Descriptive Writing
Lesson 2

Student objectives:
I. Writing
   - What is a paragraph?
   - Why do I need to consider purpose and audience?
   - The three major parts of a paragraph
   - Transitions
II. Grammar
   - How can I combine sentences in different ways, and why would I want to?
     - Compound sentences
   - How can I revise my writing to include more specific nouns?
III. Figurative Language
   - What are idioms?

Writing

What is a Paragraph?
A paragraph is a group of sentences that work together to describe one main idea or topic. A paragraph can be any length and written on any topic, as long as it is organized around a single idea. You will know your paragraph is complete when you have included all of the important details about a topic in addition to an introduction and a conclusion.

Why do I need to consider purpose and audience?

Purpose

Purpose is the reason you are writing. For example, if you are writing to inform, you want your readers to gain specific information from your paragraph. If you are writing to entertain, then you will want your readers to laugh and enjoy themselves while reading your piece. In this class, our specific purpose is to describe.

Why is it important to consider purpose when writing? Considering purpose helps you keep the goal of your writing in mind. Since our purpose for writing is to describe, our goal is to create an image in the minds of our readers. We will know we have achieved our goal when our readers can accurately portray the object or event we describe to them.
Audience

Just as important as purpose to writing is **audience**. The audience is the person or people who will read your writing. Effective writers consider the interests of their audience. Different audiences also use and understand different words. What is appropriate to include in a letter to a friend your own age is different than what you would include in a letter to your grandmother. In this class, your audience will be your parents and your teacher. Always consider this audience when writing.

The three major parts of a paragraph

A paragraph has three major parts: a **topic sentence**, **detail sentences**, and a **closing sentence**. You covered these parts last week when describing a memorable moment.

1. The **first sentence** is usually your **topic sentence** or **lead**. It tells the reader who or what you will be describing in your paragraph.
2. The **next sentences** are your **detail** or **supporting sentences**.
3. The **last sentence** in your paragraph is a **closing** or **concluding sentence**.

All of your sentences support the main idea of your paragraph, and your closing sentence finishes your paragraph by referring to your introduction or topic sentence. For examples, please review last week’s lesson and examine the example paragraph later on in this lesson.

Transitions

A well-written paragraph contains **transitions** to help your writing flow smoothly. These are words or phrases that connect ideas and sentences for your readers. They act like bridges from one idea to the next, keeping your readers from getting lost. Transitions can trace changes or occurrences in the text, such as time, location, comparing/contrasting ideas, conclusions, summaries, added information, and clarifications.

However, too many transitions can get in the way of good writing. Not every sentence needs a transition. Paying close attention to transition words in the books that you read will help you develop a flow to your writing.

(Several transition words and ideas are found through [this link](#). You may also click on the link on your lessons page for Lesson 2 for a list of many examples of transition words.)

Read the example paragraph below. Notice the underlined transitions and how they act like glue to hold different sentences and ideas together. Once you have finished reading, organize the transitions into the different categories in the chart below. You may use all or some of the categories. Use the Transition Words document to help you. Please be ready to discuss your findings in class.
My little daughter Ruby fills my days with joy and laughter. In the morning when we snuggle, her body warms me, and the sweet smell of strawberries fills my nose. My face nuzzles her silky hair, and the sound of her breathing soothes my morning twinges. When she wakes up, her mouth forms a drowsy smile just before she showers me with kisses. My morning angel only lasts until breakfast, after which Pandora’s Box opens in our house. Ruby’s sapphire eyes twinkle with mischief as she crawls like a stalking tiger. The feeling that trouble looms around the next corner floods the room. When silence is the only sound bouncing from wall to wall, you know it’s time to chase down the prowling feline to protect her from her own curiosity. As I scoop her up, sunlight glistens off the golden threads of hair floating in the draft. She is unhappy. Over by the bookcase, I seize an opportunity to dam the flood of tears that is about to burst out of my little one’s eyes: her favorite book, *Goodnight Moon*. Immediately, her scowl transforms into pure excitement. Tumbling safely out of my arms, my eager beaver charges toward the book. With anticipation, she holds me until we assume the reading position—her in my lap on our cozy rocking chair. Her fingers point and follow the words as I read. Occasionally, she fills a silent moment with words of her own, insisting that she turn the page the moment she is ready. I glance at the clock; it’s almost nap time. When we close the book, I use all of my cunning in a laughter-filled game of I’m Gonna Getcha to lure Ruby into the diaper changing position. With a distracting set of keys at the ready, I change her diaper in the blink of an eye. As we meander once again to our rocker, we play games of I Spy and Who’s Ticklish Now. A few hushed verses of “Frère Jacques” and “All the Pretty Little Horses” lull my gem’s eyes shut. The silent room echoes with the morning’s thrills and giggles. Overcome with contentment and a feeling of calm, I make myself a cup of tea and smile as I recall the simple pleasures of my day with Ruby.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Compare/Contrast</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Conclusion/Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Please be ready to discuss your answers to the following questions in this week’s class.

Read the above paragraph without the transitions. Does the paragraph make as much sense? Why or why not? __________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which category had the most transitional words or phrases? __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which categories had few or no transitional words or phrases? __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think this occurred? _____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What is the purpose of transitions in the paragraph? _____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Would you expect the purpose of transitions to be the same in all types of writing? (Please be ready to discuss examples along with your reasoning in class.) _____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Grammar

How can I combine sentences in different ways, and why would I want to?

Last week we reviewed the sentence, parts of a sentence, run-on sentences, and fragments. This week, we are going to take the concept a step further in reviewing how to combine sentences.

Learning how to combine sentences can help you in several ways.

(1) Knowing how to combine ideas can help you correct sentence fragments.
(2) Knowing how to combine sentences creates many simple choices in correcting run-on sentences.
(3) If your writing sounds or feels choppy, you can combine some of your sentences to help smooth out the flow of your writing.

Many times, a paragraph filled with one type of sentence—especially simple sentences with one subject (noun) and one predicate (verb)—sounds choppy and boring to your reader. Varying your sentence types can add interest to your paragraphs. There are many ways of putting more than one idea into a sentence to make a compound sentence. We will review this concept here.
Compound Sentences

To understand a compound sentence, one must first understand the simple sentence. The simple sentence has only one subject and one predicate.

Example: The baby crawls everywhere.
The subject is the baby, and crawls everywhere is the predicate.

Now, the compound sentence joins two or more simple sentences that contain similar or related ideas. You can make a compound sentence by using one of three methods.

(1) Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet)

Example:
She experiences a chill. She snuggles closer to me. (two simple sentences)
She experiences a chill, so she snuggles closer to me. (compound sentence)

Notice how both of the above sentences are complete thoughts, even though they are simple. I can combine these simple sentences by adding a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction. If one of these sentences were a fragment, I could not use this method.

Incorrect example:
She experiences a chill, and snuggles closer to me.
This sentence has only one subject (she) but two predicates. What I have here is a sentence with a compound predicate. I do not need the comma when I have a compound predicate.

In order to correct the above sentence all I need to do is remove the comma.
Corrected example:
She experiences a chill and snuggles closer to me.

Notice that you now have two variations on how to present the same idea. You can use a compound sentence, or you can use a sentence with a compound predicate. Both are grammatically correct. What will be the best choice is up to you.

(2) Use a semicolon (;)

You can place a semicolon in between two complete sentences.
Example: She experiences a chill. She snuggles closer to me. (two simple sentences)
She experiences a chill; she snuggles closer to me. (compound sentence)

When you want your reader to pause, use the semicolon. The semicolon here acts just like a period. However, you can use the semicolon instead of the period when the sentences are related to the same topic or idea.
(3) Use a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb, and a comma
Conjunctive adverbs are transition words that connect the thoughts and ideas in a compound sentence. Examples of some common conjunctive adverbs are consequently, therefore, nevertheless, however, moreover, and otherwise.

Example:
She experiences a chill. She snuggles closer to me. (two simple sentences)
She experiences a chill; therefore, she snuggles closer to me. (compound sentence)

Now You Try It
Change the following two simple sentences into compound sentences using the three methods presented on the previous page.

I glance at the clock. It’s almost nap time.

Make a compound sentence using a comma and coordinating conjunction.
___________________________________________________________________________

Make a compound sentence using a semicolon.
___________________________________________________________________________

Make a compound sentence using a semicolon, conjunctive adverb, and a comma.
___________________________________________________________________________

How can I revise my writing to include more specific nouns?
In previous classes, you learned that a noun is a word used to name a person, place, thing, or idea. A proper noun names a particular place, person, or thing, and it must be capitalized. A common noun does not name a particular person, place, or thing; therefore, it should not be capitalized. You also learned that abstract nouns represent an idea, quality, or emotion, such as courage or excitement.

It is important to be specific when choosing your nouns. When revising your writing, review each noun carefully and ask yourself, “Can I be more specific?”

Example: Her sad expression transforms into a look of eagerness.

Here I have to use adjectives to describe her looks. If I choose different nouns, I can eliminate a few words and tighten up my sentence.

Example: Her scowl transforms into pure excitement.
I can also use specific nouns to expand details and add to the picture or movie I am creating in the mind of my readers.

**Example:** A few hushed songs are all it takes to close my Ruby’s eyes.

If I name the type of songs specifically, I can create a soundtrack in the mind of my reader. I can also replace my daughter’s name with another noun (i.e., use a metaphor) to further describe how I feel about my daughter.

**Example:** A few hushed lullabies are all it takes to close my gem’s eyes.

Specific nouns reduce the amount of adjectives you need to use. This can make your writing tighter, more mature, and clearer for your reader.

**Figurative Language**

**What are Idioms?**

An *idiom* is a phrase where the literal or dictionary definitions of the words differ from their actual meaning. Particular idioms develop in different cultures. An idiom common in Great Britain may be confusing to someone from another country, such as the United States. For this reason, when using idioms, it is very important to consider your *audience*.

**Example:** My eager beaver charges toward the book.

*What does this mean in plain language?* My daughter is very excited to read the book.

If you took the above sentence literally, your mind might picture an actual beaver running at a book. If you consider the context of the paragraph, it becomes clear I am describing my daughter. In this case, the idiom acts like a specific noun. I can describe Ruby without having to use an adjective to add description.

If you are ever confused by an idiom or searching for an idiom to use in your writing, there should be idiom dictionaries available at your bookstore. Scholastic has a quality idiom dictionary on the market. There are also many free resources and idiom dictionaries online. Always check with your parents before visiting these sites. The examples of idioms used in this lesson were discovered on this website: [www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms/p.html](http://www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms/p.html)

**Now You Try It**

*My little brother was a pain in the neck when he followed me around.*

*What does this mean in plain language?* __________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
When my sister received the Volunteer Service Medal, it was her day in the spotlight.

What does this mean in plain language? ____________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Idioms are a great tool to add interest and descriptive detail to your writing. However, the writer needs to take care not to overuse this form of figurative language. Just as you need to vary your sentence types when writing paragraphs, you also need to vary your use of figurative language.

Descriptive Writing – Lesson 2 Assignments:

When typing your assignments, please make sure to use MLA format. When naming your documents, please be sure to include the class name (DW), your name, and the assignment number.

Example: DW-Your name-2A

Also, when you e-mail your assignments to me as an attachment, be sure the subject line of your email includes the name of your assignment. If you attach several assignments, your subject line should look like the sample below:

Example: DW-Your name-2A, 2B, 2C (and so on)

2A. Vocabulary: For this week’s vocabulary, please choose two new nouns from a book you are reading. Make sure to choose nouns that you do not know. You will look up the definition and synonyms for each of your words. You will also use the word in your own sentence. Do not copy the sentence from the book. Using Word or Open Office, you should create two word entries using the following format:

Word:
Definition:
Synonyms:
Part of Speech: Remember, these should be nouns!
Sentence:

Remember to use MLA format!
2B. Figures of Speech Journal: In a book you are reading or an idiom dictionary, find two examples of idioms. On one side of an index card or a piece of paper, copy down the idiom and beneath it draw a picture to represent the comparison. On the other side of the card or paper, identify the figure of speech as an idiom. Then write down what the idiom means in plain language, and draw another picture to represent its actual meaning. I highly encourage you to hand write and hand draw these cards.

When you have finished your cards, type out each of these cards (minus the pictures) into Word or Open Office. These must be written in complete sentences.

Example:

My eager beaver charged toward the book.

A picture of a beaver running at a book.

This is an example of an idiom.

The girl is excited to read a book.

A picture of a little girl crawling toward the book.

2C. Descriptive Writing Assignment: In this assignment, you will describe a person in your life for me, your eager teacher. When describing people, remember to describe their personality and actions in addition to their appearance. Remember to use strong sensory details, as well. Use the graphic organizer below to help you organize your ideas.

You will need to include an example of an idiom in addition to using MLA format. I would also love to see examples of metaphors and similes in your writing.

Step 1: Topic: ____________________________________________

(Remember to choose a person to describe.)

Step 2: Record your details in the graphic organizer below. The example on the left was used to write the example paragraph in this lesson. Notice how sensory details such as touch, smell, and appearance were used along with personality traits such as behavior, actions, likes, and dislikes. You may use these headings in your description of a person, or you may add your own.
Step 3: Write a topic sentence: ______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Step 4: Write a closing sentence: _________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

*(Your closing sentence should tie up your paragraph and connect up to your topic sentence.)*
Step 5: Complete the paragraph using the details you listed in your graphic organizer.
(Please remember to include at least one idiom.)

Step 6: Read your paragraph to ensure that it is focused, uses specific vocabulary, and includes many sensory details. Use your thesaurus to find colorful, interesting, and specific words. (Double check to be sure you used at least one example of an idiom.)

Step 7: Beginning with the last sentence, proofread each sentence in your paragraph to correct errors in spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and MLA format.

Step 8: Think of a creative title for your descriptive paragraph. If you want, you may add a picture to your assignment.