

英语学习者写作指南

**A QUICK WRITING GUIDE
FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

蔡兰珍 编著
王飞



中国  广播电视出版社
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A Quick Writing Guide for English Language Learners

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Preface

There are many learners of English who have rich vocabulary resources and do well on grammar tests, yet for whom writing is a major problem. Writing requires learning to express a clear and full thought in addition to mastering language itself. There are many factors involved in writing.

It's not easy to write an article in mother tongue, let alone in a foreign language. However, it has been confirmed that learners' writing ability can be cultivated so that they are able to write good and interesting articles in a foreign language.

Good writing depends not only on flawless grammar and abundant vocabulary but also, and perhaps above all, on the quality of its content, and on writing skills such as gathering information, structuring the content selected, writing, revising, and testing their final documents. Learners will also benefit from learning specific formats relevant for their individual professional statuses/situations. All of these knowledge and skill demand a strict and full-scale training and guidance. With these factors in mind, the authors edited the book *A Quick Writing Guide for English language learners* to provide guidance for English learners.

As a how-to book, it registered the following features.

1. **Extensive coverage:** The book covers a variety of topics concerning English writing, which include the general knowledge of writing such as grammar essentials, grammar editing, mechanics noting, word choice, punctuation usage and paragraph arrangement. Advices are provided on essay examinations and argumentative essays. Moreover, professional writings and genres are discussed and analyzed in details, such as the research paper, letter writing, research proposal writing, report writing and questionnaire design. Therefore, the book satisfies appetites of learners in different levels and interests.

2. **Strong guidance:** The book is an easy-to-use guide to writing. It offers clear definitions of important concepts as well as helpful explanations of rules and principles for effective writing. The book also provides the section on using the library, including introduction to the resources of the college library and to electronic and online research. Guidance on extensive models of correct citation format is included, such as MLA documentation, APA style and other documentation styles.

3. **Process Writing Orientation:** The book covers all stages of the writing process, generating ideas, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading, and is arranged in proper sequence and progress and advanced step by step. It begins with the most essential elements in English writing, such as how to use the correct structure forms, how to choose words and use them accurately, how to make sentences and organize a paragraph, how to use punctuation correctly. Then it concerns about how to make transition between sentences or paragraphs naturally and smoothly. Finally, it focuses on professional writings.

4. **Latest Writing Material:** A quantity of the latest materials have been searched and selected in the library and on Internet. The book involves an attentive and enthusiastic research in English writ-

ing.

5. Students' and professional example of different writings

Sufficient and carefully chosen students' and professional examples are provided to establish expectations for learners' writing performance. Meanwhile, corrections of errors and the way to correct them are shown in the examples.

6. Clearly Stated Learning Objectives:

Students are easy to find out what they are supposed to learn from each chapter.

With the authors' limit of experiences and knowledge, there are definitely some mistakes in the book. We would greatly appreciate if the readers can find them out and correct them without hesitation.

Acknowledgements:

We are happy to thank our leaders and colleagues in College of Foreign languages in Northwest Normal University for creating a responsive environment in which to work, so that we were able to complete the book as we had expected and benefited from honest and wise advice from them.

Great thanks should also go to the leaders and staff of the library in our University for their offer of excellence service for our preparation of this book.

Finally, we would like to thank our family for their sincere support of our work. Without their support, it is less likely to complete the work on time.

Lanzhen Cai Fei Wang

In winter, 2007

Lanzhou

Contents

Chapter I Composing Basics	(1)
1. Preparing Your Writing	(1)
2. Preliminary Shaping: A Rough Draft	(14)
3. Revising	(17)
4. Editing and Proofreading	(21)
5. Writing with a Computer	(22)
Chapter II Grammar Essential	(26)
1. Part of Speech	(26)
2. Part of Sentences	(30)
3. Phrases	(32)
4. Clauses	(33)
5. Types of Sentences	(33)
Chapter III ESL Basics: Use of Grammar	(35)
1. Verbs	(35)
2. Nouns	(49)
3. The Articles: a/an and the	(52)
4. Quantifiers	(53)
5. Adjectives	(55)
6. Adverbials	(57)
7. Prepositions	(60)
8. Phrasal Verbs and Prepositional Idioms	(63)
Chapter IV Editing for Grammar	(66)
1. Subject-Verb Agreement	(66)
2. Use Verbs in the Correct Mood	(69)
3. Use the Active Voice	(69)
4. Pronoun Problems	(70)
5. Adjectives and Adverbs	(72)
6. Sentences	(73)
7. Subordination and Coordination	(74)
8. Emphasis	(75)
Chapter V Choice of Words	(76)
1. Using Words Precisely	(76)
2. Use Words Appropriately	(79)
3. Using Words Concisely	(82)
4. Bias in Writing	(86)

5. Use of the Dictionary	(88)
6. Use of The Thesaurus	(91)
Chapter VI Editorial Style (I)—Punctuation	(92)
1 Commas	(92)
2. Semicolon	(97)
3. Colon	(98)
4. Quotatin Marks	(99)
5. Apostrophe	(100)
6. Hyphens	(102)
7. Other Punctuation Marks	(103)
Chapter VII Editorial Style (II)	(109)
1. Capitalization	(109)
2. Abbreviations	(113)
3. Numbers and Dates	(115)
4. Italics and Underlining	(117)
5. Illustrations; Caption and Legend	(119)
6. Spelling	(120)
Chapter VIII Formatting Essentials	(129)
1. Basic formatting requirements	(129)
2. Basic Requirements in MLA and APA Formats for Academic Manuscripts	(134)
3. Formatting in Business Documents	(136)
Chapter IX Paragraph Writing	(151)
1. Introduction	(151)
2. Types of Paragraphs	(151)
3. Three Characteristics of an Effective Paragraph.	(152)
4. Patterns of Paragraph Development and Organization	(161)
Chapter X Summary Writing	(168)
1. The Importance of Summaries	(168)
2. Contents of a Summary.	(168)
3. Writing a Summary	(170)
4. Evaluative Summaries	(174)
5. Minutes	(178)
6. Abstract	(182)
Chapter XI Essay Examination	(185)
1. Essay-Length Answers	(185)
2. Paragraph-length Answers	(190)
Chapter XII Argumentation Essay; Writing about Literature	(192)
1. Introduction	(192)
2. Writing an Argumentative Essay	(192)
3. Writing about Literature	(203)

Chapter XIII The Research Paper	(215)
1. Understanding research process	(215)
2. Use of library; Conducting library research	(218)
3. Preparing for Your Research Paper	(226)
4. Writing and Arranging Your Research Paper	(235)
5. Preparing and Final Editing the Final Draft	(243)
6 Sample Research Papers	(245)
Chapter XIV Proposal for Research Paper	(266)
1. Writing a successful proposal for Research Paper	(266)
2. Proposals for research paper	(268)
Chapter XV Writing a Successful Research Report	(281)
1. The Importance to Write a Research Report	(281)
2. Organization of a Research Report	(281)
3. Preparation for a Research Report	(291)
4. General Writing Guidelines; Grammatical Considerations	(293)
Chapter XVI Questionnaire Preparation and Reporting	(294)
1. The Usefulness of Questionnaires	(294)
2. Questionnaire Design	(297)
3. Questionnaire Administration	(308)
4. Interpretation of the Results	(312)
5. Writing Effective Questionnaire Reports	(314)
6. Conclusion	(320)
Chapter XVII Writing Oral Reports	(321)
1. Informal oral reports	(321)
2. Formal Speeches	(322)
3. An Oral Presentation of a Written Report	(335)
Chapter XVIII MLA-style Documentation	(336)
1. MLA Reference in-text Citations (parenthetical citation)	(336)
2. MLA List of Works Cited	(341)
3. MLA Information Notes; Footnotes and Endnotes	(355)
Chapter XIX APA-Style Documentation and Other Documentation Styles	(357)
1. General APA Formatting Guidelines	(357)
2. Directory to APA Reference in-text Citations	(359)
3. APA Reference List	(363)
4. Footnotes and Endnotes	(372)
5. Sample APA-style research paper	(372)
6. Chicago Manual Documentation Style (CMS)	(382)
Bibliography	(391)

Chapter I Composing Basics

Learning Objectives:

After reading this chapter, you should:

- ◆ *Know how to prepare a writing*
- ◆ *Understand the back-and-forth nature of the writing process*
- ◆ *Know how to revise, edit and proofread*
- ◆ *Be able to conduct a peer conference to help you with revising*

Whenever you write, you confront a series of choices such as your purpose, your audience, and the length of your writing, etc. Each of these affects the others in different ways as your composition develops. But most important of all, a good composition, regardless of its length, is purposeful and well organized. You have to focus every element of your essay on one purpose and take your audience into account.

In addition, to write an English composition well requires more than good translation skills or grammatical knowledge and inspiration. The writer needs to think, to plan, to write, to revise, edit and proofread. Good writing is only 10% inspiration and 90% hard work. However, the writing process is rarely as simple and straightforward as this. Writing is a recursive process, moving back and forth among the four stages. Moreover, writing is personal—no two people go about it exactly the same way. We will describe basic steps in the writing process and provide a reassuring method for you to understand a writing task and write a good composition.

1. Preparing Your Writing

Before you begin to write, you have to plan your writing. This includes *analyzing your writing task; choosing a subject and focusing on a topic; determining your purpose; understanding your audience; Generating ideas and collecting information; formulating a thesis statement and making an outline.*

1.1 Analyzing the writing task

Naturally you can write about something you know about—or at least something you would like to know about. But most often, much of your college writing will be in response to very specific assignments: your physical science professor may ask you to write a paper presenting pro and con evidence of the greenhouse effect. With such a narrowed topic, you can move ahead to collecting information and formulating a thesis. At other times your instructor may assign only a general subject and the choice of a topic is left up to you. For example, your class in environmental biology is assigned a term paper on toxic waste disposal. You could deal with the birth defects that threaten the offspring of women exposed to chemical wastes and develop your own thesis (asserting that toxic wastes will cause many newly-born babies to die.)

Sometimes your instructor will allow you to write on any subject that interests you. In such a case,

you may already have an idea for a paper in mind (say, discuss the effect of chemical duping on air and water quality). What happens, however, when you are free to choose your own subject and cannot think of anything to write about? If you find yourself in this situation, follow the advice set forth in the rest of this section for choosing a subject and topic.

1.2 Choosing a subject

A **subject** is a general field of knowledge, such as farming, clothing, business, ecology and transportation. You may know a great deal about the subject of your essay, or you may simply be curious about an area and wish to expand your knowledge of it.

If you are free to choose your own subject, begin by asking yourself these questions: “What do I really care about?” “What am I interested in?” “What do I know something about?” “What do I want to learn about?” Your answers to these questions will provide you with potentially good subject. Resist the temptation to seize the first subject that comes to your mind. Take your time. Define your own areas of knowledge, interest and potential expertise. Review the possibility and then pick the one subject that most appeals to you and best suits your audience and serve your purpose.

1.3 Limiting the subject to a Topic

A topic is the specific aspect of a subject on which the writer focuses.

Subjects such as literature, television, and sports are too broad to be dealt with adequately in a short composition. Even books focus on only aspects of these and other subject areas. The writer's task is to select a manageable topic within the chosen or assigned subject area. Thus, if your subject is about sports, you might choose as your topic rules violations in college sports recruiting, violence in ice hockey, types of fan behavior, the psychology of marathon runners, or the growth of sports medicine.

But exactly how you can narrow your subject to a specific topic depends, to great extent, on some factors such as the identity of your audience, your purpose, the writing task, the length of your paper, the amount of time you have to spend in writing and how much you know about your subject. These are practical considerations that affect the scope of your topic.

The following examples illustrate how to limit a topic:

Farming→livestock→cows→dairy cow disease→parasite control→dairy cows.

Music→classical→Haydn→symphonies→Haydn's Symphony 101.

Advertising→TV advertising→TV advertising of food→TV advertising of cereals→TV advertising of high-fiber cereals.

Notice that each successive topic is more limited than the one before it. Moving from general to specific, the topics become appropriate for essay-length work.

You can use a number of techniques to narrow your general subject to a limited topic. Don't make the mistake of skipping this stage of the writing process, hoping that ideas will come to you as you write. You have to work at it.

1.4 Finding something to say

Once you have limited your subject and decided on a topic, you must think of something to say about—you have to have ideas about the topic. Ideas grow from information; and information (facts and details) supports ideas. Ideas and information lie at the heart of good prose. To inform and intel-

lectually stimulate your readers, gather as many ideas and as much specific information as you can about your topic. If you try to write before doing so, you run the risk of producing a shallow, boring draft.

Information comes from two sources—you and your reading. Your life experiences, your conversations, your observations and your casual reading have put a storehouse of information at your disposal. This knowledge is all you need to write some interesting and detailed essays. In other situations, however, you may have to review your textbooks and class notes, or do library research. As in other stages of the writing process, finding something to say is easier if you proceed in an organized manner. Let us now examine some of the good strategies for collecting information and generating ideas. They include *asking questions; keeping a journal; clustering; brainstorming;; free-writing; researching; rehearsing ideas; visualizing topics; thinking creatively.*

1.4.1 Asking questions

Ask questions about your topic to discover areas for exploration and development. The newspaper reporter's 5Ws and an H—Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How are a formal method of discovery that enables you to probe your general subject in an organized way and are excellent questions to start with. These questions ensure that the readers have enough information to understand the main points of an essay.

By concentrating on each of the questions, you can form a number of more specific questions, some of which can be good paper topics. Of course, not all of these questions will apply to a single subject, but enough will to make using them worthwhile. This discovery technique allows you to probe a subject quickly and systematically, and it is especially useful when time counts—as for in-class and examinations. But every set of questions will vary with the topic and with the person formulating them.

Here is one example set for Echinacea, a popular medicinal herb:

1. *Who* discovered it?
2. *What* does it look like?
3. *Where* was it discovered?
4. *When* was it discovered?
5. *Why* did it take so long to be discovered?
6. *How* can I get some of it?
 - a. How much does it cost?
 - b. Are there limitations on how much I can buy?
 - c. Who sells it?
 - d. Where can I buy it?
 - e. Can I resell it?

Note: On your computer, you can develop a master file of key questions that you ask yourself at various dates of the writing process: questions about your subject, your topic, various draft you write and so forth. Leave several lines between the questions. This way you can copy (rename) the file each time you begin an assignment, tying in answers and notes as you work and keeping the original for use again. Over time, you will find yourself revising your master file questions as you discover more about your personal writing style.

1.4.2 Keeping a journal

Many people find their best ideas come when they are not actually working on a writing assignment, so they have the habit of keeping a **journal** and writing daily. They carry a little notebook to record their observations and their reactions to them; their thoughts about them; bits of overheard conversation, ironies, insights and interesting facts and statistics from newspaper, magazine and professional journal articles. Keeping a journal is not only a good way to practice writing, it provides you with a find of information to fall back on when an assignment calls for introspection or self-examination.

1.4.3 Free writing

Journals are useful for doing **free-writing**. Free-writing is simply writing for a brief uninterrupted period of time—say five or ten minutes—on anything that comes into you mind. It is a way of getting your mind working and easing into the writing task. Start with a blank sheet of paper or computer screen and write as quickly as you can without stopping for any reason whatsoever. Don't worry about punctuation, grammar or spelling, just loosen up and let your thoughts go where they may. Write as if you were talking to your best friend. If you run dry, don't stop; repeat the last few things you wrote or write, "I have noting to write" over and over again, and you will be surprised—writing with more content will begin to emerge. Once you have become comfortable with open-ended free-writing, you can move to more focused free-writing in which you write about a specific aspect of your topic. Free writing can give you the push you need to get moving. By free-writing regularly, you will come to feel more natural and comfortable about writing, and you overcome your fear of having nothing to say.

1.4.4 Brainstorming

If you already know something about your topic, you might begin collecting ideas **by brainstorming**—listing everything you can think of about a topic in no particular order. Like free writing, brainstorming uses free association to unlock your mind and release information that you didn't know you had. But by the time you use it you usually have to stop in mind, so brainstorming is more focused than free writing.

Freely associate one idea with another; let your mind take you in whatever direction. Try not to censor yourself or edit your brainstorming because you simply don't know what will emerge or how valuable it might be in the end. Write quickly without pausing. Your notes can be single word, phrases or complete sentences. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation and grammar. Sometimes you can abbreviate. Also, because all your ideas may not occur during one brainstorming session, keep your list over several days, adding new thoughts as they come to you. Your goal in brainstorming is get down as much useful information as you can. Here is a typical brainstorming list:

Animal Rights

Animals are living beings, too

They have nervous systems so they feel pain

Questionable experiments—proving the obvious, duplicative some medical experiments nec. , but only when no alternatives are available.

Computer models instead

Also in vitro and membrane test

Nat. Cancer Inst. Reduced its use of animals 95% by using in vitro tests

Cosmetic companies—Draize eye test

Household product testing (lethal dose test for detergents, shampoo, etc.)

Fur belongs on animals

Steel jaw traps—animals chew off legs

Dogs/cats caught, too

Progress made—legislation against inhumane traps

Some cosmetic companies quit using Draize; consumer protect

Puppy mills

Spay/neuter—the answer to pet overpopulation

When you complete your brainstorming list, number or color code the entries that closely relate to one another. This is sorting, the first step in thinking about possible organizational patterns and outlining.

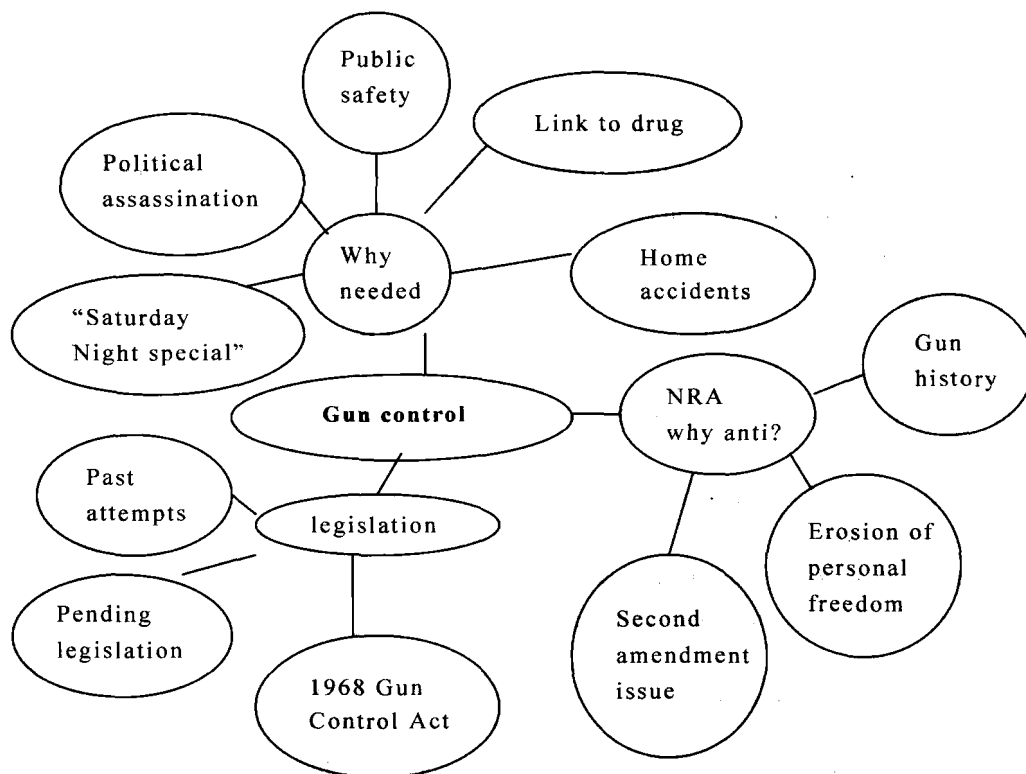
1.4.5 Clustering

Sometimes your brainstorming note shows you are at no loss for good ideas, but none of your material is in usable form—it was jumbled and disorganized. In order to generate material and sort it into meaningful grouping at the same time, we can use another strategy—clustering: choosing a point or topic to focus on, then grouping the material you selected from the brainstorming. Sorting or clustering is the first step to outlining. The steps are like this:

Put your topic, or a key word or phrase about your topic in the center of a sheet of paper and draw a circle (or box, lines, etc.) around it. Draw four or five (or more) lines out from this circle, and jot down main ideas about your topic; draw circle around them. Repeat the process by drawing lines from the secondary circles and adding example, detail and maybe questions you have. Or you may find yourself pursuing one line of thought through many add-on circles before beginning a new cluster. Do whatever works for you. As with brainstorming, keep writing—don't stop to think about being neat or capitalizing correctly. The following is an example of clustering about the topic "Gun Control"

1.4.6 Researching

You may sometimes want to supplement what you know about your topic with **research**. This doesn't necessarily mean formal library research. Firsthand observations and interviews with people knowledgeable about your topic are also forms of research and unusually more up to date. Whatever your form of research, take careful notes, so you can accurately paraphrase an author or quote interviewees.



1.4.7 Rehearsing Ideas

Some writers find it helpful to rehearse what they are going to write before committing their thoughts to paper. Simply, rehearsal is running ideas or phrasings, even sentences, through your mind until they are fairly well crafted and then transferring them to paper. The image of the writer, pencil in hand, staring off into space, perhaps best captures the essence of this technique. Rehearsing may suit your personality and the way you think. Moreover, because it is a thoughtful practice, rehearsing may help you generate idea. Sometimes rehearsing may even be oral. Try taking ten or fifteen minutes to talk your way through your paper with a roommate or friend.

1.4.8 Visualizing topics

Some experts believe that a large part of our thinking is visual—done through images. Tapping into those images can be a productive way of developing your ideas. For example, if you wish to describe an ancient pueblo, visualizing one you recently visited in New Mexico can make your task easier. Imagining that pueblo can also lead you to yet more imagines of what life must have been like there.

1.4.9 Thinking Creatively

There are many definitions of **creativity**, but in one way or another, creativity involves moving beyond what is generally regarded as normal or expected. To push an idea one step further, to make a connection not easily recognized by others, to ask a question no one else would, to arrive at a fresh insight is to be creative. Creativity and inspired thinking are within the reach of most writers if they take the writing process seriously and work hard.

1.5 Formulating a thesis statement

Having generated ideas and information, you are ready to begin organizing your thoughts. At this stage, you must commit to a controlling idea, a thesis. The thesis is the main idea, the point you are trying to make and discuss. The thesis is often expressed in one or two sentences called a **thesis statement**:

The whole language approach to teaching reading best serves the needs of all children by equipping the with a well-rounded understanding of language and a variety of strategies for decoding it.

—Michelle Whalen, student

Your thesis should always do three things: it should take a stand, be clear and give your readers a good idea of what your essay is about.

First, a good thesis tells your readers what you think and how you feel about your material, so it must be more than a title or an announcement of purpose of the subject. A purpose statement is about what you are trying to do in the paper, but a thesis statement makes an assertion about your topic.

Title

Fairy Tales and Human Behavior

Purpose

In this paper I will discuss the relationship of fairy tales and early childhood.

Thesis

Not just empty stories for children, fairy tales shed light on the psychology of your children. Second, the thesis should be clear. Neither you nor your readers should have any doubt about what you are going to discuss. Don't use vague or confusing word or a question.

Unclear

Although the timber wolf is a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated (Why is the timber wolf being exterminated?)

clear

Although the timber wolf is a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated because people wrongfully believe it to be a fierce and cold-blooded killer.

The first thesis raises as many questions as it answers. But the second thesis puts the issue into perspective and clearly presents the main idea. An effective strategy for developing a thesis statement is to begin by writing: *What I want to say is that...* For example:

What I want to say is that unless language barriers between patients and health care providers are bridged many patients' lives in our nation's most culturally diverse cities will be endangered.

Later, you can delete the formulaic opening and you will be left with a thesis statement.

unless language barriers between patients and health care providers are bridged many patients' lives in our nation's most culturally diverse cities will be endangered.

Third, a good thesis accurately represents what you intend to discuss in your essay. It makes no promises you do not intend to fulfill. If you want to discuss some effects of a rise in the prime interest rate, don't write:

Inaccurate

Although nor all economists would agree, there are three causes of a high prime interest rate

You want to stress some *effects* of a rise in the prime interest rate, so don't talk about causes, otherwise you will mislead and confuse your readers:

Accurate

Because of an unusually high prime interest rate, more and more people are getting mortgage money from sources other than banks

Therefore, a thesis statement should be:

- a. more general than the ideas and facts used to support it;
- b. focused enough to be covered in the space allotted;
- c. the most important point you make about your topic.

Your thesis help keep your readers on track. Most often you should place your thesis *at the beginning* of your essay, especially when you want your readers to know immediately what the essay is about. At other times you may delay your thesis. If your essay is about a controversial subject or a subject that needs preliminary explanation or definition, you may decide to postpone your thesis. In this case, the background material sets the stage and encourages your readers to accept your thesis when it finally appears. You may also decide to place your thesis at the end of an essay. This builds suspense or creates a mood. When your thesis finally appears, it has added impact and effect on your audience. In the beginning of an essay on the harmful effects of disposable diapers, a student, Lisa Denis builds a context for the last sentence in which she presents her thesis statement:

Picture yourself having to change a child's diaper. I will bet you don't see yourself using a cloth diaper and pins. The use of disposable diaper has become the norm in today's fast-paced society. But the fact is we have no idea of the damage they do. Disposable diapers are expensive, potentially harmful to babies, and environmentally unsound; the time has come to put an end to their use.

Lisa Denis, student

Not everything you write needs or should have a thesis. Beginning a case study or a trip report with some arguable point would just be misleading. Opening a lab report with "synthesizing dinitrobenzene can be an exciting and interesting experience" distorts your purpose, which is simply to report your observations, not your opinion of them or your feeling about them.

1.6. Determining your purpose

Implied in your thesis statement is your purpose, the answer you give to the question, "what am I trying to accomplish in this composition?" Being clear about your purpose helps you choose the best supporting details and arrange them in the most effective order. For example, Lisa Denis ends the paragraph with the thesis statement that it is time to stop using disposable diaper because they are harmful, especially to the environment, a statement she will try to prove in order to persuade her readers. At the editing stage, keeping your purpose in mind helps you use language with an awareness of the effect you want it to have on your readers.

In the most general terms, nonfiction writing has one of three purposes: (1) to express the writer's thoughts and feelings about a life experience, (2) to inform readers by explaining something about the world around them, (3) to persuade readers to some belief or action.

1.6.1 Writing to express your thoughts and feelings

When you are writing to express, you emphasize yourself or your internal reality. You put your thoughts or feelings before all other concerns. For example, when you express yourself about what it felt like to turn eighteen, describe the relationship you have with your father, narrate a camping experience you had with a friend, or share an insight you had about the career you want to pursue, you are trying to express yourself. You are writing from experience. The first purpose of expressive writing is, therefore, to clarify life's experiences and the second purpose is to communicate what you learn to someone else. That is not to say expressive writing is not immensely appealing to readers; the reflections of a thoughtful and sensitive writer illuminate the reader's experience and clarify his or her own feelings and ideas. The following is an example of the reflections of a writer on her ambitious nature:

I've always liked ambitious people, and many of my closest friends have had grandiose dreams. I like such people, not because I am desperate to be buddies with a future secretary of state but because I find ambitious people entertaining, interesting to talk to and fun to watch. And, of course, I like such people because I am ambitious myself and I would rather not feel apologetic about it.

Perri Klass, "Ambition"

1.6.2 Writing to inform

When a writer emphasize outside world, external reality—the events, people, places, things and ideas in the objective or real world, the purpose is to convey information. In informative writing you report, explain, analyze, define, classify, compare, describe a process or get at causes and effects. Informative writing is the kind most often found in newspaper and magazine articles and nonfiction books. They encompasses everything from an article on better parenting, your chemistry textbook and a news update on an approaching hurricane to a senate subcommittee report on housing, a travel guide and a computer manual.

The following example of informative writing provides useful information about the South:

To the visitor the South looks uniform and cohesive, but this is misleading. There are many Souths. The Englishness of colonial Virginia plantations is very different from the Spanish flavor of Florida's St. Augustine or the French bouquet of the bayou region of Louisiana

—Parke Rouse Jr. "The Old South Way of life:
America's Most Colorful Region"

1.6.3 Writing to persuade

In writing to persuade, you attempt to influence your reader's thinking and attitudes toward a subject or issue and sometimes move him or her to a particular course of action. The writer emphasizes the audience. Persuasive writing uses logical reasoning and authoritative evidence and testimony and sometimes emotionally charged language and examples.

Physicians and nurses often assume that pain is not a problem unless the patient or family beings it up. If the patient is stoical and trying not to be a "bother", the pain and unnecessary suffering continue. *Not wanting to "bug" the healthcare team is a natural reaction. However, the control of pain contributes to a person's physical and emotional well-being. And that is the foal toward which the healthcare team, the patient, and the family are all working.*