

The Step by Step Process of Basic Essay Writing

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Outline

Introduction

Thesis: In order to become good writers, students must follow six specific steps to accomplish the desired results.

- I. The first step in the process is to write a short, simple, declarative sentence that makes one point.
- II. After the thesis sentence is developed from its simplified version, write three more sentences about it.
- III. Now that the thesis development is complete with three additional topic sentences, each supporting the idea of the thesis, the next in the process is to write five more sentences about each of the three topic sentence.
- IV. The fourth step in writing for desired results enhances the first three and is itself the most detailed of all the six.
- V. Having come to this point, the writer is ready to advance to step five where paragraphs and sentences are connected.
- VI. The final step is similar to step five, but connects some of the sentences within the paragraphs to each other.

Conclusion

The Step by Step Process of Basic Essay Writing

Writing is an important communication skill that is a necessary ability to be successful in today's competitive job market. It can make the difference between getting a career and just getting a job. Even when applying for jobs that people consider 'no brainers', employers often ask applicants to write a paragraph or two explaining why they would make a good employee for the company to which they are applying. In one instance an applicant was asked to state, in a paragraph, why he'd make a good team member for their store. In light of this, he realized that learning to write effectively should be the goal of every college student, and so, he registered for an English Composition I course where he was attending college. The textbook he used was *Writing to the Point* by authors William Kerrigan and Allan Metcalf where they describe six steps to essay writing. They call this approach to essay writing "writing to the point", which identifies the strategy for structured paragraph composition. Within the course of instruction, the authors identify and explain these six steps necessary for coherent writing. The labels X, 1, 2, and 3 are used as identifiers to signify the thesis statement (X), sometimes referred to the main idea or theme and three topic sentences (1,2,3) for body paragraphs. The emphasis is that students must 'write to the point'. In order to become good writers, students must follow six specific steps to accomplish the desired results.

The first step in the process is to write a short, simple, declarative sentence that makes one point. Keep is simple and direct to begin with and then, after making it clear and concise, develop it by rewriting the sentence several more times; each time adding more information to paint a word picture in the reader's mind. For example, write a

declarative sentence and then write it again on the next line down, but this second time add more information to the sentence. The additional information should clarify and give more detail about what was first said. For instance, if the first draft of the sentence was “Mary went to school”, the revision of it might say “Mary, who is the first child in the family to attend college, wore her new red coat on the first day of school to make a good impression.” This often takes rewriting the sentence several times to get the desired result. Each time, enhance it by adding specific information to add clarity to what has already been said. Do this all without erasing the previous versions of the sentence. Sometimes, while revising a sentence, part of a previous one may be incorporated into the latest one. Therefore, never write, erase, and rewrite, but write and rewrite without erasing, so every sentence written can be a source for word choices and ideas for a new one. In addition to this, the thesis sentence must make only one statement. A sentence that states ‘Michael was a good carpenter, likes stamp collecting, and was the eldest in his family’ may be a complete sentence, but it makes more than one statement; in fact it makes three declarations 1) he’s a good carpenter, 2) he collects stamps, 3) he is the oldest child in his family. This statement is too broad covering more than one subject. It should be restated more specifically by addressing only one of the three subjects; ‘Michael is a skilled craftsman who is able to shape wildlife images from old tree trunks’. The end product of step one is a refined, detailed, coherent sentence that makes one statement.

After the thesis sentence is developed from its simplified version, write three more sentences about it. These following sentences are not the main idea (thesis), but

are main points that are directly related to it and support it. EXAMPLE A below illustrates this:

- X Miss Smith is a good geometry teacher.
- 1 She has a Masters degree in Mathematics.
- 2 She has a clear way of explaining complex ideas.
- 3 She is always fair in her grading of test papers.

Note that each one of the three topic sentences, identified as 1, 2, and 3, all directly say something about why Miss Smith is a good geometry teacher. Now, look at EXAMPLE B, which illustrates an *incorrect* X, 1, 2, 3:

- X Miss Smith is a teacher.
- 1 She has a Masters degree.
- 2 She is always on time.
- 3 She is married to a farmer.

There are several issues with this X, 1, 2, 3. First of all, the thesis (X) is too broad. It does not give any detail about Miss Smith, except that she is a teacher. And while sentence 1 is clear and relates to X, it could say much more as seen in the previous Example A. Furthermore, sentence 2 has nothing to do with her being a teacher, but speaks about her timeliness, not her ability to teach. Finally, the last sentence relates to her life outside the classroom and subsequently is unrelated to the thesis.

Now that the thesis development is complete with three additional topic sentences, each supporting the idea of the thesis, the next in the process is to write five more sentences about each of the three topic sentences. This next aspect of essay structure is usually easier for students. It consists of writing more about what has

already been stated in the topic sentence of each paragraph. Here is an over simplified example to help visualize what this means. Note that the topic sentence is underlined here simply to set it off from the sentences that follow it in the paragraph that are listed as A through E.

Thesis: X I dislike the winter.

Topic sentence: I. I dislike the cold temperature.

Supporting sentences: A. My hands are always freezing.
 B. My nose is continually running.
 C. My feet are like icicles.
 D. I'm always shivering.
 E. I can't ever seem to get warm.

Sentences A through E all explain why the writer dislikes the cold temperature, while the topic sentence, gives one reason why he dislikes the winter. It would be good to point out here that this same hierarchy is used in the essay outline itself. Each one of the lettered sentences offers a specific reason why the person dislikes the cold temperature. The following indented paragraph illustrates how these sentences would come together in paragraph form:

I dislike the cold temperature. My hands are always freezing. My nose is continually running. My feet are like icicles. I'm always shivering. I can't ever seem to get warm.

These sentences obviously lack development, yet each explains another aspect of the writers dislike for the cold. The idea of only five sentences, plus the topic sentence in a paragraph, is certainly considered elementary at best, but serves the writer well in

creating a first draft where he or she can then continue developing and composing more sentences through the revision process.

The fourth step in writing for desired results enhances the first three and is itself the most detailed of all the six. This step incorporates the use of word pictures. At this point, the writer should look back over each sentence in the draft and see where it is possible to add clarification or more information by inserting adjectives for more description. Attention to word pictures that supply specific details for the reader will make his or her reading more enjoyable and will also better communicate the intention of the writer. To do this, one must get specific about specifics. Someone may write “I dislike the cold temperature”, but the process of revising that sentence can bring it to maturity. Look at the following example of such an evolution and development of a simple subtopic sentence “My hands are always freezing” in the following revision process (1 through 1.3).

- 1.0 My hands are always freezing.
- 1.1 Even when wearing gloves, my hands are always freezing.
- 1.2 During the winter mornings, with the wind speed sometimes reaching 30 or 40 miles per hour, the temperature often drops into single digits, so even when wearing gloves, my hands are always freezing.
- 1.3 During the winter mornings, with the wind speed sometimes reaching 30 or 40 miles per hour, the temperature often drops into single digits, so even when wearing gloves, my hands are always freezing and it takes half my first period class to thaw out.

To reiterate what has been accomplished here, the writer has made the material in the first of the five sentences that support the topic sentence in this step more specific and concrete. Go into detail, give examples, use illustrations, and share anecdotes. Don't ask, "What will I say next?" Instead, say some more about what has already been said. The goal is to say a lot about a little; painting word pictures in the mind of the reader.

Having come to this point, the writer is ready to advance to step five where paragraphs and sentences are connected. This type of connection will help the reader move from one point to another, from one paragraph to another, and from one sentence to another smoothly. To do this, writers must employ the use of transitions, which can be either words or phrases. Transitions, as the word implies, move the reader from one point to the next by creating bridges between sentences, paragraphs, or ideas. Without these connectors, the writing becomes choppy and lacks coherence between ideas. Missing bridges that connect ideas, thoughts, or points can often create reader fatigue and cause one to lose interest.

A visual way of illustrating this connection and its importance to paragraph and sentence coherence is to imagine a PowerPoint presentation without the use of transitions between slides; each slide flashes on the screen and then abruptly disappears. When transitions are inserted between slides, one screen smoothly fades to the next, which creates a more enjoyable slideshow. With the use of transitions, the reader is gently and coherently moved from one part of the essay to another. When transitions are used within the paragraph, these bridging words and phrases bind together words and thoughts creating structure and coherence in the writing. There are many transitional words, but even though the list is substantial, it does not mean the

writer can just insert anyone of them into a sentence. These special words can be categorized by usage. Transitional words are classified into groups such as, addition, consequence, emphasis, similarity, exception, restatement, comparison and contrast, and summarizing. Words like also, again, as well as, besides, coupled with, furthermore, in addition, likewise, moreover, similarly fall into the Addition category. Although a word like *similar* may be in the Addition group, it is also part of the Similarity group. Therefore, some words in a group may also be found in another category. Like linking words, transitional phrases serve the same function, but often times improve the quality of the transition. Phrases that bridge thoughts or points in the writing are a combination of words that link ideas, paragraphs, or sentences together, just as transitional words do. Phrases like 'in addition to', 'in other words', 'for instance', 'most importantly', 'at the same time', and 'for example' are all transitional phrases that are used as connectors of ideas, statements, or blocks of text. Whether it's a word or phrase, transitions are necessary bridges and links that make for a smooth read, which effortlessly moves the reader from point to point and adds coherence to the writing.

The final step is similar to step five, but connects some of the sentences within the paragraphs to each other. This aspect of transitioning is often used within paragraphs where sub-points are listed one after another. When a writer states there are specific reasons to take action, he may use simple transitions to identify them. Typical words that can be used to link these together are 'first, second, third', 'first, next, finally', or 'first, another, also'. More complex phrases can also be incorporated. They are actually dependent or subordinate phrases. Note the following sentence: '*In addition to supplying income*, teenage employment also develops responsibility'. In this

sentence the transitional phrase is italicized. Notice that the sentence incorporates a transitional phrase 'in addition to' followed by the remainder of the sentence (an independent clause) that make the connection to a previous point. Transitions within a paragraph bind together the overall point made in the topic sentence.

It's always easier to get to a final destination when there is a path to follow, and this is certainly true in essay writing. Once a path is established, it is easy to write an essay, step by step. The most important sentence in an essay is the thesis statement, which for the purpose of this instruction, is placed as the last sentence in the introduction because it is the most specific statement in the entire first paragraph and furthermore, its the pivotal point of the whole essay. Following it are three body paragraphs that all begin with topic sentences that specific and directly relate to the thesis. Then five more sentences follow each of the topic sentences to supply enough material for a first draft for paragraphs one, two, and three in the body of the paper. After the draft is completed using these sentences, the writer must begin the revision process, which includes steps four through six. Reading each sentence and asking the question "What more can I say about what has already been said?" will open the door for the writer to say more. A good composition gives details, illustrations, and examples in addition to having specific and concrete words and sentences. Finally, the last step is to make all sentences, paragraphs, and ideas connect. This is accomplished by the use of transitional words and phrases, which build bridges between paragraphs, between sentences, and between ideas that, are presented in the essay. And just as the introduction is important to bring the reader to the thesis, so is the conclusion important to summarize and bring closure to it. Although practice makes perfect, most students

experience success in writing a basic five paragraph essay when they simply follow the six steps of essay writing. It literally becomes as simple as X, 1, 2, 3.

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