

# **TEACHING BASIC WRITING SKILLS**

**Strategies for Effective  
Expository Writing  
Instruction**

JUDITH C. HOCHMAN, Ed.D.



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## 1.9 — Sentence Expansion

Goals 18–20

When they're writing, students often assume that their reader has extensive prior knowledge of the subject matter they're covering. Sentence expansion encourages students to think about what the reader knows already or may need, or want, to know to better understand the students' writing. Using this approach, students are able to provide information with greater precision.

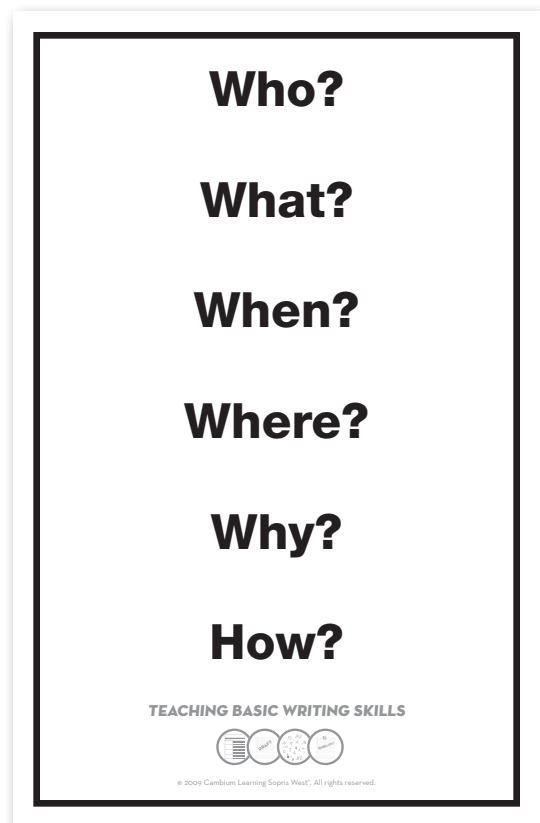
To have students practice sentence expansion, display a chart with the question words *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. Then give students kernel sentences (simple sentences), such as *Jane ran* or *The candidates will debate*. Select one, two, three, or more of the question words, and ask the class to expand the kernel sentences by answering some or all of those questions. When introducing this strategy, begin with *where*, *when*, or *why*.

Note that the kernel sentences must always be complete sentences. *They seem* or *She enjoys* are not sentences because they do not express a complete thought. **Resource 1.9** (next two pages) lists some handy kernel sentences. Keep in mind, however, that students are best able to expand sentences when they are given kernels that reflect their experience or their recent work in content areas.

Activities using kernel sentences and question words enable teachers to assess student comprehension or knowledge in any subject area. The activities in this section can easily be adapted to make such assessments. **Templates C** and **D**, in the appendix, are sentence expansion forms that make sentence expansion assignments straightforward. Initially, you should select the question words for students. Sentence expansion is also a useful tool for learning to summarize. Activities in **1.10—Summarizing** help develop that skill.

In assigning this section's activities, instruct students that their expanded sentences do not have to answer the question words in the same order in which they are presented. For example, if students put the response to *when* at the beginning of an expanded sentence, the sentence will begin with a left-branching adverbial phrase. This form is encountered more frequently in written text than in speech. If students learn to write complex sentences, their reading comprehension will improve. (Scott, 2009)

**Note:** Tell students that when they see a dotted line instead of a solid line on the sentence expansion form, their writing should take the form of words or phrases—not complete sentences.





## Resource 1.9: Sentences for Expansion

Volcanoes erupt.

Thelma will call.

The boys ran.

The bird flew.

Mary went.

The soldiers fired.

The waves crashed.

Sarah entered.

The motors roared.

The Senate approved.

The cyclists pedaled.

The food was eaten.

The colt leaps.

Dad shaves.

The cars raced.

The customer complained.

The crowd cheered.

The man wondered.

The children are eating.

The boats are docking.

They screeched.

The men smiled.

The rebels attacked.

It was stolen.

The race ended.

A can was spilled.

The spectators departed.

The snow drifts.

The sky darkened.

She worked.

The couple emigrated.

The baby is crying.

Simon dreams.

The fish swam.

The children understand.

Sam will dance.

The cat stretched.

The teacher refused.

*(continued)*



## Resource 1.9 (continued)

He studied.

The concert will begin.

They read.

John shivered.

People traveled.

They ambushed the enemy.

Lincoln unified the states.

Washington led the troops.

Elmer works.

They are writing.

The children remained.

Children are playing.

The student asked.

The table broke.

The horse stumbled.

Everyone was awakened.

The smell drifted.

Atoms are tiny.

The show closed.

The smoke disappeared.

The girls appeared.

The curtain is rising.

The Earth revolves.

He promised.

Actors performed.

He poured.

A bear scratches.

The office closed.

A girl danced.

The thief vanished.

The people searched.

The phone is ringing.

Slavery was abolished.

Bridges were built.

The violinist will practice.

The war will be won.

The judge will decide.

The Pilgrims landed.

The air smelled.

Columbus sailed.



## Example 1.9A

### DIRECTIONS:

Expand each kernel sentence.

#### The tadpole splashed.

Where? ..... in the pond .....

When? ..... this morning .....

Expanded sentence:

..... This morning, the tadpole splashed in the pond. ....

#### My dog hid.

Where? ..... under the bed .....

When? ..... during the storm .....

Why? ..... because he was scared .....

Expanded sentence:

..... During the storm, my dog hid under the bed because he was scared. ....

#### They rebelled.

Who? ..... *the American colonists* .....

When? ..... *in 1775* .....

Why? ..... *because they felt the British taxed them unfairly* .....

Expanded sentence:

..... *In 1775, the American colonists rebelled because they felt the British taxed them unfairly.* ....

#### It sank.

What? ..... *the Titanic* .....

When? ..... *April 14, 1912* .....

Where? ..... *in the North Atlantic* .....

Why? ..... *hit an iceberg* .....

Expanded sentence:

..... *On April 14, 1912, the Titanic sank in the North Atlantic because it hit an iceberg.* ....

### Example 1.9B

**DIRECTIONS:**

Expand the kernel sentence using any three of the question words: *who, what, when, where, why, how.*

**The boys ran.**

when ..... last Tuesday .....

how ..... quickly .....

where ..... in the park .....

Expanded sentence:

\_\_\_\_\_ Last Tuesday, the boys ran quickly in the park. \_\_\_\_\_

### Example 1.9c

**DIRECTIONS:**

Expand the kernel sentence using any four of the question words: *who, what, when, where, why, how.*

**They worked.**

who ..... teachers .....

how ..... feverishly .....

why ..... to finish .....

when ..... before the weekend .....

Expanded sentence:

\_\_\_\_\_ The teachers worked feverishly to finish before the  
weekend. \_\_\_\_\_

### Example 1.9D

**DIRECTIONS:**

Does each word tell **who, what, when, where,** or **how?**

|           |              |           |              |
|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| later     | <u>when</u>  | quickly   | <u>how</u>   |
| rabbits   | <u>what</u>  | yesterday | <u>when</u>  |
| carefully | <u>how</u>   | inside    | <u>where</u> |
| downtown  | <u>where</u> | soon      | <u>when</u>  |
| they      | <u>who</u>   | newspaper | <u>what</u>  |

### Example 1.9E

**DIRECTIONS:**

Do the underlined words tell **who, what, when, where, why,** or **how?**

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Christopher Columbus was born <u>in Italy</u> .                                       | <u>where</u> |
| The king and queen of Spain helped Columbus <u>by giving him three ships</u> .        | <u>how</u>   |
| <u>King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella</u> gave Columbus three ships.                   | <u>who</u>   |
| <u>In 1492</u> , Columbus sailed from Spain to the New World.                         | <u>when</u>  |
| <u>The Santa Maria</u> was one of Columbus' three ships.                              | <u>what</u>  |
| Columbus wanted to find spices and gold <u>so he could become rich</u> .              | <u>why</u>   |
| Columbus named the natives "Indians" <u>because he thought he was in the Indies</u> . | <u>why</u>   |
| The <i>Santa Maria</i> sank on the reef <u>in the summer</u> .                        | <u>when</u>  |
| Columbus never knew that he found <u>the New World</u> .                              | <u>what</u>  |

## Example 1.9F

### DIRECTIONS:

Identify the question word(s)—**who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, **why**, and/or **how**—that were used to expand each kernel sentence.

Kernel: **Jenny hid.**

Expanded sentence: During recess, Jenny hid behind the tree.

Question words: when / where

Kernel: **The bird flew.**

Expanded sentence: The bird gracefully flew into its nest.

Question words: how / where

Kernel: **She won.**

Expanded sentence: Kristen easily won her tennis match this morning.

Question words: who / how / what / when

Kernel: **It exploded.**

Expanded sentence: After Ryan shook the soda can, it exploded all over the cafeteria.

Question words: when / who / what / where

Kernel: **They cooked.**

Expanded sentence: Tom and Rose cooked a delicious meal in their small kitchen.

Questions words: who / what / where

Kernel: **Elizabeth jogs.**

Expanded sentence: Every morning, Elizabeth jogs quickly through the park so that she will not be late for work.


Questions words: when / how / where / why

## 2.6 — The Multiple Paragraph Outline

Goals 29–37

The Multiple Paragraph Outline (MPO) works for students who are ready to begin writing unified, coherent compositions of three or more paragraphs (see **Templates J, K, and L** in the appendix). By using the MPO, students learn to construct a composition that includes an introduction, body, and conclusion. The outline guides them through this process, helping them maintain a consistent topic, purpose, and point of view by providing a clear diagram of the entire work.

Here are two examples of Multiple Paragraph Outlines:

**TEACHING BASIC WRITING SKILLS**  
  
**Template K**

### Multiple Paragraph Outline (4 Paragraphs)


Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: *Extending the school year*

Thesis Statement: *There are arguments for and against extending the school year.*

| Main Idea                             | Details  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| ¶ 1<br>Introduction                   | <i>Gen. St. proposed ed. reform.<br/>Sp. St. many nations → year round schooling.<br/>Th. St.</i>  |
| ¶ 2<br><i>Pro</i><br>↓<br><i>T.S.</i> | <i>U.S. literacy declining.<br/>better ed. w/ fewer interruptions<br/>close achievement gap faster<br/>more vacations throughout year<br/>compete w/ other nations<br/>advance → technology &amp; science<br/>raise standards.</i> |
| ¶ 3<br><i>Con</i><br>↓<br><i>T.S.</i> | <i>\$ → tax payers / teachers salaries<br/>\$ → keep schools open<br/>students need break<br/>family vacations<br/>time needed for planning<br/>summer businesses</i>  |
| ¶ 4<br>Conclusion                     | <i>Rephrase Th. St.<br/>Sp. St. economic concerns dominate<br/>Gen. St. further discussion needed</i>  |

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**TEACHING BASIC WRITING SKILLS**  
  
**Template L**

### Multiple Paragraph Outline (5 Paragraphs)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: *Theodore Roosevelt*

Thesis Statement: *TR's leadership influenced the presidency at home and abroad during the 20th century.*

| Main Idea  | Details   |
|--|---|
| ¶ 1<br>Introduction  | <i>Gen. St. powerful / exciting.<br/>Sp. St. 26th pres. / youngest (42)<br/>Th. St.</i>   |
| ¶ 2<br><i>Early Life</i><br>↓<br><i>I.S.</i>                                       | <i>DOB 10/27/1858 NYC<br/>asthma<br/>Harvard<br/>Columbia Law School<br/>Marriages / Children</i>   |
| ¶ 3<br><i>Political Career</i><br>↓<br><i>I.S.</i>                                 | <i>N.Y. Legislature 1881<br/>N.Y. Police Comm. 1894<br/>Asst. Secty. Navy 1896<br/>"Rough Riders" 1898<br/>V.P. → Pres. 1901</i>                |
| ¶ 4<br><i>legacy</i><br>↓<br><i>domestic</i><br>↓<br><i>foreign</i><br><i>I.S.</i> | <i>Antitrust laws<br/>environmental / conservation<br/>Panama Canal<br/>Roosevelt Corollary → World Power<br/>Nobel Prize 1906 / death 1919</i> |
| ¶ 5<br>Conclusion  | <i>Rephrase I.S. St.<br/>Sp. St. crusader<br/>challenger<br/>Gen. St. role model → 20th cent. pres.</i>   |

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Students need all of the following skills before they can be expected to develop an MPO independently:

- Ability to construct a coherent paragraph.
- Ability to develop a topic sentence based on a category that reflects the main idea of each paragraph. Initially, encourage students to write “T.S.” under each category on the left side of the MPO as a reminder to write a topic sentence for each paragraph. (See **Resource 2.6**, next page, for examples of categories students can use to organize different types of MPOs.)
- Ability to write supporting details in brief, clear phrases. The details in a composition, also called the evidence, must support the composition’s thesis statement and the paragraph’s topic sentence.
- Ability to generate a thesis statement that is a complete sentence and states the main theme of the composition, and to incorporate it into the composition’s introduction and conclusion. In an MPO, unlike in a Quick Outline or a Transition Outline, the thesis statement should be the only complete sentence.

Also, although it is a good idea initially to assign specific topics to students who are learning to create Multiple Paragraph Outlines, they should eventually learn to narrow a broad concept into a more specific topic on which to base their outline or essay. Students will need practice before they can confidently refine a topic until it is neither too narrow nor too broad to cover in an MPO of a given length.



## Resource 2.6: Categories for Organizing an MPO, by Assignment Type

### 1. **Biographical**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ Early life
- 3rd ¶ Later years
- 4th ¶ Accomplishments
- 5th ¶ Conclusion

### 2. **Significant Event**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ Background
- 3rd ¶ Event
- 4th ¶ Result or significance
- 5th ¶ Conclusion

### 3. **Problem or Issue**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ Background
- 3rd ¶ Problem
- 4th ¶ Solution or effect
- 5th ¶ Conclusion

### 4. **Compare and Contrast**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ Similarities/  
advantages/pros
- 3rd ¶ Differences/  
disadvantages/cons
- 4th ¶ Conclusion

### 5. **Persuasive**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ First reason
- 3rd ¶ Second reason
- 4th ¶ Third reason
- 5th ¶ Conclusion

### 6. **Cause and Effect**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ Cause(s)
- 3rd ¶ Effect(s)
- 4th ¶ Solution(s)
- 5th ¶ Conclusion

### 7. **Book Review**

- 1st ¶ Introduction
- 2nd ¶ Plot Summary
- 3rd ¶ Conflict/Characters
- 4th ¶ Resolution
- 5th ¶ Conclusion

Students need not progress in sequence from three- to four- to five-paragraph compositions; the number of paragraphs should depend on the topic. As with the Quick Outline and the Transition Outline, provide abundant group work and demonstrate many models before expecting students to develop an MPO independently.

When introducing students to the Multiple Paragraph Outline, guide them through these steps:

1. Select a topic.
2. Discuss the composition's purpose and audience.
3. Develop the thesis statement.
4. In the left column of the MPO form (**Template J** for a three-paragraph outline, **Template K** for a four-paragraph outline, or **Template L** for a five-paragraph outline), write the main idea of each paragraph as a phrase or a category. This helps students avoid repetition and enables them to plan the composition more effectively. It also helps them ensure that each paragraph relates to the composition's overall theme.
5. After determining the main idea for each paragraph, write the supporting details in the right-hand column. Tell students that they can include more items in their outline than they end up using in their draft. Remind them that each supporting detail should relate directly to the main idea of its paragraph but that the sequence of the details might change in the draft.
6. Develop the introduction and conclusion only after entering the main idea and details for each paragraph of the body of the composition.

TEACHING BASIC WRITING SKILLS  
Template L

### Multiple Paragraph Outline (5 Paragraphs)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Topic: 1  
 Thesis Statement: 2

| Main Idea           | Details |
|---------------------|---------|
| Introduction<br>¶ 1 | 5       |
| ¶ 2 3               | 4       |
| ¶ 3 3               | 4       |
| ¶ 4 3               | 4       |
| Conclusion<br>¶ 5   | 6       |

TEACHING BASIC WRITING SKILLS  
Template L

### Multiple Paragraph Outline (5 Paragraphs)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Topic: 1 fill in topic  
 Thesis Statement: 2 write th. st.

| Main Idea                      | Details  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Introduction<br>¶ 1            | 5 g. s.<br>sp. st.<br>th. st.                            |
| ¶ 2 3<br>category<br>↓<br>t.s. | 4 details:<br>abbreviations/key words<br>& phrases only! |
| ¶ 3 3<br>category<br>↓<br>t.s. | 4 details:<br>abbreviations/key words<br>& phrases only! |
| ¶ 4 3<br>category<br>↓<br>t.s. | 4 details:<br>abbreviations/key words<br>& phrases only! |
| Conclusion<br>¶ 5              | 6 rephrase th. st.<br>sp. st.<br>g. s.                   |

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For longer compositions, the most important step is to construct a thesis statement. Developing writers usually place the thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph, then rephrase it in the final paragraph. Students can develop a thesis statement, or the main theme of a composition, in several ways. They may frame an idea as:

- A personal judgment on a topic. For example:  
**It is urgent that problems associated with global warming be addressed immediately.**
- Advice or directions. For example:  
**There are a number of effective strategies to combat global warming.**
- A statement of consequences (cause and effect). For example:  
**If global warming is not taken seriously by governments, our planet will be in danger.**
- An argument for or against an issue. For example:  
**Many scientists believe there is persuasive evidence that the issue of global warming is extremely serious.**
- An interpretation (usually of fiction or poetry). For example:  
**The endless legal morass described by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* is as relevant today as it was over a century ago.**
- Compare and contrast (similarities and/or differences). For example:  
**There are significant differences between the economic positions of the candidates.**

As the class works through Multiple Paragraph Outlines, show the more proficient students that the topic sentence does not have to be the first sentence in each paragraph. Also, teach them that the last words in a paragraph or a composition will have the most impact on the reader; therefore, the end of each paragraph should contain its key points. Emphasize that the last sentence of a composition is just as important as the first one.

### Example 2.6A

**DIRECTIONS:**

Write a thesis statement for each topic.

Topic: **A Longer School Year**

*Enacting proposals to lengthen the school year would have many educational benefits.*

Topic: **Homelessness**

*Mental illness and substance abuse are two of the leading causes of homelessness.*