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The Practical Writer

NINTH EDITION



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When we were working hard on the first edition of this book, back in . . . let's just say it was some time ago, we felt we had a fresh way to approach the traditional way of teaching writing. That is, we would use a friendly, spoken style of writing and lots of straightforward examples—the kind students might actually write. And we would teach a way for students to bring structure to their writing that would work not just in school but beyond.

Different approaches to writing have come and gone, haven't they? And today, with the wonderful technology everywhere, a spoken style of writing and a clear structure are much in demand. Think about the Web. Most usability experts say good writing for the Web should be skimmable—and what's more skimmable than having the main point up front for a paper? And then the main point at the beginning of each paragraph?

And in school, teachers are suffering from information overload as much as anyone. Of course most of them appreciate a clear, straightforward approach to writing. So we believe *The Practical Writer* is right on target for today's students!

HOW DOES THE PRACTICAL WRITER WORK?

We begin by presenting the fundamentals (organization, support, unity, coherence) one at a time—in a tightly structured one-paragraph essay. The paragraph is a unit large enough for students to demonstrate their understanding of the fundamentals and small enough for them to work toward mastery. At this point, we don't overwhelm them while they're learning the fundamentals by making them struggle to find support; instead we ask them to write about personal experiences and the people and things they know well. We encourage them to be colorful, interesting, and—above all—specific.

We then move through several longer stages of writing to a 3,000- to 4,000-word research paper. By the time students complete the research block, they can write a serious paper—the kind they will have to write in other college courses and beyond—with a less mechanical structure than we required earlier. We still offer a model, of course, but it becomes a guide rather than a goal.

Parts 6 and 7—punctuation and expression—are not part of the step-by-step approach. Students can study these chapters any time, whenever they're ready for them. They aren't typical handbook material, though, because we've been careful to select only what first-year students need to learn, leaving out the skills they probably know and those they're not yet ready to apply.

Throughout *The Practical Writer*, we try to avoid the “scholarly” style of writing and speak personally to students, as though we're talking to them in class. We have also included sidebars, exercises, and examples written with today's college student in mind.



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WHAT HAVE WE CHANGED FOR THIS EDITION?

Our reviewers told us that most things about the previous edition are working. So for this edition, we've concentrated on making relatively straightforward changes to be sure our book stays up-to-date.

Here are the changes we've made:

- Revised many of the exercises to make them more effective and relevant.
- Updated Part 5, "The Research Paper," to retain compatibility with the MLA format for documentation.
- Added references throughout to our website.

Another item for students' use is InfoTrac[®] College Edition, available for free with a bundled pin code. Students may access InfoTrac College Edition from their desktop (with an Internet connection), from the campus library, or through the library's website. This is an online professional information service that lets students explore and use full-length articles from nearly 6,000 periodicals. When students log on, they will immediately see how easy it is to search the database. They can examine and print out the articles.

To obtain a copy of the detailed Instructor's Manual, contact your local Wadsworth sales representative.

Edward P. Bailey
Wilmington, NC

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The One-Paragraph Essay (Stage I)

The first part of this book shows you how to write a good one-paragraph essay. Although you seldom see one-paragraph essays in publications, you'll find them remarkably handy for improving your writing for several reasons:

- They are short—you can spend your study time writing a really good one.
- At the same time, they're long enough for you to practice some fundamentals of writing.
- What you learn about one-paragraph essays transfers nicely to larger themes and even research papers.

In Part 1, you'll learn about the simplest one-paragraph essay, which we call Stage I. Later, in Part 2, you'll study the organization for a slightly more sophisticated one-paragraph essay, which we call Stage II.

Part 1 presents a tightly structured model for a paragraph. You may wonder if all good writers follow such a structure for persuasive writing. No, of course not. This structure is not the *only* good way to write a paragraph, but it is *one* good way. And this way has a very real advantage: it automatically gives your paper organization so you can concentrate on learning the other fundamentals that experienced writers already know. In addition, by working constantly with this model paragraph, you will learn organization, too, the easy way.

Support for the paragraph's main idea is also easy. Right now we don't care if you know how to find facts in the library. We're much more concerned that you can recognize and use good support once you find it. So we make finding it simple. You can use either your experiences or your imagination for support. As a result, you can have fun with your one-paragraph essays. They can be intriguing and perhaps humorous.

Writing doesn't have to be dull!

Overview of the One-Paragraph Essay (Stage I)

The one-paragraph essay is an essay in miniature. It's a little piece of writing, but it contains many of the fundamentals of much larger pieces of writing. For example:

- The one-paragraph essay has a clear, unmistakable structure. If that's good for something as small as a one-paragraph essay, think of how good that is for someone reading a 20-page paper! Or a book!
- The one-paragraph essay has good support. That is, the middle sentences help persuade the reader. Think of how important good support is for longer pieces of writing.
- The parts of the one-paragraph essay all have to go together well. We call that “unity.” Again, that's also important for everything from a paragraph to a book.
- And readers should know clearly at all times where they are in your paragraph. For example, are they still reading the first part of your support or have they moved to the second part? You should use signals to let them know. Those signals (and other devices we'll show you) help produce “coherence.” That, too, is extremely important not just in a paragraph but especially in larger pieces of writing.

So think of the one-paragraph essay as an efficient way to learn those fundamentals. By working in miniature, you can concentrate on writing something that's really good—rather than just really long. And once you master the one-paragraph essay, you'll understand how to tackle longer pieces of writing.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

www.thomsonedu.com/english/bailey

We have a website you'll definitely want to visit. It covers each chapter in the book. At the website, you'll find these topics for each chapter:

- a brief summary of each chapter
- teaching points for the chapter's key ideas
- a short, self-graded quiz that quickly tests your knowledge of the chapter

The site is illustrative and interactive. It's also efficient: expect to spend about 10–15 minutes there for each chapter.

The site doesn't, of course, replace the chapters in the book—the book's chapters are much more complete, include more examples, and cover other important points. So think of the website as an interactive executive summary: it complements the chapters nicely by focusing your attention on a few of the most important ideas.

By reading the chapters *and* visiting the website, you should easily learn the material in the chapters.

So what does the one-paragraph essay look like? Well, it's based on common advice teachers have been giving their students for years. You've heard this advice before:

- Tell your readers what you're going to tell them.
- Tell it to them.
- Then tell them what you just told them.

The one-paragraph essay simply does those three things:

- The first sentence states the idea you want your readers to accept (your main point). We call that a *topic sentence*.
- All middle sentences present specific support for that idea.
- The last sentence rewords the topic sentence—to remind your readers of the point you've just made.

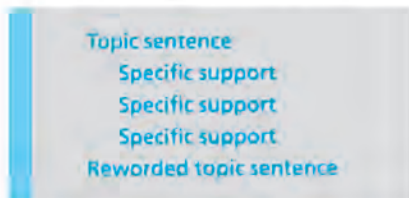
Let's look at these three points another way—as a model.

THE MODEL FOR THE ONE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY (STAGE I)



Learn more about this key topic on our website: www.thomsonedu.com/english/bailey

The Stage I paragraph model looks like this:



Now let's look at a "real" paragraph—one that follows the model we've just shown you:

If you visit Yellowstone National Park, you'll almost certainly see some big wild animals. For example, Yellowstone is known for its bears—including

grizzly bears. Though they don't hang out alongside the road as they did 40 years ago, they're common to spot in the valleys and by the lake. During a recent trip, I saw one or two grizzlies each of the four days I was there. Another common wild animal in Yellowstone is the bison. Bison—or, by a more informal name, buffaloes—like to graze in the big meadows that often adjoin the roads and villages. I saw literally dozens of bison each day. They're impressively big, too: adult males weigh over 3,000 pounds. Finally, you can usually see elk at Yellowstone. The ranger talking to our group said there are more than 20,000 in the park. So if you visit Yellowstone and keep your eyes open, you'll likely see some of these big wild animals, too.

Look carefully at the first sentence. Notice that it states the main point of the paragraph—the idea that the rest of the paragraph supports. There are three points in the middle. Now look at the last sentence. Notice that it merely rewords the first sentence. Easy, isn't it? Here's an outline of that Stage I paragraph:

Topic sentence You'll see big wild animals in Yellowstone.
Specific support grizzly bears
Specific support bison
Specific support elk
Reworded topic sentence You'll see big wild animals there

The structure of the paragraph is absolutely clear, unmistakable, obvious. Some forms of writing (fiction, personal essays) do not necessarily benefit from an obvious organization. But in writing that takes care of the day-to-day business of the world, an obvious organization usually proves helpful to readers. As writers, then, we should take into account what works best for our readers. Getting right to the point with a topic sentence and then providing the support is a good way to keep our readers on track.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Here's another sample one-paragraph essay. It, too, follows the model closely:

Even though I have never really lived there, going to my grandmother's farm always seems like coming home. The feeling begins as soon as I cross the threshold of that quaint little house and tumble into the arms of waiting aunts and cousins. The sense of welcome overwhelms me. Then there are the cozy rooms—the ceilings don't seem higher than six feet—with their crackling fireplaces that make me want to snuggle down into the feather-stuffed chairs. But the memory that always lasts the longest is the smell of Grandma's biscuits and pastries cooking in her coke-fed stove. Yes, only in Grandma's house do I feel the warmth and welcome that always seem like coming home.

Notice that the middle sentences all concern the pleasant connotation of “home” in its best sense: feeling welcome, cozy, cared for. Each of those ideas supports the topic sentence. Let’s look at an outline of that paragraph:

Topic sentence Going to my grandmother’s farm seems like coming home.
Specific support greeting by relatives
Specific support coziness of house
Specific support smell of home-cooked food
Reworded topic sentence Visiting Grandma’s seems like coming home.

Both sample paragraphs have exactly three items of specific support. You may wonder if that’s what you should always do. No. Although three seems to work well in both of these paragraphs, sometimes five or six items are necessary to be persuasive; other times, one long example will do.

A FINAL EXAMPLE

One-paragraph essays can address topics other than personal experiences. For example, consider this one:

Climbing Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is extremely dangerous. One indication of its danger is that nobody succeeded in climbing it until Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit in 1953—not all that long ago. In his best-selling book on Everest, *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer points out the danger with a chilling statistic: between 1921 and 1996, 144 people died in the attempt (page 274). Krakauer, who made it to the top, adds, “Truth be told, climbing Everest has always been an extraordinarily dangerous undertaking and doubtless always will be, whether the people involved are Himalayan neophytes being guided up the peak or world-class mountaineers climbing with their peers” (page 274). In the case of Everest, height and danger certainly go together.

Notice that this one-paragraph essay—in the third-person style—has interesting factual content from an outside source as its support. Chapter 9 shows you a simple system for documenting outside sources. Later in the book you’ll learn full-fledged techniques of documentation.

Although the sample paragraphs in the first two or three chapters of this book are good, they are intentionally fairly simple so you can easily see their basic organization. But if you don’t fully understand the one-paragraph essay yet, don’t worry. The next few chapters explain further.

Also, you can find a checklist for the one-paragraph essay immediately following Chapter 8. You may wish to turn to it now. It gives you a good sense of what the first eight chapters cover.

Practical Writing

So far we have used the one-paragraph essay only as a teaching tool. But as simple as it is, it has significant value in school—and beyond.

Practical Writing in School

In school, you can easily use the pattern of the one-paragraph essay for some of your writing. Simple answers to essay questions on tests can follow this pattern. So can any one-paragraph writing—whether you're taking a course in English, history, mathematics, physics, computer sciences, or anything else. Most readers—and we can assure you this includes teachers, too—like to see the main idea up front followed by good, detailed support.

In English, for example, you might have a brief essay question like this: “What is the main feature of e. e. cummings’ poetry that appeals to you?” Your answer could be this one-paragraph essay:

I like the individual freedom that comes through in e. e. cummings’ poetry. You can see that freedom right away in the lack of capitalization and normal spacing in his writing. You can also see it in the content: his poems often deal with the carefreeness of spring and the value of the individual. Those are just two of the ways I see the emphasis on freedom I like so much in e. e. cummings’ poems.

That could serve as a brief answer, if that’s what your teacher expected on a test. It could be more convincing, of course, as a longer essay with detailed examples for each point.

The next chapter shows you how to use examples. And later in the book, we’ll show you how to expand the one-paragraph essay into a full-length essay. You should find that especially useful in your courses beyond this one.

Practical Writing at Work

This structured approach also will be useful after you graduate. Since we wrote the first edition of this book, we’ve done a great deal of work with business and government writers—lawyers, accountants, auditors, doctors, bankers, military officers, government analysts, computer experts, political scientists, scientific researchers, and others of similar skill. Our main task has been to help these people—usually bright, educated, and successful professionals—express their ideas clearly.

One consistent message we tell them is this: Readers in the busy world of work strongly prefer to have the main point up front for almost everything they read. In fact, if they don’t find it there—right away—they often skip to the back and start hunting for it.

Think of yourself as a reader. If you’re reading a report from your doctor, wouldn’t you prefer the diagnosis up front instead of three pages later, after all the lab results and all the possible illnesses you might have, but don’t?

Suppose you work in an office and have a five-page report to read and comment on for your boss. Where do you, the reader, want the main point, at the end or at the beginning? Almost all of us prefer the beginning.

Let's look at an example of poor business writing—a memo that delays the main point (a recommendation) until the end. Notice how confusing it is to struggle through all the details without a main point to guide you.

Memo with the Recommendation Last

Date: July 7
From: Sophia Hiller
To: Kenzie Melton

The copying machine was broken for several days this month. During that time, nobody was able to do any photocopying (which, as you know, is crucial to our work). Also, it had routine maintenance during two other days this month. Then, too, nobody could use the machine. Finally, several people have large copying projects that keep others from using the machine. Therefore, I recommend we buy a second copying machine.

It's easy to get lost in the facts of that paragraph, isn't it? If you are the boss—the one deciding whether to spend the money—you'd certainly have to read that memo *twice*: The first time you'd be hunting for the recommendation, which doesn't come until the last sentence. The second time, with the recommendation in mind, you'd read to see if the facts served as effective justification.

Writers can't expect their readers to reread. And few bosses like rereading, either. Wouldn't the memo be better with the recommendation up front, like this?

Memo with the Recommendation First

Date: July 7
From: Sophia Hiller
To: Kenzie Melton

I recommend we buy a second copying machine. First, the copying machine was broken for several days this month. During that time, nobody was able to do any photocopying (which, as you know, is crucial to our work). Also, it had routine maintenance during two other days this month. Then, too, nobody could use the machine. Finally, several people have large copying projects that keep others from using the machine. For these three reasons, I strongly recommend we buy a second copying machine.

As you can see, the memo now takes the shape of the model we gave you at the beginning of this chapter.

Practical Writing

Throughout the book, we'll point to the connections between our models and good writing outside your writing course. The connections are strong and important—for your other college courses and for the world of work.



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The Practical Writer provides you with a manageable step-by-step approach to writing, from the one-paragraph essay to the five-paragraph essay, and beyond it into the research-driven paper. Everything you need to master college-level writing is right here!

- A proven model for writing takes you through a two-stage process of crafting the one-paragraph essay and concludes with techniques on how to write a sound five-paragraph essay.
- Comprehensive guidelines for writing a successful 3,000- to 4,000-word research paper are provided. Part 5, "The Research Paper," reflects the latest MLA recommendations for format and documentation and includes strategies for finding and using online sources and citing electronic sources.
- A mini-handbook on punctuation and expression offers sets of exercises on everything from comma splices to subject-verb agreement.
- Chapter 6, "Tips on the Writing Process," features a new section on peer review.
- Correlations to the updated **Book Companion Website** with *Test Your Knowledge* sections are consistently integrated throughout the text. New icons prompt you to use the website as a tool to hone your skills as well as to further your study and research.

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