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# HOW TO WRITE A PARAGRAPH: THE ART OF SUBSTANTIVE WRITING



## 如何进行思辨性写作

(美) Richard Paul (美) Linda Elder 著

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外语教学与研究出版社  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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# 序 言

思辨能力或者批判性思维由两个维度组成，在情感态度层面包括勤学好问、相信理性、尊重事实、谨慎判断、公正评价、敏于探究、持之以恒地追求真理等一系列思维品质或心理倾向；在认知层面包括对证据、概念、方法、标准、背景等要素进行阐述、分析、评价、推理与解释的一系列技能。

思辨能力的重要性应该是不言而喻的。两千多年前的中国古代典籍《礼记·中庸》曰：“博学之，审问之，慎思之，明辨之，笃行之。”古希腊哲人苏格拉底说：“未经审视的人生不值得一过。”可以说，文明的诞生正是人类自觉运用思辨能力，不断适应并改造自然环境的结果。如果说游牧时代、农业时代以及现代早期，人类思辨能力虽然并不完善，也未普及，但通过科学技术以及人文知识的不断积累创新，推动人类文明阔步前进，已经显示出不可抑制的巨大能量，那么，进入信息时代、知识经济时代和全球化时代，思辨能力对于人类文明整体可持续发展以及对于每一个体的生存和发展，其重要性将史无前例地彰显。

我们已进入一个加速变化、普遍联系和日益复杂的时代。随着交通技术和信息技术日新月异的发展，不同国家和文化空前紧密地联系在一起。这在促进合作的同时，导致了更多的冲突；人类所掌握的技术力量与日俱增，在不断提高物质生活质量的同时，也极大地破坏了我们赖以生存的自然环境；工业化、城市化和信息化的不断延伸，全方位扩大了人的自由空间，同时却削弱了维系社会秩序和稳定的价值体系与行为准则。这一切变化对人类的思辨能力和应变能力都提出了前所未有的要求。正如本套丛书作者理查德·保罗（Richard Paul）和琳达·埃尔德（Linda Elder）所创办的思辨研究中

心的“使命”所指出的，“我们身处其中的这个世界要求我们不断重新学习，习惯性重新思考我们的决定，周期性重新评价我们的工作和生活方式。简言之，我们面临一个全新的世界，在这个新世界，大脑掌控自己并经常进行自我分析的能力将日益决定我们工作的质量、生活的质量乃至我们的生存本身。”

遗憾的是，面临时代巨变对人类思辨能力提出的新挑战，我们的教育和社会都尚未做好充分准备。从小学到大学，在很大程度上我们的教育依然围绕知识的搬运而展开，学校周而复始的考试不断强化学生对标准答案的追求而不是对问题复杂性和探索过程的关注，全社会也尚未形成鼓励独立思辨与开拓创新的氛围。

我们知道，人类大脑并不具备天然遗传的思辨能力。事实上，在自然状态下，人们往往倾向于以自我为中心或随波逐流，容易被偏见左右，固守陈见，急于判断，为利益或情感所左右。因此，思辨能力需要通过后天的学习和训练得以提高。思辨能力培养也因此应该成为教育的不懈使命。

哈佛大学以培养学生“乐于发现和思辨”为根本追求；剑桥大学也把“鼓励怀疑精神”奉为宗旨。美国学者彼得·法乔恩（Peter Facione）一言以蔽之：“教育，不折不扣，就是学会思考。”

和任何其他技能的学习一样，学会思考也是有规律可循的。首先，学习者应该了解思辨的基本特点和理论框架。根据理查德·保罗和琳达·埃尔德的研究，所有的推理都有一个目的，都试图澄清或解决问题，都基于假设，都从某一视角展开，都基于数据、信息和证据，都通过概念和观念进行表达，都通过推理或阐释得出结论并对数据赋予意义，都会产生影响或后果。分析一个推理或论述的质量或有效性，意味着按照思辨的标准进行检验，这个标准由10个维度构成：清晰性、准确性、精确性、相关性、深刻性、宽广性、逻辑性、完整性、重要性、公正性。一个拥有思辨能力的人具备八

大品质，包括：诚实、谦虚、相信理性、坚忍不拔、公正、勇气、同理心、独立思考。

其次，学习者应该掌握具体的思辨方法。如：如何阐释和理解文本信息与观点？如何解析文本结构？如何评价论述的有效性？如何把已有理论和方法运用于新的场景？如何收集和鉴别信息和证据？如何论证说理？如何识别逻辑谬误？如何提问？如何对自己的思维进行反思和矫正？等等等等。

最后，思辨能力的提高必须经过系统的训练。思辨能力的发展是一个从低级思维向高级思维发展的过程，必须运用思辨的标准一以贯之地训练思辨的各要素，在各门课程的学习中练习思辨，在实际工作中使用思辨，在日常生活中体验思辨，最终使良好的思维习惯成为第二本能。

“思想者指南丛书”旨在为教师教授思辨方法、学生学习思辨技能和社会大众提高思辨能力提供最为简明和最为实用的操作指南。该套丛书直接从西方最具影响力的思辨能力研究和培训机构（The Foundation for Critical Thinking）原版引进，共21册，包括“基础篇”：《批判性思维术语手册》、《批判性思维概念与方法手册》、《大脑的奥秘》、《批判性思维与创造性思维》、《什么是批判性思维》、《什么是分析性思维》；“大众篇”：《识别逻辑谬误》、《思维的标准》、《如何提问》、《像苏格拉底一样提问》、《什么是伦理推理》、《什么是工科推理》、《什么是科学思维》；“教学篇”：《透视教育时尚》、《思辨能力评价标准》、《思辨阅读与写作测评》、《如何促进主动学习与合作学习》、《如何提升学生的学习能力》、《如何通过思辨学好一门学科》、《如何进行思辨性阅读》、《如何进行思辨性写作》。

由理查德·保罗和琳达·埃尔德两位思辨能力研究领域的全球顶级大师领衔研发的“思想者指南丛书”，享誉北美乃至全球，销售数百万册，被美国中小学、高等学校乃至公司和政府部门普遍用于

教学、培训和人才选拔。该套丛书具有如下特点：其一，语言简洁明快，具有一般英文水平的读者都能阅读；其二，内容生动易懂，运用大量的具体例子解释思辨的理论和方法；其三，针对性和操作性极强，教师可以从“教学篇”子系列中获取指导教学改革的思辨教学策略与方法，学生也可从“教学篇”子系列中找到提高不同学科学习能力的思辨技巧；一般社会人士可以通过“大众篇”子系列掌握思辨的通用技巧，提高在社会场景中分析问题和解决问题的能力；各类读者都可以通过“基础篇”子系列掌握思维的基本规律和思辨的基本理论。

总之，思辨能力的高下将决定一个人学业的优劣、事业的成败乃至一个民族的兴衰。在此意义上，我向全国中小学教师、高等学校教师和学生以及社会大众郑重推荐“思想者指南丛书”。相信该套丛书的普及阅读和学习运用，必将有利于促进教育改革，提高人才培养质量，提升大众思辨能力，为创新型国家建设和社会文明进步作出深远的贡献。

孙有中

2016年春于北京外国语大学

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## Introduction

Most people realize that learning to write is “among the most important skills a student can learn.” But far fewer realize that writing is also the key to the acquisition of content itself: “the mechanism through which students learn to connect the dots in their knowledge.” Far too few realize that for students to learn, “they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else.” In other words, “if students are to learn, they must write.” All these points are emphasized in a report recently issued by the *National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges* (*New York Times*, 4/25/03), which goes on to say that writing is “woefully ignored in most American schools today.” Moreover, according to the same *New York Times* article, “a 2002 study of California college students found that most freshmen could not analyze arguments, synthesize information, or write papers that were reasonably free of language errors.”

At present students are poor writers, not because they are incapable of learning to write well, but because they have never been taught the foundations of substantive writing. They lack intellectual discipline as well as strategies for improving their writing. This is true on the one hand because teachers often lack a clear theory of the relationship between writing and learning, and on the other hand, are concerned with the time involved in grading written work.

If we understand the most basic concepts in critical thinking, we can provide the grounds for a solution to both problems:

- (1) a theory that links substantive writing and thinking with the acquisition of knowledge, and
- (2) awareness of how to design writing assignments that do not require one-on-one instructor-student feedback.

This guide links with and reinforces other key guides, particularly *How to Read a Paragraph* and *How to Think Analytically*. All three guides provide techniques that enhance student learning and foster their ability to communicate clearly and logically what one is learning.

The development of writing abilities, as well as all other intellectual abilities, occurs only through sound theory and routine practice. When students

understand the relationship between learning and writing, and are engaged in routine writing practice using the tools of critical thinking, they are able to learn content at deeper and deeper levels, and gradually improve their ability to communicate important ideas.

## The Theory

### The Premise of This Guide

Writing is essential to learning. One cannot be educated and yet unable to communicate one's ideas in written form. But, learning to write can occur only through a process of cultivation requiring intellectual discipline. As with any set of complex skills, there are fundamentals of writing that must be internalized and then applied using one's thinking. This guide focuses on the most important of those fundamentals.

### Writing for a Purpose

Skilled writers do not write blindly, but purposely. They have an agenda, goal, or objective. Their purpose, together with the nature of what they are writing (and their situation), determines how they write. They write in different ways, in different situations, and for different purposes. There is also a nearly universal purpose for writing, and that is to *say something worth saying about something worth saying something about*.

In general, then, when we write, we translate inner meanings into public words. We put our ideas and experiences into written form. Accurately translating intended meanings into written words is an analytic, evaluative, and creative set of acts. Unfortunately, few people are skilled in this work of translation. Even fewer are able to select and combine words that, so combined, convey an intended meaning to an audience of readers.

Of course, if we are writing for pure pleasure and personal amusement, it may not matter if others do not understand what we write. We may simply enjoy the act of writing itself. This is fine as long as we know that our writing is meant only for us.

Among the various purposes for writing are the following:

- for sheer pleasure
- to express a simple idea
- to convey specific technical information
- to convince the reader to accept an important position or argument
- to challenge the reader to consider a new worldview
- to express what we are learning (or have learned) in a subject

People write in pursuit of many specific and varied agendas. Consider how the purposes would vary for the following writers:

- a media advisor writing political campaign literature
- a newspaper editor deciding how to edit a story to maintain reader interest
- a media consultant writing copy for an advertisement
- a chemist writing a laboratory report
- a novelist writing a novel
- a poet writing a poem
- a student writing a research report

Clearly, one's purpose in writing influences the writing skills one needs and uses. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental writing skills we all need if we are to develop the art of saying something worth saying about. We call this substantive writing. And learning the art of substantive writing has many important implications for our development as thinkers. For example, it is important in learning how to learn. And, it is important in coming to understand ourselves. It can enable us to gain self-insight, as well as insight into the many dimensions of our lives.

### **Substantive Writing**

To learn how to write something worth reading, we must keep two questions in mind: "Do I have a subject or idea worth writing about?" and "Do I have something of significance to say about it?"

Having recognized possible variations in purpose, we also should recognize that there are core writing tools and skills for writing about anything substantive, for targeting ideas of depth and significance. These tools and skills are the focus of this guide.

### **The Problem of Impressionistic Writing**

The impressionistic mind follows associations, wandering from paragraph to paragraph, drawing no clear distinctions within its thinking and its writing from moment to moment. Being fragmented, it fragments what it writes. Being uncritical, it assumes its own point of view to be insightful and justified, and therefore not in need of justification in comparison to competing points of view. Being self-deceived, it fails to see itself as undisciplined. Being rigid, it does not learn from what it reads, writes, or experiences.

Whatever knowledge the impressionistic mind absorbs is uncritically intermixed with prejudices, biases, myths, and stereotypes. It lacks insight into the importance of understanding how minds create meaning and how reflective minds monitor and evaluate as they write. To discipline our writing, we must go beyond impressionistic thinking.

### **Writing Reflectively**

Unlike the impressionistic mind, the reflective mind seeks meaning, monitors what it writes, draws a clear distinction between its thinking and the thinking of its audience. The reflective mind, being purposeful, adjusts writing to specific goals. Being integrated, it interrelates ideas it is writing with ideas it already commands. Being critical, it assesses what it writes for clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness. Being open to new ways of thinking, it values new ideas and learns from what it writes.

The reflective mind improves its thinking by thinking (reflectively) about it. Likewise, it improves its writing by thinking (reflectively) about writing. It moves back and forth between writing and thinking about how it is writing. It moves forward a bit, and then loops back upon itself to check on its own operations. It checks its tracks. It makes good its ground. It rises above itself and exercises oversight. This applies to the reflective mind while writing — or reading or listening or making decisions.

The foundation for this ability is knowledge of how the mind functions when writing well. For example, if I know (or discover) that what I am writing is difficult for others to understand, I intentionally explain each key sentence more thoroughly and give more examples and illustrations. I look at what I am writing from the readers' point of view.

The reflective mind creates an inner dialogue with itself, assessing what it is writing while it is writing:

- Have I stated my main point clearly?
- Have I explained my main point adequately?
- Have I given my readers examples from my own experience that connect important ideas to their experience?
- Have I included metaphors or analogies that illustrate for the reader what I am saying?

If I realize that my potential readers are likely to be unsympathetic to my viewpoint, I try to help them connect primary beliefs they already hold to primary beliefs in my viewpoint. I try to put myself into their circumstances with their beliefs and outlook. I show them that I understand their perspective.

### **Writing as Exercise for the Mind**

You have a mind. But do you know how to develop it? Are you aware of your basic prejudices and preconceptions? Are you aware of the extent to which your thinking mirrors the thinking of those around you? Are you aware of the extent to which your thinking has been influenced by the thinking of the culture in which you have been raised and conditioned?

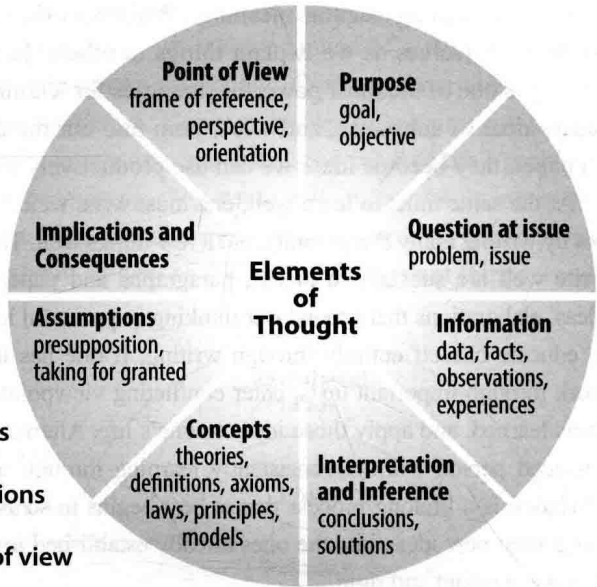
In writing about the ideas of others, you can learn to enter the minds of others and appreciate new points of view. In coming to terms with the mind of another, you can come to discover your own mind, both its strengths and its weaknesses. To write the thoughts your mind thinks, you must learn how to do second-order thinking — that is, how to think about your thinking while you are thinking from outside your thinking. But how do you get outside your thinking?

To do this, you first must understand that there are eight basic structures to all thinking. Whenever we think, we think for a purpose within a point of view based on assumptions leading to implications and consequences. We use concepts, ideas, and theories to interpret data, facts, and experiences in order to answer questions, solve problems, and resolve issues.

When we take command of these eight basic elements of reasoning, we gain powerful intellectual tools that enable us to think at a higher level. We understand that whenever anyone reasons about anything whatsoever, these parts are inherent in their thinking. Thus, when you write, you inevitably write for a purpose, make inferences, and think within a point of view. At the same time, your readers have a point of view of their own. They have their purposes, their questions, their assumptions, and their beliefs. The better you are at understanding the perspectives of your readers, the better you can understand how to explain your reasoning to them. The better you understand someone else's system of thoughts, the better you can understand your own.

**Thinking then:**

- has purposes
- raises questions
- uses information
- utilizes concepts
- makes inferences
- makes assumptions
- generates implications
- embodies a point of view



When you can move back and forth effectively between what you are writing and what you want your writing to accomplish, you bring what you are thinking to bear upon what you are writing, and you bring what you are writing to bear upon what you are thinking. You change your writing when you recognize through your thinking that improvement is needed — and how it is needed.

**How to Write a Sentence**

Within a piece of written work, every sentence should stand in a clear relationship to other sentences. Each sentence, and indeed every word of every sentence, should support the purpose of the written piece.

An important part of writing with discipline is connecting sentences to the broader context within which they are located, seeing how they fit within the whole. For every sentence you write, then, you can ask:

- How does this sentence connect with the other sentences in the paragraph?
- How does this sentence relate to the organizing idea of this text as a whole?

**Writing to Learn**

Everything we write is a potential learning experience. Writing is a systematic

process for learning essential meanings. When we write to become good writers, we teach ourselves as we explain things to others. In fact, teaching through writing is one of the most powerful strategies for learning. When we take core ideas, ideas of substance, and work them into our minds by developing them on paper, they become ideas we can use productively in our lives.

At the same time, to learn well, one must write well. One learns to write well not by writing many things badly, but a few things well. The few things we should write well are substantive pieces, paragraphs and papers containing important ideas, elaborations that ground our thinking in powerful ideas. It is quite possible to educate oneself entirely through writing, if one has the intellectual skills to work through important texts, enter conflicting viewpoints, internalize important ideas learned, and apply those ideas to one's life. Alternatively, one cannot be an educated person without consistently learning through writing. Why? Because education is a lifelong process that at best begins in school. Without continually integrating new ideas into the ones already established in our thinking, our ideas become stagnant and rigid.

### **Substantive Writing in Content Areas**

To gain knowledge, we must construct it in our minds. Writing what we are trying to internalize helps us achieve that purpose. When we are able to make connections in writing, we begin to take ownership of these connections. To do this, we must learn how to identify core ideas in the books we read, and then explain those ideas in writing, along with the role they play within the subjects we are studying.

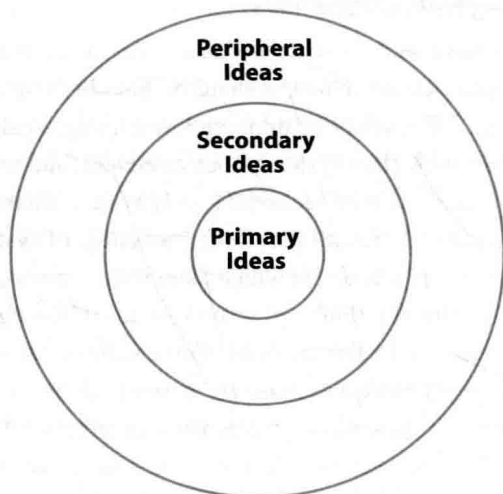
All knowledge exists in systems of meanings, with interrelated primary, secondary, and peripheral ideas. Imagine a series of circles beginning with a small core circle of primary ideas, surrounded by concentric circles of secondary ideas, moving to an outer circle of peripheral ideas. The primary ideas, at the core, explain the secondary and peripheral ideas. Whenever we read to acquire knowledge, we must write to take ownership, first, of the primary ideas, for they are key to understanding all the other ideas. Furthermore, just as we must write to gain an initial understanding of the primary ideas, we must also write to begin to think within the system as a whole and to make interconnections between ideas. The sooner we begin to think, and therefore write, within a system, the sooner the system becomes meaningful to us.



Thus, when we take command of a core of historical ideas, we begin to think and write historically. When we take command of a core of scientific ideas, we begin to think and write scientifically. Core or primary ideas are the key to every system of knowledge. They are the key to learning any subject. They are the key to retaining what we learn and applying it to life's problems. Without writing about these ideas, they never fully take root in our minds. But by seeking out these ideas and digesting them, we multiply the important subjects we can write about, as well as the multiple important things we can say about them.

**Essential Idea:**

**Writing about primary and secondary ideas in a discipline is a key to understanding the discipline.**



### **Relating Core Ideas to Other Core Ideas**

We should use writing to relate core ideas we learn within one discipline or domain to core ideas in other systems of knowledge, for knowledge exists not only in a system but also in relation to all other systems of knowledge.

Mastering any set of foundational ideas makes it easier to learn other foundational ideas. Learning to think within one system of knowledge helps us learn within other systems. Writing is crucial to that process.

For example, if in studying botany we learn that all plants have cells, we should connect this idea to the fact that all animals have cells (which we learned in studying biology). We then can begin to consider the similarities and differences between the types of animal and plant cells while recognizing