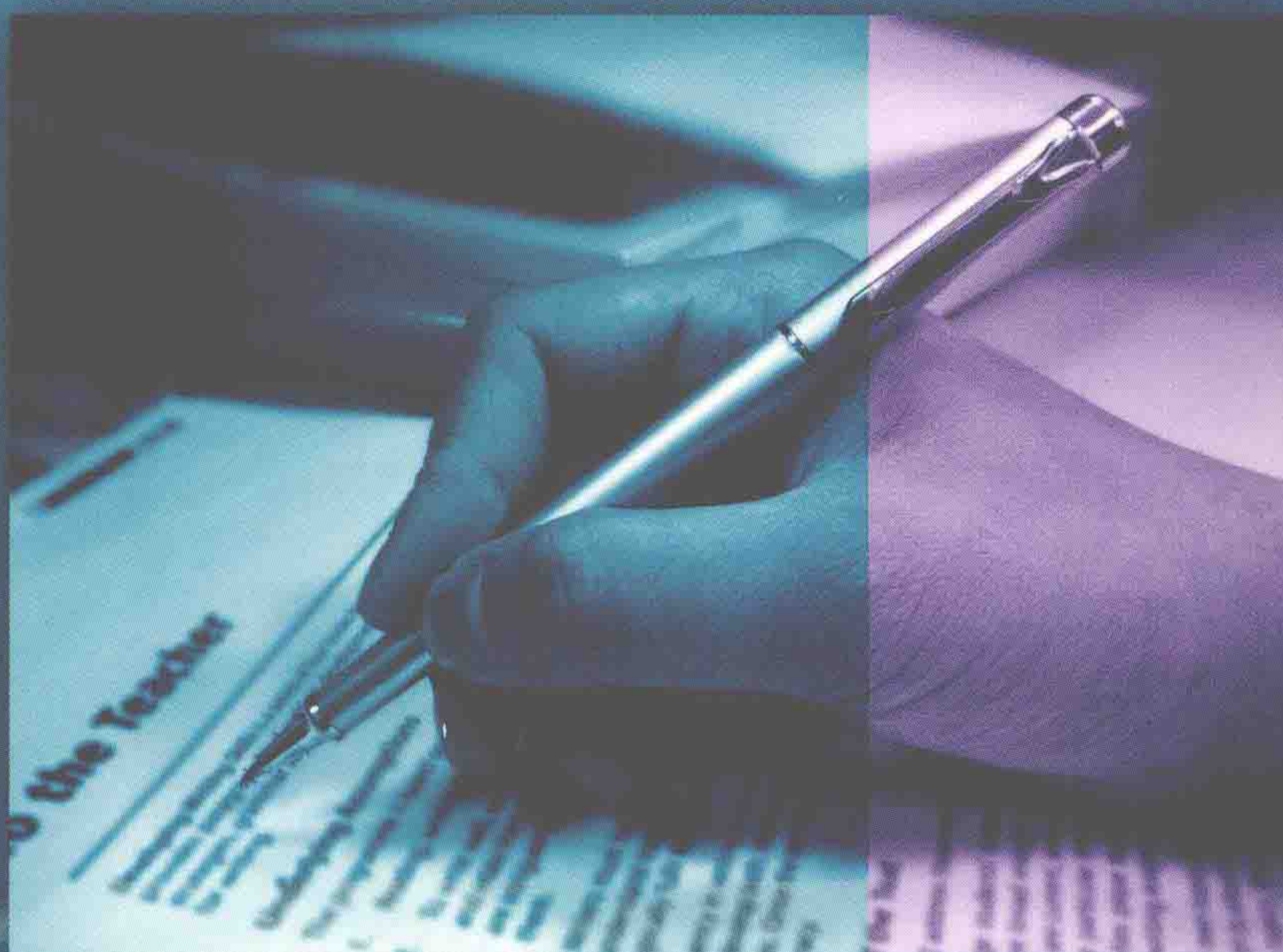


L E A R N E R S

LEARNING
WITH A
DIFFERENCE

Developing **Writing Skills**

Regina L Smalley
Mary K Ruetten
Joann Rishel Kozyrev



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MASTERING THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS THROUGH INSTRUCTION & PRACTICE

Developing **Writing Skills**

4

**MASTERING THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS THROUGH
INSTRUCTION & PRACTICE**

Regina L Smalley
Mary K Ruetten
Joann Rishel Kozyrev

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*Regina L Smalley
Mary K Ruetten
Joann Rishel Kozyrev*

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To the Teacher

Developing Writing Skills is a series of four books for secondary students. The programme provides paragraph-level writing development, introduction to and use of rhetorical strategies, grammar support, and a rich selection of readings that serve as springboards for writing.

Underlying Assumptions

The programme is based on the following assumptions:

1. Reading, writing and thinking are interrelated activities.
2. To write well, writers must engage with ideas. They must find ideas interesting and relate them to their knowledge and experience. The more that student writers are intrigued by ideas, the more time and effort they will spend in writing about them.
3. Writers must be aware of the context in which they are writing. They must understand the expectations of target audiences and the ways of thinking that typically fulfil those expectations.
4. Fluency in writing is not to be confused with grammatical accuracy; writers need to develop both. When creating a text, writers focus on rhetorical and organizational issues. Once the text has been drafted, they need to pay attention to grammatical accuracy.

Design of the Text

Books 1 and 2 address these underlying assumptions in the following ways:

1. To engage students' interest, each chapter is organized around a theme. The themes are broad enough so that all students can relate to them; at the same time, they are current, serious and relevant to an academic setting. Student writers explore the particular theme through journal writing, reading and discussion. These activities pique students' interest, foster critical thinking, and provide a context for writing assignments.
2. The students' own topics develop from the general theme of the chapter, which is focused enough to allow for unified class discussion but broad enough to generate individualized topics. Interaction with the theme allows students to build a knowledge base and to write about it with complexity.
3. Each chapter focuses on a method of development: narration, description, or analysis. In particular, the book focuses on types of analysis: process, comparing/contrasting, classifying, and cause/effect.

4. Each chapter contains samples of both professional and student writing. The professionally written selections serve both to engage students' interest and to exemplify a method of development. Since few writers rely on only one method of development to make their point, the passages reflect a blend of methods. Nevertheless, the primary mode of development is evident in each. The student writings function as examples of a method of development as well. By looking at the choices other writers make, students can develop awareness of context and method. They learn what is appropriate in writing and what rhetorical strategies are available to them.
5. Each chapter offers a variety of activities designed to familiarize students with the concepts of focusing on a main idea, developing support, and organizing a text.
6. Each chapter introduces cohesion devices relevant to the method of development and provides examples of their use.

Books 3 and 4 focus mainly on a rhetorical mode of development and the conventions associated with that mode. Each chapter contains four basic components: getting started and journal writing activities, reading selections, an introduction to the rhetorical pattern, and the relevant composition skills (devices for achieving coherence).

Most chapters begin with several readings based on a theme, with topics geared towards the interests of academically oriented students. The readings are followed by comprehension/discussion questions intended to generate lively class discussions. In addition, each chapter topic is reinforced in the examples and activities throughout the chapter. The reading passage also functions as an example of the rhetorical modes and of professional writing, providing evidence that the principles of rhetoric apply in writing both outside and inside the classroom. The reading component allows for flexibility in teaching: Teachers who wish to focus on the academic content of the essays could begin with the introductory essays, and teachers who prefer the developmental approach could begin with the sections on rhetoric.

In the rhetoric section, the patterns are carefully and clearly explained and illustrated, often with student samples that could be used as models early in the chapter. The section on composition skills introduces techniques for achieving coherence, such as the use of adverbial clauses and transitional expressions, and encourages the application of those skills in the writing of compositions, thus emphasizing the necessity for revision in the writing process. In addition, each chapter includes exercises for mastery of the composition skills. To further encourage revision and a focus on accuracy, the writing component in each chapter includes references to relevant grammar points. To conclude the chapter, writing assignments of varying difficulty are included. These assignments are typical of those students might encounter in public examinations.

The chapters of these books contain the following activities:

1. **Getting Started.** This section begins with journal writing, inviting students to connect personally to the theme of the chapter and to share their experiences with others.
2. **Reading.** This section is introduced with photographs or drawings accompanied

by discussion questions and is followed by comprehension and discussion questions. New vocabulary is glossed in the margin. The activities in both the Getting Started and Reading sections are designed to engage students with the theme by activating their background knowledge and by tying their knowledge and experience to the knowledge and experience of others.

3. **Preparing to Write.** This section introduces the main rhetorical points of the chapter and focuses on developing a main point, support and organization. In this section, students work through the relevant steps in the writing process and, in some chapters, write a paragraph as the last activity.
4. **Writing.** This section asks students to write a paragraph or essay, starting from the beginning of the writing process. Students prepare to write; then write and revise. Revising allows for peer or self evaluation. Students apply rhetorical strategies from the previous section, internalizing the steps of the writing process.
5. **Using Language Effectively.** This section focuses on cohesion and grammar. Students are encouraged to work on accuracy in their writing. An optional Internet activity extends students' knowledge of the chapter's theme and reinforces the rhetorical strategy in speaking and writing.
6. **More Reading and Writing.** This section contains another reading and more topics for writing and discussion. The reading, somewhat more challenging than the earlier one, relates to the chapter's theme and is followed by comprehension and discussion questions. It can be used at the beginning of the chapter in conjunction with the first reading to provide more background and discussion of the topic, or it can be used as a follow-up activity. The topics for writing and discussion are good assignments for journal writing and group activities.

Each book includes an Appendix on prewriting strategies to which reference is made whenever it would be of assistance to the students.

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Introduction to the Essay



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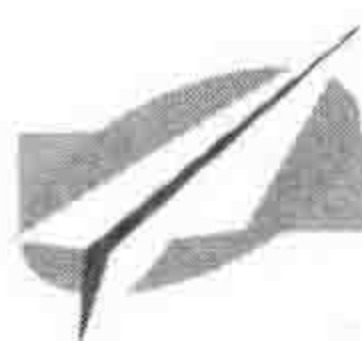
Theme

Introduction to the Essay

Goals

Writing

- To understand the purpose for and characteristics of the three parts of an essay: introduction, developmental paragraphs and conclusion
- To identify and improve thesis statements
- To identify and evaluate introductory paragraphs
- To identify topics for developmental paragraphs and write the appropriate topic sentences
- To understand the purpose for and characteristics of conclusions
- To write an outline plan of essays and/or determine if an essay is well organized



Getting Started

In Your Journal

Choose one of the following subjects, and write about it in your journal.

1. How does one tell an experienced teacher from a novice teacher?
2. How do you feel before you take a test? What kind of test do you like best? Why do you prefer this type of test?

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Composition Skills and the Internet

Plagiarism is considered a very serious offence. What is plagiarism?

Use a search tool on the Internet to search for "plagiarism". Choose two or three of these pages and compare them. Are the policies relating to plagiarism similar? Are the consequences of plagiarism the same? How do they differ? Write a paragraph describing the results of your search.

Introduction to the Essay

Unlike the paragraph, the essay is a more formal composition. Each paragraph in an essay has a designated function:

- (1) **Introduction.** The introduction is usually one paragraph (sometimes two or more) that introduces the topic to be discussed and the central idea (the thesis statement) of the essay.
- (2) **Developmental paragraphs.** These paragraphs develop various aspects of the topic and the central idea. They may discuss causes, effects, reasons, examples, processes, classifications, or points of comparison and contrast. They may also describe or narrate.
- (3) **Conclusion.** This paragraph concludes the thought developed in the essay. It is the closing word.

The number of paragraphs in an essay depends entirely on the *complexity* of the topic; some essays have only two or three paragraphs, whereas others may have 20 or 30.

The Thesis Statement

The essay, like the paragraph, is controlled by one central idea.

- In the essay, the sentence containing the central idea is called the **thesis statement**. The thesis statement contains an expression of an attitude, opinion, or idea about a topic.
- Unlike the topic sentence, the thesis statement is broader and expresses the controlling idea for the entire essay.

- Each of the developmental paragraphs should have a controlling idea that echoes or relates to the controlling idea—the central idea—in the thesis statement.

Here are a few points to remember about the **thesis statement**:

- (1) The thesis statement expresses a complete thought and should be expressed in a complete sentence. It should not be written as a question.

Thesis statement:

My fear of the dark has made my life miserable.

- (2) A thesis statement expresses an opinion, attitude, or idea; it does not simply announce the topic the essay will develop.

Thesis statement:

The effects of radiation are often unpredictable.

- (3) A thesis statement should express an opinion; it should not express a fact. It is really a statement that someone could disagree with. The thesis statement, therefore, is a statement that needs to be explained or proved.

Thesis statement:

The milk cows produce is not always fit for human consumption.

NOT:

Cows produce milk.

Thesis statement:

The advantages in going to college far outweigh the disadvantages.

NOT:

There are many advantages and disadvantages in going to college.
(Not an arguable point)

- (4) A thesis statement should express only one idea towards one topic; if a thesis statement contains two or more ideas, the essay runs the risk of lacking unity and coherence.

Thesis statement:

Going to college in the Midwest can be exciting.

NOT:

Going to college in the Midwest can be exciting, and I have found that living in a suburb of a large city is the best way to live while at college.

ACTIVITY 1-1

Study each of the following sentences. If the sentence is a thesis statement, put a tick (✓) in the blank; if it is not a thesis statement, put a cross (X).

1. _____ The advantages of majoring in engineering are many.
2. _____ I would like to discuss my views on the Olympic Games.
3. _____ Students should be allowed to manage the school bookshop.

4. _____ Why do I want to be a lawyer?
5. _____ Knowing a foreign language can be beneficial to anyone.
6. _____ This advertisement attempts to appeal to the readers' sense of patriotism.
7. _____ I am going to describe my home.
8. _____ There are many similarities and differences between New York and Hong Kong.

ACTIVITY 1-2

Rewrite each of the following sentences to make it a thesis statement.

Example

I am going to explain why I decided to go to college.

Choosing to go to college was a difficult decision.

1. The hazards of storing chemical wastes are many.
2. There are many similarities and differences between life in the country and life in the city.
3. New York City is the largest city in the United States.
4. Universities in this country should require more humanities courses; they should also have more social activities.

The Introduction

The thesis statement is the main statement for the entire essay. Where should the thesis statement be placed? Although there are no hard and fast rules about this, the thesis statement is usually in the introductory paragraph.

First, let us look at the characteristics of an **introductory paragraph**.

- (1) An introductory paragraph should inform the reader of the topic under discussion.
- (2) An introductory paragraph should indicate generally how the topic is going to be developed. It should indicate whether the essay is about causes, effects, reasons, or examples. Is the essay going to classify, describe, narrate, or explain a process?
- (3) Generally speaking, an introductory paragraph should contain the thesis statement. In more sophisticated writing, the thesis statement sometimes appears later in the essay, sometimes even at the end. In some cases, too, the thesis is just implied.
- (4) Ideally, an introductory paragraph should be interesting enough to make the reader want to continue reading. It therefore makes good sense not to put the thesis statement right at the beginning of the introductory paragraph. Stating an opinion about something in the first sentence is not usually very inviting. Therefore, it is generally a good idea to place the thesis statement at or near the end of the introductory paragraph.

Prewriting: Planning

There are many ways to begin an essay. There are four basic types of introductions.

- (1) The **"Turnabout"**. The writer opens with a statement contrary to his or her actual thesis.
- (2) The **"Dramatic Entrance"**. The writer opens with a narrative, description, or dramatic example pertinent to the topic.
- (3) The **"Relevant Quotation"**. The writer opens with a quotation pertinent to the topic.
- (4) The **"Funnel"**.

The **Funnel** is perhaps the most common type of introductory paragraph. It is so called because the ideas progress from the general to the specific. The writer opens with a general statement about the topic and then works towards the more specific thesis statement at or near the end of the introduction.

Example

Travelling to a foreign country is always interesting, especially if it is to a country that is completely different from your own. You can delight in tasting new foods, enjoying new sights, and learning about different customs, some of which may seem very curious. If you were to visit my country, for instance, you would probably think that my people have some very strange customs, as these three examples will illustrate.

In this introductory paragraph, the writer introduces the general topic of "travelling to a foreign country" and then narrows down that topic to a more specific aspect—the customs in the writer's country. The thesis statement comes at the end, with the central idea being *strange*. Illustrations should appear in the developmental paragraphs.

Just how general should the introductory paragraph be?

One way to avoid beginning too generally or too far back is to have one key word in the first sentence reappear in the thesis statement, or a synonym of the word or an idea. In the preceding example paragraph, *visit* echoes *travelling* and the word *country* appears in the first and last sentences.

Here is another example of this type of introduction, taken from a popular science magazine:

America is a throwaway society. From both industrial and municipal sources, the United States generates about 10 billion metric tons of solid waste per year. Every five years the average American discards, directly and indirectly, an amount of waste equal in weight to the Statue of Liberty. Municipal solid waste alone accounts for 140 million metric tons per year. The municipal solid waste produced in this country in just one day fills roughly 63,000 garbage trucks, which lined up end to end would stretch 600 kilometres, the distance from San Francisco to Los Angeles. The repercussions of our waste habits, however, stretch to every city. Let us demonstrate by example.

— P. O'Leary, P. Walsh, and R. Ham, "Managing Solid Waste",
Scientific American 6 (Dec 1988), p 36. Copyright ©1988
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ACTIVITY 1-3

Study the following introductory paragraphs. Identify the thesis statement in each paragraph. Then underline the word or words that appear in the first sentence and are restated in the thesis statement.

1. Computers are advanced machines that can store and recall information at very high speed. Computers are easy and interesting to use; however, some people are afraid of computers. I used to be afraid of computers, too, because of the fear of failure and because I knew nothing about programming. But actually I have learned that the procedures of working on computers are very easy.

— Nader Alyousha

2. When we were very young, we believed that parents could do no wrong. Indeed, they seemed to us to be perfect human beings who knew all the answers to our problems and who could solve any problems that we had. However, as we grow older, we find that parents can make mistakes, too.

3. We live in an era where watching television is the national pastime. Since the invention of the television set, people have been spending more of their free time watching television than doing anything else. Many of the television addicts feel that this particular pastime is not a bad one; indeed, they argue that people can learn a great deal watching television. I am sure that if you look long and hard enough, you can probably find some programmes that are educationally motivating. But, for the most part, I say that watching television is a waste of time.

— Pamela Moran

4. Today's children are our future men and women. They will become the dominant force one day. If they receive proper guidance and have a wholesome childhood, they will contribute immeasurably to our society when they become adults. In other words, today's children are going to have a significant impact on our society in the future; therefore, parents should not neglect the proper conditions that children need during their childhood.

— Chun Lee

5. When we see a blind person nearing a street corner or a door, often we try to help by opening the door or taking the person's arm and guiding him or her across the street, and while we do that, some of us talk to the blind person in a loud voice, as if the blind person is not only helpless but also deaf. Rushing to help a blind person without asking if that person needs help and speaking loudly are just two of the inappropriate ways people react to blind people. If you want to help a blind person whom you perceive as in need of help, you should bear in mind the following tips.

ACTIVITY 1-4

Using the questions that follow, evaluate each of the following introductory paragraphs.