

Teaching and Grading Expository Writing

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Introduction

Expository writing is probably the type most frequently used in college courses (Bander, 1983). This also holds true at the senior high school level. Many of the reading tasks students are required to do involve expository writing, such as explanations of certain chemical reactions, classification of plants, animals, or chemical substances, descriptions of causes of natural disasters, and comparisons of writing styles of different authors, to name just a few. However, much as they are exposed to expository writing, students' ability to write compositions of this type is far from satisfactory, even when writing in Chinese. As expository writing calls for logical analysis, students need explicit instruction in how to organize their writing, present ideas which are logically related to the main topic, and weave sentences together in a smooth way. Such instruction is particularly important in EFL writing. The present article aims at providing EFL teachers with tips on teaching and grading expository writing in the classroom.

The whole article consists of four parts. The first part is a description of types of expository writing that high school students may need to deal with, as well as the functions and characteristics of each expository writing type. The second part gives examples of expository writing from San-min English readers for senior high school. One of the reading texts is selected as a sample reading for the development of a teaching plan, which is the third part

of this article. Finally, tips are offered on how to grade students' expository writing.

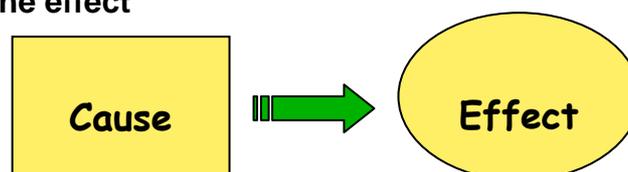
Types of Expository Writing

Expository writing is meant to inform, explain, clarify, define or instruct via logical analysis. There are several ways to develop a logical analysis, including comparison and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution, definition, examples, and logical division (Bander, 1983; Blanchart and Root, 2004; Folse et al., 2001). Whichever type it is, expository writing usually demonstrates such characteristics as focus on the main topic, logical supporting facts, strong organization, a logical order, clarity, unity and coherence, and smooth transitions (<http://www.thewritingsite.org/resources/genre/expository.asp>). In this section, discussion will be centered on the development of cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and logical division. This last genre is particularly emphasized, due to the fact that paragraphs of logical division are most often required in college entrance exams.

I. Cause and Effect

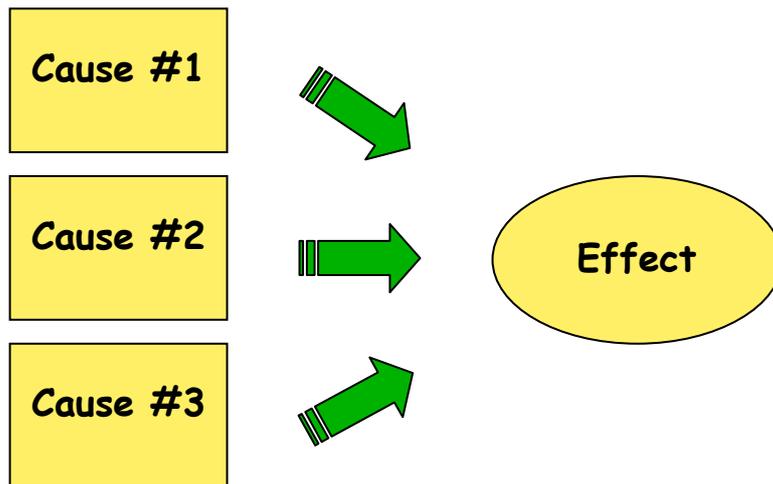
A cause-effect essay serves one of the two purposes: to show the effects of an event, or to explain the causes of an event (Folse et al., 2001). In other words, cause and effect writing aims at explaining why things happen (i.e. causes) and what happens as a result (i.e. effects). There are several possible relationships between causes and effects, as illustrated in the following graphic organizers.

1. One cause one effect



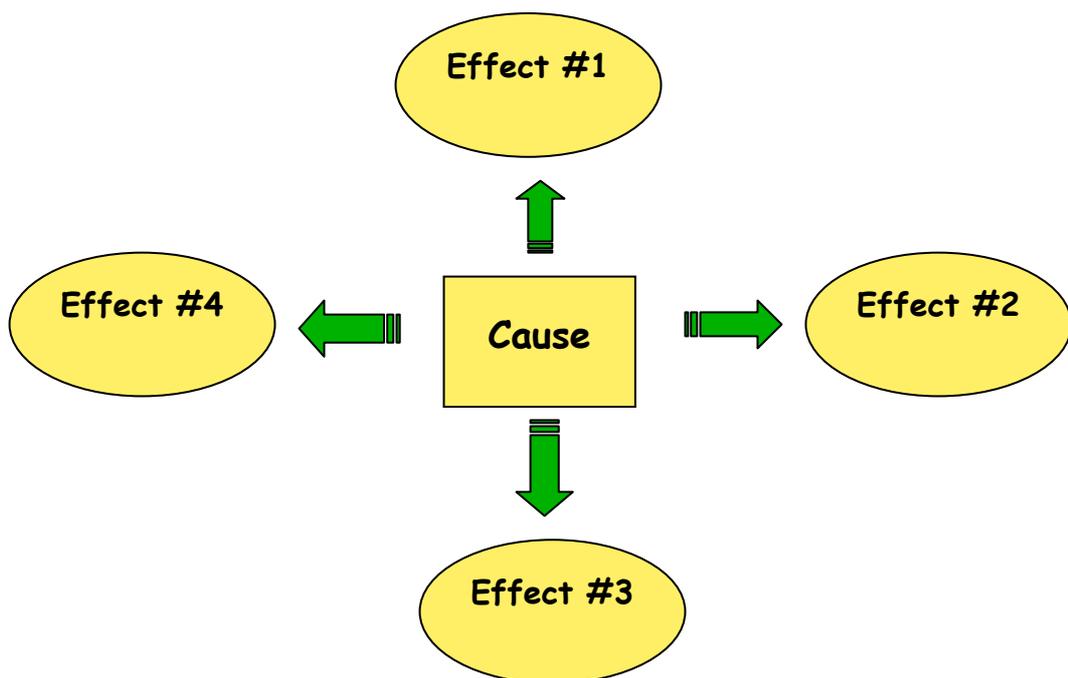
In the above situation, one cause leads to one effect, which is the least complicated relationship between events. For example, eating stale food leads to a stomach ache.

2. Many causes one effect



An effect could also be attributed to many causes as the above graphic organizer shows. For example, one's poor health may be attributed to malnutrition, overwork and a lack of sleep.

3. One cause many effects

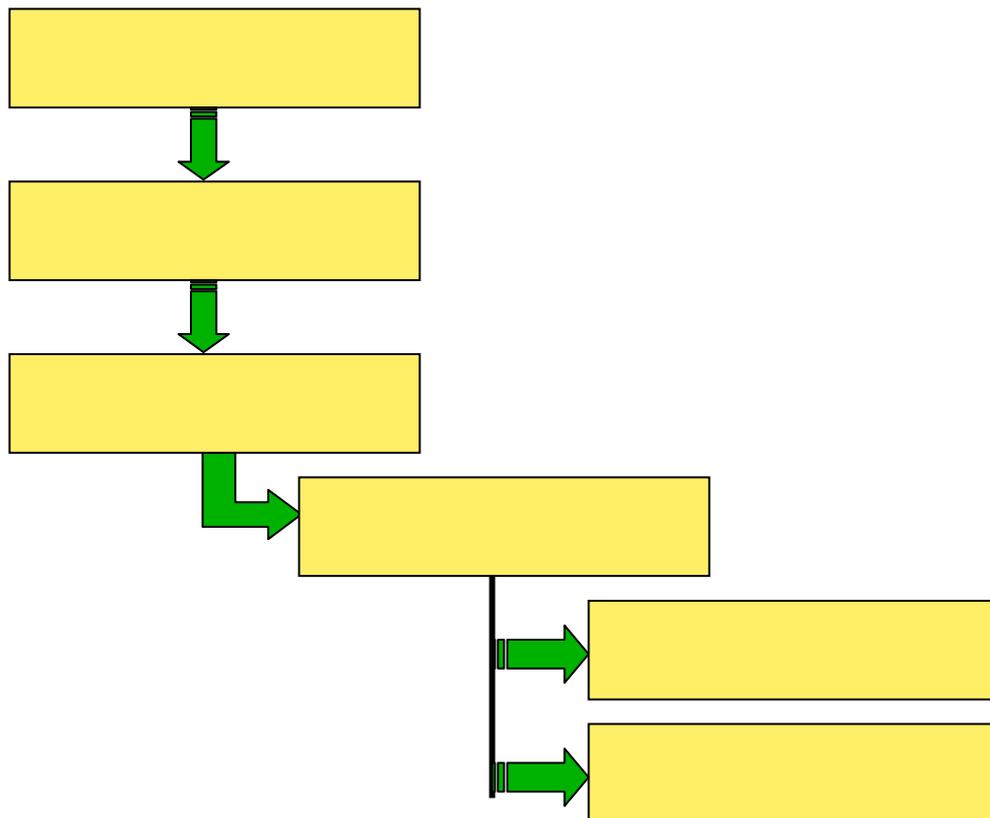


On the other hand, a cause may lead to more than one effect, and these

effects may not be related to each other. For example, when a man loses his job, many undesirable things may happen as a result. The bank may take away his house since he can't pay the mortgage; his children may have to transfer to a public school because there is no extra money for the high tuition fees for private schools, and he may have to sell his car for cash and to cut down on expenses.

4. Ripple effect or chain reaction

The most complicated case of cause-and-effect writing is the ripple effect or chain reaction, in which one cause leads to one effect, which in turn, leads to another effect, and the chain reaction continues. The following graphic organizer illustrates the relationship between the causes and effects in a ripple effect or chain reaction.



Examples of this kind are not uncommon in our daily life. Take the ripple effect of global warming for example. The increase of carbon dioxide

emissions in the atmosphere leads to a rise in temperature, which causes the ice sheets in the two polar regions to melt, which poses a threat not only to animals there but also to people living along the coastlines. The rise of temperature also causes a breakdown in ecological balance. Fish swim northwards and trees blossom in the wrong season, which causes many species to lose food sources. In this example, one event leads to another, which may still lead to one or more other events.

II. Comparison and Contrast

A comparison-contrast essay shows the similarities and/or differences between two things, people, ideas or events. Generally speaking, comparison-contrast expository writing has certain features, including two subjects, and the presentation of compared similarities or contrasted differences (Folse et al. 2001). Comparison and contrast sometimes can focus on strengths and weaknesses of something or advantages and disadvantages of something.

There are two ways to develop a comparison-contrast essay. One is the point-by-point method, and the other is the block method (Folse et al., 2001; Blanchard and Root, 2004). It is the body of the essay that demonstrates differences between these two methods of development.

1. The Point-by-Point Method

When applying the point-by-point method, the writer discusses one characteristic of both subjects at a time and then moves on to a second characteristic about both subjects and then a third characteristic. Usually there must be at least two characteristics discussed so as to make the comparison or contrast convincing. Let's take "*City Life or Country Life*" as an example. Obviously, this is a typical comparison-contrast essay, with city life and country

life being the two subjects compared. We may approach the comparison and contrast in terms of living expenses, facilities, and living environment in the city and in the country. By applying the point-by-point method, we get the outline of an essay as follows:

Point-by-Point Method	
“City Life or Country Life?”	
A. Living expenses	
1. In the city	
(1) more expensive	
(2) more temptation	
2. In the country	
(1) less expensive	
(2) less temptation	
B. Facilities	
1. In the city	
(1) convenient public transportation	
(2) more hospitals, schools...	
2. In the country	
(1) not so convenient public transportation	
(2) fewer hospitals, schools...	
C. Living environment	
1. In the city	
(1) crowded	
(2) polluted	
(3) noisy	
2. In the country	
(1) spacious	
(2) clean	
(3) quiet	

2. The Block Method

In the block method, the writer discusses a set of characteristics about one subject and then moves on to discuss the same set of characteristics about the second subject. It is important that the discussion of the

characteristics of the two subjects should be in the same order (Folse et al., 2001). Now, let's rearrange the development of "City Life or Country Life" by means of the block method. The body of the composition will be like what is shown in the following table.

Block Method	
"City Life or Country Life?"	
I.	<p>Living in the City</p> <p>A. Living expenses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. more expensive b. more temptation <p>B. Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. convenient public transportation b. more hospitals, schools... <p>C. Living environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. crowded b. polluted c. noisy
II.	<p>Living in the Country</p> <p>A. Living expenses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. less expensive b. less temptation <p>B. Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. not so convenient public transportation b. fewer hospitals, schools... <p>C. Living environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. spacious b. clean c. quiet

III. Logical Division (Division and Classification)

Logical division or classification is one of the most common ways to organize an essay in academic writing (Blanchard and Root, 2004). It is also the kind of expository writing most commonly applied in the writing test in college entrance examinations. Folse et al. (2001) consider a well-written

classification essay to be one that includes all the categories that pertain to the main thing that is being classified. However, when there is a time limit and not so much space for the writer to elaborate on the topic, the ambition of including all the characteristics must be mitigated. It is recommended that at least **three** separate groups be presented and discussed in a classification essay (Blanchard and Root, 2004). For example, if you are to write an article introducing the charms of the city where you live, you may develop your writing in terms of the natural environment, the public facilities and the people in your city. You may want to talk about more if you have time, but three characteristics are the minimum number that will make your writing appealing and convincing.

One very important element of a classification essay, if not the most important one, is the principle of organization (Folse et al., 2001). Different principles of organization may yield different developments of the same topic. For example, when talking about music, we may divide it according to genre, time in which a piece of music is composed, geography, and so on. The most important principle in deciding which principle of organization to follow is that the groups thus categorized do not overlap. This is very important in deciding whether the categorization is logical or not, which in turn decides whether the classification essay is convincing and whether the writer reaches the goal of communication through the writing.

In fact, the importance of this not-to-overlap principle is universal. It is equally important in writing classification essays in Chinese or in any other language. Important as it is, this principle is not always followed by students when they are doing EFL writing. Very often they introduce characteristics randomly without following any principle of organization. For example, in writing an essay about the benefits of exercise, one of my students produced

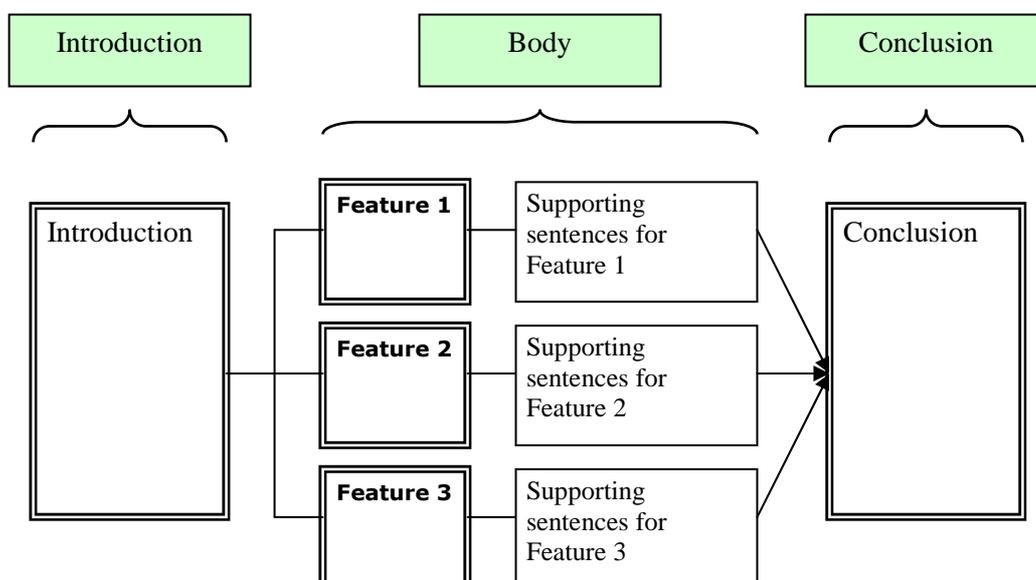
the following paragraph:

Benefits from Exercising

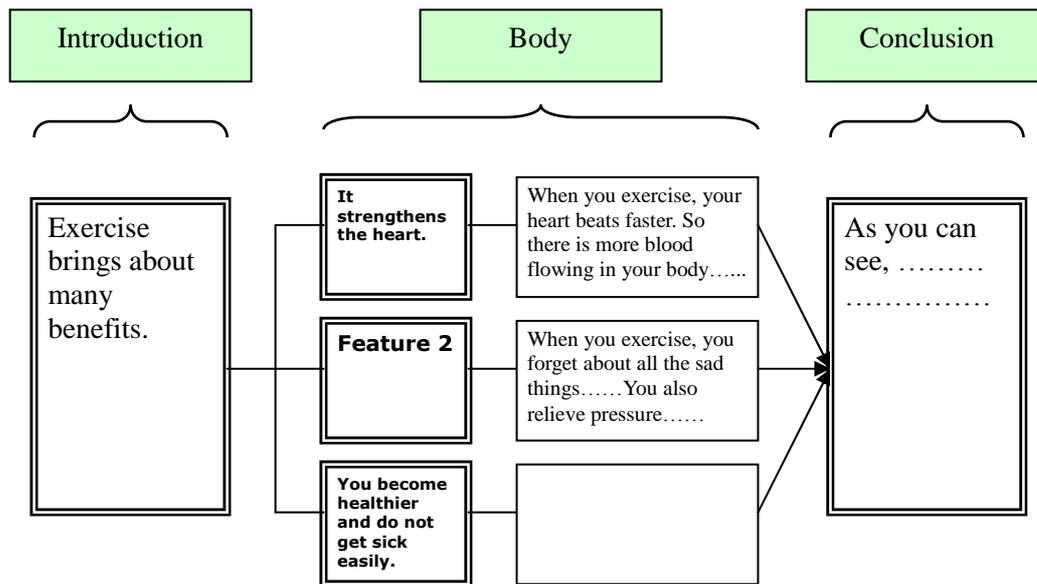
Exercise brings about many benefits. First, it strengthens the heart. When you exercise, your heart beats faster. So there is more blood flowing in your body and your heart becomes stronger. Second, when you exercise, you forget about the sad things which are bothering you. You also relieve pressure and feel relaxed after working out. Moreover, if you exercise constantly, you become healthier and do not get sick easily. As you can see, exercise really does you good in many ways. If you are not in the habit of exercising, do it now. Then you can enjoy the benefits from exercising.

At first glance, this paragraph looks like an organized piece of writing. Nevertheless, a closer look discloses a lack of logical organization in the presentation of the benefits. Both the first and the third benefits are physical benefits, and the third one is a result of the first one. It is difficult to deduce what principle of organization the writer is following. It is very possible no principle of organization was at play at all when the student was doing the writing. This is a common feature of students' writing.

To help students organize their thoughts and find a logical way to categorize things and ideas, I have devised the following graphic organizer, which includes the three main parts of an English essay: introduction, body and conclusion. The purpose of each box is specified below:

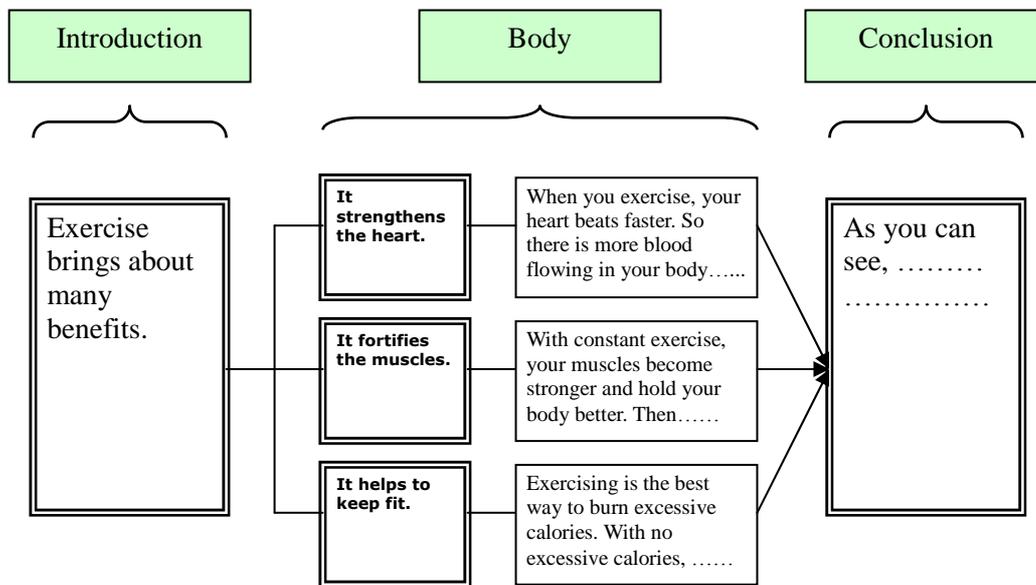


If we reorganize the above paragraph about benefits from exercising using this arrangement of boxes, we get a graphic organizer as follows.

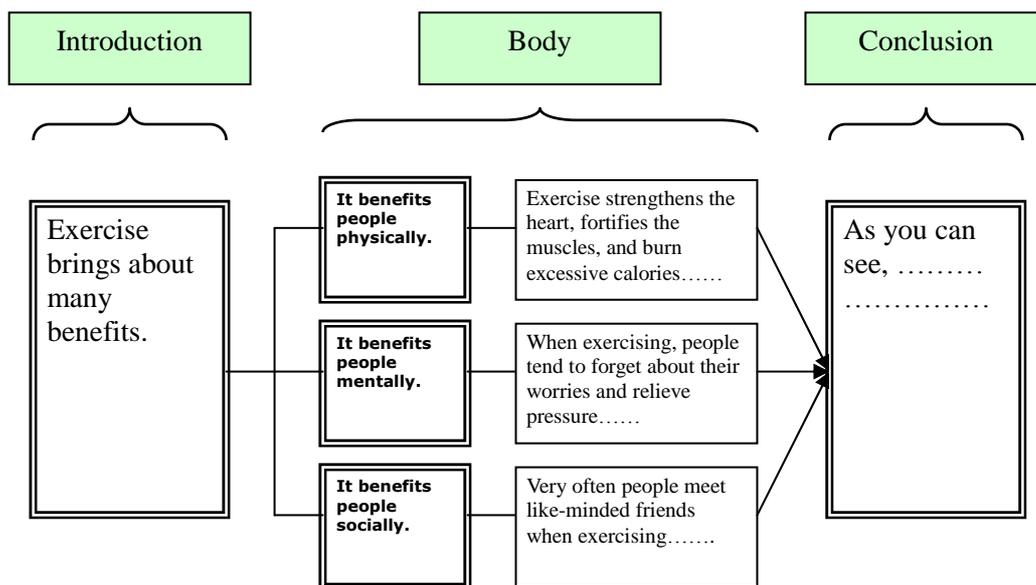


As we can see from the above graphic organizer, the student did not specify the second benefit of exercise. All she did was give supporting sentences which supported Feature 2, that is, Benefit 2. In addition, there are no supporting sentences to support Feature 3, and as mentioned earlier, there is a causal relationship between Benefit 1 and Benefit 3. In other words, they overlap, which violates the most important principle in categorizing characteristics – no overlapping.

To make the categorization a logical one, the student must think of a principle of organization to follow first. She may focus simply on physical benefits. In this case, the benefits could be (1) Exercise strengthens the heart; (2) Exercise fortifies the muscles; (3) Exercise helps us to keep fit. The principle of organization is different parts of the body. Following this principle, we may derive a graphic organizer like this:



On the other hand, the student may adopt a principle of organization which is broader in scope – how exercise influences a person’s life. Exercise benefits a person physically, mentally, and socially. In this case, the graphic organizer will be like this:



The revised versions are better-organized and sound more logical in that they follow certain principles of organization, and the benefits derived do not overlap. This example manifests the importance of an appropriate principle of

organization in writing the logical division type of expository essay.

Reading

No matter which publisher is chosen, we can always find many examples of expository writing in textbooks. Among the textbooks available for senior high school English, San-min (三民) English Readers are chosen as an example here for the sake of convenience. The following table shows the classification of expository essays in San-min English Readers, Book I and Book II.

Table 2 Types of expository writing applied in San-min English Readers Books I & II

Source	Topic	Genre
Book I, Lesson 4	Gestures: Speaking Louder than Words	Examples Comparison & Contrast
Book I, Lesson 6	What Is Written in the Stars?	Logical Division
Book I, Lesson 7	Necessity Is the Mother of Invention	Examples
Book I, Lesson 8	Who Decides What You Buy?	Examples
Book I, Lesson 9	Not Just a Friend	Examples
Book II, Lesson 1	Images of Animals	Examples
Book II, Lesson 3	Tips on Improving Your Memory	Examples
Book II, Lesson 4	Colors at Play	Logical Division
Book II, Lesson 6	A Rabbit's Foot and a Piece of Wood	Definition Examples
Book II, Lesson 7	No More Wars Between Venus and Mars	Comparison and Contrast

Lesson 4 in Book II is taken here as the sample lesson for the teaching plan developed in the next section. This lesson titled “*Colors at Play*” is an expository essay developed by logical division. The principle of organization applied is *the areas influenced by colors*, including visual perception, emotions, culture, and language. To verify how colors affect these four areas, supporting

examples are also provided. Among the six paragraphs in this text, the first paragraph of course is the introduction, and the last paragraph the conclusion. The four paragraphs in between compose the body, or the supporting paragraphs. The whole text is included in the appendix at the end of this article.

Lesson Plan—Teaching Expository Writing

The teaching plan presented here is one that combines reading and writing activities. It is advisable that teachers make the most of the textbook to conduct teaching of the four skills so that the limited class time will be used to the full and the effectiveness of teaching will be enhanced.

The whole lesson plan includes four stages: presenting the text, analyzing the text, simulating the text and composing an original piece of expository writing. As the focus of this article is writing, the stage of presenting the text will not be dealt with here. The lesson plan thus will start from analyzing the text, on the assumption that the reading text has already been introduced to students. What follows is a number of suggestions recommended for use in class when teaching EFL expository writing, with the reading text “*Colors at Play*” from San-min English reader, Book II, Lesson 4 used as an example. The whole text is included in the appendices.

Analyzing the Text

After the teacher introduces the text with important grammatical points, sentence patterns and vocabulary items explained, graphic organizers can be used to summarize it. It is assumed that by the time such writing activities are conducted in class, students have already been introduced to the structure of a paragraph and the structure of a composition. For example, they know what a

topic sentence is, and that there are usually three main parts to a composition: introduction, body and conclusion.

The introduction and conclusion deserve a little more elaboration in the teacher's analysis of the reading text. Many students have trouble in writing down the opening sentence of their composition. Very often they start their composition by giving an overgeneralization or raising something seemingly related but in fact irrelevant to the topic. For example, when writing a composition about their most unforgettable experience, they may start by writing "Everyone has his or her most unforgettable experience and I am no exception." This is an example of overgeneralization. How can one be sure that EVERYONE has his most unforgettable experience? Some people never remember anything. As for the concluding sentence, it is by no means easier. It can be so difficult for some students that they omit it altogether. The omission of a concluding sentence will weaken the power and strength of an essay and leave the readers feeling confused.

To start the introduction, it is acceptable to directly put down the thesis statement of the whole essay, but this does not attract attention from the readers. You need a hook here as an attention getter. There are five ways to draw readers' attention, as listed in the following table. Any one of the five strategies works better than overgeneralization.

Table 3 Ways to begin the introduction of an essay

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Examples</i>
1. Anecdotes	Stories of all sorts that are related to the topic
2. Examples/Facts	Examples or facts that are related to the topic
3. Questions	Rhetorical questions to raise readers' awareness of the topic and related issues
4. Quotations	Quotations from famous figures or sayings
5. Statistics	Statistics from research related to the topic

There are also effective ways to conclude an essay suggested and recommended by many authors of books on writing (Blanchard and Root, 2004; Folse et al., 2001; Gander, 1983). These tips for conclusion include (1) restating the thesis statement, (2) summarizing the main points, (3) asking a question, (4) suggesting a solution, (5) making a recommendation, and (6) making a prediction. These tips are not mutually exclusive, and the writer can choose two or three of them to conclude his or her essay. Folse et al. (2001) suggest adopting the first two strategies and then choosing one more from the other four. Therefore, they arrange a conclusion paragraph by restating the thesis statement, summarizing the main points and then making a suggestion, offering an opinion or making a prediction. One very important thing to note about writing the conclusion is that no new ideas should be introduced in this part—that is, no ideas that have not been mentioned in the introductory or the body paragraphs should be newly raised in the conclusion.

Once strategies for writing opening and concluding sentences have been introduced to students, the teacher may take the following steps to further analyze the reading text.

1. Distribute graphic organizers to students.
2. Divide the whole text into three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.
3. Ask students to find the thesis statement of the article in the first paragraph and copy it into the organizer.
4. Ask students to copy the beginning sentence into the organizer and explain the strategy the author has adopted in writing this sentence.
5. Ask students to find the topic sentences for paragraphs 2 to 5 and copy them into the boxes in the organizer.

6. Ask students to summarize the supporting sentences or supporting examples in paragraphs 2 to 5.
7. Ask students to find the sentence in the last paragraph which concludes the article, copy it, and if possible, pinpoint the strategy the author has adopted for the concluding sentence.

The graphic organizer for this lesson is as follows:

Colors at Play

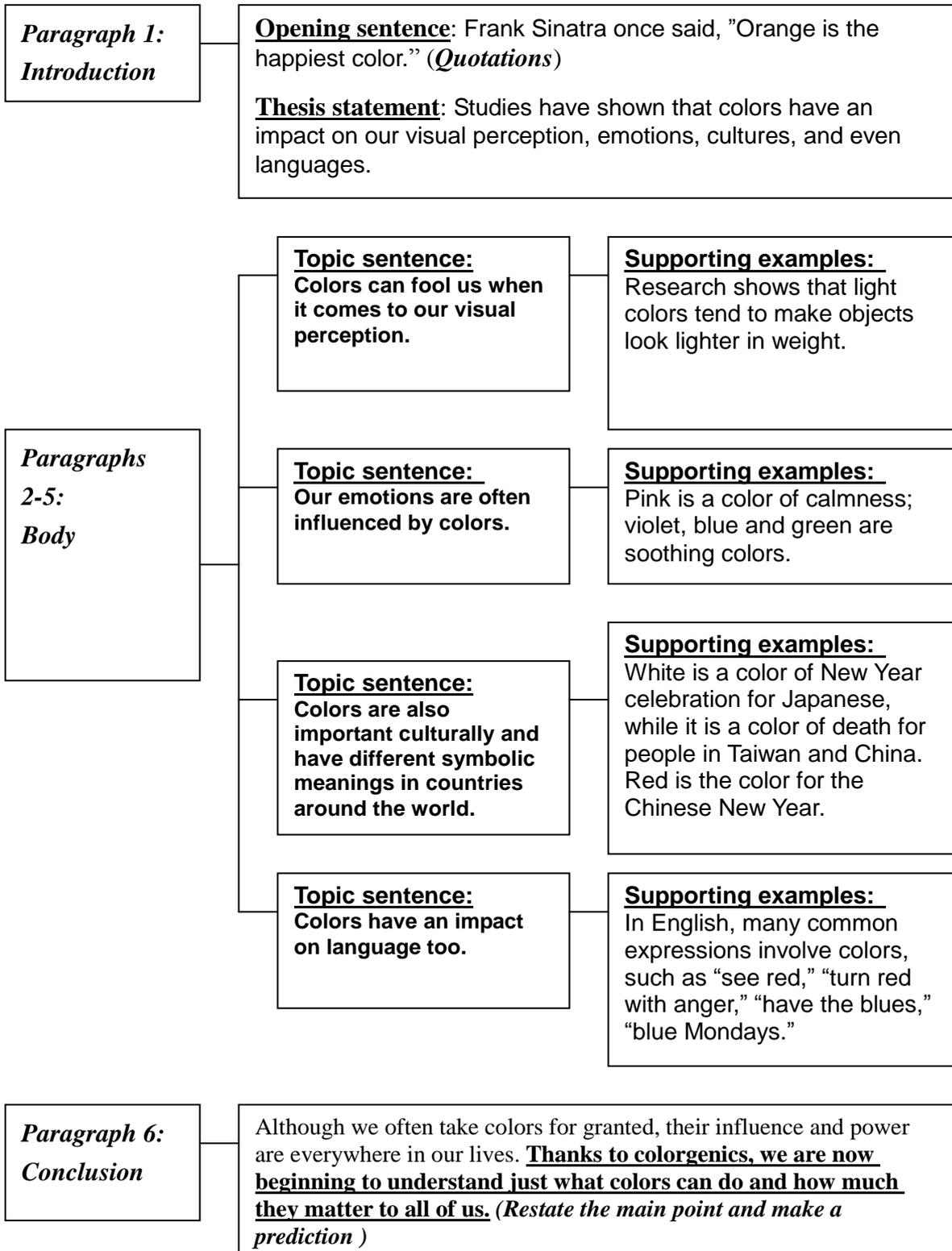
Structure of the reading:

<i>Paragraph 1: Introduction</i>	Opening sentence: _____ _____ Thesis statement: _____				
<i>Paragraphs 2-5: Body (Supporting Paragraphs)</i>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;">Topic sentence:</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Supporting examples:</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 40px;"></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Topic sentence:	Supporting examples:		
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Topic sentence:	Supporting examples:				
<i>Paragraph 6: Conclusion</i>	_____ _____				

A finished graphic organizer for this lesson looks like this:

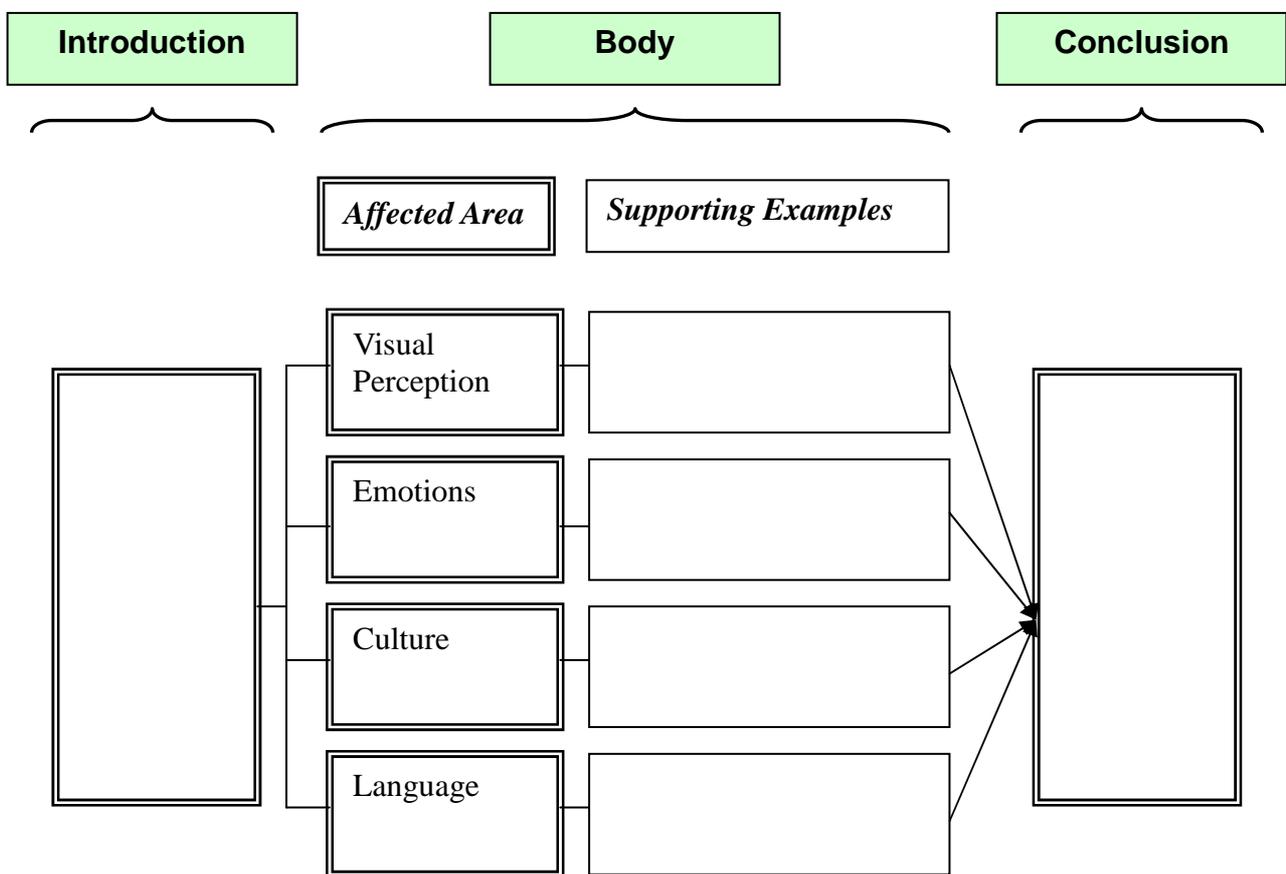
Colors at Play

Structure of the reading:



By doing so, students learn to dissect the article and better understand how the article is organized. This is a bottom-up process, in which students learn to deduce the hidden format of the article from what is presented to them.

It is suggested that the teacher move a step further to conceptualize the structure of expository writing of the classification type. To reach this end, the following graphic organizer is recommended. This time, no copying of the text is needed – only key words from each paragraph.

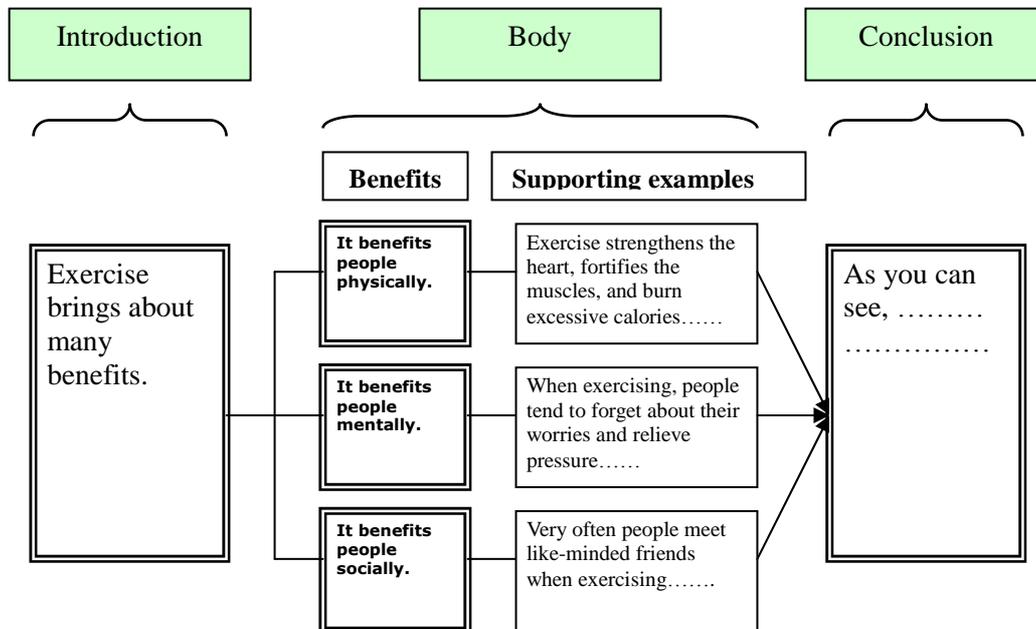


Simulating the Text

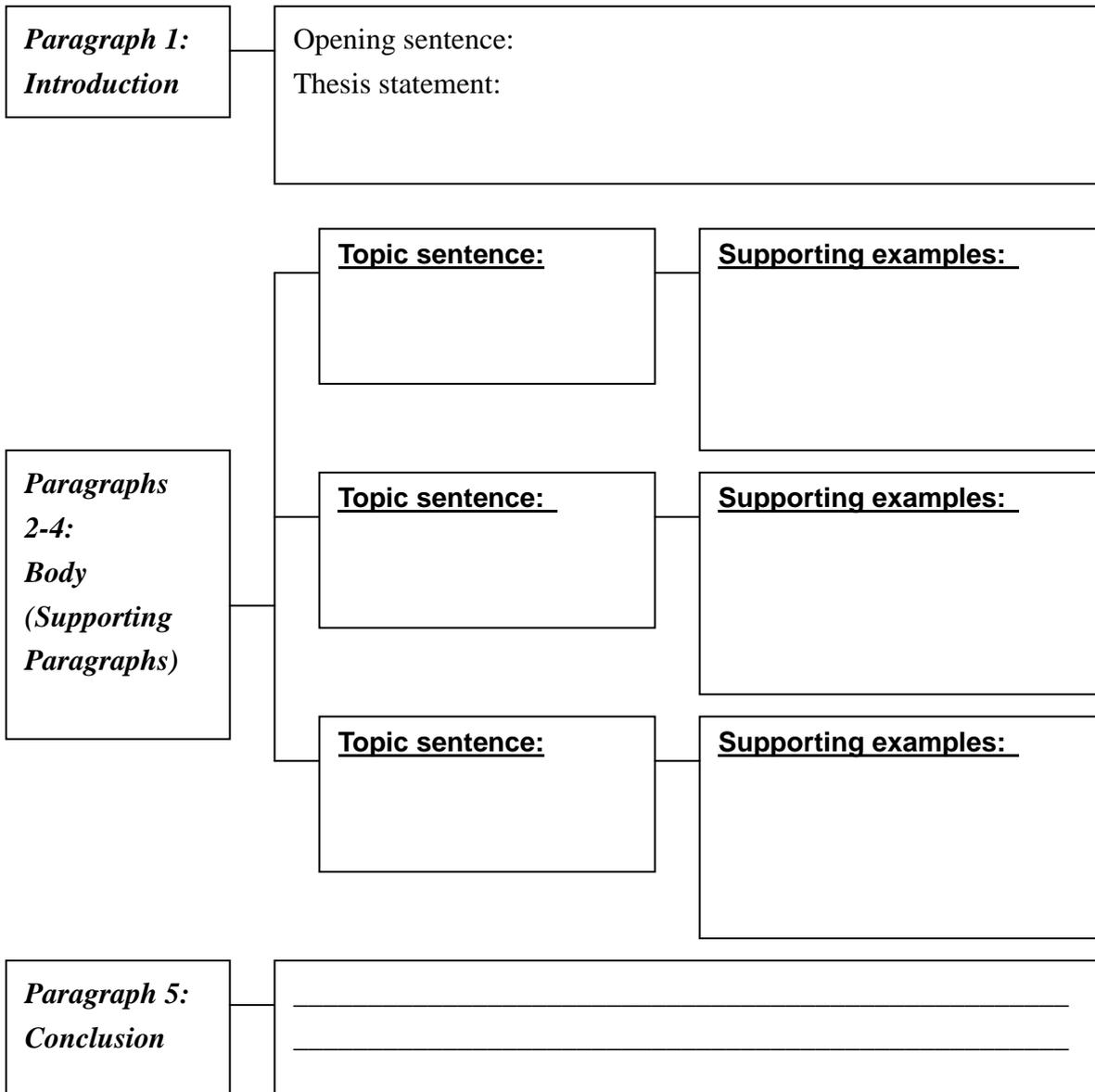
To consolidate what has been learned previously, the teacher may think of topics within the same genre and ask students to simulate what they have been doing with the reading text to finish the above two graphic organizers. Suggested topics for the practice include “What good does it do to learn English well,” “Travel is the best teacher,” “Benefits from exercising,” and many

others. Sometimes it is not easy to tell classification essays from examples essays. In fact, the distinction is not so important since what really matters in these two types of essays is that the categorizations and examples do not overlap.

Again, let's take "*Benefits from exercising*" for example. Before students fill in the graphic organizer, be sure to lead some discussion or do some brainstorming to yield a better result in their classifications. Once students finish all the boxes in the organizer, have them write complete sentences into the next graphic organizer.

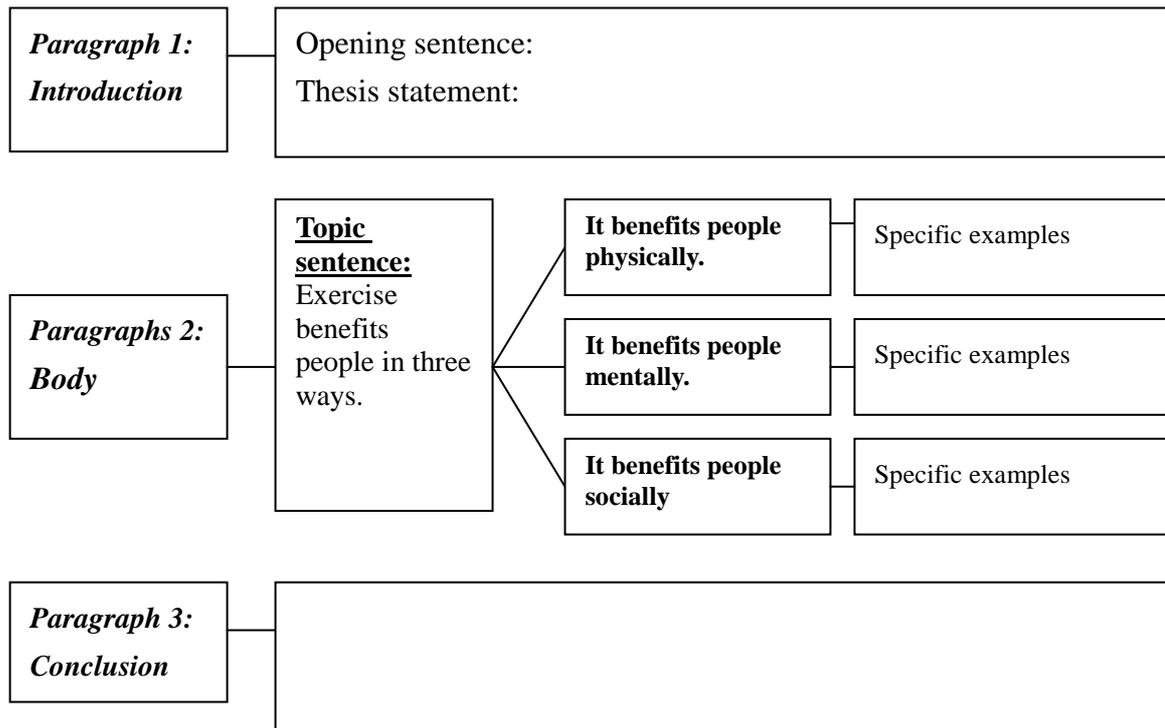


Benefits from Exercising



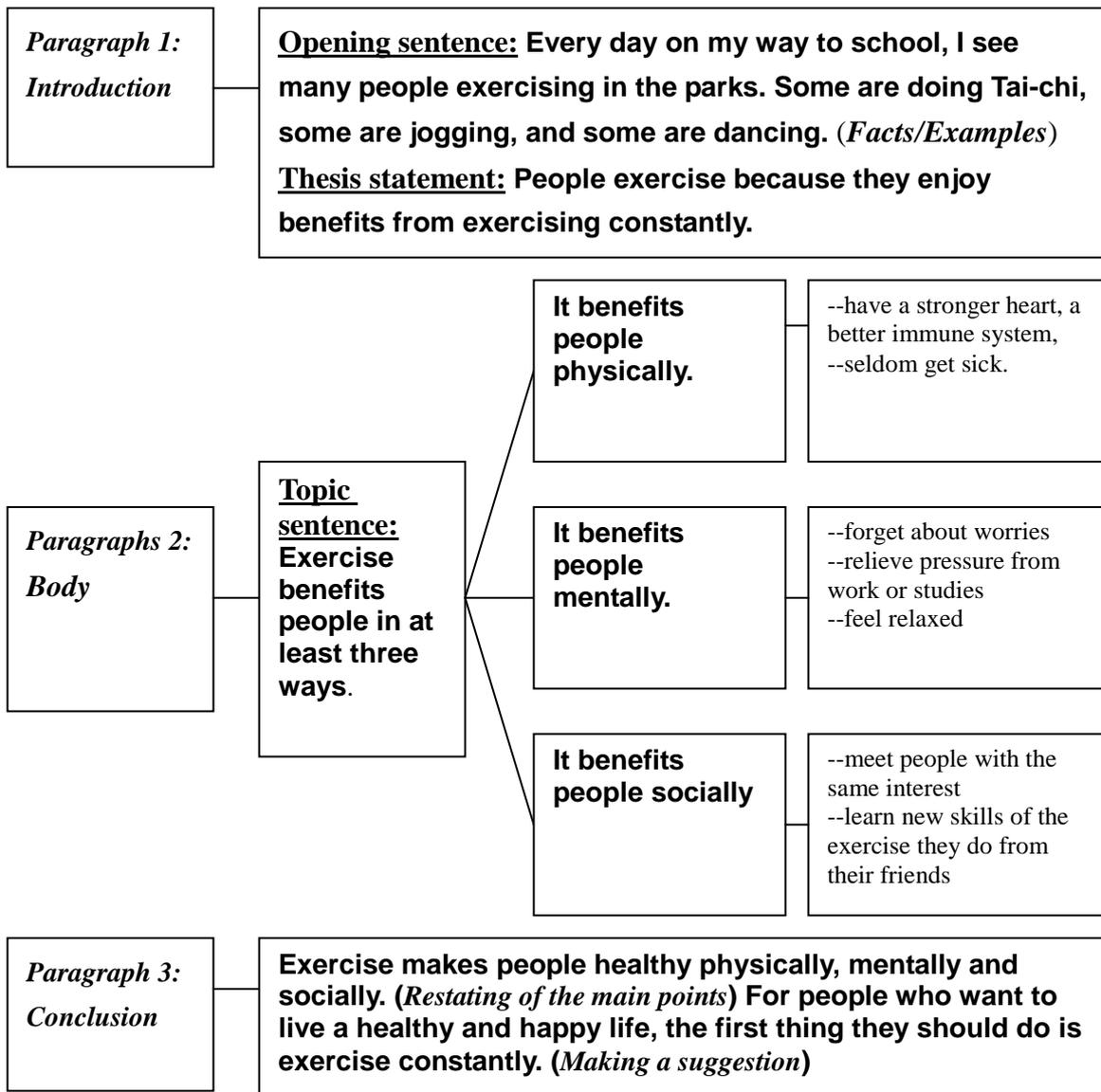
A three-paragraph body is the most common format for the development of an English essay. It is all right to merge the three paragraphs into one if there is insufficient time and space, but even in a one-paragraph body there still need to be at least three main points for discussion and development. Three is actually is a perfect number, two being too few and four being too many. In addition, if merging three paragraphs of the body into one, it is important that there be one topic sentence for that one paragraph. In this case,

the graphic organizer for the body may be revised and the whole organizer will look like this:



Composing Your Own Expository Writing

Once students have finished developing the structure of their article, it is time to organize the sentences into the form of a real composition. This can be a three-paragraph or five-paragraph essay or even just one single paragraph. What is important is that the final result must include the three main parts of an essay: introduction, body and conclusion. Equally important is that students be reminded to use appropriate connectors and transitions between sentences so as to create a smooth flow of thought in their writing. What follows is a graphic organizer and a composition developed from the organizer finished by one of my students.



Then, based on the above organizer, the student developed a full composition as follows:

(1)Every day on my way to school, I see many people exercising in the parks. (2)Some are doing Tai-chi, some are jogging, and some are dancing. (3)People exercise because they enjoy benefits from exercising.

(4)Exercise benefits people in at least three ways. (5) **First of all**, it benefits people physically. (6) People who exercise constantly usually have stronger hearts and muscles; (7) they **also** have a better immune system, **so** they seldom get sick. (8) **Besides**, exercise benefits people mentally. (9)Exercise helps people forget about their worries, and relieves pressure from work or studies. (10) **As a result**, they feel relaxed and happy. (11) **Furthermore**, exercise benefits people socially. (12)When exercising, it is very possible to meet people who like to do the same exercise or share the same

interests. (13) **Besides** meeting new friends, they can learn new skills of the exercise they do from their friends. (14) In this case, exercise enlarges people's social circle.

(15) **In conclusion**, exercise makes people healthy physically, mentally and socially. (16) For people who want to live a healthy and happy life, the first thing they should do is exercise constantly.

Grading and Evaluating Students' Writing

Sommers (1996) made a pertinent comment on responding to students' writing by pointing out that "more than any other enterprise in the teaching of writing, responding to and commenting on student writing consumes the largest proportion of our time (p. 148)". It is estimated that it takes teachers at least 20 to 40 minutes to comment on an individual student paper (Sommers, 1983, 1996). While Sommers' research was done on L1 writing, Cumming's (1983) analysis of think-aloud protocols of three ESL teachers revealed that two of the three teachers spent approximately 40 minutes responding to an ESL text. Just imagine those 20 to 40 minutes times 45 students per class (very often the number is larger than 45), which adds up to the time consumed for just one single writing task. A nightmare is not enough to describe what a torment this task of responding to student EFL writing is to teachers.

But here comes another question: how much do teachers' comments help students improve their next piece of writing? The answer to this question can be very politically correct – it depends. It depends on whether the draft is taken as a final draft or a draft to be revised. It also depends on whether the teacher is going to rank students' essays or evaluate them. Ranking means "summing up the teacher's judgment of student writing into a single, holistic number or score" as is often done by EFL teachers in Taiwan. Evaluating, on the other hand, means expressing the teacher's judgment "by pointing out the

strengths and weaknesses of different features or dimensions” (Elbow, 1996: 200). It is my belief that before ranking students’ essays, teachers should evaluate them, so that students get to know what strengths and weaknesses they have. This is important if they want to write better in their next writing task. Different as the strategies of ranking and evaluating are, they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, it is quite workable to do both simultaneously when responding to student writing.

Before the teacher responds to student writing, it is advisable to have students proofread their own works, and then do peer editing for their classmates. The purposes of these two activities are manifold. Firstly, in proofreading their own writing, students pay attention to the organization, grammar, language use and punctuation in their works for a second time, which helps to raise their awareness of the elements of a good composition. Secondly, students learn from their peers by reading others’ work with a critical eye. Thirdly, when challenged by peers, students have to explain why they wrote in this particular way. By justifying their writing choices, they learn how to present argumentation in a logical way, which is very important in writing. Thirdly, these two activities can save the teacher much time in responding to students’ compositions. With most errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation being pointed out and corrected, the teacher would not have to spend so much time responding to each individual essay.

Self-Proofreading

To have students effectively proofread their own writing, it is vital to provide them with a checklist. A checklist narrows down the scope of proofreading to one thing at a time, which is more focused and easier to carry out than proofreading with nothing at hand but the text itself. As the lesson plan

in this article focuses mainly on the classification type of expository writing, all the post writing activities presented here also have classification as the focus.

The following checklist is designed specifically for classification writing. For other types of expository writing, teachers can devise their own checklists. One major principle for writing checklists is that the items on the list should reflect what the teacher has taught in the writing class. If the students have NO as the answer to any of the questions, they should make necessary changes before they turn in their writing.

A self-proofreading checklist for classification type expository writing

Points to Check	Yes	No
Grammar		
1. Did I avoid run on sentences?		
2. Did I avoid sentence fragments?		
3. Do subjects and verbs agree in number?		
4. Does my writing have clear pronoun reference?		
5. Is my writing consistent with respect to person?		
6. Did I use the right verb tenses?		
Word Usage, Spelling & Punctuation		
1. Did I use clear and precise words?		
2. Are all the sentences related to the topic?		
3. Are all prepositions used correctly?		
4. Did I spell all the words correctly?		
5. Did I use punctuation appropriately?		
Organization		
1. Does my writing include introduction, body and conclusion?		
2. Did I include a thesis statement that contains a clear topic and points of development?		
3. Does each body paragraph have a clear topic sentence? (or "Is there a clear topic sentence in the body paragraph?")		
4. Did I include supporting sentences in each body paragraph? (or "Are there supporting sentences in the body paragraph?")		
5. Is my principle of organization easy to understand?		
6. Did I classify without overlap between groups?		

7. Did I use connecting transitions and expressions correctly?		
8. Does the concluding paragraph contain words and phrases that signal the end of the essay?		
9. Is my conclusion free of new ideas that are not mentioned previously?		

Peer-Editing

A peer-editing checklist is similar to the self-proofreading checklist, except that the questions are asked from the peer's perspective. Therefore, the checklist will be like the one below. Like the self-proofreading checklist, if peers have NO as the answer to any one of the questions, changes must be made to the writing before turning it in to the teacher. For more peer-editing sheets, please refer to the appendices at the end of this paper.

A peer-editing checklist for classification type expository writing

Points to Check	Yes	No
Grammar		
1. Are run on sentences avoided?		
2. Are sentence fragments avoided?		
3. Do subjects and verbs agree in number?		
4. Does the writing have clear pronoun reference?		
5. Is the writing consistent with respect to person?		
6. Are verb tenses used in the right way?		
Word Usage, Spelling & Punctuation		
1. Did your peer use clear and precise words?		
2. Are all the sentences related to the topic?		
3. Are all prepositions used correctly?		
4. Are all the words spelled correctly?		
5. Is the use of punctuation correct?		
Organization		
1. Does the writing include introduction, body and conclusion?		
2. Does the writing include a thesis statement that contains a clear topic and points of development?		
3. Does each body paragraph have a clear topic sentence? (or "Is there a clear topic sentence in the body paragraph?")		
4. Are there supporting sentences in each body paragraph? (or "Are there supporting sentences in the body paragraph?")		

5. Is the principle of organization easy to understand?		
6. Did your peer classify without overlap between groups?		
7. Did your peer use connecting transitions and expressions correctly?		
8. Does the concluding paragraph contain words and phrases that signal the end of the essay?		
9. Is the conclusion free of new ideas that are not mentioned previously?		

Once students have completed self-proofreading and peer-editing with YES as the answer to all the questions on the checklist, they can hand in their writing to the teacher. The teacher may respond to student writing by evaluating it, ranking it, or both.

Evaluating

As mentioned earlier, in evaluating students' works, the teacher shows the students what their strengths and weaknesses are with regard to their writing. As Elbow (1996) put it, "evaluation means looking hard and thoughtfully at a piece of writing in order to make distinctions as to the quality of different features or dimensions (p. 203)." But very often EFL or ESL teachers tend to do mainly error correction when responding to student writing (Zamel, 1996), and many of these errors could have been avoided had students been more careful and conscious of what they were writing. As students have done self-proofreading and peer-editing before they hand in their writing, the teacher may focus more on connections between sentences, content, organization, unity and coherence when evaluating their works.

To make evaluative comments on student writing, teachers are encouraged to devise their own comment lists that reflect their teaching points. The following is an example for comments on classification type expository writing.

An evaluative checklist for classification type expository writing

I. Content:
<input type="checkbox"/> Good maintenance of unity and coherence
<input type="checkbox"/> Some of your supporting sentences are not related to the topic.
<input type="checkbox"/> Enough supporting sentences to support topic sentences
<input type="checkbox"/> Good use of specific supporting sentences
<input type="checkbox"/> Not enough supporting sentences for the main ideas
<input type="checkbox"/> Content not related to the topic
II. Organization
<input type="checkbox"/> Well-organized with introduction, body and conclusion
<input type="checkbox"/> Not easy to tell the introduction, body and conclusion
<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate use of connectors and transitions
<input type="checkbox"/> Connectors and transitions not used correctly
<input type="checkbox"/> Very good attention getter as opening
<input type="checkbox"/> Very good use of principle of organization without overlap between groups
<input type="checkbox"/> Hard to figure out your principle of organization
<input type="checkbox"/> Your groups overlap with each other.
III. Grammar
<input type="checkbox"/> Good use of various sentence structures with few errors
<input type="checkbox"/> Some variations of sentence structures
<input type="checkbox"/> Few variations of sentence structures
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasional grammar errors
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many grammar errors
IV. Word usage and Spelling
<input type="checkbox"/> Very good use of (a) metaphors (b) similes (c) hyperboles
<input type="checkbox"/> Good use of precise and clear words
<input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive use of the same words
<input type="checkbox"/> Using too many vague and generic words (like <i>nice, good, happy...</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/> Occasional misspellings
<input type="checkbox"/> Too many misspellings
V. Punctuation
<input type="checkbox"/> Good use of punctuation
<input type="checkbox"/> Not correct use of punctuation

The inventory may differ from teacher to teacher and may be developed further as the teacher likes. When responding to student writing, the teacher

may choose some comments from the list for each individual student, or make a list of the comments and check the ones which are appropriate for each student.

Another way to evaluate and comment on student writing is to follow Elbow's suggestion of an analytic grid (1996: 206). In this grid, the teacher checks different dimensions of a composition according to students' performance. All in all, in evaluating, the teacher need not give a score but should point out what is good and what is not so good about the writing, so that students know where to make improvements in either revising this piece of writing or composing the next one.

Strong OK Weak

Strong	OK	Weak	
			Content, insights, thinking, grappling with topic
			Genuine revision, substantive changes, not just editing
			Organization, structure, guiding the reader
			Language: syntax, sentences, wording, voice
			Mechanics: spelling, grammar, punctuation, proofreading
			Overall (Note: this is not a sum of the other scores.)

Ranking

Compared with evaluating, ranking is less communicative, with no information or clues provided about the criteria used for deriving the score. Besides, as Elbow (1996) puts it, "Ranking leads students to get so hung up on these oversimple quantitative verdicts that they care more about score than about learning – more about the grade we put on the paper than about the comment we have written on it (p. 202)." Another negative influence from ranking which Elbow (1996) observes is that grades and holistic scores give too much encouragement to those students who score high and too little encouragement to those students who do badly. Therefore, for writing class,

ranking, unless it is necessary, should not be given without engaging in evaluation at the same time. The only situation where ranking alone may be appropriate is when grading composition test papers, such as in simulation tests taken in the senior year.

When it is necessary to give scores to students' writing, I always start by grouping their work into three piles: the good, the fair and the poor. To do such grouping, the teacher need not read in a very careful way. Just browsing can be enough. Reading two or three sentences may be enough for the teacher to know which pile the writing should go to. For the good pile, the scores range from 12 to 14 (out of 20), the fair pile from 9 to 11, and the poor pile from 5 to 8. Excellent compositions occasionally appear in the pile of good writing, and they can be given scores between 15 and 17. Only exceptionally good ones will get scores above 18. The following table shows how scores are given to students' work.

Score	Criteria
18 and above	<u>Exceptionally good</u> : a delight to read, not much to be desired
15-17	<u>Excellent work</u> : well-organized with precise and descriptive words, clear thoughts, a fluent and logical presentation of argumentation, few errors
12-14	<u>Good work</u> : good organization, clear thoughts, a fluent and logical presentation of argumentation, but word choice not precise enough, occasional misspellings and minor grammar errors
9-11	<u>Fair work</u> : organization ok but not good enough, unity maintained but not enough supporting details for the development of the main ideas, presentation of argument is fluent but logic needs trimming; word choice not precise and repetition of the same words; quite a few errors
6-8	<u>Poor work</u> : not very organized, not enough supporting sentences, unity barely maintained, some sentences unrelated to the topic, presentation of argument is not fluent;

	logic is not quite followed, many errors
5 and below	<u>Total failure</u> : so many errors in every part that it is almost incomprehensible

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Appendices

Reading text from San-min English Readers, Book II, Lesson 4

Colors at Play

Frank Sinatra once said, “Orange is the happiest color.” The world-famous singer was perhaps very aware that colors are not just for the eyes. Studies have shown that colors have an impact on our visual perception, emotions, cultures, and even languages. The study of colors and their impact on us is called colorgenics.

Believe it or not, colors can fool us when it comes to our visual perception. To prove this, a group of researchers conducted a study in a workplace. They first placed in a room heavy boxes and light boxes that were painted white and black respectively. Later, several workers were asked to determine which boxes weighed less. Surprisingly, most of the workers chose the boxes that were painted white – that is, the heavy ones. According to the researchers, this is because light colors tend to make objects “look” lighter in weight.

In addition to visual perception, our emotions are often influenced by colors. For example, pink is a color of calmness. If you are trying to settle an argument, you might want to wear pink. Violet and blue are soothing colors, and so is green. That’s why, to keep patients calm, the colors commonly seen in operating rooms are violet and blue. Also, green is the dominant color for dressing rooms in theaters or TV studios because it helps performers or guests relax before a show.

Colors are also important culturally and have different symbolic meanings in countries around the world. The Japanese, for example, hand out white envelopes filled with money for the Japanese New Year. In Taiwan and China, however, white is the color of death. As a result, it is appropriate for funerals, not festivals. The color symbolizing prosperity and good fortune in Taiwan and China is actually red. That’s why red envelopes, instead of white ones, are given out for the Chinese New Year.

Colors have an impact on languages, too. For instance, in English, if someone is very angry, we say that this person “sees red” or “turns red with anger.” If we are depressed, we could say that we have the “blues.” In addition, “blue Monday” is a common expression for the reluctance and tiredness that we may experience on Mondays, especially after a weekend of relaxation and fun.

Although we often take colors for granted, their influence and power are

everywhere in our lives. Thanks to colorgenics, we are now beginning to understand just what colors can do and how much they matter to all of us.

--by Theodore J. Pigott

Peer-editing checklist for expository writing – comparison-contrast paragraph (from Folse et al., 2001: 167)

Points to Check	Yes	No
1. Does the paragraph have a clear topic sentence?		
2. Does the topic sentence have a controlling idea?		
3. Does the paragraph have clear supporting sentences?		
4. Does each supporting sentence relate to the topic and controlling idea?		
5. Is the paragraph indented?		
6. Does the paragraph talk about one idea?		
7. Does the writer stick to only comparing or only contrasting?		
8. Is the concluding sentence one of these types? Restatement, suggestion, opinion, prediction?		
9. Is the paragraph clear and easy to follow?		
10. Is the level of writing appropriate for the audience?		
11. Does the paragraph stay consistent with respect to person?		
12. Does the paragraph effectively accomplish its purpose?		
13. Does the paragraph have unity?		
14. Does the paragraph have coherence?		
15. Do the words and sentences maintain clarity?		

Peer-editing checklist for expository writing – cause-effect paragraph (from Folse et al., 2001: 169)

Points to Check	Yes	No
1. Does the paragraph have a clear topic sentence?		
2. Does the topic sentence have a controlling idea?		
3. Does the paragraph have clear supporting sentences?		
4. Does each supporting sentence relate to the topic and controlling idea?		
5. Is the paragraph indented?		
6. Does the paragraph talk about one idea?		
7. Does the paragraph have a concluding sentence that restates the main idea or brings the paragraph to a logical conclusion?		
8. Does the topic have a real cause-effect relationship? Circle the focus of the paragraph: (a) causes (b) effects		

9. Is the paragraph clear and easy to follow?		
10. Is the level of writing appropriate for the audience?		
11. Does the paragraph stay consistent with respect to person?		
12. Does the paragraph effectively accomplish its purpose?		
13. Does the paragraph have unity?		
14. Does the paragraph have coherence?		
15. Do the words and sentences maintain clarity?		

Peer-editing checklist for expository writing – classification paragraph (from Folse et al., 2001: 171)

Points to Check	Yes	No
1. Does the paragraph have a clear topic sentence?		
2. Does the topic sentence have a controlling idea?		
3. Does the paragraph have clear supporting sentences?		
4. Does each supporting sentence relate to the topic and controlling idea?		
5. Is the paragraph indented?		
6. Does the paragraph talk about one idea?		
7. (Circle a or b) Does the writer (a) show different types or categories; or (b) differences between the parts of something?		
8. Does the paragraph have a concluding sentence that brings the paragraph to a logical conclusion?		
9. Does the writer classify without overlap between groups?		
10. Is the paragraph clear and easy to follow?		
11. Is the level of writing appropriate for the audience?		
11. Does the paragraph stay consistent with respect to person?		
13. Does the paragraph effectively accomplish its purpose?		
14. Does the paragraph have unity?		
15. Does the paragraph have coherence?		
16. Do the words and sentences maintain clarity?		