

Notes for Better Writing

According to Orwell:

- (i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- (ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- (iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- (iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- (v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- (vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Arguments are everywhere...

You may be surprised to hear that the word "argument" does not have to be written anywhere in your assignment for it to be an important part of your task. In fact, making an argument--expressing a point of view on a subject and supporting it with evidence--is often the aim of academic writing. Your instructors may assume that you know this fact, and therefore they may not explain its importance to you in class. Nevertheless, if your writing assignment asks you to respond to reading and discussion in class, your instructor likely expects you to produce an argument in your paper.

Most material you learn in college is or has been debated by someone, somewhere, at some time. Even when the material you read or hear is presented as simple "information" or "fact," it may actually be one person's interpretation of a set of information or facts. In your writing, instructors may call on you to question that interpretation and either defend it, refute it, or offer some new view of your own. In writing assignments, you will almost always need to do more than just present information that you have gathered or regurgitate information that was discussed in class. You will need to select a point of view and provide evidence (in other words, use "argument") to shape the material and offer your interpretation of the material.

If you think that "fact," not argument, rules intelligent thinking, consider these examples. At one point, the "great minds" of Western Europe firmly believed the Earth was flat. They had discussions about how obviously true this "fact" was. You are able to disagree now because people who saw that argument as faulty set out to make a better argument and proved it. Differences of opinion are how human knowledge develops, and scholars like your instructors spend their lives engaged in debate over what may be counted as "true," "real," or "right" in their fields. In their courses, they want you to engage in similar kinds of critical thinking and debate in your writing.

Argumentation is not just what your instructors do. We all use argumentation on a daily basis, and you probably already have some skill at crafting an argument. The more you improve your skills in this area, the better you will be at thinking critically, reasoning, making choices, and weighing evidence.

Making a Claim

What is an argument? In academic writing, an argument is usually a main idea, often called a "claim" or "thesis statement," backed up with evidence that supports the idea. Ninety-nine percent of the time you will need to make some sort of claim and use evidence to support it, and your ability to do this well will separate your papers from those of students who see assignments as mere accumulations of fact and detail. In other words, gone are the happy days of being given a "topic" about which you can write anything. It is time to stake out a position and prove why it is a good position for a thinking person to hold.

Claims can be as simple as "protons are positively charged and electrons are negatively charged," with evidence such as, "In this experiment, protons and electrons acted in such and such a way." Claims can also be as complex as "the end of the South African system of apartheid was inevitable," using reasoning and evidence such as, "Every successful revolution in the modern era has come about after the government in power has given and then removed small concessions to the uprising group." In either case, the rest of your paper will detail reasons and facts that have led you to believe that your position is best.

When beginning to write a paper, ask yourself, "What is my point"? For example, the point of this handout is to help you become a better writer, and we are arguing that an important step in the process of writing argumentation is understanding the concept of argumentation. If your papers do not have a main point, they cannot be arguing for anything. Asking yourself what your point is can help you avoid a mere "information dump." Consider this: Your instructors probably know a lot more than you do about your subject matter. Why, then, would you want to provide them with material they already know? Instructors are usually looking for two things:

1. Proof that you understand the material, AND
2. A demonstration of your ability to use or apply the material beyond what you have read or heard.

This second part can be done in many ways: You can critique the material, or apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. In order to achieve this second step, though, you must have a particular point to argue.

Arguments in academic writing are usually complex and take time to develop. Your argument will need to be more than a simple or obvious statement such as, "Frank Lloyd Wright was a great architect." Such a statement might capture your initial impressions of Wright as you have studied him in class; however, you need to look deeper and express specifically what caused that "greatness." Your instructor will probably expect something more complicated, such as, "Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture combines elements of European modernism, Asian aesthetic form, and locally found materials to create a unique new style," or "There are many strong similarities between Wright's building designs and those of his mother's, which suggests that he may have borrowed some of her ideas." Then you would define your terms and prove your argument with evidence from Wright's drawings and buildings and those of the other architects you mentioned.

Evidence

Do not stop with having a point. You have to back up your point with evidence. The strength of your evidence, and your use of it, can make or break your argument. You already have the natural inclination for this type of thinking, if not in an academic setting. Think about how you talked

your parents into letting you borrow the car. Did you present them with lots of instances of trustworthiness on your part from the past? Did you make them feel guilty, because your friends' parents all let them drive? Did you whine until they just wanted you to shut up? Did you look up statistics on teen driving and use them to show how you didn't fit the dangerous-driver profile? These are all types of argumentation, and they exist in academia in similar forms.

Every field has slightly different requirements for acceptable evidence, so familiarize yourself with some arguments from within that field instead of just applying whatever evidence you like best. Pay attention to your textbooks and your instructor's lectures. What types of argument and evidence are they using? The type of evidence that sways an English instructor may not work to convince a Sociology instructor. Find out what counts as proof that something is true in that field. Is it statistics, a logical development of points, something from the object being discussed (art work, text, culture, or atom), the way something works, or some combination of more than one of these things?

Be consistent with your evidence. Unlike negotiating for the use of your parents' car, a college paper is not the place for an all-out blitz of every type of argument. You can often use more than one type of evidence within a paper, but make sure that within each section you are providing the reader with evidence appropriate to each claim. So, if you start a paragraph or section with a statement like "putting the student section closer to the court in the Dean Dome will raise player performance," do not follow with your evidence on how much more tuition is raised by letting more students go to games for free. Information about how fan support raises player morale, which then results in better play, would be a better follow-up. Then the next section could offer clear reasons why undergraduates have as much or more right to attend an undergraduate event as wealthy alumni--but not in the same section as the fan support stuff. You cannot convince a confused person, so keep things tidy and ordered.

Counterargument

One way to strengthen your argument and show that you have a deep understanding of the issue you are discussing is to anticipate and address counterarguments or objections. By considering what someone who disagrees with your position might have to say about your argument, you show that you have thought things through, and you dispose of some of the reasons your audience might have for not accepting your argument. Recall our discussion of student seating in the Dean Dome. To make the most effective argument possible, you should consider not only what students would say about seating, but also what alumni who have paid a lot to get good seats might say about the issue.

You can generate counterarguments by asking yourself what someone who disagrees with you might say about each of the points you've made or about your position as a whole. If you can't immediately imagine another position, here are some strategies to try:

- Do some research. It may seem to you that no one could possibly disagree with the position you are arguing, but someone probably has. For example, some people argue that the American Civil War never ended. If you are making an argument concerning, for example, the outcomes of the Civil War, you might wish to see what some of these people have to say.
- Talk with a friend or with your teacher. Another person may be able to imagine counterarguments that haven't occurred to you.

- Consider the conclusion and the premises of your argument, and imagine someone who denies each of them. Then you can see which of these arguments are most worth considering. For example, if you argued "Cats make the best pets. This is because they are clean and independent," you might imagine someone saying "Cats do not make the best pets. They are dirty and needy."

Once you have thought up some counterarguments, consider how you will respond to them--will you concede that your opponent has a point but explain why your audience should nonetheless accept your argument? Will you reject the counterargument and explain why it is mistaken? Either way, you will want to leave your reader with a sense that your argument is stronger than opposing arguments.

When you are summarizing opposing arguments, be charitable. Present each argument fairly and objectively, rather than trying to make it look foolish. You want to show that you have seriously considered the many sides of the issue, and that you are not simply attacking or caricaturing your opponents.

It is usually better to consider one or two serious counterarguments in some depth, rather than to give a long but superficial list of many different counterarguments and replies.

Be sure that your reply is consistent with your original argument. If considering a counterargument changes your position, you will need to go back and revise your original argument accordingly.

Audience

Audience is a very important consideration in argument. A lifetime of dealing with your parents has helped you figure out which arguments work in different situations. Maybe whining works with your dad, but your mom will only accept cold, hard statistics. Your kid brother may listen only to the sound of money in his palm. It's usually wise to think of your audience in an academic setting as someone who is perfectly smart, but who doesn't already or necessarily agree with you. You are not just expressing your opinion in an argument ("it's true because I said so")--and in most cases your audience is pretty knowledgeable on the subject at hand--so you will need sturdier proof. At the same time, do not think of your audience as a genius clairvoyant. You have to come out and state both your claim and your evidence clearly. Do not assume that because the instructor knows the material that he or she understands what part of it you are using, what you think about it, and why.

Critical Reading

Critical reading is a big part of understanding argument. Although some of the material you read will be very persuasive, do not fall under the spell of the printed word as authority. Very few of your instructors think of the texts they assign as the last word on the subject. Remember that the author of every text has an agenda, something that they want you to believe. Take notes either in the margins or on a separate sheet as you read. Put away that highlighter! Simply highlighting a text is only good for memorizing that text--it does not encourage critical reading. Part of the goal is to put the author's ideas in your own words. Then you can stop thinking of these ideas as facts and start thinking of them as arguments.

When you read, ask yourself questions like "What is the author trying to prove?" and "What is the author assuming I will agree with?" Do you agree with the author? Does the author adequately defend her argument? What kind of proof does she use? Is there something she leaves out that you would put in? Does putting it in hurt her argument? As you get used to reading critically, you will start to see the sometimes hidden agendas of other writers, and you can use this skill to improve your own ability to argue.

The Role of Introductions

Introductions and conclusions can be the most difficult parts of papers to write. Usually when you sit down to respond to an assignment, you have at least some sense of what you want to say in the body of your paper. You might have chosen a few examples you want to use or have an idea that will help you answer the question: these sections, therefore, are not as hard to write. But these middle parts of the paper can't just come out of thin air; they need to be introduced and they need to be concluded in a way that makes sense to your reader.

What purpose do these sections serve? Your introduction and conclusion act as bridges that transport your readers from their own lives into the "place" of your analysis. If your readers pick up your paper about education in the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, for example, they need a transition to help them leave behind the world of Chapel Hill, network television, e-mail and the The Daily Tar Heel and to help them temporarily enter the world of nineteenth-century American slavery. By providing an introduction that helps your readers make a transition between their own world and the issues you will be writing about, you give your readers the tools they need to get into your topic and care about what you are saying. Similarly, once you've hooked your reader with the introduction and offered evidence to prove your thesis, your conclusion can provide a bridge to help your reader make the transition back to their daily lives. Such a conclusion will help them see why all that analysis about nineteenth-century education and American slavery should matter to them after they put the paper down.

Why bother writing a good introduction?

1. **You never get a second chance to make a first impression.** The opening paragraph of your paper will provide your readers with their initial impressions of your argument, your writing style, and the overall quality of your work. A vague, disorganized, error-filled, off-the-wall, or boring introduction will probably create a negative impression. On the other hand, a concise, engaging, and well-written introduction will start your readers off thinking highly of you, your analytical skills, your writing, and your paper. This impression is especially important when the audience you are trying to reach (your instructor) will be grading your work. Do you want that audience to start off thinking "C+" or thinking "A"?
2. **Your introduction is an important road map for the rest of your paper.** Your introduction conveys a lot of information to your readers. You can let them know what your topic is, why it is important, and how you plan to proceed with your discussion. It should contain a thesis that will assert your main argument. It will also, ideally, give the reader a sense of the kinds of information you will use to make that argument and the general organization of the paragraphs and pages that will follow. After reading your introduction, your readers should not have any major surprises in store when they read the main body of your paper.
3. **Ideally, your introduction will make your readers want to read your paper.** The introduction should also capture your readers' interest, making them want to read the rest

of your paper. Opening with a compelling story, a fascinating quotation, an interesting question, or a stirring example can get your readers to see why this topic matters and serve as an invitation for them to join you for an interesting intellectual conversation.

Strategies for Writing an Effective Introduction

- **Start by thinking about the question.** Your entire essay will be a response to the assigned question, and your introduction is the first step toward that end. Your direct answer to the assigned question will be your thesis, and your thesis will be included in your introduction, so it is a good idea to use the question as a jumping off point. Imagine that you are assigned the following question:

*Education has long been considered a major force for American social change, righting the wrongs of our society. Drawing on *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, discuss the relationship between education and slavery in 19th century America. Consider the following: How did white control of education reinforce slavery? How did Douglass and other enslaved African Americans view education while they endured slavery? And what role did education play in the acquisition of freedom? Most importantly, consider the degree to which education was or was not a major force for social change with regard to slavery.*

You will probably refer back to this question extensively as you prepare your complete essay, and the question itself can also give you some clues about how to approach the introduction. Notice that the question starts with a broad statement, that education has been considered a major force for social change, and then narrows to focus on specific questions from the book. One strategy might be to use a similar model in your own introduction -- start off with a big picture sentence or two about the power of education as a force for change as a way of getting your reader interested and then focus in on the details of your argument about Douglass. Of course, a different approach could also be very successful, but looking at the way the professor set up the question can sometimes give you some ideas for how you might answer it.

- **Try writing your introduction last.** You may think that you have to write your introduction first, but that isn't necessarily true, and it isn't always the most effective way to craft a good introduction. You may find that you don't know what you are going to argue at the beginning of the writing process, and only through the experience of writing your paper do you discover your main argument. It is perfectly fine to start out thinking that you want to argue a particular point, but wind up arguing something slightly or even dramatically different by the time you've written most of the paper. The writing process can be an important way to organize your ideas, think through complicated issues, refine your thoughts, and develop a sophisticated argument. However, an introduction written at the beginning of that discovery process will not necessarily reflect what you wind up with at the end. You will need to revise your paper to make sure that the introduction, all of the evidence, and the conclusion reflect the argument you intend. Sometimes it helps to write up all of your evidence first and then write the introduction -- that way you can be sure that the introduction matches the body of the paper.
- Don't be afraid to write a tentative introduction first and then change it later. Some people find that they need to write some kind of introduction in order to get the writing process started. That's fine, but if you are one of those people, be sure to return to your initial introduction later and rewrite if need be.

- Open with an attention grabber. Sometimes, especially if the topic of your paper is somewhat dry or technical, opening with something catchy can help. Consider these options:
 1. an intriguing example (for example, the mistress who initially teaches Douglass but then ceases her instruction as she learns more about slavery)
 2. a provocative quotation, (Douglass writes that "education and slavery were incompatible with each other")
 3. a puzzling scenario, (Frederick Douglass says of slaves that "[N]othing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have sustained the mighty load of a most frightful bondage, under which they have been groaning for centuries!" Douglass clearly asserts that slave owners went to great lengths to destroy the mental capacities of slaves, but yet his own life story proves that these efforts could be unsuccessful.)
 4. a vivid and perhaps unexpected anecdote (Learning about slavery in the American history course at Frederick Douglass High School, students studied the work slaves did, the impact of slavery on their families, and the rules that governed their lives. We didn't discuss education, however, until one student, Mary, raised her hand and asked, "But when did they go to school?" That modern high school students could not conceive of an American childhood devoid of formal education speaks volumes about the centrality of education to American youth today, and also suggests the meanings of the deprivation of education to past generations.)
 5. a thought-provoking question (Given all of the freedoms that were denied enslaved individuals in the American South, why does Frederick Douglass focus his attentions so squarely on education and literacy?)

These attention-grabbing openers might get your reader interested and also help your reader connect to what might otherwise seem a pretty obscure topic. Essentially, you can use attention-grabbers to help your readers see why your topic is relevant and to help them begin to care about your findings and perspectives.

- **Pay special attention to your first sentence.** If any sentence in your paper is going to be completely free of errors and vagueness, it should be your first one. Start off on the right foot with your readers by making sure that the first sentence actually says something useful and that it does so in an interesting and error-free way.
- **Be straightforward and confident.** Avoid statements like "In this paper, I will argue that Frederick Douglass valued education." While this sentence points toward your main argument, it isn't especially interesting. It might be more effective to say what mean in a declarative sentence. It is much more convincing to tell that "Frederick Douglass valued education" than to tell us that you are going to say that he did. Assert your main argument confidently. After all, you can't expect your reader to believe it if it doesn't sound like you believe it!

How to Evaluate Your Introduction Draft

Ask a friend to read it and then tell you what they expect the paper will discuss, what kinds of evidence the paper will use, and what the tone of the paper will be. If your friend is able to predict the rest of your paper accurately, you probably have a good introduction.

Five Kinds of Less Effective Introductions

1. The Place Holder Introduction. When you don't have much to say on a given topic, it is easy to create this kind of introduction. Essentially, this kind of weaker introduction contains several sentences that are vague and don't really say much. They exist just to take up the "introduction space" in your paper. If you had something more effective to say, you would probably say it, but in the meantime this paragraph is just a place holder.

Weak Example: Slavery was one of the greatest tragedies in American history. There were many different aspects of slavery. Each created different kinds of problems for enslaved people.

2. The Restated Question Introduction. Restating the question can be an effective strategy, but it can be easy to stop at JUST restating the question instead of offering a more effective, interesting introduction to your paper. The professor or teaching assistant wrote your questions and will be reading ten to seventy essays in response to them--they do not need to read a whole paragraph that simply restates the question. Try to do something more interesting.

Weak Example: Indeed, education has long been considered a major force for American social change, righting the wrongs of our society. The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass discusses the relationship between education and slavery in 19th century America, showing how white control of education reinforced slavery and how Douglass and other enslaved African Americans viewed education while they endured. Moreover, the book discusses the role that education played in the acquisition of freedom. Education was a major force for social change with regard to slavery.

3. The Webster's Dictionary Introduction. This introduction begins by giving the dictionary definition of one or more of the words in the assigned question. This introduction strategy is on the right track--if you write one of these, you may be trying to establish the important terms of the discussion, and this move builds a bridge to the reader by offering a common, agreed-upon definition for a key idea. You may also be looking for an authority that will lend credibility to your paper. However, anyone can look a word up in the dictionary and copy down what Webster says - it may be far more interesting for you (and your reader) if you develop your own definition of the term in the specific context of your class and assignment. Also recognize that the dictionary is also not a particularly authoritative work -- it doesn't take into account the context of your course and doesn't offer particularly detailed information. If you feel that you must seek out an authority, try to find one that is very relevant and specific. Perhaps a quotation from a source reading might prove better? Dictionary introductions are also ineffective simply because they are so overused. Many graders will see twenty or more papers that begin in this way, greatly decreasing the dramatic impact that any one of those papers will have. You might find a more creative way to define your terms, or perhaps you could weave a definition into a more attention-grabbing introductory paragraph.

Weak Example: Webster's dictionary defines slavery as "the state of being a slave," as "the practice of owning slaves," and as "a condition of hard work and subjection."

4. The Dawn of Man Introduction. This kind of introduction generally makes broad sweeping statements about the relevance of this topic since the beginning of time. It is usually very general

(similar to the place holder introduction) and fails to connect to the thesis. You may write this kind of introduction when you don't have much to say--which is precisely why it is ineffective.

Weak Example: Since the dawn of man, slavery has been a problem in human history.

5. The Book Report Introduction. This introduction is what you had to do for your fifth-grade book reports. It gives the name and author of the book you are writing about, tells what the book is about, and offers other basic facts about the book. You might resort to this sort of introduction when you are trying to fill space because it's a familiar, comfortable format. It is ineffective because it offers details that your reader already knows and that are irrelevant to the thesis.

Weak Example: Frederick Douglass wrote his autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, in the 1840s. It was published in 1986 by Penguin Books. He tells the story of his life.

HOW DO I WRITE BODY OR SUPPORT PARAGRAPHS?

Body or support paragraphs should specifically support the thesis or main point of the paper. Support paragraphs should not vaguely or loosely discuss the topic of the paper. Each body paragraph should be unified, meaning that nothing in the paragraph strays off the main point of the paragraph.

Good body paragraphs contain the following:

- A Topic Sentence.
- Discussion, Support, or Elaboration of the Point Made in the Topic Sentence.
- Concrete Examples, Statistics, or Facts.
- A Concluding Sentence that Restates the Main Point of the Paragraph.

Topic Sentence

A topic sentence in a body or support paragraph should:

1. Clearly state the topic of the paragraph.
2. Clearly link the topic of the paragraph back to the thesis statement.
3. Make a smooth transition between the previous paragraph and the present paragraph.

Generally the topic sentence comes at the beginning of each body paragraph.

Discussion, Support, or Elaboration of the Point Made in the Topic Sentence

Some of the weaknesses found in English 101 and English 102 papers occur in the development of body or support paragraphs. Usually students do not explain or discuss their topic sentence in enough detail within a body paragraph for the reader to really understand the significance of the

issue. Discussion and explanation are crucial to a well-developed body paragraph.

Concrete Examples, Statistics, or Facts

Good writers always include concrete evidence to support the topic sentence and the explanation and development. They follow any generalization with a concrete, specific example.

A Concluding Sentence that Restates the Main Point of the Paragraph

It is very easy to wander off topic in a paragraph, and a concluding statement that restates the topic or point of the paragraph keeps the reader focused on your argument or discussion.

The Function and Importance of Transitions

In both academic writing and professional writing, your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, if not to convert the reader to your way of thinking. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present them. Whether single words, quick phrases or full sentences, they function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas as they read through what you have written.

Transitions signal relationships between ideas such as: "Another example coming up--stay alert!" or "Here's an exception to my previous statement" or "Although this idea appears to be true, here's the real story." Basically, transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument. Transitions are not just "window dressing" that embellish your paper by making it sound or read better. They are words with particular meanings that tell the reader to think and react in a particular way to your ideas. In providing the reader with these important cues, transitions help readers understand the logic of how your ideas fit together.

Organization

Since the clarity and effectiveness of your transitions will depend greatly on how well you have organized your paper, you may want to evaluate your paper's organization before you work on transitions. In the margins of your draft, summarize in a word or short phrase what each paragraph is about or how it fits into your analysis as a whole. This exercise should help you to see the order of and connection between your ideas more clearly.

If after doing this exercise you find that you still have difficulty linking your ideas together in a coherent fashion, your problem may not be with transitions but with organization.

How Transitions Work

The organization of your written work includes two elements: **(1)** the order in which you have chosen to present the different parts of your discussion or argument, and **(2)** the relationships you construct between these parts. Transitions cannot substitute for good organization, but they can

make this organization clearer and easier to follow. The following example should help to make this point clear.

El Pais, a Latin American country, has a new democratic government after having been a dictatorship for many years. Assume that you want to argue that *El Pais* is not as democratic as the conventional view would have us believe. One way to effectively organize your argument would be to present the conventional view and then to provide the reader with your critical response to this view. So, in Paragraph A you would want to enumerate all the reasons that someone might consider *El Pais* highly democratic, while in Paragraph B you would want to refute these points. The transition that would establish the logical connection between these two key elements of your argument would indicate to the reader that the information in paragraph B contradicts the information in paragraph A. As a result, you might organize your argument, including the transition that links paragraph A with paragraph B, in the following manner:

Paragraph A: points in support of the view that *El Pais's* new government is very democratic.

Transition: Despite the previous arguments, there are many reasons to think that *El Pais's* new government is not as democratic as typically believed.

Paragraph B: points that contradict the view that *El Pais's* new government is very democratic.

In this case, the transition words "Despite the previous arguments," suggest that the reader should not believe paragraph A and instead should consider the writer's reasons for viewing *El Pais's* democracy as suspect in the upcoming paragraph.

As the previous example suggests, transitions can help reinforce the underlying logic of your paper's organization by providing the reader with essential information regarding the relationship between your ideas. In this way, transitions act as the glue that binds the components of your argument or discussion into a unified, coherent, and persuasive whole.

Types of Transitions

Now that you have a general idea of how to go about developing effective transitions in your writing, let us briefly discuss the types of transitions your writing will use.

The types of transitions available to you are as diverse as the circumstances in which you need to use them. A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. In each case it functions the same way: first, the transition either directly summarizes the content of a preceding sentence, paragraph, or section, or it implies that summary. Then it helps the reader anticipate or comprehend the new information that you wish to present.

1. **Transitions between Sections**--Particularly in longer works, it may be necessary to include transitional paragraphs that summarize for the reader the information just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section.

2. **Transitions between Paragraphs**--If you have done a good job of arranging paragraphs so that the content of one leads logically to the next, the transition will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows. A transition between paragraphs can be a word or two (*however, for example, similarly*), a phrase, or a sentence.

3. **Transitions within Paragraphs**--As with transitions between sections and paragraphs, transitions within paragraphs act as cues by helping readers to anticipate what is coming before they read it. Within paragraphs, transitions tend to be single words or short phrases.

Transitional Expressions

Effectively constructing each transition often depends upon your ability to identify words or phrases that will indicate for the reader the *kind* of logical relationships you want to convey. The table below should make it easier for you to find these words or phrases. Whenever you have trouble finding a word, phrase, or sentence to serve as an effective transition, refer to the information in the table for assistance. Look in the left column of the table for the kind of logical relationship you are trying to express. Then look in the right column of the table for examples of words or phrases that express this logical relationship.

| LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP | TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION |
|----------------------|--|
| Similarity | also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly |
| Exception/Contrast | but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet |
| Sequence/Order | first, second, third, ... next, then, finally |
| Time | after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then |
| Example | for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate |
| Emphasis | even, indeed, in fact, of course, |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| | truly |
| Place/Position | above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there |
| Cause and Effect | accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus |
| Additional Support or Evidence | additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then |
| Conclusion/Summary | finally, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, in summary |

Strategies for Writing a Conclusion:

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of an essay to write, and many writers feel that they have nothing left to say after having written the paper. A writer needs to keep in mind that the conclusion is often what a reader remembers best. Your conclusion should be the best part of your paper.

A conclusion should

- stress the importance of the thesis statement,
- give the essay a sense of completeness, and
- leave a final impression on the reader.

Suggestions

- **Answer the question "So What?"**

Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.

- **Synthesize, don't summarize**

- Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.
- **Redirect your readers**
 - Give your reader something to think about, perhaps a way to use your paper in the "real" world. If your introduction went from general to specific, make your conclusion go from specific to general. Think globally.
- **Create a new meaning**
 - You don't have to give new information to create a new meaning. By demonstrating how your ideas work together, you can create a new picture. Often the sum of the paper is worth more than its parts.

Strategies

- **Echoing the introduction:** Echoing your introduction can be a good strategy if it is meant to bring the reader full-circle. If you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay was helpful in creating a new understanding.

Example

Introduction

From the parking lot, I could see the towers of the castle of the Magic Kingdom standing stately against the blue sky. To the right, the tall peak of The Matterhorn rose even higher. From the left, I could hear the jungle sounds of Adventureland. As I entered the gate, Main Street stretched before me with its quaint shops evoking an old-fashioned small town so charming it could never have existed. I was entranced. Disneyland may have been built for children, but it brings out the child in adults.

Conclusion

I thought I would spend a few hours at Disneyland, but here I was at 1:00 A.M., closing time, leaving the front gates with the now dark towers of the Magic Kingdom behind me. I could see tired children, toddling along and struggling to keep their eyes open as best they could. Others slept in their parents' arms as we waited for the parking lot tram that would take us to our cars. My forty-year-old feet ached, and I felt a bit sad to think that in a couple of days I would be leaving California, my vacation over, to go back to my desk. But then I smiled to think that for at least a day I felt ten years old again.

- **Challenging the reader:** By issuing a challenge to your readers, you are helping them to redirect the information in the paper, and they may apply it to their own lives.

Example

Though serving on a jury is not only a civic responsibility but also an interesting experience, many people still view jury duty as a chore that interrupts their jobs and the routine of their daily lives. However, juries are part of America's attempt to be a free and just society. Thus, jury duty challenges us to be interested and responsible citizens.

- **Looking to the future:** Looking to the future can emphasize the importance of your paper or redirect the readers' thought process. It may help them apply the new information to their lives or see things more globally.

Example

Without well-qualified teachers, schools are little more than buildings and equipment. If higher-paying careers continue to attract the best and the brightest students, there will not only be a shortage of teachers, but the teachers available may not have the best qualifications. Our youth will suffer. And when youth suffers, the future suffers.

- **Posing questions:** Posing questions, either to your readers or in general, may help your readers gain a new perspective on the topic, which they may not have held before reading your conclusion. It may also bring your main ideas together to create a new meaning.

Example

Campaign advertisements should help us understand the candidate's qualifications and positions on the issues. Instead, most tell us what a boob or knave the opposing candidate is, or they present general images of the candidate as a family person or God-fearing American. Do such advertisements contribute to creating an informed electorate or a people who choose political leaders the same way they choose soft drinks and soap?

Use this Sample Basic Essay as a Model:

The essay below demonstrates the principles of writing a basic essay. The different parts of the essay have been labeled. The thesis statement is in bold, the topic sentences are in italics, and each main point is underlined. When you write your own essay, of course, you will not need to

mark these parts of the essay unless your teacher has asked you to do so. They are marked here just so that you can more easily identify them.

"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 housepets.**

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 will use it regularly. Cats do have claws, and owners must make provision for this. A tall scratching post in a favorite 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 housepets 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 housepet.

Asking the really hard questions about your writing

Just how good is the piece you've written? It's hard to be objective. But asking yourself some unbiased questions can allow you to take an impartial look at the effectiveness of your work and help you identify mistakes.

In his book *Writing with Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 252, Peter Elbow offers a series of questions which relate to four basic qualities — content, organization, language effectiveness and usage — to help you evaluate almost any kind of writing. Here is a sample of Elbow's criteria and the questions which relate to them:

a. What is the quality of the content of the writing: the ideas, the perceptions, the point of view?

1. Is the basic idea or insight a good one?
2. Is it supported by logical reasoning or valid argument?
3. Is it supported by evidence and examples?
4. Is it really saying something or is it just a collection of thoughts or observations (however unified and well written) sitting there limply? Did the writer communicate why this whole thing matters?
5. Is there too much abstraction or generalization? So few details, examples, and explanations that it ends up dull, empty, impossible to experience or perhaps even impossible to understand?
6. Is there too little abstraction and too much clutter of detail? Too little standing back for perspective? Too little forest per tree?
7. Does it do what it says or implies it is going to do? Does it satisfy the issues it raises?
8. Is there a point of view or is the writing just disembodied statements from nowhere? And is that point of view unified and consistent?
9. Is the piece fitted to its audience? Has the writer understood their needs and point of view?

b. How well is the writing organized?

10. Is the whole thing unified? Is there one central idea to which everything pertains? Or is it pulling in two or three directions or full of loose ends and digressions?
11. Are the parts arranged in a coherent or logical sequence?
12. Is there a beginning? That is, does it start off in a way that allows you to get comfortably started? (The safest and most common way of doing this is to give an introduction -- for example, a quick explanation of what's to come. But of course that's not the only way. Indeed plunging the reader into the middle of things without warning can function as a good beginning.)
13. Is there middle? A body, some girth or solidity, some sense of meat and potatoes, sufficiency? Or does it turn around and say good-bye almost as soon as it is finished saying hello?
14. Is there an ending? Does it give you a sense of closure or completion? (The safest and most common method of doing this is to end with a conclusion -- not just repeating what went before but figuring out what everything means or adds up to. But again, that's not the only good way to end a piece.)