WRITING WORKSHOPS

Center for Learning and Academic Support Services
C.L.A.S.S.
California State University Dominguez Hills
Fall 2008
Stefan Bergman
HOW TO DEVELOP
A STRONG ESSAY
ORGANIZING AND OUTLINING
Essay Structure

Format
Organization
Thesis
Outline
Format

Most college essays use MLA format or APA format. Generally, both formats use:

• A 12-point typeface on the computer.
• Double-space between lines.
• One-inch margin on all four sides.
• Indentation for the beginning of each paragraph.
• Justification only on the left side.
• Header with last name and page number.
Sample MLA Format

In studying the influence of Latin American, African, and Asian music on modern American composers, music historians tend to discuss such figures as Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Henry Cowell, Alan Hovhaness, and John Cage (Brindle; Griffiths 104-39; Hitchcock 173-98). They usually overlook Duke Ellington, whom Gunther Schuller rightly calls “one of America’s great composers” (318), probably because they are familiar only with Ellington’s popular pieces, like “Sophisticated Lady,” “Mood Indigo,” and “Solitude.” Still little known are the many ambitious orchestral suites Ellington composed, several of which, such as Black, Brown, and Beige (originally entitled The African Suite), The Liberian Suite, The Far East Suite, The Latin American Suite, and The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse, explore his impressions of the people, places, and music of other countries.

Not all music critics, however, have ignored Ellington’s excursions into longer musical forms. Raymond Horricks compared him with Ravel, Delius, and Debussy:

The continually enquiring mind of Ellington . . . has sought to extend steadily the imaginative boundaries of the musical form on which it subsists . . . Ellington since the mid-1930s has been engaged upon extending both the imagery and the formal construction of written jazz. (122-23)
read and recalled the two passages. Passages were counterbalanced across participants, and each passage appeared, a paragraph at a time, on the computer monitor, which was placed at eye level 1 m in front of the participant. Participants initiated the reading-recall sequence for each passage by pressing the space bar on the terminal to present each paragraph. Participants read at their normal rates, and after they finished reading they wrote down as much of the passage as they could remember, taking as much time as necessary. They were also instructed to press the key that recorded the time interval between bar presses for both reading and recall tasks. Participants had a rest period of 1 min between the two reading-recall sequences. At the end of the session, the purpose of the study was explained to each participant.

Scoring

Recall data. Because the high-imagery poetry was nonanalytical and nonsequential, none of the existing prose analysis procedures (e.g., Kintch, 1974; Meyer, 1975) could easily be used to determine semantic content of the poem. Instead, three graduate students proficient in English independently ranked sentences in the passage from most important to least important. Other researchers (e.g., Meyer & McConkie, 1971) successfully used this method to determine the mix of narrative and expository text.
Organization

Your goal in organizing is to produce a sequence of paragraphs that leads the reader to a single strong conclusion.

As a general formula, essays have three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. There are several common patterns of organization.
Common Patterns of Organization

- **Narration** (the sequence in which the events occurred).
- **Description** (using the five senses).
- **Process** (the steps for how something is done, or how to).
- **Comparison and contrast** (similarities and differences).
- **Classification** (types and categories).
- **Cause and effect** (or a result and its causes, why).
- **Argument** (presenting a claim and providing supports).
Your thesis is the point of your paper—the point you are demonstrating or proving. It can be stated in one sentence (*thesis statement*) that sums up your whole essay and states its purpose.

In more complex forms, thesis statement can be expressed in several sentences.

Generally, a thesis statement has two parts: a topic and a claim.
Functions of a Thesis Statement

The thesis statement serves three crucial functions and one optional one:

• The thesis statement *narrows your subject* to a single, central idea (topic) that you want your readers to gain from your essay.
• It *claims something specific* and significant about your subject, a claim that requires support.
• It *conveys your purpose*, your reason for writing.
• It often concisely *previews the arrangement of ideas*. 
Examples of Thesis Statement

As assertions, thesis statements each consist of a topic (naming the general subject) and a claim about a topic:

Q: What steps can prevent juvenile crime?

Juveniles can be diverted from crime by active learning programs, full-time sports, and intervention by mentors and the models.

[Topic: juveniles. Claim: can be delivered from crime in three ways.]
Why did Abraham Lincoln delay in emancipating the slaves?

Lincoln delayed emancipating any slaves until 1863 because his primary goal was to restore and preserve the Union, with or without slavery.

**Topic:** Lincoln delay.  
**Claim:** was caused by his goal of preserving the Union.
Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, even under the most controlled conditions, its use by private employees should be banned.

**Topic:** polygraph

**Claim:** proved unreliable
Of the many challenges facing single parents, the most difficult is learning to maintain a balance among work, school, a social life, and, most important, family.

**Topic:** challenges.

**Claim:** the most difficult is to maintain a balance.
Which college students should be entitled to federal aid?

As an investment in its own economy, the United States should provide a tuition grant to any college student who qualifies academically.

**Topic:** United States.

**Claim:** should provide a tuition to any college student who qualifies academically.
The days when college graduates meander from job to job maybe a convention of the past. School-to-work programs now in place at most schools are trying to alleviate occupational indecision by helping students understand their career choice earlier in life.

**Topic:** college graduates.

**Claim:** The days when college graduate meander from job to job maybe a convention of the past.
The eating disorder anorexia nervosa is rarely cured by one treatment alone; only by combining drug therapy with psychotherapy and family therapy can the patient begin the long, torturous journey to wellness.

**Topic:** anorexia nervosa.

**Claim:** can only be cured by combined therapies.
The incremental development of thesis statement. Example:

In this essay, I will discuss the changes in sexual harassment (1) laws over the past decade that affect the workplace. I will present landmark legislation (2) on this topic and analyze not only its clarity (or lack of clarity) in defining illegal behaviors (3) but also its enforceability within specific court cases (4).
In this essay, I will discuss sexual harassment in the workplace.

In this essay, I will discuss laws that govern sexual harassment in the workplace.

In this essay, I will discuss the history and development of laws that govern sexual harassment in the workplace.

In this essay, I will discuss the history and development of recent laws that govern sexual harassment in the workplace.

In this essay, I will discuss the charges in sexual harassment laws affecting the workplace that have occurred over the past decade.
How to Set up an Outline

I. Introduction: Your thesis statement
   a. Your purpose
   b. How you will accomplish it
II. (Major Point 1) State this concisely
    a. Example of incident and supporting evidence
    b. Another example
III. (Major Point 2) State it as above
    a. Support for major point 2
IV. (Major Point 3) Again, state it clearly
    a. Facts or quotes to support major point 3
    b. More examples to support major point 3
V. (Major Point 4) State the major point
   a. Supporting evidence for major point 4
   b. More examples
   c. Other supporting evidence
VI. Conclusion
SAMPLE OUTLINE

CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION: 1860-1968

I. Post-Civil War Era
   A. Fourteenth Amendment, 1868: equal protection of the law for all citizens
   B. Fifteenth Amendment, 1870: constitutional rights of citizens regardless of race, color, or previous servitude

II. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s
   A. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
      1. Established in 1910 by W.E.B. DuBois and others
      2. Legal Defense and Education fund fought school segregation
   B. Martin Luther King, Jr., champion of nonviolent civil rights action
      1. Led bus boycott: 1955-1956
      3. Awarded NOBEL PEACE PRIZE: 1964
      4. Led voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama: 1965
   C. Civil Rights Act of 1964: prohibited discrimination in voting, education, employment, and public facilities
   D. Voting Rights Act of 1965: gave the government power to enforce desegregation
   E. Civil Rights Act of 1968: prohibited discrimination in the sale or rental of housing.
Sample of Listing

**Topic:** Children living in a difficult, violent, even hostile world

TV – shows corrupt politicians, casual sex, drugs, alcohol, foul language, violence
Real-life violence on TV, esp. terrorist attacks and war, scares kids, have nightmares
Kids babysat by TV
Not enough guidance from parents
Kids raise selves
Too many divorces
Parents squabbling over material goods in settlements
Money too important
Kids feel unimportant
Families move a lot
I moved in fourth grade—hated it
Rootless feeling
Single-parent homes
Day-care problem
Perfect families on TV make kids feel inadequate
Pop music glorifies drugs
To download this workshop, log onto:

www.csudh.edu/class

Click on Writing Resources, Workshops and Handouts
Click on Workshops
Click on How to Answer In-class Essays