

The Elegant Essay Writing Lessons

Building Blocks for Analytical Writing



Lesha Myers



**Institute for
Excellence in
Writing**

Listen. Speak. Read. Write. Think!

Table of Contents

Student Pages

Chapter 1: Overview	1
Chapter 2: Thesis Statements	7
Chapter 3: Essay Organization.....	15
Chapter 4: Transitions	29
Chapter 5: Introductions.....	35
Chapter 6: Conclusions	47
Chapter 7: Form Review	61
Chapter 8: Thesis & Outlines	69
Chapter 9: Descriptive Essay.....	85
Chapter 10: Persuasive Essay	95

Appendices

Appendix A: Teaching Models.....	109
Appendix B: Grading Sheets	121
Appendix C: IEW Essay Model & Style Techniques.....	141

Principles

I'm a writer and I love to write. Whenever possible, I spend my free time typing on my computer or researching. Writing is one of my favorite activities.

You probably aren't like me.

You might find writing difficult.

In fact, you might actually *hate* writing.

If so, you're not alone.

Why do people find writing so distasteful? When I ask students this question, sometimes they will tell me, "It's not my gift. I don't have any talent." Other times I hear, "It's too hard" or "It takes too much time" or my all-time favorite, "When I write, I have to think."

In truth, God equips some people to excel at writing just as He gives others special talent in sports, music, academics, or other areas. On the other hand, anyone can learn the basics of writing. Anyone can learn its fundamental principles. That includes you.

Fundamental principles? Are you surprised to learn a set of *rules* undergirds all of writing? Do you suppose if you learned these rules, you might find writing easier or even (dare I say it) enjoyable?

This is exactly my hope and the reason I put this course together. I would like to introduce you to the basics of essay construction. I would like to teach you a structure to use with the essays you write. I would like to help you write an elegant essay.

Five Writing Components

Just what is this essay structure or format that I want to introduce? Follow an analogy to understand this concept. Think of the essay (or any type of writing, for that matter) as a human body. All humans share certain characteristics, yet all retain the unique stamp of the Creator. In the same way, all essays share similarities, yet each remains distinct.

Form or Structure

Essays (and all writing) embrace five different areas. The first, *form*, is like the skeletons that support people. Most skeletons look the same. They may be young or old, short or tall, male or female, but they all contain a cranium, vertebrae, femurs, and tibias. Essay form is the essay's skeleton, organization, or structure. Just as bone structure holds a person together, essays contain features that support a writer's ideas. More about this in a minute.

Content

However, beyond skeletons, people's bodies contain circulatory, respiratory, and muscular systems. They are overlaid with a wonderful covering called skin. They encompass unique personalities. You know large people and small people, healthy people and sick people, shy people and outgoing people, blondes and brunettes, and dark and light. In the same way, essays contain different *content*. You can read an essay about building a model airplane or arguing against increased taxes or comparing life in America to life in India. Content is the second part of all writing.

Style

People don't walk around *au natural*. Instead they clothe themselves with various fashions—colorful dresses or drab business suits, golf shirts or tuxedos, police uniforms or blue jeans. In the same way, authors dress essays with *style*. They might employ vivid verbs, similes, a variety of sentence openers, or many other choices. Style brings essays to life.

Mechanics

Have you ever seen a sick person, perhaps someone suffering from a lingering disease? If so, you probably saw the effects of his illness right away. He didn't look healthy. Just as people need to eat right, exercise, and treat their bodies with care, writers need to employ proper *mechanics*, such as correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Without these conventions, essays don't look right—they're hard to understand and follow. *Mechanics*, as the fourth part of writing, comprise the rules that govern essay health.

Voice

People have skeletons to keep them erect and hold them together, bodies and personalities to make them unique, and clothing to provide style. They operate according to a fixed set of principles to stay healthy. However, humans aren't skeletons, circulatory systems, dresses, or nutrition machines. Instead, they are people. In the same way, essays aren't form, content, style, or mechanics; rather, they are the combination of all these elements. They are essays. The way each of these separate parts combines creates their *voice*, overall effect, or personality. This final part of essay writing, *voice*, separates the good essay from the truly great.

What Is a Skeleton?

This introductory course concentrates on an essay's skeleton or structure, what holds it together, and on its content, the information it contains. We won't be as concerned with style, mechanics, and voice. Although important, you can look forward to addressing these elements in another course.

So we need to ask ourselves: "What is an essay, and what are its bones?"

The dictionary defines an essay as "a short literary composition on a particular subject," but you already knew that, didn't you? Perhaps we should ask ourselves, "What is the difference between an essay and a report?"

The difference concerns intent. A report presents basic information (such as meeting

minutes or a newspaper account), while an essay provides interpretation (why the company's vice president quit or how car safety has improved). While a report provides "raw" facts, an essay provides interpretation of those facts.

(An aside: In reality facts are never "raw." Writers employ many techniques to slant a seemingly factual account of an event. One is *connotation*. Denotation is the dictionary definition of the word. I remember this because both words begin with the letter "d." Connotation, on the other hand, is its emotional impact. I could say that my dog, Tora, isn't very bright or I could say she is stupid. Although the denotation of these two phrases is similar, the connotation of one is mild and even cute, while the other is downright insulting. All facts will be interpreted according to an author's *bias*. You might look for articles in your local newspaper to see how writers employ this device. Sorry, I couldn't pass up commenting on the concept of bias. OK, now back to our regularly scheduled program.)

So, the main difference between a report and an essay is the theme, point, agenda, message, purpose, or reason for writing it in the first place. One will present information, facts, and data. The other will add personal opinion, interpretation, and commentary.

Taking a Journey

As you might imagine, especially since this course will take a number of weeks to complete, essay form or structure contains several elements. We will look at each one in turn, but first I'd like to give you an overview. To do this, I need a new analogy, so let's compare essay form to taking a journey. Your mission will be to convince me to take a trip with you.

Thesis Statement

When you plan a trip, you first decide on a destination. Where do you want to go? Why? What do you hope to accomplish on your trip? Will you rest in Hawaii to revive your tired body? Visit the monuments and governmental institutions of Washington, D.C. on a civics field trip? Increase your faith in and knowledge of the Bible by traveling to Israel and walking in the footsteps of Jesus? What is the purpose of your trip?

In the same way, you need to ask yourself why you are writing your essay. (I mean, other than the fact that your teacher requires it!) What will you write about and how will you write? Do you want to inform, describe, or persuade? What is your point and reason for writing, or as I ask my students, what are you selling? The first element of essay form is the *thesis statement*. That's a one-sentence synopsis of your entire essay and usually appears in your introduction. In the same way that you might describe your destination, "Let's go whale watching in Monterey Bay," your thesis statement describes where you want to take your reader (to Monterey Bay) and why (to go whale watching).

Introduction

Next, you will need to spend some time making your trip look inviting. Frankly, whale watching doesn't sound very exciting to me. In fact, I really don't like boats at all, especially those that sail through water. I don't want to go on your trip, so you will need to introduce your idea and convince me that it will be fun. You might begin with a funny story to melt

down my natural reluctance, or you might list some benefits I would gain by taking the trip.

The *introduction* of an essay functions in the same way. It convinces the reader to take the trip or to read on. In some ways it's the most important part of the essay, so we will spend a fair amount of time on it.

Transitions

OK, I'll go whale watching with you. I'll begin the trip, but you have the responsibility to get me to your destination. I'm not familiar with the roads in the Monterey Bay area, and I don't know my way to the wharf. You will need to bring me along and make sure I get there.

You have the same responsibility when you write essays. You need to move your reader from sentence to sentence, thought to thought, and paragraph to paragraph in a smooth way. If your reader gets lost following your logic, if he says to himself, "Huh?" he will leave you and go back home. *Transitions* keep your essay on track. They give your reader instructions such as, "I'm building on my previous thought" or "Now I'm beginning a new thought." Transitions act as road markers, giving directions and pointing the way.

Conclusions

The best part of a journey is often its completion, the return home (especially from whale watching trips). After our trip (notice I didn't talk about that part, the content), you can't leave me out in the middle of Monterey Bay; you have to bring me back to shore then back to my home. Additionally, you have to convince me the trip was worthwhile. Maybe I'll have a funny story to tell my grandchildren. Maybe I've received a benefit such as learning to cope with seasickness. Maybe you want to move me to action so I will tell others how much fun it is to bob around in a small container of wood surrounded by waves the size of houses. Perhaps I could inspire others by sharing the wonder of encountering one of the largest of God's majestic sea creatures (and, in truth, the experience *was* truly awesome).

In the same way, you need a *conclusion* to your essay, a way to bring your reader back to the place he started, but with something added. Perhaps you've added knowledge by telling him about your favorite American hero or moved him to reconsider his position on a controversial issue or brightened his day by sharing a humorous story. The last part of your essay, the conclusion, ties all of your thoughts together.



Now that we've discussed an overview of where we are going in this course, let's get started. It's time to begin our journey.



Notes



Use this page to take notes as your teacher directs.

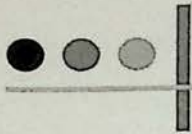
Five Writing Components

1. Form
2. Content
3. Style
4. Mechanics
5. Voice

Bias

Essay Parts

- Thesis Statement
- Introduction
- (Body)
- Transitions
- Conclusion



What Is a Thesis Statement?

If you have written a paragraph, you are probably familiar with the concept of a topic sentence, usually the first sentence in your paragraph that introduces your topic or main idea. A thesis statement is similar to a topic sentence. A topic sentence usually begins a paragraph and tells readers what to expect from it, and a thesis statement does the same for an entire essay. You can think of a thesis statement as a mega-topic sentence. Often, it can act as a one-sentence summary of your essay. It's your essay's mission statement.

English handbooks usually define a thesis statement as

- a statement of purpose, intent, or main idea of an essay

Think of the thesis statement as a compass. Like a compass, it gives direction and points the way:

- **For your readers**, the thesis statement keeps their brains on track, moving their thoughts towards your point. It establishes boundaries. If an essay traveled outside the bounds of its thesis statement, your reader might become confused. Confused readers stop reading.
- **For you as the writer**, the thesis statement also helps keep the essay on track. Writing choices abound. Should you include this fact, that detail, or another story? A well-formulated thesis statement outlining your essay's purpose will help you decide what to include and what to leave out. For research papers, it can also help you manage your time. You might decide to skim a book or website rather than read it thoroughly if it falls on the outskirts of your thesis.

Kinds of Thesis Statements

Expository, Narrative, & Persuasive

Most essays contain a thesis statement to give form and scope and state the author's point—why he or she took the time to write the essay in the first place. In an *expository* essay, which explains or informs, the thesis statement will narrow the focus of the explanation, such as how to choose a family pet, or the information, such as methods used to design and construct Hoover Dam. In a *narrative* essay, which is a story with a purpose, the thesis statement will reveal a lesson that the author learned or an emotion that he wants to share or relive. In a *persuasive* essay, which tries to change the reader's mind, the thesis statement will present the claim or argument the author wants to convince you to adopt. In an essay, the thesis statement glues thoughts together.

Working Thesis Statements

Let's say you have settled on a topic for your essay and you write a thesis statement. However, it has issues. It's dull, boring, and lifeless. No problem. Just call it a *working thesis statement* and you'll be fine. A working thesis statement is a preliminary statement of purpose that can keep your thoughts organized and your essay on track. If you change directions, just change your thesis. At the end of your writing, revisit it and see if you can breathe some life into it as you polish it up.

Occasionally, my students tell me they don't want to feel confined by a thesis statement. Rather, they want to begin their essay and see where it leads. This idea has some merit. Sometimes my writing takes on a life of its own, and what I end up with bears no resemblance to what I originally intended to convey. On the other hand, writing is thinking. You must use your brain at some point. You can use it before you begin writing, during your writing, or after you are finished during the editing step. If you wait until your rough draft is complete to develop a thesis statement, you might find it hard to locate a controlling or unifying idea, and you might have to discard some of your work. Giving thought to your thesis before you begin to write might actually save you time.

Academic Thesis Statements

If you write for people in the academic world, especially history or science teachers, you might need to write a three-pronged thesis statement to introduce the three main points of your paper. This gives focus for a busy teacher who may have a stack of papers to read. Additionally, an *academic thesis* makes a great working thesis because it clarifies your thoughts and forces you to constantly ask yourself whether or not you should include a particular detail in your essay. The academic thesis statement does the following:

- announces the essay's topics or arguments.
- usually occurs at the end of the introductory paragraph.
- completes the unspoken statement, "In this essay, I will [inform, describe, argue, or defend] this topic in these three ways."
- echoes the topics of the three main body paragraphs.



A thesis statement is like a big beach umbrella covering your essay and helping you to make choices about what information to include and what to pass by. Ask yourself, "Does this topic add something to my essay? Does it fit under the umbrella of my thesis statement?" If so, include it. If not, leave it, or change your thesis statement.

Developing Thesis Statements

In my experience, developing a thesis statement is one of the highest hurdles students need to hop over to write elegant essays. To help, I impose a few artificial rules on my beginning and intermediate students. First, the thesis may not be longer than one sentence. Although a thesis statement might span several sentences under the direction of an accomplished writer, beginners will focus better if they have fewer options. Second, the thesis must be the last sentence in the introduction. When students move on to more advanced essay structures, the thesis can move, too and discard these artificial rules.

Steps to create a thesis statement

To generate a thesis statement, follow these three steps:

1. Determine your essay's intent. Will it inform, describe, or persuade?
2. Narrow your focus or your topic. Instead of writing about Scotland, you might choose a specific aspect of Scotland—famous castles or the origin of golf, for example. Make sure you can explain your topic in the time and space allotted to you. A one-page paper requires a very narrow topic, while ten pages would let you broaden it.
3. Develop a two-part statement. In part one, state your narrow focus. In part two, add details concerning what you want to say about it.

Some examples follow.

Types of Thesis Statements

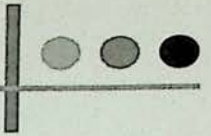
	Expository or Informative Essay	Narrative or Descriptive Essay	Persuasive Essay
Definition	Gives information on a particular topic.	Describes a person, place, idea, or event. Tells a story with a purpose.	Reasons and argues to change a reader's viewpoint or perspective.
Essay Types	Most biographies, reports, directions and instructions, analysis, and other essays that offer some or little interpretation.	Travelogues, personal narratives, some biographies, nostalgia, and writing that appeals to the five senses.	Any essay that makes an assertion and calls for the reader to agree or disagree with the writer's conclusion. Some literary analysis essays.
Purpose of Thesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announces the essay's subject • States the topic(s) • Completes the unspoken statement, "What I want to say is that..." or "This essay will tell you about..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the mood or emotion the writer wishes to impart • Expresses a feeling • Completes the unspoken statement, "This essay will make you feel or experience..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States the position you want to defend, what you believe, or what you want to explore • Takes a stand • Completes the unspoken statement, "This essay will explore or make you believe or persuade you to..."
Thesis Example	Men and women who wish to protect their country's freedoms can choose to serve in five different branches of the military.	As the movie ended, I thought about my grandfather's sacrifice on Iwo Jima and how his courage allowed me to live in freedom.	Women have no business endangering their country's security by serving alongside men on battlefields. or If women excel in civilian jobs, they can undoubtedly make positive contributions to the military.

More Thesis Statement Examples

Intent	Topic	Focus/Slant/Details	Thesis Example
Inform	Golf	Began in Scotland	The game of golf originated in Scotland.
Inform	Paul's third journey	Spread Christianity	Paul spread Christianity to thousands on his third missionary journey.
Describe	Me on September 11th	Fear	As I watched events unfold on that fateful Tuesday, I shuddered to think perhaps they foretold the beginning of WWII.
Describe	Contestants	Anticipation	The girls eagerly huddled around the announcer and waited for the judges' decision.
Persuade	Television	Beneficial	TV's educational programs expand a child's experience.
Persuade	Sports	Steroids	Steroid use destroys the competitive spirit of professional sports.

Working or Academic Thesis Statement Examples

Intent	Subject	Three Topics	Thesis Example
Inform	History of golf	In Scotland In England In the United States	The game of golf originated in Scotland, moved to England, but hit its swing in the United States.
Inform	Sports	Baseball Football Hockey	America's favorite sports include baseball, football, and hockey.
Describe	Hawaiian vacation	Refreshment Economy Culture	Stressed-out people journey to Hawaii to refresh their spirits, support the economy, and experience a different culture.
Persuade	Daytime curfews	Freedom Taxes Ineffective	Daytime curfews infringe on the freedom of minors, waste taxpayers' money, and prove ineffective.
Persuade	Television	Obesity Inappropriate Content Solitude	Unmonitored television viewing harms children physically, mentally, and socially.



Notes



Use this page to take notes as your teacher directs.

Purpose of a Thesis Statement (Function)

Kinds of Theses by Essay Type (Genre)

1. Narrative (descriptive)
2. Expository (Informative)
3. Persuasive (argumentative)

Working Thesis Statements

Academic Thesis Statements

Steps to Create Thesis Statements

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Thesis Modeling Notes

Essay Type	Topic	Focus/Slant/Details	Possible Thesis
Expository (Informative)	Friends	Loving the unlovable	
		Overcoming shyness	
		Bible verses	
Narrative (Descriptive)	Holidays	Nostalgic	
		Time for family	
		Stressful/hectic	
Persuasive	Television	Harmful	
		Wasteful	
		Enjoyable	
Academic/ Informative	Career	Fulfilling Secure Profitable	
Academic/ Persuasive	Smoking	Health Cost Image	

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 1: Thesis Statements

Thesis Statements

Directions: For each of the subjects below, choose an essay type, decide on a slant or details, and write a thesis statement. You must use each of the essay types (to describe, inform, or persuade) at least once and one example of a three-pronged academic thesis.

1. Courage

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

2. A gift

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

3. Women in the military

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

4. Education

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 2: Thesis Statements

Thesis Statements

Directions: For each of the subjects below, choose an essay type, decide on a slant or details, and write a thesis statement. You must use each of the essay types (to describe, inform, or persuade) at least once and one example of a three-pronged academic thesis.

1. Socialism

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

2. A favorite teacher

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

3. College

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

4. Ministry or community service

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

The Body

OK, you have your topic. You know what you are going to write about, at least in theory, and you've developed a thesis statement. You may not like your thesis statement, but it works and will get you started. What's next?

Logic and sequence say the introduction. However, I have had more success teaching my students to write from the inside out—that is, at least for the first several times, to write the essay's body before its introduction. To do this, you will need to understand *organization*.

Organization entails the way you put your essay together and how you arrange its content. That's the subject of this section.

The Five-Paragraph Organization

Most beginning essays span five paragraphs (introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion). You can develop a good essay—not too long or not too short—in three body paragraphs, but there is nothing sacred about the number three. You could write a four-paragraph, or a six-paragraph, or a twenty-paragraph essay and employ the same techniques.

I'm going to offer you several ways to structure your essays, beginning with a very simple structure and moving on to some that are more complex. The simple structure will help you if you are just beginning to write essays, but the concept will also help more experienced students write a short essay or write under a time constraint. If you have to write an essay in thirty-minutes to pass some sort of test, the simple structure will serve you well, although you may not have enough time to complete five paragraphs.

The Simplest Structure

Your first challenge will be to select a topic to address in each body paragraph and write a working thesis. If you've written an academic thesis, its three prongs will be the topics of your three body paragraphs. Perhaps you are writing an essay on courage, and your thesis statement reads as follows:

- People display courage every day when they stand firm in their beliefs, do something hard, or hold their sinful nature in check.

You could begin your introduction by relating an amazing story of courage—a young man rescuing his neighbor from a burning home, for example—then move on to ordinary everyday kinds of courage, and conclude with your thesis statement. Your next three paragraphs could discuss courage as it relates to upholding personal convictions, completing a difficult task, and not responding rashly.

The Simple Structure

A good way to organize your body paragraphs is to employ the acronym SEE, which stands for Statement, Explanation, or Example. Begin with a topic sentence, follow it with two SEEs, and end with a clincher. Whenever you feel at a loss for words, you can use this form for inspiration. But remember, this is just to get you started. As you become more comfortable with writing, you will want to exercise your own creativity and move beyond the formula.

I. Topic Sentence

Begin with your topic sentence. It should tie in to your thesis statement (in this case firm convictions) and explain how you will address the topic in your paragraph. In our example you might say, "Ordinary people display courage when they stand firm in their personal convictions."

A. First Statement (S)

Next, make an assertion or statement about your topic sentence. An assertion is a declaration or something you want to prove or discuss. In our example we might say, "Peer pressure sometimes prevents people from listening to their consciences."

1. First Statement Explanation (E) or Example (E)

Follow your assertion or statement with two sentences of explanation. You might develop the statement by expanding on it or explaining it in more detail, offering a story, giving an example, or in the case that follows, making an observation. In discussing courage and peer pressure you might say, "A young person might hear companions spreading false rumors or gossiping about a close friend. Speaking out, even graciously, takes fortitude."

B. Second Statement (S)

After you've developed your first assertion as much as you like (two sentences at a minimum), follow it with another statement that relates to your topic. Pay attention to your transition to make sure this statement connects with your first. You could say, "Alternatively, people might face the temptation to set aside their standards."

1. Second Statement Explanation (E) or Example (E)

Just as you did for your first assertion, follow with at least two more sentences of evidence, details, or examples. In our example, "If friends want to watch a movie filled with violence or inappropriate content, the person faces a quandary. Should he go along with the group and watch or affirm his standards and leave?"

II. Clincher Statement

Finally, conclude your paragraph with a final or closing statement that reflects the topic sentence. For example, "By exhibiting courage, people stay true to their beliefs and principles."

The simple structure is a good place to start because it contains all of the elements of a well-structured paragraph: topic and clincher sentences, transitions, and on-topic discussion. It is the simplest; it is not always the best. Use it when you're under time pressure, when you are experiencing brain freeze, or for a first draft—or even a pre-draft when you just want to get words down on the paper. For better and more elegant essays, you need more. Read on.

Showing vs. Telling

Most English books tell you that you need evidence and support for your paragraph topics, and this is true, but what exactly is *support*? I find it easier to think in terms of *telling* and *showing*. Telling is exactly what it sounds like—you tell your reader what you are going to talk about. Showing, on the other hand, demonstrates and expands your point. It creates a picture or impression in your reader's brain. What is the problem with the simple structure demonstrated above? It is almost all telling. It needs some showing. Here are some examples of the difference between telling and showing.

<i>Telling</i>	<i>Showing</i>
The Internet makes shopping convenient. (informative)	I wanted to buy a conch shell to use as a prop when I taught <i>Lord of the Flies</i> . I could have searched local shops, probably in vain, or made long distant phone calls to other parts of the country. Instead, I fired up Google, typed in “conch shell sales,” and ten minutes later a business in Florida wrapped, shipped, and prepared to deliver the shell right to my mailbox.
My dog was scared. (descriptive)	Tora's tail uncurled and her ears drooped. She backed up behind the table leg, bared her teeth, and growled softly.
Smoking destroys your health. (persuasive)	If you are a teenager and you continue to smoke for the rest of your life, you have a fifty-fifty chance of dying from tobacco-related diseases. Even if you beat the odds, you still have a 25 percent chance of sacrificing 21 years of your life.

By all means, you need to *tell* in your essay, but you also need to *show*. To say this another way, you need to make statements and assertions, but you also need to back them up with support or evidence. Your primary asserting, your *telling* occurs in your thesis. The rest of your essay responds to the reader's unspoken question (Read with your best British accent.), “I say, Old Man, you'll have to convince me.” That takes showing.

Evidence and Support—Showing

So what can you use for support in your essay? Plenty. Let's look at some ideas.

Evidence Examples

Besides developing a thesis statement, the skill my students find most difficult when learning to write elegant essays is providing evidence and support for their points. Therefore, I thought I would provide a few examples of what students might generate and how they could improve their body paragraphs.

Example One

Many people in today's society depend on the Internet's information. A lot of people read the news off Internet sites such as CNN.com. The Internet is more efficient because there are many newspapers that do not cover everything that happens. On the Internet people can search many sites for a variety of news—current or archived. People might find different types of information on the Internet, including facts, opinions, how-tos, and even information on people. The Internet bursts with information.

This paragraph is well-structured. It includes a topic sentence that relates to the thesis statement, several body sentences, and a clincher to wrap it up. It's grammatically correct and thoughtful. However, it is almost all telling and somewhat redundant. The student is telling me about the Internet's information; he is not showing me how to obtain that information. He has no evidence to back up his claims. Here are some ideas (in italics) for additions:

Today, people depend on the Internet for information. A lot of people get their news directly from Internet sites, such as CNN.com. This offers advantages over newspapers because newspapers do not include all of the news and are not always current. *A while back I wanted to know the results of the special election in my district, and I did not have access to a newspaper. I powered up my Internet, typed "Concord California local election results" into a search engine, and within seconds the results appeared on my screen.* The Internet contains other types of information as well, including facts, opinions, and even information about people. *If you type a person's phone number into Google, you will learn his full name and address, complete with a map and driving directions to his home. You can even view a satellite photo of his home.* The Internet bursts with information.

Example Two

Before we get too excited about human cloning, we need to recognize the many dangers involved in the process. Before scientists even implant the clone in the surrogate mother, there are difficulties. Those who do get their fling at living have serious health issues and defects as well. Not counting the aging problem, clones still do not have it easy. Serious health impairments result. Clones' problems include underdeveloped body organs and immune systems, diabetes, anemia, skin infections, blood vessel abnormalities, grossly enlarged placentas and umbilical cords, fatty livers, hypertension, misshapen heads, and lung disease. Would we really want to curse a human baby with these defects?



This student added her own evidence, and it brought her paragraph to life:

Before we get too excited about human cloning, we need to recognize the many dangers involved in the process. Before scientists even implant the clone in the surrogate mother, there are difficulties. *Cloning is a difficult process with a very low success rate. Only two percent of the cloned animals are suitable for implantation. Of those two percent, 97 out of 100 do not survive. Whether human or animal, that is still an enormous figure. If those are human cloned babies, they are individual people who are dying, failing to get a chance to live like other people.* Those who do get their fling at living have serious health issues and defects as well. *For starters, they age early. Dolly was suffering from arthritis at the age of five years, whereas arthritis usually strikes sheep of advanced ages, like nine or ten.* Not counting the aging problem, clones still do not have it easy. *Many cloned animals have health issues including Dolly, Second Chance, Noah, and a little six-month old lamb with a bad problem of hyperventilating.* Clones' problems include underdeveloped body organs and immune systems, diabetes, anemia, skin infections, blood vessel abnormalities, grossly enlarged placentas and umbilical cords, fatty livers, hypertension, misshapen heads, and lung disease. Would we really want to curse a human baby with these defects?

The difference between the simple example introduced a few pages ago (SEE) and this one is the support. The more support or evidence or proof you can bring to your essay, the more you will convince your audience that you are informed and worth listening to. Instead of *telling* readers to believe something, to take you on faith, you *show* them the evidence and lead them to make up their own minds. Let's look at some ways to do this.

More Evidence & Support Examples



There are at least eight ways to show and support:

1. Examples—a specific instance
2. Personal Experience—something that has actually happened to you that sheds light on the topic
3. Statistics—numbers, percents, and data
4. Research/Testimony—a quote or summary of an authority or specialist's views
5. Observation—a judgment or inference; logical reasoning
6. Description—word pictures that bring your idea to life
7. Anecdote—a story that relates to or exemplifies the point you are trying to make
8. Analogy—a comparison to something else to clarify your reasoning

To illustrate the eight options for body evidence and support, several examples for body paragraphs follow. These same techniques could be used for *showing* in all elegant essays.

Example

An example is a specific illustration of your point that occurs outside your personal experience. It could be the experience of a friend or relative, or it could be something you hear or read about.

One benefit television offers is immediate access to worldwide news. Broadcasts allow people to learn about events happening all around the globe. On Christmas Day in 2004, while most people were wrapped up in the events of the day or unwrapping their presents, television reports shared some unsettling news: In one of the worst natural disasters in recent history, a tsunami had roared across the shores of several Southeast Asian countries, killing thousands. In short order, news shows reported the devastation, which allowed Americans to drop to their knees in prayer and open their pocketbooks in tangible support. The images broadcast on television allowed people to see the effects of the tsunami and quickly help the sufferers of this dreadful disaster.

Personal Experience

Personal experience is similar to an example. However, examples report other people's experience, while personal experience conveys your own. If you use personal experience as support for your essay, please remember two things: First, it is perfectly fine to lapse into first person point of view and use personal pronouns (such as *I, me, my, we, our, us*) while relating your details. Second, personal experience must be true. It would be highly unethical to fabricate information and write about it as if it really happened and damage your credibility.

It's hard to master writing body paragraphs. Not only do students have to remember a variety of techniques, they have to think. Thinking is arduous work. In my twenty-plus years of teaching composition in one form or another, I've rarely seen students who master these techniques immediately. Instead, they have to practice. Then they have to practice some more. Finally, one day it all comes together, and their writing becomes a joy to read.

Statistics

Statistics, the use of figures and numbers to make a point, can effectively support your essay's topics. However, you need to be aware of several potential difficulties. First, any statistics you use need to come from reliable sources. You will need to exercise discernment to determine whether or not you may trust the statistics. Second, statistics can be overwhelming, especially if you use too many. Readers might get lost in a sea of numbers. After you use statistics, be sure to apply them or comment on them. Tell your readers what you want them to learn from your use of the statistics.

Television, especially unmonitored or excessive viewing, can harm children's development. Many shows, even those aired during the evening family hour, contain unnecessary and extreme violence. According to the Parents Television Council, by the time the average American child reaches his eighteenth birthday, his mind will have been polluted with 200,000 violent images. Additionally, he will have witnessed 8,000 brutal murders. This is too much. How many children have personally witnessed even one murder in real life? Very few. Parents must protect innocent young minds from television's refuse.

Please note that when you cite statistics or expert testimony, the reference needs to be cited in a Works Cited page. The citation used in the above paragraph would look like this:

"TV Bloodbath: Violence on Prime Time Broadcast TV." *Parents Television Council*. N.d. Web. 30 Jun. 2010.

Observation

Observations might also be called logical reasoning. Beginning with a premise or set of facts, you build a case for your arguments by reasoning or making inferences. Words that frequently occur with this type of evidence or support include *might* or *could*. The above paragraph illustrating the use of statistics might have ended this way if it included an observation:

Children who watch violence might imitate it. With seared consciences, they might not be able to discern right actions from wrong actions.

Generally, observation that contains speculation, like the above example, is the weakest kind of support. Think twice before you use it.

Research or Testimony

Oftentimes it's helpful to find an expert who can lend weight to your arguments. What is an *expert*? Loosely defined, it is someone who can be trusted to speak with authority on the topic or someone with experience in the field. These days, the Internet abounds with research and expert testimony. As with statistics, you will need to exercise discernment to determine whether or not the testimony is from an authority or a dependable source.

Scientists play god when they engage in embryonic stem cell research because they determine who has the right to live and who will die. Just because an embryo has not developed to the point of birth does not mean it is not a human being. According to Dr. Francis J. Beckwith, fellow of The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, "The unborn—from zygote to blastocyst to embryo to fetus—is the same being, the same substance, that develops into an adult." If it is wrong to kill an adult, it is equally wrong to kill an embryo, even if the embryo's stem cells might save another's life.

Beckwith, Francis J. PhD. "What Would Reagan Do?" *National Review Online*. 27 July 2004. 20 Feb. 2006. <<http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/beckwith200407270012.asp>>.

Description

Unlike the written word, photographs and movies portray vivid images that make an impact. Writing, especially descriptive writing, strives to create an image in the reader's mind that makes the same impact. Good descriptions contain imagery and appeal to the five senses.

Smoking causes lung cancer and a host of other life-shortening diseases. Years of inhaling tar and nicotine produce cancerous lungs: black, shriveled, and stunted. They look like burned cookies left in the oven so long their edges crisp and curl until they resemble charcoal lumps. It's no wonder victims of lung cancer lose weight and cough up blood.

Anecdote/Story

Stories and anecdotes bring essays to life; however, they must be true stories. As with personal experience, it is highly unethical to invent details and pass them off as true.

Bev Holzrichter owes her life to the Internet. During foaling season in 2005, Ms. Holzrichter entered her horse barn and felt the wrath of a mare trying to protect her colt. Thankfully, friends from around the world watched the accident on webcams installed to allow the global community to share the miracle of foaling season. The Charlotte, Iowa, Rescue Squad received calls from Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, and help arrived quickly. Not only does the Internet foster communication, it can make the difference between life and death.

Analogy

An analogy is a way to compare two dissimilar items or ideas. By linking something known to something less familiar, an analogy creates a likeness and consequently, understanding. One of my students thought of the following brilliant analogy:

Salary caps allow fair competition in sports because they limit the aggregate amount of money any one team can spend on its players' salaries. This prevents any team with an abundance of funds from hiring all superstars. Salary caps are like trips to the gas station: A person pays the attendant \$40 and proceeds to pump his gas. When he reaches his limit, the pump shuts down. In the same way, when a team reaches its salary cap, it can't spend any more money on players. Owners must budget their payroll carefully, which creates a leveling effect and promotes fair competition in the league.

All of the examples above can be profitably used for narrative or descriptive, informative or expository, and persuasive essays. Additionally, they may be combined, often in the same paragraph. But don't lose sight of your point. Remember, the purpose of evidence and support is to uphold and prove your thesis statement. Argue your premise, describe your event, or explain your process. Use these techniques for *showing*: for emphasis, proof, and backup.

Notes



Use this page to take notes as your teacher directs.

The Simple Structure

1. Format (Topic + SEE + Clincher)
2. Limitations (and when to use)

Modeling

Example #1

Peer pressure sometimes prevents people from listening to their consciences. A young person might hear companions spreading false rumors or gossiping about a close friend. No one wants to go against the crowd. Speaking out, even graciously, takes fortitude. Alternatively, people might face the temptation to set aside their standards. If friends want to watch a movie filled with violence or inappropriate content, the person faces a quandary. Should he go along with the group and watch or affirm his standards and leave? By exhibiting courage, people stay true to their beliefs and principles.

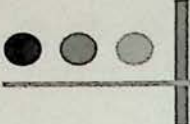
Example #2

When parents give gifts to their children, they send a special message of love. They say they care in a very real way. For example, if a child wants a computer for Christmas, parents might work hard to provide it. They might even sacrifice receiving their own gifts to buy it. Their actions communicate their love.

Example #3

When parents give gifts to their children, they send a special message of love. They say that they care in a very real way.

Their actions communicated their love.



Showing vs. Telling

Telling	Showing
Dad is very funny.	
Mom sometimes forgets things.	
The cat was afraid of Tora, the very brave dog.	
[Your favorite sport] is fun.	

Evidence & Support for Essays

1. Examples
2. Personal Experience
3. Statistics
4. Research/Testimony
5. Observation
6. Description
7. Anecdote
8. Analogy

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 3a: Body Paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

Refer to the thesis statements you generated in a previous lesson. Select two thesis statements, revise them if you wish, and write one body paragraph for each, practicing the options for evidence and support—for showing—described in this lesson.

Topics: courage, a gift, women in the military, education

1. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

2. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 3b: Body Paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

Refer to the thesis statements you generated in a previous lesson. Select two thesis statements, revise them if you wish, and write one body paragraph for each, practicing the options for evidence and support—for showing—described in this lesson.

Topics: courage, a gift, women in the military, education

1. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

2. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 4a: Body Paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

Refer to the thesis statements you generated in a previous lesson. Select two thesis statements, revise them if you wish, and write one body paragraph for each, practicing the options for evidence and support—for showing—described in this lesson.

Topics: socialism, a favorite teacher, college, ministry or community service

1. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

2. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 4b: Body Paragraphs

Body Paragraphs

Refer to the thesis statements you generated in a previous lesson. Select two thesis statements, revise them if you wish, and write one body paragraph for each, practicing the options for evidence and support—for showing—described in this lesson.

Topics: socialism, a favorite teacher, college, ministry or community service

1. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

2. Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Support options: example, personal experience, statistics, expert testimony, observation, description, anecdote or story, or analogy

Thesis:

Body:

4 TRANSITIONS

Road Signs

Have you ever found yourself totally lost while reading an article? Somehow and somewhere, you lost the thread of the author's thoughts. You backtrack and notice he moved to a different subject without informing you. You missed his transition.

Transitions move readers' thoughts along the writer's track. They connect or relate one idea or thought to another. Connecting each point smoothly, transitions indicate changes in time (sequence), in place (space), or in mood (atmosphere). English handbooks define transitions as words or phrases that help tie ideas together. In the same way that traffic signs guide cars, transitions guide thought. They help the reader keep up with the writer.

Kinds of Transitions

The Yellow Line

(called reference transitions in English handbooks)

The first type of transition connects thoughts from sentence to sentence within a paragraph. It functions similarly to the yellow line on a road, which keeps cars moving along in their proper lane. A smooth paragraph with good flow usually contains good transitions. Jumpy paragraphs with potholes, or unconnected thoughts, lack them. Yellow line transitions include

- pronouns which refer back to their antecedents, or the pronoun that replaces the noun.
- repeated words from the previous sentence.
- synonyms of a word used in a previous sentence.
- restated thoughts from previous sentences.



Road Signs

(called connectives in English handbooks)

The second type of transition signals a change in thought in the same way a road sign signals a change in direction (stop, curve ahead, yield, or even soft shoulder). Road sign transitions might include

- continuing after a stop sign: likewise, in addition, mostly, more important, thus, in other words, first, then, next.
- changing direction: on the other hand, but, however, nevertheless.
- detouring down a side road: for instance, such as, for example, like.
- reaching the destination: finally, and so, to sum up.



The Elegant Essay

Student Book

- Provides an excellent extension and refinement of IEW's Unit 8 (essay writing), with detailed explanation and practice exercises.
- From captivating introductions, to compelling descriptions and convincing conclusions, students learn to bring their words and their arguments to life.
- The student book contains all necessary handouts and exercises. Includes grading sheets and in-class exercise answers for ease of teaching.
- The accompanying teacher's manual provides teachers with everything they need to teach the class at home or with a group. Great for new and experienced teachers alike.

The Elegant Essay is most appropriate for middle and high school students who desire to build upon what they've already learned through the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* methodology.

"What a wonderful course! The teacher's manual provided me with the tools I needed to mentor my students in writing essays. Thanks to Lesha's instructions, I knew exactly how to help my students work through the exercises. Thanks to this course, my students learned how to produce clear thesis statements and solid essays." —Jill Pike



Lesha Myers was a homeschool mom and classroom teacher who founded and directed an independent study program in California while teaching English part-time in a Christian high school. She also created Windows to the World: An Introduction to Literary Analysis and Writing Research Papers: The Essential Tools, advanced texts used by teachers and homeschooling families across the country.



**Institute for
Excellence in
Writing**

Listen. Speak. Read. Write. Think!

IEW.com • 800.856.5815

TEE-S

ISBN 978-0-9779860-1-9



9 780977 986019