

Lecture 5. Writing a Paragraph

Writing any paper can turn into a challenge if you aren't prepared enough. Once and for all, forget the idea that you'll come up with a great A or at least B paper if you spend two or three hours working on it. In addition to writing a paper, you need to engage in prewriting strategies and techniques, which will considerably increase your chances for an excellent grade.

Prewriting Strategies

What is prewriting? The definition of prewriting is as simple as it gets. Prewriting is everything you do *before* you actually start writing your paper. Prewriting takes place after you've figured out the topic of your assignment and before writing.

What does prewriting do for you? Here's what:

- Sets the foundation for future writing
- Helps you develop understanding of the topic
- Helps you set out the structure of the paper
- Helps you understand the main idea of the paper
- Helps you learn how to quickly and effectively browse and process different sources
- Helps to get over the most difficult step in writing a paper — starting the actual work.

There are several pre-writing strategies, some of them are:

Answering journalist's questions (5W)

This prewriting strategy is for those of you who prefer things organized, yet creative. It is asking 5 W(h)- questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? This prewriting strategy is a fun and effective one to do because it is so simple and implies sorting arguments in specific categories.

Brainstorming

Either you've done some preliminary research or reading on your topic or not, brainstorming will be a great choice for you if you find it difficult to clarify the subject. By all means, it is best to brainstorm right after you've done some research and your mind is full with different ideas and concepts.

To brainstorm as a part of your prewriting technique, follow these recommendations:

- Write down everything that comes to your mind about your topic
- Don't set limitations for what can be written down and not — it will disrupt creative process and possibly you'll risk leaving the best ideas out of the future writing
- Don't bother about sequence of events
- Forget about grammar while brainstorming
- Draw pictures or schemes if that's what you find convenient
- Trust your feeling while writing down ideas — you might come up with something brilliant letting your creativity go wild!

Brainstorming might be not for everyone, but it is certainly worth trying. It is a simple method of prewriting that will actually help you understand how much you know about the topic and probably create a great idea for your paper.

Listing

Listing is similar to brainstorming. Listing is a process of generating a lot of information within a short time by generating some broad ideas and then building on those associations for more detail. Listing is particularly useful if your starting topic is very broad and you need to narrow it down.

Freewriting

If you find that other strategies aren't suitable for you because you don't see the full picture, try freewriting. This prewriting strategy is self-explanatory — you just write everything you want referring your topic, forming an abstract of text.

Outlining

Outlining is a great prewriting technique because it will help you structure your paper — you won't miss any point and include every single argument; it will let you understand immediately what needs to be researched more in-depth — you will know exactly how much time you'll need for additional research. Outline can be whatever you need it to be — from a simple plan to complex plan with bullet points.

Clustering

This prewriting technique is for those of you out there who are visual learners. If you learn best from diagrams, charts, and illustrations, then this prewriting strategy is for you. Clustering will help you arrange your

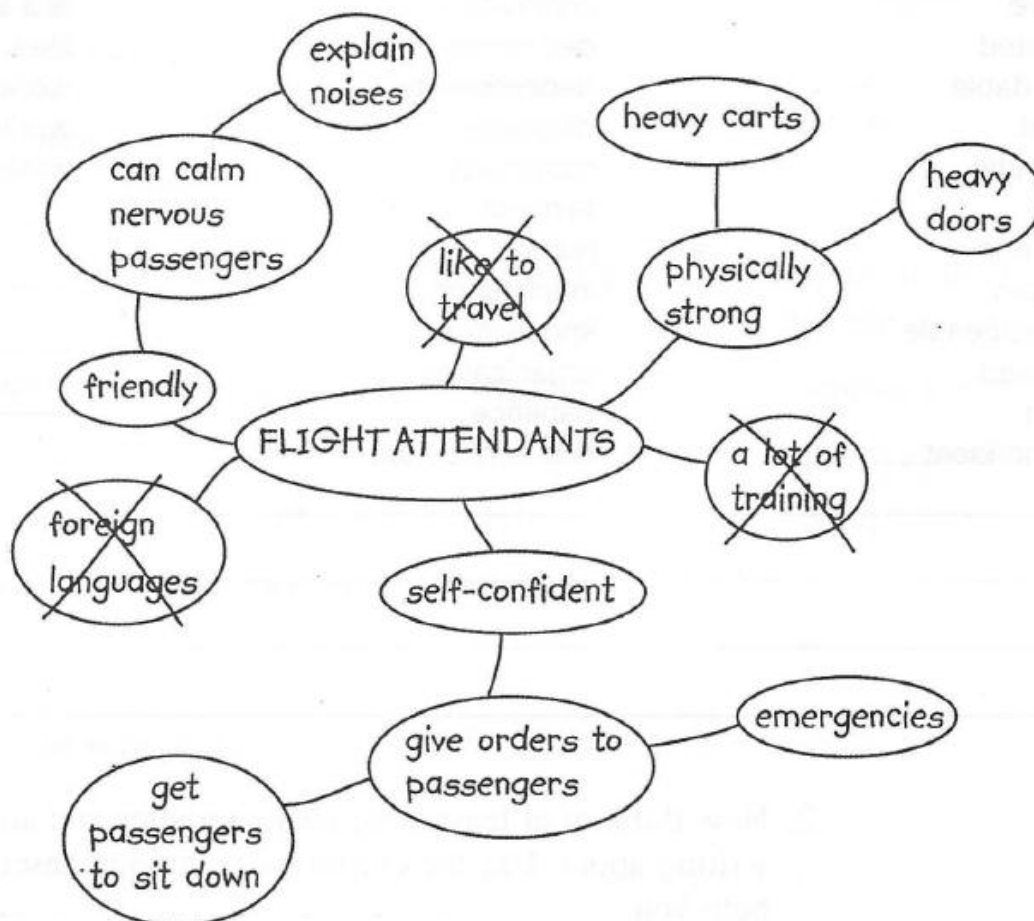
topic in a way that will allow you to see all the elements that will further be used to create your final paper.

Here is how to do clustering:

Begin by writing a word in the center of a piece of paper. Draw a circle around it. Write words or phrases in circles around the main circle and then connect them to the main circle. Write down every idea that comes into your mind.

Next, think about the word or phrase in each circle. Try to think of something that illustrates the word or phrase. Also, cross out circles that you don't want.

Here is an example of clustering:



From these clusters, or groups of circles, you can begin to see which ideas to use and which ones to throw away. Use the clusters that have the most circles.

Paragraph Organization

Organization is one of the most important writing skills. A well-organized paragraph is easy to read and understand because the ideas are in a recognizable pattern. Just as you organize tools on a workbench or clothes in a closet, you also organize sentences in a paragraph. Listing order is a pattern often used in English.

Listing-Order Paragraphs

Listing order is a way of structuring a text by enumerating its items, not necessarily according to their importance, often achieved by numbering the items or by introducing them with adverbs like “first”, “then”, “finally”.

In a listing-order paragraph, you divide the topic into separate points. Then you discuss one point, and then another point, and then a third point, and so on.

There are three keys to writing a listing-order paragraph:

1. Begin with a sentence that names your topic and says it has several points.
2. Write about each point separately.
3. End with a sentence that reminds your reader about the points you just discussed.

For example,

Flight Attendants

Flight attendants have three important characteristics. First of all, flight attendants are friendly. They enjoy greeting passengers and making them feel comfortable. Sometimes passengers are afraid of flying. A friendly flight attendant can talk to them and help them feel calm. For example, he or she can explain strange noises made by the aircraft. Second, flight attendants are self-confident. They give instructions to passengers, and they must be firm enough so that passengers obey them. This characteristic is especially important in emergencies. Third, flight attendants are physically strong. They push heavy carts of food and drinks up and down the aisles. They

also have to open and close the heavy doors of airplanes. In short, flight attendants are friendly, self-confident, and strong.

In Lecture 2 you learned that a paragraph has three parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. Now we will study each part of a paragraph in more detail.

The Two Parts of a Topic Sentence

A **topic sentence** has two parts: **a topic** and **a controlling idea**. The topic part names the topic. The controlling idea part tells what the paragraph will say about the topic. It tells the reader: This paragraph will discuss these things—and only these things—about this topic.

For example, the topic of the model paragraph above is *flight attendants*. What will the paragraph say about flight attendants? The controlling idea tells us: *They have three characteristics*. The paragraph will not tell us about their uniforms, their training, or their duties. It will only discuss three characteristics that flight attendants have.

Here are examples of other topic sentences. The topic in all three examples is the same: *English*. The controlling idea in each says something different about English.

English is constantly adding new words.

English borrows words from other languages.

English is necessary for many different jobs.

Usually, the topic comes first and the controlling idea comes second in the topic sentence. However, the controlling idea may come first. In the A sentences, the topic is first. In the B sentences, the controlling idea is first.

A. English borrows words from other languages.

B. Other languages give words to English.

Supporting Sentences

The middle sentences of a paragraph are the supporting sentences. Supporting sentences explain or prove the idea in the topic sentence. The supporting sentences are the biggest part of a paragraph

Listing-Order Transition Signals

A transition signal is a word or phrase that shows how one idea is related to another idea. In a listing-order paragraph, use transition signals such as *First*, *Second*, and *Third* to tell your reader that these are main points.

Here are some transition signals that show listing order.

Listing-Order Signals	
First,	also
First of all,	, also.
Second,	
Third,	
In addition,	
Also,	
Finally,	

1. Place most listing-order transition signals at the beginning of the sentence, and put a comma after them.

e.g.

First, living in a foreign country helps you learn another language faster than studying it at school.

In addition, small colleges are friendlier, so new students make friends more quickly.

2. *Also* may come in the middle of a sentence (between the subject and the verb) without a comma or at the end of a sentence with a comma.

e.g.

They also like to “hang out” at the beach with their friends.

They like to “hang out” at the beach with their friends, also.

Paragraph Unity

A paragraph must follow the rule of unity. All the sentences in a paragraph are about one main idea. Another way of expressing the rule of unity is to say that all the supporting sentences in a paragraph must be relevant. Relevant means “directly related to the main idea.”

The Concluding Sentence

Paragraphs that stand alone (that is, paragraphs that are not part of a longer composition) often have a concluding sentence at the end. A concluding sentence closes the paragraph so that the reader is not left expecting more.

1. Sometimes a concluding sentence reminds the reader of the main point by restating the topic sentence in different words.

e.g.

Indeed, a beach is a place to have fun all year.

2. Sometimes a concluding sentence summarizes the main points.

e.g.

In short, flight attendants are friendly, self-confident, and strong.

To summarize, employers look for dependable, responsible team players.

NB!

Do NOT introduce a new idea in your concluding sentence. Just review or repeat the ideas you have already discussed. Don't add anything new.

Use a transition signal to tell your reader that this is the end of your paragraph. The following chart lists several conclusion signals. Notice that there is always a comma after conclusion signals.

Conclusion Signals		
To conclude,	To sum up,	In brief,
In conclusion,	To summarize,	In short,
	In summary,	Indeed,