

Writing Explanatory Text Introduction

Writing Explanatory Text: Introduction



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Spark

It's very likely that you spend a good part of your day as a reader of explanatory text. From the moment your alarm goes off until your head hits the pillow again, information is all around you, in print or online, just waiting to be read to answer a question by conveying information you need to know RIGHT NOW.

What you may not consider as much, however, is the importance of writing explanatory text. Explanatory text allows you to impart knowledge that you feel is important for others to learn or know how to do. Think about the typical college essay question. Very often, it asks the applicant to explain why a certain topic is meaningful or how it has changed their life in some way. Writing explanatory text allows us to convey information that's important to us personally as well as intellectually. It is writing that

is interesting, informative, and, when done successfully, holds the attention of the reader.

Activate Prior Knowledge

You've probably seen—or even taken—a variety of quizzes that ask about your interests and strengths and then attempt to match you with careers or hobbies you might like. The purpose of such quizzes is to help you focus your energy on what you feel passionate about—because when you're passionate about something, you're likely to succeed at it.

As part of this unit, you'll be writing your own explanatory essay.

Portfolio Topic

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult (or an alternate topic as assigned by your teacher).

Planning Document

Download the following documents to your computer. Use one of these documents to plan your essay.



ELA 11 Graphic Organizers



Portfolio Draft Submission

Your teacher may ask you to submit a draft of your portfolio or other documents to ensure that you are on track to complete your essay. If they do, follow the instructions

they provide and upload the necessary documents.

Rubric

Use this rubric to familiarize yourself with the goals of the essay.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Example Portfolio

Read this sample explanatory essay to help you understand what you will be working toward throughout the unit. The portfolio topic this student chose is: change is hard, but it's an important part of the human experience and should be embraced.

Embracing Change

As you think more about the topic, consider aspects that really intrigue you. Knowing that you're focused on a motivating topic will make the research and writing process much more enjoyable and much easier to do.



Source: Ye Liew. Shutterstock

Activity

Consider an explanatory text you've recently read and found compelling. Think about why the text was effective and what it helped you learn. Then, identify ways that the author made their passion for the topic clear. Note your ideas in the organizer.



Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

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Learning Goals

Throughout this unit, your student will read a self-selected text as well as several shorter explanatory texts. As they read and respond to the texts, your student will be asked to analyze and evaluate complex ideas and to write about their observations and conclusions.

Spark

1. Have your student focus on the title of the unit. Remind them that explanatory text is a type of nonfiction text that explains something about the world or the human experience. Unlike argumentative text, which is also considered informational, explanatory text is written to provide facts rather than express personal beliefs or sway opinions. Have your student read the Spark section of the text and use the content as a springboard to a discussion of their use of explanatory text in their day-to-day lives.
2. Tell your student that over the course of this unit, they will read several examples of explanatory texts in preparation for writing their own. Encourage them to note certain features of these texts: how they are structured to convey a logical flow of ideas, as well as the words and phrases the author uses to link those ideas in a way that clarifies the connections between them; or to show a sequence of events, or how something causes something else to happen. Encourage your student to pay attention to how the writers of the model texts they read introduce their topics to spark interest, as well as the way they conclude the text to summarize ideas.

Activate Prior Knowledge

1. Have your student read the first two paragraphs and discuss why passion and interest are two critical drivers of writing for any genre, whether it be fiction or nonfiction.
2. Give your student a copy of the two-column graphic organizer chart and have them respond to the prompts with observations about an explanatory text they have recently read, why it was effective, and how the author conveyed their passion for the subject. Discuss their responses.

Portfolio Topic

1. Have your student read through the portfolio topic and resources.
 2. Download and save a copy of either the Explanatory Text Outline or the Explanatory Text Graphic Organizer so that your student can access it throughout the unit.
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Two-Column Chart

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Writing Explanatory Text: Introduction

The Basics of Writing Explanatory Text

Explanatory text is a type of nonfiction that tells how something happens or how something works. It has a clear organizational structure that supports the purpose of the text. It includes facts and evidence based on research, and it typically includes technical language or terminology that's specific to the topic.

Explanatory text doesn't have to be dry or read like a textbook, however. The explanatory texts we enjoy most—and learn from the most—are the ones in which the information is conveyed clearly, the language flows smoothly and clearly shows how ideas are linked, and the writing itself is as interesting as the content.

To learn how to accomplish this in your writing, listen to this interview with a writer who writes explanatory articles for magazines.



Think of a magazine article you've read recently. What do you think the writer might say about how they crafted the text to make it a satisfying and informative read?

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The Basics of Writing Explanatory Text

1. Explain to your student that explanatory texts require facts and evidence, which means that writing them involves research. When they're explaining a complex topic, such as how a scientific process works, they will have to gain enough background about the topic to be able to explain it clearly to someone who has no background about the topic at all.
2. Tell your student that when they read the model texts in this unit, they should pay close attention to the kinds of details the authors include to support their ideas, as well as any sources they use to document the details. Explain that when they include examples, quotations, statistics, or facts in their writing, they will have to cite the sources and cite them in a specific style. There are style guides they can use that explain how to cite sources, but they should also review the sources in the texts they read to familiarize themselves with valid document types and with citation styles.
3. Have your student listen to the podcast, and then discuss what the author interviewed on the show did to make their text satisfying and engaging to readers.

Previewing the Unit Text

Select a Text

In addition to learning more about the components of exemplary explanatory writing, you'll also spend this unit reading a self-selected nonfiction text. To choose the text you will read over the next few weeks, think about what interests you, and then examine the texts to decide which one appeals to you most. Also, consider your learning style. If you're a visual learner, you might want to look for a text that contains diagrams and charts to convey information, for example. If you prefer fiction over nonfiction, you might want to look for an informational or explanatory text that recounts a series of events in strictly narrative form.

As you consider the titles available to you, keep the following strategies in mind:

- Examine the titles to determine which ones spark your interest, but remember that there's a reason people say you can't judge a book by its cover. Look at the table of contents too.
- Are you familiar with any of the titles or authors? If not, you might want to read about the author or locate a brief synopsis of the book to help determine whether you might enjoy it.
- It's tempting to include length as criteria for choosing a text to read, especially if you feel crunched for time, but that's not the wisest plan. One reason: the writing style in explanatory texts can vary drastically, as can the organizational structure. A long book might be organized in short paragraphs or sections, or it might contain numerous graphics, for example.

Pace and Prepare Yourself

You will have approximately two full weeks (about 10 weekdays, or 14 days including weekends) to read your self-selected text. Consider your schedule, and pace yourself so you can read at a comfortable pace.

Here's one way you might set up a rough reading schedule:

- Examine your text and determine the number of chapters or pages it contains.
- Divide that number by the number of days you have available to complete the book. Remember to consider your schedule and any other commitments you might have so you can allot a sufficient amount of time to get your reading done without feeling stressed.
- Allow for flexibility. If you're having trouble focusing one day for one reason or another, give yourself a break. It's better to leave something and return to it later than to struggle through and not understand it. On the other hand, if

you find what you're reading particularly compelling, you may want to adjust your schedule to sneak in an extra chapter. Knowing what works for you and how you comprehend what you read makes all the difference when it comes to success—both in the academic world and after you graduate.

- Remember that you will be writing an explanatory text as part of this unit. Consider choosing a text that might provide source material for your own writing.

In the Apply activities that follow your reading, you will find questions that assess your understanding of how an author approaches the writing of an explanatory text. You can prepare for these activities by thinking about some key questions as you read. After you finish each day's reading, answer these questions in your Reading Log:

- How does the author introduce the topic? What does the author mainly explain in the text, and do they clearly convey that idea in the thesis?
- How is the text organized in a way that explains ideas clearly and shows how ideas are linked?
- How does the author support ideas (with facts, examples, statistics, quotations, etc.)? Are these details sufficient to explain the topic?
- Which details are documented with sources? cited? What kinds of source materials are listed and how are they cited?
- How does the author vary the sentence structure to make the text interesting to read?
- Is there a clear and concise conclusion that clarifies the main idea explained in the text?

As you consider these questions each day, review your answers from the previous days. Note any new observations and insights that have occurred to you. This approach will build an understanding of how to approach your own explanatory writing.

Begin Reading

Consult the reading schedule you created and begin reading your selected text. Use the questions above to analyze the first day's reading, and write some short, initial observations in your Reading Log. Remember that as you proceed, you will have daily opportunities to elaborate and expand upon your first impressions.

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Select a Text

1. Point out the suggestions for selecting a text and discuss them as needed.
2. Allow your student sufficient time to examine the available selections. Then, encourage them to choose a text that sparks their curiosity or aligns with their interests.

Pace and Prepare Yourself

1. Discuss the information in this section with your student. Allow them sufficient time to create their schedule.
2. Review the bulleted questions with your student. Explain that as they read their selected text, these questions will help them build their explanatory writing knowledge so that they can apply it to their own written work in Apply.

Begin Reading

1. Guide your student into reading the first day's text as indicated in the reading schedule. Make sure that they have their Reading Log available for notetaking. Discuss with your student what they have read. Guide your student through the process of analyzing the reading using the questions in the Pace and Prepare Your Reading section. Remind them that this is the procedure they will follow as they work through their text, and that you will be there to help them through the procedure as needed.

Reading Log

Writing Explanatory Text Reading Day

Reading Day

Please use today's lesson to read from the designated text for this unit. Use your reading log to take notes based on the guidance in the unit introduction reading preview. Refer to the pacing guide to plan your reading time during the rest of the unit. In the final lesson of the unit, you will be asked to apply skills learned during the unit to analyze the designated text.

Introductions

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain what a thesis statement is and how it is used.

Key Words

- **explanatory text** – nonfiction writing that provides information, ideas, and facts about a topic
 - **thesis statement** – a concise summary of the central idea of a text
-

Brainstorming

The first step in writing any text is brainstorming and gathering ideas. The type of brainstorming that will be most effective is generally determined by the type of text you're writing. For a short story, you might brainstorm characters, setting, and plot details. For an explanatory text, you will focus on main ideas and supporting points.



Source: Prostock-studio / Shutterstock

Explore the way the author of the sample explanatory text used a concept map to brainstorm their essay.



What did you notice about the concept map?

Effective brainstorming:

- is open-ended—no idea is wrong at this point
- focuses on the big picture
- attempts to organize ideas into categories
- invites the author to begin gathering supporting evidence

What if I don't know where to start?

Sometimes students get stuck at the very beginning of the writing process. If you're experiencing writer's block, here are some suggestions:

- Freewriting: Set a timer for five to 10 minutes and write. Don't worry about grammar or whether it makes sense. Let your ideas flow freely; you can organize them later.
- Mind Mapping: Start with your main topic in the center of a page, then branch out with related ideas or questions. Use colors or symbols to make connections visually.
- Question Storming: Write down as many questions as you can about the topic. Sometimes asking questions helps clarify what you want to explore.
- Use Prompts: Try starting with phrases such as:
 - "I'm curious about..."
 - "This reminds me of..."
 - "I wonder if..."
- Word Association: Write down words or phrases that come to mind when you think about the topic. Keep expanding on these words to generate more ideas.

Question

What is the value of brainstorming before drafting a text?

Reveal Answer:

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Brainstorming provides you with time to explore ideas and your thinking on the topic before beginning to organize your ideas and draft.

Concept Map

A concept map like the one used by the author of the sample essay is useful in planning explanatory texts because it focuses on mapping ideas and textual support. Consider the way the map was used to plan the use of evidence.

Sample Brainstorming Graphic Organizer

It's not necessary to complete all parts of a concept map; they might not all apply. Notice that the author has considered how to incorporate a quote and anecdote to support this idea.

By brainstorming before beginning to draft your text, you can identify key points, gather supporting evidence, and organize your thoughts so that your plan for writing is as clear as possible before you begin.

Planning Document

Now you can begin planning your writing assignment.

Download the document to your computer and use it as you begin to plan your approach to the topic. To get started:

- Write your main topic in the center of the map. It's okay if you're not sure of your main idea yet. This is just a place to start.
 - Example: "Why change is necessary for personal growth"

- Add branches for the main ideas you want to discuss in your text. Think about broad categories or themes related to your topic.
 - Examples: “Challenges of Change,” “Benefits of Change,” and “Examples of Growth Through Change”
 - Under each branch, jot down specific details, examples, or evidence. Use anecdotes, quotes, facts, or questions to flesh out your ideas.
 - Example under “Benefits of Change” may include “Improves resilience” and “Encourages creativity”
-

Explanatory Brainstorming

Introductions

Explanatory text is nonfiction writing that provides readers with information, ideas, and facts about a topic. Most explanatory texts are structured with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.



Source: Maridav / Shutterstock

Read the first paragraph of the sample student explanatory text similar to the one you will write at the end of this unit.

President John F. Kennedy once said: “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” Morgan’s experience on a recent solo trip exemplifies the truth of Kennedy’s statement:

I considered staying in Copenhagen for my entire trip because I was having so much fun. Change has always been difficult for me. However, I did not want to miss my opportunity to visit Berlin, the next city on my itinerary. The thought of leaving Copenhagen was difficult, but as I boarded the plane for a new destination, I realized I was opening myself up to new adventures. This became my mindset for the rest of my travels. I embraced the change from one European city to the next and had an amazing trip filled with new experiences and cultures!

Even though change can be hard, it is an important part of the human experience. Without it, we wouldn't grow and improve. Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

The last sentence of the example introduction is a [thesis statement](#). A thesis statement is a concise summary of the central idea of a text. In this case, the thesis statement tells the reader that the text will explain key developments in satellite technology that occurred during the middle of the twentieth century.

A strong thesis statement:

- clearly and explicitly tells the reader what the writer's purpose is
- does not express the writer's opinion
- tells about the information and ideas that the writer will cover in the text
- usually appears as the first or last sentence of the introduction

Question

Why is the thesis statement a critical element of the introduction?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The thesis statement clearly states what the text will be about.

Without a thesis statement at the beginning of the text, readers may feel confused.

Organization

A strong thesis statement also gives readers a sense of how a text will be organized.

Reread the thesis statement from the introduction above:

Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

The thesis statement points to how the text will be organized. It suggests that readers will first read about Sputnik 1, then Project SCORE, and finally the work of John Pierce and Harold Rosen. The body of the text will refer back to these ideas from the thesis statement.

Check-In

Read the following introduction from an explanatory text. Then answer the questions.

The United States has long been known for its music, from folk to hip-hop. Bluegrass, for example, developed from Celtic roots, but people in states like Kentucky and Tennessee added their own particular stamp to this European style to create something new and uniquely American. Rock music can also be traced to the music of Americans. Musical theater, too, is something specific to America. However, perhaps none of these musical styles are as distinctively American as the blues, which sprang from the experiences of Black Americans in the South and often tells the stories of hard times.

Question 1

Which sentence in the paragraph is the thesis statement?

- a.** The United States has long been known for its music, from folk to hip-hop.
- b.** Bluegrass, for example, developed from Celtic roots, but people in states like Kentucky and Tennessee added their own particular stamp to this European style to create something new and uniquely American.
- c.** Musical theater, too, is something specific to America.
- d.** However, perhaps none of these musical styles are as distinctively American as the blues, which sprang from the experiences of Black Americans in the South and often tells the stories of hard times.

Reveal Answer

- d.** However, perhaps none of these musical styles are as distinctively American as the blues, which sprang from the experiences of Black Americans in the South and often tells the stories of hard times.

Question 2

Based on the thesis statement, what topics will likely be discussed in the body of the text?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The body will likely discuss the role the blues plays in defining American music, the blues's connection to the experience of Black Americans, and the types of stories the music tells about.

Need a little extra support?

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Practice

Read the following ideas for a thesis statement for an explanatory text. Then complete the activity.

1. The Bennett neighborhood has always been, and continues to be, plagued with a lack of affordable housing.
2. While Bennett has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, the decades-long problems of underfunded schools, lack of affordable housing, and a dearth of basic services persist.
3. Even urban planners familiar with trends in the region have been surprised with Bennett's unprecedented growth in the last five years.
4. When polled about the state of the Bennett neighborhood, a majority of residents identified the problem of underfunded schools as their biggest concern.

Activity

Explain which thesis statement is most appropriate for a text about the current state of the Bennett neighborhood. Based on the thesis statement, how will the text most likely be organized? What topics will be covered in the text?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Thesis statement #2 is most appropriate for a text about the current state of the Bennett neighborhood. The other statements are ideas that would likely be included in a text about the state of the Bennett neighborhood; however, #2 concisely summarizes what the writer will cover in the text. It suggests that the writer will organize the text by first explaining the growth of the neighborhood and then explaining the history and present state of the neighborhood's persistent problems: underfunded schools, lack of affordable housing, and a dearth of basic services.

Planning Document

Now that you can recognize a strong thesis statement, open your planning document and write a first draft of your thesis statement. Think about the main point you want your text to explain. Your thesis should answer the question: *What do I want my readers to understand about this topic?* Remember that your brainstorming is just a first step. Your thesis statement may and probably will change some as you begin drafting.

Remember that your brainstorming is just a first step. Your thesis statement may and probably will change some as you begin drafting.

Explanatory Brainstorming

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified the best thesis statement and explained why.
 2. _____ I explained how the text will likely be organized.
 3. _____ I wrote a first draft of the thesis statement for my explanatory text.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will compare introductory sections of two explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **models** – examples
 - **primary purpose** – main or most important purpose or goal
 - **secondary purpose** – second or additional purpose or goal
 - **strategies** – careful plans or methods for achieving something
-

Introductions

The primary purpose of an explanatory text is to explain an idea or topic to an audience. But the writer may have another purpose based on who the audience is.

Sometimes a writer is writing for a general audience, which is to say, everyone or no group of people in particular. Other times, a writer has a particular audience in mind. For example, if you were writing an article on solar-powered scooters for a teen science magazine, your audience would probably be young people who like science, or more particularly, those who would enjoy riding a scooter. Your purpose might be not only to explain how the scooters work but to inform kids how they can build their own scooter or persuade them to choose a solar-powered scooter instead of a gas-fueled one.

Explanatory texts begin with an introduction. The introduction to an explanatory text serves these important functions:

- It introduces the topic and leads to the rest of the text.
- It engages readers so that they will want to continue to read. Writers sometimes appeal directly to readers by using “you.” To hold interest, writers may draw on what readers are already familiar with before they introduce new concepts.
- It provides background information to orient the reader and suggests why the topic is relevant or important. Background information may include relevant facts, events from history, quotes, or definitions of important keywords.
- It presents a thesis statement that focuses the topic on a single big idea that the writer will develop throughout the text.

Compare Introductions

Good writers often use models to learn new strategies for effective writing. Comparing the introductions of two explanatory texts can show you how other writers accomplish the following:

- introduce a topic
- engage the reader and hold the reader's interest
- build background on the topic
- present a thesis statement
- appeal to a particular audience
- fulfill a secondary purpose for writing

Watch the video and listen as a student compares introductions from two explanatory texts.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question 1

What type of background information does the introduction to *The Disability Experience* provide? What about *Ecological Footprint*?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The first introduction includes facts about what technologies people with disabilities use. The second introduction includes facts about what an ecological footprint is, how it can be measured, and why that's important.

Question 2

In “Ecological Footprint,” the writers repeatedly use the word *we*—as in “We can measure the carbon dioxide. . .” and “we all live on what the 'global farm' provides.” Why might the writers have used *we* rather than addressing their readers as *you*?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Their audience is all people. The writers may want to emphasize the fact that we all live on the planet together, and each one of us is responsible for doing our part to protect it.

Think about the two introductions discussed in the video. Both want to explain ideas to their audience. What might the writers have added to their introductions if they had wanted to persuade readers of something?

Check-In

Use what you've learned about comparing introductory sections to answer these questions.

Question 1

What are different ways a writer can address readers directly in an introduction?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer can address readers as *you* or ask a question directed at readers. A writer might include an anecdote in order to engage readers, or the writer might include information about what happened in the time leading up to the event that the text will focus on.

Question 2

Summarize the benefits of comparing introductions to two introductory texts.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: It can help you learn different ways to write an effective introduction. It can show you various techniques writers use to engage readers, build background, and introduce a central idea.

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Practice

Activity

Read the two introductions below. Consider how they are similar and different. Think about the strongest elements of each introduction.

Introduction 1

Certain life events, big and small, can cause us to feel stressed. Sometimes we feel stress for a short period of time—for example, what athlete wouldn't feel nerves before an important sports competition? But sometimes we experience stress repeatedly over a long period of time. That is known as chronic stress. Chronic stress can have a number of negative effects on our health. For example, it can reduce the body's ability to fight infection, and it can also increase our risk of diseases later in life, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer. One way to limit the effect of stress on our bodies is through mindfulness meditation.



Source: daisydaisy. 123rf.com

Introduction 2

Life can be so stressful for teens! Our bodies change, we experience a whole array of new emotions, and some of us struggle with anxiety or depression. Fortunately, we can

develop coping mechanisms that help us to “rewire” our brains so that we can better respond to stressful situations or events. This will not only help us navigate our way through our challenging teen years but set us on the path to a safe and healthy adulthood.



Source: parinyabinsuk. 123rf.com

Write a paragraph in which you compare the two introductory texts and identify which elements are strong in each. Evaluate which introduction you think is more effective and why.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Both introductions include a thesis statement at the end of the paragraph. Introduction 1 doesn't have a really strong hook, but the first sentence of Introduction 2 addresses teens directly and expresses a feeling that many teens share, so that is somewhat effective. Both introductions include background information. The first introduction includes facts about stress and explains what chronic stress is. It also explains that stress can lead to various health problems. Introduction 2 includes background information on the changes that teens undergo and how that can lead them to feel stress, anxiety, and even depression. The writer mentions coping mechanisms and rewiring the brain but doesn't explain what those things mean. Overall, Introduction 1 is stronger than Introduction 2.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I compared introductions from two explanatory texts.
 2. _____ I identified which elements were strong in each introduction.
 3. _____ I wrote a paragraph evaluating which introduction was more effective.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will organize an introductory paragraph to an explanatory text.

Key Words

- **thesis statement** – a concise summary of the central idea of a text
-

Introductions

Think Creatively

The introduction of an explanatory text introduces the topic of the text. A strong introductory paragraph should contain a thesis statement, or a concise summary of the central idea of the text, that tells the reader what the writer's purpose is. A strong introductory paragraph should also be engaging. In the introduction, writers think creatively to employ techniques that will hook readers and make them want to continue reading.

The following excerpt is the introductory paragraph from Chapter 1 of the book *Ecological Footprint: Managing Our Biocapacity Budget* by Mathis Wackernagel and Bert Beyers. As you read, think about how the writers introduce the chapter's topic and how they capture readers' interest.

Question

How is the introduction effective in sparking the reader's interest?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The introduction grabs the readers' attention by explaining a universal situation—that everyone has an ecological footprint. It's effective because it helps readers connect to a complicated idea.

Introductions

Techniques to Engage Readers

The introductory paragraph you just read engages readers by making a complicated issue accessible to most readers. The writers define the key term “Ecological Footprint” using informal language and show readers how the concept applies directly to them.

Review the introduction to the sample explanatory essay you’ve read, consider what the author does here to engage the reader.

President John F. Kennedy once said: “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” Morgan’s experience on a recent solo trip exemplifies the truth of Kennedy’s statement:

I considered staying in Copenhagen for my entire trip because I was having so much fun. Change has always been difficult for me. However, I did not want to miss my opportunity to visit Berlin, the next city on my itinerary. The thought of leaving Copenhagen was difficult, but as I boarded the plane for a new destination, I realized I was opening myself up to new adventures. This became my mindset for the rest of my travels. I embraced the change from one European city to the next and had an amazing trip filled with new experiences and cultures!

Even though change can be hard, it is an important part of the human experience. Without it, we wouldn’t grow and improve. Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

Question

What technique does the author use to engage the reader at the beginning of this essay?

Reveal Answer:

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The author begins with a quote from John F. Kennedy that is related to the topic of change. Then that is combined with an anecdote that makes the idea of the benefits of change more concrete.

Here is a list of some common techniques writers use when they think creatively to engage readers:

- Give a brief, related anecdote.

- Use vivid imagery or a compelling description.
- Include an unusual, revealing, or surprising fact, data point, or statistic.
- Appeal to readers' emotions.
- Ask a thought-provoking question.
- Define key terms.
- Provide specific examples that connect complicated topics to readers' own experiences.

The introduction sets the style and tone of the rest of the text. So, if a writer uses formal language in the introduction, they should continue using formal language throughout the text.

As you read other explanatory texts, focus on the introduction and ask yourself these questions:

- What is the topic of this text?
- What is the thesis statement?
- What technique or techniques does the writer use to engage the reader?

Check-In

Read the following introduction from an explanatory text. Then, use what you've learned about how writers organize an introduction to answer the questions.



Source: Potapova Valeriya. 123rf.com

How tall is the Eiffel Tower in Paris? Well, it depends on what time of the year you measure it. During the summer, the Eiffel Tower increases by a few centimeters. This is due to thermal expansion, a physical phenomenon in which heat triggers an increase in volume. Thermal expansion, in fact, is behind many changes in our dwellings and commercial and recreational buildings.

Question 1

What is the thesis statement? What is its purpose in the introduction?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The last sentence is the thesis statement. It tells the reader that the text will be about how thermal expansion affects various types of buildings.

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Question 2

Describe techniques the writer uses to engage readers in the introductory paragraph.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer begins by asking a question that seems to have an obvious answer, and then they state a surprising fact in response to the question. They use this example to introduce the topic of the text, thermal expansion.

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Practice

Read this draft of an introduction to an explanatory text about one woman's role in the transformation of a local library.

In 1993, the Bramble Library was boarded up. It had been like that for years. The books had been neglected. People had to travel 15 miles to another library. Ten years later, the Bramble Library was a success. Janice Higgins led the change. She was good at campaigning and putting pressure on local politicians.

Activity

Revise the introduction, using what you know about how writers organize strong introductory paragraphs.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In 1993, the Bramble Library was a disgrace. For years it had been boarded up, the books inside left to collect dust. Would-be patrons were forced to travel 15 miles to the next town for library services. But that was all before Janice Higgins walked onto the scene. Janice was determined to get the Bramble Library up and running again, and after ten years of creative campaigning and political pressure, she did just that; the Bramble Library became one of the county's greatest success stories.

Activity

Consider the topic for your explanatory text portfolio in this unit and brainstorm a few possible ways to engage the audience at the beginning of your explanatory text.

Consider the topic for your explanatory text portfolio in this unit and brainstorm a few possible ways to engage the audience at the beginning of your explanatory text.

Reveal Answer:

Hide Answer:

Sample answer

- Look for a surprising piece of information related to your topic that grabs attention.
 - Example: "Studies show that people who embrace change are 30% more likely to achieve their personal goals."

- Share a brief personal story or hypothetical situation that connects to the topic.
 - Example: “I was terrified when I joined the chorus at school, but I had no idea how much stepping out of my comfort zone would improve my life.”
- Pose a question that makes readers curious or reflective about the topic.
 - Example: “Change is one of the only constants in life, so why do we resist it so much?”
- Paint a visual image with words that brings the reader into the topic in an immersive way.
 - Example: “Making a change can feel like standing on the edge of a cliff in the dark, stepping out into an unknown without being able to see what lies ahead.”
- Start with a quote from a well-known person.
 - Example: “In Robert Frost’s most famous poem, he describes standing at a crossroads: ‘Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by,/And that has made all the difference.’”

Open your Brainstorming Graphic Organizer and plan a few possibilities for the opening of your explanatory text.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I organized an introductory paragraph for an explanatory text.
 2. _____ I revised the thesis statement to express the central idea of the text.
 3. _____ I used one or more techniques to engage readers.
 4. _____ I clearly explained the topic of the text.
 5. _____ I began brainstorming the opening of my explanatory text.
-

Organizing Explanatory Text

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will describe organizational structures for informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **graphic** – a graph, chart, table, or similar visual that summarizes information in an informational text
 - **heading** – a title for a section of written text within a larger article or essay
 - **text features** – component of a text that is not part of the writing itself
 - **text structure** – the arrangement of ideas in a text
-

Organizing Expository Text

When writing an informative text, writers will use a specific text structure to organize information in the text. The text structure a writer chooses will depend on the topic of the text itself. Any type of text structure will make the text easier for readers to understand. Transitional words and phrases, as well as text features, are part of text structure.

Types of Text Structures

Take a look at the different types of text structures writers can use to organize informative texts:

Text Structures to Organize Informative Texts

Text Structure	Definition
cause and effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">describes a cause and then explains the effect or effects of that causeorganizes information in terms of what happens (the cause) and what happens as a result (the effect)the causes and effects can be fully described within a paragraph, or the writer might use one paragraph or more to describe a cause and one or more paragraphs to describe the effects of that cause
compare and contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">describes the similarities and differences between two or more ideas or conceptsorganizes information in terms of how the two things are similar (a comparison) and different (a contrast)often, each paragraph compares and contrasts one aspect of the two subjects
description or list	<ul style="list-style-type: none">describes or lists the characteristics of an idea, person, or other topic by focusing on individual examples and details of various characteristicsin general, each paragraph or series of paragraphs focuses on one particular aspect of the topic

problem and solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describes a problem and then provides a detailed explanation of one or more solutions problems and solutions can be placed within the same paragraph, or one or more paragraphs can describe a problem, followed by one or more paragraphs describing or proposing a solution or solutions
sequential or chronological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describes events or steps in chronological, or time, order organizes and describes steps or events in the order in which they occurred or are performed

The text structure a writer uses will depend on the specific purpose of a text. To choose a text structure, a writer will ask themselves, *What do I want readers to take away from this text?* For example, a writer may be planning a text on different forms of government. The text structure they use will depend on the specific topic of the text:

- A cause-and-effect structure could be used to show how a specific form of government impacts other areas of society.
- A compare and contrast structure could be used to compare two different types of governments.
- A description or list structure could be used to describe the characteristics of one form of government.
- A problem and solution structure could be used to present the conflicts created by a form of government and potential solutions to those conflicts.
- A sequential or chronological structure could be used to explain how a country transitioned from one form of government to another.

Transitional Words and Phrases

A writer can use transitional words and phrases to connect ideas within a text. Which words the writer uses will depend on the text structure chosen. Transitional words and phrases can also help readers understand the structure of the text. This table shows examples of transitional words and phrases that can be used with each type of text structure:

Transitions for Explanatory Texts

Text Structure	Transitional Words and Phrases
cause and effect	<i>as a result of this, because of this, for this reason, this led to</i>
compare and contrast	<i>also, as well as, in contrast to, like, similar to, unlike</i>
description or list	<i>also, another, for example, to begin with</i>
problem and solution	<i>one concern, in order to prevent, in order to solve, an answer is/might be, one challenge is, one solution is</i>
sequential or chronological	<i>first, second, third, before, eventually, then, finally, afterward</i>

Text Features

A writer can also use text features to organize information within a text. Text features include headings, graphics, or any other textual components that are not part of the body of writing itself.

Writers can use headings to break up information in a text, with a heading signaling what one paragraph, or series of paragraphs, within a text will focus on. Headings typically stand out visually from the rest of the text so that readers can easily see where one section ends and another begins.

Graphics can present information visually. Graphics, such as tables or charts, are often best used to show data and statistics, or any information that can be better understood by viewing than by reading.

Watch the video and listen as a student discusses the different ways they can structure an informative text.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question

Why might a writer choose to use a chronological structure for an informative text?

Reveal Answer

A writer might choose to use a chronological structure to show steps in a process or describe how something happened in time order.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about how writers organize informative/explanatory texts to answer these questions.

Question 1

What transitional words and phrases might a writer use to connect ideas in an informative text with a compare and contrast structure?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer might use *as well as*, *similar to*, *in contrast to*, *like*, or *unlike* as transitional words and phrases.

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Question 2

Why might a writer use headings in an informative text?

Reveal Answer

A writer might use headings to break up information in a text and to signal what specific aspect of a topic each section will focus on.

Question 3

How can a writer use graphics in an informative text?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer can use graphics to present information that is better understood visually, such as data or statistics.

Practice

Read the ideas a writer wants to express in an informative text about democracies and constitutional monarchies. Think about what type of text structure would best help convey these ideas.

- A democracy is a form of government that allows citizens to participate in government by voting on laws directly or electing representatives to do so.
- A constitutional monarchy is a form of government that has a monarchy as well as a government organized by a constitution.
- In a constitutional monarchy, the monarch is the head of state. The monarch has certain powers, but does not set policy or choose government leaders.
- In a democracy, citizens elect the head of state, who makes decisions involving policy and government.

Activity

Write one or two paragraphs organizing these ideas with one specific text structure. Include transitional words and phrases to connect the ideas.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A democracy and a constitutional monarchy are two forms of government. Both forms of government are organized by constitutions. However, a democracy allows citizens to participate more directly in government by voting on laws or for representatives.

In a democracy, citizens elect the head of state, or someone who makes decisions involving policy and government. Like a democracy, a constitutional monarchy has a head of state. In contrast to a democracy, the head of state of a constitutional monarchy is a monarch not chosen by the people, and this monarch has certain powers but cannot make political decisions.

Question

Describe how your paragraph or paragraphs use organizational structure.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I used a compare and contrast structure to show the similarities and differences between the two forms of government. In each paragraph, I focused on comparing and contrasting one aspect of the two forms of government. I used transitional words and phrases such as *both*, *like*, and *in contrast to* to describe the ways in which the forms of government are alike and different.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I used a text structure to organize my ideas.
 2. _____ I used transitional words and phrases to connect ideas.
 3. _____ I described how I used organizational structure in my writing.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will organize complex ideas, concepts, and information in a unified whole in an informative/explanatory text.

Key Words

- **cause and effect** – describes a cause and its effect or effects
 - **compare and contrast** – describes the differences and similarities between two or more ideas or concepts
 - **description or list** – describes or lists the characteristics of an idea, person, or other topic by focusing on individual examples and details of various characteristics
 - **problem and solution** – introduces and describes a problem and then explains how to solve it or how it was solved
 - **sequential or chronological** – lists events or steps in chronological order
 - **text structure** – the arrangement of ideas in a text
-

Organizing Explanatory Text

As part of the prewriting stage, writers organize their ideas and determine the best text structure for their writing. This process often involves thinking creatively about the ideas the writers have and how best to present their research. Typically, writers begin with a topic and then do some research about that topic to help determine what to write about within that subject. Through this research, writers can think creatively to develop a list of subtopics, or more specific topics that are related to or part of the general topic.

For example, suppose that a writer is working on an expository text describing different options that students have after high school. This writer has already done some research on the topic and has developed the following notes:



Source: alphababy. 123rf.com

After high school, there are many options, including going to college, going to trade school, traveling, working, enlisting in the military, taking a gap year, and more.

63% of high school students who graduated in 2020 also enrolled in college by October 2020.

Most jobs will require a college degree. According to Georgetown University, by 2027 about 70% of all jobs will require some college.

A college degree can mean more debt, and that debt can last anywhere from a few years to 30 years depending on the amount a student borrows.

Question 1

What are some possible subtopics within the general subject of what students can do after college? Explain your answer.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Possible subtopics include the career paths students may choose after they finish high school, how choosing those career paths may influence their future plans, and the pros and cons of enrolling in college.

As the writer reviews their notes, they decide to narrow their focus so that they are only discussing the decision of whether or not to go to college directly after high school. The writer can think creatively about their narrowed topic as they continue to research and develop their idea. The writer may brainstorm their topic or develop further subtopics by freewriting or by asking themselves questions such as these: What might an audience want to know about why college can be beneficial? How can I balance different viewpoints?

Question 2

What is another question the writer might ask to help brainstorm subtopics?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: What might an audience want to know about alternatives to college?

With these questions, the writer is thinking through the various aspects of their topic and thinking creatively about how to create a balanced, cohesive explanatory text.

Organizing Expository Text

Choosing a Text Structure

After narrowing down the topic, writers must determine what text structure to use.

Writers can consider text structures such as cause and effect, compare and contrast, description or list, problem and solution and sequential or chronological:

Text Structures for Explanatory Texts

Text Structure	Definition	Examples of When to Use It
compare and contrast	describes the similarities and differences between two or more ideas or concepts	to compare similar options about where to eat out for dinner
problem and solution	introduces and describes a problem, then the writer explains how the problem could be solved or how it was solved	to describe a social problem, such as cyberbullying, and offer possible solutions
cause and effect	describes a cause and then explains the effect or effects of that cause	to describe a historical event and its impact
sequential	describes events or steps in chronological, or time, order	to describe events leading up to an election

Text Structures

Question 1

What text structure might a writer use to organize ideas about what can happen because of extreme weather conditions in various places around the world? Why?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A cause and effect text structure would be a good choice to organize ideas about what happens in the world because of extreme weather conditions. This text structure would allow the writer to explain the effect of extreme weather conditions in different parts of the world.

Question 2

What text structure might a writer use to introduce ideas about issues involving the safety of drinking water supplies and how to improve access to safe drinking water? Why?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A problem and solution text structure would be a good choice to organize ideas about ensuring safe supplies of drinking water. This text structure would allow the writer to explain the problems created by a lack of safety around drinking water and the possible solutions to this problem.

Question 3

In addition to the example given in the chart above, what would be an example of a topic that might benefit from using a sequential text structure? What about a compare and contrast text structure?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A sequential text structure could describe the steps needed to prepare a recipe, and a compare and contrast text structure could be used to help decide between two places to live.

The text structure a writer might use in an explanatory text about what to do after college is dependent on their purpose. The writer might choose to use a compare and contrast text structure in order to describe how going to college and not going to college offer different options for high school graduates. If the writer wants to go in a different direction, they may decide to use a problem and solution text structure. Perhaps this writer is thinking of an audience of high school students who do not know what they want to do after high school. The writer decides to think creatively and present the question *What should I do after high school?* as a problem and view their text as a way to give their audience some possible solutions.

Question 4

Think about an explanatory text you're read recently. What is the overarching text structure used by the author? Why do you think the author chose that text structure? How do you think it enabled the author to organize their ideas into a cohesive, unified whole?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I read an article about the European Age of Exploration. This text largely used a cause and effect text structure. This made sense because the Age of Exploration had significant impacts not only on Europe but on much of the rest of the world. This text structure allowed the writer to explain what happened during this period and also describe the effect of these events on people of the time period and people in the future.

Organizing Explanatory Text



[Source] iQconcept / Shutterstock

Whichever text structure you choose, you will need to organize your essay in a way that conveys your ideas clearly and precisely. Here are some tools to help you start your draft.

This graphic organizer offers sentence frames. Sentence frames can be helpful because they give you a firm structure. You just have to plug in your ideas. Remember, it's a first draft, so focus on getting your ideas down on paper.

An outline can be a useful tool if you want something less structured than the graphic organizer with boxes and sentence frames. The outline prompts you with questions to help you move through the different parts of your essay. Get all your ideas down and remember it doesn't have to be perfect.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about how writers organize ideas, concepts, and information to answer these questions.

Question 1

How is a problem and solution text structure like a cause and effect text structure? How are the two text structures different?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The two text structures are similar in that the solution stems from the problem in the way that an effect stems from a cause. However, solutions may not proceed directly from a problem in the way an effect proceeds directly from a cause; it's possible to have problems that go unsolved, whereas every cause has one or more effects.

Question 2

How is a compare and contrast text structure like a sequential or chronological text structure? How are the two text structures different?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: The two text structures are alike in that they both require two or more things in order to function; the compare and contrast structure needs at least two events, ideas, or people to tell how they are alike or different, while a sequential model needs to put two or more events in order. However, they are different in that a compare and contrast structure isn't focused on the order in which things happen, whereas a sequential or chronological text structure is strictly based on time order.

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Parts of a Paragraph

A writer is using a description text structure to write an essay about how extreme weather impacts places around the world. Select the View Hotspot button. Then, click on each of the seven hot spots to see how one writer organized the introduction and first body paragraph of their essay.



[Source] PCH.Vector / Shutterstock

Activity

Use the paragraph below to match the parts of a paragraph.

[1] **Have you ever been affected by extreme weather, like snow in May or a 70-degree day in November?** From hurricanes to droughts, extreme weather is becoming more common around the world.

[2] **Extreme weather shapes the world we live in and has significant and lasting consequences.** These events damage infrastructure, disrupt ecosystems, and harm communities.

[3] **By understanding these impacts, we can be better prepared to adapt to these powerful forces and how they change our world.**

[4] One significant way extreme weather affects humans is through damage to infrastructure, which has severe economic impacts. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the total combined cost of natural disasters in 2023 was \$93.1 billion (NOAA, 2024).

[5] From this evidence, it is clear that extreme weather has unexpected and lasting economic impacts on communities that can take years to recover from. This highlights the importance of anticipating how extreme weather will affect different areas of the country. This way, governments can create emergency response plans to ensure communities in need get aid quickly and efficiently before, during, and after a disaster.

[6] Next, we will explore how extreme weather affects ecosystems.

Practice

A writer has invented a new board game and is writing an article to teach people how to play this game.

Activity

Write a paragraph in which you evaluate the effectiveness of each text structure described in this lesson—cause and effect, compare and contrast, description or list, problem and solution, and sequential or chronological—for getting the writer’s point across. Give reasons for your evaluations. Then choose which of the five text structures makes the most sense, and explain why.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Cause and effect doesn’t make a lot of sense for this type of article. The purpose of the article is to explain the rules of the game, and that doesn’t have much to do with causes and effects. Compare and contrast would be an effective text structure for this article, but only if the new board game is very much like another; then the writer could show how the two games are alike and how they are different. Otherwise it doesn’t seem like a very effective structure. Description or list would work if the game does not have a time element to it and if the order the players do things in doesn’t matter. Otherwise, this could create confusion. Problem and solution might work if the game is simple enough—the writer could describe a scenario in the game and tell players what they can do in that situation, which would be like giving them a solution—but that would be very unwieldy if the game is more complex. Sequential or chronological would work because describing the rules is like explaining one thing after another—*first*, you put your pieces on the starting line, *then* you roll a number cube—and that fits in with the use of time order words. I would recommend that the writer use a sequential text structure.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I evaluated how well all four text structures fit the purpose of the article.
 2. _____ I chose the text structure that would best fit the idea and explained my choice.
-

Developing the Topic

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will develop a topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts and details when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **thesis statement** – a concise summary of the central idea of a text
-

Developing the Topic

Writers of explanatory texts develop the topics of their texts with facts and details that demonstrate that their thesis statement, or one or two sentences that express the central idea, is valid. Facts are pieces of information that can be proven to be true, while details are smaller pieces of information related to a topic or fact; often, details are used to support the claims made elsewhere in the text. To fully develop their topic, writers must make sure that the facts and details they use are accurate and reliable.

Facts and Details

A writer will choose facts and details in order to develop their texts. All facts should be well-chosen, relevant to the topic, and sufficient to prove that the thesis is valid. Some facts and details that writers come across in their research may be interesting and tangentially related to the topic. However, if those facts and details are not necessary to fully explain the topic, writers should choose to exclude those pieces of information from their texts.

Question 1

How are facts and details similar?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Both facts and details are pieces of information that are used to support the basic thesis statement or central idea of the text. In addition, facts and details are alike because they must be relevant to the topic of the text.

Question 2

A writer is discussing the care and feeding of cats in an explanatory text.

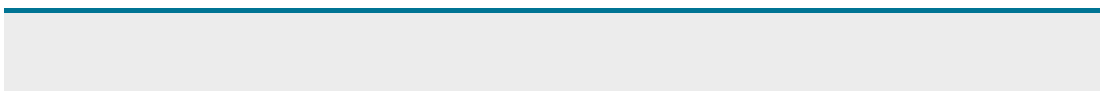
What could be an example of a fact or detail that is directly related to this topic? What could be an example of a fact or detail that is only tangentially related to the topic?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A piece of information that is directly related to the topic could be the types of food—meat, fish, vegetables—that cats should and should not eat. A detail that is tangentially related to the topic would be the types of foods eaten by other felines, such as lions, jaguars, and cheetahs.

A writer should use a variety of types of facts and details to support their topic.

Consider how the following writer develops the topic and uses facts and details:



For new drivers, being safe is about more than following the rules of the road. In 2020, according to the United States Department of Transportation, over 2,200 people died in accidents that involved a teenage driver. These incidents can involve distracted driving, which is a hazard for any driver. Looking down at a screen or playing with music selections takes valuable seconds away from focusing on the road. Also, a simple, but overlooked safety measure is wearing a seat belt. According to 2019 information from the CDC, 40 percent of teenagers did not wear seat belts every time they were in a vehicle. To stay safe, remember to focus on driving when you get behind the wheel, practice driving with a trusted adult, and wear a seat belt every time you get into a vehicle.

Question 3

In this example, what is the writer's thesis statement? Where in the text does it appear?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer's thesis statement appears at the beginning of the paragraph: *For new drivers, being safe is about more than following the rules of the road.*

Question 4

What are two facts in this paragraph that support the thesis statement? How do you know they are facts?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Facts include the statistic in the second sentence regarding the number of deaths in crashes involving teenage drivers and the information from the CDC further down about the percentage of teenagers who wear seat belts. They are facts because they can be proven true or false.

Question 5

What are two details that appear in the middle of this paragraph? What is their purpose?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Details include descriptions of distracted driving and calling out seat belts as a safety measure. These details provide additional information related to the facts and the topic.

Through these facts and details, the writer develops the topic of teenage driving safety and supports their thesis that safety is about more than traffic rules.

As you watch the following video, observe how the students develop topics by choosing reliable sources, as well as how they determine which types of facts they will use to develop their topic.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question 6

Why should writers look closely at the author and publisher of a source?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers should look closely at a source's author and publisher to see whether they have a background in the topic the source is about. Writers should also see if the author or publisher has a bias toward one point of view over another. This helps writers determine whether a source is reliable.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about how writers develop topics to answer these questions.

Rainee is writing an article about the health benefits of kayaking. For each piece of information described below, determine whether it is relevant to the topic and Rainee's likely thesis statement, along with determining whether the information is reliable; then decide whether it should be included in Rainee's article. Explain your answer.

Question 1

Kayaking developed among the Inuit peoples of the Arctic as a way to help them hunt for animals and to travel quickly and safely across the water.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: It's hard to tell whether the information is reliable because its source isn't given. But since this is not a central part of Rainee's thesis, which deals with the health benefits of kayaking, it should not appear in Rainee's article.

Question 2

Several recent medical studies show that kayaking improves a person's physical strength and has a positive effect on their cardiovascular health as well.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Although the sources are not specifically named, it's likely that the sources are reliable. In any case, the information represents a central part of Rainee's thesis, which is that kayaking carries important health benefits, so it should appear in Rainee's article.

Question 3

I heard somewhere that some people like kayaking better than running because it doesn't damage participants' knees, so kayaking is good for people's health for that reason.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: It makes sense that kayaking would be good exercise for people with knee problems, but "I heard somewhere" isn't a very reliable source. Rainee should try to find more reliable information or else leave this argument out of her article.

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Practice

Lucretia is writing an essay. Her purpose is to show how laws protecting the environment, such as the Clean Air Act and others passed during the 1960s and 1970s, have improved the quality of life in the United States. Her thesis statement will reflect this purpose.

Activity

Write a thesis statement that Lucretia might use. Then explain how Lucretia can use facts and details to develop her topic. Include at least three specific examples, and be sure to mention where she should get her information.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Lucretia might use the thesis statement *Laws that protect the environment have improved the quality of life in the United States*. Some facts that Lucretia might use include information about the number of square miles of land that has been protected by law and kept in its natural state, along with the number of visitors to national parks, state forests, and other places where nature is protected. She could also use information such as the effects on health of anti-pollution legislation, including both anecdotal and statistical data. She should be sure to get her information from reliable sources such as academic websites and well-respected scientific and historical publications written by people who are experts in their field.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I wrote an appropriate thesis statement.
 2. _____ I explained how the writer can develop the topic with facts and details.
 3. _____ I included at least three specific examples of facts and details.
 4. _____ I explained how the writer can ensure that her information is reliable.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will develop a topic with examples, quotations, or other information appropriate to your audience when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **audience** – the group of people for whom a text is intended
 - **thesis statement** – a concise summary of the central idea of a text
 - **synthesize** – combine elements to form something new
-

Developing the Topic

A writer of an explanatory text will develop their topic in a way that best supports their thesis statement, or their concise summary of the central idea in their text. To do this, writers will consider the audience, or intended readers of their text. Writers must reason effectively to engage their audience and determine what kinds of information will best develop their topic and validate their thesis statement.

Consider the Audience

Think about different types of explanatory texts and the audience for whom each type of text is intended. A text detailing the experience at a certain educational institution would likely be intended for prospective applicants. Meanwhile, a text about the evolution of pop music could be intended for music enthusiasts. The intended audience of a text will help a writer determine how much information, and what kind of information, to include.

Once a writer has identified their audience, they can ask themselves:

- What does my audience already know about this topic?
- What is my audience's level of interest in this topic?
- How much context do I need to provide on each subtopic?
- How can I draw my audience into the topic of the text?

Keep in mind that writers of explanatory texts may have more than one audience. That's why writers may choose to provide explanations for terms or concepts that readers may be unfamiliar with. Often, writers will assume that their audience has less prior knowledge rather than more. That way, readers with less background knowledge will not be confused about certain ideas.

Using Examples, Quotations, or Other Information

While doing research, writers come across various types of information to support their thesis statement. At this stage, writers can plan exactly how they will use that information to develop the topic and support their thesis statement. Writers can reason effectively in order to determine where they will use each piece of information in the text.

Writers will often try to use the same, or close to the same, number of pieces of information to support each subtopic in a text. Writers will also try to vary the types of facts they use in order to support their readers' understanding. This chart shows different types of information writers use in explanatory texts:

Types of Information with Definitions and Examples Used in Writing and Research

Type of Information	Definition	Example
anecdotal example	an example based on personal accounts rather than research	Many people who like pop music also like classic rock.
concrete detail	a specific detail grounded in evidence	The genre of pop music originated with the publication of sheet music, as music that appealed to more people had better sales.
statistic	numerical data	More than 50% of people from ages 16 through 34 report that pop is their favorite genre of music.
quotation	words taken directly from a source	As Hans Christian Andersen once said, "Where words fail, music speaks."
specialized language	language that is specific to a particular topic or academic discipline	music-related: pop, Motown, folk, record label, Top 40, LP, recording 60s-related: Ed Sullivan Show, teen culture, British invasion, fandom, political protest

To support a thesis statement such as "Pop music has been pivotal in the development of modern culture," the writer might include the concrete detail above. The writer might use the quotation to introduce the topic of pop music. Perhaps the writer will also call back to the quotation in the conclusion to reinforce the idea that pop music speaks for the people, which is why it is so pivotal to modern culture. This repetition of ideas develops the topic of pop music and supports the thesis statement.

Consider what kinds of information you might include in an informational text. How could you vary the information to support your thesis statement and keep your audience engaged?

Question

Why should a writer use different types of information to support their thesis statement and develop the topic?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer should use different types of information to develop a topic because more kinds of information show how important the thesis statement is. Different types of information also show the writer's understanding of their topic and that they developed the topic fully to support their thesis.

Finding, Citing, and Synthesizing Sources

As you gather information to develop your explanatory essay topic, you might find it helpful to record and organize it in one place. You can [synthesize](#) the information you find by analyzing topics and themes across your sources and by comparing and contrasting how the different sources approach your topic. Download the **Finding, Citing, and Synthesizing Sources** document and use it to help you manage your source information. On it, you can record your source information, the type of information you will be using from the source, the text of that information, and how that information supports the thesis of your essay. Finally, you can synthesize your information.

Explanatory Essay—Finding, Citing, and Synthesizing Sources

Remember that you need to check that any sources you intend to use are reliable and free of any bias. Use the checklist to help make that determination.

Explanatory Essay Source Reliability Checklist

Check-In

Use what you've learned about how writers develop topics of explanatory texts to answer these questions.

Question 1

How does the audience of a text impact how a writer develops the topic and supports their thesis statement?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The audience of a text may have varying levels of background knowledge on or interest in the topic, so the writer adapts what kinds of information they will include and how they develop their topic in support of their thesis statement.

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Question 2

Why might a writer use a statistic to support the following thesis statement:
“Radio airplay determines what musical artists become popular”?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer might use a statistic to show a snapshot of numerical data about the radio and how it impacts which musical artists are popular and why. This will also help the writer support their thesis because it will illustrate why radio is important.

Practice

Read the following draft of an informational text about pop music.



Source: packshot. 123rf.com

When Pop Music Changed

Pop music took over America in the 1960s. This was made evident by the emergence of many artists, including The Beatles, The Beach Boys, The Supremes, and many more. One critic claimed, “This will change the music industry as we know it.” This decade was so important for pop music that people today still listen to artists from the 1960s.

Activity

Explain how the writer could further develop the topic and support their thesis statement in “When Pop Music Changed.” Based on their audience, identify three different kinds of information the writer could include.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer could further the topic by including more information that validates the thesis statement: “Pop music took over America in the 1960s.” The writer may be considering an audience of music enthusiasts or a general reader interested in music. To appeal to a general audience, the writer could include a concrete detail about other artists who were popular in the 1960s. The writer might also include a statistic about how many people watched important musical performances, such as those that appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show and other television shows at the time. The writer might also include specialized language to demonstrate how much pop music influenced culture. For example, the writer might include words like *recording* and *LP* to discuss how artists like The Beatles changed the way music was recorded and how much music they sold.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I explained how the writer could develop the topic and support the thesis statement.
 2. _____ I identified three types of information that the writer could include.
 3. _____ I explained why this information was appropriate to the audience.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will cite sources appropriately when writing an explanatory text.

Key Words

- **citation** – a reference to a source used to inform a piece of writing
 - **paraphrase** – restating someone else's ideas in your own words
 - **plagiarism** – the act of taking words or ideas from a source and passing them off as one's own
-

Developing the Topic

When you write an essay that uses ideas from other sources, it is important to cite those sources appropriately in your work. This practice helps writers avoid [plagiarism](#), or taking someone else's ideas without proper credit. Plagiarism is intellectually dishonest and should be avoided by writers of all ages and skill levels. To properly credit other sources, writers must use [citations](#) when they [paraphrase](#), or restate, someone else's ideas and when they use a direct quotation from a source. Writers do not have to include a citation when they include information in their work that is considered common knowledge.

Understanding the Consequences

Plagiarism is a type of theft. When people take credit for another's work, they are stealing what belongs to someone else. As in any case of theft, there are serious consequences for those caught plagiarizing.

High School Consequences

- failing the assignment
- drop in course grade
- reported on academic records
- expulsion from school

College Consequences

- failing the assignment
- drop in course grade
- failing the course
- disciplinary hearing
- reported on academic records
- withdrawal of scholarship and financial aid
- expulsion from school

Professional Consequences

- disclaiming published research
- withdrawal of funding for work
- monetary penalties and fines
- demotion or loss of job
- legal action

The most serious consequences, such as being expelled from school or sued for theft, result when plagiarism is severe and intentional. The severity of the consequence increases as the severity and frequency of the plagiarism increases. However, many students commit plagiarism by accident, especially when they are first learning to research. Students might not understand how much research they can use in their own work or how to give their sources credit. Fortunately, students can learn to use citations, which allow them to use source material in their writing without plagiarizing.

Watch the video to learn the correct way to gather and cite information from reference sources.



Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Understanding Citations

There are different ways to cite sources in a written work, and it is important to choose a style and be consistent. Two common citation styles are the Modern Language Association (MLA) style and the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Sometimes there is a preferred style for certain disciplines. For example, MLA style is often preferred for writers in literature and the humanities. APA style is often preferred by writers in the social sciences and education. As always, before you begin an essay, make sure you are following the specific instructions for your assignment.

MLA style and APA style both use in-text citations and a source list at the end of a piece of writing. In MLA style, this list is called a works cited page; in APA style, it is called a Reference List.

Using MLA and APA In-Text Citations for Books

For MLA style, in-text citations for books include the author's name and the page number where information was found. For example: (Marks 213). The parenthetical citation goes inside the closing period of the sentence. Note that no *p.* is used before the page number and no comma is used to separate the author's name from the page number.

For APA style, in-text citations for books include the author's name, the year the material was published, and the page number or numbers where the material was found. For example: (Marks, 2012, p. 213). Note that commas are used to separate parts of the citation and that *p.* is used before the page number.

Using MLA and APA Source Lists for Books

A works cited page in MLA style and a Reference List in APA style contain much of the same information, but the two styles are formatted and ordered differently.

Here is an example for formatting a book on an MLA works cited page:

Author's Last Name, Author's First Name. *Title of Book*. City of Publication,

Publisher, Publication Date.

Here is an example for formatting a book on an APA Reference List:

Author, A. A. (Year of publication). *Title of work*. Publisher Name.

Note that the APA style uses an author's first and middle initials instead of their first and middle name. The year of publication goes in parentheses after the author's name. APA style also does not include the city of publication for books. Both styles use a hanging indent after the first line of source information.

Using MLA and APA Source Lists for Online Sources

Many of the sources you will use for your essays will be digital. Online sources can change and even disappear, so it is important that you save, download, or print any documents you are citing in your essay. As you do this, you will want to collect as much information as the source provides for later citation. While not all digital sources will include all of this information, look for the following:

- Author's name
- Title of the article (web page)
- Versions, volumes, editions, or issue numbers
- Publisher information (website name)
- Any page or paragraph numbers provided
- URL
- Date you accessed the material

Here is one example for formatting a digital article on an MLA works cited page:

Author last name, First name. "Title of Article/Web Page." *Website Name*, Day Mo. Year,

URL. Accessed Day Mo. Year.

Here is one example for formatting digital content on an APA Reference List:

Author's last name, First name. (Date of publication). Title of page. Retrieved from
<https://www.webaddress.com/URL>.

Pro Tip

Search online to find samples of MLA and APA citations that fit the source you want to cite. Remember to consult reputable sources, such as a library or university resource, when looking for examples.

As you create your works cited page or Reference List, refer to these online resources again for guidance and examples.

You may want to consider using an online tool for collecting, organizing, annotating, and citing your research. Just search for citation manager tools and choose one that works best for you.

Question

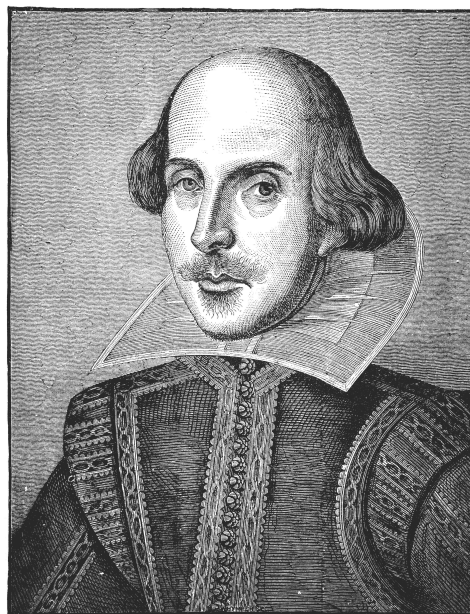
How should you decide which citation style to use?

Reveal Answer

Writers should always follow any specific directions they were given in an assignment about citation style. If writers have a choice, they can use the discipline they are writing about to choose the most common citation style. For example, writers in literature and the humanities often use the MLA style, and writers in social sciences and education often use the APA style. Writers should be consistent about which style they are using.

Check-In

Answer the following questions about how to cite sources appropriately.



Source: antiqueimagesdotnet. 123rf.com

Question 1

If you were assigned to write an explanatory text about an aspect of William Shakespeare's play *Othello*, what citation style would you use? Why?

Reveal Answer

MLA, because this style is usually used when writing about literature.

Question 2

How would you use APA style to format an in-text citation for a book in an essay about a sociology study?

Reveal Answer

I would use parentheses at the end of the sentence that included paraphrased material from a book. I would include the author's last name, followed by the year the book was published, followed by the page number where I found information. I would put the parenthetical citation inside the closing period of the sentence in my essay.

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Question 3

How would you briefly summarize the key differences between a works cited page in MLA style and a Reference List in APA style for books?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Both source lists include similar information but arrange it differently. APA style uses an author's first and middle initials instead of their first and middle name. The year of publication goes in parentheses after the author's name. APA style also does not include the city of publication for books.

Question 4

Identify and explain one minor and one severe consequence of plagiarizing source material in a research paper for a college class.

Reveal Answer:

Sample answer: A minor consequence for plagiarizing source material in a college research paper could be a drop in the overall grade for the course. If the plagiarism was severe, a more serious consequence, such as losing a scholarship, could be applied.

Practice

Choose a topic you would be interested in researching for an explanatory text. Decide on whether you will use the MLA style or APA style for citations. Use the discipline you are writing about as a guide. Remember that MLA style is the preferred style used by students and researchers in the humanities field, so it is the one you will use for citations in essays you write in your English class. Locate three reputable book titles on that topic. You do not actually have to write the text.

Next, using MLA or APA style, create a sample works cited page or Reference List. Remember that sources should be listed alphabetically according to the authors' last names.

Pro Tip

Remember to use a hanging indent after the first line of each source in your list. Also remember to use proper punctuation such as commas or periods to separate parts of your citation. If you want to cite a different type of source, search online to find examples of MLA or APA citations. Remember to use reputable sources.

Activity 1

Describe the process you used to create your works cited page or Reference List. What information did you include in order to cite each source appropriately? Explain the importance of citing course material in your writing and the consequences of plagiarizing.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I located three book titles that I could use to write an essay about educational practices. I decided to follow the APA style to create a Reference List. I organized the sources alphabetically based on the authors' last names. I used a hanging indent after the first line of each source in my list. For each book title, I formatted the citation as follows: Author, A. A. (Year of publication). *Title of work*. Publisher Name. It is important that I cite my sources correctly so that I respect the work and property of others and avoid the consequences of plagiarism. Even when accidental, plagiarism damages the credibility of my work, and can lead to failing the assignment or the course.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I located three reputable book titles I could use to write an explanatory text.
 2. _____ I identified key details about my sources, such as their authors, titles, and publication dates.
 3. _____ I followed the conventions of MLA style or APA style in order to cite sources appropriately in either a works cited page or a Reference List.
 4. _____ I explained the importance of citing source material and the consequences for plagiarism.
-

Activity 2

Reflecting on Your Writing Journey

Take a moment to reflect on the progress you have made with writing an explanatory text. This reflection will help you identify strengths, areas needing support, and potential next steps before submitting your final draft.

Before you classify your progress, review the rubric. This will help you determine if you are on track to complete your essay.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Classify your progress in the activity below.

Your teacher may ask you to submit a draft of your portfolio or other documents to ensure that you are on track to complete your essay. If they do, follow the instructions they provide and upload the necessary documents.

Clauses

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain the differences between dependent and independent clauses and their grammatical role in sentences.

Key Words

- **clause** – a group of words that includes a subject and a verb
 - **dependent clause** – a clause that does not form a sentence
 - **independent clause** – a clause that forms a sentence
 - **subordinating conjunction** – a connecting word or phrase that introduces a dependent clause
-

Clauses



Source: Dm_Cherry. Shutterstock

Explanatory writing is made up of clauses, or groups of words that include a subject and a verb. Below are two examples. In each clause, the subject is in bold type and the verb appears in italics.

- **summer music concerts** *begin* on Tuesday
- because **he** *played* the flute

There are two types of clauses: dependent and independent. An independent clause is a sentence and expresses a complete thought. The first example you just read includes

an independent clause and should be written as a sentence: Summer music concerts begin on Tuesday.

A dependent clause is *not* a sentence. Even though a dependent clause has a subject and a verb, it doesn't express a complete thought. The clause *because he played the flute* is a dependent clause that begs the question: What happened because he played the flute? There are numerous ways to complete this thought, such as:

- Because he played the flute, he was invited to join the community orchestra.
- Because he played the flute, his fingers were extremely flexible.

To form a sentence with a dependent clause, the dependent clause must be combined with an independent clause, as in the examples above.

Here are some examples of other dependent clauses. Read them and pay attention to the bolded word:

- **after** the game was over
- **although** Ernie Chiang is a talented painter

Notice that these dependent clauses start with a subordinating conjunction, or a connecting word or phrase that introduces a dependent clause. In the examples, the words *after* and *although* signal dependent clauses. Other subordinating conjunctions include *as*, *whether*, *if*, and *before*. The writer can add an independent clause after or before the dependent clause to create a complete sentence, as shown here in italic type:

- *The players participated in a press conference* **after** the game was over.
- **Though** Ernie Chiang is a talented painter, *he is an even better sculptor.*

Question

Read the following clause. Is it dependent or independent? Explain why.
ever since North Carolina became a state

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: It is a dependent clause because it has a subject and a verb but is not a complete sentence. The reader will want to know what has happened ever

since North Carolina became a state.

Check-In

Think about what you have learned about dependent and independent clauses in this lesson as you answer these questions.

Question 1

Compare and contrast dependent and independent clauses. What is their grammatical role in sentences?

Reveal Answer

Both dependent and independent clauses contain a subject and a verb. However, an independent clause is a complete sentence, while a dependent clause is not.

Question 2

Is the clause below independent or dependent? Explain your answer.
the city's newest Ethiopian restaurant is very popular in downtown

Reveal Answer

It is an independent clause. It contains a subject and a verb and forms a complete thought, so it should be written with an initial capital letter and appropriate end punctuation: *The city's newest Ethiopian restaurant is making waves in downtown.*

Question 3

Read the following dependent clause. Then explain how the writer can use the clause to create a complete sentence.
before they immigrated to Canada

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer should add an independent clause before or after the dependent clause to create a complete sentence, such as: *Before they immigrated to Canada, they had never been on a plane.*

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Practice

Complete the interactive about dependent and independent clauses.

Activity

The clauses from the interactive are below. Do the following:

1. Create complete sentences with the dependent clauses.
2. Rewrite independent clauses as complete sentences.
3. Write a few sentences explaining how you determined whether the clauses were dependent or independent.

Clauses:

- the bus began to move erratically
- the birds migrate to the lake in the fall
- after he passed his driving test
- unless she hears otherwise from her boss

Reveal Answer

Sample answers:

- The bus began to move erratically!
- The birds migrate to the lake in the fall.
- After he passed his driving test, he celebrated with his family.
- She will not go into work early unless she hears otherwise from her boss.

I examined each clause to see whether it expressed a complete thought, and if it did, I knew it was an independent clause and needed to be written as a sentence.

The subordinating conjunctions signaled dependent clauses, as well as the fact that those clauses didn't express a complete thought.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified the independent and dependent clauses.
2. _____ I rewrote the independent clauses as sentences with initial capital letters and appropriate end punctuation.
3. _____ I added independent clauses to the dependent clauses to create complete sentences.

4. _____ I explained how I determined whether each clause was dependent or independent.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain when and how punctuation should be used with clauses.

Key Words

- **clause** – a group of words that includes a subject and a verb
 - **complex sentence** – a sentence with one independent clause and at least one dependent clause
 - **conjunctive adverb** – a connecting word that adds essential meaning to a sentence, such as the words *however*, *therefore*, and *indeed*
 - **dependent clause** – a clause that does not form a sentence
 - **independent clause** – a clause that forms a sentence
 - **subordinating conjunction** – a connecting word or phrase that introduces a dependent clause
-

Clauses

When writing explanatory texts, adding sentence variety can make the text more interesting and engaging for readers. One way to add sentence variety is to change the number of clauses, or groups of words that include a subject and a verb. Depending on the type of clause and how the writer wants to construct the sentence, the writer may need to use a comma or a semicolon.

Punctuation with Subordinating Conjunctions

Determining when and how to use punctuation depends on what clauses are in the sentence. There are two types of clauses: independent and dependent. An independent clause can be a sentence on its own and expresses a complete thought. A dependent clause may have a subject and a verb, but it cannot be a sentence on its own because it doesn't express a complete thought. Below are some examples of independent and dependent clauses:

Independent and Dependent Clauses in Sentences

Independent Clauses	Dependent Clauses
taxes were enforced to raise money for the British government	when taxes were enforced to raise money for the British government
the colonist formed the Continental Congress	after the Boston Tea Party

In the examples, the independent clauses express complete thoughts, but the subordinating conjunctions, or signal words, *when* and *because* indicate dependent clauses, which do not express complete thoughts. In the independent clause *taxes were enforced to raise money for the British government*, the writer would only need to capitalize *taxes* and add a period at the end of the clause, because it is a complete thought.



Source: flipppo. 123rf.com

For *when taxes were enforced to raise money for the British government*, the writer would need to decide whether to add an independent clause or edit the dependent clause to change it into a complete thought. For example, a writer might capitalize *when* and add a comma after the dependent clause and then add an independent clause to complete the thought:

When taxes were enforced to raise money for the British government, the colonists opposed this taxation without colonial representation in Parliament.

Using Complex Sentences in Writing



Source: pelfophoto / Shutterstock

You know that a clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. In some cases, clauses are also complete sentences. In other situations, writers combine clauses to build sentences. One example is a complex sentence. This type of sentence is made of an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. To write correct complex sentences, you can use the following formula:

- Formula: complex sentence = independent clause + dependent clause(s)
- Example: Although I enjoy painting portraits, I don't have enough time to complete one.

Here, "I don't have enough time to complete one" is an independent clause, while "Although I love painting portraits" is a dependent clause.

Using Correct Punctuation

Using complex sentences will help you add variety and depth to your writing. To use them correctly, you must understand their parts. You already know how to combine independent and dependent clauses. Now, you will learn how to connect them with punctuation.

There are many rules that govern how to use punctuation correctly. The following list will explain the most common uses in complex sentences.

- Commas connect ideas, phrases, and clauses. They help to clarify ideas and control the flow of writing.
 - After introductory clauses:
 - Example: To my surprise, my sewing project turned out well.
 - After participial phrases:
 - Example: Smiling ear to ear, I happily accepted the award for best quilt.

- To set off interruptions:
 - Example: I competed against fifty contestants, as a matter of fact.
- To set off parenthetical ideas:
 - Example: Sewing, which I practice often, is easier for me than knitting.
- Semicolons connect independent clauses to show that they are closely related. They also separate items in a list.
 - To join independent clauses:
 - Example: I did my best at the cooking competition; I even memorized the recipes.
 - Before a transitionary phrase:
 - Example: I did well at the cooking competition; however, I was penalized for going overtime in the final challenge.
 - Between items in a list if the items are long or the list already includes commas:
 - Example: The top winners were Teyana Seabrook from Columbus, Ohio; Raul Seth from Anaheim, California; and Rain Wynn from Daytona, Florida.
 - Note: Semicolons can only join independent clauses. Do not use semicolons to join dependent and independent clauses.
- Colons connect independent clauses to words, phrases, lists, or other independent clauses.
 - To introduce a list:
 - Example: Our coach's victory speech included everything: an exciting introduction, a detailed review of the tournament, a list of the most successful moments, and a conclusion that inspired hope for future seasons.
 - To set off a formal statement:
 - Example: Coach repeated the following statement throughout her speech: "Cherish your teammates more than the game, because there is no game without the team."
 - To set off an explanatory statement:
 - Example: Her speech was truly meaningful: every member of the soccer team felt honored by it.

- Note: Colons must be preceded by an independent clause. Do not use a colon after a dependent clause.

Recall that complex sentences contain both independent and dependent clauses. To use punctuation correctly, you must evaluate the parts of the sentence that you wish to join or connect. Then, you can determine whether a comma, semicolon, or colon is the best choice. You may need to use more than one to express ideas clearly.

For example, if a complex sentence has multiple parts, a semicolon might be chosen where a comma would usually be used. Examine the punctuation in the following sentence:

“The weather that morning was bright and sunny; but after lunch, bursting with excitement at the prospect of swimming, we were devastated to find storm clouds forming on the horizon.”

In the example, a semicolon is used before “but” rather than a comma. While either would be correct, a semicolon in this case helps show the main break in the sentence, since there are already two commas in the second clause.

Time to Practice!

Answer the following questions to practice using commas, semicolons, and colons correctly in complex sentences.

Question 1

Question 2

It is important to know how to use punctuation in complex sentences correctly. Learning how to join clauses with commas, colons, and semicolons will help you clarify your writing as well as control the flow of ideas.

Clauses

Punctuation with Conjunctive Adverbs

Writers can also use punctuation with subordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, or words such as *however*, *therefore*, and *indeed*, to add clauses to a sentence.

Writers can also use these kinds of adverbs to edit a dependent clause so that it becomes a complete thought. For example, to add another clause, the writer might use a semicolon to connect two independent but related ideas and create the following:

When taxes were enforced to raise money for the British government, the colonists opposed this taxation without colonial representation in Parliament; however, the colonists did not realize that British citizens were subjected to much higher taxes.

In the example, the word *when* signals the dependent clause. The writer adds a comma to set that clause apart and indicate that this clause is part of a larger sentence. Next, the writer uses a semicolon and the conjunctive adverb *however* and a comma to connect ideas in the first independent clause with ideas in the second independent clause *the colonists did not realize that British citizens were subjected to much higher taxes*.

Using a variation of clauses can allow writers to make their sentences more complex. They can then alternate between some longer sentences and other shorter sentences to make their texts more interesting for readers.

Question

Read the following clause. How would you edit this clause to add punctuation and add another clause?

because the colonists formed the Continental Congress

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I see the signal word “because,” which tells me that this is a dependent clause. I can edit this clause by adding it to the end of an independent clause and adding a period at the end of the sentence, such as *The colonists formed the Continental Congress after the Boston Tea Party.*

Review these examples of subordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs and think about how you might use these words to create and punctuate clauses in your own writing:

Subordinating Conjunctions and Conjunctive Adverbs	
Subordinating conjunctions	<i>when, because, after, although, if, whenever, whether, while, as, before, even though, until, unless</i>
Conjunctive adverbs	<i>however, also, consequently, furthermore, moreover, nevertheless, therefore, indeed</i>

Check-In

Think about what you have learned about when and how to use punctuation with clauses as you answer these questions.

Question 1

When might a writer want to use a semicolon instead of a comma?

Reveal Answer

A writer would use a semicolon when connecting two independent but related clauses.

Need a little extra support?

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Question 2

Read the following example. How would a writer punctuate this example?

because they were dissatisfied with the remnants of feudal society
the French lower and middle classes revolted against the
aristocracy

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

A writer would capitalize the first word and add a comma after *society* to show the connection between the dependent clause *because they were dissatisfied with the remnants of feudal society*. Then the writer would add a period at the end of the sentence.

Question 3

Read the following example. How could a writer revise this example using a semicolon?

people think Marie Antoinette said “let them eat cake” historians
and folklore scholars believe that phrase came from Rousseau who

wrote a story about a princess who mockers her peasants' cries
for food and revolutionaries attributed the quote to Marie
Antoinette

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer could revise this example by capitalizing *people* and by
adding a semicolon and the word *however* before *historians and folklore scholars*.

Practice

Read the following paragraph and think about how the writer might vary the sentences using clauses and punctuation.

The Glorious Revolution happened from 1688 to 1689. It took place in England. It was also called “The Bloodless Revolution.” This is because there was very little violence involved compared to other revolutions. King James II was overthrown by his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. King James II was Catholic. Mary and her husband were Protestant. This change eventually meant that the absolute monarchy was now a constitutional monarchy. Historians view this revolution as a pivotal change to the government and religion of England.

Activity1

Revise the paragraph to include at least two dependent clauses, one colon, and one semicolon.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Between 1688 to 1689, the Glorious Revolution took place in England. Unlike other revolutions, it was comparatively less violent: this led to its popular nickname, “The Bloodless Revolution.” The revolution took place when Catholic King James II was overthrown by his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange, who were both Protestant. This change eventually meant that the absolute monarchy was now a constitutional monarchy; therefore, historians view this revolution as a pivotal to change in the government and religion of England.

Activity2

Explain when and how you used punctuation in your revision.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I added dependent clauses to the beginning of the first two sentences, turning them into complex sentences. After each dependent clause, I added a comma. Then, I used a colon in the second sentence to introduce an explanatory clause. Finally, I added a semicolon and the word *therefore* followed by a comma to combine the last two sentences in the paragraph.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I revised the paragraph to add at least two dependent clauses.
 2. _____ I revised the paragraph to add one colon.
 3. _____ I revised the paragraph to add one semicolon.
 4. _____ I explained when I used punctuation in my revision.
 5. _____ I explained how I used punctuation in my revision.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will rewrite sentences and paragraphs by inserting or rearranging phrases and clauses.

Key Words

- **dependent clause** – a clause that does not form a sentence
 - **dependent marker word** – a word that forms a dependent clause when added to the beginning of an independent clause
 - **independent clause** – a clause that forms a sentence
 - **participial phrase** – a phrase that begins with a participle and acts like an adjective
 - **prepositional phrase** – a preposition followed by its object and the object's modifiers
 - **relative clause** – a type of dependent clause that is also called an adjective clause
 - **subordinating conjunction** – a connecting word or phrase that introduces a dependent clause
-

Clauses

Rearranging and Inserting Clauses

A sentence can consist of a single clause or several clauses. An independent clause might stand alone or be combined with a dependent clause. A dependent clause begins with a dependent marker word, also known as a subordinating conjunction, such as *although*, *before*, *since*, and *when*. These words clarify the relationships among ideas expressed in a sentence's clauses. Look at how words like these are used in sentences.

This is an independent clause that stands alone as a sentence:

Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods.

These are dependent clauses that do not stand alone as sentences:

Although Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods...

Before Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods...

Since Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods...

When Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods...

Question 1

Complete the sentence *Although Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods . . .*

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: *Although Joli was ready to go hiking in the woods, her father lost his car keys and no one could go anywhere until they were found.*



Source: cukugede. 123rf.com

Read one writer's original and revised sentences:

Sentences Combined Using a Subordinating Conjunction

Original	Revision
In autumn, the leaves of deciduous trees change from green to yellow, red, and orange. Shorter days and cooler temperatures decrease leaves' chlorophyll levels.	In autumn, the leaves of deciduous trees change from green to yellow, red, and orange because shorter days and cooler temperatures decrease leaves' chlorophyll levels.

In the example, the writer combines two sentences with a subordinating conjunction, or dependent marker word.

Question 2

Which is the dependent marker word in the revised sentence? What role does it play in the sentence?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The dependent marker word is *because*. This word introduces the dependent clause *because shorter days and cooler temperatures decrease leaves' chlorophyll levels*. In turn, this clause tells why leaves change color in autumn—the idea expressed in the sentence's independent clause.

Revising two independent clauses into a complex sentence by inserting a transition word clarifies the relationship between the ideas conveyed.

Question 3

How would you revise the following sentences in order to create a complex sentence using a dependent marker word?

Trees feed themselves all summer long.

Leaves have plenty of chlorophyll to absorb energy from the sun during the warm weather.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Since leaves have plenty of chlorophyll to absorb energy from the sun during the warm weather, trees feed themselves all summer long.

A writer might also consider inserting a relative clause, also called an adjective clause, to provide further explanation. Read this example:

In autumn, the leaves of deciduous trees change from green to yellow, red, and orange because shorter days and cooler temperatures decrease leaves' chlorophyll, which is the chemical that makes leaves green.

The relative pronouns *which* and *that* introduce relative clauses that provide information about chlorophyll. This information explains how decreased chlorophyll results in leaves changing colors.

As you see in the examples above, revising requires creative thinking. There's more than one way to clarify information and convey specific meaning when revising. A

writer might try several revisions to determine which sounds best and is clearest.
Consider this same explanation written differently:

In autumn, chlorophyll, which is the chemical that makes leaves green, decreases because of the shorter days and cooler temperatures. As a result, the leaves of deciduous trees change from green to yellow, red, and orange.

A writer might compare the different versions and then decide which one is best and clearest. Consider which version you would choose if you were the writer.

Clauses

Rearranging and Inserting Phrases

When revising an explanatory text, a writer can also insert a phrase to provide more information. A **prepositional phrase** can modify a noun or a verb. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition, such as *for*, *in*, *by*, *to*, or *of*. It does not contain a verb. Consider this example:

Phrases Added for Sentence Detail and Variety

Original	Revision
Leaves change color.	Leaves <i>on deciduous trees</i> change color <i>in autumn</i> .

The first phrase *on deciduous trees* tells more about *leaves*. It is an adjectival phrase, or a phrase that adds description and functions like an adjective.

The second phrase *in autumn* is an adverbial phrase, or a phrase that functions like an adverb. In this case the phrase tells when the colors change. Adverbial phrases can be moved within a sentence. For example, *in autumn* could start the sentence to add variety to the sentence structure:

In autumn, leaves on deciduous trees change color.

A **participial phrase** can also be used to combine ideas and make writing engaging. A participial phrase begins with a participle, such as *wondering*, *drawing*, and *astonished*. It does not contain any verbs other than the participle. Read this example:

Displaying their beauty, colored leaves draw crowds to the Northeast each autumn.

Note that participial phrases, unlike adverbial phrases, need to have a specific placement in their sentences. The phrase *displaying their beauty* refers to the leaves. If the sentence read *Colored leaves draw crowds, displaying their beauty, to the Northeast each autumn* the sentence would be confusing—is it the leaves that are displaying their beauty, or the crowds? If the participial phrase connects directly to a noun in the sentence, it should be placed next to that noun and not moved elsewhere. In general, phrases that describe verbs are more easily moved in sentences than phrases that describe nouns.

Question 1

Which sentence contains both a prepositional phrase and a participial phrase?

- a.** Shouting with excitement, Maddy handed the bright red leaf to her brother.
- b.** Jumping with excitement, Maddy could not contain her enthusiasm.
- c.** Maddy jumped with excitement and put the red leaf inside her satchel.
- d.** Maddy shouted with excitement and could hardly contain her enthusiasm.

Reveal Answer

- a.** Shouting with excitement, Maddy handed the bright red leaf to her brother.

Question 2

Which rearrangement of phrases in the following sentence makes the most sense?

Chemical processes take place in leaves of deciduous trees, causing color changes.

- a.** Of deciduous trees, chemical processes take place in leaves, causing color changes.
- b.** In leaves of deciduous trees, chemical processes causing color changes take place.
- c.** Causing color changes, the leaves of deciduous trees experience chemical processes.
- d.** Chemical processes, causing color changes in leaves of deciduous trees, take place.

Reveal Answer

- b.** In leaves of deciduous trees, chemical processes causing color changes take place.

Rearranging and inserting clauses and phrases gives writing a better flow. Using dependent marker words to combine sentences can break up a long string of short, simple sentences. Adding phrases and clauses can provide extra information while making the writing more engaging. Writers must think creatively in order to come up with the best way to revise their writing.

Check-In

Consider what you have learned about inserting and rearranging clauses and phrases to complete the following questions.

Question 1

What dependent marker word could be used to connect the two independent sentences below into a single sentence with an independent clause and a dependent clause? Combine the sentences and rewrite them as one sentence using the dependent marker word you chose.

Many forests are in danger of being cut down to make room for homes and businesses.

The forest is a lovely place.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I used the dependent marker word *although* to create the sentence *Although the forest is a lovely place, many forests are in danger of being cut down to make room for homes and businesses.*

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Question 2

Revise the following sentence to include a participial phrase.

Leaves change color as winter approaches, and will soon fall off the trees altogether.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Changing color as winter approaches, leaves will soon fall off the trees altogether.

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Practice

Read the following paragraph. Note places where phrases and clauses are used and consider how they affect the text.

The most heavily forested state in the United States is Maine, which is located in the northeastern corner of the country. Excluding Maine, the state with the greatest forest cover in the nation is New Hampshire. States like New Hampshire and Maine have lots of forest because they receive plenty of rain, have relatively low populations, and don't have much agriculture. Outside the Northeast, southeastern states such as Alabama and South Carolina are the most heavily forested. Although midwestern states such as Nebraska are bigger than Alabama or Maine, they have less forest as a percentage of the land.

Activity

Reread the paragraph, looking for phrases and clauses. Identify at least one example of each of the following:

- a prepositional phrase
- a participial phrase
- a relative clause
- dependent clause with a dependent marker word

Then choose two of the sentences in the text. Rewrite each so at least one part of the sentence is rearranged. Add, delete, or change individual words as necessary. Make sure the meaning of the sentence does not change.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer:

- *in the nation* is an example of a prepositional phrase
- *excluding Maine* is an example of a participial phrase
- *which is located in the northeastern corner of the country* is a relative clause
- *although midwestern states such as Nebraska are bigger than Alabama or Maine* is an example of a dependent clause with the dependent marker word *although*

I can change the first sentence to *Maine, which is located in the northeastern corner of the country, is the most heavily forested in the United States.* I can

change the last sentence to *Midwestern states such as Nebraska are bigger than Alabama or Maine, but they have less forest as a percentage of the land.*

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified prepositional and participial phrases.
 2. _____ I identified relative and dependent clauses along with a dependent marker word.
 3. _____ I changed the order of the phrases or clauses in two sentences without changing the meaning of the sentences.
-

Usage

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will identify examples of usage conventions.

Key Words

- **conventions** – rules that groups of people agree on, such as the rules of correct grammar or usage
 - **mechanics** – the use of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation in writing
 - **usage** – widely accepted ways in which people use words and phrases
-

Usage

Good writers of explanatory text need to demonstrate a command of the conventions of grammar, usage, and mechanics, as well as strong organization and content.

Conventions are the agreed-upon rules of a language. While grammar generally refers to how to construct sentences using various parts of speech, usage refers to how certain words and phrases are used within a sentence. Mechanics include spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Usage matters because sometimes confusion over a mere word or phrase can make writing unclear. These are examples of several types of usage conventions that writers should master:

- using clear pronouns
- using possessives and contractions correctly
- making certain words in a sentence agree
- using the correct word of an easily confused pair

Using Clear Pronouns

When you use a pronoun, make sure it is clear what noun you're referring to. For example:

1. Unclear: Michael gave Steven his book.
2. Clear: Michael returned Steven's book to him.

In the first sentence, the pronoun *his* is ambiguous or unclear—it could refer to Michael or to Steven. In the corrected sentence, the verb *returned* clarifies that the book belongs to Steven. Now, there is no doubt that *to him* refers to Steven.

Here's another example:

1. Unclear: When Thuy dropped the bowl onto the ceramic floor, it broke.
2. Clear: The bowl broke when Thuy dropped it onto the ceramic floor.

What broke—the bowl or the ceramic floor? In the first sentence, it's unclear. The pronoun *it* could refer back to either noun, and either could be breakable. The revision makes clear that the bowl was what broke.

Using Possessives and Contractions

This group of usage conventions pertains to using possessives such as *its*, *your*, *their*, and *whose* properly and not confusing them with contractions such as *it's*, *you're*,

they're, and *who's*. Here are some examples:

1. Incorrect: Its time we washed the car; it's windshield is very dusty.
 2. Correct: It's time we washed the car; its windshield is very dusty.
-
1. Incorrect: Whose the inventor of the personal computer?
 2. Correct: Who's the inventor of the computer?

It's easy to confuse a possessive form with a sound-alike contraction. But the following strategies can help you check that any possessive or contraction conveys the meaning you intend.

1. Read a sentence aloud and, in your mind, replace any possessive with its sound-alike contraction in its spelled-out form. Ask yourself if that makes sense in the sentence. For example, with the first incorrect sentence, ask: Does "It is time we washed the car" make more sense? If so, then you should replace the possessive *Its* with the contraction *It's*.
2. Read any contraction you see as two separate words and ask if that makes sense. For example, instead of "it's windshield is very dirty," you'd read, "It is windshield is very dirty." Does that make sense? No, it doesn't! In this case, the possessive form *its* is needed rather than *it's*.

Correct Agreement

Different parts of a sentence need to agree, or fit, with one another correctly. For example, a verb needs to agree with its subject, a pronoun needs to agree with the noun or nouns it refers to, and a noun needs to agree with any noun or nouns it refers to.

Review the following examples and notice the corrections that were made:

Subject-verb agreement

1. Incorrect: Juana and her friend Martin has spent the weekend working on a project for the local science fair.
2. Correct: Juana and her friend Martin have spent the weekend working on a project for the local science fair.

Noun-noun agreement

1. Incorrect: Hard work and discipline are the key to success in sports.
2. Correct: Hard work and discipline are the keys to success in sports.

Noun-pronoun agreement

1. Incorrect: My favorite pastime is reading fantasy novels because they can take you to other worlds.
2. Correct: My favorite pastime is reading fantasy novels because it can take you to other worlds.

Question

Identify three usage conventions that are important in writing.

Reveal Answer

It's important to use clear pronouns, to use possessives and contractions correctly, and to use correct agreement.

Usage

Avoiding Word Mix-Ups

Words may be easily confused with other words that sound and look alike but have distinct meanings and usages. Avoiding word mix-ups is another usage convention writers pay attention to.

As you can see in this example, the phrase *all ready* has been confused with the word *already*:

1. Incorrect: By the time Tonya arrived to soccer practice, the team was all ready running a warm-up lap.
2. Correct: By the time Tonya arrived to soccer practice, the team was already running a warm-up lap.

When someone or something is “all ready” to do something, that means that they are prepared to do something or about to do something. When someone is already doing something, they have started doing it. The team had started running, so *already* is the correct word in this case. Remember, if you are unsure about the meaning of a word, check an online dictionary.

Watch this video to learn about some other words that are often confused.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Avoiding Word Mixups Transcript

Question

Give examples of two words that are easily confused.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: *Affect* and *effect* are easily confused because they sound alike and are spelled in similar ways.

Remember, writers of explanatory text often ask themselves these questions about usage:

- Have I used clear pronouns? What noun or nouns does each pronoun refer to?
- Have I used possessives clearly? Have I confused a possessive for a contraction, or vice versa? When I read a contraction aloud as whole words, does it make sense in the sentence?

- Do my subjects and verbs agree? Do my nouns agree with any other nouns they refer to? Do my pronouns agree with the nouns they refer back to?
- Could I have confused any words in the sentence with other words that look and sound alike?

Check-In

Read each sentence. Identify one error and identify the usage convention it breaks.

Question 1

A good plot and a strong main character is all you need to write a good thriller.

- a.** using clear pronouns
- b.** using possessives correctly
- c.** showing correct agreement between words in a sentence
- d.** using the correct word in a frequently confused pair

Reveal Answer

- c.** showing correct agreement between words in a sentence

the subject is plural so the verb should be *are* not *is*

Question 2

Professor Karimi of Boston University sites research by the National Institute on Aging to support her claim about the negative effects of loneliness on physical health.

- a.** using clear pronouns
- b.** using possessives correctly
- c.** showing correct agreement between words in a sentence
- d.** using the correct word in a frequently confused pair

Reveal Answer

- d.** using the correct word in a frequently confused pair

the word *sites* has been confused with *cites*

Question 3

They should invest more money in creating safe parks for people of all ages to enjoy.

- a.** using clear pronouns
- b.** using possessives correctly
- c.** showing correct agreement between words in a sentence
- d.** using the correct word in a frequently confused pair

Reveal Answer

- a.** using clear pronouns

it's unclear who the pronoun *They* is referring to

Question 4

Not only are penguins cute in they're "black-and-white tuxedos" but that coloration plays an important survival function.

- a.** using clear pronouns
- b.** using possessives correctly
- c.** showing correct agreement between words in a sentence
- d.** using the correct word in a frequently confused pair

Reveal Answer

- b.** using possessives correctly

they're should be replaced with the possessive *their*

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Practice

Activity

Read the sentences and complete the activity.



Source: Cole123RF. 123rf.com

1. When Henry set his sculpture on the folding chair, it collapsed.
2. Drowsiness is one of the affects of some types of some types of medication.
3. After being scratched by a neighbor's cat, the dog sat to lick it's paw.
4. Kayla gave Rose her sweater.
5. Ming and Shanna became a software developer and launched their own company.

For each sentence, identify the usage convention that has been broken.

Then revise the sentence to correct that error. There may be more than one way to revise a sentence.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer:

- a. The pronoun referent for *it* is unclear. It could refer to either the sculpture or the folding chair. Correction: *When Henry set his sculpture on the folding chair, the work of art collapsed.*
- b. The word *affects* has been confused with *effects*. Correction: *Drowsiness is one of the effects of some types of medication.*
- c. The contraction *it's* should be replaced by a possessive. Correction: *After being scratched by a neighbor's cat, the dog sat to lick its paw.*
- d. It's unclear whether the sweater belongs to Kayla or Rose. Correction: *Kayla returned Rose's sweater to her.*
- e. The noun phrase *a software developer* doesn't agree with the phrase *Ming and Shayla*. Correction: *Ming and Shanna became software developers and launched their own company.*

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

- 1. _____ I identified errors in writing.
 - 2. _____ I identified the usage convention each error violated.
 - 3. _____ I corrected each error using what I know about correct usage.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

Key Words

- **subject-verb agreement** – the rule that the subject and verb of a sentence must match in number
-

Usage

Languages change over time as people and technology change. People's usage of language develops as society changes overall. People make up new words or find new ways of communicating, and language has to change to accommodate that. For example, the word *email* is a shortened version of the words *electronic mail*. The words *email* and *electronic mail* did not exist until computers and the internet existed. As computer technology and *electronic mail* became more common during the late twentieth century, more people used the shortened form, *email*, and the word became part of English convention—that is, an accepted way of speaking and writing English.

Overall, usage is more than just adding new words or new meanings of words to the English language—or deleting them. While usage is generally determined by the standard conventions of English, it is important for writers to remember that usage can change over time and that it can be contested.

Conventions in Word Usage

Typical conventions guide how writers put together their texts. For example, sentences normally include a complete thought and contain a subject and a verb. A convention related to how sentences are constructed is subject-verb agreement. This rule of English usage means that the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must match in number, so if a subject is singular then the verb must be singular and if a subject is plural then the verb must be plural.



Source: dolgachov. 123rf.com

Consider these examples of subject-verb agreement:

Subject-Verb Agreement in Singular and Plural Sentences

Singular	Plural
The reader chooses a book.	Readers choose books.
The writer researches her topic.	Writers research their topics.

By using correct subject-verb agreement, writers are following English conventions. Very few writers would write *The reader choose a book* or *Writers researches their topics*; if they did, most editors would change it!

Question 1

Consider the sentence *The people in the restaurant talk loudly to their friends*. Henry says this sentence needs to be changed because of an error in subject-verb agreement. He argues that *talk* should be *talks* because *restaurant* is singular. Is Henry correct? Explain your answer.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: No, Henry is incorrect. The subject of the sentence is not *restaurant*, but rather *people*, which is plural. The verb *talk* is correct because we

would say *the people talk* rather than *the people talks*. *In a restaurant* is just a prepositional phrase between the subject and the verb.

Another example of a convention of English usage is pronoun agreement, or the idea that a pronoun must agree with the nouns used in the sentence.

Consider the following examples:

1. Mark Twain became popular for his humorous style and memorable characters, including Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.
2. Emily Dickinson was not a celebrated author during her lifetime.

Question 2

What are the pronouns in these two sentences? Are they singular or plural?

To whom do they refer?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In each of these examples, the subject is singular and the pronoun refers to that subject. *His* in the first sentence refers to *Mark Twain* to tell readers that the style and characters belong to Mark Twain. *Her* in the second sentence refers to *Emily Dickinson* to tell readers that the lifetime described in the sentence is Emily Dickinson's lifetime.

Pronoun usage is one example of how English conventions are changing. In the past, *they*, *them*, and *their* were considered plural pronouns and could only be used to refer to plural subjects. Now it is more common to see these pronouns used as singular pronouns or as pronouns that describe someone who identifies as nonbinary. Note, however, that we still typically use plural verbs with singular *they*; we are much more likely to say *This is my friend Dale; they are a very good writer* than *This is my friend Dale; they is a very good writer*. As society changes to be more inclusive, the language people use must change as well.

Demonstrate your understanding of usage and conventions by completing the following activity.

Usage

Conventions in Punctuation

In addition to conventions of sentence construction, conventions of punctuation also determine typical usage when writing in English. For example, sentences end with a punctuation mark, such as a period, an exclamation point, or a question mark. Within sentences, writers use commas to show the relationship between certain types of clauses and the rest of the sentence.

Question 1

Consider the sentence *I like reading Victorian novels, they are a lot of fun*. Is the comma appropriate in this sentence according to the rules of English usage? Explain, and revise the sentence if necessary.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: This is not an appropriate use of a comma as it joins together two complete sentences. It combines the independent thoughts *I like reading Victorian novels* and *They are a lot of fun*. Commas can join clauses, but when they join full sentences they create run-on sentences. The comma can be replaced with a semicolon, with a period, or with a dependent marker word such as *because*.

To show possession or to create contractions, writers can also use apostrophes. See the following examples:

Uses of Apostrophes in Possessives and Contractions

Explanation	Examples
Possessives use apostrophes to show ownership.	Amir's book the family's SUV Socrates's philosophy

Contractions combine two words into one word.	they + are = they're would + not = wouldn't it + is = it's
---	--

Note that one of these examples represents contested usage. *Socrates's philosophy* indicates that English conventions can be contested. In some style guides, *Socrates* would be made possessive by adding an apostrophe without an *s* because *Socrates* is a classical or Biblical name. In these style guides, you would also see *Moses' leadership* and *Zeus' children*. For other style guides, a proper noun needs an apostrophe and an *s* to make it possessive, and this rule applies to classical and Biblical names and any other proper nouns that end in *s*, *x*, or *z*.

For the contractions, the example of *it's* shows why writers should keep conventions in mind. *It's* means *it is*, but *its* refers to something that belongs to *it*.

Question 2

Consider these two sentences. Do they show the correct forms of *its* and *it's*, or not? If they are correct, explain why. If they are not correct, explain why and rewrite the sentences so they are accurate.

1. Its form is a sonnet.
2. It's written in iambic pentameter.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Both usages are correct. In the first example, *its* is a possessive word that refers to the poem's form. In the second example, *it's* is a contraction that combines the words *it* and *is*.

To create clear explanatory texts, writers must be able to apply their understanding of English conventions and usage so that readers can easily follow their ideas.

Question 3

Which of the following sentences features a possessive noun that correctly uses an apostrophe?

- a. One common language in the United States' is English.
- b. Angelica's family speaks English and Spanish.
- c. Spanish speakers' make up the second most common language group.

d. Eric and his family's speak English and Chinese.

Reveal Answer

b. Angelica's family speaks English and Spanish.

Check-In

Think about what you have learned about applying an understanding of usage, conventions, and contested usage as you answer these questions.

Question 1

Apply your understanding of subject-verb agreement to correct this sentence if necessary or to leave it as is. Explain your reasoning.

Modern authors of fiction and nonfiction publishes print and electronic books.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The sentence is not correct as it stands because the subject is *authors*, not *nonfiction*, even though *nonfiction* is closest to the verb. The sentence should read *Modern authors of fiction and nonfiction publish print and electronic books*.

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Question 2

Which of these sentences is correct? Explain your answer.

1. *Greek writer Aristophanes's plays include The Birds, The Frogs, and The Clouds.*
2. *Greek writer Aristophanes' plays include The Birds, The Frogs, and The Clouds.*

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Both sentences can be correct, depending on the style guide that is being used. This is an example of contested usage.

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Question 3

Describe the two forms of apostrophe usage. Write a sentence that includes both forms and identify which is which.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The two forms of apostrophe usage indicate possession and contraction. The possessive form indicates belonging, while the contraction form indicates the removal of letters. A sentence that uses both forms might be *I once read a novel about a house in Great Britain, but I can't recall the novelist's name.* The contraction is *can't*, short for *cannot*, and the possessive is *novelist's*, which shows that the name belongs to the novelist.

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Practice

Read the following paragraph and apply your understanding of usage and conventions.

Writers sometimes run into trouble with a type of comma that's called the Oxford comma or the serial comma. The issue of Oxford commas comes up in sentences that list three or more items. Suppose a writer wants to say that a particular author's output included poems *and* plays *and* short stories. However, she wants to list the three types of writing without using *and* twice. She could write the sentence *This author wrote poems, plays, and short stories*. Notice the comma after the word *plays*, the item in the list that comes directly before the word *and*. That's an Oxford comma. Some writers and editors strongly prefer to use the Oxford comma. Other writers and editors have an equally strong objection to it, however! They would prefer to write the sentence as follows: *The author wrote poems, plays and short stories*.

Activity

Reread the paragraph. Identify examples of the following usages:

- an apostrophe used in a contraction
- an apostrophe used in a possessive form
- a subject-verb agreement, singular
- a subject-verb agreement, plural
- a pronoun agreement, singular
- a pronoun agreement, plural

Finally, write 2–3 sentences explaining what the text of the paragraph shows about usage.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer:

- *a type of comma that's called* includes the word *that's*, which is short for *that is*.
- *a particular writer's output* includes the word *writer's*, which is a possessive form indicating that the output belongs to or is associated with the writer.
- *she wants to list* includes the subject *she* and the verb *wants*. This is an example of subject-verb agreement using the singular, since the subject is singular.

- *Some writers and editors strongly prefer* includes the subject *writers and editors* and the verb *prefer*. This is an example of subject-verb agreement using the plural, since the subject is plural.
- *However, she wants to list* includes the singular personal pronoun *she*, which refers back to the original singular noun *the writer*.
- *They would prefer to write the sentence* includes the plural personal pronoun *they*, which refers back to the original plural noun *writers and editors*.

The whole paragraph is an example of how contested usage affects punctuation.

The paragraph explains how some people accept and like the Oxford comma and others reject it and dislike its use. Whether writers use the Oxford comma will probably depend on the style guide they have access to and like best—or those belonging to their editors and publishers.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I identified examples of the listed usages to show my understanding of subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, possessive nouns, and contractions.
 2. _____ I explained what the text of the paragraph shows about usage.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will resolve issues of complex or contested usage and consult references as needed.

Key Words

- **contested usage** – an area of language use in which experts disagree
 - **convention** – rules that groups of people agree on, such as the rules of correct grammar or usage
 - **usage** – how people use language
-

Usage

Writers must consider their language usage, or how they use language, when writing explanatory texts. There are generally accepted ways of using language, but at times these conventions of English create disagreement among experts and scholars. These instances are called contested usage. When writers encounter instances of complex or contested usage, they can draw on their own knowledge of conventions or consult reference sources as needed.

Consulting Reference Sources

When writers are confronted with complex or contested usage, they can use reference sources. For example, a writer constructing an essay on the work of Edgar Allan Poe might consult reference sources such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style to determine how experts reference sources when writing about literature. The writer may also consult reference sources such as *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* and *Garner's Modern American Usage* when determining how to use certain words or how to resolve certain grammar issues in their writing.

No matter what reference sources the writer uses, it is important for writers to always consult the most recent version of the source. Many references are updated by experts over time, so writers should check the publication date or consult a frequently updated online source in order to get the most accurate and current usage.

Exploring Complex and Contested Usage

Consider how to address issues of complex and contested usage by watching this flipbook.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Word Play Transcript

Question

What should a writer consider when making decisions about usage? Use an example to support your answer.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A writer should consider the subject of their text and their audience. For example, if a writer is writing about a scientific topic, they should follow conventions of scientific writing and use traditional English usage rules if the audience will be more formal or more academic.

Check-In

Think about what you have learned about resolving issues of complex or contested usage and using references as you answer these questions.

Question 1

Read the following sentences. How would you revise to remove a possible issue in usage?

Storms continue to be more intense year after year. But scientists are hopeful that climate change can still be addressed.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I would revise to remove the *but* at the beginning of the sentence.

I could do this by combining the sentences with a comma: *Storms continue to be more intense year after year, but scientists are hopeful that climate change can still be addressed.*

Question 2

Read the following sentence. What makes this an example of complex or contested usage? How would you resolve this issue if you were the writer?

With climate change impacting the weather so much, people are unsure how to weather challenges like extreme heat.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: This is an example of contested or complex usage because it contains two uses of the word *weather*. I would resolve this issue by changing one instance of the word *weather* in order to avoid confusion.

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Question 3

Which of the following references would you use to look up a grammar question?

- a.** *Encyclopedia Britannica*
- b.** *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*
- c.** *Guinness Book of World Records*
- d.** *Collins English Thesaurus*

Reveal Answer

- b.** *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*

Practice

Read one writer's informational paragraph about the dangers of distracted driving, written for a general audience.



Source: lanastock

Distracted driving is an important issue in modern society. Distracted driving can include eating while driving playing with the stereo or talking with other passengers. But the most dangerous distraction of all is texting while driving. This distraction takes a drivers' eyes off of the road for seconds at a time which does not sound like much time but they can be deadly. Drivers may miss seeing other cars changing lanes or pedestrians stepping into the road. And failing to see these important changes can cause injury or even death.

Activity

Revise the paragraph to resolve issues of usage, including issues with complex or contested usage. Consider the audience and consult references as needed.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Distracted driving is an important issue in modern society.

Distracted driving can include eating while driving, playing with the stereo, or talking with other passengers; but the most dangerous distraction of all is texting while driving. This distraction takes a drivers' eyes off of the road for seconds at a time. This does not sound like much time, but it can be deadly. Drivers may miss seeing other cars changing lanes or pedestrians stepping into the road. Failing to see these important changes can cause injury or even death.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I revised the paragraph to resolve issues of usage.
 2. _____ I applied my understanding of English language conventions and usage.
 3. _____ I consulted references as needed.
-

Syntax

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will describe methods for varying syntax when writing informational text.

Key Words

- **complex sentence** – a sentence that contains an independent clause and at least one dependent clause joined by a subordinating conjunction
 - **compound sentence** – a sentence that contains two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction
 - **compound-complex sentence** – a sentence that contains multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause
 - **declarative sentence** – a sentence that states a fact
 - **exclamatory sentence** – a sentence that expresses emotion
 - **imperative sentence** – a sentence that gives a command or request
 - **interrogative sentence** – a sentence that asks a question
 - **simple sentence** – a sentence that contains one independent clause
 - **syntax** – the arrangement of words and phrases in sentences
-

Syntax

Think Creatively

A writer's purpose for writing an informational or explanatory text is always to educate readers. To educate readers, writers must think creatively in order to make sure that their writing keeps readers engaged. One way to do this is by using various methods to vary their syntax, or the way words and sentences are structured to convey ideas.

Varying Sentence Length

One of the most common methods of varying syntax is by varying the length of sentences. Depending on what information the writer wants to convey, a writer can use extremely short sentences or extremely long sentences to get their message across. Varying the length of sentences is more likely to hold a reader's attention, because sentences of varying lengths make information less monotonous. Read these sentences from Carol Anderson's *We Are Not Yet Equal*, which vary in length:

Fourth U.S. president and founder James Madison called America's engagement in the African slave trade the nation's "original sin."

The horrors of chattel slavery would bring down a wrath of biblical proportions, prophesied another founder, Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the Declaration of Independence. Like Madison, this third US president was a slaveholder.

"Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever," wrote Jefferson in the 1780s.

The day of reckoning came roughly eighty years later.

We now call it the Civil War.

This writer begins with three longer sentences followed by two shorter sentences. Using this kind of variety draws the reader into the topic of the text, which enhances understanding.

Varying Sentence Structure

In addition to varying sentence length, writers can also think creatively about how to vary the structures of sentences in order to keep readers engaged in a text. Read these sentences, which do not vary in structure:

I went for a walk. I ran into my friend. It began to rain.

These are all simple sentences, and not very engaging to read. Writers can convey the same information in a more engaging way by varying the structures of sentences they use. This table shows the four sentence structures and examples including simple, compound, complex and compound-complex:

Overview of Sentence Structures with Definitions and Examples

Sentence Structure	Definition	Example
Simple sentence	contains one independent clause	I went for a walk.
Compound sentence	contains two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction	I went for a walk, and I ran into my friend.
Complex sentence	contains an independent clause and at least one dependent clause joined by a subordinating conjunction	I went for a walk until it began to rain.
Compound-complex sentence	contains multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause	I went for a walk, and I ran into my friend until it began to rain.

Look at how the writer of *We Are Not Yet Equal* varies the sentence structure in these paragraphs:

The Thirteenth Amendment passed in the US Senate in early April 1864, then in the US House of Representatives in late January 1865. It now had to be ratified by at least three-fourths of the states.

This Thirteenth Amendment was, in significant ways, revolutionary. By ending slavery through a US constitutional amendment, the Congress signaled it was willing to address civil rights at the federal level. This advocacy set the scene for the all-important Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to follow.

In these sentences, the writer uses a variety of simple, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Through this variation, the writer demonstrates creative thinking about how to put the information together in a way that will keep readers engaged.

Varying Sentence Type

Writers can also vary the types of sentences they use. The four types of sentences are:

- declarative sentences, which state facts
- interrogative sentences, which ask questions
- exclamatory sentences, which express emotion
- imperative sentences, which give a command or request

Writers of informational or explanatory texts will most often use declarative sentences; however, they can vary their syntax by using other types of sentences when appropriate. Look at this table, which shows how the writer of *We Are Not Yet Equal* uses each type of sentence:

Examples of the Four Main Types of Sentences in English Grammar

Type of Sentence	Example
declarative sentence	America was now at the crossroads between its slaveholding past and the possibility of a truly inclusive, vibrant democracy.

interrogative sentence	Would — could — the majority of white people come to see black people as equals?
exclamatory sentence	Federal examiners could take charge of voter registration in places where voter suppression was most horrendous!
imperative sentence	Think about what a different national conversation we might be having, even as the economy turns ever more surely to knowledge-based industries, rather than watching our share of the world's scientists and engineers dwindle.

By using a variety of sentence types, the writer varies how the information is presented and how readers will interact with the information. This shows that the writer is thinking creatively about their topic and how best to present their ideas.

Question

Why should writers of explanatory texts vary syntax?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers of explanatory texts should vary syntax to hold their readers' attention while explaining a topic.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about the methods writers use for varying syntax to answer the questions below.

Question 1

How can writers vary the structure of sentences they use to vary syntax?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers can use a variety of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences to vary syntax.

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Question 2

How can writers vary the types of sentences they use to vary syntax?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers can alternate between using declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences to vary syntax.

Practice

Read these paragraphs from Carol Anderson's *We Are Not Yet Equal*, paying attention to how the writer varies the syntax.

Migration is the story of America. It is foundational. From Pilgrims fleeing oppression in Europe in the 1600s and the millions of Americans going West after passage of the 1862 Homestead Act to the erection of the Statue of Liberty in New York's harbor (dedicated in 1886) and beyond. The movement of people fleeing tyranny, violence, and withered opportunities is precious, sacrosanct to Americans. "Freedom of movement" is a treasured American right.

Yet when thousands of black people began leaving the land below the Mason-Dixon Line, which along with the Ohio River became the dividing line between the North and the South, white Southern elites raged with cool, calculated efficiency.

These were mayors, governors, legislators, business leaders, and police chiefs. In the wood-paneled rooms of city halls, in the chambers of city councils, in the marbled state legislatures, and in sheriffs' offices, white government officials, working hand in hand with plantation, lumber mill, and mine owners, devised an array of ways to stop black people from exercising their right to freedom of movement.

Why?

Black labor was the foundation of the region's economy. Black people were also indispensable to the South's social and political structure.

Activity

Describe the methods the writer uses for varying syntax in this text.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer uses several methods to vary syntax in this text. The writer varies the length of sentences by starting out with two very short sentences and moving into longer sentences. The writer also varies the structure of the sentences by alternating between simple, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Finally, the writer varies the types of sentences. The writer mostly uses declarative sentences to state facts, but also uses the interrogative sentence "Why?" before the final paragraph.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I described each method the writer used for varying syntax.
 2. _____ I identified different types of sentences in the text.
 3. _____ I identified different structures of sentences in the text.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's *Artful Sentences*) for guidance as needed.

Key Words

- **rhetorical question** – a question posed by an author used to emphasize a point
 - **syntax** – the grammatical structure of sentences, or the way words are arranged or organized in sentences to convey ideas
-

Syntax

Writers make deliberate choices about syntax, or how they arrange words and phrases in their sentences, to achieve a certain effect on their readers. When thinking about the length, type, and structure of sentences, writers consider how each decision they make will impact how their message comes across.

Varying Syntax for Effect

One way to vary syntax is by varying sentence length. The length of a sentence will largely depend on what information the writer wants to convey. Writers can make sentences longer by adding more detail or make them shorter by providing only the most basic information. They can also create longer sentences by combining two or more shorter sentences through the use of semicolons, coordinating conjunctions such as *and* or *but*, or dependent marker words like *before* and *because*. Alternatively, they can break apart longer sentences into two or more shorter ones. Writers will consider the effect they want each sentence to have, and then craft each sentence to be as lengthy or as concise as it needs to be to achieve that effect. Writers will also think about how each sentence in a paragraph or text works together. Often, writers may follow a very long sentence with a much shorter sentence. This organization can make the shorter sentence much more powerful than if the sentence came after a series of other short sentences.

In this paragraph from Carol Anderson's *We Are Not Yet Equal*, the writer varies the length of sentences.

Question 1

How are the two sentences in this paragraph different?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The first sentence is extremely long, with several clauses and a nonessential phrase set off by dashes. The second sentence is much shorter.

Question 2

What is the effect of the second sentence on the reader? Why?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The second sentence drives home the main point of the paragraph by being so much shorter and more direct than the first sentence.

Writers also think about the effect of varying the structure of sentences. As with varying sentence length, using different sentence structures will sometimes allow a writer to either provide more details or get straight to the point. A writer may choose to

convey information in two simple sentences. However, combining those sentences to create a compound sentence can allow the writer to show how the ideas are related.

Question 3

Combine the following two sentences to show more clearly how the ideas are related: *The Civil War began in 1861. Several states tried to secede from the Union.*

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: *The Civil War began in 1861 after several states tried to secede from the Union.*

When writing complex or compound-complex sentences, writers also think about the order in which to place clauses in a sentence. Read this sentence from *We Are Not Yet Equal*.

By crafting the sentence this way, the writer emphasizes first the idea that Americans needed to fight against a national problem. Next, in the independent clause, the writer layers the ideas using the phrase “something more radical, more muscular” to continue the idea about fighting against a national problem. This syntax emphasizes the high stakes inherent in how American division and systemic inequality shaped U.S. history.

Finally, writers can achieve different effects by varying the types of sentences they use. While declarative sentences can always achieve a writer’s purpose of explaining, other types of sentences can appeal to readers’ emotions or make them think more deeply about an idea. Any interrogative sentence a writer uses will be a rhretorical question, or a question intended to make a point rather than get an answer. An exclamatory sentence can show how strongly the writer, or someone else, feels about a certain topic, with the intention that the reader will share these feelings as well. And an imperative sentence can directly encourage readers to consider a specific idea.

Take a look at how the writer of *We Are Not Yet Equal* varies sentence types in these paragraphs:

Question 4

How does the writer vary the types of sentences she uses in this excerpt?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Here, the writer first uses declarative sentences to inform readers about Lincoln’s messaging. The writer then uses an exclamatory sentence to convey Lincoln’s defensiveness and insistence that the Civil War be about preserving the Union and not about slavery. The writer follows this with a sentence consisting of the same words but formed as an interrogative sentence to question Lincoln’s message.



Source: alphaspirit. 123rf.com

Writers have many choices to make when varying syntax to achieve a certain effect. That's why writers will often consult references in order to get guidance on different ways they can vary syntax. These might include books, such as *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style* by Virginia Tufte, or reputable online sources.

Question 5

How can writers vary syntax for effect?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers can think about the effect they want certain information to have on their readers, and craft the sentence lengths, structures, and types to achieve that effect. For example, writers can use very long sentences to provide a great deal of detail about something, or very short sentences to drive home a certain point. Writers can use interrogative sentences to make a reader think about something, or exclamatory sentences to appeal to readers' emotions.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about how writers vary syntax for effect to answer the questions below.

Question 1

What are some of the advantages for a writer of using varied syntax? What are some of the advantages for a reader?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers can tailor the length and type of sentences they write to help get their meaning across. For example, they can use simple sentences in order to emphasize a single idea more powerfully or combine simple sentences into a compound sentence to show the relationship between the ideas. Writers can also choose how to order the clauses in sentences to clarify information. From the perspective of a reader, varied sentence structure makes the text more interesting to read. A series of short, simple declarative sentences can become uninteresting to read.

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Question 2

A writer wants to highlight a specific idea or piece of information in a text full of declarative sentences. What type of sentence might the writer use to highlight this idea or information? Why? Give an example of such a sentence.

Reveal Answer

A writer might use an imperative sentence, which can be an excellent way of getting readers to think about a specific idea or piece of information. An example of an imperative sentence might be *Consider the plight of the enslaved Americans on the eve of the Civil War.*

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Question 3

What reference might a writer use for guidance about syntax?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Tufte's *Artful Sentences*

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Practice

Read this paragraph.

The Civil War began in 1861. Its roots lay much further back. The main issue was slavery. Slavery was common and legal in the Southern states. It was forbidden in the Northern states. Southern whites feared that Northern politicians wanted to get rid of slavery altogether. That was not in fact true of most Northern leaders. Abraham Lincoln wanted to stop the spread of slavery into western territories. When he was elected, he did not want to interfere with slavery where it already existed. Southern leaders did not believe that Lincoln would leave their institution of slavery alone. Some states tried to secede from the country after Lincoln's election.

Activity

Rewrite the paragraph to vary syntax and sentence structure. Include longer, more complex sentences along with at least one imperative, exclamatory, or interrogative sentence. Then explain the overall effect on the reader of the changes you made. Finally, identify what kind of reference you could consult for guidance on syntax.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Although the Civil War began in 1861, its roots lay much further back. The main issue was the institution of slavery. While it was common and legal in the Southern states, slavery was forbidden in the North. Southern whites feared that Northern politicians wanted to get rid of slavery altogether. Were they right? No; Southern leaders ignored the pronouncements of Northerners like Abraham Lincoln, who opposed the spread of slavery into western territories but did not want to interfere with slavery where it already existed. Nonetheless, Southern leaders did not believe that Lincoln would leave their institution of slavery alone, and as a result some states tried to secede from the country following Lincoln's election. The new paragraph includes a variety of sentence lengths, which adds interest for the reader. It combines short sentences into longer ones that indicate the connections between the various ideas, such as by including words and phrases like *although* and *as a result*. It also includes a rhetorical question which serves to break up a line of declarative sentences and drive the point home that the Southern leaders were wrong about the Northerners' intent. For reference about how to vary syntax, I could consult Tufte's *Artful Sentences*.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I revised the paragraph to include longer, more complex sentences.
 2. _____ I included at least one imperative, exclamatory, or interrogative sentence.
 3. _____ I explained the effect I achieved by varying syntax.
 4. _____ I identified a reference that I could consult for guidance about syntax.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

Key Words

- **complex sentence** – a sentence that contains an independent clause and at least one dependent clause joined by a subordinating conjunction
 - **compound sentence** – a sentence that contains two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction
 - **compound-complex sentence** – a sentence that contains multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause
 - **declarative sentence** – a sentence that states a fact
 - **exclamatory sentence** – a sentence that expresses emotion
 - **imperative sentence** – a sentence that gives a command or request
 - **interrogative sentence** – a sentence that asks a question
 - **simple sentence** – a sentence that contains one independent clause
 - **syntax** – the set of grammatical rules that determine how words and phrases are arranged in a sentence
-

Syntax

When reading, writers pay attention to the syntax used by authors of complex texts. This can help writers understand how to vary syntax in their own writing to make their texts more engaging for readers.



Source: lincolnroger. 123rf.com

Understand Syntax

In order to understand how and why writers vary their syntax, readers should study the variety of sentences in complex texts. Writers can vary their syntax by varying the length of sentences, the type of sentences they use, and how they structure their sentences. Remember, the four sentence structures are:

- Simple sentences, which have one independent clause with a subject and verb that express a complete thought.
- Compound sentences, which have two or more independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *or*, *but*, or *so*.
- Complex sentences, which have an independent clause and at least one dependent clause that are joined by a subordinating conjunction such as *because*, *although*, *when*, or *until*.

- Compound-complex sentences, which have more than one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

By using different sentence structures, writers can begin sentences in a variety of ways, which helps to keep the text interesting for readers. For example, a writer can begin a complex sentence with either a dependent clause or an independent clause.

Sentences can also vary in their purpose. Declarative sentences state facts.

Interrogative sentences ask questions. Exclamatory sentences express strong emotions. Imperative sentences give commands or requests. By applying an understanding of syntax to complex texts, readers can analyze why writers have structured their sentences in certain ways. This allows readers to better understand the text, and to vary their own syntax when writing.

As you watch the following video, observe how the students analyze the syntax of a complex text.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question

Why should writers apply an understanding of syntax to complex texts when reading?

Reveal Answer

Writers should apply an understanding of syntax to complex texts when reading to see how they can vary syntax in their own writing in order to make their texts more engaging for readers.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about applying an understanding of syntax when reading complex texts to answer the questions below.

Question 1

How can writers of complex texts vary syntax?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers of complex texts can vary syntax by writing sentences of different lengths that use different structures and have different purposes.

Question 2

What are the different sentence structures writers of complex texts can use to vary syntax?

Reveal Answer

The sentence structures are simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

Question 3

How can varying sentence structure help a writer of a complex text vary their syntax?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: By varying sentence structure, a writer of a complex text can begin their sentences in different ways, which can help them keep readers engaged in the text.

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Practice

Read this excerpt from Carol Anderson's *We Are Not Yet Equal*.

Activity

Apply an understanding of syntax to explain how the writer of this text varies sentences and sentence structure.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer of this text uses a variety of sentence lengths and sentence structures to vary syntax. The first paragraph contains sentences that are relatively short compared to the sentences that follow. The first sentence is a simple sentence, while the second sentence begins in a different way, making the text flow in a way that is interesting to read. The third paragraph contains a mixture of sentence structures, beginning with a simple sentence followed by a variety of compound-complex sentences.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I applied an understanding of syntax while reading a complex text.
 2. _____ I explained how the writer of a complex text varied syntax.
-

Connections and Transitions

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will make important connections and distinctions when writing informative/explanatory text.

Key Words

- **connection** – the relationship between two or more similar ideas in a text
 - **distinction** – a difference or a contrast between two or more ideas in a text
 - **transition** – a word or phrase that shows the relationship between two ideas
-

Connections and Transitions

In explanatory texts, writers should present information in a way that is logical and easy to follow. Well-written paragraphs with well-developed ideas should be organized to show how the ideas are related—or how they are different—so that the reader’s understanding steadily builds as they work their way through the text. To guide readers, writers should make connections and distinctions among ideas. Connections show how ideas are similar or related, and distinctions show how ideas differ or contrast.

Writers link connections and distinctions by using transitions, words or phrases that show the relationship between two ideas. Be aware that transitions can show the relationship between ideas contained in separate sentences or ideas that appear within a single sentence.

The following table shows examples of connections. The transitions are bolded.

Examples of Connections Using Transitions	
Example	Connection
Some sunscreens contain a chemical that damages coral. Areas of coral that are popular with scuba divers and snorkelers have consequently been dying off.	The writer describes a cause/effect relationship by explaining the connection between coral damage and sunscreen.
First , sift together the dry ingredients. Next , use a fork to blend in the butter; then , use a rolling pin to make your biscuit dough into a flat circle.	The writer organizes a process into sequential, connected steps that make it easy for a reader to follow along and to see how each idea relates to the one before.

Reread the first example. Notice that the transition word does not need to appear at the start of a sentence or a clause.

Question 1

Consider the sentence *A long walk in the park is a beneficial form of exercise; it is also a great way to enjoy nature.* What is the transition word in this sentence? How does it link two ideas together?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The transition word is *also*. It indicates that there is more than one way in which walking in a park is a good idea.

This next table shows examples of distinctions:

Example	Distinction
Many people prefer to watch movies on a television; on the other hand , some people are fine watching them on their phones.	The writer distinguishes between two preferences for watching movies: on a television and on a phone.
Reptiles have scales, and their skin is dry. Amphibians, in contrast , have skin that is kept moist by mucus.	The writer tells how amphibian skin differs from reptilian skin.

Again, note the placement of the transition phrase in the second example, in which *in contrast* is embedded inside the second sentence.

Question 2

Consider the sentence *Polio weakened one of Wilma Rudolph's legs when she was a young girl; nevertheless, she went on to win three gold medals at the 1960 Summer Olympics.* What is the transition word in this sentence?

Does it create a connection or a distinction? Explain your answer.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The transition word is *nevertheless*. This word indicates a distinction in which the first part of the sentence is contrasted with the second part

to show the importance—and seeming unlikelihood—of Rudolph winning medals after her bout with polio.

Question 3

If you were writing an explanatory text about a controversial issue, should you use connections or distinctions when contrasting the two sides of the issue? Why?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: You should use distinctions because they show ideas that contrast or differ.

Writers use tools like graphic organizers to help them convey their ideas clearly. When brainstorming at the beginning stage of writing, writers focus on generating as many ideas as they can about their topic. Graphic organizers can help writers by giving them a framework to capture those ideas. After the initial brainstorming phase, graphic organizers can help writers decide where they need to use connections and distinctions. Choose Graphic Organizer 1 or 2 for your initial planning.

ELA 11 Graphic Organizers

Question 4

How do graphic organizers help writers decide where to include connections and distinctions?

Reveal Answer:

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: After writing initial ideas, a writer will have a visual representation of what their essay will look like. A graphic organizer can help a writer see where their ideas will need to be connected or where they will need to include distinctions.

Connections and Transitions

Making Connections and Distinctions

Once a writer has assembled all their ideas into a draft of an explanatory text, it is time to revise. The revision process is an excellent time to clarify the relationships among ideas. The result will be an organized composition that the reader will better understand.

Below is a writer's draft and revision about the New Horizons spacecraft. Notice that in the revision, the writer added transitions in bold to clarify the connections between similar ideas. Making these connections strengthened the text as a whole.



Source: forplayday. 123rf.com

Draft

In 2015, NASA's New Horizons spacecraft was on its way to take the first close-up photos of Pluto after a ten-year voyage. When New Horizons was just ten days away from Pluto, engineers suddenly lost contact with the spacecraft. The mission was in danger of failure. The spacecraft would pass by Pluto only one time.

NASA learned that the computer on New Horizon had become overloaded with uploading programs. The computer had crashed and rebooted, erasing all of the programs previously uploaded. Engineers on Earth had just a few days to upload all of the files that had been erased. They had to upload other files needed to coordinate the photographing of Pluto. They worked around the clock, sleeping on cots and ordering takeout food, and completed the programming with just four hours to spare.

Revision

In 2015, NASA's New Horizons spacecraft was on its way to take the first close-up photos of Pluto after a ten-year voyage. When New Horizons was just ten days away from Pluto, engineers suddenly lost contact with the spacecraft. **As a result**, the mission was in danger of failure **because** the spacecraft would pass by Pluto only one time.

NASA learned that the computer on New Horizon had become overloaded with data. **Consequently**, the computer had crashed and rebooted, erasing all of the programs previously uploaded. Engineers on Earth had just a few days to upload all of the files that had been erased. **In addition**, they had to upload other files needed to coordinate the photographing of Pluto. They worked around the clock, sleeping on cots and ordering takeout food, and completed the programming with just four hours to spare.

The revised draft expresses the connections among important ideas in the text: why the mission was in danger of failure, what had caused the problem, and how the engineers on Earth were responding. The revision makes it easier for the reader to follow the flow of information.

Question 1

Which two ideas does the transition *consequently* link?

Reveal Answer

the overloading of the computer and the erasing of the data

Question 2

Reread the first two sentences in the first paragraph of the text. What transition word or words could be inserted to make it clear that the two

sentences present a contrast? Revise to show how the new sentences would read and bold the transition word or phrase you used.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In 2015, NASA's New Horizons spacecraft was on its way to take the first close-up photos of Pluto after a ten-year voyage. When New Horizons was just ten days away from Pluto, **however**, engineers suddenly lost contact with the spacecraft.

Whenever you read a text, think about how the writer makes connections and distinctions between ideas. Ask yourself what relationships there are between ideas in the text and why the writer is making these connections and distinctions.

Check-In

Read the passage below, and then use what you've learned about making connections and distinctions to answer the questions.

Suppose you cut out a map of the United States from a piece of stiff cardboard. Then you balanced the map on the head of a pin. The spot where the pin meets the map is called the *geographic center* of the United States. The position of the geographic center has changed as states have been added. For many years, for example, the geographic center was east of the Mississippi River. In the same way, as late as 1958 the geographical center was near Lebanon, Kansas. However, in 1959 Alaska entered the Union. Since Alaska is very large and at a distance from the rest of the nation, that shifted the country's geographic center to the northwest: out of Kansas and into South Dakota. Although Hawaii soon entered the Union as well, the admission of Hawaii didn't affect the geographic center very much; that's because Hawaii, despite being very far away from the rest of the country, is very small. As a result, the geographic center remained in South Dakota.

Question 1

Identify two transition words in this paragraph that indicate a contrast or a distinction. Explain what distinction is being made.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The word *however* is a transition word that signals a change. At first, Alaska was not a state; then, it became one, which changed the location of the geographic center of the country. The word *although* is also a transition word marking a distinction. The purpose this time is to draw a contrast between the small size of Hawaii and the large size of Alaska and the resulting fact that Hawaii didn't shift the geographic center very far while Alaska did.

Question 2

Identify two transition words in this paragraph that indicate a similarity or a connection. Explain what connection is being made.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The phrase *in the same way* indicates that what follows relates to what came before; they are both examples of the same thing. In this case, the transition indicates two different examples of where the geographic center used to be. The phrase *as a result* shows a cause and effect relationship between the small size of Hawaii and the very small change in the geographic center.

Need a little extra support?

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Practice

Activity1

Read the following paragraph.

In some ways soccer and basketball are very similar. In other ways they are very different. In soccer and basketball the idea is to score. You score by putting the ball into a net or goal. And you are not allowed to run with the ball. You can pass or dribble. In soccer you usually have to kick the ball to dribble, pass, or shoot. In basketball you use your hands to dribble, pass, or shoot. In soccer goals count just one point. In basketball you can score one, two, or three points at a time. You play soccer on a grass field and basketball on a wooden court.

This paragraph includes many connections and distinctions, but it does not include any transitions. Rewrite the paragraph using at least three transition words and phrases to show connections and at least three more transition words to show distinctions. Bold the transition words and phrases you used. Then write a sentence explaining how the edits you made improve the original.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In some ways soccer and basketball are very similar, **but** in other ways they are very different. In **both** soccer and basketball the idea is to score. **Likewise**, you score by putting the ball into a net or goal. And **in the same way** you are not allowed to run with the ball. You can pass or dribble in basketball **just as you can** in soccer. In soccer you usually have to kick the ball to dribble, pass, or shoot, **while** in basketball you use your hands to dribble, pass, or shoot. In soccer goals count just one point, **whereas** in basketball you can score one, two, or three points at a time. **Another difference** is that you play soccer on a grass field and basketball on a wooden court.

Adding these transition words helps the reader by signaling whether two ideas are going to be related or contrasted.

Activity2

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I included at least three transition words and phrases to show distinctions.
 2. _____ I included at least three transition words and phrases to show connections.
 3. _____ I explained why adding transition words represented an improvement over the original.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of explanatory texts, to create cohesion, and to clarify relationships among complex ideas when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **cohesion** – the effective linking of ideas and of sections within a text
 - **connection** – the relationship between two or more similar ideas in a text
 - **distinction** – a difference or a contrast between two or more ideas in a text
 - **syntax** – the arrangement of words and phrases in a particular order
 - **transition** – a word or phrase that shows the relationship between two ideas
-

Connections and Transitions

An important part of writing an effective explanatory text is creating cohesion. Cohesion means that the parts of the text are linked together in a way that is logical and helps the reader understand the ideas. A text should be cohesive in two ways: The sections of the text should be clearly linked. Also, the writer should link complex ideas in a way that shows how they are related.

Transitions are a key tool that writers can use to help create cohesion. They often appear at the beginning and end of paragraphs, signaling the beginning or end of a section of a text, especially the conclusion. These transitions show the relationships among ideas and help the reader follow the writer’s thoughts. Without transitions, writing often feels clunky and awkward.

The following table shows some common transitions:

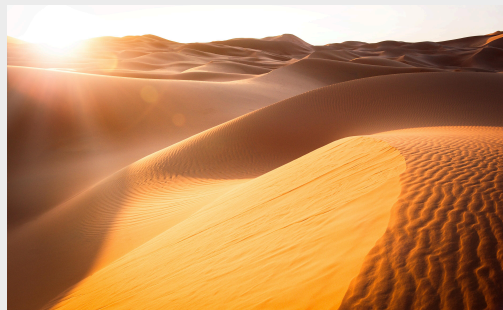
Purposes of Common Transitions	
Purposes of Transitions	Examples
cause and effect	as a result, therefore, consequently, because
grouping	first/next/finally, in addition, furthermore, besides
similarity	likewise, in this way, in similar fashion
from general to specific	for example, for instance, e.g., namely
contrast	although, despite, however, in contrast, nevertheless, on the other hand, though

The transitions in the table can show two types of relationships between ideas: connections and distinctions. Connections show similarities among ideas, and distinctions show differences.

Cohesion of Complex Ideas

Connections, distinctions, and the transitions that signal them are especially important for helping readers understand complex ideas. To help readers with this task, writers can provide examples, group ideas, show contrast, or present similar ideas.

In the following excerpt, the writer uses transitions to explain complex ideas in a geography text.



Source: vixit. 123rf.com

The Sahara Desert in northern Africa is about 10 percent larger than it was a hundred years ago. The Sahara covers nearly 4 million square miles; **however**, it is not the largest desert. The largest deserts are the “cold deserts” of the Arctic and Antarctica. A desert is defined as a place that receives less than 10 inches of rain a year.

Most of the growth of the Sahara has been to the south. Cyclical changes of ocean surface temperatures accounts for most of this growth. Changes in these ocean temperatures affect rainfall. **As a result**, Africa has experienced severe droughts in recent decades. As drought kills plants on the edges of deserts, the deserts grow.

The transitions in the passage signal the relationships among the complex ideas in the passage. Many people think of the Sahara as the world's largest desert, but the transition *however* signals the distinction that the vast Arctic and Antarctic regions are considered to be deserts.

Question

In the second paragraph of the passage, what cause/effect relationship is signaled by the transition *as a result*?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Droughts and other patterns of rainfall in the Sahara Desert are caused mostly by changes in the temperatures of ocean surfaces.

Writers also use [syntax](#), or the arrangement of words and phrases in a particular order, to create cohesion and clarify ideas. Often, reordering words and phrases in a sentence can help readers understand ideas.

Activity

Connections and Transitions

Cohesion of Sections

In addition to complex ideas, the sections of explanatory texts require cohesion. Cohesion between the body and the conclusion can be achieved with transitions such as *in conclusion* and *to sum up*, but cohesion between the introduction and the body is a more complicated issue.

In explanatory texts, it is common for the introduction to give a survey of the key ideas to be discussed, usually with a thesis statement that states the single most important idea. The first paragraph of the body will often begin a discussion of one of the ideas previewed in the introduction.

Review Graphic Organizer Option 2 to see how writers organize their ideas. As you continue this lesson, think about how transitions could be helpful for a writer to convey their ideas.

ELA 11 Graphic Organizers

In this excerpt from an explanatory text about Harriet Tubman, the writer creates cohesion between the introduction and the first paragraph of the body.

Harriet Tubman is best known for her heroic and dangerous work leading enslaved persons in Maryland to freedom in the 1850s. She used the Underground Railroad as a network to freedom for these people. However, Harriet Tubman also did important

work during the Civil War helping the Union Army to free enslaved persons. The most important was a raid in South Carolina in June 1863.

The raid occurred in the South Carolina settlement of Combahee Ferry, where rice was grown by enslaved workers. Tubman had spent months on South Carolina islands controlled by the Union Army. She talked with local African Americans to gain knowledge of the Confederate mainland. She wanted to select a location where Union forces would have the least difficulty liberating enslaved people. She shared her knowledge with Union colonel James Montgomery.

Question 1

What words that appear near the end of the introduction are repeated early in the first body paragraph to provide cohesion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: *raid, South Carolina, enslaved*

Watch the following video in which a student explains the use of transitions in writing explanatory text.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 2

Based on the information in the video, how could you use syntax to help readers understand complex ideas?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: By arranging the syntax in a way that emphasizes a particular part of the idea, the writer can help the reader know what part to focus on.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about using transitions to create cohesion and clarify complex ideas in explanatory text to answer these questions.

Question 1

Explain how you can use transitions to create cohesion between the introduction and the first body paragraph of a text.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: You can use transitions to show how the first body paragraph will elaborate on one of the key ideas discussed in the introduction.

Question 2

How can the transition *for example* be used to help readers understand complex ideas?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The transition *for example* can provide a familiar detail that makes a concept easier to relate to.

Question 3

What sorts of relationships between ideas do distinctions show? What is an example of a transition that signals a distinction?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Distinctions show differences or contrasts between ideas. "On the contrary" is an example of a transition that signals a distinction.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Activity

Read the following excerpt from a text, which has the last body paragraph and the conclusion of an explanatory text.

The most difficult part of preparing your campsite is setting up the tent. Choose an area that is level, flat, and clear of plants. Next, remove any stones, twigs, and other debris from the area. Lay down a tarp and stretch out the base of the tent over the tarp. Use stakes to hold the corners of the base in place. Finally, assemble the poles and slide them into the sleeves of the rest of the tent, fastening it to the base when finished.

A good campsite is a key part of a successful camping trip. It provides the foundation for your stay. If you have a poor campsite, you may not be able to sleep well. It may be difficult to cook your food. A tired and hungry camper is an unhappy camper. You may have planned many fun activities; they will be less fun if your body and mind are not in good shape because of a poor campsite.

Add two transitions to the passage to help the reader follow the complex ideas and one transition to provide cohesion between the body and the conclusion.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The most difficult part of preparing your campsite is setting up the tent. **First**, choose an area that is level, flat, and clear of plants. Next, remove any stones, twigs, and other debris from the area. Lay down a tarp and stretch out the base of the tent over the tarp. Use stakes to hold the corners of the base in place. Finally, assemble the poles and slide them into the sleeves of the rest of the tent, fastening it to the base when finished.

In conclusion, a good campsite is a key part of a successful camping trip. It provides the foundation for your stay. If you have a poor campsite, you may not be able to sleep well. It may be difficult to cook your food. A tired and hungry camper is an unhappy camper. You may have planned many fun activities; **however**, they will be less fun if your body and mind are not in good shape because of a poor campsite.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I added two transitions that helped the reader with complex ideas.
 2. _____ I added one transition to provide cohesion between the two sections of the text.
-

Pro Tip

You can repeat words between body paragraphs to provide the same sort of cohesion that links introductions with the paragraphs that follows them.

Format and Style

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will explain the use of formatting (e.g. headings), graphics (e.g. figures, tables), and multimedia to aid comprehension when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **bullet** – a symbol used to emphasize an item in a list
 - **caption** – a written explanation of an illustration or other graphic
 - **figure** – a diagram
 - **formatting** – the way in which a piece of writing is organized or presented
 - **graphics** – visual representations, such as tables, maps, or diagrams
 - **heading** – a word or short phrase that introduces a new section of a text
 - **infographic** – a visual image combining data and text
 - **multimedia** – information that is conveyed in multiple ways, such as through video, audio, or images
 - **subheading** – a heading given to a subsection of a text
-

Format and Style

Writers of explanatory texts need to ensure that their writing meets all of the following criteria:

- A clear introduction that introduces the topic and states the thesis.
- Supporting paragraphs that develop the topic and support the thesis with evidence and supporting details.
- A logical organization in which ideas and paragraphs flow smoothly from one part of the text to another.
- A conclusion that wraps up the essay, restates the thesis, and leaves the reader with something new to think about.

For a longer text, part of creating an effective informative or explanatory text is making sure that all the information is presented in a format and style that best aids readers' understanding.

Graphics

One way to aid readers' comprehension in a text is to include graphics. The term graphics encompasses visual images such as diagrams—which are sometimes called figures—along with tables, maps, and graphs. Writers often prepare graphics to go along with their texts, especially if the text is long or relatively complicated.

The main advantage to including graphics is that it can be easier to pick up information expressed in the form of a table or a graph than to pick up the same information from a long block of text. That's especially true if the information is easy to organize in a visual way. Consider a writer who is writing about baseball and wants to describe the dimensions of a typical baseball field. The writer can write a long and detailed description indicating that there are bases set 90 feet apart, that the pitcher's mound is 60 feet 6 inches away from home plate, that the foul lines radiate away from home plate at a 90-degree angle to each other, and on and on. Or, the writer can simply provide a diagram of an actual baseball field. A majority of readers will have a better idea of the dimensions of a field by studying the diagram than by reading a description of it.

Graphics are especially useful when a writer needs to provide a great deal of information without overwhelming the reader. Suppose that a writer is writing about track and field and wants to list all the world record-holders in the one-mile run since the 1950s along with their times. Although this information could be presented in ordinary prose, it is much faster and easier for a reader to digest if the writer uses a table to list these names and show the gradual improvement of times over the years.

Another particularly useful type of graphic is called an [infographic](#). An infographic is a way of expressing information using both text and various types of graphics. A writer who is writing a history of soccer, for example, might insert an infographic that includes a color-coded map with callouts to show the locations of countries that have won the World Cup and the year each country won. Though infographics include text, the text is usually minimal; the text serves more to introduce the graphics and put them into context than to provide large amounts of information on its own.



Source: Ohmega1982. Shutterstock

The fundamental reason for graphics, whether tables, maps, or infographics, is to help the reader make sense of the text. By expressing some information in visual form, writers can often improve the chance that their audiences will understand the main points they are making.

Multimedia

[Multimedia](#) components are common in texts too, especially texts that are meant to be read online. The term *multimedia* means “more than one medium” and indicates that a writer is using two or more ways of communicating with the reader. Some common forms of multimedia include images, such as photographs and drawings, along with audio recordings and videos that can be incorporated into the text.

As with graphics, the main purpose of including multimedia features in a text is to enhance readers' understanding. It's useful to read a description of how basketball has changed over the years in terms of how the game is played, but it's probably more memorable for readers to see a video clip of a game from the early 1960s and compare it to another video clip from a game played last season. In the same way, it may be more valuable for readers to hear a hockey announcer's voice describing a dramatic goal than it would be to read a transcript of the announcer's words.

Many multimedia features are interactive. An article about swimming, for example, might include clickable text labeled with the name of one of the four racing strokes—backstroke, freestyle, breaststroke, and butterfly. When the reader clicks on one of these words, an animation opens up showing the reader what that stroke looks like both above and below the surface. Again, the goal is to increase the reader's understanding of the topic.

Question

How would adding an infographic impact the way a reader understands a text about the path of monarch butterfly migration?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Adding an infographic would impact the way a reader understands the topic because it could show the path of monarch migration on a map, or it could provide statistics about butterfly migration. Whatever infographic the writer chooses could help readers quickly grasp more about the topic than they would by simply reading a block of text.

Format and Style

Formatting

Formatting is a way of presenting or arranging a text document. Instead of having paragraphs march all the way down the page, writers use formatting to make it easier for the reader to understand certain points or to follow the writer’s argument.

For example, writers can use **bullets** to break big ideas into parts. Bullets are marks, usually circles, which appear in front of a line of text to emphasize it. A series of bullets form a list, and lists are easier for readers to remember. Writers use bullets as a way of indicating to the reader that certain information is important. The use of bullets helps ensure that readers get out of a text what the writer wants them to understand. Here’s an example of bullets in action:

Some of the most important professional sports leagues in North America include:

- the National Basketball Association
- the National Hockey League
- Major League Baseball
- The National Football League

Captions are another use of formatting that can help the reader. A caption is a written explanation of what is shown in a graphic or other image. Captions help readers understand the purpose and meaning of the graphics the writer has included in the text. Captions tend to be short—rarely more than two sentences—and their purpose is to inform. If it’s not immediately clear to a reader what a graphic or photograph shows, the caption can help solve that mystery. For example, a photo might show a soccer player heading the ball, and the caption might read: “A player hits the ball with her head during a professional soccer game. Some people believe that heading the ball should be banned for safety reasons.”

Finally, writers often make use of **headings** and **subheadings** to break up a text and make it easier for a reader to understand the writer’s organizational plan. Headings are titles for main sections of an essay, article, or report. An article about the Olympics, for example, might include headers such as “The Olympics in Ancient Greece,” “The Early 1900s,” and “Professionals versus Amateurs.” These are broad topics that will each require a number of paragraphs to discuss. By using headings, a writer can make sure that a reader is following the discussion.

Some broader topics may in turn have subtopics, which will require headings called subheadings. Two subheadings within the larger topic “The Early 1900s” might be “Interruption for War,” about the canceling of the Olympics during World Wars I and II, and “The Winter Olympics Begin,” about how the Olympic movement expanded to include winter sports. Again, the purpose of a subheading is to orient the reader and help the audience understand what each subsection is about.

Question

Identify an example of formatting in a text you read recently. How did this formatting aid in your understanding of the text?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I recently read an online news article that included an image with a caption and multiple headings. These formatting choices allowed me to understand more about the topic and to follow the writer’s organization with ease as I read.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about graphics, multimedia, and formatting to answer these questions.

Question 1

Look at the article in the Hot Spot by selecting the button. For each number, identify the type feature being used. Select the pins to check your answers. There are seven pins.

Apple News Format and Style – Check-In Hot Spot

1 The Second Half

As the third quarter began, the Express was still trailing by five points, but Coach Stirling said she was never concerned. "I know these girls and how hard they fight," she said. "And I know that we've come back from bigger deficits earlier in this season." Indeed, three times this year the Express has come back to win after being down by ten points or more:

Date	Opponent	Largest Deficit
11/13	Eagles	14
11/16	Knights	13
12/2	Renegades	10

2

3 [Click here for the full interview with Coach Stirling.](#)

4 The Comeback Begins


In the first few minutes of the third quarter the Express scored 7 points:

- A layup by Chen
- A three-point shot by De La Rosa
- Two free throws by Morgan

5

At this point the team trailed by just 3 points. The Redbirds called timeout, and...

6



7 After pulling down a rebound, Express guard Alex Kimble begins moving the ball forward.

Question 2

Consider the following scenario: An article about a new athlete joining a major sports league aims to help readers get to know the player. The article includes a photo of the player in action along with a caption describing what is happening in the photo.

What other graphic, multimedia, or formatting might be helpful in getting the writer's points across? Give two examples and explain your answer.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer could also include a bulleted list of the player's achievements so far or a link to a video montage of great plays he or she has made. The bulleted list would be a useful way to give statistical information about the player, and the video would allow fans to see the player in action and get a sense of the player's style.

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Practice

Activity

Read the two paragraphs below.

Tennis is not only a wonderful sport to watch; it is a wonderful sport to play. The benefits of tennis are undeniable. Playing tennis adds to a player's physical strength. It improves the cardiovascular system. It increases flexibility and balance. Playing tennis not only makes you fit, it keeps you fit.

Tennis also exercises the brain! Players need to think ahead: if I hit my shot to *that* corner of the court, where will my opponent aim when she catches up with it? Players also need to be alert to tendencies and patterns in their opponents. If I notice that my opponent has difficulty hitting a backhand shot, I'll be sure to hit the ball regularly to his backhand. In this way tennis is like a game of chess in which strategy can be as important as physical proficiency.

Explain how a writer could aid readers' comprehension in these paragraphs by adding two types of formatting, inserting an infographic, and including two multimedia components.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer could add a heading such as "The Benefits of Tennis" and list the physical benefits using a bulleted list instead of writing full sentences within the narrative. An appropriate infographic might show diagrams of the tennis court with lines to indicate where the ball will travel during play. This infographic could help readers visualize the possibilities described in the second sentence of the second paragraph. Some multimedia components could include photos of tennis players in action or an animation showing the different types of tennis strokes (forehand, backhand, serves). All of these examples would allow readers to gain a better understanding of tennis and why playing it can be beneficial.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I explained how adding formatting, graphics, and multimedia could aid readers' comprehension.
2. _____ I described two examples of formatting that would improve the text.

3. _____ I gave an example of an infographic that would improve the text.

4. _____ I described how adding two multimedia components would improve the text.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

Key Words

- **analogy** – a comparison made between two unlike things with the goal of making an abstract idea clearer
 - **domain-specific vocabulary** – language used within a particular area of knowledge
 - **figurative language** – words and phrases that are used in a nonliteral way to describe one thing as another in order to achieve a particular effect
 - **metaphor** – a comparison between two unlike things, without using the words *like* or *as*
 - **precise** – exact or very specific
 - **simile** – a comparison between two unlike things, using the words *like* or *as*
-

Format and Style

The purpose of an explanatory text is to provide information about a topic. To communicate ideas clearly, writers use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary, language used within a particular area of knowledge. They may also use literary techniques, including simile, metaphor, and analogy, to support readers' comprehension. The author's use of precise language and domain-specific terms specifically enables readers to develop their vocabulary knowledge as well as their understanding of the topic. Writers should expect their readers to consider and comprehend key words or phrases that are essential to their understanding of the text and the topic.

Precise Language and Domain-Specific Vocabulary

Precise language requires a writer to move from the general to the specific: from *house* to *ranch* or *Victorian* and from *fish* to *rainbow trout*. By using specific words and phrases, a writer creates a vivid image and conveys a particular idea.

Precise language goes hand in hand with domain-specific vocabulary. The combination of the two allows a writer to clearly communicate complex concepts. Consider this explanation of a turning point in American history:

In 1800, American voters ushered in the Jeffersonian Era with the election of Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson as president. This era marks the turning away from conservative policies and moving toward a more democratic society.

Notice that the writer uses specific nouns and strong verbs, such as *American voters*, *ushered*, *marks*, and *conservative policies*. The writer also uses the domain-area term *Jeffersonian Era* and clearly defines its inception—the election of Thomas Jefferson as president—and its defining characteristic—moving toward a more democratic society. The author's use of these specific words and key terms challenges the reader to independently gather vocabulary knowledge by considering key words and phrases as they read and learn about the topic.



Source: bwzenith. 123rf.com

Because the goal of explanatory writing is to share information and convey ideas, using precise language and domain-specific vocabulary allows a writer to communicate these ideas clearly.

Question

Read this vague sentence: *That house is very old.* How might you make the sentence more precise by replacing vague words with specific words?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: That farmhouse was built in 1850.

Format and Style

Simile, Metaphor, and Analogy

You are likely more inclined to think of figurative language in the context of narrative writing, but it serves an important role in explanatory writing as well. Figurative language conveys meaning in a nonliteral way. Notice the difference between these literal and figurative statements:

Literal and Figurative Language Comparisons

Literal	Figurative
I have a lot of paperwork to complete.	I have to climb this mountain of paperwork.
The sprinter runs quickly.	The sprinter is like a speeding train

Consider how the literal expressions differ from the figurative ones. The literal statements present a fact or evaluation. The figurative statements make comparisons to convey the same ideas in a more creative way. Think about the images that come to mind when reading each of the figurative statements.

The first figurative statement is a metaphor in which a comparison is implied by talking about one thing as if it were another—namely, a lot of paperwork becomes a mountain. The second is a simile in which a comparison between the sprinter and a speeding train is directly stated using the word *like*.

Perhaps the most useful comparison to make in explanatory text is analogy. Writers use analogy with the purpose of making a difficult or abstract concept easier to understand by comparing it to a familiar, concrete concept.

Look at how one writer uses an analogy to explain how to construct a logical argument:

Imagine laying a brick path from your doorstep to your garden. You start at the beginning and build brick by brick. If you were to randomly place bricks, they wouldn't line up properly, and your path would be a mess. Without all the needed bricks, your path will be incomplete. Building an argument is a similar process. You start at the beginning with your claim and place reasons in support of it. You align evidence in support of each reason. In the end, you create a straight, logical path to your conclusion.

The writer compares building an argument to building a brick path. In that analogy, the doorstep represents the claim, the bricks represent reasons and evidence, and the garden is the conclusion. Visualizing how a brick path is constructed and aligned can help a reader understand how the pieces of an argument align and lead to a conclusion.

Writers use comparisons to communicate ideas clearly and in memorable ways. Simile, metaphor, and analogy are techniques that allow a writer to manage a complex topic, making it easier for readers to comprehend.

Question

What do simile, metaphor, and analogy have in common?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: They all feature comparisons and express ideas in a way that makes them memorable and easier to understand.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, simile, metaphor, and analogy to answer these questions.

Question 1

Read this sentence: *After running five miles, Sheila's legs were spaghetti.*

What type of figurative language is used? What idea does it convey?

Reveal Answer

A metaphor is used because the comparison is made by talking about one thing as if it were another; namely *legs were spaghetti*. The metaphor conveys a feeling of weakness and lack of control as a result of exhaustion.

Question 2

Read this sentence: *Days are like coins tossed into a wishing well; once they are gone, there's no retrieving them.* What type of figurative language is used? How do you know?

Reveal Answer

A simile is used because the comparison is made using the word *like*.

Question 3

Read this sentence: *When first proposed, Copernicus's theory of heliocentrism was considered radical.* Which domain-specific term should a writer consider defining for readers?

Reveal Answer

A writer should define the term *heliocentrism* because it is particular to the domain of astronomy.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Read the following information. Look for places to use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, simile, metaphor, and analogy to communicate ideas clearly.

Before the 1500s, people accepted the Ptolemaic System, a belief that Earth sat still in the middle of the universe and all the other celestial bodies circled our planet. Then, Copernicus took on Ptolemy's science by proposing the heliocentric theory, which sets the sun at the center instead of Earth.

Activity

Use what you have learned to revise the paragraph. Add at least two precise words, clearly define one domain-specific term, and add figurative language to communicate ideas. As you revise, imagine the reader's experience of reading your revised text. Explain how your reader will gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a key word or phrase in the text that is important to their comprehension.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Before the 1500s, people accepted the Ptolemaic System, a belief that Earth sat still in the middle of the universe and all the other celestial bodies, such as planets and stars, orbited our planet. Earth was the rockstar, and the planets and stars were her fans. Then, Copernicus challenged Ptolemy's science by proposing the heliocentric theory, which sets the sun at the center instead of Earth.

As a reader, I would gather vocabulary knowledge when considering the words *Ptolemaic System*, *celestial* and *heliocentric*. These words are key to understanding the topic. I've provided some help to the reader by providing examples of celestial bodies—planets and stars—and by defining what the Ptolemaic System and heliocentric theory are.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I revised the paragraph to communicate ideas more clearly.
2. _____ I added at least two precise words.
3. _____ I defined one domain-specific term.

4. _____ I added figurative language (simile, metaphor, or analogy).

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **discipline** – a subject or content area
 - **formal style** – a style of writing in which the text structure and syntax are more complex and the vocabulary level is more advanced
 - **norms and conventions** – the expectations readers in a given discipline have
 - **objective tone** – a tone of writing in which no indication of a writer’s personality or other personal details is presented
 - **style** – the “mechanics” of writing, including word choice, sentence structure, and grammar
 - **tone** – the attitude of a writer toward a subject
-

Format and Style

All writers have their own unique ways of writing. However, writers will adapt both their style and tone to best achieve their purpose for writing and to appeal to their audience. Style refers to the mechanics of writing, such as word choice and sentence structure, while tone refers to the writer's attitude toward the topic they are writing about. Think about the style and tone a writer might use when drafting a persuasive text. The writer's word choice and attitude will be crafted in a way that aims to persuade the reader toward one way of thinking over another. However, in explanatory texts, writers are looking to inform their readers. That's why writers will adopt a formal style and objective tone when writing explanatory texts.

Formal Style

Writing in a formal style involves using more complex syntax and advanced vocabulary than would be used in informal writing, such as in a text to a friend. Formal writing is similar to what you might read in textbooks or other explanatory texts, such as a newspaper article. When writing in a formal style, writers do their best to avoid using contractions, slang, or personal pronouns. Writers should also be as precise and clear as possible, avoiding generalizations or vague phrases such as *Some say . . .*

A formal style of writing is appropriate for explanatory texts, as the audience is often unknown to the writer. Just as you would speak differently to someone you don't know very well compared to someone you are close with, your style of writing changes depending on the intended audience. However, writers of explanatory texts should assume that their audience has some basic knowledge about the discipline or subject matter, they are writing about. Formal writing also involves adhering to the norms and conventions of the discipline, meaning writers should use certain vocabulary or text structures to best help their readers understand the information. For example, a scientific text often begins with an introduction providing context on a research question, followed by a discussion of methods used to research, and then the results. This type of text is typically concluded with an analysis of the results. Following such norms and conventions helps the reader know what to expect and be able to digest the information more easily.

Read the following excerpts, written in different styles, from an explanatory text on the effectiveness of multivitamins:

Comparison of Informal and Formal Writing Styles

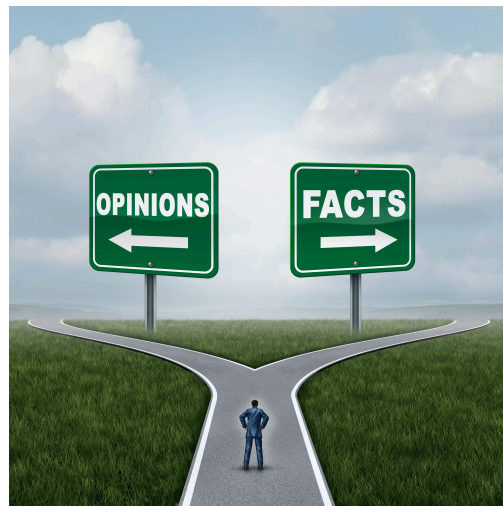
Style	Example
Informal Style	Tons of people take multivitamins to stay healthy, but it's unclear if these pills actually do what they say they will.
Formal Style	More than half of adults in the United States take a multivitamin each day. However, it is unclear whether such supplements are as beneficial as they claim to be.

The text written in an informal style uses the slang *tons of people*, which is also vague, while the text written in the formal style uses the more specific data point of *more than half of adults*. The text written in the formal style also uses the term *supplements* rather than *pills*, which adheres to the norms and conventions of writing about health. Additionally, the text in the formal style does not use contractions and uses the advanced vocabulary term *beneficial*.

Format and Style

Objective Tone

Although style and tone are distinct from each other, style often influences tone. Writing in a formal style usually leads to using an objective tone, in which the focus is on facts and evidence rather than personal opinions. An objective tone also helps writers to adhere to the norms and conventions of an explanatory text. Regardless of the specific discipline of the text, the purpose of an explanatory text is always to inform, so maintaining an objective tone helps writers to achieve that purpose.



Source: lightwise. 123rf.com

Using an objective tone in writing means avoiding stating one's opinions or personal beliefs, either directly or indirectly. It seems obvious that writers should avoid using phrases such as *I think . . .* or *In my opinion . . .*. However, writers should also take care not to use words or phrases with certain connotations that could reveal their opinions. Read the following excerpt from an explanatory text on the effectiveness of multivitamins:

Because studies have shown that taking multivitamins does not improve health outcomes, they seem to be a waste of money for most people.

The phrase *waste of money* indicates that the writer believes multivitamins are not worth buying. In this excerpt, the writer uses a more objective tone:

Studies have shown that taking multivitamins does not improve health outcomes. For this reason, health experts recommend that people get their vitamins and minerals from a healthy diet.

In these sentences, the writer focuses more on evidence and recommendations from experts rather than their own conclusions.

As you watch the following video, observe how the student describes a text written in a formal style and objective tone.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Now, answer the question.

Question

How can a writer maintain a formal style in an explanatory text?

Reveal Answer

A writer can use more complex syntax and advanced vocabulary; avoid contractions, slang, and personal pronouns; use precise language, and adhere to the norms and conventions of the discipline of the text to maintain a formal style.

Check-In

Use what you've learned about how writers of explanatory texts maintain a formal style and objective tone to answer these questions.

Question 1

How can writers of explanatory texts make sure to maintain an objective tone in their writing?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Writers of explanatory texts can maintain an objective tone in their writing by refraining from revealing their own personal opinions or thoughts, whether by stating them outright or using language with certain connotations that may indicate their opinions.

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Question 2

Why should writers of explanatory texts adhere to the norms and conventions of the text's discipline?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Adhering to the norms and conventions of the discipline is part of what it means to write in a formal style. By using vocabulary and organizational structures that are typical of the discipline, the writer can help readers know what to expect and therefore understand the information better.

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Practice

Read the notes a writer has taken on the effectiveness of multivitamins.

- Humans need 13 vitamins and 15 minerals to stay healthy.
- Multivitamins contain these vitamins and minerals, along with other ingredients.
- Multivitamins are not regulated by the FDA.
- More than half of U.S. adults take a multivitamin daily.
- People take multivitamins to prevent cardiac disease and cancer, boost immunity, and improve brain function.
- Studies have shown no reduction in heart disease or cancer for those who take multivitamins.
- An abundance of certain vitamins or minerals can be harmful to some populations (vitamin A can be bad for pregnant people and smokers).

Activity

Write a paragraph using these notes, maintaining a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In order to stay healthy, humans need 13 vitamins and 15 minerals. These vitamins and minerals can be found in multivitamins, which also contain other ingredients. However, multivitamins are not regulated by the FDA. Still, more than half of adults in the U.S. take a multivitamin daily with the intention of reducing the risk of cardiac disease and cancer, boosting their immunity, and improving brain function. However, studies have shown that taking a multivitamin does not actually lead to these outcomes. In fact, an abundance of certain vitamins or minerals can be detrimental to the health of specific populations. For example, too much vitamin A can lead to negative health outcomes for pregnant people and smokers.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I wrote a paragraph using the notes provided.

2. _____ I maintained a formal style.
 3. _____ I maintained an objective tone.
 4. _____ I attended to the norms and conventions of the discipline.
-

Informational Text Conclusions

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will write a concluding section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **closing statement** – the final sentence of an informative or explanatory text
 - **concluding section** – the final section of a text
-

Informational Text Conclusions

Typically, writers structure their explanatory texts with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introductory section presents the main idea or thesis statement, as well as orienting the reader to what they are about to read in the main section or body of the text. The body lays out the facts and ideas to support the claim. The concluding section is the last section of a text and wraps up the topic. Depending on the length of the text, the concluding section may be one or more paragraphs.

The conclusion is a critical section of the text in that it brings together the writer's ideas and provides readers with a sense of closure on the topic. This final section should follow from and support the ideas presented in the explanatory text. It often restates the thesis statement and summarizes the main points that support this main idea; it should not introduce more new evidence.

The concluding section should not simply recap the ideas already stated in the text. It affords writers an opportunity to emphasize their most important points and connect those points to a larger idea or theme. This step gives a finished feel to the text. A concluding section also includes a closing statement, or final sentence about the writer's thoughts on the topic.

Question 1

What is the purpose of the concluding section within an explanatory text?

How might a writer make sure this section is effective?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The concluding section follows from or supports the ideas presented in an explanatory text by bringing them together to create a finished feel.

This section gives readers closure on the topic. A successful concluding section ties together the ideas of a text to a larger idea instead of merely summarizing the main points from the body of the text.

If you have already used one of the graphic organizers to plan your essay, open it now. If you haven't, download and choose a graphic organizer and focus on the conclusion as you move through the lesson.

Writing an Effective Concluding Section

One way a writer can use the concluding section to effectively tie together information is to reason, or think logically, about their topic's significance. How is the information connected to a larger idea? Why should the reader care about this topic? Writers can use these sorts of questions as they think about how to articulate or explain to readers the significance of the topic.

For example, say a writer is composing an article on a new scientific discovery. Questions about the topic's significance might include: How does this scientific discovery fit into a wider context? What does it mean for the future? In a similar vein, if a writer is developing a text on recent accomplishments in artificial intelligence, questions about the topic's significance might be: What are the implications for this technology? How might it continue to evolve?

Using these types of questions, a writer can think through the significance of a topic and hopefully keep readers thinking about their topic long after reading the explanatory text.

Question 2

In an explanatory text about trends in tourism in remote places, what are two questions about the topic's significance the writer might use to help develop the conclusion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Who or what is affected by this trend, and why? How does tourism in remote places fit into historic or international contexts?

As you think about writing a concluding section, consider the central idea of the explanatory text and the main points that are made in the body. Then use the skill of reasoning effectively to brainstorm the significance of the topic and consider whether you have any final thoughts to leave with readers about the topic.

Question 3

How can a writer determine the significance of the topic when writing a concluding section?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer can reason effectively by asking themselves questions about the topic, such as how the topic fits into a wider context or how it impacts the future. This process will help readers have a clear takeaway after reading the explanatory text.

Question 4

Read the concluding paragraph of the sample essay, “Embracing Change,” and think about the purpose of each part of it.

By embracing change, we allow ourselves opportunities to improve and grow. But don't worry if you can't hop around from one country to another. Incorporating change into your life can be as simple as taking a new route to school. Just sit down and brainstorm some ways you can get yourself out of a rut and go for it. Your future self will definitely thank you for your efforts and willingness to embrace change today!

Check-In

Read the following two drafts for a concluding section to an explanatory text about the Gettysburg Address. Then complete the activities.

Draft 1

As discussed above, the Gettysburg Address is one of the most famous speeches in American history. Abraham Lincoln gave this speech on November 19, 1863, to dedicate a cemetery at the site of the Gettysburg battle. The speech took two minutes. Lincoln spoke about American ideals of liberty and equality.

Draft 2

As discussed above, the Gettysburg Address is one of the most famous speeches in American history. Given at a critical turning point of the Civil War in 1863, this speech by Abraham Lincoln reminded the public of the American ideals that the nation's soldiers were fighting to defend. The Gettysburg Address continues to inspire the nation to strive toward the ideals of freedom and equality.

Activity 1

Compare the two concluding sections. Which is stronger? How does the writer reason effectively in the concluding section of the stronger text?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Draft 2 is stronger. In the first example, the writer includes information without tying the ideas together or restating a main idea. In the second example, the writer supports and connects information to a main idea. This second concluding section helps the reader more clearly identify the important takeaways from the text. The writer also finishes with a strong closing statement, or final sentence about their thoughts on the topic. The writer reasons effectively by logically connecting their topic to values the nation is still continuing to strive toward, as well as indicating that the speech continues to serve as an inspiration today.

Activity 2

Imagine a writer is developing an explanatory text about critical moments in the life of Martin Luther King Jr. What should the writer keep in mind when writing the concluding section?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The writer should restate the thesis statement of the text. They should also summarize the main points they made about King's life and show how those main points are connected. For example, they may want to consider these questions: How did each event lead to the next? How did the events define King's personality and mission? The writer should also connect their main points to a larger idea, such as why King's enduring legacy is so important or how our world today has been framed by his leadership.

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Practice



Source: Darknesss. Shutterstock

Activity

Read this outline for the explanatory text “Social Learning and Birds,” and then use it to complete the activity.

Thesis Statement: Birds are social creatures who learn new skills and behaviors from observing other birds.

Main Points:

1. House sparrows adapt to new environments by observing and learning what is safe from the more daring individual birds in their social environment.
2. Many species of birds learn to avoid unpalatable or poisonous foods by observing another bird’s response to sampling those foods.
3. An increasing number of birds in Sydney, Australia, learned how to open outdoor garbage cans to find food. Researchers tracked the original location of the skill to three neighborhoods in 2018. It had already spread to 44

neighborhoods by the end of 2019. This suggests that birds observed and passed along the technique throughout the city.

Write a concluding section that follows from and supports the information presented in the text and articulates the topic's significance for readers. Then explain the reasoning you used to develop an effective concluding section.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer:

Concluding section: These examples illustrate that many species of birds learn to adapt to the resources in their environment by observing the behaviors of the birds around them. This ability enables birds to improve the chances of their own survival as well as the survival of their neighbors. These innovative, social, and adaptable behaviors of bird populations give researchers a clue as to how birds will adjust to increased urbanization and other changing conditions in their environment.

My reasoning: I repeated the thesis statement and summarized the main idea that birds adapt and learn new behaviors by observing other birds. Connecting this common theme between the main points helps readers identify important takeaways from the text. In my final sentence, I give a wider context for the topic, indicating that studies such as the one discussed in the text will be important in a world of increased urbanization.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I wrote a concluding section that supported the information presented in the text and connected it to a wider theme or idea.
 2. _____ I wrote a closing statement with final thoughts on the topic.
 3. _____ I wrote an effective concluding section.
 4. _____ I explained my reasoning behind the ideas and structure in my concluding section.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will write a closing statement for an informative/explanatory text.

Key Words

- **closing statement** – the final sentence of an informative or explanatory text
 - **concluding section** – the final section of a text
 - **explanatory text** – non-fiction that provides information, ideas, and facts about a topic
-

Informational Text Conclusions

Writers share information or explain ideas by composing an informative or explanatory text. Anything from an article on a new plant species to an essay on the legal process would fall into this category. Explanatory texts follow the same basic structure: an introduction with a thesis stating the main idea, a body or main section with supporting evidence, and a final or concluding section to wrap up the text.

The concluding section summarizes the main points of the text. It can also emphasize the significance or future implications of the topic. This section is a writer's chance to provide a sense of closure about the topic, especially with the help of the final sentence, or closing statement.

Creating an Effective Closing Statement

There are many ways to write a closing statement. A strong closing statement should do one or more of the following:

- Refer back to key words, metaphors, questions, or other ideas from the introduction. This makes the explanatory text feel complete.
- Suggest further possibilities or a larger meaning of the topic. Ask: How does this have a wider impact? What does it mean for the future?
- Give a challenge or command to readers. This could be asking the reader to take an action or to think from a specific viewpoint.
- Share a relevant quote or statistic from an outside source. It should reinforce a message about the topic without introducing new evidence to distract readers from the overall message.

A closing statement should not, however, simply restate the thesis statement. Instead, it can rephrase the thesis while adding more insight based on the evidence in the text. A closing statement should not be a basic summary of the main points already in the text. Instead, ask yourself: Is there an overall theme or message that needs to be conveyed about these main points?



Source: zhukovsky. 123rf.com

Topics and Closing Statements

Topic	Closing statement
pet adoption	So, the next time you think about getting a pet, consider adopting one.
historic music venues in New York	These historic music venues continue to host talented performers, linking generations of music lovers to the legacy of the musical greats who have graced their stages.

The type of closing statement will depend on what would fit best with the text.

Consider the following questions when deciding on a closing statement:

- What word, phrase, or question from the introduction can be referred back to in the closing statement?
- What larger meaning or wider impact of this topic should readers consider?
- What action or step could readers take after reading about this topic?
- What author, quote, or statistic from an outside source would reinforce a message about this topic without introducing new evidence?

Watch the video and listen as two students explain the do's and don'ts of writing a closing statement for an informative/explanatory text.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question

Choose one of the strategies for writing a closing statement described in the video. Why is this strategy effective?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: One strategy is to restate the central idea, or to reword the thesis statement, while also adding more depth. This is effective because it leaves an impression on the reader. The reader can gain a deeper understanding of the ideas presented between the introduction and the conclusion.

Think about the suggestions discussed in the video and then choose one that you think is important to remember when writing a closing statement of your own.

Check-In

Read the explanatory text “The Process of Invention,” and then use it to answer the questions.

The Process of Invention



Source: JohanSwan. 123rf.com

Introductory statement: When someone has a great idea, we can call it a “light bulb moment,” but how does this compare to the very first light bulb—was it created in a moment?

Thesis statement: Inventions often take years of experimentation and many people working together before they can become a reality.

Main points:

- Thomas Edison is often credited with inventing the light bulb in 1879, but his light bulb was the product of an entire team of researchers. And his team was not the only one. Scientists around the world had been experimenting with creating a type of electric light decades before Edison received his patent.
- Multiple inventors contributed to developing the modern bicycle. Their prototypes in the 1800s included designs with pedals attached to the front wheel or with a larger front wheel for added stability. Then in 1885 came the bicycle we know today, with same-size wheels and a bicycle chain.
- Black American inventor Garrett Morgan worked on many inventions. He created a new type of traffic signal in 1923 that indicated a yield signal for the first time—what we have now as a yellow light before the traffic light turns red. Many inventors played a role in changing these early traffic signals into the traffic lights we have today.

Closing statement: Inventions seem like a defined object, but they represent hours and hours of work by many researchers before they resemble their current forms—and these forms keep evolving as researchers continue to improve upon light bulbs and other inventions.

Question 1

What is the writer's goal in a closing statement?

- a.** to introduce new evidence about the topic
- b.** to acknowledge that the information might be proven wrong someday
- c.** to repeat the thesis statement exactly as written in the introduction
- d.** to show the relationship between the main points in a cohesive way

Reveal Answer

- d.** to show the relationship between the main points in a cohesive way

Question 2

How does your response in Question 1 lead to an effective closing statement?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Showing the relationship between the main points in a cohesive way is a way for the writer to add depth to the topic. It leaves the reader with

something to think about or remember. As a closing statement, this is one approach to provide a sense of completion to the text.

Question 3

How is the closing statement effective? What could make it more effective?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The closing statement refers back to the ideas from the thesis statement that inventions require time and a team. It also connects the main points in a cohesive way and points to the future of inventions. One way to make it more effective could be by adding a reference to a key word from the introduction, such as “great idea” or “light bulb moment.”

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Practice

Read the outline of an explanatory text below. Then, answer the questions and complete the activity.

Introduction: When people think of what makes a building accessible to people of all ages and abilities, they often think of wheelchair ramps and bathroom handrails. These types of accessible architectural features became a requirement after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, a civil rights law that continues to protect Americans from discrimination based on disability. Accessible design often meets the minimum requirements and no more, but architects and designers with disabilities are starting to change that. Thoughtful design is a rising trend in architecture and design that aims to use accessibility challenges as an opportunity to design inclusive, beautiful spaces.

Outline:

- Designers raising awareness for creative and accessible design solutions point out that incorporating elements of beauty and safety into a space creates a more welcoming environment and impacts the mental health of people using the space.
- Architects can rethink what it means to have physical accessibility with features such as adjustable countertops, no-step entryways, and wider door frames.
- Architects can add aesthetic design elements that also improve access for people with visual impairments by considering illuminated steps or wall panels to increase visibility, tactile surfaces on floors and walls, or sound features such as an indoor waterfall that orients visitors to where they are in a large space.
- Designers who incorporate accessibility more fully into their ideas have an increasing market as people get older and wish to live and move through accessible spaces without sacrificing the beauty of their environment.

Question 1

How are the main ideas connected to the thesis statement?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The challenge of adding accessibility features to a design can instead be an opportunity to create inclusive spaces where people of all abilities can enjoy an aesthetically pleasing space.

Question 2

What is a larger message that the writer could include in the closing statement?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Changing the way people think about accessible design is leading the way to beautiful spaces that are designed to include people of all abilities instead of just accommodating them.

Activity

Use the outline and your answers to the above questions to write a closing statement for the informative/explanatory text that gives the reader a sense of closure.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I reviewed the introduction, thesis statement, and main points for the text.
 2. _____ I supported the information presented in the text and connected it to a wider theme or idea.
 3. _____ I wrote an effective closing statement for an explanatory text that provided a sense of closure for readers.
-

Writing Explanatory Text Apply

Writing Explanatory Text: Apply

Objective

In this section, you will apply skills learned throughout the unit.

Show What You Know

In this unit, you focused on the process of writing explanatory text. You learned the techniques you can use to develop an informative and engaging piece of writing by implementing these learning goals:

- Compare the introductory sections of two explanatory texts and explain the thesis statements and how they are used.
- Describe organizational structures for explanatory texts, and note how the author develops the topic appropriate to the audience by organizing an introductory paragraph and well-chosen, relevant and sufficient facts, details, examples, quotations and other information, presenting complex ideas as a unified whole and citing all sources.
- Explain dependent and independent clauses and their grammatical role in sentences, and explain when and how punctuation should be used with clauses.
- Rewrite sentences and paragraphs by inserting or rearranging phrases and clauses.
- Identify examples of usage conventions, apply the understanding that usage can change over time, and resolve issues of complex and contested usage, consulting references as needed.
- Describe methods for varying syntax for effect, and apply those methods in writing, consulting references as needed.
- Use appropriate and varied transitions to link ideas and create cohesion, and explain the use of formatting and graphics to aid comprehension.
- Maintain a formal style and objective tone, and use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and literary techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to convey ideas.

- Write a concluding section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g. articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

Now, you will have an opportunity to show what you have accomplished and apply what you have learned about explanatory writing to the text you selected at the beginning of the unit. If you haven't already done so, take time now to finish reading the text. Then, spend a few minutes discussing the text and the author's approach with your Learning Coach, using the suggested talking points below as a guide. Notice that the activities are open-ended—there are no “correct” answers—but they will help you to focus on the text as you get ready to apply the learning goals you have mastered in this unit:

- Tell your Learning Coach what you enjoyed and did not enjoy about the text. Would you recommend it to a friend? Explain using details from the text.
- Comment specifically on the language. How did the author vary the language and sentence structure to make the text more interesting to read?
- Comment on the relevance of the content. When you chose the text, what did you hope to gain from the reading experience? Did the text fulfill your expectations? How did the author make the reading experience both informative and enjoyable? What techniques did they use that worked particularly well to clarify ideas and add interest (e.g. graphics, headings, quotations to break up text, etc.)?

Finally, access the text you have read, review your notes, and get ready to answer the questions that follow.

Writing Explanatory Text: Apply

Show What You Know

Assess your grasp of the learning goals from this unit by completing the activities that follow.

Activity 1

Consider the introduction of the unit text you chose and evaluate its effectiveness and organization. Comment especially on the thesis statement and how the author uses it to state the central idea their text develops. Then, compare the author's introduction to that of another explanatory text you have read on the same topic. Which author more effectively organizes the introduction to suit their purpose?

Activity 2

Choose a metaphor, simile, analogy, or other example of figurative language the author uses, and explain how the example helps the author make the complexity of the topic more manageable for readers.

Activity 3

Describe what the author of the unit text did to vary the syntax they used. Choose one paragraph or section and provide examples of the use of varied and distinctive syntax. Then, explain the effect of these sentences on your understanding of the topic and your reading experience.

Activity 4

Find an example of how the author of your unit text used modern usage conventions for emphasis or to convey a particular meaning, and explain why the author's use of modern conventions is effective. As needed, use a reference source to check any issue of complex or contested usage.

Activity 5

Find several examples of sentences with dependent and independent clauses in a paragraph or section of your unit text. Explain the grammatical role of each type of clause and then evaluate their use of punctuation. Finally, choose one sentence and suggest a way it could be rewritten by inserting or rearranging phrases and clauses.

Activity 6

Select the interactive to show what you know about using details to develop a topic.

Complete the multiple choice question.

Activity 7

Choose two major ideas from the unit text and explain what the author did to note the important connections and distinctions between them. Note several examples of how the author used transitions to link major sections, create cohesion, and clarify relationships among complex ideas.

Activity 8

Evaluate how the author concluded the unit text you read. Pay particular attention to the closing statement the author makes, explaining how it follows from and supports the information presented throughout the text.

Self-Assess

How did you do? If you feel like you're ready, move on to Try This. If you need more practice, use this chart to review the sections mentioned.

Self Review

Activity Missed	Section to Review
1	Introductions
2	Format and Style
3	Syntax
4	Usage
5	Clauses
6	Developing the Topic
7	Connections and Transitions
8	Informational Text Conclusions

Writing Explanatory Text: Apply

Try This

Use the unit text to provide written responses to these activities.

Activity 1

Write a paragraph evaluating the author's use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary throughout the text. Note specific examples and explain how they help the author manage the complexity of the topic.

Activity 2

Consider the general structure the author used to organize the content of the unit text you read. Then, in an essay of 250 to 500 words, describe the structure the author used, noting how this organizational structure helped the author organize ideas, concepts, and information into a unified, cohesive whole. Include in your discussion an analysis of how formatting, graphics, and/or multimedia helped the author execute a particular structure and make the content more understandable to readers. Use specific quotations and evidence from the text to support your analysis and include a properly written citation for the text at the end of your essay. Organize your essay clearly and follow the rules of English grammar and punctuation while maintaining a format style and objective tone.

Self-Assess

Use the rubric to decide whether your writing fulfills the standards of ideas/purpose; analysis; organization; comprehension; and grammar, conventions, and spelling.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 1

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 1



Source: FocusDzign. Shutterstock

We live in an era in which huge amounts of information are available to use from millions of sources, day after day after day. Our world is so complex, and so many skills are needed to navigate everyday life, that good explanatory writing is worth its weight in gold.

Explanatory writing can take many forms. It can tell you about the new features on a smartphone update. It can tell you how to make dinner. It can even tell why a country changed its government overnight. People rely on explanatory writing to help them make good decisions on important life issues.

Mastering explanatory writing can not only help you in school but also give you a key skill for the job market. People who can explain processes or communicate instructions clearly are in high demand.

Explanatory writing benefits from a clear thesis statement, closely linked ideas that include details and examples, and a strong, focused conclusion. Clarity and cohesion are key.

You will create a portfolio demonstrating the process needed to create an effective explanatory text. The portfolio will focus on an explanatory text you write in response to the following prompt:

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.

Portfolio Introduction

Over the next three lessons, you will write an Explanatory Text portfolio. You will have three days to address the learning goals and complete the portfolio.

Type of Writing Definition

Explanatory texts help readers learn new information but presenting it in a way that is clear, organized, and unbiased. Explanatory writing benefits from a clear thesis statement, closely linked ideas that include details and examples, and a strong, focused conclusion.

Portfolio Topic

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult (or an alternate topic as assigned by your teacher).

Planning Document

Download the following document to your computer. Use this document to plan your portfolio.

You can also use this graphic organizer to help plan your portfolio.

Explanatory Brainstorming

Rubric

Use this rubric to ensure you are meeting all the goals of the portfolio.

Example Portfolio

Use this example of a completed portfolio as a guide for your writing. The portfolio topic this student chose was: Change is hard, but it's an important part of the human experience and should be embraced.

Embracing Change

Explanatory Text Portfolio 1

Continued

Watch the video for some ideas on approaching this prompt.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

To help you through the process, the lessons in this portfolio will support you as you plan, write, revise, and edit your work. They will help you decide what kind of story you want to tell and how to tell it in an effective way.

As you develop your text, you will also follow the progress of another student, Xiao, as she creates her own explanatory text. Read Xiao's text now and think about what she does to discuss change in an interesting way and keep you reading to the end.

Pro Tip

Throughout this portfolio, you'll be learning more about specific ways in which Xiao approached the process of writing an explanatory text. You may want to download her text to your desktop, tablet, or phone or print it out so that you can take notes or highlight portions that help you understand a specific element or technique.

by Xiao Chen

President John F. Kennedy once said: “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” Morgan’s experience on a recent solo trip exemplifies the truth of Kennedy’s statement:

I considered staying in Copenhagen for my entire trip because I was having so much fun. Change has always been difficult for me. However, I did not want to miss my opportunity to visit Berlin, the next city on my itinerary. The thought of leaving Copenhagen was difficult, but as I boarded the plane for a new destination, I realized I was opening myself up to new adventures. This became my mindset for the rest of my travels. I embraced the change from one European city to the next and had an amazing trip filled with new experiences and cultures!

Even though change can be hard, it is an important part of the human experience.

Without it, we wouldn’t grow and improve. Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

Toward Change

One study described in a *Harvard Business Review* article showed that the main reason employees in a workplace resist change is because they are afraid they will no longer be able to recognize the organization’s core values, culture, and mission (Venus et al.). The study found a causal relationship between change and continuity: change is more readily accepted if it promises some continuity. As a result, experts recommended that when changes need to be made, leaders need to emphasize that the values and principles of the organization will be preserved, regardless of the suggested changes.

This study applies to personal change as well. If people think about change in terms of what will stay the same, they might be better able to accept shifts in their lives.

Consider a person who wants to add a new habit to their daily routine. They want to change how they spend their evenings. Rather than chilling on the couch watching television with their buddies, they want to get out and be more active.

This is a positive change, of course, but maybe the friends might feel abandoned. What is something this person could do to acknowledge their friends’ fears but still proceed with the changes they want to make? They could explain that this change will not impact the core nature of their relationship: they are still friends. They may even suggest that being more active and sharing new experiences could enhance their relationship.

Reaping Health Benefits

Following a monotonous schedule can lead to physical and emotional stress. Accepting that change needs to be part of our daily routine helps eliminate those stressors before

they come into our lives. In fact, a joint study by researchers at New York University and University of Miami found that “having new, diverse experiences every day is linked to positive emotions and enhanced happiness” (Stieg).

The authors of this study found that even minute changes can make a considerable difference in a person’s life. Want to make a healthy change? Try a new work out. Need a new perspective? Try taking a new route to school or work, eating lunch in a different location, or studying in a different internet café, park, or library spot. These types of small changes can make a big difference.

Accepting Difficult Changes

It is unrealistic to think that all change is good change. Some changes are hard; however, it is often through the difficulties in life that we learn and grow the most.

In another *Harvard Business Review* article, organizational psychologist Nick Tasler suggests that when faced with difficult change, people should focus on their values instead of their fears. He states that “reminding ourselves of what’s important to us—family, friends, religious convictions, scientific achievement, great music, creative expression, and so on—can create a surprisingly powerful buffer against whatever troubles may be ailing us.”

One way to do this is through journaling, especially gratitude journaling. The very process of focusing on what we’re grateful for helps increase our positivity, self-esteem, and happiness. It also helps us be more resilient and less stressed during difficult changes.

New Beginnings

Every change in life is like turning a page: specifically, closing a chapter and opening a new one. Morgan, the traveler mentioned at the beginning of this essay, experienced the feeling firsthand. Had she been resistant to change, she would have missed out on all the adventures she had by moving forward.

By embracing change, we allow ourselves opportunities to improve and grow. But don’t worry if you can’t hop around from one country to another. Incorporating change into your life can be as simple as taking a new route to school. Just sit down and brainstorm some ways you can get yourself out of a rut and go for it. Your future self will definitely thank you for your efforts and willingness to embrace change today!

Activity 1

Rate Xiao’s story by giving it one, two, or three stars (1 star = So-so; 2 stars = Pretty good; 3 stars = Great!) Then, write one or two sentences that explain your rating.

Using the Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

There is a lot to think about as you plan, write, revise, and edit an explanatory text. You might not be sure of the best way to get started. The portfolio rubric, or checklist, will guide you through the process by helping you make sure your text has all the elements of good explanatory writing.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Activity 2

Tell one specific way you will use the rubric as you develop your explanatory text.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will gather information from texts and other research on a topic or issue to prepare for writing.

Key Words

- **digital source** – a website, broadcast news network, informational video, or other electronic source
 - **print source** – a book, newspaper, magazine, or other source printed on paper
 - **source** – something that provides information for an explanatory or persuasive text
 - **thesis statement** – a concise summary of the central idea of a text
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 1

Before you start drafting your explanatory text, you will begin gathering information. To help frame your research, you will first develop a [thesis statement](#). Your thesis statement will be based on an analysis of the writing prompt and brainstorming ideas to address the prompt.

Incorporating research into your explanatory text gives credibility to your writing. Using an authoritative [source](#) can persuade readers to trust your information and pay more attention to your ideas. Research can also help you give more depth to your ideas by providing examples and details. It may even give you new ideas for how to strengthen your thesis statement.

Analyzing the Writing Prompt

Your task for your portfolio is to respond to the writing prompt:

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.

When you analyze a writing prompt, you need to determine what the prompt is asking you to do. Begin by identifying the most important words in the prompt. Then think about what feelings and ideas you associate with these words.

After you break apart the prompt, you can use the ideas you come up with to help you brainstorm and draft a thesis statement.

Question 1

What words do you notice in the writing prompt? What feelings and ideas do you associate with these words?

Show Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: The words I notice are “change” and “personal growth.” These words make me think about the changes I have encountered personally and changes I see in the lives of my friends and family. “Personal growth” makes me think about how changes can make someone grow, even though the changes themselves might be difficult.

Brainstorming a Thesis Statement

Now that you’ve analyzed the prompt, you can use what you came up with to draft a thesis statement. A thesis statement provides a concise summary of the central idea of a

text, and you can use your thesis statement to guide your research and make sure that you answer the prompt.

Xiao analyzed the writing prompt and did some brainstorming to draft her thesis statement. Review her brainstorming notes below:

I saw the words *change* and *difficult* along with the words *necessary* and *personal growth*. I definitely want to explore how change can be beneficial. So my first thesis statement idea is:

Change is difficult, but it brings benefits.

With this thesis statement, Xiao is making an attempt to summarize her ideas about the prompt, but she is concerned that her statement does not address all parts of the prompt. For example, her statement does not mention personal growth. Her thesis statement is also very broad and may be difficult to cover.

Xiao reviews the prompt again. She decides to include the words *personal growth* this time. Here is her revised thesis statement:

Change can be scary and difficult, but embracing it brings personal growth and other benefits.

Once Xiao is satisfied with her preliminary thesis statement, then she can begin gathering information for her explanatory text.

Question 2

Why is it helpful to create a thesis statement prior to beginning research for an explanatory text?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The thesis statement provides a focus for gathering information. It is especially usual when the research is needed to address a writing prompt.

Question 3

Create a draft of your thesis statement. What important words did you use?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: My thesis statement is: Change is necessary for personal growth because without change most people stay the same. I decided to use the important words *change* and *personal growth* in my thesis statement.

Pro Tip

Be flexible with your thesis statement. As you progress through the research process, you may uncover information that contradicts your thesis statement. Or you may come across interesting ideas that you would like to focus on in your writing. You can revise your thesis statement at any time during the prewriting process. You may even find the need to tweak the thesis during the actual writing of your explanatory text, as thinking through your ideas in depth may alter your perspective on the prompt.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 1

Choosing Print and Digital Sources

Once you have settled on a thesis statement, you have a direction to take for your research. While gathering information, refer back frequently to your thesis statement to make sure the information you collect is relevant to the writing prompt.



Source: Prostock-studio. Shutterstock

Use a variety of sources when you gather information. You should use both [print sources](#) and [digital sources](#). Print sources are those printed on paper. Digital sources are electronic sources. Some examples of these sources appear in the following table:

Print vs. Digital Information Sources

Print Sources	Digital Sources
Books	Websites
Periodicals (newspapers, magazines, journals)	Broadcast news networks
Recent editions of encyclopedias	Online encyclopedias

It is important to use a variety of sources because there are many viewpoints on what information is most important for your topic. By choosing a variety of sources, you will find a variety of information and increase your chances of finding support for your thesis along with interesting ideas you hadn't thought of.

If you have access to a local library, a research librarian can help you learn about what print sources are available. An electronic card catalog can help you find a book related to your topic. There are databases of periodicals that will allow you to search by topic. Some print sources have been digitized and can be searched from your home computer by using browsers.

You can also use your home computer to search for digital sources. Websites of newspapers, magazines, and broadcast news networks are particularly good digital sources, as are well-maintained online encyclopedias. For the writing prompt for your explanatory text, you might focus your search on the word *change*, as well as on your thesis statement.

When you have located an article that is related to your thesis statement or the prompt, carefully record information about it, such as the name of the source and the date. You may decide to look for additional information there later, or your Learning Coach may require you to include this information. This is how Xiao typed the information for two of her sources into her computer notes:

1. Author: Nick Tasler
2. Title of Article: How to Get Better at Dealing with Change
3. Journal: *Harvard Business Review*
4. Date: September 21, 2016
5. Author: Cory Stieg
6. Title of Article: A change of scenery can boost your well-being and mood—
Here's how you do it safely

7. Broadcast News Network: CNBC

8. CNBC website

Question 1

Why is it important to get your information from different sources instead of only multiple issues of the same magazine or only one book?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: It is important to get your information from different sources because you want to be able to fully support your thesis statement and fully develop your topic. If you use only a magazine, the magazine may specialize in a particular type of information and have a narrow focus. If you only use one book, then you will likely miss out on a variety of ideas that would make your explanatory text more balanced and more interesting.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Choosing What Information to Use

Once you have found an article, webpage, or other source that seems to provide useful information, it is time to start taking notes on the content of the article. Some of the information you write down should be background information that simply helps you learn more about your topic. You also need information that you will actually use in your explanatory text.

Material that is closely aligned with your thesis statement is a candidate for inclusion in your text. Include some direct quotations to keep readers engaged. Ideas that are particularly well expressed or interesting are good candidates for direct quotation.

Question 2

Why are direct quotations important in an explanatory text?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: People are interested in what other people have to say, and so quotations keep readers engaged. They also may lend an air of authority to the text if they come from an expert.

Check-In

Reread Xiao's explanatory text, "Embracing Change." Then, complete the activities.

Embracing Change

Embracing Change

by Xiao Chen

President John F. Kennedy once said: "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." Morgan's experience on a recent solo trip exemplifies the truth of Kennedy's statement:

I considered staying in Copenhagen for my entire trip because I was having so much fun. Change has always been difficult for me. However, I did not want to miss my opportunity to visit Berlin, the next city on my itinerary. The thought of leaving Copenhagen was difficult, but as I boarded the plane for a new destination, I realized I was opening myself up to new adventures. This became my mindset for the rest of my travels. I embraced the change from one European city to the next and had an amazing trip filled with new experiences and cultures!

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Without it, we wouldn't grow and improve. Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

Toward Change

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Consider a person who wants to add a new habit to their daily routine. They want to change how they spend their evenings. Rather than chilling on the couch watching television with their buddies, they want to get out and be more active.

This is a positive change, of course, but maybe the friends might feel abandoned. What is something this person could do to acknowledge their friends' fears but still proceed with the changes they want to make? They could explain that this change will not impact the core nature of their relationship: they are still friends. They may even suggest that being more active and sharing new experiences could enhance their relationship.

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family, friends, religious convictions, scientific achievement, great music, creative expression, and so on—can create a surprisingly powerful buffer against whatever troubles may be ailing us.”

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Every change in life is like turning a page: specifically, closing a chapter and opening a new one. Morgan, the traveler mentioned at the beginning of this essay, experienced the feeling firsthand. Had she been resistant to change, she would have missed out on all the adventures she had by moving forward.

By embracing change, we allow ourselves opportunities to improve and grow. But don’t worry if you can’t hop around from one country to another. Incorporating change into your life can be as simple as taking a new route to school. Just sit down and brainstorm some ways you can get yourself out of a rut and go for it. Your future self will definitely thank you for your efforts and willingness to embrace change today!

Pro Tip

Consider printing out Xiao’s explanatory text or pasting it into a text document. That way, you can more easily annotate specific portions of the text as you read it.

Activity 1

Evaluate how well Xiao’s explanatory text addressed the writing prompt.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao did well because she dealt with both the necessity and difficulty of change. She also provided some insights concerning change and personal growth.

Activity 2

Suggest a way that Xiao could have improved the way she chose sources for the information she gathered.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao used two articles from the same journal, *Harvard Business Review*. She could have used just one of those articles and found another one in a book or magazine for better diversity of perspectives.

Practice

Activity

It's time to begin preparing to write your own explanatory text about change and its role in personal growth.

Follow these steps.

1. First, revisit the thesis statement you wrote earlier in this lesson. Review it against the writing prompt.

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.

2. Gather information for your explanatory text, using your thesis statement to focus your research. Evaluate your resources for reliability. Remember to include a variety of sources, including the following:

- Print sources
 - books
 - periodicals (e.g., newspapers, magazines, journals)
 - recent editions of encyclopedias
- Digital sources
 - websites
 - broadcast news networks
 - online encyclopedias

3. Take notes from your sources, including possible direct quotations. Decide which information best fits the writing prompt and your thesis statement. Refine or replace your thesis statement if the information you find does not support it.

4. Record details about the sources, along with the information you collected.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I drafted a thesis statement after brainstorming ideas related to the writing prompt.
2. _____ I used the thesis statement as the focus of my research.
3. _____ I gathered information from reliable print and digital sources.

4. _____ I took notes on information that was relevant to my thesis statement, including direct quotations.
5. _____ I recorded my thesis statement, source information, and research findings.

Then, review the full Exploratory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Word

Objective

In this section, you will use a concept map or outline to organize information.

Key Words

- **concept map** – a visual diagram a writer uses to organize ideas before writing a text
 - **organizational plan** – the way a writer plans to put a text together
 - **outline** – a plan a writer uses to organize ideas before writing a text
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 1

Now that you have a thesis statement and have gathered information for your explanatory text, it is time to create an organizational plan to address the writing prompt. You need to arrange your ideas in a logical way to make it easy for your readers to understand them. You also want to think of ways to keep readers engaged so that they don't abandon your text halfway through.

Making a formal plan with an outline or concept map provides you with a valuable tool that you can use to keep your writing on track. An outline is a plan that a writer uses to organize ideas before writing a text, often in the form of a list. A concept map is a visual diagram a writer uses to organize ideas before writing a text. You can refer to your plan throughout the writing process and even change the plan if you come up with any new ideas.

In this lesson we will see how Xiao created an outline to guide the process of writing her explanatory text.

Structure of an Outline

Most outlines are lists that are organized with main categories and subcategories. The main categories are usually the introduction, the body sections, and the conclusion. The subcategories provide details about the body categories. The categories are often labeled with roman numerals, and the subcategories with letters, as shown in the following:

- I.** Introduction
- II.** Body Section 1
 - A.** details/examples
- III.** Body Section 2
 - A.** details/examples
- IV.** Body Section 3
 - A.** details/examples
- V.** Conclusion

Learn more about outlines by looking at one that Xiao made.

- I. Introduction**
 - A.** Tell real-life experience with a direct quote from individual
 - B.** Expound on the experience and support with Kennedy quote

- C. Provide thesis: Change is hard, but it's an important part of the human experience and should be embraced.

II. Toward Change (Body Part 1) - People prefer that change occurs only partially and some things are kept stable.

- A. Provide information on a study about organizational change
 - i. Use information from first *Harvard Business Review* article
- B. Apply study to an individual approach

III. Reaping Health Benefits (Body Part 2) - Even small changes can have a major positive impact on physical or mental health.

- A. Explain how monotony can lead to issues
- B. Cite CNBC study with direct quotation
- C. Provide examples of how people can add changes to avoid monotony

IV. Accepting Difficult Changes (Body Part 3) - When dealing with difficult change, focus on what's important in life.

- A. Acknowledge that not all changes are good changes
- B. Provide info from another *Harvard Business Review* article
 - i. Use direct quotation from second *Harvard Business Review* article
- C. Give example of gratitude journaling and how that can be helpful

V. New Beginnings (Conclusion) - Mark connections to traveler in introduction and how the changes discussed lead to growth.

- A. Tie in text with traveler's experience at the beginning
- B. Further explain benefits to change and conclude

Xiao has taken a creative approach with her explanatory structure. Instead of beginning with the thesis statement in the first paragraph, she begins with a quote and an anecdote to “hook” the reader. The thesis statement comes later in the introduction.

Question 1

What does Xiao do to set up her essay and connect to the prompt in her Introduction?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao gives an overview of each section. She notes connections to the prompt by including the keyword *change*.

Question 2

What does Xiao indicate in body section II. Subpoint A. of her outline?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao Indicates where she will position the source information that she gathered.

Question 3

In body section III, how will Xiao make connections to her source material according to her outline?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: In subpoint C, Xiao states that she will provide examples of how people can avoid monotony.

Question 4

How will Xiao use her conclusion to create cohesion in her essay according to her outline?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao plans to make connections between major parts of her text. According to body paragraph V, she will “Make connections to traveler in introduction and how the changes discussed lead to growth.”

Question 5

What ideas does Xiao include in both the Introduction and the Conclusion?
Why do you think she does this?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: Personal growth is referenced in both places. I think she repeats this idea to emphasize the importance of personal growth and to create a satisfying conclusion to her text.

Question 6

How does this outline help you see that Xiao gathered information before writing?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: By looking at the letter *a* in each part of the outline, I can tell that Xiao gathered research and that she pulled the information from her research to fill out the outline.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 1

Creating an Outline

With a thesis statement ready and research information gathered, a writer has key building blocks for their outline. The outline gives a preview of what each section of the explanatory text will accomplish. The following is a common approach to creating the parts of an outline:

- The *introduction* presents the thesis statement and gives an overview of some or all of the ideas in the text.
- Each part of the *body* should present an idea that supports the thesis statement. These ideas should be supported by research material or other types of elaboration, such as examples, anecdotes, graphics, or multimedia elements.
- The *conclusion* should revisit the thesis statement in some way and review some of the support for it.

As you write your outline, keep your writing prompt in mind. Each part of the outline should connect with the prompt in some way. The different sections of the body should complement and build on one another rather than repeating similar ideas.

Pro Tip

You do not need to go into a lot of detail in your outline. Save your energy for writing your draft. Think of your outline as a general map you will use to navigate the process of writing. It should provide just a brief summary of what large chunks of text will be about.

Using Concept Maps

An outline is not the only planning tool available to writers of explanatory texts. Some writers prefer to use a concept map. A concept map is a diagram that shows ideas related to a topic. Usually, the topic appears at the center of the map and ideas are written in all directions from this center. Details and examples may be added to the ideas.

A writer created the following concept map for an explanatory text on time management:



Source: dizain. Shutterstock

The diagram shows the subcategories of time management that the writer wishes to cover. Some of these subcategories, such as Prioritizing, show examples in smaller oval spaces.

Question 1

Compare the advantages of outlines and concept maps as organizational tools for writing.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Outlines provide a sequence for writing a text and include more detail. Concept maps might be better for people who are visual learners or prefer a more creative approach to planning.

Question 2

How could a writer combine an outline and a concept map into a hybrid planner?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The concept map could have ovals for the introduction and conclusion. The subcategories, or medium-sized ovals, could represent sections of the body.

Check-In

Reread a simplified outline Xiao made while planning her explanatory text. Then answer the questions.

I. Introduction

- A.** Tell real-life experience with a direct quote from individual
- B.** Expound on the experience and support with John F. Kennedy quote
- C.** Provide thesis: Change is hard, but it's an important part of the human experience and should be embraced.

II. Toward Change

- A.** Provide info on a study about organizational change
- B.** Apply the study to an individual approach

III. Reaping Health Benefits

- A.** Explain how monotony can lead to issues
- B.** Cite CNBC study with direct quote
- C.** Provide examples of how people can add changes to avoid monotony

IV. Accepting Difficult Changes

- A.** Acknowledge that not all changes are good changes.
- B.** Provide info from another Harvard Business Review article
- C.** Give an example of gratitude journaling and how that can be helpful

V. New Beginnings (Conclusion)

- A.** Tie in text with traveler's experience at the beginning
- B.** Further explain benefits to change and conclude

Question 1

How can the information you gathered in the previous lesson be used to create an outline?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The thesis statement can form the basis for the Introduction section of the outline, and the research material can be assigned to the various parts of the Body.

Question 2

In Xiao's outline, what are some connections that are made to the writing prompt, "Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult?"

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The introduction and the conclusion touch on personal growth, and difficult change is a focus of part 3 of the Body.

Question 3

What might cause a writer to make changes to the outline while writing a draft of the explanatory text?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answers: The writer might decide to revise the thesis statement based on the way ideas were being developed, and this would require changes to the Introduction of the outline. The writer might think of a new idea while writing, which would require adjustments to the Body sections.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Activity

It's time to start planning your explanatory text by using a concept map or outline to organize the information you gathered. Your concept map or outline should connect with all parts of the writing prompt, and there should also be connections within your outline. Think about ways you can begin to expand on the research you found during the information-gathering process.

Here is the writing prompt again for your reference:

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.



ELA 11 Graphic Organizers



How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I used a concept map or outline to organize information.
2. _____ I included my thesis statement in my concept map or outline.

3. _____ I included the main idea of each body paragraph in my concept map or outline.
4. _____ I included a summary of the evidence I will use to support each idea in my concept map or outline.
5. _____ I included a concluding statement in my concept map or outline.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Key Words

- **audience** – the group of people for whom a text is intended
 - **coherent** – unified, consistent, and logical
 - **purpose** – the reason a text is written
 - **task** – the type of writing being produced
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

Now that you’ve developed a plan for your explanatory text, it’s time to start thinking about writing the actual draft. It is important that the draft be clear and coherent so that readers will understand your ideas. It is also important to keep in mind the nature of your audience, your purpose, and your task for your portfolio.

Determining Audience, Purpose, and Task

In writing, the audience is the group of people for whom a text is intended. Sometimes your text is nothing more than a “text” itself—a short electronic message you send to your friends or family members. For a text message audience, informal English and abbreviations are completely appropriate. Class assignments, however, have a very different audience—your Learning Coach—and require formal English. There are only a few exceptions; for example, a narrative composition might have some informal English in dialogue.

Closely related to the concept of audience is purpose, the reason a text is written. You can write an explanatory text for a variety of purposes: asking a company for a refund with an email, explaining how to play a sport you are good at in a blog post, or answering a writing prompt that involves an essay for a standardized test. All of these have different audiences and involve various degrees of formal English. It is important to keep the audience and purpose in mind throughout the writing process so that your text doesn’t end up being a confusing mix of different approaches to writing.

Finally, your task is what is being produced. For this portfolio, your audience is your Learning Coach, your purpose is responding to a prompt, and your task is to write an explanatory text. It is helpful to master a wide range of writing tasks while in high school, including narrative texts, explanatory texts, and argumentative texts. Strong writing skills are in high demand in the modern job market, but writing can also be a healthy creative outlet.

Question

Imagine you work in an office and you have a task that involves writing a report for a group of managers. Why would informal English be inappropriate for this audience?

Show Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: Managers might consider informal English in a report to be a sign of disrespect for the task. Based on the informal English, they might believe that the writer is not taking their job seriously or that the writer might be unreliable.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

Writing Clearly and Coherently



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No matter the purpose or task, writers need to communicate clearly to get their meaning across. To accomplish this, it is important to be coherent. Coherent writing is unified, consistent, and logical.

To communicate clearly, you need to have coherent sentences and coherent paragraphs. Sentences should contain ideas that are closely related. A paragraph should have a topic sentence followed by details that elaborate on this sentence. Don't change the focus in the middle of the paragraph, or you will confuse your readers.

Something that is not coherent is called incoherent. Here is an example of incoherent writing:

Copenhagen has been called the happiest city in the world, and it is the capital of Denmark. Some people consider Wellington, New Zealand, to be happier. Copenhagen is also known for its beauty, thanks to its canals and public gardens. One of the gardens is part of an amusement park with a Ferris wheel and a roller coaster that is more than

one hundred years old. The city has many churches with spires extending high into the air, providing a strong connection to the city's past. A walk around Copenhagen will bring you in contact with the friendly residents, who are always eager to help.

There are numerous problems with coherence in the paragraph. The last part of the first sentence does not fit well with what comes before it. There is other information in the paragraph that does not fit well with the other sentences. The sentence about New Zealand should be cut, and there is too much detail about the amusement park. These problems mean the paragraph is neither unified nor consistent.

Xiao's student model has many examples of coherent writing. The introduction is one example:

President John F. Kennedy once said: "*Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.*" Morgan's experience on a recent solo trip exemplifies the truth of Kennedy's statement:

The paragraph has a unified approach about a traveler's experience with European cities. Each sentence follows logically from the next, and there is a consistent focus on how the trip affected the traveler's personal growth.

A composition needs to be coherent in one additional way. The paragraphs have to be coherent with one another. There needs to be a logical progression of ideas, and paragraphs must be consistent with the thesis statement. This includes unity among the introduction, body, and conclusion.

Question

How is the concept of coherence related to the concept of a writer's purpose?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: A writer uses their purpose to focus their writing within a text, and all parts of the text should be coherent with this writer's purpose.

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Congruence

Congruence is a quality of effective writing that creates order and structure. As in math, congruence is achieved by balancing various elements. These variables occur at the sentence, paragraph, and text level. On the small scale, writers can balance phrases and sentences to create a clear, meaningful flow of ideas. On the large scale, writers can balance entire sections to create unity and connect parts of the whole.

Parallel Structure

You can use **parallel structure** to create balance and promote the congruence of ideas in your essay. Parallel structure is similar to repetition in that a writer repeats a pattern of words, sentences, or paragraphs to show how ideas are related or similar.

While too much repetition makes an essay predictable, some is necessary to develop a logical flow of ideas that build on each other. By repeating the same style, structure, or form, you can show how parts of the essay are alike or equally important. You can also reinforce the overarching idea or message.

One famous example of parallel structure is in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. King used the same phrase to begin multiple sentences throughout his speech. This has the effect of unifying every part of his speech under a strong, central message.

To apply parallel structure at every level in your essay, use the following methods:

- Repeat words, phrases, and sentences to convey or connect important ideas.
- Use the same structure for phrases and sentences to express equally important ideas.
- Use the same structure for paragraphs and larger sections of text to create a congruent message.

Parallel Structure at Every Level

Nasir revised the rough draft of his explanatory essay. During revision, Nasir noted where he added parallel structure. Examine his notes in the following table:

Nasir's Essay Notes

Paragraph	Text	Sentence Notes	Paragraph Notes
P1 (Introduction)	Many students enter college, training, or a career right after high school (1). However, some choose a different path and take a gap year instead (2). In a gap year, students take a break before starting college or a job (3). Reasons for taking a year off vary, but most people use it for personal growth and learning experiences outside the school environment (4). Taking a gap year gives young people the benefit of time—time to explore and time to learn (5).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences 2–4 begin with phrases followed by commas that present or introduce what follows. • Sentence 5 repeats the word <i>time</i> as well as the phrase “time to . . .” 	<p>This paragraph uses the same structure as the last paragraph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence 1 introduces a new idea. • Sentence 2 complicates the idea in sentence 1. • Sentences 3–4 further explain the idea in sentence 2. • Sentence 5 rephrases the idea in sentence 2.
P2 (Body)	Gap years give young people the opportunity to explore who they are (1). Because school is so structured, it is hard for people to explore what they really like and are good at (2). A gap year gives them time to try new things like working, traveling, or volunteering (3). For example, a person who works on a farm during a gap year might decide to study environmental science after learning they love being outdoors (4). Those who work or volunteer in their gap year will learn what their strengths and interests are (5). This kind of self-knowledge helps young people make better choices for their future (6).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences 2 and 4 use phrases followed by commas to introduce the main part of the sentence. • Sentences 3 and 5 begin with a subject, are followed by a verb, and end with an object. 	<p>This paragraph uses the same pattern as paragraph 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence 1 introduces a new idea. • Sentence 2 gives background information for sentence 1. • Sentence 3 further explains the idea in sentences 1–2. • Sentence 4 gives an example for the info in sentence 3. • Sentence 5 rephrases the idea in sentence 1. • Sentence 6 states a new idea related to the idea in sentence 1.

P3 (Body)	<p>Gap years give young people the opportunity to learn important skills (1). Schools teach students essential skills like math and writing (2). A gap year teaches people practical skills that enable them to live on their own (3). Students learn money management, cooking, and everyday problem solving while living independently in their gap year—skills that are useful throughout life (4). Those who travel in their gap year will learn how to adapt to a new language and culture (5). These skills prepare young people for the challenges they will face in college, work, and life in general (6).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence 1 begins with the same phrase as sentence 1 in body paragraph 2: “Gap years give young people the opportunity to” • Sentences 2 and 3 follow a similar pattern: subject, verb, object. • Sentences 5–6 begin with the same words or structure as sentences 5–6 in paragraph 2. 	<p>This paragraph uses the same structure as paragraph 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence 1 introduces a new idea. • Sentences 2–3 further explain the idea in sentence 1. • Sentence 4 gives examples for the info in sentence 3. • Sentence 5 rephrases the idea in sentence 1. • Sentence 6 states a new idea related to the idea in sentence 1.
P4 (Conclusion)	<p>Whether or not to take a gap year is a serious decision (1). While it delays entering college or the workforce, it also offers people time to explore and grow (2). A gap year gives students a better idea of what they want to pursue in life (3). It also gives them experience living independently before starting a career or college (4). Deciding what to do after high school is a big deal, and it is normal to feel unsure (5). Taking a gap year gives young people the benefit of time—time to make the best choice for their future (6).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences 1, 2, and 5 begin with an introductory phrase followed by a comma. • Sentences 3 and 4 follow the same pattern: subject, verb, object. • Sentence 6 repeats the word <i>time</i> and the phrase “time to . . .” just like in sentence 5 of paragraph 1. 	<p>This paragraph uses the same structure as the first paragraph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence 1 introduces a new idea. • Sentence 2 complicates the idea in sentence 1. • Sentences 3–4 further explain the idea in sentence 2. • Sentence 5 rephrases the idea in sentence 1. • Sentence 6 rephrases the idea in sentence 2.

Use Nasir’s notes to answer the following questions.

Question 1

Question 2

Check-In

Read this paragraph from an explanatory text. Think about where this type of text might be published. Then, complete the first two activities.

Last night the girls volleyball team defeated its archrival, Pierce High, for the first time in 12 years. The score was 11–25, 25–19, 28–26. The thrilling comeback was led by Vanessa Gomes, who seemed to be blocking Pierce’s spike attempts the entire evening. The powerful serves of Maxine Jones also played a key role in the win. Coach Hillary Tellander commented, “This team has come so far this season. This win showed their character and composure.”

Activity 1

Based on the content of the paragraph, create a table that identifies the audience, purpose, and task for the paragraph.

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer:

Audience, Purpose, and Task Summary

Audience	st
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Purpose	to d e s c r i b e t h e o u t c o m e of a v o l e y b a l l m a t c h
Task	to w r i t e a n a r t i c l e f o r s c h o o l n e w s p a p e r

Activity 2

Consider how the article above might change if the writer’s purpose changed to a narrative text about a fictional girls volleyball team. Explain how the article might change based on this change in purpose.

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: If the article was a narrative text, then the writer’s purpose would be to tell a story or to entertain the reader. The writer might include more dialogue or might include descriptions of how the game felt for the girls to play. The language might become more informal as a result as well.

Need a little extra support?

Activity 3

Read the following paragraph and then complete the activity below.

Berlin, the capital of Germany, has had an unusual history since World War II. Heavily damaged during the war, the city was occupied by several countries that had defeated Germany. Berlin has become known for its cultural freedom. When the Soviet Union and the United States became enemies, they divided Berlin into separate parts with separate governments. East Berlin was part of East Germany and had a communist government. West Berlin was part of West Germany and had a democratic government. Isn't that strange? The city became even more divided in 1961 when East Germany built a barricade made of concrete and barbed wire between East Berlin and West Berlin. In the 1980s, East Berlin had harmful air pollution in winter due to the burning of low-grade coal. This Berlin Wall would stand until 1989, when it was torn down after the economy of East Germany collapsed. By the next year East Berlin and West Berlin had been reunified into a single city.

Identify sentences that prevent the paragraph from being coherent. Also identify a sentence that is not appropriate for the audience.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answers:

Sentences that make the paragraph incoherent:

Berlin has become known for its cultural freedom.

In the 1980s, East Berlin had harmful air pollution in winter due to the burning of low-grade coal.

Sentence that is not appropriate for the audience: Isn't that strange?

Practice

Activity

It's time to begin drafting your explanatory text. Use your concept map or outline to help you stay on track as you write.

ELA 11 Graphic Organizers

Before you begin writing, ask yourself these questions:

- What is my task?
- What is my purpose?
- Who is my audience? For whom is my writing intended?
- How can I use my task, purpose, and audience to help me support my thesis statement?

Once you have identified your task, purpose, and audience, think about how you can make sure to produce writing that is clear and coherent. How can you use parallel structure across paragraphs or larger sections to create congruence of ideas?

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I produced clear and coherent writing based on my task, purpose, and audience.
2. _____ I supported my thesis statement while keeping my task, purpose, and audience in mind.
3. _____ I used parallel structure across paragraphs or larger sections to create congruence of ideas.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and a variety of phrases, connections, and transitions.

Key Words

- **connection** – the relationship between two or more similar ideas in a text
 - **precise** – exact or very specific
 - **transition** – a word or phrase that connects ideas
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

As you continue drafting and revising, it is important to use precise language as well as vocabulary appropriate to the domain you are writing about. Using imprecise words can confuse your readers and using vocabulary that is overly simple can bore them. It is also important to keep in mind what you learned in the previous lesson about being coherent. Making a connection between ideas and signaling them with a transition helps the reader to follow the logic of your text.

Precise Words and Phrases



Source: seventyfour74. 123rf.com

Using **precise** words and phrases makes your writing more interesting and makes the meaning of your ideas clearer to readers. Avoid using general words again and again, as this kind of writing can cause readers to lose interest and perhaps even abandon your task.

After Xiao drafted her introduction, she reviewed it for word choice. She knew it would set the tone for the rest of her explanatory text, and she wanted to make a good first impression with the reader. She noticed these three sentences at the end of the introduction:

Change can be hard, but it is an important part of life. Without it, we don't improve ourselves. Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

Xiao decided that this passage came off as bland and not very interesting. She didn't want her introduction to fall flat at the end, especially because this part of the text is where she introduces her thesis statement. She thought about words and phrases she could add to make her writing more precise. The following is the revision she decided on. Her changes are shown in bold type.

Even though change can be hard, it is an important part of **the human experience**. Without it, we **wouldn't grow and** improve. Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

Xiao changed the structure of her first sentence and replaced the word "life" with "the human experience." These changes make her language more powerful in this sentence. For the second sentence, Xiao decided to use more description to make her point. She used words like "wouldn't grow" and "stay stuck in a rut" to help readers visualize and understand why change is important. By making these changes, Xiao makes her language more precise and more interesting for her readers.

Pro Tip

Avoid inserting fancy words at every opportunity. They can distract the reader from more important content. For example, if Xiao had said "part of the expansive, diverse, and indescribable human experience" instead of just "part of the human experience" it would have made readers focus more on the adjectives than on Xiao's point.

Domain-Specific Vocabulary

When you are writing about a specific field of study, you should include vocabulary that is appropriate to that domain. For example, in math class some of the vocabulary is highly specialized and would not be used in English or history classes.

In Xiao's explanatory text, she chose to draw content from the domain of business because she is interested in majoring in business in college. She thought it would be interesting to draw a connection between personal change and organizational change. A

connection is the relationship between ideas in a text. By looking at two different kinds of change, Xiao felt she would be providing more perspective for the reader. The following is one of the places in the text where Xiao explored organizational change:

One study described in a *Harvard Business Review* article showed that the main reason employees in a workplace resist change is because they are afraid they will no longer be able to recognize the organization's core values, culture, and mission (Venus et al.). The study found a causal relationship between change and continuity: change is more readily accepted if it promises some continuity. As a result, experts recommended that when changes need to be made, leaders need to emphasize that the values and principles of the organization will be preserved, regardless of the suggested changes. As a result, experts recommended that when changes need to be made, leaders need to emphasize that core values and principles of the organization will be preserved, regardless of the suggested changes.

Xiao incorporated the domain-specific vocabulary *workplace*, *employees*, and *core values* in the paragraph. Using these domain-specific vocabulary terms increases her credibility as someone who has researched business organizations.

Question

Review the writing prompt once again:

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.

Do you agree with Xiao's decision to discuss change in business organizations as one of the ideas she uses to address the prompt? Why or why not?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: It is appropriate that Xiao connected with business organizations, because many people spend a large part of their lives in business settings, and their professional growth forms part of their concept of personal growth.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

Variety of Phrases, Connections, and Transitions

When writing a long text, writers need to be careful not to use the same expressions again and again. For instance, using the same transition to connect ideas with examples or to connect related ideas gives a mechanical feel to the composition. Writers sometimes fall back on the same words and phrases without even realizing it.

As you've learned, connections are a way to improve the coherence of a text. Transitions can signal connections, as well as contrasts, to signal readers that links are being made between ideas. Some of the more common transitions are “as a result,” “for example,” and “however.”

As Xiao was reviewing the first few paragraphs of the draft of her explanatory text, she kept in mind the importance of variety. She noticed this passage in the “Toward Change” section of the body:

Consider a person who wants to add a new habit to their daily routine. They want to change how they spend their evenings. Rather than chilling on the couch watching television with their buddies, they want to get out and be more active.

Xiao noticed that she had used “for instance” in some notes for a later paragraph. She also remembered that in one of her previous compositions, her Learning Coach had noted her tendency to overuse “rather than.” “For instance” is a transition that signals an example, whereas “rather than” signals a contrast. She revised the passage to make an effort to improve the variety in her writing. Review her revision:

Consider a person who wants to add a new habit to their daily routine. They want to change how they spend their evenings. **Instead of** chilling on the couch watching television with their buddies, they want to get out and be more active.

As you continue writing your explanatory text, use a variety of phrases and transitions to connect your ideas.

For more on how Xiao used precise word choice, domain-specific vocabulary, connections, and transitions in her explanatory text, review this peer model video.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Question 1

Why did Xiao use “minute” and “considerable” instead of “small” and “big” in her text?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: “Minute” and “considerable” are more precise than “small” and “big,” so the more precise words will help readers better understand the nuance Xiao wants her readers to understand. Also, “small” and “big” are common words that appear often in writing.

Question 2

The video mentions the study that found “a causal relationship between change and continuity.” Why is this context especially helpful for the use of domain-specific vocabulary?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The writing prompt focuses on change, so using domain-specific vocabulary gives the writer an air of authority about the central topic of the explanatory text. Xiao can use the phrase “causal relationship” and the word “continuity” in her text to increase her air of authority.

Check-In

Check your understanding of precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary by completing the following questions.

Question 1

The following table shows some other examples of imprecise, vague words and some possible replacements for them.

Overused Words and Their Precise Alternatives

Overused	Precise
awesome	excellent, magnificent, outstanding, superb
bad	lousy, second-rate, unacceptable, unfortunate
beautiful	attractive, exquisite, lovely, pleasing
happy	content, delighted, ecstatic, joyful
new	innovative, latest, original, state-of-the-art

Using precise words instead of overused, vague ones will give your writing freshness and better engage your readers.

Choose a word in the “Precise” column of the table. How would you describe a situation in which that word would be a good choice?

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: The word *ecstatic* would be appropriate if a senior received an email that they had been accepted by a college that was their first choice.

Question 2

Why might it be important to include context clues and examples when using domain-specific vocabulary?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Domain-specific vocabulary often consists of complex and unfamiliar terminology that may be difficult for readers to comprehend.

Question 3

Why is it especially important to use transitions between sections of an explanatory text?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Readers can follow the flow of ideas better if they know where the body and the conclusion begin.

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Practice

Activity

Return to your explanatory text draft. As you write and revise, look for opportunities to include precise words or phrases, domain-specific vocabulary, and transitions to show connections between ideas.

Here are a few other things to keep in mind as you draft:

- Make sure you address all parts of the writing prompt.
- Keep your composition coherent by connecting related ideas and avoiding the placement of unrelated ideas within the same paragraph.
- Use specialized vocabulary only when it serves a purpose; for example, to incorporate research from a reputable source.
- Adjust your thesis statement if you develop new ideas while drafting.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I used precise words or phrases to keep my reader engaged in my explanatory text.
2. _____ I used domain-specific vocabulary for passages that involve a scientific field of study about the topic of change.
3. _____ I use transitions to signal connections and contrasts between ideas.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **conventions** – rules that most writers agree with, such as rules of grammar and usage
 - **discipline** – a subject or content area
 - **formal style** – a style of writing in which the text structure and syntax are more complex, the vocabulary level is more advanced, and rules of grammar and usage are closely followed
 - **norms** – the ways that writers usually create texts within a discipline
 - **objective tone** – a tone of writing in which no indication of a writer's personality or other personal details is presented
 - **style** – the “mechanics” of writing, including word choice, sentence structure, and grammar
 - **tone** – the attitude of a writer toward a subject
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

In a previous lesson, you learned about audience, purpose, and task. As you work on your explanatory text, you should also keep in mind the concepts of style and tone. Style consists of the choices that a writer makes in a text, especially in the area of vocabulary and syntax, or sentence structure. Tone is the attitude the writer has toward the subject, or topic, of a text.

Maintaining a consistent style and tone are an important aspect of coherence. It contributes to clear communication and reduces the potential for confusing the reader. In explanatory writing, it is traditional to have a formal style. Formal style is a style of writing in which the text structure and syntax are more complex, and the vocabulary level is more advanced. Explanatory writing also has an objective tone. Objective tone is a tone of writing in which no indication of a writer's personality or other personal details is presented.

Explanatory text, usually formal in style and objective in tone, is acceptable in both the workplace and post-secondary education. Such writing requires clarity, conciseness, and structure. Your writing should be easy to understand, to the point, and logically organized. The tone of your writing should be professional, avoiding slang and casual personal references.

Just how formal your style is and how objective your tone also may depend on the discipline you are writing in for your explanatory text. The discipline is a subject or content area in which you are writing. If you are writing an explanatory text in the discipline of science, for example, and are explaining an important discovery, your style would likely be very formal and your tone would likely be very objective. This is because clear communication is essential when a writer is explaining complex topics. Style and tone are typically a bit more relaxed in explanatory text in a discipline of the humanities.

These differing levels of formality and objectivity are part of the norms and conventions of explanatory text disciplines. Norms are the ways that writers usually create texts within a discipline. Conventions are rules that most writers agree with, such as rules of grammar and usage. In the following sections you will see how style and tone can vary based on the norms and conventions of different explanatory disciplines.

Formality of Style



Source: YollusZam1802. Shutterstock

In writing, formal style is about following the rules. But there is a degree of formality depending on the discipline. In some disciplines the norm is for a very formal style in which all of the grammar and usage rules are followed all of the time. In other disciplines, writers may occasionally use informal expressions to create a more friendly, conversational tone.

Let's return to the writing prompt for this portfolio. The discipline for this prompt could be said to be a combination of sociology and psychology.

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.

Although most of Xiao's explanatory text has a formal style, she chose to incorporate informality in certain sections to engage the reader and make the text relatable. We can see this by comparing two sections of her text.

In this first excerpt, Xiao uses a formal style:

When people lead a monotonous life, following the same exact schedule day after day, they can start to experience great physical and emotional distress. Therefore, accepting that change needs to be part of our daily routine helps eliminate those stressors from coming into our lives.

The complicated sentence structure and elevated vocabulary in this passage are typical of a formal style. Words such as *monotonous* and *stressors* are examples of this as well. The passage serves as logical reasoning that supports Xiao's thesis statement about change, and the formal style contributes to the air of authority in this passage.

In contrast, some informal style is notable in this excerpt:

People don't have to move to new cities, or constantly be doing wild and crazy stunts to add change to their lives either! The authors of this study indicated that even minute changes can make a considerable difference in a person's life. For instance, they can just try a new workout. They could also just find ways to get some new scenery in their day by taking a new route to school or work, eating lunch in a different location every day, or studying in a different internet café, park, or library spot.

This passage appears past the halfway point at this text. At this point, readers may be starting to lose their focus after processing lots of ideas and research findings. It is wise for a writer to try to reengage the readers at such a point in a text. The informal expressions "wild and crazy stunts" and "get some new scenery in their day" add a creative dash to the text that may well intrigue readers and get them refocused on the progression of ideas.

To switch back and forth effectively between formal and informal English, it is helpful to know some key conventions on both sides.

Formal Informal

Formal	Informal
elevated vocabulary	first-person pronouns (<i>I, my, we</i>)
long, complicated sentences	contractions (<i>isn't, won't</i>)
correct grammar	slang (<i>groovy, rad, boujee</i>)

Keep in mind, though, that in most cases the norm for an explanatory text is to be more formal than informal in style for clear communication about the topic.

Question

Why might a more informal style be more appropriate for narrative writing than for explanatory writing?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Narrative writing draws more on creativity and the imaginations; also, most characters in narratives are more likely to use informal English than formal English. The primary purpose of narrative writing is to entertain, so an informal style works. Explanatory writing, on the other hand, is meant to inform, so using informal style would distract from this purpose in an explanatory text.

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Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 2

Objective Tone

Just as an explanatory text can incorporate some informal style in certain domains, so too can it incorporate a subjective tone. For most domains, however, the norm is to be objective. This objectivity allows for clear communication about the domain.

When readers are being informed about a topic, they like to decide for themselves what to think about it, including how important it is. When a writer presents biased information in an explanatory text, most readers will not appreciate it and may even stop reading. Bias is a form of subjective tone.

Subjectivity can take several forms. A writer may present good reasoning on only one side of an argument when explaining a controversial issue. Or a writer may present only some of the key information about a topic to “spin” it in a certain way. A writer may even display an obviously negative attitude toward a topic by using disparaging language.

Readers are more likely to be accepting of a subjective tone in explanatory writing if it promotes some sort of positive outcome or attitude. An example of this appears in the following passage from Xiao’s text:

It is unrealistic to think that all change is good change. Some changes are hard; however, it’s often through the difficulties in life that we learn and grow the most.

The phrase “it is unrealistic” shows a judgment, which is one form of opinion or subjectivity. The words *hard* and *difficulties* also reflect judgments. The reader is likely to be accepting of this subjectivity, though, because in the first sentence Xiao is presenting a counterargument to her thesis statement. She does this in a respectful way, which is likely to gain her credibility from readers.

On the whole, however, Xiao uses an objective tone. Examples of this are the research findings she presents from *Harvard Business Review* and CNBC.

Here are some examples of words and phrases that are conventions for a subjective tone. Avoid them if your domain requires a completely objective tone.

- Opinion words: *think, believe, needs to, must, should*
- Comparatives and superlatives: *better, worst, wisest, more illogical*
- Disparaging words: *ridiculous, misguided, arrogant*

As you revise your explanatory text, look for opportunities to use a formal style and objective tone so that you can communicate clearly with your audience.

Question

In which situations might research findings not be objective?

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The sources may be biased, as with a magazine that promotes political views from only one side. Alternatively, a person being quoted may use disparaging words about a topic or another person.

Pro Tip

Subjective language does not necessarily mean an explanatory text is biased. For example, if a writer is presenting an issue and presents subjective language on each side of the issue, then the writer is using a balanced approach that amounts to an objective tone.

Voice in Writing

When we write, our sentences can be structured in different ways to create different effects. Two important ways to structure sentences are by using active voice and passive voice. When the subject of the sentence performs the action, it is in the active voice. When the subject of the sentence receives the action, it is in the passive voice.

- Active Voice: The cat (subject) chased (action) the mouse.
- Passive Voice: The mouse (subject) was chased (action) by the cat.

Consider the Purpose

Both active and passive voices have their place in writing, depending on what you want to achieve, or your purpose. Your purpose in writing is the reason why you are writing. It might be to inform, persuade, describe, or entertain. When your purpose is to create a clear and direct statement, active voice is usually the best choice. However, if your purpose is to focus on the action itself rather than who is doing it, the passive voice might be more appropriate.

- In a persuasive essay in which you want to strongly assert your opinion, using the active voice makes your argument more forceful and engaging.
 - “The government should reduce taxes.”
- In a scientific paper in which you want to explain a process, using the passive voice focuses on the actions taken rather than the people who did them.
 - “The experiment was conducted in a controlled environment.”

Consider the Audience

Another important factor in deciding between active and passive voice is your audience—the people who will read your writing. For instance, if your audience is your teacher or classmates, and you want to be clear and direct, the active voice is usually preferred. It makes your writing easier to understand and more engaging. However, if you are writing for an audience that expects formal or objective language, such as in a research paper, the passive voice might be more appropriate. It can help you sound more formal and remove personal bias from the writing.

Consider the Discipline

Finally, the choice between active and passive voice often depends on the discipline, or the field of study, you are writing for. Different academic disciplines have different conventions. In science and engineering, passive voice is often used because the focus is on the process or results rather than the researcher.

On the other hand, in the humanities or social sciences, active voice is more common because it allows the writer to emphasize their analysis or argument. Understanding the expectations of your discipline helps you choose the most appropriate voice for your writing.

- The phrase, “the data was analyzed . . .”, is an example of passive voice commonly found in scientific papers.
- The phrase, “the author argues that . . .”, is an example of active voice commonly found in literary papers.

Time to practice! Read both paragraphs. Then, answer the question.

Paragraph 1

A fast-paced new sport combines elements of table tennis, handball, and four square: Hantis. To play, you must use your hands to hit a ball across four tables arranged in a square. Your objective is to keep the ball in play without letting it hit the ground. You score points by forcing your opponents to miss the ball or hit it out of bounds. To win in Hantis, you will need quick reflexes and strategic thinking.

Paragraph 2

In a fast-paced new sport, elements of table tennis, handball, and four square are combined. In the game, known as Hantis, a ball is hit by the hands across four tables arranged in a square. To keep it in play, the ball must be kept from hitting the ground. Points are scored when an opponent misses a ball or hits the ball out of bounds. Quick reflexes and strategic thinking are necessary attributes of successful players.

Question 1

Check-In

Test your knowledge of the norms and conventions of formal style and objective tone within a discipline by completing the following activities.

Activity 1

Revise the following passage to meet a standard that would be acceptable in the workplace or post-secondary education.

Infrared light is a type of light that lies between visible light and microwaves on the electromagnetic spectrum, which is the way we can most clearly describe the range of all types of light. Although humans can't see infrared radiation, they're able to detect it as heat. Infrared waves are part of sunlight. These waves also have many uses on earth. Some of the neatest applications are in TV remote controls, night vision goggles, and art restoration. Infrared rays are also used in astronomy, as they can pass through clouds of dust and gas, kind of like X-ray vision in comic books. NASA's James Webb Space Telescope uses infrared rays to make its observations of deep space.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Infrared light is a type of light that lies between visible light and microwaves on the electromagnetic spectrum, which is the range of all types of light. Although humans are unable to see infrared radiation, they can detect it as heat. Infrared waves are part of sunlight and have many uses. Some of the applications are in TV remote controls, night vision goggles, and art restoration. Infrared rays are also used in astronomy, as they can pass through clouds of dust and gas. NASA's James Webb Space Telescope uses infrared rays to make its observations of deep space.

Activity 2

Complete the following activity.

Practice

Activity

Return to your explanatory text and evaluate the style, tone, and voice that you used. Use informal style and subjective tone sparingly, saving them for special purposes like engaging the reader. Use and maintain a consistent active or passive voice as determined by your purpose, audience, and discipline. Also remember to create coherence in your text and to communicate your purpose clearly: answering the writing prompt completely.

Remember to use the following only in well-planned exceptions to formality and objectivity.

- informal style: contractions, first-person pronouns, slang
- subjective tone: opinion words, superlatives/comparatives, disparaging language

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I attended to the norms and conventions of the explanatory writing discipline, including correct grammar and usage.
2. _____ I maintained a mostly formal style.
3. _____ I maintained a mostly objective tone.
4. _____ I used and maintained active or passive voice as determined by my purpose, audience, and discipline.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 3

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will write a concluding section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic) when writing informative/explanatory texts.

Key Words

- **concluding section** – the final section of a text
 - **implication** – the resulting conclusion that can be drawn or inferred based on the available information
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 3

By this point you should be wrapping up the body of your explanatory text and starting to think about a conclusion. Your concluding section is the final section of your text and should examine the implications and significance of your topic.

The implications of your topic are the resulting conclusions that can be inferred based on the available information. You have presented a number of ideas to address the writing prompt; now you must make sense of these ideas in a unified way. In your conclusion, you want to reason effectively so that your readers will embrace the takeaways that connect with your thesis statement.

Planning a Concluding Section



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To plan your conclusion, review your thesis statement. Compare it with the body section you have just written. Does each part of the body connect with the thesis statement in some way? If there are any disconnects, now is a good time to address them by either tweaking your thesis or reworking a body section that doesn't really fit.

Also review the writing prompt again. You want to make sure that it has been completely covered by your body paragraphs. Don't wait for the conclusion to cover an

aspect you have not touched on previously.

Once you are confident that your body section is complete and coherent, you can start looking at a plan for your conclusion. A concluding section should not be a mirror of your introduction. It should highlight information in the body in a way that connects with the writing prompt and your thesis statement. Here are some ideas for conclusions:

- Issue a call to action based on one or more of your ideas.
- Highlight the idea that you feel is most important.
- Connect a research finding with one of your ideas.
- Connect your findings with an important issue in the world or your community.
- Give your own answer to the writing prompt and support it with material from the body paragraphs.

You can also take another path with your conclusion. Just remember the key goals of connecting in some way with three things: (1) your thesis statement, (2) the writing prompt, and (3) your body paragraphs. You want to reason effectively in your conclusions so that your text will have an impact on your readers, and a multifaceted approach will show them your reasoning savvy.

Question 1

Why should you avoid paraphrasing your introduction in your conclusion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A conclusion should do more than your introduction does. It should highlight something in the body of your explanatory text, whether an idea or a research finding. The concluding statement should have a connection to the thesis statement in your introduction, but it needs to connect with more than that to be memorable.

Drafting a Concluding Section

Now that you have a plan for your conclusion, it's time to start writing it. Let's take a look at Xiao's conclusion to see how she accomplished the key objectives:

By embracing change, we allow ourselves to improve and grow. But, don't worry if you can't hop around from one country to another. Incorporating change into your life can be as simple as taking a new route to school. Just sit down and brainstorm some ways you can get yourself out of a rut and go for it. Your future self will definitely thank you for your efforts and willingness to embrace change today!

Xiao stresses personal growth to make a clear connection with the writing prompt. She also mentions travel to connect with her introduction. Finally, she makes a call to action to encourage her readers to implement change in their own lives.

Avoid the temptation to go off in a new direction to give readers “fresh” content in the concluding statement. You want readers to retain something from the body of your explanatory text, which you have worked so hard on. The conclusion is your opportunity to emphasize and summarize what you think is most valuable in your text.

When you have finished drafting your conclusion, check for coherence. In trying to connect with other parts of your text, have you created a conclusion that is fragmented and confusing? Transitions are one possible way to make your concluding sentences more unified.

Your conclusion should also be in line with some of the same characteristics needed in your body text. You should use formal style and an objective tone. Keep your audience and purpose in mind. Use precise words.

Question 2

How does the call for action in Xiao’s conclusion connect with the writing prompt?

Write an explanatory text about why change is necessary for personal growth even though life changes are difficult.

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao’s call for action focuses on how the reader can achieve personal growth through change, and personal growth is a focus of the prompt.

Check-In

Review your understanding of writing concluding statements by answering the following questions.

Question 1

Why is it important to periodically review the writing prompt during the writing process, even near the end?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Your aim is to address the writing prompt. Your purpose for writing is to inform readers and support a thesis statement that addresses the prompt. It is easy to lose track of the writing prompt when you are focused on constructing the three sections of your text, so it is important to revisit the writing prompt as you write.

Question 2

Which of the following is most important in a concluding statement?

- a.** a restatement of your introduction
- b.** a new idea that enhances the creativity of your text
- c.** the idea from the body section you believe is most important
- d.** additional research that strongly supports your thesis statement

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- C.** the idea from the body section you believe is most important

Question 3

Using your answer from Question 2, explain why each of the other choices is not as important.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: C. is the correct answer. A. is not as important because your conclusion needs to more than just paraphrase the introduction. B. is not as important because a new idea will negatively impact coherence and take focus away from connections with ideas in the body section. D. is not as important because additional research requires explanation, which will distract from other parts of the conclusion and weaken the coherence.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

[Embracing Change](#)

Practice

Activity

Now, you need to complete your concluding statement. Review the rest of your text and take notes on which ideas you want to highlight in the conclusion. Also review the writing prompt.

As you write your concluding section, ask yourself:

- How can I connect my concluding section to my thesis statement?
- Would a call to action fit well with the rest of my text?
- What idea or research finding do I want to highlight?
- Did I address the writing prompt?
- What are the implications of this topic in the world or my community?
- Does my concluding statement have coherence?

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I wrote a concluding section that connected with the writing prompt, my thesis statement, and the body of my text.
2. _____ I made my concluding section coherent by reasoning effectively.
3. _____ I presented key information that I want readers to retain.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will spell correctly.

Key Words

- **homophone** – a word that is similar to another word in pronunciation but different in spelling and meaning
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 3

Common Spelling Errors



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At this point in your writing process, you should have completed all parts of your explanatory draft. But you are not finished! It is important to give all drafts a thorough review before calling them final. You will begin with a spelling review.

Spelling errors are not only distracting but cause readers to question your credibility. Some readers will stop reading if they encounter more than a couple of such errors. Let's look at some of the most common spelling errors made by high school students.

Homophones, words that sound the same but are spelled differently, are one of the categories of words most often misspelled. At the top of the list are *there* and *their*. The word *there* appears in text much more often than *their*. Remember to use *their* only when you are talking about possession or ownership. A memory clue is the word *heir* inside of *their*: an heir is someone who inherits possessions. Another homophone is the word *they're*: use this spelling only when it can be replaced by *they are*. Likewise, use the word *it's* only when it can be replaced with *it is*; otherwise, use *its*.

Another common misspelling involves the word *too*. Writers often accidentally write *to*. If you are using the word at the end of a sentence to mean “also,” you need two *o*’s. You also need two *o*’s if you are talking about more than enough of something: working **too** long can overload the brain.

Two other commonly misspelled words are *received* and *separate*. The rule “*i* before *e* except after *c*” doesn’t always work, but it works most of the time, including with *receive*. Many people misspell *separate* with an *e* in the middle. If you write *separate* with three *e*’s, you’ve gone down the wrong road.

Finally, there are contractions other than *they’re* that are a problem. Frequently confused are *you’re* and *your*. Use *you’re* only when it can be replaced with *you are*. And avoid extra apostrophes: do not use apostrophes in plural nouns unless they are possessive.

Question 1

Rewrite the following sentence with correct spelling: Students may misspell words when they are to distracted by noisy siblings to concentrate on there work, and they might receive bad grades as a result.

Reveal Answer

Students may misspell words when they are **too** distracted by noisy siblings to concentrate on **their** work, and they might receive bad grades as a result.

Checking for Spelling

When you are reviewing your explanatory text for spelling errors and other mistakes, it is important that you are not tired or in a bad mood. After you finish a draft, take a break so that you can begin revision tasks with a fresh outlook and renewed energy.

Having the right tools is of major importance when checking spelling. If you are not sure about a word, check the definition in a dictionary to make sure you are remembering the word correctly. Dictionaries are also helpful for determining if compound nouns should be one word or two. Avoid children’s dictionaries, which have fewer words than standard dictionaries.

Another valuable tool is an online or built-in spell checker. Many online grammar checkers include spell checkers. Although these tools provide many benefits, also be aware of their limitations. They may not catch misspellings if a word is misspelled as another word. Be especially careful with proper nouns, which also may not be caught as misspelled. Some of these digital tools, however, do quite well at catching a high percentage of errors, so it is worth using a good one. You can reap benefits on all future writing assignments.

Question 2

Find an online spelling and grammar checker that correctly identifies the error in this sentence:

You probably will miss some spelling errors if your not using good tools.

The error is the word *your*, which should be *you're*. If your checker does not catch this error, find a better checker.

Check-In

Question 1

In an early draft of her explanatory text, Xiao found spelling errors in the following paragraph. What are the misspelled words?

The authors of this study found that even minute changes can make a considerable difERENCE in a persons' life. Want to make a healthy change?

Try a new work out. Need a new perspective? Try taking a knew route to school or work, eating lunch in a different location, or studying in a different internet café, park, or library spot. These types of small changes can make a big difference.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

persons', difERENCE, knew

Question 2

Copy and paste Xiao's passage in the previous exercise into the spell checker you use and see if it catches all of the errors. If not, look for a better spell checker.

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Activity

Review the draft of your explanatory text and check for misspellings. Use both a dictionary and a spell checker or grammar checker.

Be especially careful with the following categories of words when you check spelling.

Type of Words for Spellcheck

Type of word	Examples
Homophones	there/their, to/too, weather/whether
Contractions	it's, they're, you're
Other	all right, believe, receive, separate, until

Pro Tip

Keep a log of words you misspell frequently. It can serve as a checklist for future assignments.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I reviewed and corrected errors in spelling in my explanatory text.

2. _____ I used a good dictionary and good digital tools to improve my chances of catching errors.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio rubric to prepare for what you will do next.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Objective and Key Words

Objective

In this section, you will strengthen your writing by revising and editing.

Key Words

- **edit** – change writing to correct mistakes in language, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
 - **parallelism** – the use of grammatically similar phrases or sentence structures to show balance among different ideas
 - **revise** – review a piece of writing and make changes that improve its organization, clarity, and interest level
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 3

You have finished a complete draft of your explanatory text and are now ready for the last steps in the writing process. You will revise your writing by making changes to the organization and content to make sure the ideas are relevant, clear, and connected. Next, you will edit your work, looking for issues with grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Revising and editing will improve your text, and this makes it more likely your text will be well-received by your audience.



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Revising

Too many students neglect the revision stage, probably because they feel drained after finishing most of the steps of the writing process. But the revision stage may give you the opportunity to improve your grade with only an hour or two of work.

When revising, use parallelism across paragraphs or sections to enhance the coherence and impact of your writing. Parallel structure involves using the same pattern of words, phrases, or clauses to express similar ideas.

One way you can apply parallelism is to identify key ideas and present them in the same format. For example, if you are writing about different strategies for solving a problem, each strategy should follow the same sentence or grammatical structure.

You can also revise your writing for symmetry. If one section uses a list of actions while another uses descriptive phrases, your writing will appear unbalanced. Revise to make the structures congruent.

Parallel structure helps create a rhythm and makes your writing easier to follow. It emphasizes connections and congruence between ideas, making your text more compelling.

Developing a checklist gives you a tool for revision not only now but also on future assignments. This lesson will give you some checklists you can feel free to adapt for your own purposes. A troubleshooting chart like the following is another helpful tool for revision:

Troubleshooting Problems for Revision

Problem	Solution
Research does not fit well with ideas.	Sometimes a writer will find interesting information in a source, but the findings do not connect well with the thesis statement or writing prompt. Return to the source to see if there is information that is more relevant. If not, you will need to disregard the source and cut the information, no matter how interesting it is.
Ideas are disjointed and text seems to jump around.	Look for ways that two ideas are connected and use a transition to signal this connection. Then see if you can find connections with other paragraphs.
Some ideas are mentioned only briefly.	If an idea strongly supports the thesis statement or connects with the writing prompt, think of some examples or details that expand on it. Otherwise, cut it.
Information in two sections is very similar.	Decide where the information fits best and cut it from the other section.

When Xiao was ready for the revision stage, she not only reviewed the writing prompt but also her thesis statement:

Not only do we need to accept change as a part of life, but we also need to embrace it.

Using her thesis statement, Xiao made some changes to the body section of her text that made it more coherent.

The following checklist covers many of the skills you have learned during the creation of your portfolio. Use it to review all sections of your text.

Revising Checklist: Explanatory Text

- Does the beginning of my explanatory text introduce the main ideas and thesis statement? Does it draw the reader into the text in an engaging way?
- Does each body paragraph connect with the thesis statement and focus on one main idea?
- Does precise language and domain-specific vocabulary demonstrate my knowledge of the topic and present my ideas effectively?
- Are my research findings integrated smoothly into the text? Do they support my ideas directly?
- Do I use appropriate transitional words and phrases to connect paragraphs and sections of the text?
- Is the text missing details or clarifications important to understanding the topic? Conversely, are there unnecessary details or ideas that should be deleted?
- Are my paragraphs coherent and free of random information?
- Are active and passive voices used effectively?
- Have I used parallelism to create symmetry and congruence?
- Do I use a formal style and objective tone throughout the text? If not, how can I maintain a formal style and objective tone?
- Does the conclusion follow from and support information in the text? Does it relate to the thesis statement and writing prompt?

What did you find most helpful about this checklist? Is there anything you would add?

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 3

Editing

Editing differs from revising mainly in terms of making changes on a smaller scale. Revision is more about major repairs and editing is more about fine tuning.

When editing your text, concentrate on the details of word use, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The goal in this stage is to have as few errors as possible to avoid distracting readers and having them question your knowledge.

Do not try to do revising and editing at the same time. Save your editing for one last read, after you've taken a break from completing the revision stage.

Here are some effective techniques for catching errors:

- Many software programs will automatically highlight errors. Occasionally they will do so incorrectly, so make sure there is a real error before making a change. If there is, check carefully to make sure your correction both fixes the error and does not introduce a different error.
- Make sure subjects and verbs agree, especially if there are other words between them, such as prepositional phrases.
- Carefully check names and other proper nouns, as being careless can be interpreted as being disrespectful.
- In direct quotations, remember that periods and commas always come before quotation marks. Also, make sure periods are not mistyped as commas, and vice versa.
- Don't gloss over short words: short words are often overlooked and therefore left out or mistyped as other short words.
- Compare verb tenses within a paragraph, making sure you haven't switched tenses without a good reason.
- Read paragraphs backwards, starting with the last sentence and ending with the first. This will prevent you from getting "caught up in the flow" and not looking at individual words. Some writers will even read sentences backwards, going word by word from the end.

Use the same tools mentioned in the spelling lesson. These include grammar checkers, spell checkers, and online and print dictionaries.

The following checklist can serve as a helpful tool for your editing review. Again, consider adding other items to the checklist, just as you did with the revision checklist.

Editing Checklist: Explanatory Text

Language

- Are some words and phrases used repeatedly? Can some of them be replaced with a more precise word or phrase?
- Are there run-on sentences or overuse of sentence fragments?
- Are sources cited accurately and thoroughly?

Grammar

- Does the writing use verbs correctly, including tenses?
- Do pronouns have clear antecedents? Do they agree in number?
- Do subjects and verbs agree in number and form?

Punctuation and Capitalization

- Are the names of people and places capitalized correctly?
- Are introductory clauses followed by a comma?
- Are semicolons used to link closely related independent clauses?

Spelling

- Are homophones used and spelled correctly?
- Have you given your text a final read-through in addition to using a spell check or grammar checker?

What is an error you have often made when writing? What can you do to keep from making that mistake in the future?

Check-In

Activity 1

During revision, Xiao decided to cut the following paragraph from her explanatory text. Explain whether or not you agree with her decision.

On his Fearless Culture website, dedicated to improving workplace culture, Gustavo Razzetti wrote a blog titled “Change is not difficult. We make it difficult.” He emphasized that change is a natural process and that resisting it is not natural. “We are more afraid of change than we should be,” he wrote. “Resisting change won’t make it disappear—It will make things worse. What we resist, persists.” Razzetti is right that having the correct mentality is key. If we consider that change is normal and no big deal, it makes us easier to move forward.

Show Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Xiao did the right thing by cutting the paragraph. It conflicts with the part of her thesis statement that talks about change being scary and difficult. Also, part of the paragraph includes some informal style and subjective tone. In addition, Xiao already has a source dealing with workplace culture. Finally, a blog is a less reliable source than the other sources Xiao used.

Activity 2

If there are any items on the checklists you do not understand, review the previous lessons and search online for help.

Prepare a log sheet you can use during revising and editing to take notes of any errors you find. Continue to use this log during future writing assignments, or for writing you do on your own.



[Revising Checklist](#)

[Editing Checklist](#)

Need a little extra support?

[Get Help Here](#)

Practice

Activity

Use the notes you took about common errors that you make and use them as part of the revising and editing process. Refer to the checklists as needed as you do the final reads on your explanatory text.

Revising Checklist

Editing Checklist

After you have made revisions and edits to your explanatory text, read it through carefully one more time. This step is to make sure that you did not introduce any new

errors while making your edits, such as mistakenly cutting an important word or sentence.

Finally, check your formatting and other basic components such as title and name.

Pro Tip

Turn on the Track Changes or Suggestions function to keep a record of where and how you changed your text. The Track Changes or Suggestions function will allow you to undo a revision or edit later if you change your mind, without having to retype.

How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. _____ I strengthened my writing by revising my explanatory text to improve organization, coherence, and logical flow.
2. _____ I strengthened my writing by editing my text to correct errors in language, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
3. _____ I formatted my explanatory text correctly.

Then, review the full Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric to prepare for the last step in your portfolio.

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio 3

Reflect

For your final tasks on your explanatory text project, begin by using the explanatory text rubric to review your completed portfolio. Think about these questions:

- How well does your writing meet the criteria on the rubric?
 - What was the writing process like?
-

Writing Explanatory Text Portfolio Rubric

Then, choose three of the questions below and use them to reflect on the experience of writing an explanatory text. Write your answers in your notebook.

1. Explain what part of the planning process was the most helpful in developing your text.
2. Choose one of the following steps in the writing process and explain why it was challenging for you and how you responded to the challenge: developing a thesis statement or writing a concluding section.
3. What was the most interesting part of the portfolio?
4. What did the experience of crafting an explanatory text teach you about yourself as a writer? What are your strengths? What do you still need to work on?

- 5.** Think back to an explanatory text you wrote previously. How did the process you used for that text compare with the process you used for this portfolio?

Which part of each process would be most useful to you in the future?

Now imagine that you have a friend who has to write a long explanatory text for a college application. Write the three pieces of detailed advice that you believe to be most useful in helping your friend succeed at the task.

