and revise your essays and other writing.

Glossary

active voice—English sentences can be written in either the active or passive voice. In the active voice, the subject is the doer of an action. For example, in *Sam kicked the ball*, the action is *kicked*, and the doer is *Sam*. An active sentence emphasizes the doer of an action.

adjective—Adjectives give more information about nouns. In English, they usually come before nouns. For example: *a red umbrella*, *a rainy day*, *a beautiful woman*.

adverb—Adverbs are words such as *quickly*, *happily*, or *carefully*. They can tell more about an adjective (for example, *very big*), another adverb (for example, *very quietly*), or a verb (for example, *walk slowly*).

antecedent—A noun to which a pronoun refers is the antecedent. In the following sentence, *John* is the antecedent of the pronoun *he*: *John was late for school because he missed the bus*.

apostrophe—This punctuation mark (') shows the omission of letters in contractions (*cannot—can't*), or possession (the *girl's* dress, the *animals'* cages).

article—Articles are *a*, *an*, and *the*, the little words in English that come before nouns. English has two types of articles. The definite article (*the*) is used to refer to one or more specific things, animals, or people (for example, *the house on the hill*). The indefinite articles (*a*, *an*) are used to refer to a thing, animal, or person in a nonspecific or general way (for example, *a house*, *an elephant*).

clause—A clause is a group of related words that contains a subject and a verb. There are two kinds of clauses: independent and dependent. An independent clause expresses a complete thought and can be seen as a sentence (for example, *She saw Jim*.). A dependent clause is a part of a sentence and cannot stand on its own. (*When she saw Jim* is a dependent clause.) To make a complete sentence, you need to add an independent clause (for example, *When she saw Jim, she smiled*.).

collective noun—A collective noun refers to a group of people or animals: *population*, *family*, *troop*, *committee*.

comma—This punctuation mark (,) is used to separate words (*She bought apples, oranges, and grapes*.) or parts of a sentence (*He was here, but he left*.).

compound subject—This is a plural subject, a subject that consists of more than one part: *Lions, tigers, and bears are kept in the zoo*.

compound verb—This type of verb consists of more than one part: *The baby started crying*.

compound words—These are words that are made up of two words: *everywhere*, *boyfriend*, *himself*, *weekend*.

conclusion—This is the last paragraph of an essay, the paragraph that closes the essay. In a conclusion, you can restate the thesis or sum up the main ideas of the essay.

conjunction—A conjunction is a word that connects words, phrases, or sentences. It also shows relationships between words or clauses. There are two kinds of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating. Coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, and *for* connect parts that are equal: In the sentence *She bought a desk and a chair*, both *desk* and *chair* are nouns. Subordinating conjunctions such as *although*, *because*, *if*, *since*, and *when* connect parts that are not equal: In the sentence *Because he missed the train, he was late for work*, the clause *Because he missed the train* is a dependent clause, and *he was late for work* is an independent clause.

contraction—Contractions are short forms. You make a contraction when you combine two words, shorten one of them, and add an apostrophe: *cannot*—*can't*; *does not*—*doesn't*; *should not*—*shouldn't*; *it is*—*it's*.

dependent clause—A dependent clause is a part of a sentence and cannot stand on its own. For example, *When she saw Jim* is a dependent clause. To make a complete sentence, you need to add an independent clause: *When she saw Jim, she smiled*.

exclamation point—This mark of punctuation (!) at the end of a sentence is used to show surprise or strong emotion.

fragment—A fragment is a group of words that is not a complete sentence, even though it sometimes starts with a capital letter or ends with a punctuation mark and often contains a subject and verb.

helping verb—This type of verb is also called an auxiliary verb. Helping verbs are used with main verbs in a verb phrase: *is going*; *were singing*; *can talk*; *may leave*; *must tell*; *will see*.

hyphen—This mark (-) is used to separate the different parts of a compound word: *mother-in-law*, *self-motivated student*.

independent clause—An independent clause has a subject and a verb, expresses a complete thought, and can be seen as a sentence (for example, *She saw him*). It can also be combined with another independent clause to make a compound sentence (*She saw him, so she called him over*). It can also take a dependent clause to make a complex sentence (*She saw him, even though it was dark*).

infinitive verb—An infinitive consists of the word *to* plus a *verb* (for example, *to go*, *to swim*, *to wish*). It can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb. For example: *To swim the English Channel is my friend's strongest dream*. Here, the infinitive *to swim* acts as a noun. It is the subject of the sentence.

intransitive verb—This type of verb does not need an object to complete its meaning. For example: *John ran*. *Bob left*. *Jane slept*.

introduction—An introduction is the first paragraph of an essay. Effective introductions do two basic things: grab the reader's interest and let the reader know what the whole essay is about. This is why most introductions include a thesis statement that clearly states the writer's topic and main argument.

main idea—Main ideas are the important points of an essay. They state what will be discussed in each paragraph (or set of paragraphs for longer essays). Main ideas develop the thesis statement of an essay and are in turn developed by supporting details.

modal verb—A modal verb is a kind of helping verb. Modal verbs help to express meanings such as permission (*may*), obligation (*must*), prediction (*will, shall*), or ability (*can*).

noun phrase—This type of phrase consists of several words that together function as the noun of a sentence. For example: *Talking to my mother made me feel better*. Here, *Talking to my mother* is a noun phrase that is acting as the subject of this sentence.

paragraph—An essay is made up of smaller sections called paragraphs. Each paragraph should focus on one main idea; you tell your reader what this idea is by using a topic sentence. A good paragraph is one in which every sentence supports the topic sentence.

passive voice—English sentences can be written in either the active or passive voice. In a passive sentence, the verb *to be* is combined with the past participle form of a verb (for example, *John was kicked*.). A passive sentence emphasizes the receiver or the results of an action.

period—In English grammar, this punctuation mark (.) is used to signal the end of a declarative sentence. (A declarative sentence is one that is not a question or an exclamation.) It is also used to indicate abbreviations (for example, *Mr., St., Ave.*).

phrase—A phrase is a group of related words with a single grammatical function (for example, a noun phrase or a verb phrase). The noun phrase acts as a noun or subject in this sentence: *The girl in the corner is Mary*.

plural—*Plural* means “more than one.” In English grammar, nouns, pronouns, and verbs can take plural forms. For example, *cars* is a plural noun, *they* is a plural pronoun, and *climb* is a plural verb.

possessive pronoun—These are pronouns that show possession or ownership (for example, *my, our, his, her, their, whose*). Some possessive pronouns can function as nouns: *Is this yours? That book is mine*.

prefix—A prefix is a word part, such as *co-* in *costar*, attached to the front of a word to make a new word. For another example, the prefix *re-* can be added to the word *sell* to make the word *resell*, which means “to sell again.”

preposition—Prepositions are words such as *in, of, by, and from*. They describe the relationship between words in a sentence. In the sentence *The professor sat on the desk*, the preposition *on* shows the location of the professor in relation to the desk.

pronoun—A pronoun can replace a noun or another pronoun. You can use pronouns such as *she, it, which, and they* to make your writing less repetitive.

question mark—This is the punctuation mark (?) used at the end of a direct question. For example: *Is David coming to the party?*

sentence combining—Sometimes writers combine two or more short sentences to make a longer one. The reason for doing this is that too many short sentences often make the writing sound choppy. Using sentence-combining techniques in the revising process can improve the style of your essay.

singular—*Singular* means “single,” or “one.” In English grammar, nouns, pronouns, and verbs can take singular forms. For example, *car* is a singular noun, *he* or *she* is a singular pronoun, and *climbs* is a singular verb in the present tense.

subject—The subject of a sentence tells who or what a sentence is about. For example, in the sentence *Stephen ran into the parking lot*, *Stephen* is the subject of the sentence.

supporting idea—Supporting ideas are the details that develop the main idea of a paragraph. They can be definitions, explanations, illustrations, opinions, evidence, and examples. They usually come after the topic sentence and make up the body of a paragraph.

tense—Tenses indicate time. Sometimes tenses are formed by changes in the verb, as in *He sings* (present tense) and *He sang* (past tense). At other times, tenses are formed by adding modals, or helping verbs. For example: *He will give me fifty dollars* (future tense); *He has given me fifty dollars* (perfect tense).

thesis—The thesis or thesis statement of an essay states what will be discussed in the whole essay. It offers your reader a quick and easy summary of the essay. A thesis statement usually consists of two parts: your topic and what you are going to say about the topic. Thesis statements are supported by main ideas.

topic sentence—The topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph. It tells your reader what the paragraph is about. An easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of a paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph. (This is a good general rule for less experienced writers, although it is not the only way to do it.)

transition word or phrase—Transition words and phrases are used to connect ideas and signal relationships between them. For example, *first* can be used to signal the first of several points; *thus* can be used to show a result.

transitive verb—Transitive verbs require an object. For example, in the sentence *He mailed the letter*, *mailed* is a transitive verb, and *letter* is its object.

verb—A verb is an “action” word (for example, *climb*, *jump*, *run*, *eat*). English verbs also express time. (For example, past tense verbs such as *climbed*, *jumped*, *ran*, and *ate* show that the action happened in the past.) Verbs also show states of being—“to be” words—mentioned earlier in the chapter.

verb phrase—A verb phrase is a phrase (or a group of words) that consists of a main verb (for example, *climb*, *jump*, *run*, *eat*) plus one or more helping verbs (for example, *may*, *can*, *has*, *is*, *are*). Examples of verb phrases are *She may go*, and *The students will receive certificates*.

