

# **Guide to** **Expository Writing**

---

A Step-by-Step Manual for Helping Students Craft  
Successful Essays



### **About the author**

Robert Wesolowski taught Advanced Placement English in Livonia, MI, public schools for 30 years. Many assignments in *Guide to Expository Writing* have been tested and honed in those classrooms as students made constructive suggestions to improve the workability of each assignment. After retirement from Livonia Public Schools, Robert taught English classes at Eastern Michigan University in the Honors Program for 10 years.

**Revised edition ©2009 Interact - [www.teachinteract.com](http://www.teachinteract.com)  
10200 Jefferson Blvd • P.O. Box 802 Culver City, CA 90232  
Phone: (800) 359-0961 • [www.teachinteract.com](http://www.teachinteract.com)  
ISBN# 978-1-56004-373-7**

All rights reserved. Interaction Publishers Inc. grants permission to reproduce activity sheets and student handouts for classroom use. No other part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise—without prior written permission from the publisher.

## Welcome to *Guide to Expository Writing!*

This step-by-step process helps students grasp a topic, narrow it down, and identify the most important aspects of the idea they want to write about. The text leads students to the creation of a workable thesis sentence, which in turn controls the body of the work. In the body of the composition, students enlarge their ideas in paragraph form. This process also reinforces a logical presentation of ideas in the text, and causes students to think about the importance of each part of their paper. The steps in this guide help students develop a rough draft. Later, they refine the composition with improved vocabulary, sentence structure, and transitions to smooth the reader's movement from each line of thought to the conclusion.



# Table of Contents

## Notes to the Instructor

Introduction.....	5
Grading a Paper .....	8
Course Content.....	11
Objectives.....	13
References .....	14
Suggested Writing Topics for Student Compositions.....	18

## Notes to the Student

Welcome to Expository Writing.....	19
Plagiarism: A Warning.....	19
Composition Standards .....	20
Objectives.....	20

## How to Write Expository Prose

Introduction.....	21
Structure of a Composition.....	21
Developing Your Technique .....	26

## Writing Assignments

Examples Paper.....	27
Classification Paper .....	36
Comparison Paper .....	47
Process Analysis Paper .....	58
Cause and Effect Paper.....	67

## ● **Table of Contents** ●

Definition Paper .....	77
Narration Paper.....	85
Description Paper.....	94
Argument Paper.....	104
Literary Analysis Paper .....	112
Final Examination.....	121
<b>Teacher feedback form .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Release for Photographic Images .....</b>	<b>129</b>

## Notes to the Instructor

### Introduction

Business leaders and academic leaders are asking why students can't write a decent composition these days. Part of the answer is explained in the quotations cited below.

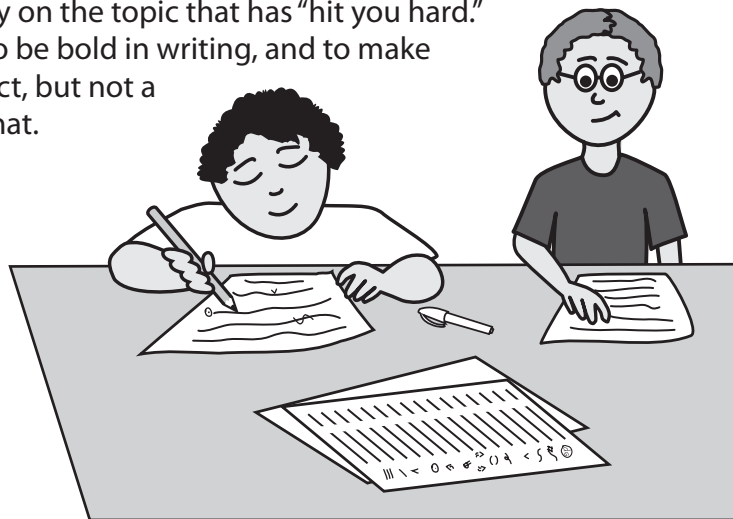
Studies suggest the source of the problem: many students get little opportunity to write, little instruction and few useful comments on their efforts.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of students tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) possess minimal writing abilities, but they quickly stumble when attempting to use critical thinking and organizational skills.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, several states have developed alternative exams to replace the old multiple choice tests. Maine added open-ended questions "requiring written answers to social studies and humanities tests..."<sup>3</sup>

As a composition teacher in a middle-class suburban high school, I, too, became increasingly distressed at the quality of student writing. So, I looked for published material at the high school and college levels to help my students improve their writing skills. I realized they needed clear writing assignments.

Unfortunately, many writing texts offer little help with clear writing assignments. For example, one text asked students to read an essay and write short answers to some questions which analyze the essay: The text wants to know what the author said. How did the author say it? Then the student is asked to write an interesting essay on the topic that has "hit you hard." Also, the student is encouraged to be bold in writing, and to make the reader interested in the subject, but not a word was said about how to do that.



1 Featherstone, Helen, "Teaching Writing," *The Harvard Education Letter*, 1985, 1

2 NAEP, "Students Lack Skills in writing and Critical Thinking," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 1987, 484

3 Putka, Paul, "New Kid in School: Alternative Exams," *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 November, 1989, 2B

After reading that assignment, my high school students looked at me and asked, "How do I get started?" Later, they asked, "How do I write the paragraphs between the beginning of the essay and the end of the essay?" Over time, I explained the process so often, to so many students, that I decided to put the process on paper in the form of steps. I called this process a "writing step." It helped students get from step to step until they completed the rough draft.

While different teachers have various approaches to the writing process, I have found this process very successful with students who have beginning writing skills, or students with minimal expository skills. It is, after all, only one approach to the writing process. After students have mastered a writing technique, we never leave it alone. We use it again and again in every writing task in the course. The repetition means that students will learn and use a writing technique many times, until the technique becomes a natural part of their writing skills.

Students have told me the writing assignments really helped them get started, and, when they ran out of material, it helped them move to the next part of the composition. Actually, some students began to ask for the assignments early in the week so they could spend extra time on their papers to get better grades. Of course, that encouraged me to refine the assignments even more. One refinement, for example, came from a comment by Dan Fader at a party in the Alice Lloyd Crocker Hall at the University of Michigan in May, 1979 after a writing conference. Fader said he provided students with parts of sentences to help them get their mental processes rolling in their compositions. I thought, why not? And it worked. My students told me they spent several hours writing and revising their papers because they were more confident they were going in the right direction. That is, they felt they knew what the teacher wanted, and the assignment gave help in choosing language appropriate to the topic.

I have used these assignments at the high school, at the community college level, and at a four-year college level with students who have never seen a rhetorical approach to writing. Perhaps a rhetorical approach will be useful to these students later in their academic careers. Still, the assignments work equally well at all levels.

These expository writing assignments allow students to write small parts of the composition each day. When all the parts are written in rough-draft form, students can easily rewrite and revise the text as the final copy takes shape. And, all along the way, I offer suggestions to help students improve the composition. So, these assignments appeal to students with limited language skills and to those with advanced language skills. In that sense, these assignments are an effective way of reaching large groups who have a wide range of language skills.

The assignments are designed to create a framework in which students can be as original and creative as they choose. In fact, students often discover that they have to stretch their minds to view the topic in new and objective ways in the conceptual stage, in the transitional stage, and in rough-draft stage.

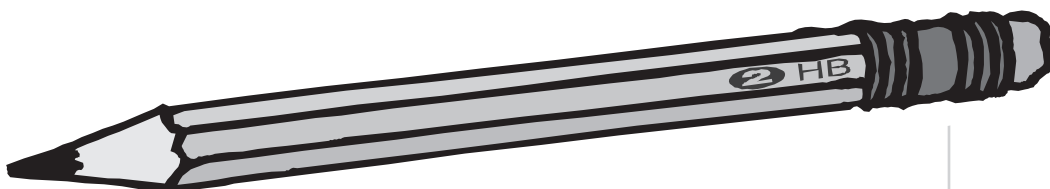
Also, I have found that the assignments are successful with a wide range of students who are very logical thinkers and with students who are very creative thinkers. In nearly every case, students realize that, in writing, they must develop their thoughts so others can understand them. Most writing students have important things to say, and the assignments help them express ideas and emotions in clear and organized ways.

The writing teacher, I'm sure, will find these assignments very useful, too. First, they help focus attention on specific parts of the writing process. So, when a student has difficulty in one step of the writing process, the teacher can isolate the problem and help the student overcome it. Second, the assignments help students become more self-reliant in the writing process because students can visualize the overall writing task and better understand the writing process. As students gain self-confidence in writing, they often put these "writing steps" aside and work independently on their writing skills.

These assignments do not impede creativity and growth in writing skills. Many students have returned to tell me how successfully they completed writing tasks in their jobs or classes. In fact, the writing teacher will be pleased to know that as the writing course moves along, and as students become more skilled in various writing techniques, the task of correcting papers grows lighter because students tend to help each other with more skillful proofreading. I encourage peer editing. For each assignment, we use one class period to exchange papers and look for ways to improve every part of the students' compositions.

Students are welcome to write their paragraphs in this text. Or, they can write rough drafts on notebook paper. Later, they will rewrite their compositions in a better form, and that's where a great amount of critical thinking takes place as they struggle to decide which language is most appropriate for the subject and for the audience.

Although the units follow in a logical sequence, they are self-contained. Except for the final exam, they may be assigned in any order the instructor might prefer.





## Course Content

The basic reading text will be announced by the instructor. Each week, students will read several essays written by professional writers to examine specific writing techniques. Sometimes, the class will read news and journal articles as they seem appropriate to the technique of expository writing being studied. Basically, students will write a paper each week. Papers should be an assigned number of pages long, typed or written neatly in pen, double spaced, with a cover sheet.

The exercises are arranged by task. They can be followed in order, or by section, according to the needs of the students. For this reason, it should also be useful as a supplementary text, whether for the class as a whole or for individual students needing additional practice.

The assignments look like this:

### ***How To Write an Examples Paper***

This is probably the most fundamental composition in all nonfiction writing. Abstract ideas and generalizations can become clear only as we provide plenty of examples to illustrate them. This assignment helps students generate a composition based on examples.

### ***How To Write a Classification Paper***

We classify things every day: "Sammy is a good friend." "Sandra is a lovely woman." "Sigmund is very intelligent." This assignment helps students develop a classification based on observable facts.

### ***How To Write a Comparison Paper***

This assignment asks students to look carefully at two objects that appear to be similar, but upon closer inspection have many more features in common than at first suspected.

### ***How To Write a Process Analysis Paper***

Process analysis is an explanation of a step-by-step process. A cooking recipe is a simple process analysis. Instructions for assembling a model airplane is a process analysis. Giving clear, step-by-step instructions is a very important skill.

### ***How To Write a Cause and Effect Paper***

This writing task asks students to carefully consider an event. What really caused the event and what are some effects of that event? The writer will try to determine the immediate, short-range, and long-range effects of an event and begin to use basic research techniques to supply answers.

### ***How To Write a Definition Paper***

When asked to define a word, many people rush to a dictionary for a definition. This assignment helps students look at the dictionary definition and then look at their own experience as an additional way of defining words and ideas. This leads to a discussion of the denotation and connotation of words.

### ***How To Write a Narration Paper***

Dialogue can brighten a composition if the dialogue is carefully chosen. Students should choose an experience that make them ecstatic or extremely frightened and write about it to convey their great happiness or fear.

### ***How To Write a Description Paper***

Description requires students to be aware of their physical senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Each part of the paper asks students to concentrate on a particular sense, so that, after reading the paper, the reader has a sensory description of the item.

### ***How To Write an Argument Paper***

An argument is not a quarrel or a shouting match. It is a presentation of facts and logic designed to modify another person's views to help resolve a conflict. This is a good time to look at, and avoid, logical fallacies.

### ***How To Write a Persuasion Paper***

This may be the easiest, yet the most difficult, paper to write. It is easy because every writer knows many persuasion techniques from watching many television commercials. It may be difficult because those persuasion techniques must be cleverly used so that they are not too obvious. This is good time to review some emotional techniques in writing: name-calling, generalities, plain folks, card-stacking, and the old bandwagon technique, just to name a few.

### ***How To Write a Literary Analysis Paper***

Each semester, I ask students to read an American novel and analyze it. We discuss the conflict, the characters, and the setting. If we have time, we talk about the symbols in the story and what they mean. This exercise helps students get ready for the final exam.

### ***Final Examination***

Students will read two distinguished essays and then write a paper showing the similarities and differences between the essays. Students will examine the structure of the essays, the language, and the various writing techniques used by the authors. After all, if famous writers use these writing skills, we should have them, too.

#### ***Bright Idea***

The final exam paper may be counted twice (two grades) because it is a review of writing techniques included in this course, and because it is an example of the students' writing and analytical skills as they identify certain writing techniques in some of the best writing in the American English language.



## Objectives

At the completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Develop a precise thesis sentence.
2. Write a well-organized, multi-paragraph paper.
3. Demonstrate several writing techniques.
4. Perform self-editing functions.

## References

I have included a list of sources for students and teachers to consider as they move through the assignments. Some sources are dated, but relevant to writing today. Some sources are available on the Internet. For example, "The Declaration of Independence" by Thomas Jefferson can be downloaded and studied in depth along with several scholarly essays.



# How to Write Expository Prose

## Introduction

The more you understand writing techniques, the more you will be able to visualize the writing process. In the next few pages, you will learn about the necessary parts of a composition, ways to structure a composition, what a thesis sentence looks like, and the main parts of the introduction to a composition. This should help you get started with your own composition.

## Structure of a Composition

### *What Is Structure?*

Structure in an essay refers to the underlying pattern or design of the composition. Structure (unity, coherence, emphasis) holds the essay or composition together. In planning an essay, the writer is building a structure similar to the skeleton of the human body. Normal human skeletons have the same number of parts, but the muscle and tissue of the body give it its uniqueness. In the same way, a composition has structure. To some people, structure offers a way to approach the writing process. To others, structure offers freedom to be flexible within a given pattern. Here are several ways to achieve structure in writing:

- **The Thesis.** The writer decides on an overall pattern and develops a firm thesis with a subject, direction, and several (Let's say, three) reasons (S+D+3R). The formula has a direction (D) and three reasons (3R) to support the thesis. While there are several kinds of theses sentences available to students, this course will direct attention at one kind of thesis.
- **Predictions.** The writer makes several predictions near the beginning of the paper and follows through with each one in the paper.
- **Repetition.** Go back to paragraph 2 on this page and reread the paragraph. How many times is the word "structure" printed? That technique is called repetition. It is meant to hold the essay together while it conveys the message. A way to develop so-called "unity" in a paper is to repeat the subject in every sentence in a paragraph. If the subject itself becomes too repetitive, try adding pronouns.
- **Transitions.** Words like "however," "nevertheless," "on the other hand," "for example," and "as a result" are used in expository writing as links or directional signals. They help make the reading easier, and they make the writing sound much more sophisticated. These words or phrases are called transitions.

### *The Thesis Sentence*

A thesis sentence is vital to the organization of the paper. It tells the reader three things. First, it identifies the subject of the paper. Next, it indicates the direction the paper will go. Then, it gives reasons why (we'll use three) the discussion should go in that direction. An easy way to remember the three parts of a thesis sentence is this formula, (S+D+3R), which stands for:

SUBJECT + DIRECTION + THREE REASONS

Below are three examples of a thesis sentence.

- Writing is an important skill because it helps people exchange thoughts, it is necessary in a high-tech society, and it increases mental strength in the writer.
- Swimming is a demanding sport because it requires proper breathing techniques, proper strokes, and proper body conditioning.
- Marriage is a full-time task because it requires careful listening, patience, and love.

As you can see, the first word in each sentence above is the subject (S) of the thesis sentence.

The second part of the thesis sentence narrows the subject to become the direction (D) of thought in the paper. Suppose you choose “money” as the subject of your composition. Then you must choose a “direction” of thought, such as the history of money, or the creation of money, or the value of money, or the various kinds of money. Your task is to choose one direction quickly because you do not have very much space in this composition, and the composition is due in a short time.

The third part of the thesis sentence gives reasons in support of the topic. The three reasons in our model sentence are, for now, arbitrary. Later, the student may elect to have two reasons or four or more reasons, depending on the complexity of the topic.

The three reasons supporting the topic should make sense to the reader. Furthermore, the reasons should be placed in order of increasing importance. In other words, reason 3 should be the best and most important reason in the thesis sentence because it has the last chance to make an impact on the reader. In the writing assignments in this guide, the thesis sentence should be the last sentence in the introductory paragraph, where it is easy to find, easy to read, and easy to understand.

To understand how to write a thesis sentence, you might like to use the model shown below. First, choose a subject you know a lot about. Write that subject in the “subject” position. Suppose you chose “crime” as your subject because you have read about it in the news. Now, what can you say about crime? We know it is expensive, so our thesis sentence might start like this: Crime is expensive. That gives us a subject (crime) and a direction (expensive). But we do not yet have a thesis sentence until we add three reasons to support the topic. How is crime expensive? Well, it increases our insurance premiums. It costs more to expand police forces. It costs about \$30,000 a year to keep a prisoner in jail for a year.

Now, combine the subject, the direction, and the three reasons. The thesis sentence might look like this:

Crime is expensive because it increases our insurance premiums, it increases taxes in order to hire more police officers, and it costs about \$30,000 a year to lock up one criminal.

With that thesis sentence, you know what you are going to write about, and you have three good arguments to support your topic.

Below, there are several practice topics. Write a thesis sentence for each.

Money is \_\_\_\_\_ because

1) \_\_\_\_\_ , 2) \_\_\_\_\_ ,

and 3) \_\_\_\_\_ .

Success is \_\_\_\_\_ because

1) \_\_\_\_\_ , 2) \_\_\_\_\_ ,

and 3) \_\_\_\_\_ .

Happiness is \_\_\_\_\_ because

1) \_\_\_\_\_ , 2) \_\_\_\_\_ ,

and 3) \_\_\_\_\_ .

Pride is \_\_\_\_\_ because

1) \_\_\_\_\_ , 2) \_\_\_\_\_ ,

and 3) \_\_\_\_\_ .

Patriotism is \_\_\_\_\_ because

1) \_\_\_\_\_ , 2) \_\_\_\_\_ ,

and 3) \_\_\_\_\_ .

After you have chosen one of these sentences or written a thesis sentence on another topic, it's time to think about how you want to open the essay.

### ***The Introduction***

After writing a thesis sentence to guide your thought through your essay, you need to get started. The first paragraph in the essay is called the **introduction** (or introductory paragraph), and the first sentence in the introduction is called the **opener** or interest catcher. The first sentence should, like a bear trap, snap at the reader. Most people don't have time to wade through a lot of words to get to the information in the text. So, the first sentence is very important. There are several ways to engage the reader. Read through the models below, and then choose one of these ways to start your introductory paragraph.

- State the central idea in the opening sentence:  
*Courtship is as natural as breathing.*
- Show the significance of the subject in the opening sentence:  
*Courtship affects every normal person.*