

The Writing Process

3

Steps in the Writing Process

Even professional writers do not sit down and write a paper automatically, in one draft. Instead, they have to work on it a step at a time. Writing a paper is a process that can be divided into the following steps:

- *Step 1:* Getting Started through Prewriting
- *Step 2:* Preparing a Scratch Outline
- *Step 3:* Writing the First Draft
- *Step 4:* Revising
- *Step 5:* Editing and Proofreading

These steps are described on the following pages.

Step 1: Getting Started through Prewriting

What you need to learn first are strategies for working on a paper. These strategies will help you do the thinking needed to figure out both the point you want to make and the support you have for that point.

There are several *prewriting strategies*—strategies you can use before writing the first draft of your paper:

- Freewriting
- Questioning
- Clustering
- Making a list

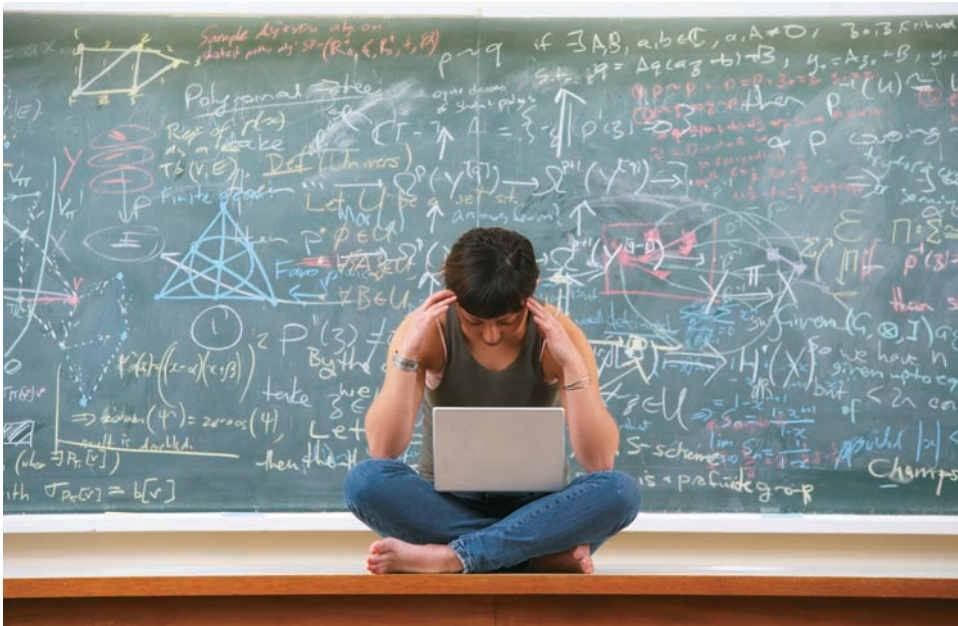
Freewriting

Freewriting is just sitting down and writing whatever comes into your mind about a topic. Do this for ten minutes or so. Write without stopping and without worrying at all about spelling, grammar, or the like. Simply get down on paper all the information about the topic that occurs to you.

Here is the freewriting Gary did on his problems with returning to school. Gary had been given the assignment “Write about a problem you are facing at the present time.” Gary felt right away that he could write about his college situation. He began prewriting as a way to explore and generate details on his topic.

EXAMPLE OF FREEWITING

One thing I want to write about is going back to school. At age twenty-nine. A lot to deal with. I sometimes wonder if Im nuts to try to do this or just stupid. I had to deal with my folks when I decided. My dad hated school. He knew when to quit, I'll say that for him. But he doesn't understand Im different. I have a right to my own life. And I want to better myself. He teases me alot. Says things like didnt you get dumped on enough in high school, why go back for more. My mom doesnt understand either. Just keeps worrying about where the money was coming from. Then my friends. They make fun of me. Also my wife has to do more of the heavy house stuff because I'm out so much. Getting back to my friends, they say dumb things to get my goat. Like calling me the college man or saying ooh, we'd better watch our grammer. Sometimes I think my dads right, school was no fun for me. Spent years just sitting in class waiting for final bell so I could escape. Teachers didnt help me or take an intrest, some of them made me feel like a real loser. Now things are different and I like most of my teachers. I can talk to the teacher after class or to ask questions if I'm confused. But I really need more time to spend with family, I hardly see them any more. What I am doing is hard all round for them and me.



Look at this photo and freewrite for several minutes about a task you find difficult or challenging.

Notice that there are problems with spelling, grammar, and punctuation in Gary's freewriting. Gary is not worried about such matters, nor should he be. He is just concentrating on getting ideas and details down on paper. He knows that it is best to focus on one thing at a time. At this stage, he just wants to write out thoughts as they come to him, to do some thinking on paper.

You should take the same approach when freewriting: explore your topic without worrying at all about being "correct." At this early stage of the writing process, focus on figuring out what you want to say.

Questioning

Questioning means that you think about your topic by writing down a series of questions and answers about it. Your questions can start with words like *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*.

Here are some questions that Gary might have asked while developing his paper, as well as some answers to those questions.



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EXAMPLE OF QUESTIONING

Why do I have a problem with returning to school?

How do they not support me?

When do they not support me?

Where do I have this problem?

Why else do I have this problem?

What details back up the idea that high school was bad experience?

My parents and friends don't support me.

Dad asks why I want to be dumped on more. Mom is upset because college costs lots of money. Friends tease me about being a college man.

When I go to my parents' home for Friday night visits, when my friends see me walking toward them.

At home, where I barely see my wife and daughter, and where I have to let my wife do house things on weekends while I'm studying.

High school was bad experience.

Sat in class bored, couldn't wait to get out, teachers didn't help me. One embarrassed me when I didn't know the answer.

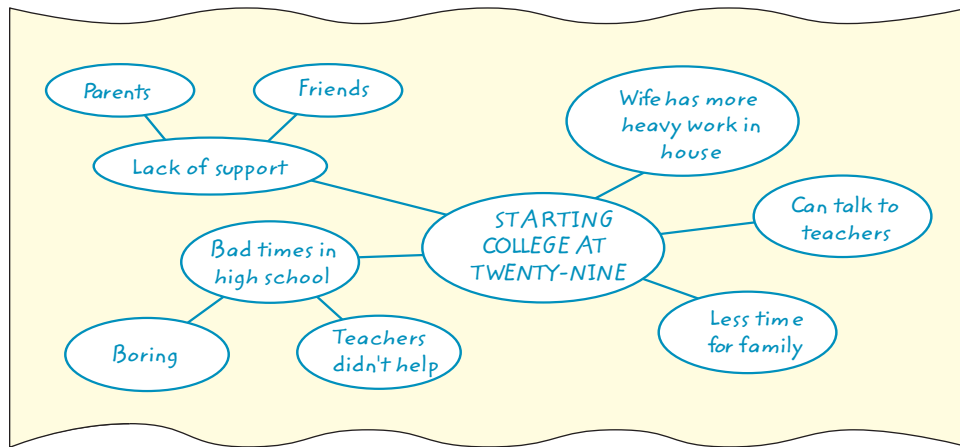
Clustering

Clustering is another prewriting strategy that can be used to generate material for a paper. It is helpful for people who like to do their thinking in a visual way.

In clustering, you begin by stating your subject in a few words in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Then as ideas come to you, put them in ovals, boxes, or circles around the subject, and draw lines to connect them to the subject. Put minor ideas or details in smaller boxes or circles, and also use connecting lines to show how they relate.

Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong way of clustering. It is a way to think on paper about how various ideas and details relate to one another. The following is an example of clustering that Gary might have done to develop his idea.

EXAMPLE OF CLUSTERING



Making a List

In *making a list*—a prewriting strategy also known as *listing*, *list making*, and *brainstorming*—you make a list of ideas and details that could go into your paper. Simply pile these items up, one after another, without worrying about putting them in any special order. Try to accumulate as many details as you can think of.

After Gary did his freewriting about returning to school, he made up the list of details shown below.

EXAMPLE OF LISTING

parents give me hard time when they see me
 Dad hated school
 Dad quit school after eighth grade
 Dad says I was dumped on enough in high school
 Dad asks why I want to go back for more

continued



*Mom also doesnt understand
keeps asking how Ill pay for it
friends give me a hard time too
friends call me college man
say they have to watch their grammar
my wife has more heavy work around the house
also high school was no fun for me
just sat in class after class
couldnt wait for final bell to ring
wanted to escape
teachers didnt help me
teachers didnt take an interest in me
one called on me, then told me to forget it
I felt like a real loser
I didnt want to go back to his class
now I'm more sure of myself
OK not to know an answer
talk to teachers after class
job plus schoolwork take all my time
get home late, then rush through dinner
then spend evening studying
even have to do homework on weekends*

One detail led to another as Gary expanded his list. Slowly but surely, more supporting material emerged that he could use in developing his paper. By the time he had finished his list, he was ready to plan an outline of his paragraph and to write his first draft.

Notice that in making a list, as in freewriting, details are included that will not actually end up in the final paragraph. Gary decided later not to develop the idea that his wife now has more heavy work to do in the house. And he realized that several of his details were about why school is easier in college (“now I’m more sure of myself,” “OK not to know an answer,” and “talk to instructors after class”); such details were not relevant to his point.

It is natural for a number of such extra or unrelated details to appear as part of the prewriting process. The goal of prewriting is to get a lot of information down on paper. You can then add to, shape, and subtract from your raw material as you take your paper through the series of writing drafts.

Important Points about Prewriting Strategies

Some writers may use only one of the prewriting strategies described here. Others may use bits and pieces of all four strategies. Any one strategy can lead to another. Freewriting may lead to questioning or clustering, which may then lead to a list. Or a writer may start with a list and then use freewriting or questioning to develop items on the list. During this early stage of the writing process, as you do your thinking on paper, anything goes. You should not expect a straight-line progression from the beginning to the end of your paper. Instead, there probably will be a constant moving back and forth as you work to discover your point and decide just how you will develop it.

Keep in mind that prewriting can also help you choose from among several topics. Gary might not yet have decided which problem to write about. Then he could have made a list of possible topics—areas in his life in which he has had problems. After selecting two or three topics from the list, he could have done some prewriting on each to see which seemed most promising. After finding a likely topic, Gary would have continued with his prewriting activities until he had a solid main point and plenty of support.

Finally, remember that you are not ready to begin writing a paper until you know your main point and many of the details to support it. Don't rush through prewriting. It's better to spend more time on this stage than to waste time writing a paragraph for which you have no solid point and not enough interesting support.

Step 2: Preparing a Scratch Outline

A *scratch outline* is a brief plan for a paragraph. It shows at a glance the point of the paragraph and the main support for that point. It is the logical backbone on which the paper is built.

This rough outline often follows freewriting, questioning, clustering, or listing—or all four. Or it may gradually emerge in the midst of these strategies. In fact, trying to outline is a good way to see if you need to do more prewriting. If a solid outline does not emerge, then you know you need to do more prewriting to clarify your main point or its support. Once you have a workable outline, you may realize, for instance, that you want to do more listing to develop one of the supporting details in the outline.

In Gary's case, as he was working on his list of details, he suddenly discovered what the plan of his paragraph could be. He went back to the list, crossed out items that he now realized did not fit, and added the following comments.



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EXAMPLE OF LIST WITH COMMENTS

*Starting college at twenty-nine isn't easy—three reasons**parents give me hard time when they see me**Dad hated school**Dad quit school after eighth grade**Dad says I was dumped on enough in high school**Dad asks why I want to go back for more
Mom also doesn't understand* *Parents and friends don't support me**keeps asking how I'll pay for it**friends give me a hard time too**friends call me college man**say they have to watch their grammar*~~*my wife has more heavy work around the house*~~*also high school was no fun for me**just sat in class after class**couldn't wait for final bell to ring**wanted to escape**teachers didn't help me**teachers didn't take an interest in me**one called on me, then told me to forget it**I felt like a real loser**I didn't want to go back to his class*~~*now I'm more sure of myself*~~~~*OK not to know an answer*~~~~*talk to teachers after class*~~*job and schoolwork take all my time**get home late, then rush through dinner**then spend evening studying**even have to do homework on weekends**Bad memories of school**Not enough time with family*

Under the list, Gary was now able to prepare his scratch outline.

EXAMPLE OF SCRATCH OUTLINE

Starting college at age twenty-nine isn't easy.

- 1. Little support from parents or friends*
- 2. Bad memories of school*
- 3. Not enough time to spend with family*

After all his preliminary writing, Gary sat back, pleased. He knew he had a promising paper—one with a clear point and solid support. Gary was now ready to write the first draft of his paper, using his outline as a guide.

Step 3: Writing the First Draft

When you write your first draft, be prepared to put in additional thoughts and details that didn't emerge in your prewriting. Don't worry if you hit a snag; just leave a blank space or add a comment such as "Do later" and press on to finish the paper. Also, don't worry yet about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. You don't want to take time correcting words or sentences that you may decide to remove later. Instead, make it your goal to develop the content of your paper with plenty of specific details.

EXAMPLE OF FIRST DRAFT

Last fall, I finally realized that I was stuck in a dead-end job. I wasn't making enough money and I was bored to tears. I figured I had to get some new skills which meant going back to school. Beginning college at age twenty-nine turned out to be much tougher than I thought it would be. My father didn't understand, he hated school. That's why he quit after eighth grade. He would ask, Didn't you get dumped on enough in high school? Then wondered why I wanted to go back for more of the same thing. My mother was worried about where the money were coming from and said so.

continued

When my friends saw me coming down the st. They would make fun of me with remarks like Hey theres the college man. They may have a point. School never was much fun for me. I spent years just siting in class waiting for the bell to ring. So I could escape. The teachers werent much help to me. One time, a teacher called on me then told me to forget it. I felt like a real loser and didnt want to go back to his class. College takes time away from my family. ADD MORE DETAILS LATER. All this makes it very hard for me.

After Gary finished the draft, he was able to put it aside until the next day. You will benefit as well if you can allow some time between finishing a draft and starting to revise.

Step 4: Revising

Revising is as much a stage in the writing process as prewriting, outlining, and writing a first draft. *Revising* means rewriting a paper, building on what has been done, to make it stronger. One writer has said about revision, “It’s like cleaning house—getting rid of all the junk and putting things in the right order.” It is not just “straightening up”; instead, you must be ready to roll up your sleeves and do whatever is needed to create an effective paper. Too many students think that the first draft *is* the paper. They start to become writers when they realize that revising a rough draft three or four times is often at the heart of the writing process.

Here are some quick hints that can help make revision easier:

- Ideally, set your first draft aside for a while. Although a few hours can be enough, a day or two is best. You can then come back with a fresh, more objective point of view.
- Work from typed or printed text. You’ll be able to see the paper more impartially in this way than if you were just looking at your own familiar handwriting.
- Read your draft aloud. Hearing how your writing sounds will help you pick up problems with meaning as well as style.
- As you do all these things, add your thoughts and changes above the lines or in the margins of your paper. Your written comments can serve as a guide when you work on the next draft.

EXAMPLE OF SECOND DRAFT

Starting college at age twenty-nine turned out to be really tough. I did not have much support from my parents and friends. My father hated school, so he asked, Didnt you get dumped on enough in high school? Why go back for more? My mother asking about where the money were coming from. Friends would be making fun of me. Hey theres the college man they would say as soon as they saw me. Another factor was what happened to me in high school. I spent years just siting in class waiting for the bell to ring. I was really bored. Also the teachers liked to embaras me. One teacher called on me and then said forget it. He must of relized I didnt know the answer. I felt like a real loser and didnt want to go back in his class for weeks. Finally I've learned that college takes time away from my family. I have to go to work every day. I have a little over one hour to eat dinner and spend time with my wife and daughter. Then I have to go off to class and when I get back my daughter is in bed asleep. My wife and I have only a little time together. On weekends I have lots of homework to do, so the time goes by like a shot. College is hard for me, but I am going to stay there so I can have a better life.

Notice the improvements made in the second draft:

- Gary started by clearly stating the point of his paragraph. He remembered the first goal in effective writing: *Make a point*.
- To keep the focus on his own difficulties, he omitted the detail about his father quitting school. He remembered that the first goal in effective writing is also to *stick to one point*, so the paper will have unity.
- He added more details so that he would have enough support for his reasons why college was hard. He remembered the second goal in effective writing: *Support the point*.

- He inserted transitions to set off the second reason (“Another factor”) and the third reason (“Finally”) why starting college at twenty-nine was difficult for him. He remembered the third goal in effective writing: *Organize the support.*

Gary then went on to revise the second draft. Since he was doing the paper on a computer, he was able to print it out quickly. He double-spaced the lines, allowing room for revisions, which he added in longhand during his third draft. (Note that if you are not using a computer, you may want to do each draft on one side of a page, so that you see your entire paper at one time.) Shown below are some of the changes that Gary made in longhand as he worked on his third draft.

Part of Third Draft

Starting college at age twenty-nine ~~turned out to be really tough.~~ *was difficult.*
~~I did not have much support from my parents and friends. My father~~
~~hated school, so he~~ *For one thing* asked, Didnt you get dumped on enough in high
 school? Why go back for more? My mother ~~asking~~ *worried* about where the
 money were coming from. Friends would ~~be making~~ *make* fun of me. Hey
 theres the college man they would say as soon as they saw me.
~~Another factor~~ *reason that starting college was hard* was what happened to me in high school. I spent years
 just sitting in class waiting for the bell to ring. I was really bored. Also
~~the teachers liked to embaras me. . . .~~ *final*

After writing these and other changes, Gary typed them into his computer file and printed out the almost-final draft of his paper. He knew he had come to the fourth goal in effective writing: *aim for error-free sentences.*

Step 5: Editing and Proofreading

The next-to-last major stage in the writing process is *editing*—checking a paper for mistakes in grammar, punctuation, usage, and spelling. Students often find it hard to edit a paper carefully. They have put so much work into their writing, or so little, that it’s almost painful for them to look at the paper one more time. You may simply have to *will* yourself to carry out this important closing step in the writing process. Remember that eliminating sentence-skills mistakes will improve an average paper and help ensure a strong grade on a good paper. Further, as you get into the habit of checking your papers, you will also get into the habit of using sentence skills consistently. They are an integral part of clear, effective writing.

The checklist of sentence skills on the inside back cover of the book will serve as a guide while you are editing your paper.

Here are hints that can help you edit the next-to-final draft of a paper for sentence-skills mistakes.

EDITING HINTS

1. Have at hand two essential tools: a good dictionary (see page 89) and a grammar handbook (you can use Part Two of this book).
2. Use a sheet of paper to cover your essay so that you expose only one sentence at a time. Look for errors in grammar, spelling, and typing. It may help to read each sentence out loud. If the sentence does not read clearly and smoothly, chances are something is wrong.
3. Pay special attention to the kinds of errors you tend to make. For example, if you tend to write run-ons or fragments, be especially on the lookout for these errors.
4. Try to work on a typewritten or word-processed draft, where you’ll be able to see your writing more objectively than you can on a handwritten page; use a pen with colored ink so that your corrections will stand out.

Shown below are some of the corrections in spelling, grammar, and punctuation that Gary made when editing his paper.

Part of Gary's Edited Draft

Starting college at age twenty-nine was difficult. For one thing, I did not have much support from my parents and friends. My father asked, "Didn't you get dumped on enough in high school? Why go back for more?" My mother ^{worried} ~~woried~~ about where the money ^{was} ~~were~~ coming from. Friends would make fun of me. "Hey, there's the college man," they would say as soon as they saw me. . . .

All that remained for Gary to do was to enter in his corrections, print out the final draft of the paper, and proofread it (see hints on proofreading on the next page) for any typos or other careless errors. He was then ready to hand the paper in to his instructor.

Proofreading, the final stage in the writing process, means checking a paper carefully for errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and so on. You are ready for this stage when you are satisfied with your choice of supporting details, the order in which they are presented, and the way they and your topic sentence are worded. You will already have attempted to correct all grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

At this point in his work, Gary used his dictionary to do final checks on his spelling. He used a grammar handbook (such as the one in Part Two of this text) to be sure about grammar, punctuation, and usage. Gary also read through his paper carefully, looking for typing errors, omitted words, and any other errors he may have missed before. Proofreading is often hard to do—again, students have spent so much time with their work, or so little, that they want to avoid it. But if it is done carefully, this important final step will ensure that your paper looks as good as possible.

PROOFREADING HINTS

1. One helpful trick at this stage is to read your paper out loud. You will probably hear awkward wordings and become aware of places where the punctuation needs to be improved. Make the changes needed for your sentences to read smoothly and clearly.
2. Another helpful technique is to take a sheet of paper and cover your paragraph so that you expose just one line at a time and check it carefully.
3. A third strategy is to read your paper backward, from the last sentence to the first. This helps keep you from getting caught up in the flow of the paper and missing small mistakes—which is easy to do, since you're so familiar with what you mean to say.

Activities in the Writing Process

These activities will give you practice in some of the prewriting strategies you can use to generate material for a paper. Try to do two or more of these prewriting activities.

Freewriting

On a sheet of paper, freewrite for several minutes about the best or most disappointing friend you ever had. Don't worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Try to write, without stopping, about whatever comes into your head concerning your best or most disappointing friend.

Activity

1

Questioning

On another sheet of paper, answer the following questions about the friend you've started to write about.

1. When did this friendship begin and how long did it last?
2. Where did you meet your friend?
3. What is one reason you think highly or disapprovingly of this friend? Give one quality, action, comment, etc. Also, give some details to illustrate this quality.

Activity

2

4. What is another reason for your opinion of your friend? What are some details that support the second reason?
5. Can you think of a third reason? What are some details that support the third reason?

Activity

Clustering

3

In the center of a blank sheet of paper, write and circle the words *best friend* or *most disappointing friend*. Then, around the circle, add reasons and details about the friend. Use a series of boxes, circles, or other shapes, along with connecting lines, to set off the reasons and details. In other words, try to think about and explore your topic in a very visual way.

Activity

Making a List

4

On separate paper, make a list of details about the friend. Don't worry about putting them in a certain order. Just get down as many details about the friend as occur to you. The list can include specific reasons for your opinion of the person and specific details supporting those reasons.

Activity

Scratch Outline

5

On the basis of your prewriting, prepare a scratch outline made up of your main idea and the three main reasons for your opinion of your friend. Use the form below:

_____ was my best *or* most disappointing friend.

Reason 1: _____

Reason 2: _____

Reason 3: _____

Activity

First Draft

6

Now write a first draft of your paper. Begin with your topic sentence, stating that a certain friend was the best or most disappointing one you ever had. Then state the first reason to support your main idea, followed by specific details supporting that reason. Next, state the second reason, followed by specific details supporting that reason. Finally, state the third reason, followed by support.

Don't worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Just concentrate on getting down on paper the details about your friend.

Revising the Draft

Ideally, you will have a chance to put your paper aside for a while before writing the second draft. In your second draft, try to do all of the following:

1. Add transition words such as *first of all*, *another*, and *finally* to introduce each of the three reasons for your opinion of the friend you're writing about.
2. Omit any details that do not truly support your topic sentence.
3. Add more details as needed, making sure you have plenty of support for each of your three reasons.
4. Check to see that your details are vivid and specific. Can you make a supporting detail more concrete? Are there any persuasive, colorful specifics you can add?
5. Try to eliminate wordiness (see page 445) and clichés (see page 442).
6. In general, improve the flow of your writing.
7. Include a final sentence that rounds off the paper, bringing it to a close.

Activity

7

Editing and Proofreading

When you have your almost-final draft of the paper, proofread it as follows:

1. Using your dictionary, check any words that you think might be misspelled. Though the spell-checking features on most word-processing programs are useful tools, they often do not detect commonly misused words (see pages 412–434) such as *there*, *their*, and *they're*. Make sure you proofread your draft manually to avoid such errors.
2. Using Part Two of this book, check your paper for mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and usage.
3. Read the paper aloud, listening for awkward or unclear spots. Make the changes needed for the paragraph to read smoothly and clearly. Even better, see if you can get another person to read the draft aloud to you. The spots that this person has trouble reading are spots where you may have to do some rewriting.
4. Take a sheet of paper and cover your writing so that you can expose and carefully check one line at a time. Or read your writing backward, from the end of the paragraph to the beginning. Look for typing errors, omitted words, and other remaining errors.

Don't fail to edit and proofread carefully. You may be tired of working on your paper at this point, but you want to give the extra effort needed to make it as good as possible. A final push can mean the difference between a higher and a lower grade.

Activity

8

Ten Writing Assignments

Your instructor may ask you to do one or more of the following paragraph writing assignments. Be sure to check the rules for paper format on page 289.

Writing Assignment

1 Providing Examples

Listed below are three topic sentences, followed by specific examples, the supporting details. On a piece of paper, invent two additional examples to support each point. Try to make your examples as specific and as realistic as the ones shown.

Point: My friend Mac has several dangerous driving habits.

1. For one thing, he never signals when he's going to make a left-hand turn. The only warning a car behind Mac has is when he slows down suddenly.
2. . . .
3. . . .

Point: My apartment is in need of repairs.

1. When it rains, water runs down through the ceiling light fixture in the bedroom. The ceiling is always damp and soggy, and there is a musty odor that grows stronger every day.
2. . . .
3. . . .

Point: There are three kinds of everyday happenings that really annoy me.

1. First of all, I hate waiting in long lines at a store, especially when several employees are standing around nearby when they could be opening up another register.
2. . . .
3. . . .

Writing Assignment

2

A Great Snack

Everyone has a favorite snack. What is yours? Maybe it is a huge plate of tortilla chips coated with cheese, a bowl of vanilla ice cream sprinkled with semi-sweet chocolate chips, or a stack of chocolate graham crackers to dip in hot cocoa with marshmallows floating on top. Write a paragraph about preparing and eating your perfect snack, including any special way, place, or time you prefer to eat the snack.

Begin your paragraph with a statement that summarizes the details you plan to write about, such as this: “One of my favorite snacks is a ham and cheese sandwich with pickle chips, which must be made and eaten in just the right ways.” Then go on to explain in detail just how you prepare your snack. For the example above, you would include what kind of bread you use, how many slices of ham and cheese you put on, and where exactly you position the pickle chips. You would then go on to write about how you like to eat your creation. For instance, perhaps the best way to eat your favorite snack is late at night while sitting on your living room couch with a good book in your hand and the TV turned on with the sound turned down.

Your paragraph will be organized in time order, describing the different steps that are involved in your enjoyment of the snack. Help your reader follow your supporting details by using time transition words, such as *first*, *next*, *then*, and *finally*.

Writing Assignment

3

A Special Photograph

Pictures have a magical power. They freeze moments in time forever, allowing us to look back to events that happened long ago. Find a photograph that has special meaning for you. Perhaps it is a photo of a family member who has passed away or a childhood picture of you and a close friend. Write a paragraph describing the picture and explaining its significance. Begin with your topic sentence, perhaps similar to one of the following:

A photo I have of me with my first girlfriend, Dana, is very special for two reasons.

A photograph of a funny scene during my tenth birthday party reminds me of the most fun—and the funniest—birthday party I ever had.

Since your readers will not actually see the picture, it is up to you to provide descriptive details so that they will know just what the picture looks like. You

might use that description as a starting point for the specific details needed to support your topic sentence.

After describing the photo referred to in the first topic sentence above, for example, you would go on to explain the two reasons mentioned. One reason might be that the photo was taken on a particularly wonderful date. A colorful description of that date will help readers see just how terrific it was. Your second reason might be that Dana is the person you ended up marrying, and that photo is the earliest one of you two together. A few more details about the photo—how you two posed, the expressions on your faces—may tell how the photo shows you suspected even then you would end up together. (You may wish to attach a copy of the photo to the draft of the paper that you hand in.)

Writing Assignment

4 Your Position in the Family

Psychologists have concluded that there are significant differences in being an only, oldest, middle, or youngest child. Which of these are you, and how did it influence the way you were brought up? Did you have more responsibilities than your brothers and sisters? If you were an only child, did you spend a lot of time with adults? Were you a spoiled youngest child? Jot down the advantages and disadvantages that come to mind.

Use the most important ideas on your list to develop a paragraph on how you think your position in your family affected you. Begin with your topic sentence, a statement such as this: “As the second of three children, I received less attention, was given more independence, and was pushed less to achieve than my brother and sister.” Use specific examples to illustrate each part of your topic sentence. Try to make your examples interesting and colorful by including very specific relevant details, such as how things looked and what was said.

Writing Assignment

5 An Embarrassing Moment

Each of us has been embarrassed at some time or other. Thankfully, we often look back at our embarrassing moments years later and smile. Write a paragraph about an embarrassing incident that happened to you which you can smile about today. The paragraph should provide lots of specific detail so that readers can feel and understand your embarrassment.

Begin your paragraph with a topic sentence that tells readers the general situation in which you were embarrassed, such as any of the following.

My first day on the job as a waiter ended with an embarrassing accident that still makes me cringe a little today.

When I met my girlfriend's parents, something happened that was so embarrassing it took me many months to be able to smile about it.

One of the most embarrassing moments in my life happened in high school when I was walking in the cafeteria with a platter of meat loaf on my tray.

You might find freewriting to be a useful way of quickly getting down on paper the story you want to tell. Then you can use that freewriting as a starting point by adding, subtracting, and refining. As you tell events in the order in which they happened, help your readers follow your narrative by using time transitions like *first*, *next*, *then*, and *finally*.

Writing Assignment

6

Leaving Home

Sooner or later most young people leave the home they have grown up in to begin life on their own. While the feeling of independence may be thrilling, flying the coop also involves numerous problems. Write about one problem that many people are likely to meet when they live away from home for the first time. Your thesis statement should be similar to either of these:

When young adults move out on their own for the first time, they are likely to experience a problem with _____.

When I moved out of my parents' home to live on my own for the first time, one problem I experienced was _____.

Before beginning this paragraph, you may want to make a list of problems that young people on their own for the first time are likely to experience or problems that you experienced when you were first on your own. Select one of those problems to write about. Make sure you use adequate and relevant support to back up your point.

Writing Assignment

7 Life on the Job

At some point or other, each of us has had a job that we have strong feelings about. Write a paragraph about the best or worst job you have ever had. You might begin with a general description of your job, explaining what it was and what you were supposed to do.

Here are some thesis statements that may help you think about your own paper.

I hated my government office job because the building was in bad condition, the rules were ridiculous, and many of the workers were unhappy.

I love my job as a waiter because my boss is friendly, the schedule is flexible, and the pay is good.

Writing Assignment

8 A Letter of Praise or Criticism

Most of us watch some television, listen to the radio, or read the newspaper. We have each seen, heard, or read things that we have found enjoyable or offensive. Write a letter to a television network, radio station, or newspaper in which you compliment or criticize something that you saw, listened to, or read. Don't just say you liked or disliked your topic. Instead give two or three detailed reasons that support your feelings either way.

Writing Assignment

9 The Most Important Qualities in a Person

TV ads, music videos, and many popular TV shows suggest that our culture values physical beauty, strength, and wealth. But are these the most important qualities a person can have? Can you think of others that are more important? For example, which is better: for a teenager to learn how to be cool or how to be kind? Think about the most important qualities a person can have and choose one that you think is very important. Write a paragraph in which you show why the trait you chose is so crucial.

A good prewriting strategy is to write a list of personal qualities that are important to you. Then choose the one that you feel most strongly about. Free-write on some of these potential topics to see if they make strong subjects. In this way, you'll be able to determine whether a particular quality will work for this assignment.

Alternatively, write a paragraph titled "The Most Unpleasant Quality in People."

Writing Assignment

An Analysis of Spending Habits

10

Like many people, you probably would be happy if you could put more of your money aside for future needs, perhaps next year's tuition, another car, or even a new home. But—also like many people—you may find that by the end of each month, there is nothing much left of your paycheck. Often, a careful analysis of spending habits turns up several ways a person can find some cash to squirrel away. To prepare for this assignment, do a careful analysis of your own spending and shopping patterns. Then write a paragraph about one way you feel that you can change your spending habits in order to feed your bank account. Use at least three specific details.

Here's a sample scratch outline for this assignment:

Topic sentence: I now see that I can spend much less at the supermarket by being more disciplined.

- (1) I can be more careful about using coupons.
- (2) I can take better advantage of sales.
- (3) I can buy less junk food.

If after analyzing your spending habits you feel that you have been doing a good job of making the most of your paycheck, write a paragraph instead about your success. A thesis statement for that paragraph might go like this: "An analysis of my spending habits shows that I have been doing a pretty good job of keeping down my food expenses."