



CHAPTER 3

Drafting Essays

Essay writing builds on many of the skills you have already mastered in learning to write a paragraph. Once you know how to write a paragraph, it is not much more difficult to write an essay; an essay is just longer. Simply stated, an essay is a set of paragraphs about a specific subject. Like a paragraph, an essay makes and supports one main point. However, the subject of an essay is too complex to be developed in a few sentences. To support fully the main point of an essay, several paragraphs are needed. A typical essay contains five paragraphs, but many other types of essays are longer or shorter, depending on their purpose. In this book, you will learn the formula for a five-paragraph essay. Just as knowing the musical scales will help you compose music, understanding basic essay structure will help you write well.

Although many essays do not conform to the five-paragraph formula, most follow some pattern of organization. The formula is simply a plan to help you arrange your ideas into a systematic order. It has a recognizable beginning, middle, and end. If you know how to write a typical five-paragraph essay, you will always have something to fall back on.

Parts of an Essay

An essay has three main parts: an **introduction**, a **body**, and a **conclusion**. Each part has its own special purpose. Briefly, the introduction provides some background information on the subject and states the main point in a thesis statement. The body consists of several supporting paragraphs that develop the main idea. The essay ends with a conclusion that summarizes the main points.

BASIC PLAN OF A TYPICAL FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Gets reader's attention using:

Facts and statistics

Quotations

Anecdotes

Questions

Thesis Statement

States purpose

Introduces 3 main points

INTRODUCTION

(continued on next page)

FIRST BODY PARAGRAPH

Topic Sentence

States first main point

Provides supporting details

SECOND BODY PARAGRAPH

Topic Sentence

States second main point

Provides supporting details

BODY

THIRD BODY PARAGRAPH

Topic Sentence

States third main point

Provides supporting details

CONCLUSION

Makes final comments by:

Summarizing main points

Drawing a conclusion

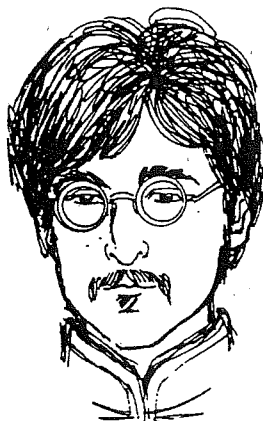
Making a prediction

Offering a solution

CONCLUSION

Read the following five-paragraph essay that a student wrote about the impact of John Lennon's music. Notice that the first line of each new paragraph is indented. After you have read the entire essay, label the parts on the lines provided.

John Lennon: A Musician for All Time



Imagine the world without John Lennon; it's almost inconceivable. How can one envision a world without the melodies and lyrics of the man who transformed the way people feel about popular music? John Lennon did not set out to leave an indelible impact on the world. His beginnings were no different from those of thousands of other teenage hopefuls who went from club to club in pursuit of a recording contract. After much hard work, John Lennon and the other members of the Beatles became world famous. But at the pinnacle of his success, Lennon had the courage and vision to move beyond contemporary rock 'n' roll. He broke away from the most popular group of all time and ultimately emerged as his generation's most influential voice. More than any other contemporary artist, Lennon spoke in a universal language that transcended generational lines, combined musical forms, and crossed geographical borders.

Lennon's inspirational music and his persona provided a vehicle for transcending generational divisions that existed while he was alive and still exist today. During the 1960s and 1970s, when Lennon was an active musician, people of all ages admired and responded to his music. So why are so many members of the '90s generation heavily influenced by a '60s musician? Perhaps it is because Lennon speaks to the inner voice in each of us that questions the status quo and strives for a better world. Today, Lennon's music still links his generation to many others.

John Lennon was also a unique artist because of his ability to combine musical forms. Not only did he explore new directions in music, but he embraced them, reinventing himself over and over again, despite offending the millions of fans who mourned the breakup of the Beatles. As he matured as a musician, Lennon incorporated classical music into rock 'n' roll songs. He also added some of the Hindu sound into his compositions. Lennon's music expresses the full range of human emotion, from the introspective mood of "Nowhere Man" to the playful refrain of "Yellow Submarine." Lennon was always surprising his fans with new and creative combinations of musical forms.

John Lennon was tremendously successful in crossing geographical borders through his powerful lyrics, such as those of his song "Imagine." Lennon sang, "I hope that someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one." He suggested that people of all nationalities should join together. He believed in the unification of all people everywhere. As the world becomes a smaller place and geographic borders melt away, the ability to communicate effectively will become vital. Lennon understood this and tried to teach people to get along with one another.

Although John Lennon is no longer with us, his music is still very much a part of people's lives. He was a remarkable individual who spoke in a language that everyone could relate to. During a turbulent time, his optimistic message of peace, love, and happiness emerged. And today, people still refer to the themes of his songs and look to them for answers. Perhaps this is because Lennon was tremendously successful in melting down barriers and borders between people and in finding ways to unify them.

1. The Introduction

Most formal essays begin with an introductory paragraph. In some ways, the introduction is the most important paragraph of your essay. Because it is the first one that will be read, it must capture the attention of the audience and create a desire to read the rest of the essay. It should set the stage for what follows and give the reader an idea of what to expect.

The function of the introduction is

- to provide background information,
- to capture the reader's interest,
- to state the thesis.

While there are no set rules for writing an introduction and you are encouraged to be creative, there are several techniques that have proven successful. Many introductions use one or a combination of the following techniques to provide background information and capture the reader's attention.

A. Move from general to specific

This type of introduction opens with a general statement on the subject that establishes its importance and then leads the reader to the more specific thesis statement.

B. Use an anecdote

Another way to write an introduction is to relate an interesting story that will get the reader interested in the subject. Newspaper and magazine writers frequently use this technique for their articles.

C. Use a quotation

A quotation is an easy way to introduce your topic. You can quote an authority on your subject or use an interesting quotation from an article. You can also be more informal and use a proverb or favorite saying of a friend or relative.

D. Ask a question

Asking one or more questions at the beginning of an essay is a good way to engage the readers in the topic right away. They will want to read on in order to find the answers to the questions.

E. Present facts and statistics

Presenting some interesting facts or statistics on your subject establishes credibility.

ANALYZING INTRODUCTIONS

Reread the introduction for the John Lennon essay on page 40. Notice that the author used several techniques to get the reader interested in the subject. She began with a quote from one of Lennon's most famous songs. She also asked a provocative question to get the reader actively thinking about her topic: *How can one envision a world without the melodies and lyrics of the man who transformed the way people feel about popular music?*

Now read the following sample introductions. Then, in small groups, identify the technique or techniques used in each one. Remember that authors often use a combination of techniques to write an introduction.



1. Karate, which literally means "the art of empty hands," is the most widely practiced of all the martial arts. It is primarily a means of self-defense that uses the body as a weapon for striking, kicking, and blocking. Originating in the ancient Orient, the art of karate is more than 1,000 years old. It developed first as a form of monastic training and later became a method of self-defense. During the seventeenth century, karate became highly developed as an art on the Japanese island of Okinawa. Over the years, this ancient art has gained much popularity, and today karate is practiced throughout the world. More than a method of combat, karate emphasizes self-discipline, positive attitude, and high moral purpose.

Technique(s): _____

2. One student looks at his neighbor's exam paper and quickly copies the answers. Another student finds out the questions on a test before her class takes it and tells her friends. Still another student sneaks a sheet of paper with formulas written on it into the test room. What about you? Would you be tempted to cheat on an exam if you knew you wouldn't get caught? According to a recent national survey, 40 percent of American teenagers would cheat under that condition. What is causing this epidemic of cheating in our schools? Most students cheat on tests because they feel pressure to get into a good college, because they want to avoid the hours of studying they need in order to get high grades, or simply because they are not concerned with honesty.

Technique(s): _____

3. Homicides cause the deaths of more children in Washington, D.C., than any other single type of injury, including car accidents, house fires, or drowning. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is not exclusive to Washington. The overcrowded neighborhoods of many big American cities, such as New York, Detroit, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles, are all plagued with senseless violent crime. Types of violent crime range from arson and burglary to assault, rape, and murder. The solution to this growing problem is not to build more and bigger prisons, but rather to examine and deal with the causes: easy access to guns, drug use, and overwhelming poverty.

Technique(s): _____

4. "Misty, a five-month-old German shepherd puppy, goes to the hospital twice a week, but not to see a veterinarian. At this Veteran's Administration Hospital, Misty is helping doctors—not the other way around. In what may seem like a role reversal, animals like Misty are visiting the halls of human illness to relieve a type of pain doctors cannot treat. Their therapy is love, both giving it and helping others return it to them." Pets ranging from dogs to tropical fish are showing up as therapists in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and other institutions.

Source: Cobblestone, June 1985

Technique(s): _____

5. Experience, not theory, has taught me the truth of the popular saying, "Two heads are better than one." For the past two years, the job of secretary in my office has been shared very successfully by two people. This "job-sharing" arrangement has worked out quite well for all involved. All over the business world, the interest in flexible employment arrangements, like job-sharing, is growing. Employers are beginning to realize that there are many talented people out there who are looking for alternatives to traditional patterns of employment. In a job-sharing arrangement, a full-time job is shared by two people. As an executive in a multinational firm, I feel that job-sharing is one way that organizations can meet the growing diversity of employees' needs. Not only is job-sharing helpful to employees, it also offers several advantages to employers. With two people working together, tasks tend to be completed more quickly, a wider range of skills is brought to the job, and most importantly, production is increased.

Technique(s): _____

Writing Thesis Statements

After you have presented some general background information, you will need to narrow your focus. This is done in a thesis statement, which is often the last sentence of the introduction. A thesis statement is similar to a topic sentence in several ways. Just as a topic sentence controls the information for a paragraph, a thesis statement controls the information for an entire essay.

A good thesis statement

- identifies the subject of the essay,
- establishes the aspects of the subject that the essay will deal with.

Underline the thesis statement in *John Lennon: A Musician for All Time* on page 40 and answer the following questions:

1. Does the thesis statement identify the subject of the essay?
2. Does it establish the aspects of the subject that the essay develops?

Now look back at the sample introductions on pages 42 and 43 and underline the thesis statement in each one. Write the five thesis statements on the lines below.

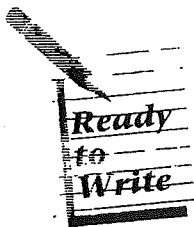
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____



Writing an Introduction

- A. Write the introduction for a five-paragraph essay on *the pressures of being a student*. Follow these steps:
1. Spend some time thinking about the angle of the subject that you plan to write about. For example, are you going to discuss the pressures of being a student in a foreign country or in your native country? Are you going to talk about the pressures of a high school student, college student, or graduate student? Other angles you might consider are the pressures of being a student and having a job or being a parent. Are you going to talk about economic, academic, social, or emotional pressures?
 2. Decide what technique or techniques you want to use to introduce your subject. Would an anecdote be effective? What about a quote or some facts and statistics?