

# **WRITING WITH PURPOSE AND PASSION**

A Writer's Guide to  
Language and Literature

**JEFF STALCUP ♦ MIKE ROVASIO**

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## **A WRITER'S GUIDE TO LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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**PRENTICE HALL**  
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Stalcup, Jeff

Writing with purpose and passion : a writer's guide to language  
and literature / Jeff Stalcup, Mike Rovasio

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-13-437609-9

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English language—Grammar.  
3. College readers. 4. Report writing. I. Rovasio, Mike

II. Title

PE1408.S667 1998

808'.0427—dc21

97-32576

CIP

Acquisition Editor: Elizabeth Sugg

Editorial/production supervision, interior design,

and electronic page makeup: Mary Araneo

Editorial Assistant: Emily Jones

Marketing Manager: Danny Hoyt

Director of Production and Manufacturing: Bruce Johnson

Managing Editor: Mary Carnis

Manufacturing Manager: Ed O'Dougherty

Cover Designer: Bruce Kenselaar

Cover Director: Jayne Conte



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Simon & Schuster/A Viacom Company

Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

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reproduced, in any form or by any means,  
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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-437609-9

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, London

Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty Limited, Sydney

Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., Toronto

Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., Mexico

Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi

Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., Tokyo

Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., Singapore

Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., Rio de Janeiro

# PREFACE

## **Writing . . .**

Of all the actions of which humans are capable, writing is perhaps the most significant. Writing is both personal and social; it provides us with a means of communicating with ourselves and others. Writing defines who we are and what we want. It describes how we think, feel, and dream, and it helps others to understand us in every way possible. Writing is analytical and fantastical. It is whatever we want it to be.

## **With Purpose . . .**

Writers always write with a purpose, even if that purpose seems meaningless on the surface. This book attempts to instill in student writers the realization of *why* we write. Whether your writing is for a college course, a letter to a loved one, or simply a personal journal, there is always a reason why we write. This realization of purpose helps writers to focus the scope of the written words and to direct those words towards a particular goal or audience type. Such focus allows the writing to be better understood and appreciated by its readers.

## **And Passion . . .**

Student writers often find it difficult to acquire passion, emotion, or feeling when writing. However, this dedication to writing is *tied directly to* purpose: If writers comprehend the reason for writing, they may find it

easier to take an interest in the act of writing. So many students have expressed to us over the years how much better they felt about a piece of writing that dealt with a topic that they were “interested in.” Both purpose and passion remove some of the fear that is typically associated with producing a piece of written work, and this book promotes these ideas throughout each chapter.

*Writing with Purpose and Passion: A Writer's Guide to Language and Literature* was written in response to the dire need for writing texts and materials at Heald Institute of Technology back in 1994. The vocational/technical curriculum seemed to ignore the need for an integrated approach to writing: As teachers we were unable to obtain texts that taught our students to read or to develop even the most basic essay forms. We decided to take matters into our own hands, and the result is this text.

This text combines an overview of the five most commonly used modes of rhetoric (description, narration, persuasion, comparison, and causal analysis) with a similar overview of the most common elements of grammar, punctuation, style, and usage. Added to this are many samples of student writing which demonstrate the rhetorical modes and principles of style and usage. It is this blend which makes this text the most complete book for students to improve their writing skills.

The writers would like to thank the following people, without whom none of this would have been possible: Mary Cullinan, Jacob Fuchs, Eileen Barrett, and all the faculty at California State University, Hayward who helped make this book possible. Thanks also goes out to Brad Burnett, graphic artist and designer, and thanks to all the students who proudly submitted their work to us for this text. The authors would especially like to thank our families—very special people who have supported us through the entire writing process.

Jeff Stalcup  
Michael Rovasio

# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

vii

## CHAPTER ONE THE WRITING PROCESS

1

- Prewriting 1
  - Researching, 2 Brainstorming, 2 Clustering, 2*
  - Freewriting, 3 Listing, 4 Outlining, 5 Taking Notes, 5*
  - Journal Writing, 6 Asking Questions, 6 Discussion, 6*
- Drafting and Revising 7
  - Identifying Major Topics, 7 Thesis and Conclusion, 8*
  - The Three Elements of a Good Thesis Statement, 9*
- Rewriting the Essay (Revision) 10
- Review—Getting Started 11
- Writing Assignments 12

## CHAPTER TWO THE PARTS OF SPEECH

13

- Introduction 13
- The Parts of Speech 14
  - Nouns, 14 Pronouns, 15 Verbs, 17 Adjectives, 21*
- Practice 21
  - Adverbs, 22 Prepositions, 22 Conjunctions, 23*
  - Interjections 24*
- Practice 25
- Writing Assignment 26
- Review—Proofreading 27

iii



**CHAPTER THREE  
DESCRIPTIVE WRITING****29**

- Description 29
  - Appealing to the Senses, 29*
- Review—Description 34
- Vocabulary—Description 35
- Activities 36
- Writing Assignments 37
- Reading Review—Description 38
  - "A Walk in the Park," 39* *"Beautiful Beach," 40*
  - "The Golden Road," 42* *"Puerto Penasco," 47*

**CHAPTER FOUR  
SENTENCE STRUCTURE****51**

- Constructing a Sentence 51
  - Parts of a Sentence, 52* *Common Sentence Structuring Errors, 53*
- Practice 54
- Practice 55
- Practice 56
- Writing Assignments 58
- Review/Proofreading 59

**CHAPTER FIVE  
NARRATIVE WRITING****61**

- Narration 61
  - Fiction or Nonfiction? 61* *Directly Stated Thesis vs. Implied Thesis, 62* *Use Chronological Order, 63* *Choose a Point of View, 65* *Develop Your Characters, 65*
- Review—Narration 66
- Vocabulary—Narration 67
- Activities 68
- Writing Assignments 69
- Reading Review—Narrative Writing 70
  - "He Laughed First," 71* *"Over the Rainbow," 73* *"The Fist of Hell," 77*

**CHAPTER SIX  
COMMAS AND CONJUNCTIONS****83**

- Introduction 83
- Coordination 83
- Practice 85
- Subordination 86
- Practice 88
- Coordination/Subordination Exercise 89
- Review/Proofreading—Coordination and Subordination 91
- Quiz—Coordination and Subordination 92

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

93

- 
- Comparing and Contrasting 93
    - Organization, 94*
  - Review—Comparison/Contrast Writing 96
  - Vocabulary—Comparison/Contrast 97
  - Activities 98
  - Writing Assignments 99
  - Reading Review—Comparison/Contrast 100
    - “Computer Literate or Illiterate,” 101*
    - “A Dream versus a Nightmare,” 102*

**CHAPTER EIGHT**  
**PARAGRAPHS AND TOPIC SENTENCES**

109

- 
- Paragraphs 109
  - Topic Sentences 109
  - Concluding Your Paragraphs 110
  - Transitions between Paragraphs 111
  - Arranging Paragraphs in an Essay 112
  - Practice #1 113
  - Practice #2 114
  - Review—Paragraphs and Topic Sentences 115
  - Writing Assignments 116

**CHAPTER NINE**  
**CAUSE AND EFFECT WRITING**

117

- 
- What Is Cause and Effect? 117
  - Writing the Cause and Effect Essay 118
  - Reading Review—Cause and Effect 121
  - Vocabulary—Cause and Effect 122
  - Activities 123
  - Writing Assignments 124
  - Reading Review—Cause and Effect Writing 125
    - “Media’s Violence,” 126*
    - “A Perfect World,” 127*
    - “Pesticide Pollution,” 129*

**CHAPTER TEN**  
**OTHER FORMS OF PUNCTUATION**

133

- 
- Learning the Signs 133
    - Conjunctive Adverbs and the Semicolon, 133*
  - Practice 135
  - Writing Assignments 137
    - The Dash, 139*
    - The Parenthesis, 140*
    - Quotation Marks, 140*
  - Practice 142
  - Practice 145



**CHAPTER ELEVEN  
PERSUASIVE WRITING****147**

- The Benefits of Persuasion 147
- Getting Started 148
- Using Facts, Logic, and Reason 148
  - Facts, 148 Logic and Reason, 149*
- Organizing Your Ideas 150
- Anticipating Counter Arguments 150
- Four Things to Remember about Persuasive Writing 150
- Review—Persuasion 151
- Vocabulary—Persuasion 152
- Activities 153
- Writing Assignments 154
  - “Same Old Problem,” 155 “Cheaters Cheat Themselves,” 156*
  - “Eliminate the Designated Hitter,” 160 “Baseball Is Better with Designated Hitter,” 164*

**CHAPTER TWELVE  
READING AND PROOFREADING****169**

- Active Reading 169
  - Notetaking, 169*
- Reading Literature 171
  - Plot, 171 Characterization, 172 Point of View, 172*
  - Setting, 173 Tone, 173*
- Proofreading 174
  - Proofreading Checklist, 174*
- Practice 176
- Practice 176
- Practice 178
- Practice 179
- Practice 180
- Proofreading Checklist 183
- Review—Proofreading 184

**APPENDIX  
STYLE, USAGE, AND MORE****185**

- Documentation and Format 185
  - Signal Phrases, 185 Parenthetical Citations, 186*
- List of Works Cited 186
  - Basic Book Format, 186 Basic Periodical Format, 187*
  - Essay Format, 187*
- Some Simple Rules for Usage 188
  - Apostrophes, 188 Capitalization, 190 Noun Plurals, 190*
  - General Punctuation, 192 Subject / Verb Agreement, 193*

**INDEX****195**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE WRITING PROCESS

### PREWRITING

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Many writers would agree that starting an essay is perhaps the most difficult aspect of writing. You sit there, staring at a blank page or computer screen, and you cannot image where you will begin. At times the blank page may even seem to laugh at you, mocking you for your inability to mar its surface while the blank computer screen simply gives you a headache.

When students receive a writing assignment, they often feel overwhelmed. How long does it have to be, when is it due, and how do I start are often-asked questions. There is the feeling that a “perfect” paper must be handed in on the due date, giving the author only one chance at producing a piece of excellent writing. Students’ perceptions that the writing process consists solely of sitting down and cranking out a draft for the date the paper is due causes debilitating stress for most students and overlooks the real process behind producing any piece of good writing.

Contrary to the popular belief, a piece of good writing does not suddenly come into existence. As with any skill, writing takes practice and uses a number of techniques specific to the process of writing. An extremely important technique to learn is how to generate ideas once you’ve been given a topic. This technique is known as prewriting.

Here are various prewriting techniques that you can use to help you generate ideas for writing. You may notice that many aspects of each technique overlap. Some methods are more involved than others. Choose whichever prewriting technique you feel the most comfortable with and the technique which best suits the needs of the given assignment.

Remember to be patient with yourself. Shakespeare was not a success overnight.

### **Researching**

Researching a subject will help you understand the ideas surrounding the subject you've been asked to write about, which in turn will help you generate ideas in relation to what other authors have said on the subject. As with spoken conversation, it is much easier to come up with something meaningful to say when you know the subject of conversation. Research is an excellent way of learning the issues related to your writing assignment.

Don't be afraid to use your school's library or learning resource center. Most likely you will find plenty of information on the topic you must write about. Use the card catalog (or the electronic version of it) to find books which you can browse through. Use the periodicals and microfilm for articles related to your topic. If you have questions on how to find something, make the librarians earn their pay by asking them for help.

Once you've gathered material on the topic, begin skimming through it. Jot down any information that sparks your interest: phrases, words, titles, sentences. Soon you will see a pattern begin to develop and your ideas on the topic will begin to flow. Remember, if in the course of writing your assignment you decide to use a quotation from the sources you've gathered, be sure to give that source credit.

### **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming can be done on your own or with other people. Many writers find brainstorming with their peers a useful prewriting technique. There is no right or wrong way to brainstorm, so long as you are able to create some material, even if it is only one or two minuscule ideas. The object here is quantity. Write down in the shortest form possible, even if it is only one word, any idea, however silly, that comes to mind. You can categorize your ideas or leave them strewn across the page as long as you put down as many ideas as possible.

Songwriters know that the more material you have, the greater the chances for a hit song. Working with friends can help you generate lots of ideas though you can just as easily brainstorm by yourself. Try to let go of stress and anxiety as you begin to write down your ideas. Reject nothing. Then after you exhaust all possible ideas, go back and pick out the ones that seem the best.

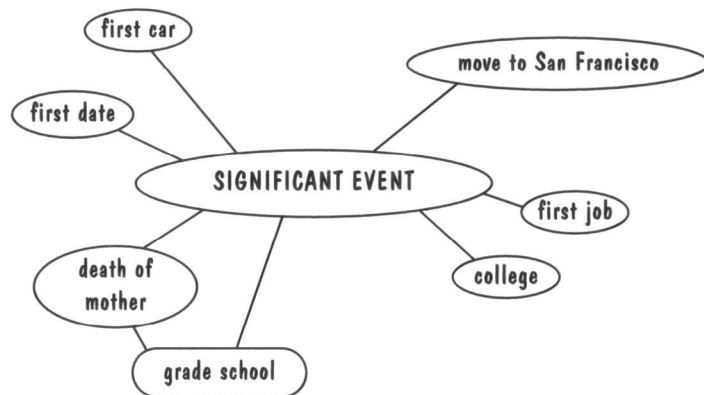
Some students run into a stumbling block during the brainstorming process because they mistake silly, crazy, weird, bad ideas for no ideas. Ideas that at first seem "stupid" can be reshaped and improved upon. In fact, that is what the writing process is all about. Even Virginia Woolf started with some bad ideas. But remember, the more ideas you have to choose from at the start, the easier it will be to choose worthwhile ideas to develop.

### **Clustering**

People generally tend to develop ideas through association, and clustering is one way to group ideas of a similar nature so that recognizable

patterns may emerge. In fact, you may be able to develop an entire essay through a grouping, or clustering, of your ideas. Consider this example:

Let's say you've been asked to write a short narrative of a significant event in your life, but you're not sure which event to write about. First, write down the "significant event" in the center of your paper and circle it. Now list every possible event you can think of that might be considered significant, clustering them around your central topic. Are any of the events related? If so, connect them with a line, and then build from that. Soon you may see patterns begin to develop, patterns which may eventually lead you to a very focused topic for your essay. Figure 1-1 shows a student's clustering for this assignment.



**Figure 1-1** Clustering of a significant event.

Think of clustering as a detective unearthing clues for a case. In many instances, one clue will lead to another and another, until the final mystery—in this case, what to write about—is solved. You may be surprised by what you discover about yourself!

### Freewriting

Sit down for a few minutes and just write freely. This is the essence of freewriting—literally, to write freely and without fear of error, organization, or clarity. Many teachers of writing agree that the best way to get started writing is simply to start writing, and this is exactly what freewriting enables a person to do. Freewriting can also generate ideas in a fashion similar to those of clustering.

Freewriting should be done for a period of no longer than 10 to 15 minutes, but you must write **constantly**. It is this constant contact between pen and paper that is the essence of freewriting, for not only are you thinking but also writing, and this process is often the most difficult obstacle in getting started.

Begin your writing by contemplating a major topic or idea. If, for

example, you were writing about that same “significant event” from above, you might freewrite about whatever events that came into your head. Write down exactly what you are thinking; change topics as your mind changes topics; get down as much information as you can in 10 to 15 minutes.

Does this sound like regular writing to you? In a way it is, but the difference is that you never go back and edit or revise. The best part about freewriting is that you don’t ever stop and contemplate what you’ve already written; you don’t erase or change anything: you’re always going forward. even if you can’t think of what to write next, you must continue to write, regardless of the drivel that comes from your pen. Always keep writing! The following example, freewriting about a “significant event,” gives a graphic demonstration of freewriting.

significant event, huh? well i can think of a lot of significant events but I don't really know which to begin with. I suppose I could tell about the time I got my first job bussing tables at that cruddy old greasy spoon restaurant back in San Diego, and all the money I thought i was making at the time. Funny how i remember my crazy old boss more than anything, and how she seemed to take good care of me maybe she had a crush on me . . . can't think of anything to write write now write now write now write now, Robin was her name, and I think she did have a crush on me. I sued her for a reference to get an even better job waiting this time. That was a significant event.

Notice two things here: (1) the writer is totally unconcerned with errors in punctuation, spelling, etc. And why should he be? This is simply an exercise to generate ideas, so don’t sweat it. The only one who will be reading it is you. Later, after you’ve milked it for all it’s worth, you can throw it away; (2) the writer has lapsed from the topic occasionally, yet he has still continued to write. Proponents of freewriting insist that this is of paramount importance, for freewriting is as much a muscle-memory exercise as mental.

### Listing

When ideas don’t readily come to you, try making a list of any possible ideas related to the subject. It doesn’t matter how good or bad the ideas are. Just get a list of some ideas going. Shoot for a list of at least ten items. You can always add or delete as you go.

Slowly read over your list until patterns begin to emerge. Don’t be afraid if your list of ideas leads to other ideas you hadn’t thought of in the beginning. Listing is a good tool to lead you from one idea to the next and to the next and so on. In fact, the ideas you finally decide to expand in your essay may not be the ones in your original list. At the same time, you may find relationships between your ideas that you hadn’t known existed when you started listing.

## Outlining

Making an outline is an excellent way to start the writing process because it helps to **organize** your ideas produced in the brainstorming portion. One of the most important aspects of creating a “good essay” is to organize your thoughts so that they may be presented clearly; nothing is more confusing for a reader than a jumbled bunch of information that seems to have no form or structure. A good outline can help a writer get a logical order figured out even before the first word is written. However, you should expect the shape of the outline to change as you shape your ideas.

To start your outline, you must first determine the length of your work. If your assignment asks for only a few pages (3–5) then two or three major topics may be sufficient; however, a longer assignment will certainly require more major topics and more corresponding subtopics. An outline, then, is simply a logical organization of major topics and subtopics.

One of the best ways to determine your major topics is to closely examine the assignment itself. Usually, the answer can be found in the wording of the question; at the very least you should be able to develop a **thesis statement** from it, and this in turn may lead to the development of the major topics. Consider the following sample assignment question. What might be a logical outline of the *major topics* for this assignment?

Write a short personal narrative that recounts a “significant event” in your life. Describe the event as vividly as you can, and then try to determine how this event has affected you as the person you are today.

Look again at this example. The answer is in the question(s). Underline the parts of the assignment that give you writing directions or instructions. These directions will most often become your major topics, and your outline might look something like this:

- I. Introduction
  - A. Thesis
- II. Description of the event
- III. How the event has affected me
- IV. Conclusion

## Taking Notes

Most instructors will help the class generate ideas for the writing assignment he or she has assigned. Take detailed notes during this time. Also take notes on the class discussions that evolve around the topic. When it

is time to begin thinking about your topic, you can go back to your notes for ideas.

You'll often find your writing assignment is based on the ideas you've been reading about in your class. Many times the assigned essays are to serve as models for your own essays. Therefore, when class discussions center around the themes and ideas from your readings, take notes. Again, you can go back and review your notes, looking for ideas that spark your interest, ideas you can further develop in an essay.

### Journal Writing

Keeping a record of your experiences and ideas can provide you with a myriad of topics for further expansion. Many writers go back to their journal entries when they need help with an assignment.

Journal writing also allows you to work on your writing style. If no one critiques your journal, you are completely free to experiment with various writing techniques that you can later use in an essay.

Your journal is also an excellent place to help you sort through your thoughts. Most people's natural thought process is confused, jumbled, and unclear. Journal writing allows you to reflect on your thought process as you write, without anyone looking over your shoulder.

### Asking Questions

Imagine yourself a reporter for a newspaper or magazine. Begin asking questions of the topic you are supposed to write about. Who is this paper for—who will be my audience? Who or what is this essay about? What is my opinion on the topic? What is the topic? Where do the events take place? Why did something happen? When did it happen? How did it happen?

Asking the types of questions a reporter would ask is a useful way to analyze your assigned topic, drawing out the necessary information surrounding it. You may be surprised at how many angles from which you can approach a topic.

### Discussion

This method of brainstorming may often be overlooked, but it has always worked well for our students. Discussion may enable those who are auditory learners to **hear** ideas rather than see them on paper. We recommend, however, that even if you choose to discuss ideas, you may want to have pen and paper handy so that you may note any ideas you encounter, unless you have an incredibly acute memory.

Discussion can be especially rewarding when used in conjunction with either clustering or freewriting, and we strongly recommend any combination of the three. Again, there is no right or wrong way to do this, but if the goal is to generate ideas, then we must get these ideas any way we can. Play around with our suggestions, or come up with some of your own.



## DRAFTING AND REVISING

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Once you have generated sufficient ideas, you are ready for the next step in the writing process: drafting and revising. Most instructors will allow you to write more than one draft of your essay so that you can hone your ideas and writing style. Even if your instructor does not give you credit or time for writing more than one draft, plan ahead. Leave yourself enough time to revise and proofread your essay.

We have found that three drafts of an essay help students produce a piece of writing that they and their instructors are satisfied with. The first draft allows the writer to develop ideas from the prewriting. The second draft allows the writer to work on better organizing and further expanding her or his ideas. For the third draft, basic grammatical errors and other typical mistakes can be corrected. Do not, however, feel limited to three drafts. Many writers revise their essays five, ten, twenty times or more.

Any experienced writer will testify that writing is really revising. Revising is not just correcting errors the instructor has pointed out. Rather, revision means you see what you have written in a different way. It may mean you need to add new examples, cut out wordiness, or rearrange the order of your ideas, among other things. At first, revising may seem a tedious task to you, but once you become used to “revisioning” your ideas, revising can be fun. The more you revise, the clearer your ideas become and the clearer your writing becomes. The more you revise, the better you will become at it, and the more satisfied you will become with your writing and the writing process.

You may now be asking yourself, “What about the actual writing of the draft?” “How do I start my first draft, and what do I need to put in it?” As with freewriting, there is no right or wrong way to go about writing an essay, but again, we have some suggestions for making the sailing a little smoother.

### Identifying Major Topics

One of the most important aspects of creating a “good essay” is to organize your thoughts so that they may be presented clearly; nothing is more confusing for a reader than a jumbled bunch of information that seems to have no form or structure. The next step in the writing process, then, is to give your prewriting ideas a logical organization.

After you have generated ideas through prewriting, there are many ways you could go about organizing them. First, you must be as familiar as possible with the ideas you have generated. Reread what you have written in your prewriting. As you read your ideas over and over, certain ideas will present themselves as important. Once you’ve identified the important ideas, you will want to organize them in what seems to you the most logical manner.

We have discovered a few methods that help us rearrange our ideas after prewriting.

1. List each idea on three by five cards or slips of paper that can be easily shuffled around. The point here is to arrange your cards or slips of paper so that one idea leads into the next, giving both ideas stronger support.
2. Cut your ideas out of the paper you've written them on and rearrange the pieces of paper.
3. Use the cut and paste feature in your word processing program.

Don't be afraid to try as many variations as possible. Eventually you will find a pattern that works the best. The major points will become obvious as well as supporting details and areas that need expansion. In essence, the above suggestions are ways of listing or outlining your ideas. If you've made a list of some kind or used the outlining method of prewriting, formalizing your list or outline is an excellent way to smoothly bridge the gap between prewriting and the first formal draft of your essay.

### Thesis and Conclusion

The **thesis statement** is the controlling mechanism of your essay, and a strong thesis is essential for a well-organized piece of writing. The thesis states the writer's intentions, and it should also anticipate a focus or direction of the essay. Depending on the length of your assignment, the thesis may be a sentence or two, or it may be a number of paragraphs. Regardless of length, however, the thesis statement should usually be placed at the end of the **introduction**.

After you have developed a decent outline, your thesis will be easy to formulate because the thesis need only briefly explain what a reader may find in the pages that follow. A good thesis tells the reader *exactly* what is to come, in as specific a manner as possible. Keeping with the above topic/outline, consider the two following examples. One is more specific while the other is vague. See if you can determine which is more effective.

In this essay I will relate to you a significant event from my life, and I will try to explain how it has affected me as a person.

My first job was absolutely incredible, and it was certainly a very significant event in my life. Not only did it teach me responsibility at an early age, but it also taught me not to trust people, no matter what the circumstances, a lesson that I use even today in my everyday life.

Which seems to be more effective? Which seems to better explain not only the writer's intention, but also *specific* information about what the essay is about? It is not difficult to see why the second example is