

*“Writing is the hardest work in the world not involving heavy lifting.”*

—Pete Hamill

### *In this chapter you will learn*

- the importance of having students start their drafts early.
- tips for helping students develop appropriately limited controlling objectives or thesis statements.
- techniques that students can use to refine the organization and structure of their papers.
- how to identify and teach paragraph unity, development, and coherence.

The line between prewriting and drafting is a blurry one: Some students draft as a form of prewriting, and others plan so thoroughly that their plans function almost as drafts. The actual line of demarcation doesn't matter. What does matter, however, is that students write a draft and move toward a document that meets the requirements of the assignment.

This chapter discusses methods you can use to help your students through the drafting step of the writing process—getting their ideas down on paper, developing and refining their controlling objectives or thesis statements, finding appropriate structures, and creating well-unified and fully developed paragraphs.

### *Getting Ideas Down on Paper*

Drafting is like peeling an onion; with each draft a student reveals different aspects of his or her paper, different problems to solve. For example, a first draft might reveal a controlling objective or thesis statement that is too broad; when the student fixes that problem, a subsequent draft might reveal an illogical or confusing structure, a poorly supported argument, or incomplete or poorly developed paragraphs. In short, drafting is the step in the writing process where students do the real heavy-duty work of molding and shaping what will become their final papers.

Remember that drafting's enemy is procrastination, and the best way you can prevent students from procrastinating is to force them to get their ideas,

however fragmentary or rough, down on paper where they can be polished and refined later or in subsequent drafts. Remind students that as painful as the experience of drafting is, they will save themselves even *more* pain and frustration by drafting now, not the night before their papers are due.

### **Teaching Tip: The “Quick and Dirty” Draft**

Often, students' first drafts are also their final drafts, which leaves students little or no time to refine their work. To combat such procrastination, discuss with your professor the possibility of requiring a “quick and dirty” draft that forces students to start writing. A good time for this draft is when students have had time to complete most of their research but when there is still plenty of time for revision.

- **Start.** Students gather all their prewriting—invention exercises, rough outlines, all their notes and resources—and sit themselves before their computers. They tell their families and friends to leave them alone for the next three to four hours.
- **Write.** Students keep writing, no matter what. If they come to a place where they worry about their reasoning, they type that worry into their drafts. If they find they need more evidence, they type that need into their drafts. They need to ignore the voices in their head that will likely tell them, “This is a waste of time. You're not ready to write. You're just writing garbage.” For this exercise to work, they need to just keep writing, ignoring all distractions.
- **Save.** After finishing their drafts, students save their files on their computers' hard drives and on disks. They also print out hard copies but do not read them.
- **Break.** Students take a break and reward themselves with ice cream, chocolate, a game of basketball, or whatever they want. They use this time to separate themselves mentally and physically from their writing.
- **Review.** Later, students read through their drafts critically to consider what to keep as is and what to continue working on. Usually students are pleasantly surprised by the amount of good material they have written. They find they have a better idea of their focus and content and know what they need to do next to make the paper better.

### *Developing a Controlling Objective or Thesis Statement*

Most writing needs to be controlled by an appropriately limited objective. Argumentative academic essays will be controlled by a thesis statement. A formal scientific research report centers on a specific purpose for investigation. In both cases the paper's focus stems from a question, a problem, some issue. The paper is in essence a response to that problem, a way of answering it.

## SCIENCE WRITING

In science writing the purpose is determined by the goals of the document. David Porush, a professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and author of *A Short Guide to Writing About Science*, suggests the following examples of science-related goals for writing:

- To explain a new concept
- To demonstrate the efficiency of a method that you executed
- To lay out in a clear and logical way the data you measured or captured with an experiment
- To describe the existing research or thinking about a problem

The specific answer to concerns such as these should guide your writing in the sciences. Porush suggests that students post their controlling objectives near their computers or on their desks, where they will see them as they write.<sup>1</sup>

## THESIS STATEMENTS

Though some writing (such as science reports) may not have a stated thesis, much academic writing in all disciplines does. A thesis statement is the assertion a student will prove in his or her paper, the student's stance on a particular topic, one that is sufficiently limited for the scope of the paper. The entire paper is predicated by the thesis, and every paragraph presents an aspect of the evidence supporting the major assertion. If a paper has a strong thesis, it is likely to be a strong paper. If it does not have a strong thesis, it cannot be a strong paper.

Novice writers usually need help limiting their theses to an assertion that can be supported in the space allowed by the assignment. Sometimes students choose a broad thesis intentionally. Their thinking is something like this: "I'll never be able to write ten whole pages. I had better write on *all* the causes of the French Revolution so that I'll be sure to have plenty of information to fill up the space." Students who think in this way don't understand that a broad thesis is much harder to research (think of all the sources you would need to read to cover *every* cause of the French Revolution), it is almost impossible to prove, and it is probably not very interesting. Help students to recognize an appropriately limited topic, small enough to research thoroughly and large enough to provide an interesting issue to discuss.

Besides teaching students to limit, or narrow, their thesis statements, teach them to make a claim that requires proof, something with an argumentative edge. If the claim made is obvious, readers will not care to read the paper proving it. A good thesis raises questions, makes the reader think "Why is that true?" or "How will that be proved?" Students might start by making an observation about the topic and then asking "So what?" As they keep asking questions about the topic, eventually they will find an interesting angle to the topic, one readers will want to learn more about.

One way to teach students what you expect in the way of a thesis is to show examples. For a literature class, you might show a series of sample thesis statements and discuss each one in turn.

1. The poem "Pied Beauty" is by Gerard Manley Hopkins.
2. "Pied Beauty" is about God's creations.
3. "Pied Beauty" uses diction, form, and alliteration to discuss the diversity of nature.
4. In "Pied Beauty," Hopkins uses alliteration to unite diverse images, demonstrating the unity inherent within the diversity of God's creations.

Students can readily see that Number 1 is too obvious and that Number 2 is too broad. Number 3 may look good, but with a little guidance students begin to see that it is fairly predictable and still quite broad. Number 4, however, is sufficiently limited so that a short essay could discuss the ideas in depth. Besides, it is not obvious; readers will be interested to see how the writer supports this claim with evidence. There is an argumentative edge to this statement. Students begin to understand the kind of thesis that would be appropriate for a college-level literary analysis, one that would add a fresh perspective to the topic being analyzed.

Another technique for teaching students how to prepare good thesis statements is to provide a simple series of questions, such as those in Table 4.1 for science and history topics. Though somewhat formulaic, these questions can lead to a very specific and well-balanced thesis that students would then revise or simplify before plugging into their papers. This type of exercise can help students understand the precision a good thesis demands.

While students are drafting, look for ways to help them develop and refine their thesis statements. Completing a question-type exercise, such as the one featured in Table 4.1, or having students share their ideas with you or each other are good methods for getting students fully involved with their writing at the drafting stage.

**TABLE 4.1.**  
Using a Series of Questions to Develop Thesis Statements<sup>1</sup>

| <i>Questions</i>   | <i>Responses for<br/>Science Topic</i>   | <i>Responses for<br/>History Topic</i>  |
|--|--|---|
| What is your topic?  | Effectiveness of cystic fibrosis drugs.  | U.S. culpability for not bombing and destroying the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz.   |
| What is your stance on the topic? State this as a complete sentence. | Tobramycin is the most efficient drug in treating cystic fibrosis.   | The United States could not have effectively targeted and destroyed Auschwitz directly.   |
| Why do you believe this? State your reasons in a "because" clause.   | Because it directly kills problem-causing bacteria, is easy to administer, and can be used on small children safely. | Because the United States lacked the technological precision and intelligence necessary to destroy the camp's death houses without also destroying many or most of the Jewish captives. |

(continued)

| <i>Questions</i>   | <i>Responses for Science Topic</i>   | <i>Responses for History Topic</i>   |
|--|--|--|
| Why would someone disagree with this? State the opposing opinion in an "although" clause.  | Although drugs like Pulmozyme have the same effects with a different mechanism of decreasing the thickness of lung mucous,   | Although the United States possessed sufficient firepower and information to attack Auschwitz's industrial sector,   |
| "Although" clause<br>+<br><b>Stance on the topic</b><br>+<br>"Because" clause<br>=<br>Complete thesis statement (may need to be revised or simplified) | <u>Although drugs like Pulmozyme have the same effects with a different mechanism of decreasing the thickness of lung mucous. Tobramycin is the most efficient drug in treating cystic fibrosis because it directly kills problem-causing bacteria, is easy to administer, and can be used on small children safely.</u> | <u>Although the United States possessed sufficient firepower and information to attack Auschwitz's industrial sector, the United States could not have effectively targeted and destroyed Auschwitz directly because the United States lacked the technological precision and intelligence necessary to destroy the camp's death houses without also destroying many or most of the Jewish captives.</u> |

<sup>3</sup>Thanks to Amanda Alleman and Paul Morrison, Brigham Young University Writing Fellow trainees, for these examples.

### *Finding an Appropriate Structure*

In order to write a draft, students must have some preliminary idea of the structure they will follow. *The Elements of Style*, the classic style text by William Strunk and E.B. White, boldly proclaims, "Choose a suitable design and hold to it."<sup>2</sup> While Strunk and White make this task sound obvious and easy, it is often very difficult to accomplish. As students are drafting, they may find better ways to structure their papers and may need to make adjustments and start over. Even when students are writing in a genre whose format dictates the overall parts of the document, they may need to rethink the organization within each part.

Often different types of writing require certain structures. The lab report, proposal, and research article, for example, have clearly delineated sections, and the writer's task is to present information clearly in each required section. A science professor explained to me that the first step he takes when he begins to draft a research article is to set up the headings in his document: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. He then works on filling in the necessary information and ideas for each section.

Other times the student needs to determine what particular structure will

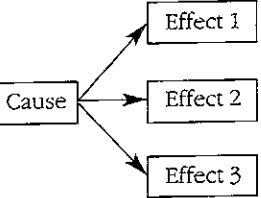
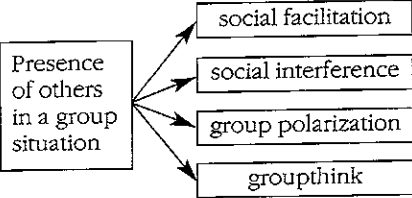
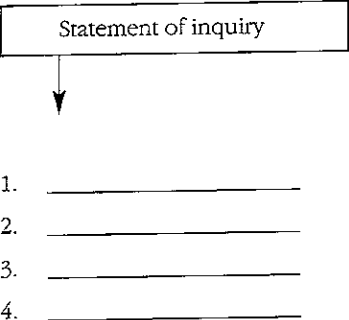
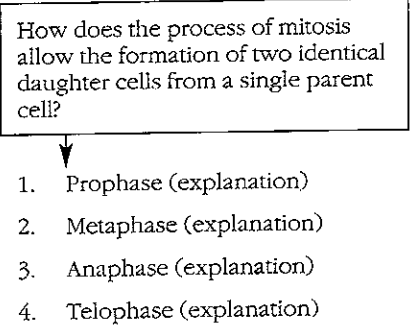
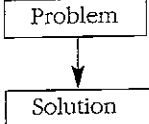
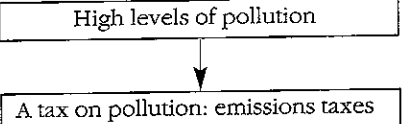
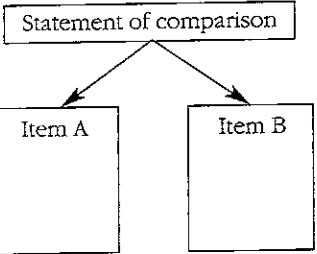
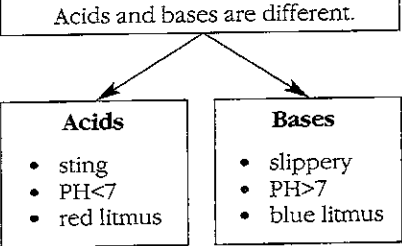
work best to support the objective or thesis of his or her paper. Thesis-driven papers must show a clear correlation between the thesis and the overall structure. For example, if the thesis has two main parts, the paper should likewise be divided in two sections. If idea A is addressed first in the thesis, idea A should also be addressed first in the paper. Key words used in the thesis should be repeated as signposts at major transitions in the paper. As students firm up their papers' structures, they will begin to refine their objectives and theses and find more appropriate ways of organizing their ideas.

Personality and learning style will sometimes determine a student's approach to organizing his or her paper. Some students like to lay out a firm objective or thesis and outline carefully before they begin to write a draft. Others will prefer to write a draft, rethink their structure and objective or thesis, and then write another draft. Either way works. Let your students know what the options are so that they can choose the method that seems to work best for them. Recognize that not all your students will use the same writing strategies you do. That's fine, as long as at some point they come up with an effective structure for their papers.

The following are some useful techniques for getting your students engaged with planning their papers' structures. (Note: These techniques might be useful in the prewriting and revising steps of the writing process as well.)

- **Mapping.** Have students draw pictures of their papers' structures, using flowchart-like boxes, trees, or circles such as those shown in Table 4.2.<sup>3</sup> These graphic organizers will help students see how their papers are structured and where they need to make adjustments or changes.
- **Grouping.** On index cards or slips of paper, have students write down all the ideas they want to include in their papers, one idea per card or paper. Then, on a large, uncluttered horizontal surface, have students spread out their cards and group similar ideas together. Students can then start playing around with the overall order of the groupings to determine which group would come first, second, and third and then decide what order would work best within each group. Students can keep manipulating the cards until the order seems to fit their audience and purpose. They can then make an outline from the order they see in the cards.
- **Formal outlining.** Have your student create formal outlines of their drafts, using complete sentences and Roman numerals. Students can then check their outlines to make sure that their drafts are logically arranged and make adjustments, if necessary. (Refer to a writing handbook, such as those listed in the Bibliography, for information on outlining conventions.)
- **Informal outlining.** Have students evaluate their structures by composing an outline of the draft as written. On a separate sheet of paper, have students write out their papers' objective or thesis statement. Then, below that statement, have students list each paragraph's topic sentence. Students can check to see if every topic sentence relates back to the objective or thesis and if there is a logical progression of ideas.

**TABLE 4.2.**  
Examples of Mapping Techniques and Their Applications

| Technique   | Application   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Cause and Effect</b></p>       | <p><b>Cause and Effect (Psychology)</b></p>      |
| <p><b>Sequence</b></p>                | <p><b>Sequence (Biology)</b></p>                 |
| <p><b>Problem and Solution</b></p>  | <p><b>Problem and Solution (Economics)</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Comparison</b></p>           | <p><b>Comparison (Chemistry)</b></p>           |

**Technology Tactics**

Using their word-processing programs' drawing tools or a standard art program, such as MS Paint, students can create visual representations, or graphic organizers, of their papers' structures. These electronic representations have the following characteristics.

- **Flexible.** Students can radically change their graphic organizers with a click of the mouse, which makes experimenting with different structural plans easy.
- **Savable.** Students can see how their thinking changes over time by saving each incarnation of their graphic organizers.
- **Recyclable.** Students can copy content from their graphic organizers and paste it into traditional draft documents.

Downloadable graphic organizers, such as those in Table 4.2, are available at [bedfordstmartins.com/ta\\_guide](http://bedfordstmartins.com/ta_guide). You can distribute copies to your students to complete electronically or in print.

**Paragraphing**

Paragraphs are the basic unit of writing, the packages determined by subclaims to the main thesis and developed with specific supporting evidence to prove that particular subclaim. Strunk and White elegantly suggest, "A paragraph [should contain] no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts."<sup>4</sup> Within that efficiently composed package, each paragraph needs to be unified, fully developed, and coherent.

**UNITY**

A topic sentence is the captain of a paragraph: It makes a claim that must be supported by each of the paragraph's sentences. Most well-unified paragraphs follow a simple Claim/Evidence/Comment structure, which accentuates the evidence's support of the claim.

The following paragraph from a human physiology textbook demonstrates the quality of unity.

In contrast, the sympathetic branch [of the efferent nervous system's autonomic division] is dominant in stressful situations, such as the potential threat from the snake. One of the most dramatic examples of sympathetic action is the fight-or-flight response in which the brain triggers massive simultaneous sympathetic discharge throughout the body. As the body prepares to fight or flee, the heart speeds up; blood vessels to muscles of the arms, legs, and heart dilate; and the liver starts to produce glucose to provide energy for muscle contraction. Digestion becomes a low priority when life and limb are threatened, so blood is diverted from the gastrointestinal tract to skeletal muscles. The massive

sympathetic discharge that occurs in fight-flight situations is mediated through the hypothalamus and is a total body response to a crisis. If you have ever been scared by the squealing of brakes or a sudden sound in the dark, you know how rapidly the nervous system can influence multiple systems of the body.<sup>5</sup>

The following is an analysis of the previous paragraph's structure.

### Claim

[T]he sympathetic branch [of the efferent nervous system's autonomic division] is dominant in stressful situations. . . . One of the most dramatic examples of sympathetic action is the fight-or-flight response.

### Evidence

1. As the body prepares to fight or flee, the heart speeds up; blood vessels to muscles of the arms, legs, and heart dilate; and the liver starts to produce glucose to provide energy for muscle contraction.
2. Digestion becomes a low priority when life and limb are threatened, so blood is diverted from the gastrointestinal tract to skeletal muscles.
3. The massive sympathetic discharge that occurs in fight-flight situations is mediated through the hypothalamus and is a total body response to a crisis.

### Comment

If you have ever been scared by the squealing of brakes or a sudden sound in the dark, you know how rapidly the nervous system can influence multiple systems of the body.

You can easily see how every piece of information in the example paragraph supports the claim that the fight-or-flight response is a powerful example of the function of the sympathetic branch of the autonomic division of the nervous system.

## DEVELOPMENT

To convince your audience, you need specific, detailed evidence in support of your claim.

The following is a paragraph from Jared Diamond's Pulitzer Prize-winning anthropology book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, which has been modified to show only abstract support for its claim. Immediately following is the original paragraph, with its specific details underlined.

### Paragraph 1: Abstract Support

A stored food surplus built up by taxation can support other full-time specialists besides kings and bureaucrats. This food surplus is very important because it can be used to feed different kinds of workers. Having specialized workers can allow a civilization to grow.

### Paragraph 2: Specific Support

A stored food surplus built up by taxation can support other full-time specialists besides kings and bureaucrats. Of most direct relevance to wars of conquest, it can be used to feed professional soldiers. That was the decisive factor in the British Empire's eventual defeat of New Zealand's well-armed indigenous Maori population. While the Maori achieved some stunning temporary victories, they could not maintain an army constantly in the field and were in the end worn down by 18,000 full-time British troops. Stored food can also feed priests, who provide religious justification for wars of conquest; artisans such as metalworkers, who develop swords, guns, and other technologies; and scribes, who preserve far more information than can be remembered accurately.<sup>6</sup>

The first paragraph shown here just says the same thing over and over again, but the second paragraph uses specific details to develop and support its claim. The second paragraph's extended illustration of professional soldiers' importance to Britain's conquest of New Zealand is especially compelling, but the details about priests, metalworkers, and scribes also show why stored food is important. These specific details effectively uphold the paragraph's claim that a "stored food surplus built up by taxation can support other full-time specialists besides kings and bureaucrats."

## COHERENCE

The order in which information is presented in a paragraph must be logical, with each sentence connecting the sentences that come before and after it. This quality of connectedness is sometimes called *coherence*. Some ways to provide coherence in a paragraph are to repeat key words, use parallel structure, and provide transitions.

The following is a paragraph, from a business textbook, that demonstrates coherence. *Key words*, parallel structure, and **transitions** are marked to show how they contribute to the paragraph's overall coherence.

Today's factory must *improve* continually to remain competitive in an ever changing and uncertain environment. Factories that expect and encourage change have the flexibility to adapt and improve their operations. **However**, action must be taken to ensure that improvements are incorporated into the daily routine and become a permanent part of the standardized procedure. **Otherwise**, the improvements will erode quickly, and the benefits will be lost. Improvement without standardization cannot be sustained.<sup>7</sup>

Notice how the idea of improvement is carried through this paragraph by repeating the key words *improve*, *change*, *adapt*, and *improvements*. When *standardized* is introduced as an important concept midway through, it is also repeated again in a subsequent sentence. This repetition of key words, together with meaningful use of the transitions *however* and *otherwise*, and good use of parallel structure, makes every sentence connect to the sentences before and after it. The paragraph is coherent because of the use of language in it.

Paragraphs are the basic building blocks of writing. If the paragraphs are unified, fully developed, and coherent, the ideas presented in the document will

be clearly communicated. As students draft their papers, help them understand how well-crafted paragraphs build well-crafted papers.

## Conclusion

Drafting is a messy, painful, recursive business. In the beginning it's like prewriting, but after several drafts it becomes more like revision. Warn your students that they'll likely struggle with drafting. Tell them to just stay with it, and, if possible, require them to draft well before the paper's due date.

Through drafting and then revising and drafting again, writers move from trying to figure out for themselves what they have to say, to trying to say it in a way that will influence a reader favorably.<sup>8</sup> This awareness of audience is honed as students continue revising.

### Chapter Checklist

- Getting started is the hardest part of writing. Students will need encouragement and prodding to get their ideas down on paper.
- At the drafting step, students need help finding an appropriate controlling idea. They also need to find a suitable structure to support that controlling idea.
- Different types of writing dictate different types of structures.
- Well-written papers have paragraphs that are unified, fully developed, and coherent.

## Applications to Your Own Situation

1. Create a continuum of thesis statements ranging from bad to all right to very good. Using the example on p. 39 as a model, lead a class discussion on identifying appropriately limited thesis statements. Alternatively, use the series of questions in Table 4.1 with your students to draft a sample thesis statement that would be appropriate for a hypothetical paper written for the class you are TAing.
2. Go to [bedfordstmartins.com/ta\\_guide](http://bedfordstmartins.com/ta_guide) and download the graphic organizers that are based on the mapping techniques in Table 4.2. Distribute copies, either electronically or in print, to your students so that they can begin analyzing and improving their papers' structures.
3. Identify a paragraph that exemplifies the qualities of unity, development, and coherence in a piece of writing that is appropriate for your discipline. Make three copies or transparencies of the paragraph (one each for unity, development, and coherence). As modeled on pp. 43–45, use different colored highlighters to show how individual elements work together to create unified, developed, and coherent paragraphs. You could turn this into a Writing-to-Learn assignment by having your students complete this analysis themselves.

## Working with Your Professor

1. Discuss requiring students to complete a “quick and dirty” draft. (Refer to the Teaching Tip box on p. 37.) Also, ask your professor if he or she knows of any other methods to encourage drafting or combat procrastination. Discuss how you can incorporate those methods into the class.
2. Discuss the possibility of meeting with your students individually to review their drafts during your office hours. (For information on conducting one-on-one writing conferences, see Chapter 8.)
3. Ask your professor if he or she could suggest good examples of writing in your discipline that display appropriately limited controlling objectives or thesis statements, logical structures, and unified, well-developed, and coherent paragraphs. Use paragraphs from these examples to complete Application 3 with your students.