

The Art of Composition:

Writing the Essay



Structuring the Composition

WS# 1.4

Compositions are structured much like individual paragraphs. There are clear introductory and concluding elements. However, compositions are a series of paragraphs that attempt to communicate a main idea that cannot be sufficiently developed in one paragraph.

Introductory Paragraph

- ❖ Hook
- ❖ Introductory Material
- ❖ Thesis Statement

Concluding statements

Unlike an individual paragraph, the clinching statement of a composition paragraph should do one or more of the following:

- Restate main idea of paragraph
- Connect paragraph main idea with composition thesis
- Restate main idea of paragraph and transition into / setup next paragraph main idea

Supporting Paragraphs

- ❖ Topic Sentence
- ❖ Supporting Details
- ❖ Clincher Sentence

Composition Paragraphs

Like individual paragraphs, composition paragraphs should be organized in some way to support the main idea of the larger piece of writing.

Typical functions, or purposes, of these paragraphs are generally one of the following:

- explain or inform
- narrate a story / anecdote / analogy
- describe events, persons, activities
- define
- persuade
- transition from one subject to the next

Concluding Paragraph

- ❖ Restatement of thesis
- ❖ Review main ideas
- ❖ Provide closure – a final thought

Extending Your Ideas

The conclusion should make a lasting impression while providing a sense of completeness. The final thought(s) should extend from the points discussed in the body of your writing.

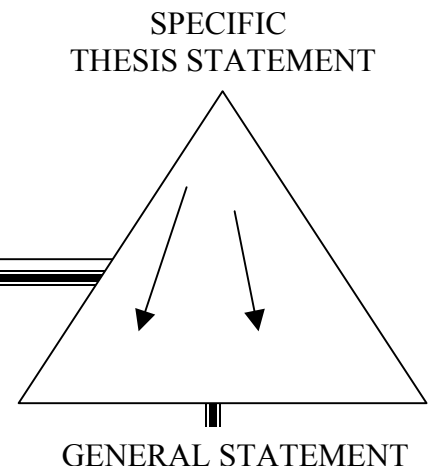
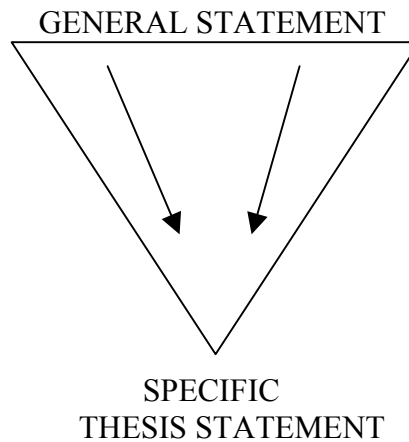
A Closer Look: The Introduction

WS# 1.1

The introduction is a unique paragraph because it must prepare the reader for the text that will follow. It should accomplish each of the following:

- (1) Catch the interest of the audience
- (2) Clearly indicate the topic and purpose
- (3) Establish the tone of the composition

- HOOK
- TRANSITION
- THESIS



Hooking the reader ...

Anecdote / Example

Use a brief personal story / example that leads naturally to the thesis statement.

Contradictory Statement

Begin with a statement that contradicts your thesis in order to interest the reader.

General Background Knowledge

Provide background knowledge when it might be helpful to an audience that is not familiar with your topic.

Question

Although this technique should only be used as a last resort or unless the topic truly warrants it, ask a question that requires more than a "yes" or "no" response that will encourage your audience to continue reading.

Direct Quotation

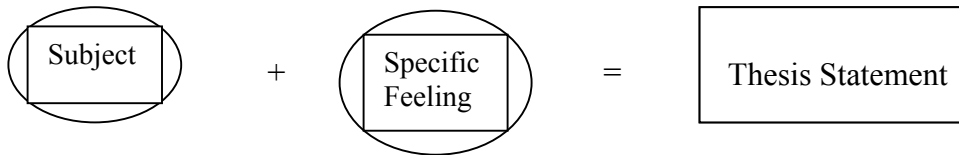
Use a passage or text or a comment from someone notable to introduce the general topic and connect it with your thesis statement.

Constructing a Thesis Statement



A thesis statement is the controlling idea of a composition. It states the main idea(s) of the writing while establishing the tone.

IN A SINGLE SENTENCE, THE **THESIS STATEMENT** DECLARES THE **MAIN SUBJECT** AND A **FEELING/ATTITUDE** ABOUT THAT SUBJECT.



Writing a Thesis Statement

subject (Cancún, Mexico's metamorphosis from drowsy fishing village to vacation paradise)

+ **a specific feeling about the subject** (is a simple story of determination and luck)

= **an effective thesis statement**

Thesis Statement: Cancún, Mexico's metamorphosis from drowsy fishing village to vacation paradise is a simple story of determination and luck.

Defining Your Subject

1. Consider the information that you have gathered and decide what specifically you would like to discuss in your research.
the metamorphosis of Cancún, Mexico, from a drowsy fishing village to a vacation paradise
2. Put your idea into a form of a question.
What type of metamorphosis took place in Cancún, Mexico?
3. Now turn your question into a sentence that states exactly what you would like to declare about your subject.
Cancún, Mexico's metamorphosis from drowsy fishing village to vacation paradise is a simple story of determination and luck.

Evaluating a Thesis Statement

WS# 1.1

Thesis Structure

- (1) Develop your thesis from information gathered.
- (2) Include both a limited topic as your subject and the specific feeling you have about the topic as your main idea.
- (3) Be clear and specific.
- (4) Use parallel structures.
- (5) Keep your thesis in front of you as you write.

Thesis Do's

- (1) Must be an opinion.
- (2) Must have 2 or 3 points that will be developed.
- (3) Must be supported with research or other types of support.

Thesis Review

How well the writer has focused on and supported his or her thesis determines the quality of a paper. A good thesis statement can answer **yes** to the following:

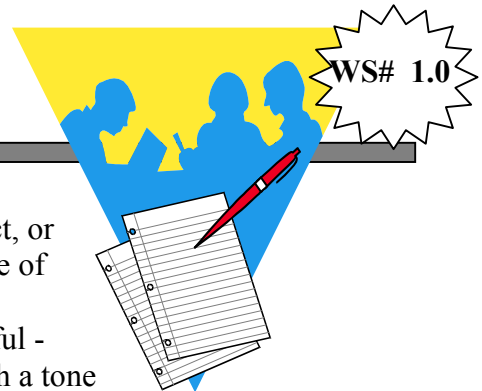
- Does your thesis clearly define a specific opinion on some subject?
- Is the thesis stated in a clear, direct sentence?
- Is your thesis supported by the information you have gathered?
- Is your thesis located as the last sentence in the introductory paragraph?

Statements to Avoid

- (1) DON'T make your thesis merely an announcement of your subject matter or a description of your intentions. DO NOT use phrases like "I'm going to write about . . ." or "This paper is about"
- (2) DON'T clutter your thesis with expressions such as "in my opinion," "I believe," and "I think that"

Establishing Tone

WS# 1.0

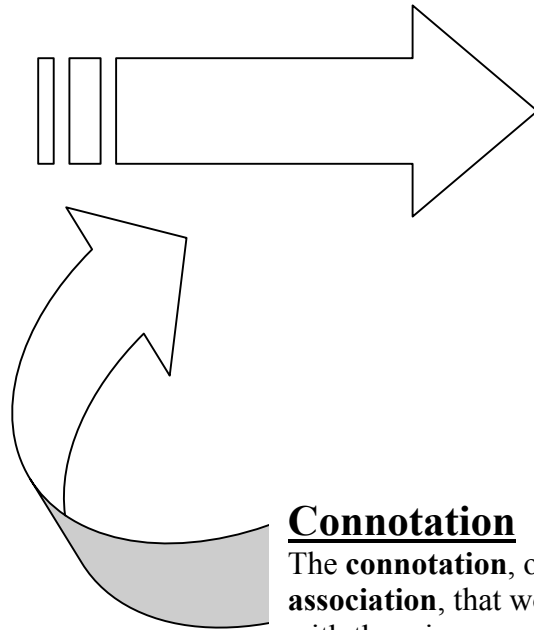


The attitude a writer takes toward his or her characters, subject, or readers is called **tone**. Just as a person speaks in a certain tone of voice, written text also conveys, or expresses, a tone.

The tone of a text may be critical, detached, angry, or respectful - whatever fits its subject and message. The writer can establish a tone through the use of imagery and figurative language such as similes, metaphors, and personification. Word Choice, or diction, though, is the foundation of a writer's tone. The writer's use of language, as well as the connotative responses to that language, powerfully emphasizes the effect a writer has on his or her readers.

Diction

- ❑ Specific language
 - action verbs
 - precise nouns
 - vivid adjectives / adverbs
- ❑ Sensory details
- ❑ Figurative Language
 - similes
 - metaphors
 - personification
 - hyperbole
- ❑ Dialogue / Dialect
- ❑ Slang
- ❑ Verbal informal language
 - contractions
 - clichés
- ❑ Written formal language
 - standard grammar / mechanics



Tone

Connotation

The **connotation**, or **emotional association**, that words carry with them is a powerful tool in creating a tone. Two words can have the same **denotation**, or **dictionary meaning**, but one may be more positive or negative than the other may. Consider the difference in the words *proud* and *arrogant*, both of which mean "full of pride."

Using Descriptive Language

WS# 1.2
1.9

Language is power! Using specific language to describe your world or explain yourself makes it easier for your audience to grasp your vision. Whether you are speaking to someone or writing about some aspect of a topic, use precise nouns, action verbs, vivid modifiers (adjectives, adverbs, comparisons), and sensory words to capture your audience's attention and to make your communication more lively.

PRECISE NOUNS

GENERAL
↓
SPECIFIC
↓
MORE SPECIFIC

monster
↓
vampire
↓
Count Dracula

animal
↓
amphibian
↓
bullfrog

rain
↓
storm
↓
hurricane



VIVID ADJECTIVES / ADVERBS

Make your modifiers livelier!

funny	→	amusing	→	hilarious
heavy	→	weighty	→	ponderous
well	→	adequately	→	expertly



ACTIVE VERBS

Maintain an active voice in your writing by choosing verbs that are descriptive.

dashes or darts
sauntered or lumbered

instead of *runs quickly*
instead of *walked slowly*

SENSORY WORDS

Use words that appeal to the five senses:

Sight: *maroon, globular, flashy, radiant, serene*
Sound: *clamor, gurgle, giggle*
Taste: *tangy, ripe, peppery*
Smell: *aromatic, dank, pungent*
Touch: *crisp, gritty, damp*



Integrating Direct Quotations



Anytime you directly use another writer’s words to support your conclusion, you are citing evidence, or quoting a source. This use of text passages, lines, or words can be integrated into your essay in one of the four ways.

P r o s e Q u o t e s

(1) Incorporated into the Sentence

A creator always has an obligation to the thing he creates. This is clearly shown in the epigraph from Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in which the monster seemingly cries out, “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me Man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me...?” (4). At his creation, the monster is a...

- **Mark omission of the text by three periods (called an ellipsis) with a space between each (. . .).**

(2) Set-Up by the Previous Statement

A creator always has an obligation to the thing he creates. Mary Shelley clearly shows this in the epigraph for Frankenstein, an epigraph that reflects the monster’s point of view: “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me Man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me...?” (4). At his creation, the monster is a...

- **Just giving a citation is not enough. You must say something about it before and after the citation.**
- **The colon is used after a COMPLETE sentence.**

(3) Set Apart from the Main Text

A creator always has an obligation to the thing he creates. As an epigraph for Frankenstein, Mary Shelley chose the following lines from Milton’s Paradise Lost that reflect the creature’s point of view: “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me Man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me...?” (4). The constant pleas of the monster itself, though, provide the strongest evidence of the creator / creation obligation:

How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? (100)

At his creation, the monster is a...

- **When quoting more than 4 lines, skip a line and double-indent**
- **Continue your paragraph without indenting**

Integrating Direct Quotations - Poetry

WS# 1.6

P o e t r y

(4) Lines of Poetry

Incorporating citations from poetry is very similar to the methods used to integrate prose. Make note of the following examples:

Example A

The first stanza of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" provides the starting point for the emotional irregularity that characterizes the speaker's condition throughout the poem. The speaker pointedly shares that "[o]nce upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary, / Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore - / While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping ..." (lns. 1-3). Physically exhausted, Poe's speaker ...

- Separate lines of poetry with a slash (/) for up to 3 or 4 lines, depending on the length of the lines
- Use brackets [] when text is altered from its original form in order to flow naturally in the new sentence in which it is integrated
- Refer to specific poem lines using the abbreviation "lns."

Example B

The first stanza of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" provides the starting point for the emotional irregularity that characterizes the speaker's condition throughout the poem. The speaker pointedly shares his frame of mind:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore –
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. (lns. 1-4).

Physically exhausted, Poe's speaker ...

- When quoting more than 4 lines, introduce and double-indent
- Preserve the capitalization at the start of each sentence
- Present the text exactly as the author intended it

Warning! Warning! Warning! Warning!

AVOID THESE ...

- Sentences that state, "The following quotation shows ..."
- Sentences that begin, "A quote in the poem that proves this is ..."
- Sentences that begin, "One example of this can be found in the passage ..."
- Floating quotations – quotes that are not connected to any sentence

**The Horror!
I can't read these
statements again!
Save me!**



Very
Important!

Unity and Coherence in the Composition

WS# 1.9

Unity

Maintaining unity in a paragraph necessitates that every sentence in a paragraph or every paragraph in a composition should be closely related to the topic. A strong paragraph will eliminate sentences that do not relate or help develop the paragraph's main idea. Thus, a unified composition will only have paragraphs that are crucial to developing the thesis. Ask a peer reviewer to read the checklist below and keep it in mind as they listen.

Unity Checklist

1. Does every detail I have selected support the main idea?
2. Have I organized the supporting details in the most logical way?
3. Have I included any sentences that are unnecessary because they simply Restate the main point without adding any new information or meaning?
4. Have I made the relationships between my ideas clear?

Coherence

Maintaining coherence in a paragraph or composition not only requires unity, but also a logical, smooth, and natural flow from one idea to another. When this occurs, coherence has been established. There are three key ways to create coherence in a paragraph or multi-paragraph text:

(1) Arrange ideas to achieve emphasis

All the parts of the composition are not necessarily of equal importance in explaining your topic to your audience. How you arrange and develop the paragraphs in the body of the composition should, therefore, clearly indicate which ideas and details are most important. Place emphasis in one of these three ways:

- (1) direct statement
- (2) by position – first and last body paragraphs or weakest to strongest idea
- (3) by proportion – a topic may use several paragraphs if it has more value

Maintaining Coherence



(2) Arrange ideas to achieve coherence

Body paragraphs should be well developed and arranged in a logical order. Use a pattern of organization that is appropriate to the composition purpose and the audience.

Various Methods of organizing supporting details and the most common purposes for each are listed below. However, do not feel that you have to limit the organization of your writing to just what is shown here.

- Chronological Order
- Spatial Order
- Order of Importance
- Cause and Effect
- Comparison and Contrast
- Explanation
- Classification

Chronological Order

- ❑ Narrating a story
- ❑ Explaining a step-by-step process
- ❑ Relating a historical account
- ❑ Relating an incident or anecdote

Spatial Order

- ❑ Describing a scene or place

Order of Importance

- ❑ Presenting facts, examples, reasons
- ❑ Writing persuasively
- ❑ Evaluating a subject

- ❑ Explaining scientific findings
- ❑ Explaining a historical event

Classification

- ❑ Analyzing literature, a speech, etc.
- ❑ Defining a subject

Maintaining Coherence



(3) Connect your ideas to achieve coherence

In an effective composition, the current of thought flows smoothly throughout the composition. Use one or more types of transitional words or phrases to connect ideas within and between paragraphs:

- (1) transitional expressions (see below)
- (2) direct pronoun references
- (3) repetition of key words

➤ **Words that can be used to show LOCATION:**

Against	Among	Away from
Beneath	Between	Beyond
In back of	In front of	Onto
Over	Throughout	Under

➤ **Words that can be used to show TIME:**

After	As soon as	At
Before	Finally	First
Immediately	Meanwhile	Second
Then	Third	Tomorrow
Until	When	Yesterday

➤ **Words that can be used to show SIMILARITIES:**

Also	As	Furthermore
Like	Likewise	Similarly

➤ **Words that can be used to show DIFFERENCES:**

Although	But	Even though
However	On the other hand	Yet

➤ **Words that can be used to EMPHASIZE A POINT:**

Again	For this reason	In fact
To emphasize	To repeat	Truly

➤ **Words that can be used to CONCLUDE:**

As a result	Finally	In conclusion
In summary	Therefore	To sum up

➤ **Words that can be used to ADD INFORMATION:**

Additionally	Also	And
Another	Equally important	Finally
In addition	Likewise	Moreover

➤ **Words that can be used to CLARIFY:**

For instance	In other words
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