

AJEEP

English Writing Skills

Description

This course aims to improve student writing on two levels: the global level of idea development, support and unity, and the more detailed level of mechanics, such as capitalization and punctuation. We will use the paragraph and essay as vehicles to strengthen writing characteristics that are shared by academic writing and writing for journalism. Each lesson has practical exercises for the students to complete in class with the help of peers and the instructor. The topics covered in this module are by no means exhaustive; they are introductions at best.

Course Goals

Students will strengthen their English writing skills.

Course Content Learning Objectives

After successful completion of this module, students will be able to

L01	explain the differences and similarities between academic writing and journalistic writing.
L02	understand the structure of a paragraph.
L03	write an effective topic sentence.
L04	develop adequate support for a topic sentence.
L05	understand and exhibit unity in writing.
L06	understand the basic essay format.
L07	understand the essay writing process.
L08	develop an angle appropriate for a 5-paragraph essay.
L09	write effective thesis statements.
L010	write different styles of leads for introductions.
L012	write an effective conclusion for a feature style essay.
L013	write a 5-paragraph essay, exhibiting a strong introduction, well-developed body, effective conclusion, with unity throughout the essay.
L014	apply basic rules of capitalization in English.
L015	demonstrate appropriate use of apostrophes in English.
L016	use commas in lists and after transition words at the beginning of sentences.
L016	use commas in compound sentences.

Required Texts

No textbook is required for this module.

Glossary of Terms

Academic writing

Writing done by scholars for scholars.

Topic sentence

Introductory sentence in a paragraph that states the topic of the paragraph.

Controlling idea

Part of a topic sentence that tells what specific aspect of a topic a paragraph will cover.

Supporting sentence

Paragraph sentence that supports the topic sentence and develops your idea.

Thesis statement

Sentence in an academic essay that states what the essay is about.

Unity

If all sentences and ideas in a paragraph or essay are related to one main idea, then the writing has unity.

Anecdotal Lead

A lead that tells a short true story about a person or incident related to your larger piece of writing.

Scenario lead

This descriptive lead puts the reader at the scene of the story.

Transition words

Words that form a bridge from one idea to another idea.

Simple Sentence

A sentence that has only one subject-verb pair and is a complete thought.

Compound Sentence

Two simple sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Coordinating Conjunction

Conjunctions that join two independent sentences together. The coordinating conjunctions are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*. FANBOYS is a mnemonic device to help you remember the coordinating conjunctions.

Class Outline

- Lesson 1 Academic writing vs. journalism
 Introduction to paragraph format and content
 Capitalization rules
- Lesson 2 Topic sentences
 Supporting sentences
 Punctuation: apostrophes
- Lesson 3 Paragraph unity
 Sentence structure – simple and compound sentences
 Punctuation: using commas in compound sentences
- Lesson 4 Essay format
 Essay writing process
 Focusing the topic
 Thesis statements
- Lesson 5 Developing introductions
 Outlining
- Lesson 6 Writing a conclusion
 Finalizing the essay

- What kinds of writing did you have to do in university?
- What kinds of writing do your students do for you?
- How is this writing different from other forms of writing – business writing, creative writing, or journalism?

Academic writing is writing that is done by scholars for scholars. It is used mostly in high school and universities. Some examples of academic writing are: an essay about human rights, an essay comparing two artists, and a report about healthcare for the elderly. How is this form of writing different than journalism?

Differences

<p>Academic Audience – scholars Language – formal Format – Essay -- intro / body / conclusion Paragraphs – longer Content --</p> <p>Formats Research paper 3000 – 6000 words Thesis 20,000 + words Essay 1500 – 6000 words Exam questions for students</p>	<p>Journalism Audience – general public Language – less formal Format -- Inverted pyramid Paragraphs short Content --</p> <p>Formats News article Opinion Essay Feature article</p>
---	---

Shared Characteristics

- Main idea – your piece should have one main idea
- Idea development through supporting sentences
 - All sentences should support your main idea. If they don't, then cut.
 - All points should have good support -- examples, details, statistics, anecdotes, quotations, etc.
- Unity – All good writing has unity, i.e., all the elements of the written work contribute to a central idea. If all your sentences support the main idea, your piece will have unity.
- Cohesion – One idea should flow logically and smoothly to the next idea
- Sentence structure – Both academic writing and journalism follow basic rules for sentence structure in English.
- Punctuation – Basic rules are the same, with some variations. You should consult the style guide for the publication you are writing for.

- Documentation of sources – Academic writing and journalism use different styles, but both require documentation and attribution.
- Format – Opinion essays are similar to academic essays.

For the English writing skills classes, we will use the *essay format* from academic writing and look at those characteristics that are shared by academic writing and journalism. We will *not* write an academic research paper. We will use the essay mostly as a vehicle to strengthen these writing skills: sentence structure, punctuation, idea development and support, and unity.

Here is the outline:

Lesson 1

- Academic writing vs. journalism
- Introduction to paragraph format and content
- Capitalization rules

Lesson 2

- Topic sentences
- Supporting sentences
- Punctuation: apostrophes

Lesson 3

- Paragraph unity – more on relationship between topic sentence and supporting sentences
- Sentence structure — simple sentences and compound sentences
- Punctuation — commas

Lesson 4 From paragraph to essay

- Structure of an essay
- Essay writing process
- Focusing your topic
- Thesis statements

Lesson 5 The Essay Continued

- Developing introductions
- Outlining

Lesson 6 The Essay Continued

- Writing Workshop
 - Write conclusion
 - Finish essay

The Paragraph

A paragraph is made of a group of related sentences that support one main idea. A good paragraph in academic writing has the following elements:

Topic Sentence

This sentence contains the main idea that the author wants to express. It is often located at the beginning of the paragraph but sometimes, especially in longer pieces, it can be found in the middle or even at the end of a paragraph.

Supporting Sentences

All sentences in a paragraph should support the topic sentence. A combination of details, examples, statistics, anecdotes and quotations can be used to illustrate your idea.

Logical Order

The sentences need to be in an order that makes sense. This will depend on the type of paragraph you are writing. For example, if you are writing a paragraph outlining the steps to get a visa, you will likely organize the steps chronologically, using words like *first*, *next*, etc. If you are writing a paragraph that describes a place, you will probably choose a different kind of order.

Concluding Sentence

If your writing comprises only one paragraph, it should have a concluding sentence. An essay should have a concluding paragraph.

Unity

When all the sentences in a piece of writing relate to one main idea, it has unity.

Practice Exercise 1

Read the paragraphs below. Answer the following questions for each paragraph.

- 1) Is there a topic sentence? What is it?
- 2) Does the paragraph have unity? In other words, do all the sentences support the topic sentence?
- 3) Does it have a concluding sentence?
- 4) Which paragraph is the strongest? Why?
- 5) How could each paragraph be improved?

Paragraph 1 Advantages of Owning a Small Car

Owning a small car has several advantages over owning a large car. First of all, a small car is usually cheaper than a large car. If you purchase wisely, you will have money left over to enjoy other areas of your life. Second, a small car is easier to park. In many cities parking is very difficult, so a small car will be helpful. It will save you a lot of time and frustration. Finally, a small car uses less gas. Once again, you can save money. With all the advantages of owning a small car, who can afford to buy a large one?

Paragraph 2 The Importance of a College Education

A college education is essential for people's careers. You can gain a lot of knowledge and practical skills to help prepare you for your future. As well, many campuses have a wide variety of clubs for students to join. Sports facilities are often good too. You should research internships while you are a student because they can help you get a job when you graduate.

Paragraph 3 The Healthy Student

Staying healthy is not easy, especially when you are a student. Here are a few tips to follow. The first is to get enough sleep. Time management is key. If you are organized about studying, then you won't have to stay up all night to study. Another thing is to eat well. It's easy and convenient to grab fast food, but it's not so great for your body. Eat healthy to feel more energetic. Finally, you should exercise regularly. So really it's about time management and energy.

Practice Exercise 2

With a partner, rewrite paragraphs 2 and 3. Use the same topic sentences that are given for each paragraph, but change the supporting sentences so that they all relate to the main idea. Remember to include a concluding sentence.

When you are finished, we will look at your paragraphs together with your classmates.

Capitalization Rules

These are the most common rules for capitalization in English.

Rule	Example
<p>Capitalize</p>	
<p>1. The first word in a sentence.</p>	<p>She is a professor at Herat University.</p>
<p>2. The pronoun, <i>I</i></p>	<p>She and I have known each other for two years.</p>
<p>3. Abbreviations made by using the first letters of words.</p>	<p>USA UN UNESCO CBS</p>
<p>4. All proper nouns. Proper nouns include:</p>	
<p>a. names of deities</p>	<p>Allah God Shiva</p>
<p>b. names of people and their titles</p>	<p>Ms. Halima Kazem President Qayoumi</p>
<p>c. names of specific groups of people (nationalities, races, and ethnic groups)</p>	<p>Italian Asian Muslim</p>
<p>languages, and religions</p>	<p>Caucasian Hispanic Dari</p>
<p>d. names of specific places on a map</p>	<p>Kabul Indian Ocean</p>
<p>e. names of specific geographic areas</p>	<p>North Pole Center Street</p>
<p>f. names of days, months and holidays</p>	<p>the Middle East Eastern Europe</p>
<p>g. names of specific structures (buildings, bridges, monuments, etc.)</p>	<p>Sunday January</p>
<p>h. names of specific organizations (businesses, schools, government agencies, sports teams)</p>	<p>Ramadan Thanksgiving</p>
<p>i. names of specific school classes, usually with a number</p>	<p>Golden Gate Bridge Burj Khalifa</p>
<p></p>	<p>the White House the Great Wall of China</p>
<p></p>	<p>Apple Computers Stanford University</p>
<p></p>	<p>Manchester United Red Cross</p>
<p></p>	<p>State Department</p>
<p></p>	<p>Beginning Reporting 101</p>
<p></p>	<p>Business 320</p>

BUT NOT the names of school subjects when you are not referring to a specific class, except languages.

j. first and last words in a title
all other words in a title except:

- Articles: a, an, the
- Coordinating conjunctions: and, but, or, for, nor, etc.
- Prepositions: on, at, to, from, by, etc.

**Different publications have different rules for title capitalization. You should check with the publication for its title requirements regarding capitalization.

He's studying journalism this semester.
She studied economics at SJSU.
Susan studied Persian literature last year.

Italy Goes to the Polls

President Obama to Meet with Karzai over Troop Withdrawal

Capitalization: Practice Exercise 1

The following sentences all have errors in capitalization. Add capitals where necessary.

1. While in dubai, the professors visited the burj khalifa.
2. Professor karimi is teaching beginning reporting this semester.
3. Laily studied french in paris.
4. My sister works for google.
5. The radio station is located on the corner of main street and park avenue.
6. His favorite food is italian.
7. The professors toured many media outlets while they were in san jose.
8. They visited the san jose mercury news, kqed news, and bay area tv.
9. This year's women in media conference will be held from january 2 to january 5.
10. The keynote speaker for the conference will be ms. halima kazem.

Capitalization: Practice Exercise 2

The following paragraph needs capital letters! Change small letters to capital letters wherever you think it is necessary.

maria kazem

i'd like to introduce my classmate, maria kazem. she is from kabul, the capital city of afghanistan. maria is 32 years old and has been teaching journalism for four years. before that, she worked as a reporter for war and peace reporting. she continues to write news articles and is a frequent contributor to ap. in january, maria established an organization called writing for women. this is an organization which helps women writers get published. in her free time (when she has any!), maria likes to watch old movies and go for long walks in the park. maria currently lives in san jose with her husband and two children.

Your Turn

Interview a classmate and write a paragraph similar to the one above. Your paragraph should be 100-150 words long. Be sure to use capital letters correctly.

Review Capitalization**What's wrong with the following sentences?**

- faisal's brother studies economics.
- Halima Kazem teaches beginning reporting.
- Last weekend, we saw the golden gate bridge and visited the muir woods.
- Julie rented a van. I think it was a honda.
- Thank god it is friday!

Last week we started talking about the paragraph.

What makes a good paragraph?

- One main idea
- Topic sentence (statement of your idea)
- Supporting sentences (development of your idea)
- Unity
- Concluding sentence

Topic Sentence and Supporting Sentences

The topic sentence is usually found at the beginning of the paragraph and introduces the reader to the topic of the paragraph. It has two parts: the topic and the controlling idea. The topic states the subject, and the controlling idea tells what specific aspect of the subject the paragraph will discuss. Look at the following examples. What is the topic? What is the controlling idea?

- Exercise is good for both mental and physical health.
- Exercise can be practiced from a very early age to a very old age.
- Exercising in the outdoors has many benefits.
- Afghan weddings are expensive, especially for the groom.
- Afghan weddings require weeks of preparation and involve the work of many people.

What does the controlling idea do?

It tells you what specific aspect of the subject the paragraph will be about. It narrows the focus. So if we look at the example about Afghan weddings being expensive for the groom, everything that follows that sentence must be about wedding expenses paid by the groom. You cannot, for example, write about traditional wedding dances in that paragraph unless it is somehow related the groom's expenses. Likewise in the third example, you could not include information about exercising indoors.

The topic sentence limits the scope of the paragraph.

Look at the previous examples of topic sentences. What kind of information would you include in each paragraph? Elicit answers and examples from class.

(Together, do *Afghan weddings are expensive, especially for the groom*. Put on board. Talk about relationship of supporting sentences to topic sentence.)

Writing the Topic Sentence

The topic sentence should be neither too general, nor too specific. It should express an idea that you can develop in one paragraph. (Remember, paragraphs in academic writing and feature writing usually have longer paragraphs than paragraphs in news writing.)

Practice Exercise 1

Read the following sentences. Identify those that would make good topic sentences. Which sentences are too general? Which ones are too specific?

1. Everybody loves pizza.
2. It is estimated that 5 billion pizzas are bought worldwide each year.
3. Though pizza has its roots in Italy, this much-loved fast food has become a true world traveller.
4. Springtime is a season that many people enjoy.
5. Springtime is the season of blossoms in Kabul.
6. Trees in Kabul usually start to blossom in early March.
7. Smartphones are very useful.
8. Smartphones have revolutionized workplace communications.
9. Smartphone usage in Afghanistan rose 40% in 2011.
10. Smartphones have changed the way teenagers communicate.

Practice Exercise 2

Read the following paragraphs and circle the best topic sentence for each one.

Paragraph 1

Everyone knows you can buy bagels everywhere in the US, but anyone who's ever tried a New York bagel will tell you there is no comparison. Texans love their barbecued meat, and in southern California, fish tacos are a specialty. In Maryland and Virginia you can enjoy crab cakes, while a little further north, in the state of Maine, you can order a lobster sandwich or New England clam chowder. Wisconsin, a state with over 11,000 dairy farms, is known for numerous varieties of cheese. No matter which part of the US you travel to, you're sure to find regional food that's worth tasting.

- a. There is a variety of food in the United States.
- b. Food in the United States varies from beef to crab cakes.
- c. Different cities and regions of the United States have their own special food.
- d. Food in the United States is quite delicious.

Paragraph 2

The grapefruit diet, which has been around at least since the 1930's, promises a weight loss of 10 pounds in 12 days. The cabbage diet surfaces frequently, and advises people to eat cabbage soup with most meals. In the 1980's, the Atkins diet was popular. Dieters who follow this regime are supposed to eat mostly protein and vegetables, and no carbohydrates. The South Beach diet, which became popular in the 1990's, is a healthier version of the Atkins. Carbohydrates are forbidden in the first two weeks of the diet, but then are re-introduced in small amounts. Whatever kind of diet you can think of, it's sure to be out there, if not today, then some day soon.

- a. Many popular diets promise rapid weight loss.
- b. Over the years, several different diets have been popular with people trying to lose weight.
- c. Low carbohydrate diets are popular with people who want to lose weight quickly.

Practice Exercise 3

Work with a partner. Write a topic sentence for four of the following topics. The topics listed below are very general; you need to limit them to something that is manageable in one paragraph.

Traveling in Afghanistan
Sports
Teaching

Learning English
Being a journalist
Flowers

(Put sentences on board and critique as a class.)

Use of Apostrophes in English

Contractions

Apostrophes are used in contractions to indicate missing letters. Contractions are used frequently in speaking and informal writing, but not in academic writing. In journalism, contractions are used only in quotations.

There are many contractions in English. Here are a few examples.

he's	he is	won't	will not
it's	it is	they'd	they would or they had

Possessives

Possessives are words that show ownership. There are two ways to do this in English.

- Use an apostrophe followed by *s*.
E.g. That is Diane's camera. (the camera belongs to Diane.)

- Use a prepositional phrase with *of*.
Examples:

the house of my neighbor (the house that belongs to my neighbor)

the roof of my house (the roof that belongs (or is attached) to my house)

** When you use a person's name, you must use an apostrophe + s to show possession.

Susan's computer – correct The computer of Susan -- incorrect

Rules for using apostrophes to show possession

1. Singular noun that does not end in s

Add apostrophe + s e.g. friend my friend's sister

car my car's headlights

2. Plural noun that does not end in s

Add apostrophe + s e.g. children the children's teacher
women the women's soccer team

3. Plural noun that ends in s

Add apostrophe only e.g. students the students' classroom
horses the horses' stable

4. For singular nouns or names ending in s,
AP style uses use an apostrophe only.

e.g. Kansas' new governor Thomas' cat

(There is much disagreement on this rule; it changes depending on which publication you are writing for.)

Common Mistakes and Problems

1. Do not confuse *its* and *it's*.

Its is a possessive pronoun. The cat licked *its* paw. (no apostrophe!)
(like *her, his, their*)

It's is a contraction for *it is*. *It's* (it is) hot today. (apostrophe is necessary)

2. Do not use apostrophes to make nouns plural.

The professor's have a meeting at 3 p.m. this afternoon. Incorrect

The professors have a meeting at 3 p.m. this afternoon. Correct

Practice Exercise A

Change each of the following phrases to the possessive using an apostrophe or an apostrophe + s.

1. the poems of Rumi _____
2. the capital city of Afghanistan _____
3. the president of CNN _____
4. the assignments of the students _____
5. the dresses of ladies _____
6. the perfume of the flowers _____
7. the brother of Chris _____
8. the members of the UN _____
9. the orders of the doctor _____
10. the questions of the reporters _____
11. the votes of the people _____

Practice Exercise B

Write one sentence for each word listed below. Use the possessive form.

children

men

girls

people

reporters

Topic Sentences and Supporting Sentences

Topic sentence has two components: 1) topic 2) controlling idea

What is the difference?

Topic – general

Controlling idea – specific aspect of topic

What is the topic and controlling idea in each of the following sentences?

- Afghan weddings are expensive, especially for the groom.
- If you want to learn a language, immersion is the best way to do it.
- Although biking on campus is necessary, we should implement some rules to make it safe for everyone.
- Solving the problem of gun violence in America is not complicated; it is simple.
- Spanking children isn't child abuse, but it's not an effective way to teach a lesson.

In each of these examples, what kind of information would you expect to follow? In other words, what will the supporting sentences tell you?

Supporting sentences develop the idea expressed in the topic sentence by providing details in the form of

- Examples
- Anecdotes
- Statistics
- Quotations

(Elicit an example of each kind of support using the Afghan weddings example.)

Practice Exercise 1

In the last class, we wrote topic sentences for the following topics. Choose one of the topic sentences you wrote and develop a paragraph. Each person should write a paragraph.

Traveling in Afghanistan

Learning English

Sports

Being a journalist

Teaching

Flowers

Peer Editing

When you are finished, exchange paragraphs with someone else who has finished. Read each other's paragraph. Do all sentences in the paragraph support the topic sentence? Submit your paragraph to me after one of your colleagues has read it.

Commas

Commas can be frustrating for English learners because the rules seem to change a lot. And in fact this is true; they do change a lot. The thing to remember about commas is that there are a few basic rules that most people follow and then there are variations and other rules that people use more subjectively.

Keep in mind that you will always find exceptions to the rules, and different publications will have slight differences in how they apply rules. My advice is to learn some basic punctuation rules, and if you are writing for a publication, consult their style guide. It may make you feel good to know that because there are so many variations in English punctuation, even native English speakers use style guides. As always, your goal should be to make your writing clear for the reader.

Below are three common rules for comma usage in English. The first two are relatively simple. We will go over these very briefly. The third rule sometimes causes difficulties for learners of English, so we will spend most of our efforts there.

1. Words or phrases in a series of 3 or more.

e.g. The stripes on the Afghan flag are black, red and green.

The three most populous cities in the US are New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.

If you want to be healthy, you should eat a good diet, exercise regularly, and enjoy time with your friends and family.

Is it necessary to use a comma before “and” in a list? It depends. If the items in the list are short, as in the examples about the Afghan flag and the cities in the US, a comma is not required. When the items in a list are longer, you should include a comma before “and.”

2. After most transition words at the beginning of sentences. (You can find in-depth explanation of this in most good grammar books.)

e.g. first, next, finally
also, furthermore, in addition
however, on the other hand
for example,
therefore,

Examples

We decided to have a picnic tomorrow.

First, we need to get some food.

Next, we need to find a good place to have the picnic.

Also, we should check the weather forecast.

Unfortunately, Faisal can't go to the picnic because he has a lot of work to do.

Therefore, we will bring him back some food from the picnic.

3. Two independent sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Which sentence has correct punctuation?

- a. He works as a lawyer in New York, his brother works as a lawyer in San Jose.
- b. He works as a lawyer in New York and his brother works as a lawyer in San Jose
- c. He works as a lawyer in New York, and his brother works as a lawyer in San Jose.

The correct answer is C.

Types of sentences in English

To understand when to use commas in English, it is helpful to understand the different sentence types and their structures. There are four sentence types in English:

- Simple sentence
- Compound sentence
- Complex sentence
- Compound-complex sentence

In today's class, we'll look at simple and compound sentences.

Simple Sentence

- Has one subject-verb *pair*.
- Is a complete thought.
- Can be independent.

Examples of Simple Sentences

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 1. | The Department of Journalism received a large sum of money. | SV |
| 2. | Students and professors attended the press conference. | SSV |
| 3. | Bob Rucker and President Qayoumi spoke at the conference. | SSV |
| 4. | Bob Rucker opened and closed the press conference. | SVV |

All of the sentences above are simple sentences.

In sentence #2, there are 2 subjects, but they are both connected to the same verb. Sentence #4 has two verbs, but they are both connected to the same subject. Thus, in both, there is only one subject-verb pair. Commas are not necessary before conjunctions in simple sentences.

Compound Sentence

- Has two or more subject-verb pairs.
- Is essentially two or more simple sentences joined by a **coordinating conjunction**.
- This type of sentence requires a comma before the conjunction.

Coordinating conjunctions join two sentences together. They are:

for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

FANBOYS – this word can help you remember the coordinating conjunctions.

Examples of Compound Sentences

1. President Qayoumi opened the ceremonies, **and** Bob Rucker closed them.
2. The test was difficult, **but** it was fair.
3. He might move to New York, **or** he might move to Boston.
4. Kelly wanted to learn Dari, **so** she moved to Afghanistan.

On both sides of the conjunctions, there are complete sentences. For example, sentence #1 could be split into the following sentences.

President Qayoumi opened the ceremonies.

Bob Rucker closed them.

When you join two simple sentences with a coordinating conjunction, you must use a comma before the conjunction.

Comma or no comma? (Do together as a class.)

Find the conjunction. Is there a complete sentence on either side of the conjunction? If so, then you need a comma.

1. Faisal might study economics or business. He hasn't decided yet.
2. He might study economics or he might join his father's company.
3. The weather was hot and rainy.
4. The weather was hot and it rained every day.
5. She studied hard but she didn't pass the test.
6. Laily studied hard and passed the test.
7. Maria was not tired so she went to bed late.

Practice Exercise 1

Add commas where necessary.

1. Maria Laily Parwana and Shafiqa all cooked dinner for us.
2. It was delicious and very filling.
3. The women went for a walk after dinner and the men stayed back and watched TV.
4. Therefore the men were a little sleepy and the women were full of energy.
5. Everyone had tea when the women returned from their walk.
6. Finally Susan drove everyone back to the hotel.
7. The professors were tired but they stayed up late to work on their packages.
8. The professors have several classes tomorrow: Video Editing English News Writing and Editing. (How many different ways could you edit this one?!)

Practice Exercise 2

Write sentences describing the steps necessary to obtain a travel visa. Pay particular attention to punctuation.

Practice Exercise 3 Compound Sentences

- A. *Read the following folktale.*
- B. *For sentences 1-5, explain why commas are used or not used.*
- C. *For sentences 6-8, you decide if commas are needed.*

The Fisherman and his Wife

Once upon a time, there was a poor fisherman who lived with his wife, Isabel, in a hovel by the sea. One day, the fisherman was surprised to catch a golden fish. The fish begged to be let go. "I am no ordinary fish," it said. ¹"I am really a magic prince, and I will not taste very good to you." ²This impressed the fisherman, so he let the fish go back to the sea.

When his wife heard the story, she said the fisherman should have asked the fish to grant him a wish. ³Isabel told her husband to go back and ask the fish to grant her wish for a nice house. ⁴The fisherman returned to the sea but was nervous when he saw that the sea was becoming black. ⁵He sang a song to summon the fish, and it granted the wife's wish.

The wife was happy with her new house only for a short time. ⁶She soon became greedy and asked for more. First she wanted a castle where she would be queen. Next, she wanted to be an empress and finally, a pope. ⁷The fisherman knew this was wrong but he could not reason with his wife. The fish granted the wishes, but each time, the sea became blacker and stormier.

Eventually the fisherman's wife went too far. "I want to make the sun and moon rise. I want to be like God," she said. ⁸The fish took back everything it had given the couple and the fisherman and his wife lived once again in their hovel.

Practice Exercise 4

In a small group, write a folktale from your country. Use compound sentences and pay attention to comma usage.

Take up homework from previous day.

From Paragraph to Essay

For the last three lessons we looked at paragraphs; now we'll shift our focus to essays.

Essay Structure

1. Introduction and thesis statement

Here you catch the attention of your reader and introduce your topic.

2. Body (You can have as many paragraphs as you want; we will write an essay with three body paragraphs.)

Supporting paragraph

- Topic sentence
- Supporting sentences (2-5 sentences)

Supporting paragraph

- Topic sentence
- Supporting sentences

Supporting paragraph

- Topic sentence
- Supporting sentences

3. Conclusion

The conclusion signals the end of your essay. There are different ways to write a conclusion, depending on whether you are writing, for example, a research paper or a feature essay.

Essay Writing Process

Everyone has his or her own process for writing, but the essay-writing process below works for many people.

Process for writing a 5-paragraph (intro, 3-P body, conclusion) essay:

- Choose and limit your topic
 - You need to choose an aspect of a topic that you can develop in 3 paragraphs. The topic, *Afghan Weddings*, for example, is too big (too general) for 3 paragraphs. You need to narrow the focus and choose an angle. You need to choose a specific aspect of Afghan weddings.
- Write the thesis statement (What is your essay about?)
 - You can always change this later, but starting with a thesis statement will help you focus your research and writing.
- Gather information and brainstorm ideas for supporting details
- Organize your material
 - Look at your notes and decide what each paragraph will be about.
 - Make an outline.
- Write the introduction / finalize the thesis statement
(Some people like to write the introduction before they write the body; others like to write it after.)
- Write the draft body
- Write the conclusion
- Revise – Here you look at content. Does the essay make sense? Is there unity in each paragraph? Do you need to change the order of sentences so that your writing flows better? Do you have a strong introduction and a good conclusion?
- Edit and polish – Now you look at details: grammar, punctuation, and word choice.

Narrowing your topic: developing an angle

(Talk about developing angles using funnel method and tree method.)

Funnel

(Draw a funnel shape around the topics below.) At the top, you have a topic so general that you could fill several books about it. As you go down the funnel, you continually narrow your topic until you come to a topic that is suitable for the size of essay or article you are writing.

At each stage ask, "What about the topic?" What about Afghan weddings? What about preparation for Afghan weddings? Etc.

Weddings
Afghan weddings
Preparation for
Afghan weddings
Clothing preparation
for Afghan weddings
Develop thesis statement here?

Tree – sketch tree with Dubai as trunk and subtopics as branches

Dubai (HUGE topic)

- *Life in Dubai*
 - *Life for immigrants in Dubai*
 - *Life for Indian immigrants in Dubai*
- *Shopping in Dubai*
 - *Modern shopping centers*
 - *Shopping in the Souks*
 - *Shopping for gold in the Souks – how to find a good deal.*
 - *Other? Their ideas?*
- *Tourism in Dubai*
 - *7-star hotels in Dubai*
 - *Who stays at 7-star hotels?*
 - *How does a hotel become a 7-star hotel?*
- *Architecture*
 - *? Their ideas*

(Ask for and add their ideas to the tree.)

Practice Activity 1

Work with a partner. Use either the tree method or the funnel method to find an angle suitable for a 5-paragraph essay. Use one of the topics below.

Afghanistan

Teaching

Media

(Pairs put diagrams on board. Class critique on focus – doable in short essay?)

The Thesis Statement

We've already covered topic sentences, so the thesis statement should be fairly easy. A thesis statement is similar to a topic sentence. While a topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph, the thesis statement introduces the main idea of the essay. (The thesis statement is similar to the nut graf in feature writing.)

The thesis statement controls the focus of the essay: each paragraph that follows should develop and support the thesis statement.

Some points about the thesis statement:

1. It introduces the main idea of the essay.
2. It limits the topic to a size that is appropriate for the length of the essay / article.
3. Experienced writers often imply the main idea without stating it directly in one particular sentence. For beginning writers, or for writers working in a new language, stating your thesis will help make your essay clearer.
4. As a writer, you have the choice of where to put your thesis statement. However, for beginning writers, the most common place to put the thesis statement is after the introduction / lead. The thesis statement can be the last sentence in the first paragraph, or can stand alone, as its own paragraph.

Practice Activity 2

Look at the following thesis statements. They are written for a 5-paragraph essay. Which do you think are most successful? Which ones are not successful, and why?

1. My hometown was founded in 1652.
2. My hometown has several interesting historical sites that visitors should see.
3. Speaking more than one language has several advantages.
4. Learning a new language is difficult.
5. Improving your pronunciation in a different language can be difficult, but there are a few tips that will help you become a better speaker.
6. I'm going to tell you about people from my country.
7. People in Afghanistan come from different ethnic backgrounds, but they share two common characteristics: they are extremely sociable and have a good sense of humor.

Practice Activity 3

Write a thesis statement for the angle that you developed in practice activity 1. Remember, the thesis statement should present the main idea that the author will develop in his or her essay.

Homework

Using the thesis statement that you developed in today's class as a guide, brainstorm some ideas and make a list of possible support points. Write more ideas than you will need so that you can choose the best. In the next class, we will work on outlines and introductions. In the last class we will work on conclusions.

Outlining

What is an outline? Do you use them? When and why?

As you begin to write longer pieces, outlining becomes increasingly important. Why?

Let's go back to our old example of Afghan weddings, with the thesis statement,

Afghan weddings are expensive, especially for the groom.

Let's brainstorm together support for that statement. Think of examples, details, maybe even some personal stories.

(Put all ideas on board and critique together as a class.)

- Does each of these ideas support the thesis statement?
- Cut those that do not support the thesis statement.
- Is there a logical way to group our ideas?
- How could we write an outline for this essay? Is there an order that seems best?
- (Put outline on board.)

Practice Exercise 1

Using your notes, make an outline for your essay. Look at your thesis statement. Does the outline support your thesis statement? Do the details support your thesis statement? If anything does not relate to the thesis statement, cut it!

Introductions / Leads

The introduction for an essay is much like the introduction or lead for a feature article. It is not like a news story lead. What kind of lead does a news story use? (A summary lead.) Can someone explain that to me? Do not use this type of lead for your introduction to your essay.

People read a news story because they are looking for information. But people read a feature article or an essay because they are interested in the topic. If you cannot hook your audience with your introduction, they will not read further. So that means an interesting introduction is perhaps even more important in a feature article or essay than in a news article.

Purpose of the introduction

- capture the interest of the readers
- introduce the topic

** Do not use a summary lead for an introduction to a feature article or an academic essay.

Introductions / Leads

There are several types of leads. Here are some common ones:

- Scenario -- sets the stage where the story takes place; is usually descriptive
- Anecdote -- a short story about a real person or incident that illustrates the main idea of the essay / article
- Direct address lead – writer speaks directly to the reader and his or her problems, often using “you.”
- Quotation
- Shocking or surprising information
- Some combination of the above

Practice Exercise 2

Read the following leads. Which approach does the writer use?

1. You're driving on the freeway when the car in front of you slows down to 40 miles per hour. You finally manage to pass the car and you can't resist glancing at the driver. He is busy texting.
2. From all the good news released in the recent Silicon Valley Health Report comes one disturbing fact: Although obesity rates have been steadily declining among the affluent, they are on the rise for both low income and middle class citizens.
3. “Do you want to be a cog in the wheel, or do you want to be one of the gears, turning the wheel?” Martin Zaun's father asked him this question five years ago. Zaun says that question saved his life.
4. On a snowy day in Saint John, thousands gathered outside the courthouse to pay respects for former Mayor Tom Smith. Beside the podium, the flag snapped in the wind as Alderman John Maxwell took the stage. As he began to read the eulogy for Saint John's longest reigning mayor, three men in black rushed to the podium.
5. Elisa Ramirez calls the San Jose Police Department and asks for backup. “We're going in today,” she says. “We'll be there from 10 a.m. until 12 noon.” Ramirez isn't planning a police operation. She's preparing for fresh produce delivery to a poor San Jose neighborhood that's dominated by gangs.
6. Janice Goguen looked at the message on her Black-Berry. “Visas pending; processing time unknown.” After months of planning, it looked like Goguen's trade mission to India, would have to be cancelled because of government bureaucracy.

“This is ridiculous. We applied for visas well within the time-frame stipulated by the government,” said Goguen. “Everything is booked – hotels, conference rooms, flights. If it were a private company, you wouldn't put up with it. But as it is now, a lot of people are going to be inconvenienced and lose a lot of money.”

Practice Exercise 3

Write two different kinds of leads for the following thesis statement. If you choose to write an anecdotal lead, you can make something up for this exercise; the story doesn't have to be true. Of course, in a real essay, the story should be true.

"Afghan weddings are extremely expensive, especially for the groom."

(Critique together as a class.)

Homework

Write the introduction and finish the body for your essay.

Today, we will work on writing conclusions and finalizing your essay in class.

Writing Conclusions

Your conclusion signals the end of your essay and should leave a lasting impression on the reader. It's important to note that conclusions are different for academic writing, feature writing and news writing.

News writing --- this one is easy because there are usually no conclusions in news writing for print.

Academic writing (and report writing) – conclusion required

- Summarizes main points of essay
- Does not introduce new support
- Sometimes restates thesis statement in a different way
- Often includes a prediction or a recommendation for future action.

Feature writing – conclusion required

- Does *not* usually summarize the main points
- Does not introduce new support
- Uses comments, anecdotes, quotes or observations in a way that highlight the main idea.
- Leaves a strong impression in the mind of the reader – just as the lead creates strong interest in the story.

Examples

Example 1

Let's go back to our example of Afghan weddings, with the following as our thesis statement.

Afghan weddings are expensive, especially for the groom.

Academic Summary

In summary, the Afghan groom has large payments to make in the areas of wedding preparation, the wedding ceremony itself and for household purchases. This financial obligation is a burden for many men, and indeed an increasing number must postpone marriage for lack of adequate resources. A recent study, however, indicates that in urban areas of Afghanistan, the bride's family is increasingly contributing to wedding costs. This new trend offers a glimmer of hope to those Afghan men who simply cannot afford to get married.

Feature Article Summary

For many men in Afghanistan, getting married is not a joyous rite of passage, but an enormous financial problem. In the words of Ahmed Karimi, "I want to get married, but my bank account won't let me."

Example 2

Here is one more example, this time about the differences between Canadian and American English.

Academic Summary

To summarize, Canadian English and American English exhibit differences in three main areas: vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling. Though the differences are distinct enough to indicate a person's nationality, they are minor, and rarely cause miscommunication. Further studies on people's preconceived ideas associated with various Canadian and American regional accents is an area worth investigating.

Feature Article Summary

If you find yourself speaking with someone and wondering if they are Canadian or American, listen closely. Their words may give you the answer.

Write Your Conclusion

Work on your conclusion. When you are finished, exchange conclusions with a partner and do peer reviewing.

For this essay, I would like you to write a conclusion that could be used in a feature article. Do **not** write a summary conclusion.

Peer Reviewing

Read your partner's conclusion. Is it clear? Read the introductory paragraph. Is the conclusion related to the introductory paragraph? Is the conclusion written in feature writing style? (There should be no summary.) Is there anything you can think of that would make your partner's conclusion stronger?

Finalize your Essay

Use the following checklist to help you finalize your essay.

Checklist

Format

Title -- Do you have a title that is properly capitalized?

Spacing – Is your essay double-spaced?

Indentation – Are paragraphs indented?

Margins – Do you have a 1-inch margin around the text?

Does your essay have: an introductory paragraph
 three body paragraphs
 a concluding paragraph

Content

Thesis statement – Does your essay have a thesis statement?

Do all paragraphs support the thesis statement?

Topic sentences – Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?

Do all paragraphs have unity?

Does each paragraph have good detail to support its topic sentence?

Is there a logical flow between sentences and paragraphs?

Grammar, etc.

Spelling – Do a spell-check on your computer.

Capitalization – Check for capitalization; use the handout from lesson 1.

Subject-verb agreement – Do all verbs agree with their subjects in number?

Verb tense shifts – Are verb tenses consistent?

Punctuation – Check for correct usage of periods and commas.