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Lesson One

Types of Writing

Paragraphs and compositions are generally classified as one of the following:

1. *Descriptive* writing describes a topic.

Descriptive writing appeals to the senses, telling how the subject matter looks, feels, sounds, smells, tastes, or acts. Subjects may be impressions, moods, people, animals, places, scenes, or objects. There is usually some kind of "spatial movement" in descriptive writing, that is, the depiction begins at some physical reference point and moves elsewhere in developing the description: from a prominent feature to less prominent features, from head to foot, from left to right, from light to shadow, etc. Words chosen for descriptions will be words that relate to moods or one of the senses: *joyous, clanging, harsh, smooth, soft, sour*, etc. These words are adjectives, but vivid and concrete nouns, verbs, and adverbs are also effective—often better—in describing a subject.

2. *Expository* writing explains a topic.

Most of what you read on a daily basis—newspaper, magazine, or newsletters articles; book or movie reviews, etc.—is expository writing. Follow a logical order in your explanations. For example, begin with what your reader is likely to already know about a subject and move to lesser known facts or information. Or follow a time sequence; use inductive reasoning (moving from particular cases to general principles or conclusions); use deductive reasoning (moving from general principles to specific examples); use analogy or contrast; move from simple to complex ideas. Expository writing may also include definitions, provide instructions or directions, offer criticisms, or express the writer's attitudes about a subject.

3. *Argumentative* writing takes a position on a topic and defends that position.

Argumentative writing begins with a "proposition," a claim that something is true and right (and by implication, the opposite is false and undesirable). In formal progression, the writer goes on to analyze the proposition and surrounding facts, develop an argument which is intended to convince the reader of the truth of the writer's position or persuade the reader to take some action in favor of the writer's point of view. *Evidence* is an essential ingredient, much as it is in a courtroom. Think of the courtroom analogy throughout your argumentative composition: you are trying to get a favorable verdict from the judge and jury—your readers. Prove your case.

4. *Narrative* writing tells a story or illustrates a topic through the tool of *chronicle*.

Narrative comes in many varieties: telling an incident (a single situation), an anecdote (people in action), an autobiography or biography (life story of yourself or another), an interview (dialogue and quotation), a profile (interpretation of a person's character based on incidents, anecdotes, biographical material, and expressions). Narratives can take the form of novels, short stories, plays, screenplays, news stories, jokes, histories—all told from a particular point of view, the author's, a character's, or the reader's. Of course, in each case, the author, being the originator of the composition, "knows all" there is to be known or told in the story.

Every paragraph in any type of composition must have a topic sentence. The topic sentence has two major parts: the *definite topic* and the *general clew*. The *topic* is the word or group of words that sets forth the subject of the paragraph. The *clew* is the remainder of the topic sentence and gives "clues" as to what the paragraph is going to say about the subject. The *clew* should be general enough to give the writer room for developing the *specific* topic. The topic should be limited enough so that the paragraph may be focused on a single idea. Together, the topic and the clew control which information may be included in the paragraph. Everything in the paragraph must be limited to the *definite topic* and the *general clew*.

Writing a Narrative Paragraph

For your first writing assignment, tell the story of an experience that you had during the summer. First, decide what your topic sentence will be; then you might use the following questions as a guide for developing your *narrative* paragraph.

1. When did the event occur?
2. Where did it occur?
3. Who was involved?
4. How did it occur?
5. Why did it occur?
6. What made it meaningful to you?

Your paragraph should do more than simply answer a list of questions: *when?*, *where?*, *who?*, *how?*, *why?*, and *what?* A well-written narrative implicitly answers these questions while developing an interesting story.