TEACHING BASIC WRITING SKILLS

Strategies for Effective Expository Writing Instruction

JUDITH C. HOCHMAN, Ed.D.
Contents

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1
  The Challenge of Learning to Write ................................................................. 1
  The Role of Executive Functions ........................................................................ 2
  Effective Writing Instruction ............................................................................... 3
  How to Use This Manual ..................................................................................... 4
  Sentences ............................................................................................................. 4
  Paragraphs and Compositions ........................................................................... 5
  Instructional Guidelines ....................................................................................... 6

Section 1: Sentences ........................................................................................................ 8
  Sentence Goals ....................................................................................................... 10
  1.1 Sentences and Fragments ................................................................................ 12
      Examples 1.1A to 1.1C
  1.2 Scrambled Sentences ..................................................................................... 14
      Example 1.2A
  1.3 Sentence Types ................................................................................................ 15
      Examples 1.3A to 1.3G
  1.4 Questions ......................................................................................................... 18
      Examples 1.4A to 1.4E
  1.5 Phrases and Clauses ........................................................................................ 22
      Example 1.5A
  1.6 Conjunctions .................................................................................................... 22
      Examples 1.6A to 1.6D
      Resource 1.6: Sentence Starters ..................................................................... 26
  1.7 Sentence Combining ........................................................................................ 27
      Example 1.7A
  1.8 Run-on Sentences ............................................................................................ 28
      Examples 1.8A to 1.8B
  1.9 Sentence Expansion ........................................................................................ 30
      Resource 1.9: Sentences for Expansion ......................................................... 31
      Examples 1.9A to 1.9F
  1.10 Summarizing ................................................................................................... 37
      Examples 1.10A to 1.10C
  1.11 Grammar and Usage ....................................................................................... 39
      Subjects and Predicates ................................................................................. 39
      Examples 1.11A to 1.11E
      Punctuation and Capitalization .................................................................... 42
      Examples 1.11F to 1.11G
      Number and Tense Agreement ..................................................................... 43
      Examples 1.11H to 1.11K
Section 2: Paragraphs and Compositions

2.1 Planning

2.2 Topic Sentences

2.3 Outlines: An Overview

2.4 The Quick Outline

2.5 The Transition Outline

2.6 The Multiple Paragraph Outline

2.7 Introductions

2.8 Conclusions

2.9 Writing Drafts

2.10 Revising and Editing

2.11 Producing a Final Copy
Section 3: Writing Assessment ............................................. 115

Resource 3.1: Suggested Grade-Level Assessment Objectives ...... 117

Appendix ................................................................................. 121
Template A: Expository-Writing Terms .................................... 122
Template B: The 4 Types of Conjunctions ................................. 123
Template C: Sentence Expansion with 3 Question Words ........... 124
Template D: Sentence Expansion with 4 Question Words .......... 125
Template E: Symbols and Abbreviations for Outlining ............... 126
Template F: Quick Outline ..................................................... 127
Template G: Quick Outline—Book Report ................................. 128
Template H: Sentence Summary ............................................. 129
Template H-A: Article Summary .............................................. 130
Template I: Transition Outline (2 Paragraphs) ......................... 131
Template I-A: Transition Outline (3 Paragraphs) ....................... 132
Template J: Multiple Paragraph Outline (3 Paragraphs) .......... 133
Template K: Multiple Paragraph Outline (4 Paragraphs) .......... 134
Template L: Multiple Paragraph Outline (5 Paragraphs) .......... 135
Template M: Multiple Paragraph Outline—Book Report .......... 136
Template N: Revise and Edit Checklist .................................... 137
Template O: Proofreading Symbols ....................................... 138
Template P: Listening Evaluation Checklist ............................. 139

Glossary ................................................................................. 141

References ............................................................................... 145
1.9 — Sentence Expansion

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.  The boats are docking.
Thelma will call.  They screeched.
The boys ran.  The men smiled.
The bird flew.  The rebels attacked.
Mary went.  It was stolen.
The soldiers fired.  The race ended.
The waves crashed.  A can was spilled.
Sarah entered.  The spectators departed.
The motors roared.  The snow drifts.
The Senate approved.  The sky darkened.
The cyclists pedaled.  She worked.
The food was eaten.  The couple emigrated.
The colt leaps.  The baby is crying.
Dad shaves.  Simon dreams.
The cars raced.  The fish swam.
The customer complained.  The children understand.
The crowd cheered.  Sam will dance.
The man wondered.  The cat stretched.
The children are eating.  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.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The boys ran.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They worked.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feverishly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before the weekend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>later</th>
<th>when</th>
<th>quickly</th>
<th>how</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rabbits</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carefully</td>
<td>how</td>
<td>inside</td>
<td>where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>downtown</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>soon</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td>what</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 1.9e

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

Christopher Columbus was born in Italy.

The king and queen of Spain helped Columbus by giving him three ships.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella gave Columbus three ships.

In 1492, Columbus sailed from Spain to the New World.

The Santa Maria was one of Columbus’ three ships.

Columbus wanted to find spices and gold so he could become rich.

Columbus named the natives “Indians” because he thought he was in the Indies.

The Santa Maria sank on the reef in the summer.

Columbus never knew that he found the New World.
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: ____________

Kernel: **The bird flew.**
Expanded sentence: The bird gracefully flew into its nest.
Question words: ____________

Kernel: **She won.**
Expanded sentence: Kristen easily won her tennis match this morning.
Question words: ____________

Kernel: **It exploded.**
Expanded sentence: After Ryan shook the soda can, it exploded all over the cafeteria.
Question words: ____________

Kernel: **They cooked.**
Expanded sentence: Tom and Rose cooked a delicious meal in their small kitchen.
Question words: ____________

Kernel: **Elizabeth jogs.**
Expanded sentence: Every morning, Elizabeth jogs quickly through the park so that she will not be late for work.
Question words: ____________
2.6 — The Multiple Paragraph Outline

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:

---

**Multiple Paragraph Outline (4 Paragraphs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Idea</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction** | Stem. Alt. prepared ed reform  
Alt. many nations | year round schooling  
Alt. alt. |
| ¶ 1 | U.S. literacy declining  
Better ed. with fewer interruptions  
Close achievement gap faster  
More vacations throughout year  
Compete with other nations  
Advance tech. & science  
Rate standards |
| **Pro** | $ 
taxpayer/teacher salaries  
$ 
save schools open  
students work hard  
family vacations  
time needed for planning  
summer businesses |
| ¶ 2 | $ 
taxpayer/teacher salaries  
$ 
save schools open  
students work hard  
family vacations  
time needed for planning  
summer businesses |
| **Conclusion** | Rethink ch. Alt.  
Alt. alt. economic  
concerns dominate  
Stem. alt. further discussion needed |
| ¶ 4 | |

---

**Multiple Paragraph Outline (5 Paragraphs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Idea</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction** | Stem. all powerful  
Exc. Alt. 26th pres./youngest (42)  
Alt. Alt. |
| ¶ 1 | Early life  
208-10/27/1858 NYC  
father  
war hero  
Columbia Law School  
Marriage/Children |
| **Political Career** | National Party  
1881  
P. J. Pol. Commit. 1894  
Crit. Andy. Sachs 1896  
"Rough Riders" 1898  
200  
P. 1901 |
| ¶ 2 | F.D.  
Aid  
years abroad  
panama canal  
Roosevelt Corollary  
World Power  
Nobel Prize 1906/1919  
death 1919 |
| **Conclusion** | Retract  
Alt. Alt.  
Challenges  
Stem. Alt. role model 20th cent. pres. |
| ¶ 5 | |

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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

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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.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: <strong>A Longer School Year</strong></th>
<th>Enacting proposals to lengthen the school year would have many educational benefits.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic: <strong>Homelessness</strong></td>
<td>Mental illness and substance abuse are two of the leading causes of homelessness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>