

新视界大学英语系列教材

N PROSPECT
NEW COLLEGE ENGLISH

大学英语 学术写作基础

主编 田育英 张玉荣

 中国人民大学出版社

新视界大学英语系列教材

大学英语学术写作基础

Basics for University Academic Writing

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前 言

PREFACE

《大学英语学术写作基础》旨在为在校的大学生奠定英语学术写作基础。这本教材是应近些年大学英语教学改革不断深化，学生入学水平不断提高这样一个变化而产生。原有的大学英语教学要求所规定的学生要达到的标准已经不能满足学生和社会发展的需要，如在写的方面，学生能就一定的话题或提纲在半小时之内写出 120 ~ 150 词的短文，思想表达较清楚，无重大语言错误。英语作为世界通用语是全球化不断深入的结果，与世界接轨、提高科学研究水平以增强创新能力是当下世界各国提升竞争力的目标之一，在这样的大背景下，英语作为信息传播、交流的重要媒介，其重要性愈发凸现。

《大学英语学术写作基础》力求提高和完善学生英语书面表达能力，为学生未来学术写作打基础。力求通过提高学生写作能力使学生了解东西方文化在思维和写作方面的异同，培养和锻炼学生运用英语的逻辑思维能力、思维的条理性、对问题的深入认识和分析归纳及概括能力，以及促进和提高学生运用语言的综合素质，从而实现书面交流的有效性和准确性，为社会培养和输送具有高素质的人才。

依据国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要全面提高高等教育质量的要求，我们在编写《大学英语学术写作基础》时充分考虑到了目前学生的水平、写作中存在的问题以及信息化社会的飞速发展对高素质人才的要求等多种因素，在编写中，特别是在章节各部分的设计和文章体裁的安排上，既注重扎实和完善学生英语写作基本技能，同时又注意强化学生在进入社会后应具备的篇章写作能力。

《大学英语学术写作基础》是在《高级英语写作》基础上作了修订。该书出版近十年来，一直作为高级英语写作课程的教材而深受欢迎。由于该教材是以范例阐释写作基本理论为特色，这在国内同类教材中绝无仅有，国外教材中也鲜见，并且备有充足的范例和写作修辞等技巧，便于学生理解，一直受到学生和读者的好评，也得到其他一些写作书籍和教材作者的推荐。

在这次修订中，我们将其名副其实，书名改为《大学英语学术写作基础》，还原编写本书的初衷。本教材的编写目标就是为学生学术写作奠定基础，为学生继续深造、学习写学术文章打好前站。

新修订的教材中删去了原书中的应用文体 4 个章节，增加了批判性写作、学术写作文体特征等章节。还在 Dr. Jim Hu 的大力支持下，在第 16 章汇集了 Jim 所收集的 15 篇国际学生的写作范例，为我国大学生体味不同文化学生的写作风格创造了条件。此外，每个章

节都更新了部分范例，增加了病句修改和学生范文点评。

本教材共有 17 章。体裁涵盖 4 个方面，即描写、记叙、说明和议论文。本教材的前 6 章重点讲述了关于写作的一些基本理论，如第 1 章的 **Unity**，这是任何英语文章都必须遵循的一个基本概念。第 2 章和第 3 章介绍了文章的条理性 and 连贯性。这三章所详细阐述的是英语写作最基本和最常用的写作原则。英语写作中的一致性原则、条理性原则和连贯性原则是一切写作的基础，只有在了解和掌握这些基本技能的基础上才能有效地学习写各种体裁的文章。

第 4~6 章是对写作过程的描写。写作的准备过程是写作成功与否的关键环节。在写作中如何激发思维、拓展思路，如何有条理地组织思想、把握写作步骤，如何入手写好第一段以及得当地处理好结尾段，都是困扰学生的常见问题。我们寄希望于学生在这个阶段牢牢地把握住书中介绍的这些方法，从而实现写作能力的飞跃。

描写、叙述、说明和议论四种体裁是第 7~14 章的内容。本书把重点放在了说明文和议论文体上。我们用三章的篇幅，即第 7~9 章演示描写和叙述文的写作技能。用了五章阐释说明文和议论文，其中第 10~11 章围绕介绍说明文的写作方法。第 12~13 章较为详细地阐述了议论文的写作方法和技巧，第 14 章介绍了批判性写作方法，涉及批判性阅读和思维。第 15 章简介了学术写作的文体修辞风格。需要说明的是，说明文和议论文是大学阶段写作教学的重点，也是实际生活中最常用的体裁，更是学术写作的文体形式。四种文体之间的关系是互为补充、相辅相成，而不是相互排斥的关系。它们的主要区别是写作方法不同，而采用何种写作方法应视内容而定。一篇被定义为说明文的文章是指它运用的主要表达方式是说明，并不意味着在说明文中不能运用别的写作方法。实际生活中，在一种体裁中使用多种表达方式，不仅是允许的，而且在很多情况下是必需的。

此外，依据教师是教学中的主导和学生是主体的指导思想，我们对每章中的各个部分做了精心的设计。除个别章节外，每章划分为七部分：范文点评 (**Comment on Essays**)、课堂讨论 (**Workshop**)、语言功能 (**Functional Concepts**)、收获佳句 (**Sentence Crafts**)、修辞基础 (**Rhetorical Focus**)、写作任务 (**Writing Tasks**)、佳作赏析 (**Additional Samples**)。写作能力的实现取决于多种因素，编者希望通过这七个部分的有机结合，为学生提供一操作平台，满足学生在写作时的多种需要和不同水平学生的不同需要。

范文点评荟萃了编者精心挑选的英语原文的佳作，每一篇范例都具有典型性、知识性、哲理性和趣味性。编者的点评彰显了文体的显著特征，能有效地满足学生的认知需要。学生中的佼佼者或许不再需要浏览安排在范例后写作技能的讲解；而需要补充这部分写作知识的学生则可以细细地品味该文体的每一演绎步骤。我们力求通过范文点评这个栏目，使读者对本章的重点一览无余，并为学生自主学习留有充分的空间。

课堂讨论是检测学生是否领悟和把握写作技能的关键，也是教师对学生进行检查和指导的重要手段。为了协助使用者把握好这一关，本栏目提供了一篇经典范文，并在其后从多层面、多角度设计了问题，这些问题颇具匠心，涉及语篇、语段、主题思想、文章的铺叙方法、技巧、语言功能以及修辞等方面，灵活运用这些问题有助于提高课堂讨论的质量，并加强学生对有效英文书面表达的认识。

本书为写作训练设计了两大板块。一是从语言功能、收获佳句、修辞基础这三个不同的角度，从句子层次，帮助学生夯实语言基本功。**语言功能**以各章的文体特征为核心讲解了表达方法；**收获佳句**摘录了范文中标准句型，这些句型更多地带有鲜明的语篇特征，期望学生模仿使用。**修辞基础**为学生介绍了必要的修辞知识。表达能力准确与否在很大程度上取决于句子的表述水平，编者希望使用者能以提供的范例为模式，从3个层面进行有效的写作练习。**写作任务**是进行写作训练的第二个板块。各章围绕本章讨论的文体，设计了以段落和篇章为主的写作题目。使用时，教师可根据学生情况选用或自拟题目写作。

佳作赏析中的范例与范文点评和课堂讨论中的范例一样，都是编者精心挑选的佳作。希望学生通过阅读相关文体，增强对不同体裁文章的感受力。

编者认为《大学英语学术写作基础》起点较高，每一章节内容丰富，有经典范文、有详细讲解、有多角度的问题供讨论，还有语言功能、修辞、练习和写作实践等，这些内容在一次课内很难完成。而写作课是一门实践课，不是理论课，所以，我们建议根据学生的不同情况制订不同的教学进度和教学要求。

优秀的学生可在一学期内完成本教材。写作水平的提高是一个循序渐进的过程，即使是出类拔萃的学生也很难在短期内实现这个过程，但是这些学生一旦具备较全面的写作知识和常用的写作技巧，他们可以在日后的实践中通过自学逐渐实现这一过程。如若学生在写作方面有较多的困难，也可放慢进度，安排两周学一章；或者依据实际需要重点学某些章节。

无论安排何种进度，都要采用课内外相结合的形式。教师要根据学生的情况安排学生课前预习。写作课不同于阅读课，要立足在“写”上，实际动手操练是提高写作水平的关键。编者建议对于需要阅读的部分应提前预习，课内以讨论、写作、作文讲评为主。

写作能力是一项综合运用语言的能力，涉及学生的词汇、语法、篇章、文体等多方面的知识和能力。因此，在使用本书时，应注意不能局限于写作知识的传授，而要特别注重学生语言能力的全面发展。

参加本书编写的老师几乎全部是曾经和正在担任人大写作课的教师，他们大都具有国内外名牌大学博士学位，为本书的完成付出了辛勤汗水。**Stanley Paul Shifferd**是我校聘请的美籍专家，他为本书做出了创新性的贡献。**Dr. Jim Hu**任职于加拿大一所高校，他的参与以及他所提供的国际学生的写作范例是本书的一大亮点，使我们的学生有机会在教材内就能品味来自不同国度不同文化背景同龄人的作品。在此编者还要一并感谢的还有初萌和田倩，她们为本书提供了宝贵意见并作了资料整理的工作。本成果得到中国人民大学“985工程”“人才培养基金项目”的支持。

限于水平和时间，疏漏和失误在所难免，欢迎广大读者和英语界同仁批评指正。

编者

2012年3月

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Chapter 1 Unity

In this unit, you will learn:

- What unity is in writing
- How to achieve paragraph unity
- How to achieve essay unity
- How to establish the thesis statement and the topic sentence
- How to expand simple sentences

I. Introduction

Unity is one of the essential principles in English writing. A well-written paragraph or essay must have unity. A unified paragraph is one in which all the sentences are clearly and directly related to the main idea, usually stated in the topic sentence. An essay, like a paragraph, should be unified, with every part clearly related to the central idea expressed in the thesis statement. To fulfill a purpose, both paragraphs and essays require thorough supporting detail and explanation.

II. Making a Unified Paragraph

Paragraphs have several important roles in an essay, depending on where they are located. The opening paragraph should catch your reader's attention and present your main idea; the body paragraphs support and develop your main idea, and the concluding paragraph brings your essay to a close with a sense of completeness. The following discussion focuses on the writing of body paragraphs, the real core of a piece of writing.

The best way to be certain that your paragraph has unity is to construct a specifically focused topic sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph, and then develop it through the entire paragraph. If the paragraph sticks to what is promised in the topic sentence, it has unity. Any sentence that does not develop the topic violates the unity of the paragraph and should be omitted.

The following paragraphs are unified, with the first sentence functioning as the topic sentence and the rest of the sentences as supporting sentences.

Topic sentence	<p><u>Some of the greatest scientific discoveries are the result of inspirations caused by chance occurrences.</u> Three brief examples can demonstrate this point. <u>First</u>, Archimedes' noticing the rise of water level as he submerged himself in a tub led to the formulation of the laws of liquid displacement, the foundation of many of the laws of modern physics. <u>Second</u>, Sir Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity because an apple fell on his head while he was sitting under a tree. <u>Third</u>, after being caught in a strong current of hot rising air while flying his gas balloon, George Alexander Whitehead thought about the occurrence and developed the fundamental principles of meteorology.</p>	Support by examples
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Read another example of a unified paragraph:

Topic sentence	<p><u>There is no historical precedent for China's extraordinary achievements since the time of reform and opening up thirty years ago.</u> Already more Chinese have been lifted out of poverty in three decades than Europeans and North Americans during the seven decades of Industrial Revolution commencing in 1760. And even more remarkable than China's economic progress has been the transformation of its culture, society, and attitudes toward the world. Without forsaking continuity with the past, the Chinese who have come of age during the period of reform and opening up see China's future not only as a great nation but also as an integral part of an interdependent world.</p>	Support by reasons
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These examples illustrate two strategies that help to achieve paragraph unity—using the topic sentence, and then relating each supporting sentence to the main idea.

1. Using Topic Sentences

You can create unified paragraphs by making sure that each paragraph has a topic sentence that shapes and controls the content of the rest of the paragraph. Topic sentences can be placed in several places in a paragraph.

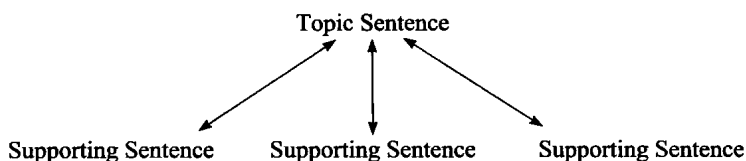
1) Topic sentence at the beginning

A topic sentence placed at the beginning of a paragraph is the clearest kind of paragraph organization. It tells readers what to expect and helps them to understand the paragraph's main idea immediately. Also, it helps you to stay focused on your subject.

There are several ways for people to view money. First is the person whose dollars disappear in mere moments. To this person, a savings account is like a straitjacket. The spender lives only in the present and can't plan ahead financially. Next is the individual who hoards pennies like rubies. The hoarder may be wealthy, but remains unable to relish the pleasures that money makes possible. This person lives in the future, a future that never arrives. More common is the person who likes to save, but can occasionally spend without anxiety. This person is rooted in the

present, but prepared for days to come.

The diagram below is the structure of a paragraph with topic sentence at the beginning.



2) Topic sentence in the middle

The topic sentence appears in the middle of some paragraphs, either because of the need to provide readers with background information at the beginning or because of the writer's desire to build momentum.

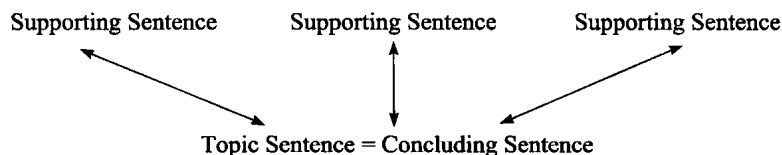
For years I have struggled with my writing skills. My inability to master correct grammar as well as my struggle to formulate coherent ideas has made my compositions dull and ineffective. This year, however, I decided to take a writing course to help improve my skills. I found, to my surprise, that the real key to writing a good composition is to have a passion for the things about which you are writing. When a person becomes interested in his or her subject of composition, he or she will make a better attempt at organizing ideas and giving them a strong coherence.

3) Topic sentence at the end

Some paragraphs reveal the supporting details before the main idea. The topic sentence, therefore, comes at the end of a paragraph. This approach is particularly effective for building suspense and for dramatic effect.

The environment is the world around us, and everyone agrees it needs a cleaning. Big corporations gobble up the countryside and disgorge what is left into the breeze and streams. Big trunks rumble by, trailing their fumes. A jet roars into the air, and its soot drifts down the trees. Everyone calls for massive action, and then tosses away his cigarette butt or gum wrapper. The world around us is also a sidewalk, a lawn, a lounge, a hallway, a room right here. Cleaning the environment can begin by reaching for the scrape of paper at your feet.

The diagram below is the structure of a paragraph with topic sentence at the end.

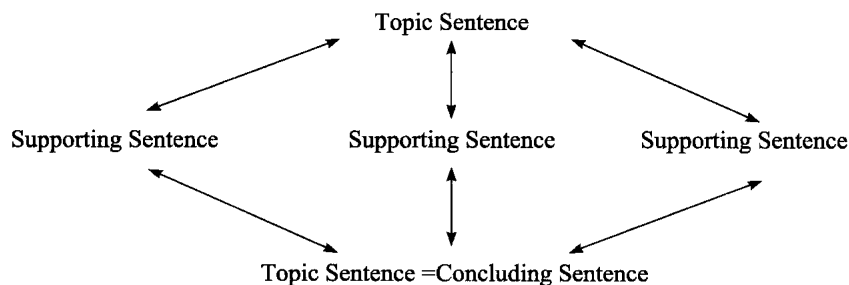


4) Topic sentence at the beginning and end

Sometimes you will want to state a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph and then refer to it in a slightly different form at the end. Such an "echo" of the topic sentence adds emphasis, pointing up the importance you attach to the idea.

Sports demand an effort of will and muscle that is healthful for the soul as well as the body. Swimming is physically healthful, although it may seem undemanding lying for hours inert on a deck chair in the sun. But the first dive into the pool is always cold; taking the plunge always requires some effort of will. And the swimmer soon summons his will to compete, against himself or others, for greater distances and greater speed, doing twenty laps where he used to do one. Similarly, tennis takes quantities of energy, physical and moral, especially when the competition stiffens under a hot sun. Team sports, like basketball, baseball, and volleyball, perhaps demand even more of the amateur. The awkward player is miserable when he strikes out, or misses an easy fly, or an easy basket, no matter how patient his teammates. He must drive himself to keep on trying, no matter how heavy his heart. Whatever the sport, a little determination can eventually conquer one's awkwardness and timidity, and the reward will be more than physical. Character and health frequently go hand in hand.

The diagram below is the structure of a paragraph with topic sentence at the beginning and end.



5) Topic sentence implied

Some paragraphs make a unified statement without the use of a topic sentence. Writers must construct such paragraphs carefully so that a reader can easily discern the main idea.

Parents who are concerned that their children get enough to eat during the growing years often not only overfeed their children but also cause them to establish lifelong habits of overeating. The person who is constantly praised for cleaning up his or her plate as a child later on experiences a sort of gratification while cleaning up all too many plates. The easy availability of so much food is a constant temptation for many people, particularly the types of foods served in fast-food restaurants and the snack foods advertised on television. Such foods, because they are laced with salt and sugar, tend to be more tempting than other sorts. But many people don't need temptation from the outside; their overeating is a result of such psychological factors as nervousness, loneliness, insecurity, or an indisposition to be active or to exercise.

The details in this paragraph, taken together, point toward a clear central idea: *Overeating is caused by several factors.*

Effective paragraphs without stated topic sentences are hard to write; even if they are well done, they still make an extra demand on the reader. For the kind of writing you will do in the classroom and on the job, the best advice is to develop your paragraphs from clearly expressed topic sentences.

2. Relating Each Sentence to the Main Idea

To achieve unity in writing a paragraph, you must make sure that each supporting sentence is related to the main idea, which is usually expressed in the topic sentence. The following paragraph lacks unity because it is only a collection of unrelated ideas. Notice how the student writer discussed a number of topics, all of which were abandoned:

One of the first problems that students have is learning to use a computer. All students were required to buy a computer before school started. Throughout the first semester we took a special course to teach us to use a computer. My notebook computer has a large memory and can do word processing and spreadsheets. It has a hard drive and a modem. My parents were happy that I had a computer, but they were concerned about the price. Tuition was high, and when they added in the price of the computer, it was almost out of reach. To offset expenses, I got a part-time job in the school library. Now I am determined to overcome “computer anxiety” and to master my computer by the end of the semester.

Before revising this paragraph, the writer had to decide what the main idea actually was. Then he deleted the sentences about his parents’ financial situation and the computer’s characteristics, keeping only those details related to the main idea (expressed in the topic sentence below).

One of the first problems that students have is learning to use a computer. All first-year college students were required to buy a computer before school started. Throughout the first semester we took a special course to teach us to use a computer. In theory this system sounded fine, but in my case it was a disaster. In the first place, the closest I had ever come to a computer was the hand-held calculator I used in math class. In the second place, I could not type. And to make matters worse, many of the people in my computer orientation course already knew how to operate a computer. By the end of the first week I was convinced that I would never be able to work with my computer.

3. Supporting the Main Idea Adequately

The topic, which is introduced by the topic sentence, should be discussed fully and adequately. Some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed include:

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons

- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyze the topic
- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event

Read and compare the following two paragraphs:

1

We ought to ban the use of cell phones in moving vehicles. Using a phone while driving causes too many dangerous accidents to happen, and even if there's no terrible accident, people using them have been known to do some really stupid things in traffic. Drivers using phones are constantly causing problems for other drivers; pedestrians are in big trouble too. I think this is getting to be a really dangerous situation, and we ought to do something about it soon.

2

Although cell phones are a time-saving convenience for busy people, they are too distracting for use by drivers of moving vehicles, whose lack of full attention poses a serious threat to other drivers and to pedestrians. The simple act of dialing or answering a phone, for example, may take a driver's eyes away from traffic signals or other cars. Moreover, involvement in a complex or emotional conversation could slow down a driver's response time just when fast action is needed to avoid an accident. Last week I drove behind a man using his phone. As he drove and talked, I could see him gesturing wildly, obviously agitated with the other caller. His speed repeatedly slowed and then picked up, and his car drifted more than once, on a street frequently crossed by schoolchildren. Because the man was clearly not in full, conscious control of his driving, he was dangerous. My experience is not isolated; a recent study by the Foundation for Traffic Safety has discovered that using a cell phone is far more distracting to drivers than listening to the radio or talking to a rider. With additional studies in progress, voters should soon be able to demand legislation to prohibit the use of cell phone while driving.

As we can see, the first paragraph is poorly developed, while the second paragraph is quite effective in developing the main idea, for the writer backed up the main idea by using examples and citing evidence.

III. Making a Unified Essay

An essay can be regarded as a series of paragraphs about one main idea. The main idea of the essay is usually expressed in a thesis statement, a sentence that tells the reader what the essay will cover. In other words, a thesis statement reveals, usually in one sentence, the controlling or main idea of the essay.

College essays usually follow a general pattern composed of three main parts: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. In college writing, usually the thesis statement is the last sentence in the introduction part of an essay.

The following is a unified essay. The first paragraph concludes with the thesis statement, the next three paragraphs make up the body, with each of them developing one aspect of the thesis statement, and the conclusion ties the essay together.

Structure	Essay	Comments
<p data-bbox="165 274 298 304">Introduction</p> <p data-bbox="165 731 228 761">Body</p>	<p data-bbox="435 240 1002 270" style="text-align: center;">Commercialism at Holiday Time Benefits the Nation</p> <p data-bbox="340 274 1096 711">Signs of commercialism at holiday time are easy to see in the United States. Christmas decorations begin their call to consumers in October. Memorial Day and Labor Day remind shoppers to prepare for the seasonal change in clothing fashions. Halloween and Easter mean children can make toll calls to the Great Pumpkin or the Easter Bunny. Some people disapprove of these commercial uses of holidays in the United States. These people feel that the meaning of a holiday gets lost when television is blaring news of the latest holiday sale or expensive gift item. Many people also feel that the proliferation of gifts and greeting cards creates stressful pressure on budgets and ruins any pleasure derived from giving and receiving. No one, however, has to forget the meaning of a holiday simply because commerce is involved. After all, <i>commercial uses of holidays benefit the nation's economy and lift people's spirits.</i></p> <p data-bbox="340 731 1096 999"><u>Commerce at holiday time in the United States enriches the economy.</u> Prosperity in the United States is based on the ongoing circulation of money, which holidays encourage. When people spend money on gifts and holiday products, jobs are created. The jobs are in many sectors of the economy; manufacturing, distribution, advertising, and retailing. Jobs help people support their families. Profits help business and industry grow. Salaries and profits bring about tax revenues that support schools, police, hospitals, and other government services.</p> <p data-bbox="340 1019 1096 1417"><u>In addition to economic benefits, commercial activity enhances the spirit of holidays.</u> Most people feel more cheerful at holiday time. Everyone takes part in one big party. Advertising related to holidays, along with stores filled with holiday products, creates an atmosphere of festivity across the nation. Being able to say "Happy Thanksgiving" or "Merry Christmas" to strangers while shopping breaks down barriers and helps everyone feel part of one big family. The festivity on the streets, in malls, and in stores is infectious. Giving and getting gifts and greeting cards helps people stay in touch with each other and express their feelings. Children look forward all year to wearing a store-bought costume for Halloween, sitting on Santa's lap in a department store, and talking to the Easter Bunny at the local shopping mall.</p> <p data-bbox="340 1437 1096 1815"><u>The holiday activities that help businesses prosper also inspire many businesses to improve everyone's quality of life.</u> Many companies, for example, organize collections of clothing and preparation of hot meals for needy people at holiday time. Toy stores often give away toys for Christmas and Hanukah to children in hospitals and in caretaking home. Macy's department store annually delights people of all ages with its Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. The entire nation is invited to enjoy the parade in person or on television. In small towns and large cities, many businesses sponsor fireworks, mounted and displayed safely by professionals, to celebrate the Fourth of July. Good will and good business go together to everyone's benefit at holiday time.</p>	<p data-bbox="1124 652 1236 711">Thesis statement</p> <p data-bbox="1124 731 1222 791">Topic sentence</p> <p data-bbox="1124 840 1257 900">Support I (1st reason)</p> <p data-bbox="1124 1019 1222 1079">Topic sentence</p> <p data-bbox="1124 1119 1264 1178">Support II (2nd reason)</p> <p data-bbox="1124 1447 1222 1506">Topic sentence</p> <p data-bbox="1124 1546 1264 1606">Support III (3rd reason)</p>

Structure	Essay	Comments
Conclusion	The United States is a nation blessed with economic strength and resourceful people. While commercialism can detract from the true meaning of a holiday, it does not have to. People can discipline themselves to balance the spiritual with the commercial. Americans recognize that the advantages of a stimulated economy and a collective festive spirit are worth the effort of such self-discipline.	

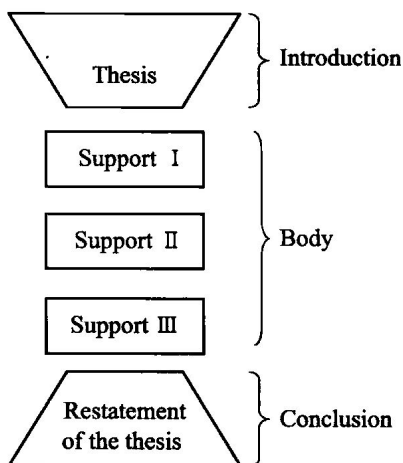
The essay is unified and well-structured:

The introductory paragraph gives background and concludes with the thesis statement, setting forth clearly the controlling idea of the essay.

The body paragraphs develop and support the thesis effectively, with sufficient reasons, facts and examples. Each of the body paragraphs develops a single point supporting the thesis, and that point is expressed in a focused topic sentence (located at the beginning of the paragraph). The topic sentence, in turn, is supported by sentences that develop the paragraph topic. The sentences in a body paragraph support the topic sentence in the same way that the body paragraphs support the essay's thesis statement, so that the result is a unified whole.

The concluding paragraph wraps up the discussion by restating the thesis and providing further comment.

The following diagram illustrates the basic structure of an essay.



IV. Workshop

Read the essay below and complete the discussion with the guided questions provided.

My Mother

It took me eighteen years to realize what an extraordinary influence my mother has been on

my life. She's the kind of person who has thoughtful discussions about which artist she would most want to have her portrait painted by, the kind of mother who always has time for her four children, and the kind of community leader who has a seat on the board of every major project to assist Washington's impoverished citizens. Growing up with such a strong role model, I developed many of her enthusiasms. I not only came to love the excitement of learning simply for the sake of knowing something new, but I also came to understand the idea of giving back to the community in exchange for a new sense of life, love, and spirit.

My mother's enthusiasm for learning is most apparent in travel. I was nine years old when my family visited Greece. Every night for three weeks before the trip, my older brother Peter and I sat with my mother on her bed reading Greek myths and taking notes on the Greek gods. Despite the fact that we were traveling with fourteen-month-old twins, we managed to be at each ruin when the site opened at sunrise. I vividly remember standing in an empty amphitheatre pretending to be an ancient tragedian, picking out my favorite sculpture in the Acropolis museum, and inserting our family into modified tales of the battle at Troy. Eight years and half a dozen passport stamps later I have come to value what I have learned on these journeys about global history, politics and culture, as well as my family and myself.

While I treasure the various worlds my mother has opened to me abroad, my life has been equally transformed by what she has shown me just two miles from my house. As a ten year old, I often accompanied my mother to a local soup kitchen and children's center. While she attended meetings, I helped with the Summer Program by chasing children around the building and performing magic tricks. Having finally perfected the "floating paintbrush" trick, I began work as a full time volunteer with the five and six year old children last June. It is here that I met Jane Doe, an exceptionally strong girl with a vigor that is contagious. At the end of the summer, I decided to continue my work as Jane's tutor. Although the position is often difficult, the personal rewards are beyond articulation. In the seven years since I first walked through the doors of the local soup kitchen, I have learned not only the idea of giving to others, but also of deriving from them a sense of spirit.

Everything that my mother has ever done has been overshadowed by the thought behind it. While the raw experiences I have had at home and abroad have been spectacular, I have learned to truly value them by watching my mother. She has enriched my life with her passion for learning, and changed it with her devotion to humanity. In her endless love of everything and everyone she is touched by, I have seen a hope and life that is truly exceptional. Next year, I will find a new home miles away. However, my mother will always be by my side.

Questions for Discussion and Study

Theme/Topic

1. What is the controlling idea of the essay?
2. What are the powerful influences that the writer's mother has exerted on him/her?