

1. THE AUDIENCE

The two essential rules are: WRITE ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW. ALWAYS WRITE FOR AN AUDIENCE.

The audience is an essential concept for all writers. Writers choose their subjects and their methods of presenting material according to who will read the finished product. In order to communicate successfully, to write essays that have interest and value, you must decide:

- a. Who you are: a student? Son or daughter? Expert?
- b. Who your audience is: classmates, parents? Officers?

Your decisions about who you are and who your audience is will determine:

- a. What you write: what does your audience know? What are the interests, the needs, and the expectations of your audience? What does your audience not know? What might your audience want to know?
- b. How you write: will you use short sentences and simple language? Will you use sophisticated concepts and terms?

All audiences have expectations. Your professors also have expectations when they make writing assignments (essays, laboratory reports, research papers,...), they expect their students to write in very specific ways.

1. Decide whether the following sentences are colloquial, neutral or formal.

Peter was sacked yesterday.

Peter was dismissed from work yesterday.

Peter was fired yesterday.

Aunt Mary died last week.

Aunt Mary kicked the bucket last week.

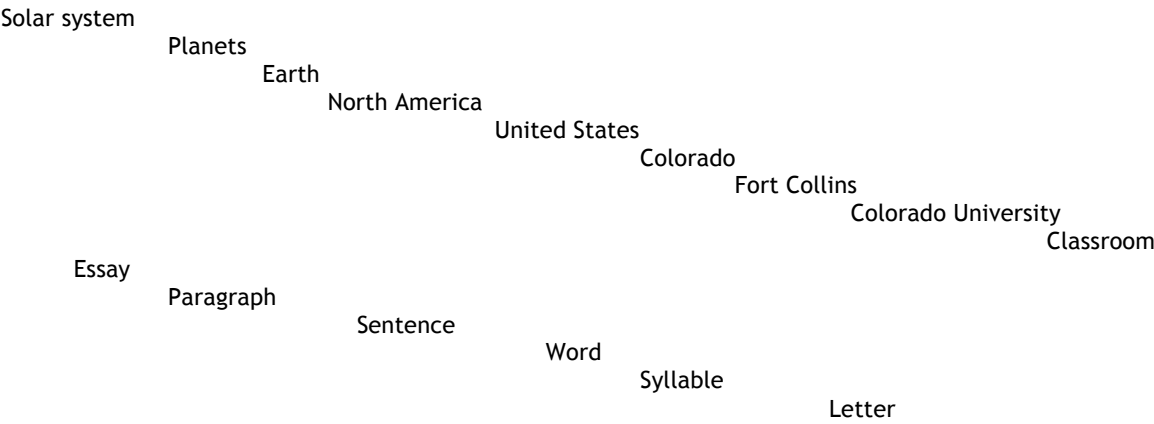
Aunt Mary passed away last week.

2. Write a paragraph describing a tree for the following audiences. You can choose between a or b:

- a. a school child
- b. a professor of botany

2. GENERAL IDEAS - SPECIFIC DETAILS

In writing a paragraph you will need to know the difference between a general idea and a specific detail. Between the two, many levels may exist. In the examples below, each word is more specific than the word above it. That is, each of the subsets is subordinate to the word above it:



In the example below, each general word is followed by several more specific words. All of the more specific words are equally specific; that is, each is on the same level of generality. This means that each of the more specific words is a coordinate of the word before it. Notice that a more specific word can become a general word:

GENERAL	MORE SPECIFIC	MORE SPECIFIC
animal	lion	
	horse	
	dog	
	bear	
		grizzly
		brown bear
		polar bear

1.

Choose two of the following general words. Write a general sentence about each word, and then write a more specific sentence about each word. For instance, MUSIC: *Everybody likes listening to music. Especially classical music calms people down and helps them relax.*
holidays - transportation - movies
2.

Make specific statements from the general statements below:

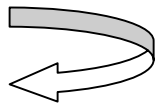
2.1 *People who play sports sometimes get hurt.*
2.2 *National parks are crowded during the summer months.*
2.3 *Learning a second language is difficult.*
2.4 *Gardening can be fun.*

3. THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A paragraph is a series of sentences that develop one idea. In English, that idea is usually stated in a general form in one sentence, called the **topic sentence**. That sentence tells your audience what to expect in the paragraph. The rest of the sentences in the paragraph provide the reader with specific explanation or proof, evidence and support of the general topic sentence. The supporting sentences help the reader understand more clearly what the writer means. They show that the topic sentence is valid. Of course, a reader does not have to agree with your topic sentence. But if your paragraph is complete, the information should show the reader that your point of view is worthwhile and clear.

In order to get to a paragraph, you need to narrow your subject to a topic. A topic is then a subject that has been narrowed so that it can be covered thoroughly. How narrow a topic is, depends on the assignment (length,...). The following examples show you how subjects can be narrowed:

SUBJECTS	TOPICS
Sports	Soccer, Marathon racing...
World Travel	Hiking through Europe, My first trip abroad...



For every topic, you can write several different paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs will have a topic sentence that will:

- introduce the topic in the paragraph
- be the most general sentence in the paragraph
- be the most important sentence in the paragraph
- contain **controlling ideas** that the following sentences in the paragraph will explain / define / clarify / illustrate

Examples of topic sentences:

- It is very difficult to be alone in a foreign country.
- Most people have the wrong idea about the definition of statistics.
- The most serious problem in higher education in Venezuela is the growing number of students who fail courses several times.

Each topic sentence contains several controlling ideas. These are words or phrases where the reader can ask questions about: *How? Why? In what ways? What does that mean?* The underlined words show the controlling ideas of the topic sentences above:

- It is very difficult to be alone in a foreign country.
- Most people have the wrong idea about the definition of statistics.
- The most serious problem in higher education in Venezuela is the growing number of students who fail courses several times.

NOTE:

A topic sentence cannot be a simple statement of fact because in a fact there are no controlling ideas that need development. Examples of facts that are not topic sentences:

You can buy these socks at K-Mart for \$2. We celebrate Christmas on December 25.

Weaker topic sentences are often simple personal opinion; the controlling idea in “I like” or “I think” is difficult to support. Examples of simple statements of opinion that are weak topic sentences:

I can't help liking this book. I like dogs better than cats. It is my opinion that smoking causes cancer.

A successful topic sentence usually contains an opinion that will be proved or supported in the paragraph, or a statement of intent that the writer will explain in detail in the paragraph.

Examples of topic sentences that have an opinion or a statement of intent:

Snakes make better pets than dogs or cats. Smoking can cause genetic defects in an unborn child. Marathon racing is good for the soul as well as for the body.

Choose 2 of the following subjects. Narrow each to a topic you could write a paragraph about. Then write a topic sentence for each topic.

Computers - horses - skiing - electronics - censorship - newspapers - sports cars - revolution - jewellery - space travel - agriculture - education - university - advertising

4. THE POINT PARAGRAPH

Each paragraph you write will contain a topic sentence and four to eight sentences that will support the topic sentence. These supporting sentences will be more specific than the topic sentence. A diagram of a balanced, detailed paragraph looks like this:

TOPIC SENTENCE (WITH CONTROLLING IDEAS 1-3)

A.	POINT NUMBER ONE	SPECIFIC DETAIL 1 SPECIFIC DETAIL 2
B.	POINT NUMBER TWO	SPECIFIC DETAIL 1 SPECIFIC DETAIL 2
C.	POINT NUMBER THREE	SPECIFIC DETAIL 1 SPECIFIC DETAIL 2

CONCLUDING SENTENCE


Resulting paragraph:

Riding a bicycle is preferable to driving a car. First of all, a bicycle is relatively inexpensive to buy and to maintain. While a car may cost thousands of dollars to buy and hundreds of dollars annually, a good bicycle will cost only a hundred dollars or so, and its annual maintenance cost is very small. Biking is also healthier; not only does the biker get more physical exercise than the driver, but bicycles are non-polluting. The consequence is a person with strong legs and a strong heart whose bicycle helps keep the environment clean. Finally, bicycling is, unlike driving, personally satisfying. Instead of being a robot inside a machine, the biker pedals along, enjoying the scenery, becoming a part of nature. In all but the most inclement weather, the bicycle is a pleasurable means of transportation.

1. Take different colours and mark the theoretical parts in the paragraph.
 2. Complete the paragraph you started in section 3 according to the structure above.

5. THE PROCESS OF WRITING A PARAGRAPH

1. Choose a subject that you know about! Ex: Studying abroad
2. Identify your audience. Ex: Classmates
3. Narrow your subject to a topic that will interest your audience. Examples:



Advantages and disadvantages of being a university student in the U.S. (SUBJECT)

Problems of living alone while studying at a university in the U.S.

Most serious problem of living alone while studying at a university in the USA (TOPIC)
4. Collect some ideas about your topic.

Having to clean the apartment

No one to wake me up in the morning

Having to shop and cook for myself

Missing classes because I don't keep a regular schedule

Spending my money too quickly

Having to do the laundry

Loneliness...
5. List details about some of your ideas that will interest your audience.

Cleaning the apartment > *wastes time, looks nice when done,...*

No one to wake me up > *late for class, never time for breakfast,...*

Loneliness > *homesick, no friends...*
6. Limit the ideas to the most important ones you want to communicate.

Ex: *housework*
7. State the main idea of the paragraph in your topic sentence.

Ex: *Since I began living in an apartment and going to school, my biggest problem has been the housework.*
8. Write a point paragraph

General topic sentence: *Since becoming a student at a university in the USA, the most serious problem of living alone has been my housework.*

Point number 1:

Specific detail 1:

Specific detail 2:

Point number 2:

Specific detail 1:

Specific detail 2:

Cleaning the apartment

Takes away from my studies

Makes the apartment look nice

Shopping for food

Don't know English names

Spend time asking for help etc.

Concluding statement: *If I did not have to do these jobs, I would have more hours to concentrate on my studies.*
9. Write the paragraph, using the details you have listed.

CHOOSE A SUBJECT. FOLLOW THE STEPS GIVEN IN THE PROCESS ABOVE TO DECIDE ON A TOPIC. THEN MAKE A POINT PARAGRAPH OUTLINE AND WRITE THE PARAGRAPH.

6. PLANNING THE ESSAY

An essay is a series of paragraphs about one subject. The essay normally has:

An introduction

This is the first paragraph in the essay. It ends with the **thesis sentence**. This sentence is the most general, most important sentence in the essay. It contains controlling ideas that limit and direct the rest of the essay. It basically summarizes (in different words) the different topic sentences of the essay. It is the strongest sentence of the essay and shows the reader the purpose of writing the whole essay. Catch the interest of the reader! Never start with "I think..."

A body

Different paragraphs that explain, define, illustrate the thesis sentence. Each paragraph consists of a topic sentence and several supporting sentences. The number of body paragraphs depends on the length and complexity of the assignment.

Conclusion

This paragraph completes the essay. Here you sum up what you have said before. Make a final statement.

Academic essay assignments are often very broad. You need to narrow your subject down first. Once you have narrowed down your subject, brainstorm it. The different topics you can use to write your paragraphs. Decide on 3-4 strong topics. Each of these topics you brainstorm again to find different strong specific details. Then you create topic sentences for each of your paragraphs.

The essay below demonstrates the principles of writing a basic essay. The different parts of the essay have been marked. **The thesis sentence is in bold**, *the topic sentences are in italics*, and each main point is underlined.

An ideal house pet

"A dog is man's best friend." That common saying may contain some truth, but dogs are not the only animal friend whose companionship people enjoy. For many people a cat is their best friend. **Despite what dog lovers may believe, cats make excellent house pets.**

In the first place, people enjoy the companionship of cats. Many cats are affectionate. They will snuggle up and ask to be petted, or scratched under the chin. Who can resist a purring cat? If they're not feeling affectionate, cats are generally quite playful. They love to chase balls and feathers, or just about anything dangling from a string. They especially enjoy playing when their owners are participating in the game. Contrary to popular opinion, cats can be trained. Using rewards and punishments, just like with a dog, a cat can be trained to avoid unwanted behavior or perform tricks. Cats will even fetch!

In the second place, cats are civilized members of the household. Unlike dogs, cats do not bark or make other loud noises. Most cats don't even meow very often. They generally lead a quiet existence. Cats also don't often have 'accidents'. Mother cats train their kittens to use the litter box, and most cats will use it without fail from that time on. Even stray cats usually understand the concept when shown the box and use it regularly. Cats do have claws, and owners must make provision for this. A scratching post in a favourite cat area of the house will often keep the cat content to leave the furniture alone. As a last resort, of course, cats can be declawed.

Lastly, one of the most attractive features of cats as house pets is their ease of care. Cats do not have to be walked. They get plenty of exercise in the house as they play and they do their business in the litter box. Cleaning a litter box is a quick, painless procedure. Cats also take care of their own grooming. Bathing a cat is almost never necessary because under ordinary circumstances cats clean themselves. Cats are more particular about personal cleanliness than people are. In addition, cats can be left home alone for a few hours without fear. Unlike some pets, most cats will not destroy the furnishings when left alone. They are content to go about their usual activities until their owners return.

Cats are low maintenance, civilized companions. People who have small living quarters or less time for pet care should appreciate these characteristics of cats. However, many people who have plenty of space and time still opt to have a cat because they love the cat personality. In many ways, cats are the ideal house pet.

7. ESSAY WRITING TIPS

The emphasis in essay writing is on facts and interpretation of the facts. These should be presented in a logical way using an appropriate writing style.

Some Writing Tips

- **Have a clear design when you write.**
Show your audience where a paragraph ends and where a new one starts.
- **Try not to make generalizations.**
Only make statements you can support with evidence.
- **Use linking words to connect your ideas, sentences and paragraphs.**
Using a variety of linking words makes reading your essay so much more enjoyable.
- **Try to avoid making sentences overlong and complicated.**
Short and simple sentences are liked better than complex and endless ones.
- **Do not address the reader directly or use questions.**
For example: "Does this mean that some strategies are better than others?"
- **Use straightforward language.**
Take care with grammar and sentence construction. Avoid using a note-style of writing.
- **Use impersonal language.**
Essays and reports should be written in the third person singular. Avoid personal terms such as 'I' or 'We'; the word 'It' should be used instead.
- **Be precise.**
Avoid using terms such as 'nice', 'good' or 'excellent' that lack a precise meaning. One person's idea of what is meant by 'good' is not necessarily another's.
- **Avoid using contractions (short forms of verbs).**
For example: 'they're' for 'they are', 'etc' and 'i.e.' should also be avoided.



8. HOW TO ANNOY YOUR TEACHER

The following time-tested methods of irritating your teacher and persuading him to deduct points and lower your mark will surely work for you, too.

1. Teachers just love repetitions, that is why you should repeat yourself as often as possible ("As I have already said before ...").
2. Save paper and write across the margins. Your teacher will be happy that he will not have to write too many comments.
3. Write illegibly. If you cannot, your handwriting should be as tiny as possible. Practise this at the bottom of each page.
4. If you are not sure how to spell a word, simply write your second version over the first one. This method is especially efficient with vowels. Your teacher just loves to find out whether it is supposed to be an 'a', an 'o' or maybe a 'u'.
5. Do not stick to the point. Do not even say what the point is. Just waffle on about anything that comes to your mind.
6. Do not reveal the source of any of your conclusions, interpretations etc. Never ever give any line numbers, they would spoil the teacher's fun to search for the passage you might refer to.
7. Do not use any quotation marks. Let the teacher find out himself whether you used your own words or not.
8. If a quotation does not fit into your sentence, simply change it. If necessary just leave out unnecessary words like *not*.
9. Do not begin a new paragraph for a new aspect, argument etc. It is so much more entertaining for the teacher to work that out himself.
10. Under no circumstances indent the first line of a new paragraph. Make sure that the last line of the previous paragraph goes to the very right margin so that everything is packed into one big paragraph.
11. Do not provide connectors and signal words. Simply connect all your sentences with *And*.
12. Include plenty of hackneyed (*abgedroschen*) phrases and avoid any alternatives to *good* and *bad*.
13. Either run sentences together without full stops *or* write sentence fragments *or* alternate the two forms. Alternatively just write a bulleted list or keywords. The teacher will appreciate your efficiency.
14. Keep changing between present and past tense, even within the same sentence.
15. Make sure your pronouns do not refer to anything or anyone in particular.
16. Sprinkle (*verteilen*) dots everywhere. Full stops simply look good and activate the reader.
17. Do not do any revising or proofreading. This would surely raise your grade.
18. Never ever use your monolingual dictionary! When you come across an unknown word, just look out of the window and guess its meaning. When you are not sure how to use a word, stare at the ceiling and speculate. As you know there are a lot of similarities between English and German, so simply take the German word and make it English (bekommen = become, bewahren = beware etc.)