



# University Prep Writing C

*A textbook for advanced-low ESL writing students*

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# University Prep Winter Writing C

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# Addressing the Prompt

One of the most essential steps of writing is ensuring that you fully understand what you are being asked to write about.

## Verbs

First of all, the verb used in the prompt is an important signal to you on how you need to write your essay. If you think carefully about the meaning of the verb, it will help you decide on your organization and you can use it to check that you included all of the necessary information.

## Example Prompts

- Describe your home city.
  - This topic is more general. You could approach it by describing the people who live in your city, history, architecture, popular tourist sites, or even the urban planning. If you had the opportunity, it would be wise to clarify with the teacher if there is a more specific explanation of what aspect of your city should be described.
- Compare and contrast your home city and Provo, UT.
  - You need to explain similarities and differences. You must include both in order to completely respond to the prompt. This requires you to do a little more than describe the characteristics of the two places, you need

- to also make some judgements about them.
- Summarize the speaker's thoughts about Provo, UT.
    - In this response, your supporting ideas should be limited to the content in the original source. You should not have any of your own ideas mixed into this answer. It should also be limited to the opinion about the city, not about any other area in Utah.
  - Many cities in the United States do not have reliable, widespread public transportation. Do you think college towns, such as Provo, UT, should be required to provide public transportation for the students? Support your position on this issue with reasons and examples.
    - The question is about more than your opinion. The idea of supporting your ideas implies that you need to bring in additional sources to add strength to your argument. If the prompt is timed, you would need to focus your support on general knowledge or personal experience to give reasons and examples.

## Content

Next, you need to understand what content you are expected to include. The prompt may be very narrow because the topic is very specific. In other cases, the prompt may be very general and allow you space to make personal decisions about what supporting ideas to include.

**Always remember to review the prompt throughout the writing process to make sure that the focus of your essay matches the same scope as the prompt.**

## Example Content

1. Describe your home city.
  1. This topic is more general. You could approach it by describing the people who live in your city, history, architecture, popular tourist sites, or even the urban planning. If you had the opportunity, it would be wise to clarify with the teacher if there is a more specific explanation of what aspect of your city should be described.
2. Compare and contrast your home city and Provo, UT.
  1. Again, this topic is fairly broad. You know you need to talk about what is the same or different, but it could again be about many different attributes of the two cities.
3. Summarize the speaker's opinion about Provo, UT.
  1. In this response, your supporting ideas should be limited to the content in the original source. You should not have any of your own ideas mixed into this answer. It should also be limited to the opinion about the city, not about any other area in Utah.
4. Many cities in the United States do not have reliable, widespread public transportation. Do you think college towns, such as Provo, UT, should be required to provide public transportation for the students? Support your position on this issue with reasons and examples.
  1. The content of this essay is restricted to public transportation accessibility for college students specifically. Your focus should only be on this population and the unique environment of college towns. Additionally, you need both reasons and examples as support, excluding one of those types of support would result in an incomplete response.

# Constraints

Finally, you should also look at any limitations included in the prompt. Constraints could include

- limits of time
- characters (letters, punctuation, and spaces)
- words
- revision tools (dictionaries, thesaurus, spell check)
- sources (required or no access)
- teacher, tutor, or peer review (required or no access)



# Introduction Paragraphs

our introduction paragraph should grab your reader's attention, introduce the topic of your essay, and present your thesis.

## **Grab the reader's attention and introduce the topic**

The very first sentence of your introduction should get your reader interested in your topic. Don't start out too generally in your introduction paragraph. Also, don't state all of your specific main points individually in the introduction. Focus on giving background information that your reader needs to understand the topic generally.

## **Present your thesis**

The thesis states the main idea, or focus, of the essay. The rest of the essay will give evidence and explanations that show why or how your thesis is true.

## **An effective thesis—**

- addresses the prompt if there is one\* (i.e., answers the question).
- is usually at the end of the introduction paragraph.
- controls the content of all of the body paragraphs.
- is a complete sentence.
- does not announce the topic (e.g., "I'm going to talk about exercise.").
- should not simply be a fact (e.g., "Many people exercise.").
- should not be too general (e.g., "Exercise is good.").
- should not be too specific (e.g., "Exercise decreases the chance of developing diabetes, heart disease, asthma, osteoporosis, depression, and anxiety.").
- may state or imply main points (e.g., "Exercise is essential because it improves overall physical and mental health." vs. "Exercise is essential for improving our well-being.").

# Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs should all work to support your thesis by explaining *why* or *how* your thesis is true. Each body paragraph has three types of sentences.

## Topic sentences

A topic sentence states the main idea, or focus, of the paragraph. The rest of the body paragraph will give evidence and explanations that show *why* or *how* your topic sentence is true. In many ways, a topic sentence is very similar to a thesis. The biggest differences will be the location of the sentence and the scope of the ideas.

### **An effective topic sentence—**

- clearly supports the thesis statement.
- is usually at the beginning of a body paragraph.
- controls the content of all of the supporting sentences in its paragraph.
- is a complete sentence.
- does not announce the topic (e.g., "I'm going to talk about exercise.").
- should not be too general (e.g., "Exercise is good.").
- should not be too specific (e.g., "Exercise decreases the chance of developing diabetes, heart disease, asthma, osteoporosis, depression, and anxiety.").

## Supporting sentences

Your body paragraph needs to explain *why* or *how* your topic sentence is true. The sentences that support your topic sentence are called **supporting sentences**. You can have many types of supporting sentences. Supporting sentences can give examples, explanations, details, descriptions, facts, reasons, etc.

## Concluding sentences

Your final statement should conclude your paragraph logically. Conclusion sentences can restate main idea of your paragraph, state an opinion, make a prediction, give advice, etc. New ideas should not be presented in your concluding sentence.

# Conclusion Paragraphs

Your conclusion paragraph should logically conclude your essay, just like your conclusion sentences logically conclude your body paragraphs. The conclusion paragraph should begin by restating your thesis, and then you should broaden back out to a general topic. End with a closing statement.

## Restate your thesis

The first sentence of your concluding paragraph should restate your thesis.

### Example: Restated thesis

Thesis: Some of the most impactful inventions of the nineteenth century that changed the way we live were the telephone, the bicycle, and plastic.

Restated Thesis: It is obvious that these three nineteenth-century inventions dramatically changed our lifestyles.

The thesis changed by implying the main points, instead of stating them directly. Even though the words were changed, the overall meaning did not change. Other ways to restate a thesis include reversing the order of the clauses or using different word forms (e.g., adjective to noun: essential>the importance).

## **Apply your thesis to general contexts**

Connect your thesis back to the general topics you mentioned in your introduction.

## **Give a closing statement**

Your concluding statement is very similar to the concluding sentence of a body paragraph except that you will not restate your main idea at the very end of your paper. Your closing statement can be a prediction, suggestion, or opinion.

# A Shifting Structure

This structure is sometimes referred to as a traditional "five-paragraph essay." When you write a five-paragraph essay, your organization is very predictable. There is always one introduction paragraph with the thesis at the end, body paragraphs that each develop one topic related to the thesis, and a conclusion paragraph that begins with a restatement of the thesis. This structure is excellent to use when you write **short** essays (e.g., essays for AA/AB, the TOEFL independent essay, etc.).

By properly using a five-paragraph essay structure, you show that you understand the basics of American English writing. This foundation is important because once you can write a solid five-paragraph essay, then you can expand it without confusing your reader.

In **longer** academic essays, the structure has to become more flexible. Imagine an eight-page research paper with only five paragraphs! The topic and the length is too complex for a five-paragraph structure. Longer essays may have more than one paragraph for the introduction, headings may signal major parts of the essay, or one topic may be developed over several paragraphs. Do not be surprised if your advanced writing teachers ask you to stop using the five-paragraph essay for your writing assignments as you start writing longer academic essays.

Your college teachers may ask you to write something other than an essay (e.g., a literary analysis, reflection, chapter summary, etc.). Often, these other types of writing assignments will have an entirely

different structure. One of the most essential steps to success when you write in college is to clearly understand the professor's expectations. If your professor shows you a sample of what you need to write, you should use the sample to help you understand what your professor expects.

This book emphasizes the importance of analyzing model writing because that will help you know how to write whatever you need to write in college, regardless of the structure of the assignment.

Consider how the following essay starts to break the patterns of a typical five-paragraph essay. The structure is less predictable, but it still follows the same general principles of good essay writing that you have learned.



# Example Essay

## Rain's Journey back to the Clouds

Water is essential to sustain human life. Water is used for drinking, cooking, bathing, growing food, cooling, manufacturing (cement, glass, plastic, paper, etc.), and creating energy (hydroelectric and geothermal). This life-sustaining liquid covers 70% of the surface of our planet (Oki & Kim, 2017) and is found in the form of rivers, rain, glaciers, clouds, oceans, lakes, underground aquifers, snow, and even as dewdrops on the morning grass. What's interesting is that it doesn't stay in one form for too long. Snow melts, water vapor in the sky falls to Earth as rain, rivers flow into the ocean, ground water bubbles up to the surface through springs and geysers, and lakes constantly lose water into the atmosphere. This process of water changing from one form to another as it moves through the Earth's environmental systems is called the "water cycle" or the "hydrologic cycle" (Micklin, 1996, p. 285). The hydrologic cycle has many different parts but, simply put, it is a repeating process of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation.

Before examining each part of the water cycle, it is important to recognize the importance of the cycle and the conditions required to maintain it. Much of life is sustained with fresh water: humans need fresh water to drink and plants need fresh water in order to grow. However, a large majority of the Earth's water is found in the oceans, and ocean water is too salinated to meet many of the functions that we depend on water for (Micklin, 1996). Through the natural process

of evaporation, ocean water is desalinated as it is taken from oceans into the atmosphere; as water in the atmosphere condenses and returns to Earth's surface as rain and snow, it returns as fresh water (Micklin, 1996), which can be used to meet the functions we need. In this way, "the water cycle may be thought of as a giant natural machine, running on solar energy..." (Micklin, 1996, p. 286) that makes it possible to use and reuse the precious water sources we have available.

The conditions required for the water cycle are having available water and the correct surface temperature. Many other planets, even if water existed on them, would not be able to sustain a hydrologic cycle because the temperatures are too extreme. "The Planet Earth has a particularly vigorous hydrology because [of] its surface temperature ...As a result of this circumstance, water in the Earth's hydrosphere occurs in all three phases and is readily transformed from one phase to another" (Dooge, 1984, p. 325). Thus Earth provides the perfect environment to be able to cycle and recycle water from one form to another, and as already mentioned, human life depends on the ability to do so. Each of the steps in the water cycle focuses on moving water through these phases. What follows is an explanation of each of the phases.

### Evaporation

Evaporation is how water molecules get into the atmosphere. Depending on various factors (temperature, humidity, wind speed, and radiation), water molecules found on the surface of the Earth absorb kinetic energy ("Water Cycle," 2014) and become part of the atmosphere in a gaseous state. It may not seem like a significant step of the water cycle because evaporation is not readily observable, but over 450,000 km<sup>3</sup> of water annually leave the oceans through evaporation (Micklin, 1996). This significantly contributes to the water in the atmosphere. Water also enters the atmosphere when ice and glaciers evaporate (called sublimation) or when plants release

water through their leaves (called transpiration), but these processes are typically referred to in a general sense as total evaporation (Micklin, 1996). These processes of evaporation form a large part of the hydrologic cycle, supplying water vapor for the next stage: condensation.

### Condensation

The next phase of the water cycle is condensation. Once water molecules are in the atmosphere, they stay in a gaseous state until they lose energy and cool down. Water molecules condense as they transition to a liquid state ("Water Cycle," 2014). Condensation may be the simplest stage of the water cycle because it mainly occurs based on temperature. When moist air cools, the water molecules in the air turn from a gas into a liquid. Condensation happens in many places that are easily observed, like on a glass of water with very cold water in it. Sometimes drops of water will form on the outside of the glass because there was water in the air around the cup. The same thing happens on a larger scale with clouds. Water in the air cools and collects on particles of dust, dirt, or even smoke that are suspended in the atmosphere, forming clouds (U.S. Geological Survey, 2016). Condensed water molecules move around inside of clouds. These "cloud particles" often bump into one another and stick together until they form raindrops, snowflakes, or hailstones that are heavy enough to fall back to the Earth.

### Precipitation

Precipitation is the next stage of the water cycle. In this stage of the water cycle, water that was lost into the atmosphere via evaporation returns to the Earth via precipitation. There are many different forms of precipitation: rain, snow, hail, sleet, and mist. However, not all water that accumulates in clouds falls back to the Earth in the form of precipitation. Sometimes clouds will simply seem to disappear as the water that has condensed in them heats up and

re-evaporates back into the atmosphere. This evaporated water has the potential to condense back into clouds later and fall as precipitation (USGS, 2016). The condensed water that does fall from clouds will eventually make its way back into the atmosphere either by transpiration or as it evaporates from the soil or ocean where it collects after it falls ("Water Cycle," 2014).

Sometimes precipitation may also start in one form, but change into another later. For example, if the temperature rises during a snowstorm, the snowflakes may melt as they fall and become rain or, if temperatures become cold enough during a rainstorm, the droplets may freeze in the air to form shards of ice (USGS, 2016). This complex process of precipitation is how the water cycle is able to repeat itself indefinitely, without needing additional water to be added into it.

### Conclusion

These phases of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation happen continually. They also happen simultaneously. As water evaporates into the atmosphere, there is already water condensing into clouds. As some clouds form, others are already beginning to precipitate. While water evaporates from some places more quickly than others and while some places on Earth receive more precipitation than others, the water cycle is, overall, very well balanced. It is so balanced that we've always had the same amount on our home planet. "The global water cycle is in balance, so that on average over the years precipitation equals evaporation....The hydrologic cycle for practical purposes is a closed system with the amount of water in it of fixed volume" (Micklin, 1996, p. 286). The process happens in such balanced proportions that our total amount of water is conserved without losing water. The cycle has been repeating itself for as long as the Earth has been in existence. Its existence is what makes humans' existence a possibility. In comparison to the other planets in the Milky Way, Earth has the right conditions to sustain a hydrologic cycle and keep humans and plants

alive.

# Personal Statements

Personal statements are writing tasks that require the writer to describe their experiences, characteristics, purpose, or plans. These types of writing are common for job and school applications. While there is a lot of variation in the prompts and expectations, there are some key things writers need to know about this style of writing.

# Example Personal Statement

Since 2016, I have found great interest in the field of bionic prosthetics. Thanks to participating in church activities and community service programs, I met limbless people who have sadly not been able to rely on the right medical and technological support to improve their current lives. I have been able to go through their daily routines and help them in their daily struggles, with things as simple as changing clothes or going out for a walk. Thanks to those small experiences, I have gained tremendous concern for these people and the solution that could give them a promising future. The growing sympathy for this kind of people has led me to believe that medicine and technology should have a reinforced focus for them. Ever since, I have slowly increased my knowledge in general about neuroscience, bionics, and the relation between muscle memory and nerve impulse sensors. Including myself in this matter is my main academic priority as well.

I have strong reasons that make me believe BYUI has the right program in Electric Engineering for me. My main goal as a university student is to apply all of my knowledge and help in the development of bionic prosthetics for people in need of them. This subject is highly interesting to me, and the Bachelor's Degree Program in Electrical Engineering at your school is very attractive. I am a person who can persist and sustain my passion for this matter, and that will help me to be a successful student and never forget the importance of this work. Thanks to other experiences and the opportunity to serve as a missionary for the Church of Jesus-Christ, I have been able to develop interpersonal skills that help me understand teammates, peer

members, and people, in general, I work with, making me a good team worker that always focuses on people's necessities. I have grit and love to enjoy whatever I propose myself to do. Through community service I have grown in empathy, through sports I have learned to follow a constant learning curve, through work I have thrived, and because of my mother, I have gained ever-augmenting care for other's wellbeing.

Obtaining academic knowledge in the subject will exponentially prepare me to reach this dream that I have. In my opinion, as well, the field of Bionic Prosthetics will grow in demand for Electrical Engineers who have specializations in human biology and neuroscience. I believe that starting my career as a BYUI student will be an important milestone in order to achieve my goal and help the people in need of technology to better their lives and not be forgotten by society. Thanks to advances in technology, the future can and will offer great opportunities to use enhanced technology and make it more accessible for people around the world. My goal is to be part of that process, and I am sure I will achieve that goal.



# Types of Personal Statements

There are different situations that would require a personal statement, each of which would have slightly different approaches. The most common types of personal statements are: cover letters, admissions essays, and statements of purpose. In all three of these situations, you as a writer are trying to convince the reader to invest in you by showing evidence of your ability and potential.

While the exact specifications of these writing tasks will vary, all of them expect the writer to disclose personal information and respond to the prompt clearly and fully. The idea of sharing details about your life or "bragging" about your qualities can feel deeply uncomfortable for many people. It is therefore important to remember the purpose of a personal statement. This type of writing exists to provide the reader with relevant information about you that would set you apart from others. A personal statement stands in conjunction with the rest of an application and transforms that data into a full picture of you as a person and how you would fit into the institution.

[The Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) has some excellent personal statement advice and examples.

## Admissions Essay

An admission essay is part of the application to a college or university. The school will have access to a lot of information about you from the rest of your application, but this is your opportunity to present your full self. Think of it as a written interview where you get to provide

more details about yourself that add to their understanding of how you would fit in the college environment.

The admissions essay typically prompts you to talk about a specific aspect of yourself that they would not know about from just your transcript and demographic information. The question may be about your goals, overcoming past challenges, service, or any other attribute the college views as being essential for success in that specific school.

Every university will have different expectations for how many admission essays you submit. They will also have varying word or character counts. It is important for you to use that limited space wisely to really persuade the reader that you are an ideal future student.

Examples of admission essay prompts include:

1. Many students submit applications to several colleges. What will determine which one you will choose to attend? Please be specific in your response.
2. Describe a specific time when you were aware of a need in your family, school, or community. How did you respond to that need?
3. Tell us about a time when you did not achieve a goal or experienced a difficult challenge. How did you recover from this experience? What did you learn from this and how will it influence your future reactions to challenges?
4. Discuss an area of interest that you find really engaging. Why is this topic so fascinating to you? What do you do to learn more about this topic?

# Cover Letter

Cover letters serve a similar function to an admissions essay. This type of personal statement goes along with your resume or curriculum vitae to give a more complete description of you and why you would be the best choice for the position. Again, it serves as a written interview that allows a potential employer to narrow down the search to candidates that would be most competitive.

In today's world of online submitted job applications, the resume or CV will get you through the initial sorting of applicants if the necessary experience is listed and certain buzz words are mentioned. The cover letter then discriminates between the applicants based on their character and personal alignment with the business.

Therefore, it is important to fully research the business you are applying for and to tailor your cover letter to the specific company. You can do this by looking at the mission or vision statements on the company website's About Us page. You can also learn about specific current projects and reference them in your cover letter. The cover letter is your way of showing that you really understand what the business is about and how you could contribute to it.

Cover letters do not generally have specific prompts. However, if the prompt were to be articulated, it would be something along the lines of:

1. How do your experience and your skills qualify you for this role and why should we choose you instead of the many other applicants?

That being said, some specialized careers may include a short written response to a question. For example, a teacher may be asked to provide their philosophy on learning.

# Statement of Purpose

Finally, there are times when you may be asked to write a more general personal statement. This might be as part of an application for a scholarship, a nomination to receive an award, a promotion, or an investment pitch. It may also be part of your personal goal setting routine.

The statement of purpose is slightly different than the other two personal statements because it is more focused on the present and future goals rather than your past experience. Like a cover letter, there is unlikely to be a specific prompt to respond to. However, you can approach a statement of purpose by thinking about these questions:

1. Where do you see yourself in (number) of years?
2. How do you plan to achieve your goals?

# Organization for Comprehensive Personal Statement

To write a personal statement, let's begin with a general, comprehensive approach. This means that rather than develop your statement for a specific purpose, you will consider how you would respond to the three main personal statement types in general.

## The Hook

A personal statement needs a hook, just like any other type of writing. In fact, a personal statement is almost more in need of getting the reader's attention early because you want to be memorable among the many statements the reviewers will see. While this can be done in the usual ways you have learned for writing hooks, one of the most common types is the use of an anecdote. An **anecdote** is simply an interesting and relevant true story. A personal statement often uses a specific story to illustrate important attributes or to create an organization for highlighting experience.

## The Thesis

Your personal statement should have a clear sentence that directly expresses your purpose. Your goal should be abundantly clear in this sentence and all other points in your personal statement need to

support this main idea.

## Supporting Ideas

The remainder of your personal statement should focus on clearly establishing your qualifications and experience, demonstrating your character and personal qualities, and indicating your potential for growth. This may be done with a variety of examples or one extended description that highlights all of the necessary traits that set you apart.

## Conclusion

Finally, your comprehensive statement should have a concluding sentence that recommends you to the reader. This final sentence should be memorable and emphasize your purpose in sending this information.

## Writing a Comprehensive Personal Statement

Here are some things to keep in mind as you write this general form of a personal statement.

1. The terms *general* and *comprehensive* here are about purpose, not content. This version is meant to be a starting point for you to use when you are called on to provide a personal statement. Therefore, the examples, reasons, and descriptions should be powerful, clear, and detailed. Once you have a comprehensive statement you are happy with, it will be easier to make adjustments to it for a specific situation.
2. Because it is a *personal* statement, remember to focus on yourself and present yourself honestly and fully. You do not

need to adhere to the same rigid writing style as the typical academic writing.

3. Your writing should be full of energy. You want to present the best version of yourself in the writing. If you think of this as a preliminary interview, you can imagine the combination of positivity and professionalism you would want to present. Especially if you are sharing an experience that had some negative aspects, remember to focus on the positive side and the lessons learned.
4. Make it stand out! Imagine sitting in an office for hours looking at short essay after short essay. You are trying to narrow down the search for a new employee. As a writer, you need to pop off of the page and share something that will stay with the reader.

# Organization for Personal Statement with Prompt

Once you have your more general personal statement, you will need to tailor it for specific audiences. This means that whenever you are asked to submit a statement, you make adjustments to your personal statement to fit the requirements, expectations, or tone of the unique situation.

## Specific Prompts

There may be times when you will need to start from scratch because there is a specific prompt or the circumstance renders the general statement irrelevant, but you will usually have at least some part of the general statement that you can use as a starting point. This will typically be the case when the person or organization requesting the personal statement is looking for specific information that would not be included in a resume that is necessary for the applicant.

Examples of information they would try to find through providing a specific prompt would be:

- How you respond to challenges
- Your philosophy on a topic and whether or not it aligns with their own
- Intentions and long-term perspective
- Signals that indicate how well you would mesh with an existing team



When you face a specific personal statement prompt, be sure to look at each part of the question and consider:

1. What does the reviewer expect to learn from my answer?
2. How would my answer separate me in a positive way from other applicants?
3. How to I show myself in the best light in this question?
4. What information is not included in my personal data and resume that they already have access to?

## **Brainstorming**

Before you begin writing, break down the prompt into the individual pieces. Make sure that you fully understand what it is asking and that you include answers to every part of it. Once you have the prompt broken down into pieces, begin your brainstorm. Your brainstorm should give you a chance to write down all ideas you have about each section. At this stage, nothing is good or bad. The only purpose of the brainstorm is to get all of the ideas out of your head and onto paper. Then you can begin to look for patterns and evaluate the strength of the different points. You may want to mark the ideas you like so that they stand out. Then, review your general personal statement and identify any parts of it that would be useful in responding to this particular prompt.

## **Development**

Once you know what the reviewer wants to know and have brainstormed your ideas of your response, you need to consider how to develop those ideas further. To do this, consider the points in your brainstorm in terms of your motivation, your qualifications, and the expectations of the reviewer. Choose a limited number of items from your brainstorm to include. Because a personal statement is so brief, you want to thoughtfully construct your ideas.

As you develop your ideas, you may find yourself writing much more than you can actually include in your final product. This is ok during the drafting stage. You want to fully build a mental image for your reader, but you also want to discard the irrelevant points later. After you have drafted your ideas, think about these questions to eliminate the extra thoughts.

1. Does the reader *need* to know this?
2. Is anything here sufficiently included in the materials I have already submitted?
3. How does this sentence add to the reader's understanding of me?
4. Is the information memorable and unique?
5. Do I fully answer the question?

## **Cohesion**

The most important thing to remember as you finalize your personal statement is that it should feel very clear and direct. It should be obvious to the reader why you included specific details. Every idea needs to point back to the prompt. The response should show unity in the tone and content. You do not have room for any stray ideas in this short of a writing task. After you think you have answered the question as completely as you can, give yourself time to look over it again for cohesion and/or ask for someone to review it for you.

# Revision

## Review the Prompt

One strategy for revision that may help you is to highlight the different points of the prompt in different colors. Then use those same colors to highlight the sentences in your response that relate to those parts of the prompt. For example, a prompt may ask you to describe an award you received, what you did to earn it, and what resources you used to achieve success. You may mark any ideas in your writing that relate to the purpose of the award in yellow, the narrative/process sentences in green, and the resources in blue. This will help you recognize if there are any unmarked sentences that might not address the prompt. It can also help you to see if ideas are repeated or underdeveloped.

## Word Choice

Because personal statements are often limited in terms of character or word count, you want to be sure that you get the most impact out of the words you choose to use. Choosing a word that is more precise in its meaning and connotation will help you to use the space wisely.

# Example Personal Statement

## Exercise: Analyze a personal statement

1. How does the writer introduce herself?
2. What information do you think the prompt asked for?
3. Are the ideas sequenced in a logical order?
4. Is there a clearly stated purpose (conclusion) in this personal statement?
5. What suggestions would you give this writer to improve the personal statement?

Everyone has his own dream. I have my own dream as well. I look forward to returning to my career life in the USA which was my lifestyle in [home country] before I immigrated here. I was a [medical] specialist in [home country]. I had been working in a hospital for more than 20 years. I accumulated a lot of experience on how to diagnose disease faster and more correctly. Also, I collected many treatment skills for how to solve patients' problems. I love to help people and make my life more meaningful. In addition, my children are my internal locus of control and keep me motivated. Using other words, I want to be a good example for my children. Let them know that their mother is an eternal learner, so they will learn from me and love to study and maintain good habits in their whole life.

I know myself well. I am a self-disciplined person, I will focus on what I need to do and should do as long as I set my goal. I believe that I can

be successful in anything I want to do because of my self-discipline quality. For example, I had decided to get my master's degree after I graduated and had been working in [Hospital] for more than 10 years. Then, I had been studying and teaching by myself very hard. excepting for working, eating, and sleeping, I had used almost all my free time to concentrate on my study and goal. I failed the postgraduate entrance exam for the first time. Then I took the GRE again, then I failed again. But I hadn't given up, I just continued to do it and even studied harder and more diligently. Finally, I passed the GRE test and got into [University] in 2000. Finally, I gained my master's degree in 2006. So, I believe that I can pass the TOEFL test too.

If I can reach above 80 scores in the TOEFL test, then I can apply to the Physical Assistant (PA) Program at the University of Washington, which is located in Seattle. If I can get into University for my PA program, I can learn and practice all my medical knowledge and skills in English again. Specifically, I have already collected many experiences and skills to help my classmates, and they can help me to practice every medical term in English too. There is a saying that says "If people are learning knowledge alone without friends, he will become a lonely and ignorant person." So, I love to go to school to study knowledge with my classmates together. Also, being a PA shade will be a good way to practice the process of how to diagnose and treat patients better in the USA. I have already prepared all the documents I need for applying for a PA program online. The only thing I still need to do is pass my TOEFL test performance, then I will be ready for the application of my PA program. I know how to use my experiences and skills to help people after I gain the PA license after a couple of years, just like I used to service people in [home country]. Except for reputation and finance, I think people also pursue a sense of achievement. The sense of accomplishment is the need for everyone. I desire to be needed with my skill and knowledge by people. So, I can persist in my study, even though the process is hard and rough. I will keep doing it till I make it.

# Cause-Effect Essays

What makes certain things happen? What happens because of certain things? These questions will help you write a cause/effect essay.

# Example Cause-Effect Essay

## Exercise: Analyze an essay

1. Does the introduction provide the general information a reader needs in order to understand the topic?
2. Does the introduction end with an effective thesis? Does it match the style of the essay?
3. Do each of the body paragraphs begin with an effective topic sentence?
4. Are the body paragraphs sequenced in a logical order?
5. Look at each body paragraph. Do the supporting sentences support the topic sentence?
6. Look at each body paragraph. Are the supporting sentences sequenced in a logical order?
7. Look at each body paragraph. Is there enough development? Are there more details or examples that would help the reader?
8. Look at each body paragraph. Does the concluding sentence close the paragraph logically?
9. Does the conclusion paragraph start by restating the thesis?
10. Does the conclusion paragraph have a suggestion, prediction, or opinion at the end?

## Chronic Stress

The stress response has always been part of our nature, and isn't necessarily bad. Our body responding to stressors is actually something that serves as a defense in times of danger. When you

encounter a stressor, the brain signals the production of stress hormones such as adrenaline. In turn, these hormones stimulate the heart causing an increased heartbeat and a rush of blood to the parts of the body that need to activate to help us fight or flee (Pietrangelo & Watson, 2017). In a time of stress, the body prepares to defend, to think and react quickly. Such a reaction is necessary for survival when the stressor is something dangerous like a bear. However, people are experiencing more stress today from non-dangerous situations, and this stress for many people is prolonged, which is not healthy for our bodies. Why is this happening? According to the research of psychologists, many factors can cause chronic stress. Work and major life changes can be a cause of stress, and in turn, stress is able to exert a strong influence on a person's health and behavior.

### Causes of Stress

In addition to changes in life, work often causes stress. There can be many reasons for this. First, work occupies an important place in people's lives, and when they really desire to succeed in their work, they worry about their performance or finishing projects successfully. For many Americans, "workplace ambitions can lead to feelings of self-induced pressure to perform" (Snyder, 2017, para. 3). This desire to excel can be seen as a good stressor, but nonetheless causes stress. Another reason that stress can come from work is that financial security is tied to a person's job. For families, this financial security often comes from the parents' employment, and any member of the family can experience stress due to work challenges because they are perceived as threats to the financial security of the family (Snyder, 2017).

Finally, stress comes from work for many people that feel their supervisor has unrealistic expectations or demands too much from them. When people feel unable to succeed at a task, stress is a very natural response. For these reasons, stress can be induced by work. Major life changes are one of the principal causes of stress.



Major life changes include moving to a new home, getting married, pregnancy, or changing jobs. One of the most common life changes that causes major stress is the death of a loved one (Jones, 2016), and it is even more stressful if the loved one is a spouse (Alton, 2018). Especially in the case of a spouse dying, this type of major life event causes stress because there are many changes that occur suddenly. Losing a spouse affects family stability, emotional support, and often financial support (Alton, 2018). These events are also stressful because there are many legal and financial matters to arrange that can be very confusing. There are contractual obligations that must be met as they are set forth in the deceased person's will as well as claiming money from life insurance policies or trust funds. In addition to these matters being new and confusing, they also have serious consequences, so people feel added pressure to take care of these issues properly. It is little wonder that for people who experience major life events, stress is sure to follow.

### Effects of Stress

Constant stress on the body has serious physical health effects. Some of the negative physical effects of chronic stress are due to the acute stress response, which hampers digestion, increases blood pressure, makes the heart beat faster, and floods your body with extra chemicals (Snyder, 2017). This makes the heart work much harder than it needs to, and it's not healthy to be in a constant, heightened state. That is why one of the major long-term health effects of stress is cardiovascular disease, including heart disease, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and stroke (Marks, 2021). Other physical effects of chronic stress can be caused by the way people cope with stress. For example, unhealthy eating (combined with a lack of exercise) can lead to obesity. Chronic stress can significantly impact a person's physical health.

Mental health problems are also among the major negative effects of chronic stress. Depression and anxiety are very common in

individuals who constantly report high levels of stress (Snyder, 2017). Many college students offer a sad example of how chronic stress can have these effects. One study found that the majority of college freshman reported an increase in stress from before their enrollment to after their first semester; they also reported increased levels of depression, anxiety, and isolation (Snyder, 2017). Many research studies have shown that this connection is more than simply a correlation (Alton, 2018). These mental health effects are clearly a result of the stress many people experience.

In addition to health, stress can negatively affect human behavior. The stress response also has a role to play here. When the body reacts to stress, blood is pulled from the prefrontal cortex and goes to the emotion centers of our brain (Snyder, 2017). This affects the logical processes of the human mind. Without enough blood flowing to the logical center of the brain, people often lack mental clarity or the ability to make decisions well. As a result, people who suffer from chronic stress may not seem to make the best decisions. They may rush into a decision or have a hard time prioritizing what needs to be done. Many times, they do not fully consider the implications of an action the same way that they would have if they weren't under so much stress.

In summary, stress has natural causes and can have lasting effects. Stress can come as a result of work or changes in life and it can lead to significant health problems and changes in behavior. Because stress is so common for people living in our fast-paced lives, we need to understand the realities of chronic stress before we take steps to try to change it. Remember that stress isn't bad; it's prolonged exposure to stressors without a break that really does the damage. Once the realities are understood, we should take steps to control our own stress levels so we can live a long, healthy, and happier life.

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# Prewriting

In the prewriting stage of a researched essay, you will do a lot of reading and information gathering. In this stage of the process, you should keep your information organized carefully so that you can find it when it comes time to write your essay.

## Understand the assignment

In your essay, you will describe either the causes/effects of a topic. The topic may be a problem (e.g., poverty), but may also be a good thing (e.g., economic stability). You are not trying to solve a problem in your essay. In shorter essays, you may be asked to only consider causes or only consider effects. In longer essays, it may be more appropriate to consider both. Always be sure to understand what your teacher expects for the scope of your essay.

## Research

Remember that after you do enough preliminary research to brainstorm and choose your focus, you should do more detailed research about your topic so that you can make your outline.

## Brainstorm

Simple Google searches with either “causes of” or “effects of” might be a good place to start if you aren’t sure what to write about. You

may also participate in a discussion with a friend or classmate to try to generate possible topics. Consider discussing trying to answer some of questions like the following:

## **Generating Topics**

- What is a natural phenomenon that impacts nature or humans? (e.g., tsunamis)
- What is a phenomenon that impacts people socially? (e.g., bullying)
- What is a phenomenon that impacts relationships? (e.g., miscommunication)
- What is a phenomenon in business that makes companies successful? (e.g., marketing)

You could also start by thinking about positive benefits that people look for or problems we face.

## **Choose a focus**

Then examine the causes/effects of that topic. Many students get confused writing this type of essay because they choose a topic and develop body paragraphs about the causes as well as the causes of the causes. Put your topic in the center and build around it.

## **Outline**

Start with your topic sentences and thesis. Add questions or quotes to help you develop each of your ideas.

## 1 Exercise: Complete an outline

*Use the topic sentences to create the thesis for this outline.*

- TH:
- TS: Good interior design comes from knowing principles of unity and contrast.
- TS: Respecting personal taste is another way to achieve a good design.
- TS: A good design can help people feel more relaxed.
- TS: A good design can also facilitate the functionality of a room.

## Introduction

Your introduction should describe in general terms the topic you will write about in your essay. At the end of your introduction paragraph, you should write your thesis. The thesis should clearly state a cause or effect relationship.

- A poor diet, excessive stress, and sleep deprivation cause attention problems in school.
- Some of the effects of social media include having more access to information, easier communication, and an ability to share photos and videos.

Here are some phrases that are useful for writing a cause/effect thesis:

- Attention problems in school are **caused by** a poor diet, excessive stress, and ...
- **The positive effects of** social media include...

## 2 Exercise: Revise thesis statements

*Revise the theses to be more effective for a cause/effect essay.*

1. Here are the three negative effects of overfishing.
2. It's required a global awareness to stop this uncontrollable problem which affects not only us, but also, those who come.
3. It affects the person in different ways and can affect every part of the body because the cancer can expand all over affecting all your organs.
4. Therefore, the mental and physical effects, using a smartphone before bed worsens sleep quality, some of the most common effect include not concentrate and poor memory on study or work, obesity risk and increased risk of having an accident.
5. All forms of addiction are dangerous and difficult to get rid of but the most common problem in a society is the problem with alcohol abuse.
6. The most common eating disorders are anorexia and bulimia nervosa and the most important factors that cause it are a psychological, environmental, and biologic-genetical issues.
7. The impact of social media in our lives can be in positive and negative ways.

## 3 Exercise: Complete an outline

*Use the topic sentences to create the thesis for this outline.*

TH:

- TS: Depression can be caused by genetics.
- TS: Another cause of depression is chemicals in the brain.
- TS: A final cause of depression is due to circumstance.

## Body

Your body paragraphs should explain how or why your thesis sentence is true. As you plan each of your body paragraphs, remember that using sources will make your writing more credible and interesting. Use sources properly so that you do not plagiarize.

## Conclusion

Your conclusion paragraph should start by restating your thesis. Then, you should speak about the person/event in more general terms and apply their situation to the world more generally. End with a concluding statement.

### 4 Exercise: Give feedback about an outline

*Read the basic outline below. What would you do to help a classmate or friend that wrote an outline like this?*

- TH: The causes more relevant about Pollution around the world are air, water, and
- ground pollution.
- TS: Air pollution is one the causes of pollution, and it can cause many diseases.
- TS: Water pollution is the second cause of pollution, and it can cause harm to
- marine animals.
- TS: Finally, ground pollution is the third cause of pollution, and it is the most common for the people.
- TS: Air, water, and ground pollution are the causes more common in the world
- about pollution.

As you outline your body paragraphs and choose research, make sure



the quotes you use support your topic sentence.

### **Example: Outline with sources for a body paragraph**

- TH: Stress affects our body’s muscular, cardiovascular, and chemical systems.
  - TS: One of the most obvious effects of stress is muscle tension.
    - “When the body is stressed, muscles tense up. Muscle tension is almost a reflex reaction to stress – the body’s way of guarding against injury and pain” (APA, n.d., “Musculoskeletal,” para. 1).

### **5 Exercise: Choose sources that support a topic sentence**

*Choose source material from the quotes below that would support the following topic sentence. (Don’t choose an entire quote if the whole quote doesn’t support the TS.)*

TS: Volcanic eruptions can occur due to an increase in the amount of magma in the chamber.

- “A volcano is essentially an opening or a vent through which this magma and the dissolved gases it contains are discharged” (Killinc, 1999, para. 2).
- “If the density of the magma between the zone of its generation and the surface is less than that of the surrounding and overlying rocks, the magma reaches the surface and erupts” (Killinc, 1999, para. 3).
- “As...magma moves toward the surface, the solubility of the water in the magma decreases, and so the excess water separates from the magma in the form of bubbles. As the magma moves closer to the surface, more and more water

exsolves from the magma, thereby increasing the gas/magma ratio in the conduit. When the volume of bubbles reaches about 75 percent, the magma disintegrates to pyroclasts (partially molten and solid fragments) and erupts explosively” (Killinc, 1999, para. 5).

- “These processes are obviously difficult to observe. The third process that causes volcanic eruptions is an injection of new magma into a chamber that is already filled with magma of similar or different composition. This injection forces some of the magma in the chamber to move up in the conduit and erupt at the surface (Killinc, 1999, para. 6).
- “Although volcanologists are well aware of these three processes, they cannot yet predict a volcanic eruption. But they have made significant advances in forecasting volcanic eruptions. Forecasting involves probable character and time of an eruption in a monitored volcano” (Killinc, 1999, para. 7).

# Writing

Now that your planning stage is complete, you can begin writing your draft.

As you write your introduction, think about the information your reader needs to understand your topic so they feel ready for the thesis when they read it. Read the following thesis. What information would help a reader understand the general topic so he is ready for the thesis?

TH: Positive urban development is the result of careful planning, wise investing, and a good understanding of the needs of the area.

The reader needs to know what the author means by “positive urban development” so that when they read the thesis, they will be ready to learn about the causes of this type of development. The introduction may start discussing how cities change generally and then introduce the idea of positive changes like growth, stability, and safety. Then the reader should feel prepared for this thesis.

## **1 Exercise: Brainstorm background knowledge for an introduction**

*What does the reader need to know before they encounter any of these thesis statements in an introduction paragraph?*

1. TH: The imbalance of brain chemicals, personality and family relationships are important causes of depression.
2. TH: Reading can help stimulate your brain, reduce stress, and increase knowledge.
3. TH: Obesity in the US can be caused by lifestyle or genetics and it, in turn, causes a considerable number of people to develop diseases.

## **2 Exercise: Analyze an introduction paragraph**

*Read the following introduction paragraph. Were you prepared for the thesis? Why? (Or why not?)*

Climate change has become one of the major problems that the planet earth is facing. Scientists have observed changes in rainfall patterns, increase droughts in some inland areas, rising of sea level due to flooding from storms, and other unusual patterns in natural phenomena. Researchers have also discovered that the planet is increasingly heating up. Oceans and land are warmer than in the past. To illustrate this, scientists have discovered that there has been an increase of 1.71 degree in the temperature between the years 1880 and 2016 in both land and oceans (Pappas, 2017). The planet needs to maintain a certain temperature for its balance and for the benefit of all living creatures. As many wonder about the roots of this phenomenon on the planet, science has shown that human activities and natural events are causes of global warming.

As you write your body paragraphs, keep your focus on explaining

how and why your topic sentences are true. It can be easy to get distracted when incorporating research into body paragraphs, but make sure everything you write supports the topic sentence.

### **3 Exercise: Analyze a body paragraph**

*What kind of advice would you give the author of this body paragraph?*

Growing up bilingual has cognitive benefits. Humans have the capacity to learn languages. How much we develop this capacity relies on the context and experiences each person has in his/her life. Dr. Bialystok in her research assessed a group of monolingual and bilingual children with specific tasks. Children needed to have flexibility in problem solving, inhibit irrelevant information, and recognition. When the rules changed, the bilingual children were outstanding in their tasks. She attributed the bilingual children's abilities in these tasks to their ability to switch between languages and select the appropriate words to use, due to their cognitive development. Bilingual people have the ability to hold two different things in their brain at the same time, and switch between them when they need it. Bialystok (2012) cited several studies that found bilinguals perform better in the cognitive and metalinguistic measures, divergent thinking, and creativity. She explained these advantages are because bilingual have mutual interference between languages to force them to adopt strategies that accelerate cognitive development.

#### **4 Exercise: Write a body paragraph**

*Return to the research about the causes of volcanic eruptions. Use the sources to develop a body paragraph that begins with this topic sentence:*

- A difference in density or air pressure can cause a volcanic eruption.

#### **5 Exercise: Write a conclusion**

*Read the following introduction paragraph for an essay about effects of sugar consumption. Write a conclusion paragraph for this essay.*

It is not surprising that sugar can trigger negatives consequences in our body. For that reason it is natural that people are concerned about sugar consumption. In 2008, Americans were consuming over 60 pounds of added sugar per year, which is equivalent to 19 teaspoons or 306 calories. (Gunnars, 2017). This habit has taken hold of the conscience of the whole world. According to Gunnars, sugar consumption went down by 23% between the years 2000 and 2008, but ongoing intake levels are still way too high and are the principal factor in making people unhealthy (2017). Sugar in great quantities can lead to health problems, such as obesity, addiction and changes in your mood.

# Revising

## 1 Exercise: Check your essay

1. Does the introduction provide the general information a reader needs in order to understand the topic?
2. Does the introduction end with an effective thesis? Does it match the style of the essay?
3. Do each of the body paragraphs begin with an effective topic sentence?
4. Are the body paragraphs sequenced in a logical order?
5. Look at each body paragraph. Do the supporting sentences support the topic sentence?
6. Look at each body paragraph. Are the supporting sentences sequenced in a logical order?
7. Look at each body paragraph. Is there enough development? Are there more details or examples that would help the reader?
8. Look at each body paragraph. Does the concluding sentence close the paragraph logically?
9. Does the conclusion paragraph start by restating the thesis?
10. Does the conclusion paragraph have a suggestion, prediction, or opinion at the end?

## 2 Exercise: Peer review a body paragraph

Look at one of your body paragraphs with a partner. Is there enough support? Is the paragraph unified?

# Revise a Cause-Effect Essay

## Exercise: Revise an essay

Read the student essay. What suggestions would you give the author?

Many believe that doing regular exercise makes them happier or more active on that particular day. Working out not only means that people go to the gym or lift weights, it can be any active sport that requires active physical movements for at least 20 minutes long. Although, not a lot of people know that working out increases memory and productivity.

Most people choose to work out because they enjoy it. Exercising may seem like a boring or uncomfortable thing to do but many people find great fun and enjoyment in it. The people who enjoy exercising always make an extra effort to fit it in their schedule. So, this increases their physical wellness and their social wellness at the same time.

Another key reason why working out is a priority in our society because of peoples strong knowledge of the health benefits. Everyone knows that exercising improve one's health but fewer people know that it can even prevent different kinds of diseases, and even prevents ailments like diabetes, obesity, or high blood pressure (Why Exercise Is Wise, n.d.). Many elderly people nowadays suffer from physical problems, if they exercise wisely they will more than likely age better as your bones and joints will become stronger (Teens Health.org).



Something that has become more continuous and common in society are educational institutions and employers that make it a point to either require or highly advocate for greater health wellness in their organization or student body. Physical Education is mandatory in elementary and high schools, in most degree programs universities require health and wellness courses. According to Heidi Godman (n.d.) sports help students focus more and earn better grades at school than without it. Moreover, military service also requires an active lifestyle.

In conclusion, a lot of people agree with the statement that working out helps to improve the brain. People should take advantage of these benefits in the education systems where physical activity is a requirement for students

# Other Genres of Writing

In addition to the traditional drafted essays, there are times when you will be expected to write under specific constraints. This usually refers to time limits, but it can also mean that there are expectations on organization or content.

International students most often consider the TOEFL, but as you will see, the TOEFL is just one specific instance where these genre expectations can be seen.

# Timed Writing

Timed writing can take many forms, but the obvious unique factor of this type of writing is the fact that there is a limit on the amount of time you have to complete it. This most commonly occurs in an exam situation, where the tester is evaluating how well you understand a topic and/or can explain your thoughts without any external assistance. The amount of time and the expected length of your writing will vary based on the instructions.

You could expect to find a timed writing portion of a test or quiz in virtually any subject. It doesn't matter whether you plan to study business, engineering, music, or linguistics. Timed essays are used frequently to get you to analyze, argue, or create something with what you have learned. Essays push you to show more than just recognizing a correct answer.

## Step One: Recognize the constraints

This means that when you encounter a timed writing prompt, you should first think about the context.

- How much time do you have?
- What length of a response does the teacher expect?
- What aspect of my writing is most important to the teacher?
- Are there other sections of the test that you need to complete?
- Does the testing format provide spell check?

Usually you will know in advance that there will be a timed writing

component to an assessment, so you can think about these questions beforehand. This will help you prioritize your time.

## **Step Two: Organizing your ideas AND your time**

It is common for students to feel a sense of panic when they see a clock counting down the seconds during an exam. Because of this psychological pressure, it is easy to overlook a few important things.

First of all, an outline will *always* benefit you. You may think that the best idea is to immediately start writing because the time is limited, but that could lead to a very disorganized presentation of an answer. Read the prompt carefully and make a brief outline of ideas so that you know all parts of the prompt will be addressed and all of your most important details will be included.

Second, consider how to use the time as your ally. Rather than allowing it to control you, think of how you can use the time to keep yourself on track. For example, if the essay is only a small part of the total grade, control the amount of time you give yourself to write the answer. You might do this by answering that question first under a stricter time limit before you answer any of the multiple choice questions. Divide your the time you have to work with so you can work smarter.

As an example, you may have 30 minutes to complete an essay. In order to work quickly, you could follow a time schedule like this:

<b>Time (Counting down)</b>	<b>Task</b>
30:00-27:00	Write your thesis and topic sentences (outline)
27:00-20:00	Write your first body paragraph
20:00-13:00	Write your second body paragraph
13:00-8:00	Write your introduction paragraph
8:00-3:00	Write your conclusion paragraph
3:00-0:00	Revise and edit your essay

You will obviously need to structure your times differently depending on the length of time you have to work with. It may also be necessary to adjust times depending on what is most important to the teacher. For example, there may be a larger emphasis on accuracy, so you will need to give yourself more time to revise and edit.

### **Examples of timed writing prompts**

- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between Greek and Roman civilizations. Choose at least three aspects in your comparison. (Civilization-History)
- As part of a midterm, you would need to read and analyze financial statements. (Intro to Business)
- Analyze the rhetorical devices used in the poem above. Be sure to include at least 5 specific terms from the textbook in your analysis. (English Literature)
- Explain the process for prototype design. Include each step and a complete description of each stage of the process. (Engineering)
- Discuss the physiological and psychological changes that occur in humans between the ages of 18-25. (Psychology)

## **Student Choice (Pick Two)**

Because students are able to repeat University Prep, the class will vote each semester on two of these four short essays to write. This will hopefully create some additional different experiences for students taking the course more than once. It also gives the class an opportunity to focus on skills that feel most relevant to their future goals.

Please remember that self-plagiarism (resubmitting your own work for another grade) is unacceptable. You should begin each writing assignment from the very beginning.

# Creative Writing

While there may be some educational and professional settings that will encourage creative writing, the purpose of this practice is more about developing your own voice in writing. Creation in your second language is an important part of both establishing your sense of self and extending your language finesse without the pressure of grades or rigid structure of academic writing.

## Purpose

Creative writing is centered on the idea of expressing original ideas and reflecting on experiences. The most common purpose for creative writing is entertainment. This takes many forms, from novels to poetry to movie scripts to song lyrics to a personal history. In all of those forms (and many others), creative writing serves as a vehicle to share ideas and emotions with the audience. Creative writing also often has the purpose of description and reflection, which further connect the audience to your ideas by painting a picture with words in such a way that the reader can see or feel that same experience second-hand. Finally, creative writing is often for the purpose of self-expression. In these cases, the potential audience is less important than you as a writer having a space to explore your internal world through your own words.

In other words, the purpose of creative writing is a varied as the product itself. Although there are many types of creative writing, this chapter will only discuss the short story (fiction) and short memoir

(personal non-fiction).

## **1 Exercise: Creative Purpose**

You will need to write a creative essay for this assignment. The first step of the process is to choose a creative writing purpose by selecting one of the prompts below for your writing:

1. Focus your purpose on entertaining with a positive emotion at the center. Your purpose is to make your reader laugh, smile, and feel happy.
2. Focus your purpose on entertaining with surprise. This could be to shock your reader as in a scary story or to present a mystery that will be explained by the end.
3. Focus your purpose on connecting with the reader over self-expression about something difficult. This may take the form of sharing a disappointment, sadness, or struggle.
4. Focus your purpose on describing so carefully that the reader can picture all of the details. There might be some emotion or reflection involved, but the principle reason for writing is to transport a reader somewhere else.

## **Prewriting**

Although some creative writing can be spontaneous, for the purpose of this course, you will be producing planned and drafted creative work.

## **Genre Selection**

The first step is to decide what type of creative writing you will work on. This begins with deciding between fiction (not based on history or fact) and non-fiction (accurately presents true events). For this assignment, this becomes either a short story or a memoir.



A short story is a fictional writing that focuses on an isolated event (or a simplified series of events) and typically has few characters, but it is fully developed and unified.

A memoir is a true (or at least assumed to be true) retelling of a lived experience. A short memoir is focused on an episode (scene, incident, occurrence).

From here, you can decide on a more specific genre such as humor, romance, horror, action, drama, mystery, etc. Because this chapter is focused on *short* creative writing, you will want to choose the genre carefully so that you can fully develop your narrative in that amount of space. For example, you would not want to attempt to tell the whole story from beginning to end of how you and your significant other fell in love. Likewise, you would not want to try to fit the entirety of a complicated magic world into two pages of writing. Thinking of a specific situation (like an episode of a tv show) will help you to narrow down your ideas to a manageable story within your chosen genre.

## **2 Exercise: Narrowing by Genre**

Decide how you want to achieve your purpose either by telling a fictional story or personal events. The writing assignment is a two page paper, so consider the limits of how much story you can tell in that space.

## **Character & Setting**

Once the genre has been decided, brainstorming about character and setting begins. In order for creative writing to effectively connect with the audience, the reader needs to be able to visualize the story and understand the people involved. In a novel, you have plenty of space

to describe physical appearance, give examples of personality in different situations, and describe the full, detailed world inhabited by the characters. However, in a short story or memoir, you need to communicate only the essential points so that there is space for plot.

Because of this limited space, take time to brainstorm details about the people and places first. When you have a full mind map of everything you *could* include in the story, it will be much faster to identify the *essential* details that relate to the episodic plot you will write. First write all of the descriptions you can think of and mark the ones most related to the genre choice. You will then come back and make that selection even shorter after you have outlined the plot.

An additional point to deciding on character is deciding on the narrative style you will use. The most common styles are first person and third person narratives. A first person narrative is the story told with personal pronouns (I, my, me, etc) as if the main character is writing the story. A third person narrative is the story told as an outside observer (using third person pronouns such as he, she, it). This is a matter of preference in the perspective, but a successful story can be told in either style. The decision does need to be made before you begin writing however, because you must maintain that grammatical style.

## **Plot Outlining**

The importance of the outlining stage of writing becomes more clear when you have limited space. There is no room for extra ideas. You do not have the luxury of anything unnecessary. The shorter the word or page count, the more intentional you need to be about what details you will include.

Plot outlining begins with identifying the problem, conflict, or peak of drama at the center of the episode. This is known as the *story climax*, and it is the most critical part of the story because it answers both the

question *what happened* and *why does it matter*. In a humorous story, this would be the *punchline* or the moment that makes you laugh. In a dramatic story, it may be the moment the main character realizes the truth of the situation. You can think of it as a late thesis statement. It is the sentence, or sometimes paragraph, that is the whole purpose of the story. Everything before it builds up to this moment. The conclusion is the reaction to it.

Once the that point of the story has been established, you can work backward to brainstorm the steps leading up to it and the context of character and setting that create a sense of tension around that main point. Again, it may be easier to first write down all of the facts or minor events prior to the main event and all details from immediately after. Getting all of the ideas down on paper during the prewriting stage will clear your mind and you will be able to sort through the necessary and unnecessary.

### **3 Exercise: Creative Prewriting**

1. Take your initial purpose and genre plan and create a 1-2 sentence summary of what the story is about.
2. Create word webs to brainstorm details about characters, setting, and important plot points.
3. Carefully eliminate the unnecessary details.
4. Practice telling the story to a partner using only the remaining brainstorming details.
5. Add or delete any details based on your spoken draft.

## **Organization**

Creative writing is an excellent opportunity to practice "breaking the rules" of writing. It is a common saying that you have to know the rules in order to know how to effectively ignore or change them for a specific task. A great example of this principle can be seen in the

artwork of the famous painter Vincent van Gogh.

#### **4 Exercise: Artistic Freedom**

1. Take a look at some of van Gogh's early work on [this page from the van Gogh Museum](#).
2. Then click through to see his later self-portraits, landscapes, and floral artwork on [this page from the van Gogh Museum](#).
3. Discuss the differences and similarities between his early artwork and the paintings and drawings he created later in life.
4. How does this relate to writing?

Writing follows a similar pattern. You begin by learning very strict rules about punctuation, organization, appropriate length, etc. However, as you practice and explore and gain skills, you will see that there are many opportunities to break from the rigid structure and expectations to create something that is uniquely designed to fit the task.

This all goes to show that although creative writing is very free and open, there are elements of organization patterns that will be familiar to you from your heavily structured academic writing experiences.

#### **Hook**

Just as with an essay, a creative writing draft needs to begin with something that draws your attention. It is often very memorable and connects the reader immediately to the new world they have opened up. Take a little time to open a few different novels, blog posts, or magazines. You should be able to immediately spot the hook that convinces the reader to continue.

## **The problem/conflict**

The problem or conflict in a story is similar to a thesis statement. Everything in the story centers around a main event, issue, or individual. All of the details surrounding that idea are given only to create a richer description of the world so that the problem/conflict feels real to the reader. The story will arrive at a moment when the problem reaches its peak (climax), such as the reveal of the villain, the moment when the character falls in love, or the point when a major decision is made that changes everything.

## **The solution**

The solution is like the conclusion of an essay. It reminds you of how the characters got to the moment where the main problem was solved. It should feel like a natural end, where all the major points (topic sentences) have been addressed. Sometimes the solution includes a message or a clarifying theme (an implied main idea) that emphasizes to the reader a lesson that should have been learned after the experience.

## **5 Exercise: Outlining**

1. Rewrite your summary as a problem/conflict thesis statement.
2. Develop a hook connected to the thesis statement.
3. Write a brief conclusion to show how the story will end.
4. Develop the points left from the brainstorm into complete sentences.
5. Organize the outline logically.

## **Writing**

Aside from the usual practice in presenting clear ideas and logically organized connections between those ideas, creative writing is an

opportunity to practice two very useful writing skills.

The first writing skill that gets extra attention in creative writing is word choice. Creative writing should push you to expand your vocabulary and to understand the connotations of synonyms. Finding a more interesting word that conveys an additional meaning (ex. speak vs whisper vs mumble vs rant) can add depth to understanding without using a significant amount of space. This skill transfers very well to academic writing, where you often have strict length limitations and you need to reduce your word count to be more precise.

## **5 Exercise: Adding Detail**

Now that the outline is complete, revisit the word choice in your completed sentences to add more descriptive language. Don't just focus on adding adjectives and adverbs. Think about how synonyms with more specific connotations can add interest to all of the parts of speech.

As you add to the existing sentences, keep a list of any extra words you find that do not fit now but could be used in your supporting sentences.

The other writing skill frequent in creative writing that can benefit you in academic writing as well is the use of literary devices. The main literary devices that often crossover between these two genres of writing are *analogy*, *metaphor*, and *simile*.

An *analogy* is a comparison between two different things that emphasizes the similarities to make a point. This comparison explains important attributes of the first thing by drawing connections with the second object or concept. An analogy is typically longer than a sentence or two because of the purpose of explaining with details.

- "O! be some other name: What's in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet; So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd" (*Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare)
- "My mom always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." (*Forrest Gump*)

A *metaphor* is a short analogy that does not require explanation, and uses equivalent language that x is y. The comparison is simple and the reader is expected to infer the meaning of the comparison without much difficulty.

- Her anger was a hurricane.
- The truth is a light in the darkness.

A *simile* is a different type of short analogy that also does not require explanation, but uses language for similarity such as x is like y or s is as y. Again, the comparison is simple and the reader is expected to infer the meaning of the comparison without much difficulty.

- He is as strong as an ox.
- The teenager was growing like a weed.

## 6 Exercise: Literary Devices

1. Add three literary devices (analogy, metaphore, or simile) to your draft.
2. Switch drafts with a partner and evaluate their literary devices.
3. Identify what literary device is used.
4. Give suggestions of how to integrate the phrase more fully into the story.

## **7 Exercise: Creative Draft**

Submit a draft of your creative writing online for your teacher to review.

- 2 pages (double-spaced)
- fiction or memoir
- descriptive language (including 3 literary devices)
- clear story structure and purpose



# Formal Emails

One of the common types of writing you will encounter is writing emails in English. The expectations for formality and content vary dramatically in this format depending on to whom you are writing and the topic of the email. For this section of the course, we will focus on formal emails like the ones you will likely send in the future to professors or employers.

The image shows an email interface with the following components labeled:

- subject**: Subject: Speaking request
- salutation**: Dr. Damron,
- opener**: 안녕하세요십니까? I'm not sure if you remember me, but I audited your Korean linguistics class as a TESOL MA student several years ago. I now work full-time at the ELC as the Reading Skill Area Supervisor. I'm reaching out to ask if you'd be willing to come to the ELC and present at our weekly soup 'n' seminar.
- introduction**: (The entire opening paragraph is labeled as the introduction.)
- short (polite!) request**: This semester, in an effort to build community in the TESOL program among the students, faculty, and those teaching at the ELC, and to promote professional development and presentation skills, we've decided to hold an informal lunch each Friday where we invite someone from the university to present about something related to the field. We know you have a TESOL background, and we would love for you to come and talk to our students about other opportunities and ways to use their TESOL degrees and experience outside of teaching or researching ES/FL. If you'd be willing, we'd also love if you could talk about the experience of being a woman working in higher ed / academia; as you know, TESOL as a field is heavily dominated by women, but we currently have no female TESOL faculty who could speak to that experience.
- details (if necessary)**: (The paragraph about the lunch and the specific request is labeled as details.)
- closer**: We were tentatively planning on having you come ; would that date work with your schedule? If not, please let me know if there's another Friday afternoon you would be available -- we would really love to have you!
- signature**: We look forward to hopefully hearing from you!
- signature**: AnnMarie Saunders

## The Structure

An email has a very different look than the other types of writing discussed in this text. However, there are still similarities when you are writing a formal email. The basic outline of a formal email is as

follows:

## 1. Subject line (similar to an essay title)

Although the subject line is similar to a title for a typical essay, it is important to keep the information limited to only what is necessary. This type of "title" is not meant to be creative, but rather to give the reader an immediate idea of the content of the email. Do not leave this field of the email blank. Keep the ideas brief, and put the most important information first.

Most purposes for emailing can be boiled down to a single noun phrase that highlights the most important information.

## 2. Salutation

The salutation is where you address the reader. You should use the title that best shows the level of formality. If the reader has a title, be sure to use the appropriate form. Do not assume it is appropriate to use only a first name in the salutation.

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### Most Common English Titles (honorifics)

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Mr.	all men
Miss	unmarried women
Mrs.	married women
Ms.	woman regardless of marital status
Dr.	someone with a PhD, a medical doctor or veterinarian
Professor	used less frequently in the US than Dr.
President/Principal/Dean/Director/Chief Executive	other titles specific to the job may also be used
To Whom it May Concern	when emailing to a general office/business account without knowing the name of the person to address your question to

---

Some examples of different formal salutations include:

- (Title + full name of recipient only)
- Hello
- Good morning/afternoon
- Dear (full name of recipient)

### **3. Opener (similar to an essay hook)**

The opener should match the level of formality of the email and reflect your relationship with the reader. In other words, a salutation such as "How's it going?" would only be appropriate in an email to a friend. A more common formal version of this would be "I hope this email finds you well."

Similarly to how a conversation in English begins with a pleasantry, or a polite question about your well-being that is not intended to get a true response, this opener exists only for the sake of manners. No one expects an actual response to the opener.

### **4. Introduction**

At this point in the email, you will introduce yourself to the reader. This helps to create context for why you are sending the email. For example, you might mention the course you are taking or the department you work in. Unless you have communicated with the individual multiple times, it is helpful to use this space to help the reader identify you.

### **5. Short request (similar to an essay thesis)**

After you have created this brief introduction, you can immediately introduce your purpose for the email. Remember to keep his request polite and clear. Include any references to specific times, places, or products involved in the request. In general, you should try to limit an

email to one main idea.

At some point in your email, it is good to acknowledge that you are likely asking them to do additional work, adjust their schedule, or some otherwise inconvenient favor. Where possible, provide some flexibility in the request and emphasize gratitude.

## **6. Necessary details (similar to an essay supporting ideas)**

You may need to include additional information about the request after it is clearly stated. For example, the reader may need to know about the topic of the presentation, concerns about a project, or an outline of the agenda for a meeting. The request should be separate enough to be quickly understood, and this section allows for the additional clarification of the situation. Again, remember to maintain appropriate distance from the reader by not oversharing beyond what is essential to know.

In this section of the email, it may be helpful to use a numbered or bulleted list to separate pieces of information related to the topic. This is a good way to create blank space in the email and to keep it focused on the essentials.

## **7. Closer (concluding sentence)**

As with a typical concluding sentence, it can be helpful to end your email with a sentence that states expectations or a call to action. The most common closers are either in the form of requesting a timely response or a proposing a meeting time.

## **8. Signature**

Always remember to close the email with your name and any other identifying information. This could include a phone number (if

needed) or your job title, but can also be as simple as just your name. Don't forget to use the form of your name that would be most easily recognizable to the reader.

## **1 Exercise: Outline**

*Read the situation below and create an outline to show how you would organize your email.*

Your professor has scheduled office hours. Unfortunately, you are unable to make it at that time because of a schedule conflict. You have a question about the course that would be too difficult to discuss over email.

## **2 Exercise: Draft an email**

*Read the situation below and create an email draft explaining the situation and offering a solution.*

You transferred from Ensign College to BYU Provo. Although you took an Introduction to Economics class as part of your Associate's Degree at Ensign, the class credit did not transfer and you are expected to take the class again. Write an email to the BYU Enrollment Services explaining why you think the course should be re-evaluated to count toward your degree at BYU.

## **Polite Requests**

One of the important aspects of writing a formal email is using polite language to make requests. Culturally speaking, a request in English is more polite the less direct it is. Note the difference between someone saying "I would appreciate it if you would wash your hands before dinner." vs "Wash your hands."

Two ways that grammar can support creating a polite request is through the use of modals and *if* clauses. In the example above, the word *would* is used to soften the request. This can also be done using modals like *could*, *might*, and *can*. Dependent clauses with *if* soften a request as well by focusing on the reader's ability to decline the request and the writer's awareness of the potential disruption the request may cause.

Examples of polite requests:

- "I would appreciate it if you could [request]."
- "It would be [adj] if you could [request]."
- "If you could [request], that would be [adj]."
- "Can/Could you/I [request]?"
- "Would you/I be able to [request]."
- "Would [time/request] work for you?"
- "If possible...?" / "Would it be possible to [request]?"
- "Do/would you mind [request]?"
- "Would you be willing to [request]?"

### **3 Exercise: Polite requests**

*Your teacher will assign a partner to you. With your partner, practice 2-3 different ways of making a polite request in each of the following scenarios:*

- You need to borrow a stranger's phone to make a call because you lost yours.
- You are sick on the day of a major presentation and need to reschedule it.
- You need your team at work to come to an urgent extra meeting about a project.

Other common words used to demonstrate politeness are known as hedging adverbs. These are words such as *just*, *only*, *possibly*,

*maybe*, and *perhaps*. Writers will include these to increase the courtesy felt in a request.

- I am just emailing to ask if you could check the budget report attached in this email.
- Would you possibly be available for me to interview for my career development course? It would only take twenty minutes, I know you are very busy.

#### **4 Exercise: Draft an email**

*Read the situation below and create an email draft explaining the situation and offering a solution.*

You have a personal emergency that you need to take care of during one of your class times. However, the schedule for that class day includes information that is essential for the upcoming test. You know that the professor teaches another section of that class at a later time which you could attend after resolving the personal issue.

## **Formatting**

Formal emails follow many of the same conventions of formatting and style as an essay. It should be written in an easy to read font in a 10-12pt size. Colorful text should be avoided unless necessary to draw attention to something (such as a deadline).

Do not use ALL CAPITAL LETTERS at any point in your email because the internet culture designates this as yelling (angry). Instead, it's better to use **bolded**, *italicized*, or underlined text to emphasize information. Expressive punctuation (e.g., using multiple exclamation points [!!!] or ellipsis [.....]) and emojis (e.g., ☹️, 😡, etc) should also be avoided.

The main formatting difference between an email and an essay is that an email does not need to be indented, and can instead just be left-aligned.

## **5 Exercise: Choose a prompt**

*Choose one of the prompts below as your situation for an email that you will submit as your final assignment. Remember to explain the situation, propose solutions, and maintain an appropriate level of formality.*

- Request to add a course that is currently full
- Contact a potential employer about your interest in applying for a job (no job is currently open)
- Invite a speaker to present at an upcoming club event
- Ask for a prerequisite class to be waived
- Send a thank you after an interview

## **Responding to a formal email**

The advice here applies to responding to a formal email, not just when you initiate the conversation yourself. In some cases, someone in higher authority may not begin the conversation in a formal manner, but you should still maintain the standards here unless told otherwise. For example, a professor may ask students to call her by her first name rather than her last name or an office environment may frequently use emojis. Once you are aware of the expectations for that context, you are able to adjust your writing accordingly.



# Reflections

In the majority of this text, academic writing relies heavily on summaries and demonstrating a clear understanding of an issue. However, some academic writing you will encounter at the college level will have a different purpose and therefore requires a different approach.

## Purpose

A reflection essay is primarily used by professors to hold students accountable for out of class learning. By requiring you to reflect about what you read or listened to as part of your homework, the reader is able to quickly identify three important outcomes from that homework:

- The student is prepared for the class discussion and/or to participate in a learning experience that requires background knowledge.
- The student understands key information and is attempting to integrate this new knowledge.
- The student can identify and explain questions, lack of understanding, or disagreement with the content.

The first of these outcomes is important because many courses will expect you to come to class with foundational knowledge in place so the professor can focus on the more challenging skills of applying, creating, evaluating, or analyzing. By holding you responsible for that initial learning, everyone in the class can take full advantage of the

limited face-to-face time.

The second point is important because information does not exist in isolation. All new knowledge should connect to things you previously learned or what you are currently learning in other courses. Finding connections allows you to think more critically about the content and also improves the likelihood that you will retain the knowledge.

Finally, a reflection gives you time to think through your questions or your counterarguments. The professor can either prepare for the course by reading reflections in advance to anticipate questions or it can simply save time by having ready made comments and questions instead of losing time while you try to figure out what it is you don't understand and/or agree with.

## Prewriting

Before you can begin writing your reflection, you must first prepare for the learning experience you are going to reflect on. One idea for preparing to write a reflection is using an adapted KWL chart. A typical KWL chart has a column for *know*, *want to know*, and *learned*. These are often used with reading assignments because it encourages students to connect to their background knowledge before learning something new. For this purpose of this assignment, the *want to know* column has been removed and *reflect* has been added. Look at the chart below and the prewriting questions in each column to help you understand what notes you might add there.

<b>Know</b>	<b>Learned</b>	<b>Reflect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you already know about this topic?</li><li>• What beliefs (if any) do you have connected to this topic?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What about the experience stands out to you?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did what you learn add to and/or change your understanding or opinions?</li><li>• What questions (if any) do you have after the learning experience?</li></ul>

## Writing

As stated previously, a reflection should not be a summary of the material. Rather, the reflection is focused on your feelings, reactions, beliefs, understanding, and other aspects of your experience during the learning process. This is meant to be more personal and subjective than other writing. This means that your reflection will vary from the others that are submitted because it is specific to you.

Although it is personal, it should still be academic in the tone. This should not sound like a social media post or an email with informal language. Remember that this is still an essay that will be reviewed by a professor and/or teaching assistant. So while personal pronouns may occur more frequently, the ideas should be expressed appropriately.

In many cases, a reflection-style essay will include some questions to prompt your writing. However, if the assignment does not include any specific questions to guide your reflection, you can use the example questions below to help you develop your ideas.

## General guiding questions for a reflection

- Does the reading, lecture, or experience challenge you socially, culturally, emotionally, or theologically? If so, where and how? Why does it bother you or catch your attention?
- Has the reading, lecture, or experience changed your way of thinking? Did it conflict with beliefs you held previously, and what evidence did it provide you with in order to change your thought process on the topic?
- Does the reading, lecture, or experience leave you with any questions? Were these questions ones you had previously or ones you developed only after finishing?
- Did the author, speaker, or those involved in the experience fail to address any important issues? Could a certain fact or idea have dramatically changed the impact or conclusion of the reading, lecture, or experience?
- How do the issues or ideas brought up in this reading, lecture, or experience mesh with past experiences or readings? Do the ideas contradict or support each other?

SOURCE: <https://edtechbooks.org/-bBZp>

Depending on the length, complexity, and familiarity of the content you are reflecting on, you may have more ideas than you can develop in the limited space given for this assignment. In this case, it is important to carefully choose the ideas that most clearly demonstrate that you completed the work and have considered the implications of that learning.

On the other hand, you may find that your ideas for the reflection are encapsulated in one major idea. This is also appropriate as long as it can be fully developed and fulfill the purpose of the assignment.

# Organization

The organization of a reflection paper is generally dictated by the number of points you decide to include. In the case of multiple points of reflection, you may have topic sentences that separate your ideas into three or four paragraphs. If you only have one main idea, your essay may have more of a traditional thesis statement that expresses this overarching theme from the learning experience.

Most reflection essays range from about 300-700 words, which is about 1-2 pages double spaced.

# Reviews

In most cases, reviews will not be part of your academic writing experience. The majority of your evaluation writing will occur in the form of a reflection or a critical reading analysis. That being said, there will be many situations in your life that call for a review of a product or experience. For that reason, this chapter will focus on preparing you to write effectively for the purpose of review.

## Purpose

Reviews exist to give potential future consumers or participants of a product or experience an idea of what to expect from the service based on your own experience. The review can also benefit the provider by giving them feedback on what was successful or what needs to be improved.

For this chapter, when the word product is used, it is referring to items or articles that are typically purchased:

- items such as electronics, books, clothing, games, software, artwork, movies etc
- consumable substances such as food, drinks, candy, beauty supplies, art and craft supplies etc

When the words experience is used, it includes either a place/event or treatment and assistance from a specialized workers :

- places like hotels, vacation resorts, salons, businesses, etc

- events like concerts, art shows, festivals, university courses, etc
- services like repair or maintenance work, healthcare, customer support, public transportation, education, application processes etc

As you can see, there are many different contexts that can lead to either formal or informal reviews.

You are often prompted to leave a review after purchasing a product online. While not required, your insight can be very beneficial. Reviews can also be given for experiences like a performance, vacation, or even a course. The majority of these situations allow you to choose whether or not you give feedback. However, in a context like the English Language Center, you are required to give end of semester feedback.\*

Because the feedback you provide on the product or service can have a strong influence for change, it is important to carefully craft a review so that it reaches the widest audience and provides focused feedback.

\*This is because the ELC is a lab school, meaning many of the teachers are in training and need to get input from the students to improve their teaching. It is also because the administrators are constantly trying to improve the student experience and need to hear directly from the target audience.

## **1 Exercise: Online shopping reviews**

*Work with a partner to discuss the following questions.*

1. Do you read reviews before buying something online? Do you read the reviews before agreeing to a service or experience? Why or why not?
2. Do you follow any social media influencers? Why do you follow them?
3. Have you ever purchased a product or experience because of a review? Why or why not?
4. How often do you write reviews (your native language included) about products or experiences you purchased? How often do you review them informally (such as in a conversation or social media post)?

## **2 Exercise: Reviewing reviews**

*As a group, choose a product or experience that you are either familiar with or are interested in knowing more about. Follow the steps below to complete this exercise.*

1. Search online to find reviews.
2. Read one positive review (4 or 5 stars, 9/10 or 10/10, etc).
3. Read one negative review (1 star, 0/10 or 1/10, etc).
4. Discuss what details, examples, or other points in the two reviews had the most influence over your opinion.
5. After reading the reviews, do the members of your group feel more or less confident in the product or experience?

## **Prewriting**

Before you begin to write a review, you need to brainstorm about your



own experience. Remember that a brainstorm does not require complete sentences, it only requires you to make a list of ideas to help you begin the writing process. To create your brainstorm, you can try asking yourself the questions below to generate your list:

1. Why did you choose this product or experience?
2. Describe your perspective of it. Focus on choosing your adjectives carefully.
3. Did the product or experience live up to your expectations?
4. What are the positive aspects? (pros)
5. What are the negative points? (cons)
6. Do you think others should participate or purchase this?

Once you have your list of ideas, it helps to read through it and mark the most important points. This narrows down the scope of your review and keeps it at paragraph length instead of feeling like an essay.

### **3 Exercise: Brainstorm**

*As a class, you will choose a general product or experience that everyone is familiar with. For example, you may choose cellphones or your experience traveling to the United States.*

Use the questions above to create a brainstorm for your review. Compare your brainstorm with a partner.

## **Writing**

When writing a review, it is always important to keep your intended and unintended audience in mind. An intended audience would be the people you expect to read the review. This could be a potential consumer before committing to the product or experience. An

unintended audience is often an employee over online customer service for the related company. This person is monitoring the customer satisfaction levels based on this feedback and reports back trends or patterns (both positive and negative). Remembering that your review will be read by both types of audience is key to writing an effective review.

An effective review is defined by four main characteristics

1. **Honesty:** Submitting a review that inaccurately presents your experience is both unethical and unhelpful. You should avoid purposefully inflating the popularity or effectiveness of something as well as purposefully damaging a reputation without cause. Simply limit your review to truth without exaggeration.
2. **Clarity:** If a review is not clear in presenting ideas, it will be disregarded completely. Your opinion, advice, and/or recommendation should all be easily recognizable.
3. **Specificity:** The brainstorm helps to refine your focus so that your review does not ramble with unnecessary detail or overlook needed support.
4. **Politeness:** Always remember that a review is communication, so on the otherside of your often anonymous review is an actual reader. Especially when dealing directly with a company, recognize that your review may have an impact on someone. This understanding should not come at the cost of being honest, but it should influence your tone.

## **Organization**

The review should begin with a brief description of the context for the use of the product or your experience. For example, knowing that your negative review of a flight is given in the context of an unexpected snowstorm gives the readers context of how much of your review is applicable to their situation. Another example would be if

you used a security camera inside a building instead of outside, it can help a reader know if your context is similar. Keep this section short and specific.

Your thesis statement for this type of writing will be your overall opinion, advice, or recommendation. This should be very clear and obvious.

Next, explain both the positives and negatives you identified in your brainstorm. These points should highlight the parts of your own experience that you think someone needs to know before continuing. Online reviews will often include bullet points to list the pros and cons. This simplifies reading the review and makes it easier for someone to process. Bulleted items will often be reduced to phrases rather than sentences. For example, the bulleted pros and cons list of a review for a camera battery might say: *lasts for seven hours, takes too long to charge, not worth the cost etc.*

Remember to restate your thesis so that your purpose in writing the review is abundantly clear to the readers.

The length of a review response should be around a paragraph. If the paragraph is any longer, readers will either skim or move to a different review. A longer response typically does not narrow the focus enough on the most important ideas to share with a reader.

In some online review contexts, photos or videos can be helpful additions to clarify your bullet point pros/cons. For example, describing a festival as well-attended or organized will not be as powerful to a reader as seeing videos or pictures that show crowds of people or short lines.

#### **4 Exercise: Write a product review**

*Choose a product that you recently purchased to use as the focus of this review.*

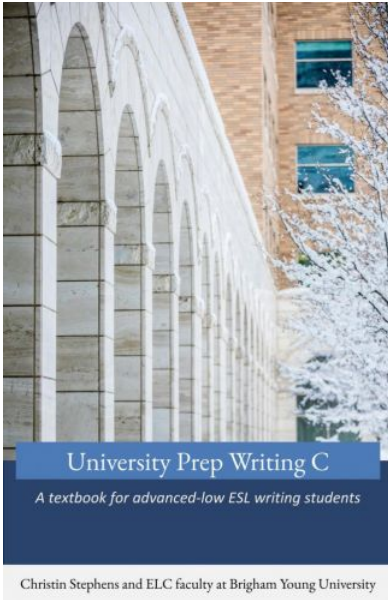
1. Decide on your intended audience, but keep the unintended audience in mind.
2. Brainstorm using the questions in this chapter.
3. Write a product review draft

#### **5 Exercise: Write an experience review**

*Choose an experience that you recently participated in to use as the focus of this review.*

1. Decide on your intended audience, but keep the unintended audience in mind.
2. Brainstorm using the questions in this chapter.
3. Write a product review draft





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