

WRITTEN EXPRESSION

Topics included in this **Section** are as follows-

- Written Expression and Instruction
- Some Essay Writing Basics
- Expanding Vocabulary Knowledge
- A Checklist of Essay Writing Components
- A Suggested Assessment Checklist

Other activities included in the [Learning Disability Section](#).

WRITTEN EXPRESSION AND INSTRUCTION

Students with a learning disability frequently encounter problems with written expression. As written expression is the final stage of literacy skill development, any difficulties experienced during the preceding stages including listening, speaking, reading and spelling can affect the ability to express thoughts in print or writing. **The importance of reading can not be overemphasised.**

Written expression problems become more apparent during secondary and tertiary levels of education and can have a major impact on learning outcomes and academic success and enjoyment.

Beyond the more basic or mechanical aspects of writing including handwriting, spelling and punctuation, higher-order skills including vocabulary knowledge and writing clarity, coherence and style, are critical aspects of written expression.

The ability to write clearly and coherently is dependent on planning and organisational abilities. Sequencing or ordering thoughts, ideas and information within sentences, paragraphs and larger linguistic units is a fundamental requirement for effective writing. As many students experience sequencing difficulties, the frequency of written expression problems is not surprising.

Strategies to assist students improve their written expression skills should include the following:

- providing structured approaches to written composition such as the POWER method (Plan, Organise, Write, Edit, Revise)
- vocabulary building (personal word lists, flashcards- selected word on one side and a synonym/antonym on the other, use of a dictionary/thesaurus, crosswords)
- using key terms and phrases from subjects and texts
- providing a list of language for learning words-e.g., describe, discuss, compare, contrast, evaluate
- telling stories as a preparation for writing stories
- planning activities (outlines, brain storming, modeling and scaffolding)
- provide model essays for different genres
- copying small selections from model essays - "to feel the style"
- structuring and organising ideas (sequencing information, introduction, middle and conclusion)
- graphic organisers-mind maps, concept maps (with numbering to indicate sequential ordering of ideas)
- writing and editing guides
- conferencing and editing
- offering alternative modes of presentation of work
- providing private feedback to student with clear, concise oral report of essay strengths and weaknesses
- having reasonable time expectations on the completion of tasks
- providing constant ENCOURAGEMENT
- use of appropriate computer software

Some suggestions for essay presentation:

Introductory Paragraphs

- ask a question
- use a quotation
- use an anecdote
- give a brief overview
- stress the importance of the topic

Middle Paragraphs

- definition of terms
- specific details
- examples or illustrations
- comparison or contrast
- analysis
- story or anecdote

Concluding Paragraphs

- summarise
- ask a question
- show concern
- use an anecdote
- make conclusions

SOME ESSAY WRITING BASICS

CONSTRUCTING SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS

A well constructed paragraph consists of-

- a topic sentence,
- supporting sentences, and
- a concluding sentence.

An effective topic sentence states both the topic and central contention/idea of the paragraph. It is generally, but not always, the first sentence in the paragraph.

Supporting sentences elaborate the topic sentence by giving supporting details, examples, facts, statistics, quotations etc. Every sentence must be clearly related to the main idea and must support the main idea. A concluding sentence summarises the important points briefly and indicates the end of the paragraph.

A paragraph should fulfil the following criteria:

Does each paragraph have one main idea? Is it clearly stated in a topic sentence?

Is the main idea appropriately elaborated and substantiated with supporting details and examples?

Is the paragraph unified? Are all the sentences in the paragraph relevant to the main idea?

Is the paragraph coherent? Are all the points within the paragraph arranged in a logical order to develop the main idea?

Is the length of the paragraph consistent with the relative importance of the idea?

Do the paragraphs flow logically and are effectively linked?

In planning each paragraph jot down a two-or three-word summary. Ask the following questions-

- Is the contention/argument consistent?
- Is the connection between each section clear?
- Are the ideas in logical, coherent order?
- Is there contention/argument balanced by the use of examples?

CHECKING/EDITING WRITING

For an overview of an essay, read the first sentence in each paragraph-it should be possible to gain a clear impression of the logical development of the contention/argument/story etc.

Then, check/consider the following points-

- Are sentences complete, do they make sense?
- Do the sentences follow logically and coherently?
- Is there variety in the sentence construction?
- Avoid too many long, complicated sentences.
- Can a clear and strong voice be identified?
- Has the active rather than the passive voice been used?
- Is the writing well paced?
- Check vocabulary usage for accuracy, appropriateness.
- Use a few words that give sparkle.
- Eliminate unnecessary words.
- Check grammar, spelling and punctuation.

EXPANDING VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

I am frequently asked by senior secondary students to improve their vocabulary knowledge. Many students, especially boys, are reluctant or slow readers, particularly those with a learning disability.

The best way to broaden word knowledge is through wide reading. However, for the above mentioned students, they need direct, explicit instruction in vocabulary-building to help compensate for their lack of reading.

The following words have been gleaned from lists and glossaries provided by the Department of Education's VCE English Study Design and course materials and resource and from schools and other sources.

The VCE English Study Design indicates the value of making a glossary of vocabulary to support text analysis. Words to be included are those that the student is likely to need to describe actions, characters and events. Students are encouraged to expand their vocabulary to give their writing variety, punch, flair and sparkle.

To increase word knowledge, specially prepared small cards are a useful aid.

Basically, there are two ways to use such cards.

1. The target word is written on the front of the card with a synonym written on the back.
2. The target word is written on the front of the card with several synonyms written on the back. The synonyms can be listed in terms of "sophistication"

sad glum
 gloomy
 melancholy

happy cheerful
 joyous
 ecstatic

argue disagree
 feud
 remonstrate

state report
 contend
 purport

Such cards are very easy to use. Students are often reluctant to regularly consult a dictionary or a thesaurus. However, the cards are small so they are easy to read, display, carry and hence, frequently revise. It is important not to have too many such cards- say 30-50 is a sensible number.

RESPONDING TO TEXTS
SOME WORDS TO USE IN DESCRIBING CHARACTER

A list of words used to describe personality characteristics.

abusive	beguiling	decisive	gentle
accusing	bemused	deep	guarded
acerbic	benign	deferential	
acrimonious	bitter	demanding	
adamant	blase	dependable	harmonious
adaptable	bright	detached	hopeful
adaptive		determined	
adept		devoted	
admiring	calming	direct	idealistic
admiring	capricious	disappointed	impassionate
adventurous	caring	disapproving	impatient
advisory	cautious	disingenuous	impersonal
aggressive	challenging		impetuous
alarmist	chauvinistic		independent
alert	cheerful	easygoing	ingenuous
aloof	commanding	efficient	ingratiating
amiable	committed	eloquent	intense
analytical	compassionate	empathetic	intimate
angry	complaining	encouraging	introverted
antagonistic	confident	energetic	
anxious	congenial	enthusiastic	
apologetic	conscientious	expedient	jovial
appalled	contrite	expressive	juvenile
appreciative	controlled	extroverted	
apprehensive	cooperative		loquacious
approving	creative		loyal
arrogant	critical	factual	
astute	curious	fair	magnanimous
audacious		fearful	malicious
authoritative		firm	melancholic
autonomous		forceful	meticulous
		forgiving	modest
		frank	mocking
		friendly	myopic
neutral	realistic	taciturn	
noble	reasonable	tact	
nostalgic	recalcitrant	tactful	
	reliable	talkative	
	resentful	theoretical	
objective	reserved	timid	
observant	resourceful	tolerant	
officious	respectful	tough	
optimistic	responsible	traditional	
organised	responsive	truculent	
outraged	restless		
overconfident	restrained		
	reticent	understanding	
		unforgiving	

painstaking			
passionate	sarcastic		
patient	sensible	vacuous	
perceptive	sensitive	vague	
personable	serious	verbal	
persuasive	sincere	versatile	
pessimistic	skeptical	vindictive	
pious	sociable	visionary	
pleading	speculative	vulgar	
pleasant	spontaneous		
practical	steadfast		
pragmatic	straightforward	worried	
precise	strategic		
private	supportive		
prophetic	sympathetic		
protective	systematic		
quarrelsome			
querulous			

SOME WORDS TO USE IN ANALYSING ARGUMENTATIVE OR PERSUASIVE TEXTS

The list contains target words with a synonym or definition.

abase	degrade	derogatory	belittling
aberration	abnormal	disingenuous	insincere
abrogate	cancel/repel	dispute	argue
abstruse	difficult to understand	dogmatic	emphatic
acerbic	harsh		
acrimony	bitterness		
acumen	insight	eloquent	persuasive
alacrity	enthusiasm	elucidate	explain
allegation	accusation	emphatic	definite
allegory	symbol	endorse	approve
ambiguous	vague	equivocate	mislead
animosity	hostility	evocative	imaginative associations
antilogy	contradiction in terms	explicate	make clear
antipathetic	strong dislike to	extrinsic	external
apocryphal	of dubious authenticity		
apposite	appropriate		
appraisal	assessment	fallacious	incorrect reasoning
astute	perceptive		
audacious	bold	grudge	animosity
		homily	tedious moral lecture

bellicose	aggressive		
belligerent	antagonistic	impartial	even-handed
		impugn	call into question
		inexorable	incapable of being
capricious	unpredictable	iniquity	great injustice
chicanery	deception	intransigent	uncompromising
cogent	convincing	inveigh	speak/write with great animosity
credulous	gullible	involute	complex
critique	appraisal		
metaphor	figure of speech		
mitigate	reduce severity		
myopia	short-sightedness		
nefarious	evil		
obdurate	stubborn		
objective	without emotion		
odious	repulsive		
palladium	defence		
panacea	remedy for everything		
panegyric	discourse in favour of something		
paradigm	an example		
partiality	favourable bias		
patronising	condescending		
persuasive	convincing		
prejudice	bias		
rebut	refute		
recalcitrant	stubbornly disobedient		
reticent	restrained		
salient	foremost		
sapid	agreeable		
satire	send-up		
seriatim	orderly, one subject after another		
specious	false		
subjective	personal point of view		
tendentious	promote a point of view		
tenebrous	gloomy		
vacuous	unintelligent		
vociferous	loud-mouthed		

A CHECKLIST OF ESSAY WRITING COMPONENTS

General

- a) Planning, Structure and Organisation
- b) Coherence
- c) Clarity
- d) Interest and Imagination
- e) Productivity
- f) Evidence of Proofreading/Editing

Specific

- a) **Words**
 - Usage
 - Spelling

- b) **Sentences**
 - Structure
 - Syntax
 - Tense
 - Punctuation

- c) **Paragraphs**
 - Structure
 - Unity
 - Coherence

A SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Criterion 1 (15 marks)

Knowledge and control of chosen content.

Response to Text

Knowledge and understanding of key aspects of the selected text.
Relevance and exploration of the text in response to the topic.
Ability to develop and sustain a detailed response to the text.
Selection of appropriate evidence from the text to support a response.
Use of appropriate metalanguage.

General Essay

Exploration of ideas.
Complexity of ideas and depth of thinking.
Sustained development of ideas.
Relevance of ideas to topic.

Criterion 2 (10 marks)

Coherence and effectiveness of the structure and organisation of the writing.

Effectiveness of introduction, main body and conclusion.
Effective and appropriate selection of ideas.
A structure appropriate to the word length, purpose and form.
Coherent sequencing and development of ideas.

Criterion 3 (5 marks)

Control of the conventions of the English language.

Control of the mechanics of language to support meaning.
Effective and accurate language appropriate to the specific purposes of the task.
Expressiveness and fluency.

Resources:

ACER www.acerpress.com.au
Dataworks www.dataworks.com.au
Dominie www.dominie.com.au
Edsoft www.edsoft.com.au
Link Educational Supplies www.linkeducational.com.au
Softwaretime www.softwaretime.com.au

Computer Software

Softwaretime
Inspiration-8

Dataworks
English Builder The Writing Program
Grammar
Getting Writing Right
WordPower: Spelling

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Revised: 9-February-2009