

SIMPLIFIED PARAGRAPH SKILLS

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SIMPLIFIED PARAGRAPH SKILLS

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P REFACE

Writing is not so much getting the commas right as it is expressing your ideas fully, clearly, in an organized and effective manner. Writing is discovering what you know and feel about something, and writing is communicating that knowledge to your audience. Writing can be one of the hardest things you ever attempt to do, but writing can also be exhilarating and illuminating and rewarding.

Learning to write well takes time. It takes memorizing rules and practicing methods and techniques; it takes digging into yourself and drawing out diamonds in the rough that can be cut and polished into gems that make your writing sparkle and shine. Most of all, learning to write takes a lot of practice. Each piece of writing will take time to draft and revise and revise until it is as close to your ideal as you can get it. This takes concentration, a will to write as well as you can, and most of all, lots of writing. You cannot learn that which you do not practice. So practice as much as you can. This effort will prove valuable in your writing—and in your life.

In writing this book, I wanted to offer information and guidance about writing that allows you, the writer, to use your knowledge, intelligence, and personal interests to create writing you can be proud of. The end result is that your writing will improve, remarkably in some cases. I also wanted to offer as many discovery methods for prewriting as possible, more than the typical three: brainstorming, freewriting, and clustering. These three are important, but I believe in offering as many tools as possible so that you, the writer, can pick the right tool that best fits your style, needs, and writing habits. There is never only one right answer, at least not with writing.

You will also notice that occasionally I will mention how other types of writing differ from academic writing. As I said, there's no one right answer,

and there's no one way to write. In fact, each community has its own types of writings (called genres), and each type has its own rules and constraints. If you break the rules, the writing will not be accepted by that community. It is the same with academic writing. In the academy, we have certain aspects we look for in writing, from exhibiting Standard Written English, to developing ideas fully, to citing outside authors properly. If you do not follow these guidelines, your work will not be accepted, so it is important to understand that texts can differ in the real world.

I also focus on the structure of a paragraph: topic sentence, generalizations, and details. One problem with writing is that it is often underdeveloped; that is, not enough details are included to understand what is going on. Thus I focus on giving you lots of practice creating these three levels of information.

And finally, I believe that writing should be fun, whenever possible. That is why many of the exercises and writing assignments ask you to choose your own topic. I do this because writing on an assigned topic that you have no interest in can result in bad writing. On the other hand, writing out of your interests, your passions, your concerns, creates writing that is much more enjoyable to write and to read. Find something that sparks your interest and write about that.

ORGANIZATION

This text is organized into four parts, each with a distinct focus. Part I, *Getting Started with Paragraphs*, introduces the basics of writing a paragraph. Chapter 1, *The Writing Process*, shows you the stages involved in writing, be it a sentence, a paragraph, or an essay. In Chapter 2, *Structuring a Paragraph*, the basic organization of a paragraph is introduced. Chapter 3, *Focusing a Paragraph*, shows you how to narrow your topic to a scope both manageable for you, the writer, and interesting for your readers. Chapter 4, *Sequencing a Paragraph*, gives you different options for putting your ideas together in a logical order for your readers. Chapter 5, *Achieving Coherence through Transitions*, offers you a variety of ways to bridge from one topic to another. Likewise, Chapter 6, *Achieving Consistency in a Paragraph*, gives you the means to create a smoother paragraph by eliminating consistency errors. In Chapter 7, *Revising Your Writing* guidelines for revising your paragraph are given. Chapters 8, 9, and 10 offer more tips for revision: Chapter 8, *Editing for Wording*, shows you how to eliminate clichés and wordiness from your writing; Chapter 9, *Editing for Punctuation Errors* shows you how to punctuate your sentence correctly; and Chapter 10, *Editing for Homonyms*, shows you how to avoid the common errors of similar words.

Part II, *Discovering Ideas for Writing*, gives you a number of ways to spark your writing and get your ideas on paper. These are divided into two

categories. Chapter 11, *Using Mind Flowing and Visualizing to Discover Ideas*, introduces such methods as brainstorming, freewriting, and invisible writing, as well as journal writing and using grids and pictures to get your writing started. Chapter 12, *Using Questioning Methods to Discover Ideas*, offers another angle on setting your writing started—using reporter’s questions and development methods to trigger ideas.

Part III is *How Do You Develop a Paragraph?* Each of the chapters focuses in on one particular way to develop a paragraph. Chapter 13 is on using description, Chapter 14 is on using narratives, Chapter 15 is on using examples, Chapter 16 is on using process analysis, Chapter 17 is on using comparison and contrast, Chapter 18 is on using definition, Chapter 19 is on using classification, and Chapter 20 is on using cause and effect. Each of these chapters describes the particular kind of development method, then offers useful tips for creating and structuring a paragraph using that method.

Part IV, *Creating Better Sentences*, is a helpful section at the end of the book, written to help you write complete and interesting sentences. You may use the materials in this section anytime as you are working your way through the whole text. Chapter 21 shows you how to create more complex and interesting sentences by combining shorter sentences using the coordinating conjunctions. Chapter 22 shows you how to join sentences using adverb clauses. Chapter 23 through Chapter 25 show you how to embed clauses into sentences to create better and more interesting sentences: Chapter 23 using adjective clauses, Chapter 24 using prepositional phrases, and Chapter 25 using verbal phrases. Chapter 26 cautions about the misuse of modifiers, either dangling or misplaced, which can make sentences hard to understand. And Chapter 27 shows you how to fix fragments and run-on sentences, both of which can impede understanding.

FEATURES

A number of features throughout the text help make information clear and easy to understand. A number of features are located in the text itself, offering everything from ways to come up with ideas for writing to activities to work on with your classmates. Each chapter starts with a *Discovery Writing* or *Pattern Discovery* box. These encourage you to begin each chapter by freewriting or thinking about the topic in the chapter. “Ask Yourself” boxes at the end of each chapter give you guidelines for thinking about the chapter.

In Part III, two extra features help reinforce the different methods of approaching a paragraph. “Creating” boxes help you walk step-by-step through the process of writing a particular kind of paragraph. And *Collaborative Activities* offer you the chance to brainstorm and work with other students on various exercises.

The text also offers a variety of exercises throughout each chapter. *Try-It Exercises* allow you to immediately practice a point or technique. The

answers to these exercises are included in the text, below the Exercises themselves. Practice Exercises are placed at various points throughout each chapter to offer you a chance to stop and practice what you have just learned in the previous two or three sections. At the end of the chapter, the Review Exercise and Chapter Quiz help you synthesize what you have learned throughout the chapter.

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KATHERINE PLOEGER

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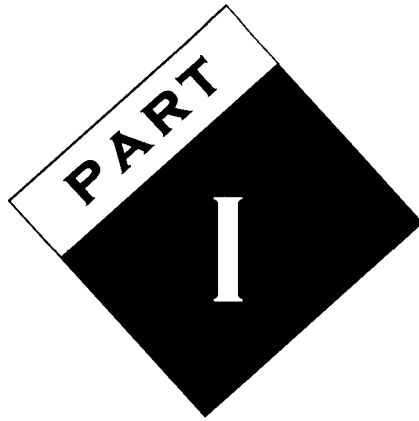
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GETTING STARTED WITH PARAGRAPHS



THE WRITING PROCESS

A FEW WORDS OF WELCOME

Welcome to *Simplified Paragraph Skills*, a book about writing skills. Writing is one of those skills that many people, and especially students, feel should be done easily and quickly, without extended thought or effort. To write well, however, can be difficult, even for professionals who write every day. And learning to write—to communicate your ideas clearly and fully, in an interesting and grammatically correct way—takes time, effort, and concentration.

Your efforts in using this book will pay off. You will perform better in classes that require papers and essay exams because you will be able to communicate your knowledge to the instructor. You will express yourself better, so you will write better letters to friends, letters of complaint, letters to the editor. You will earn promotions because it is often the case that the higher your administrative or corporate position, the more writing you will be required to do. You might even find you like writing so much that you want to become a professional writer or find an occupation that involves a great deal of writing.

As you become a better writer, you may find (or already know) that you enjoy the process of writing. You may become more fascinated by the use of language and the process of creating information and images in a reader's mind. One of your goals for this class might be to learn a positive, enthusiastic attitude from this book because your attitude will help make this class a success.