

Writing Handout E-2:

Methods of Essay Development

1. **Example or Exemplification** (generalization) – generalization supported by examples
 - A. Florida has several unique attractions.
 - B. My friend has irritating habits.
2. **Cause/Effect** – topic was caused by...or topic resulted in...
 - A. A series of events undermined President Clinton’s reputation.
 - B. Watching cartoons has a negative effect on children.
3. **Process Analysis** – instructions to accomplish something
 - A. Building a campfire requires three basic steps.
 - B. Baking a cake from scratch is a complex process.
4. **Definition** – topic is... or topic belongs to a class.
 - A. Newt Gingrich, a senator, is a conservative.
 - B. Good manners is the art of making people feel at ease.
5. **Compare/contrast** – One item or topic compared (similarities) or contrasted (differences) to another.
 - A. Life is often likened to a voyage.
 - B. Ice skating differs from roller skating.
6. **Classification** – Topic is broken into distinct categories.
 - A. The United States government has three major branches.
 - B. The flags used during a NACAR race convey different messages.
7. **Analysis** – Topic = constituent parts.
 - A. Tourism and agriculture are both essential elements of Florida’s economy.
 - B. The president’s four recommendations might be effective for lowering taxes.
8. **Persuasion or argument** – Topic is defended or recommended.
 - A. College tuition should be waived for those who maintain a 4.0 average.
 - B. There should be a national law against texting while driving.
9. **Description** (spatial sequence) – Objective or subjective description (person, place, thing)
 - A. The Indian River has a special beauty.
 - B. My room is a special place.
10. **Narration** – Writer relates a story or anecdote.
 - A. I will never forget my first day of college.
 - B. Getting my driver’s license was a frustrating experience.

Organizational Patterns

The following are examples of typical patterns.

Exemplification: This is the most common pattern. It may be termed as a list of examples. These examples may be in order of importance, either from most important to least important or from least important to most important.

Example:

Florida has many natural attractions that often transcend the state's more commonly visited commercial lures, such as Rodent Realm or Aquatic Adventure. Florida's state parks, for example, provide a glimpse of the state's remarkable wildlife, including colorful birds and unusual animals. Manatee State Park even offers an underwater viewing area for observing the endangered species for which the park was named. Florida's beaches are among the best in the world. The Treasure Coast along the Atlantic Ocean provides crystal clear waters that are perfect for swimming and diving. The white sands of the state's panhandle along the Gulf of Mexico offer miles of unspoiled shoreline. Crystal-clear springs in the north-central part of the state and the Everglades area in the southern-central region provide picturesque alternatives to the state's manmade attractions. In addition, Key West provides superb fishing and wonderful diving opportunities.

Cause and Effect: Cause and effect paragraphs and essays examine outcomes and reasons for those outcomes. There is always at least one cause and at least one effect, although there may be more of each.

Example:

Texting while driving has become a uniquely modern problem. Talking on cell phones while driving led to an increase in accidents, but texting amplified the numbers. Speeding and reckless driving used to be the main causes of automobile accidents. Now, however, talking on cell phones is second only to texting as the greatest cause of these often fatal crashes. There is no doubt that laws against texting while driving can save lives.

Process Analysis: A paragraph or essay developed by a process pattern is one in which a sequence of operations or actions is described. It is similar to time order, but the emphasis is placed on the steps to be followed and the order of following them. Recipes and instruction manuals are examples of process analysis writing.

Example:

Here is a simple, four-step method that can help you write a successful process essay. First, decide upon a topic, preferably something that interests you. Second, develop a thesis statement, usually one or two sentences that narrow the focus of your topic and inform your audience either how to do something or how something works. Then create an outline that will guide you through the writing phase. Finally, allow yourself time to edit the essay for content and proofread for clarity and grammar.

Definition: A definition paragraph or essay develops a topic by explaining the meaning of a word or concept. Obviously, a paragraph or essay is more extensive than a simple dictionary definition.

Example:

The Rev. Malcolm Aikman is an excellent example of a good minister. His Sunday morning sermons usually address one point, rather than trying to address many complex theological issues. He also limits his sermons to fifteen minutes, which also leads to greater understanding for his congregation. His ministerial duties are not limited to his Sunday morning services. On weekdays, for example, he schedules office hours for those who wish to stop by to discuss concerns or those who simply need someone to talk to. Offering solace to those who are sick or injured, the Rev. Aikman uses weekday afternoons to visit hospitals. Also, he is always available to perform other services, such as weddings or funerals.

Compare/Contrast: Comparison deals with similarities, but contrast deals with differences. There are two basic ways in which comparison/contrast paragraphs or essays can be written. In a point-by-point paragraph, each of the items being compared or contrasted is discussed on each point of similarity or difference. The other type, block structure, discusses one item completely and then discusses the other item.

Example: (Point by Point)

My wife and I often marvel at the fact that our two daughters, who are ten years apart in age, are such completely different people. The most obvious differences became apparent during their high school years. Our first born, Jamie, was an avid reader of fiction, escape literature. Our second daughter, Jessica, was also an avid reader, but her choice of materials was non-fiction, books that involved science and biology. Despite becoming a good reader, Jamie did not care about her grades, as long as she achieved a passing score. Jessica, on the other hand, was a driven student, always striving to become the top student in her classes. Their first cars also reflected different personalities. Jamie loved to drive her sporty Mustang. Jessica had no interest in cars and selected a Ranger pickup truck as her mode of transportation.

Example: (Block Style)

My wife and I often marvel at the fact that our two daughters, who are ten years apart in age, are such completely different people. The most obvious differences became apparent during their high school years. Our first born, Jamie, was an avid reader of fiction, especially escape literature. Despite becoming a good reader, Jamie did not care about her grades, as long as she achieved a passing score. Jamie also loved to drive her sporty Mustang. Our second daughter, Jessica, was also an avid reader, but her choice of materials was non-fiction, books that involved science and biology. Jessica, unlike her sister, was a driven student, always striving to become the top student in her classes. Jessica exhibited no interest in cars or driving and selected a Ranger pickup truck as her preferred mode of transportation.

Classification: A classification paragraph or essay develops by classifying information according to some scheme.

Example:

Many NASCAR racing fans do not understand the meanings of the various colored flags used during a race. Many of the flags are an indication that something has gone wrong. Yellow, for example, is a caution flag that indicates an accident has occurred somewhere on the track. A red flag brings a complete stop to the race, dictating that racing must come to a halt and all pit crew and repair work must cease. A black flag indicates that a particular driver has committed a violation of rules and must immediately return to the pit area. A white flag indicates the last lap of a race, and the checkered flag denotes the end of the race.

Analysis: A paragraph or essay developed by analysis divides one subject into its component parts. Paragraphs and essays written in this pattern usually start by identifying the one subject and continue by explaining that subject's distinct parts.

Example:

The two most important aspects of Florida's economy are tourism and agriculture. According to the Florida Department of State, 89.3 million visitors spent approximately 67 billion dollars in 2012. In addition to the more obvious financial effects, such as admission to the commercial theme parks, these tourists spent billions of dollars at gas stations, restaurants, and motels. Florida agriculture generates more than \$102 billion. Grapefruit is the state's leading agricultural crop; however, few people realize that Florida also is the nation's top producer of all citrus, sugar cane, winter vegetables, ornamental plants, and sod. Florida's agriculture consistently ranks second only to tourism in supporting the state's economy.

Persuasion or Argument: A persuasion paragraph or essay usually begins with a very general statement and then gives examples which "prove" a point.

Example:

College tuition should be waived for students who maintain a 4.0 average. The costs of college have risen dramatically, creating a hardship for many students and their families. Some students who maintain a 4.0 have a demonstrated intellectual prowess. Others with a 4.0 average have proven that they possess the dedication and desire to succeed. For students who do not have a 4.0 average, the tuition waiver could provide an incentive to improve their grades. A 4.0 is an indicator that these students possess a potential for positive contributions to society, and they should be rewarded for their accomplishments.

Description (Spatial Sequence): A descriptive paragraph or essay usually describes the position of objects relative to one another, often from a central point of reference.

Example:

About two miles from where I started my hike along a dusty, high-desert trail in New Mexico, I rounded a curve leading to a narrow promontory. I climbed carefully to the top of the ledge and gazed down upon an amazing sight. In the rocky canyon below ran a narrow creek that created a series of tiny, sparkling waterfalls over large, gray boulders. Both sides of the creek were lined with purple-flowered cottonwood trees. Flicking from one tree to another were flocks of bluebirds, filling the valley with their chortling calls. On the far side of the shallow stream, just beyond the trees, a sheer, rocky cliff ascended high into the sky. The lower levels of the cliff were punctuated by a series of small caves, many of which had been made into dwellings by the ancient inhabitants who sealed the openings with adobe walls. A switchback trail zigged back and forth from the creek to a ledge high atop the cliff. On the near side of the creek lay the ruins of an ancient Anasazi village. All that remained were low, broken, brown adobe walls of what had once been a thriving village. The ancient inhabitants' square-shaped dwellings surrounded a perfectly round kiva, which had been dug into the ground for religious observances. The startling scene from that ledge will remain etched in my memory.

Narration: A narrative paragraph tells a story. It might include a message, such as “I learned the hard way about playing with matches.”

Example:

I will never forget my first day of working as a test boat driver for the Outboard Marine Corporation. During my job interviews, everyone assumed that someone who applied for a job driving boats had experience, but I was one applicant who did not. Nevertheless, I was hired and handed a set of keys to a high-powered, twin-engined boat when I reported to work. Starting the engines, pulling away from the dock, and driving in open waters proved easy. When I returned to the dock, however, my inexperience became readily apparent. Unlike a car, a boat has no brakes and can coast a very long distance even when the engines are placed into neutral. Everyone on shore had a good laugh as I was too slow to realize my mistake and crashed into the dock, taking out several pilings. Well, at least, I never claimed to know what I was doing.