

How To Write An Effective Composition: Narrative And Descriptive Writing Organizing And Writing An Essay

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How To Write An Effective Composition

From "The Anatomy Of Language" by Morris Schreiber

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How To Write An Effective Composition: Narrative And Descriptive Writing Organizing And Writing An Essay

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HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE COMPOSITION

Part One—Narrative and Descriptive Writing

A reporter, hunched tensely over a typewriter, pounds out an exiting news story. An artist describes a beautiful sunset in a letter to a friend and is later inspired to paint it. A scientist works over an important medical report to be delivered at a national convention. A parent, concerned over a serious traffic hazard in her community, pens a vigorous letter to a local editor. A drama critic writes a frank report on a new play which he has just seen. A movie writer, assigned to prepare a scenario based on a best-seller, plans which scenes he will include, emphasize, or omit.

In all of these instances, when people are called upon to narrate, describe, explain something, or state an opinion, though the format each uses is different, *the art of composition* is basically the same—governed by the same basic principles.

What are some of these key principles?

First, the writer **MUST CAPTURE THE ATTENTION** of the reader as quickly as possible.

Secondly, the writer must have **AN INTERESTING OR IMPORTANT THEME OR MESSAGE** to present—and he must make the reader a sympathetic and attentive participant in whatever he is presenting.

Thirdly, his work must be **WELL ORGANIZED**. He must develop his story or character sketch or medical report or editorial **LOGICALLY** and **SEQUENTIALLY** so that the reader can follow him clearly step by step through an unbroken chain of ideas—from A to B to C to D to E, and so on.

Fourthly, he **MUST SUPPORT HIS FACTS BY CLEAR-CUT EVIDENCE**, excluding from his writings bias or prejudice, and presenting a *balanced* picture which gives all shades of opinion.

Fifthly, he should leave the reader **WITH A SENSE OF ENRICHMENT**—through a belief in the worthwhileness of what he has said, through the novel or imaginative way in which he has said it, and through the stirring and the quickening of the reader's senses and emotions.

—This holds true for Narration, Description, Exposition, Argumentation, Dramatization, etc. —for every phase of composition.

Before we begin written work in any of these areas, it might be well to examine a famous literary piece which embodies many of these *principles of good composition*:

The passage is "The Breaking of the Wine-Cask." It opens Chapter V., entitled "The Wine Shop" in Dickens' famous novel of the French Revolution, "A TALE OF TWO CITIES." It is reprinted for you in your booklet.

As I read it aloud, follow it in your booklet. Look for the answers to the following three questions:

1. How does Dickens immediately *arrest your attention*?
2. How does he arouse and develop your *interest in his characters*?
3. How does he appeal to your *senses and emotions*?

"THE BREAKING OF THE WINE-CASK"

"A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street. The accident had happened in getting it out of a cart; the cask had tumbled out with a run, the hoops had burst, and it lay on the stones just outside the door of the wine-shop, shattered like a walnut-shell.

"All the people within reach had suspended their business, or their idleness, to run to the spot and drink the wine. The rough irregular stones of the street, pointing every way, and designed one might have thought, expressly to lame all living creatures that approached them, had dammed it into little pools; these were surrounded each by its own jostling group or crowd, according to its size. Some men kneeled down, made scoops of their two hands joined, and sipped, or tried to help women, who bent over their shoulders, to sip, before the wine had all run out between their fingers. Others, men and women, dipped in the puddles with little mugs of mutilated earthenware, or even with handkerchiefs from women's heads, which were squeezed dry into infants' mouths; others made small mud embankments, to stem the wine as it ran; others, directed by lookers-on up at high windows, darted here and there, to cut off little strams of wine that started away in new directions; others devoted themselves to the sodden and lee-dyed pieces of the cask, licking, and even champing the moister wine-rotted fragments with eager relish. There was no drainage to carry off the wine, and not only did it all get taken up, but so much mud got taken up along with it, that there might have been a scavenger in the street if anybody acquainted with it could have believed in such a miraculous presence.

"A shrill sound of laughter and amused voices—voices of men, women, and children—resounded in the streets while this game lasted. There was little roughness in the sport, and much playfulness. There was a special companionship in it, an observable inclination on the part of every one to join some other one, which led, especially, among the luckier or lighter-hearted, to frolicsome embraces, drinking of healths, shaking of hands, and even joining of hands and dancing, a dozen together. When the wine was gone, and the places where it had been most abundant were raked into a gridiron-pattern by fingers, these demonstrations ceased, as suddenly as they had broken out. The man who had left

his saw sticking in the firewood he was cutting, set in motion again; the woman who had left on a door step the little pot of hot ashes, at which she had been trying to soften the pain in her own starved fingers and toes, or in those of her child, returned to it; men with bare arms, matted locks, and cadaverous faces, who had emerged into the winter light from cellars, moved away, to descend again and a gloom gathered on the scene that appeared more natural to it than sunshine.

"The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street in the suburb of Saint Antoine, in Paris, where it was spilled. It had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes. The hands of the man who sawed the wood, left red marks on the billets: and the forehead of the woman who nursed her baby, was stained with the stain of the old rag she wound about her head again. Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth, and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a night-cap than in it, scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees—BLOOD!

"The time was to come when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there.

"And now that the cloud had settled on Saint Antoine, which a momentary gleam had driven from his sacred countenance, the darkness of it was heavy—cold, dirt, sickness, ignorance, and want, were the lords in waiting on the saintly presence—nobles of great power all of them; but most especially the last. Samples of a people that had undergone a terrible grinding and re-grinding in the mill, and certainly not in the fabulous mill which ground old people young, shivered at every corner, passed in and out at every doorway, looked from every window, fluttered in every vestige of a garment, that the wind shook. The mill which had worked them down, was the mill that grinds young people old; the children had ancient faces and grave voices; and upon them, and upon the grown faces, and ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh, was the sign, Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon poles and lines, Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood that the man sawed off; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street that had no offal, among its refuse, of anything to eat. Hunger was the inscription on the baker's shelves, written in every small loaf of his scanty stock of bad bread; at the sausage-shop, in every dead dog preparation that was offered for sale. Hunger rattled its dry bones among the roasting chestnuts in the turned cylinder; Hunger was shred into atomies in every farthing porringer of husky chips of potato, fried with some reluctant drops of oil."

This is an exceptionally powerful passage, combining vigorous narrative, rich description, and forceful exposition of a point of view.

How does Dickens achieve his effects? Let us now answer the three questions we posed before our reading:

First, how does he immediately engage your *attention*?

ANSWER: The very first sentence, "A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street," simply, clearly, and *vigorously* describes an unusual situation: Wine, a luxury beyond the average slum-dweller, is literally *flowing* in the streets!

Second, how does Dickens arouse and develop your interest in his *characters*?

ANSWER: In the following ways:

1. By showing people so desperate and hungry as to try to salvage spilled wine from the mud of the streets.
2. By showing chivalry even among people so impoverished—with men giving their portions of retrieved wine to women and with people at high windows helping to direct the efforts of others to obtain some of the wine before it all runs out.
3. By showing them, in spite of their sordid, depressing environment still able to laugh, dance, and drink toasts to one another.

Third, how does Dickens appeal to your senses and emotions?

ANSWER: By evoking such striking images and word-pictures as the following and arousing sympathy for the people involved:

1. "The cask lay on the stones, shattered like a walnut shell." (STRESS ON SIGHT AND SOUND)
2. "Some men kneeled down, made scoops of their two hands joined, and sipped." (STRESS ON TASTE AND TOUCH)
3. "Handkerchiefs from women's heads were dipped in the puddles and squeezed dry into infants' mouths." (TASTE)
4. "Others licked and even champed the moister wine-rotted fragments with eager relish." (TASTE)

...Another standard we set up before for the writing of an effective composition was GOOD ORGANIZATION: We asked: Does the writer tell his story logically, step by step?

To appraise Dickens' skill in organization imagine that you are a cameraman photographing this scene for television or the movies. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does Dickens proceed logically in order of *time*?
2. In order of *place*?

Let us check the TIME element:

The wine-cask bursts. People stop whatever they are doing and flock to the spot from all parts of the street. The wine is retrieved and consumed. Slowly the people resume what they were doing, then retreat into their hovels. Finally, the early darkness of winter descends on the street.

—From this we see that events have proceeded in clear chronological order. The time element is, therefore, well handled.

Now let us check the PLACE element:

Do events move logically from PLACE to PLACE? Let us see.

First, your camera focuses on a center point, the door of the wine-shop, in front of which the cask lies broken. Then you follow the rivulets of wine flowing in various directions. Then you show people dropping various occupations or activities and flocking inwards towards the central spot. Next, you show the steps taken to retrieve the wine, including shots of people directing friends from their high windows. You end with a shot of the empty cask.

Has the author moved logically from place to place?

Yes. From a central point he has moved in and out, around and around, up and down, and finally back to the empty cask at the center.

...In what other ways is this passage well organized?

First, in the way in which Dickens arranges his material. The first incident, the breaking of the wine-cask, sets off a series of reactions from the people, mounting in interest and intensity until the cask has been drained dry. This is BUILDING in order of LOGICAL IMPORTANCE. Dickens could also have reversed the process, first showing the EMPTY WINE-CASK and then, through a series of flashbacks, telling how it had been left thus by the people.

Another way in which this passage is well organized is that there is a CLEAR CONNECTION between the breaking of the wine-cask and what is to follow: The passage not only serves to introduce Defarge, the wineshop keeper, and his sinister wife but also foreshadows the blood-bath of the French Revolution through the symbolic spilling of the wine. This is logical, step-by-step development—development by CAUSE AND EFFECT. Event A. leads to Event B. B is the cause of C. C leads to D or is connected with it. And so on...—Every event must be connected with every other event. There must be no loose ends.

Now for our final two standards:

1. Does the writer have an important theme or message to present?
- and 2. Does he leave the reader with a sense of the WORTHWHILENESS of what he has said?

On both counts Dickens is successful. He personifies Hunger as a grim specter, present everywhere in that blighted neighborhood. He states his own anger at the "cold, dirt, sickness, ignorance, and want" which he finds there prevalent. And he succeeds in arousing the reader's sympathies for the dwellers of Saint Antoine.

TO SUMMARIZE: This passage is an outstanding literary composition for the following reasons:

1. It NARRATES a vivid and exciting happening, catching the reader's attention in the opening sentence.
2. It DESCRIBES people and things with striking effect, using sharp word-pictures that appeal to the IMAGINATION and the SENSES and EMOTIONS.
3. It is WELL ORGANIZED. It moves LOGICALLY in space and time, step by step, with each incident connected with the next or with another in the over-all plot.
4. It expounds a POINT OF VIEW...or a THEME which the reader finds important or worthwhile—a theme which is strong enough to stir his imagination and enlist him as an interested observer in the story.

With these GUIDEPOSTS in mind, let us now try our hand at writing. In Part Two of this lesson we shall deal with a type of composition, skill in the writing of which is particularly called for throughout high school and in scholarship and college entrance examinations. This is the essay. We shall also consider common errors in English made in the writing of the essay and other types of composition and the best ways of eliminating these common errors.

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE COMPOSITION

Part Two:— EXPOSITION: Organizing and Writing an Essay

Today it is "Open House" in senior English Class 880. Many students are assembled here today—both members of the regular class and others interested in composition problems. It is a week before the State-wide examination in English, and many students have come here to the "Composition Clinic"... to talk things over, seeking guidance, clarification, assurance.

Many questions are raised on the correct approach, methods of developing a composition, sustaining interest, pitfalls in technical English, etc.

Mr. Allen, the teacher, with many years of experience in training students in self-expression, answers all questions with patience, tact, and authority.

John, a student in the technical course, who feels more at home with electrical circuits than with the intricacies of sentence structure, asks:

QUESTION:

Mr. Allen, I've been writing compositions for a long time, essays in English and social studies, reports in science, research papers in electronics, and so on. Yet each time I sit down to write, I'm faced with the same problem: HOW DO I BEGIN?

ANSWER:

Your problem, John, is a common one,—in fact, one that upsets and needlessly frustrates many students who are called upon to write. And yet so many compositions can be improved by proper organization. You set down your thoughts as they come to you. You try to present all sides of a question. You decide which points deserve the greatest emphasis and which, only minor emphasis. You then present your ideas in order of importance—giving greatest stress and space to the strongest ones.

For example: If you were called upon, as candidates were in a recent scholarship examination, to discuss a topic such as: THE EFFECT OF POCKET BOOKS UPON THE READING HABITS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC—how would you approach the problem?

Here are some suggestions:

1. Since *both sides* of the question should be discussed, you could organize your thoughts under DESIRABLE FEATURES of pocket books and UNDESIRABLE FEATURES of pocket books.

—Under DESIRABLE features you might list:

a. Larger numbers of books have been made available at a price the average man can pay.

b. Making books available on a large scale helps to promote more extensive reading.

c. Ease of carrying pocket books promotes reading while traveling, waiting for appointments, relaxing out-of-doors, and at other favorable moments.

d. People who would not ordinarily read are stimulated to do so by the attractive design of many pocket books, their compactness, and their appeal to varied tastes.

e. Larger sales of many pocket books help the publisher offer many more titles, reissue important classics, and launch new writers in paperback originals.

f. Many good home libraries have been started with an assortment of pocket books as a nucleus.

—Among the UNDESIRABLE features of pocket books you might list the following:

a. In their desire to capitalize on the new market in pocket books many publishers have glutted the book stores with lurid and sensational books of dubious literary quality.

b. The presence of too many pocket books on the market may detract attention from finer books, i.e., books outstanding in content, appearance, typography, make-up, etc.

c. The lower cost of pocket books to the buyer will make a purchaser favor them in preference to the finer books.

d. Since pocket books cost as little as many magazines, the public may prefer a complete pocket book to a magazine, causing an appreciable drop in magazine circulation.

QUESTION:

Having mustered these arguments pro and con, what would your next steps be?

ANSWER:

1. You would rearrange these arguments in order of increasing IMPORTANCE, presenting your most telling points toward the end.

2. You would then plan an OPENING that would capture the attention of the reader and promptly interest him in reading the BODY of your argument, the pro's and con's of pocket books.

Such an INTRODUCTION could be a personal experience, an anecdote, a quotation, an historical event, or a current happening.

...For example, you could launch your discussion with an OPENING PARAGRAPH describing an historical situation such as the following:

"During lulls in battle on three massive fronts —the Pacific jungles, the German cities, and the mountains of Italy — many an American soldier in World War II. carried in his pocket insurance against fatigue, boredom, or worry over impending combat. This insurance was the pocket book. It included books of philosophy, history, science. It included light novels, serious novels, books of humor, poetry, and religious consolation. To a soldier facing battle for the first time the feelings of Stephen Crane's fictional Civil War soldier in "The Red Badge of Courage" were of comparable intensity." —This would be your opening paragraph.

QUESTION: What would your next step be?

ANSWER: A very important one. To ensure a smooth flow of thought between each part of your composition you would have to have connecting or TRANSITIONAL sentences:

A CONNECTING sentence such as the following ADDED TO YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH will help bridge the gap between the *opening* and the *body* of your argument. This is the sentence: "Pocket books began to change the reading habits of millions of Americans, not only those of our soldiers but also those of the multitudes at home, some for the better and some for the worse."

The words "some for the better and some for the worse" tell the reader what he may expect in the *next* part, the *body* of the composition, i.e., the favorable and unfavorable features of pocket books. Thus, at the close of the introduction, the MAIN THEME is clearly stated. Note that this sentence, which states the topic to be discussed, is actually the *topic sentence*. Note also that the topic sentence is not necessarily the first sentence of a composition, as some students believe. It may be found *anywhere* in the opening paragraph. It may, as in this case, be the *last* sentence of the opening paragraph.

QUESTION: Where else is there an important need for CONNECTING SENTENCES?

ANSWER: In two other places:

First, between the positive and negative features of pocket books to show CONTRAST between the two. Such a sentence might read: "Despite their many contributions to education and culture, the publishers of pocket books must consider several undesirable features of these books."

Second, another connecting sentence is needed BEFORE THE CONCLUSION. You have already connected the beginning and the middle. You must now connect the middle and the end. Here is such a CONNECTING or TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE closing the middle section on the weaknesses of pocket books: "Although publishers of pocket books should seriously reexamine some of their present practices, the pocket book revolution has brought many benefits to Americans."

John commented: "I see. This sentence is a sort of announcement that we are getting ready to CLOSE the composition."

"That is correct," replied Mr. Allen. "In our CLOSING PARAGRAPH we shall RESTATE the points in our opening paragraph but from a DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW."

Such a closing paragraph might read as follows:

"An examination of the balance sheet shows more gains in the case of pocket books than losses. Paper-backs have extended the education of Americans. They have stimulated their intellectual curiosity. They have whetted their literary appetite. Writers of the future will thus have a vast new audience to whom they can offer their wares."

—And now TO SUMMARIZE:

In writing the long composition or critical essay,

—FIRST: List your thoughts on the subject AS THEY OCCUR TO YOU.

SECOND: Note which ideas are RELATED and can be GROUPED UNDER THE SAME HEADING.

THIRD: Plan on as many paragraphs as you have IMPORTANT SUBDIVISIONS of your topic.

FOURTH: Arrange these paragraphs in the order of importance. This is the BODY of your composition.

FIFTH: Prepare an OPENING or INTRODUCTION which will serve as a *springboard* for your main argument and which succinctly indicates what that main argument will be. Stating the nature of the main argument should be the function of your *topic sentence*.

SIXTH: Draft *transitional* sentences connecting ALL MAJOR SUBDIVISIONS of your composition: Connect the introduction with the body; the various parts of the body with one another; and the body with the conclusion.

SEVENTH: Vitalize your arguments by *concrete details* from your personal experience, appropriate books that you have read, plays that you have seen, research and interviews that you have conducted, and so on.

(FOR COMPLETE ESSAY see Supplement to this Lesson, Section I.)

...“Thank you, Mr. Allen,” John commented. “I see now how important proper organization is in writing a good composition. But many of us have trouble also with the MECHANICS of English, with sentence structure, agreement, usage, and so forth. Can you give us any advice on that matter?”

“I’ll be glad to,” replied Mr. Allen. “In preparation for our Composition Clinic today I have made a survey of the most common errors in English on your last set of composition papers. You recall we wrote on the topic “CHOOSING A CAREER.”

To help you understand the nature of these errors and to correct them may I suggest that you copy the following sentences as I dictate them. We shall then correct each, explaining why we do so. Here are the sentences:

No. 1 —“At first, I chose engineering as a career later I changed to aviation.”

This is a common type of error, the run-on sentence. Two or more independent clauses are run together into one group of words. There are several ways of correcting this type of error:

First, is to separate the group of words into TWO SEPARATE SENTENCES, as follows:

“At first, I chose engineering as a career. Later, I changed to aviation.”

A second way is to insert a coordinating conjunction such as “but” between the two clauses. We now have one sentence, a COMPOUND one, with the two independent clauses connected by “but” as follows:

“I chose engineering as a career, but later I changed to aviation.”

A third method is to insert a SEMI-COLON after the first clause to connect it with the second clause since both clauses are closely connected in *thought*. The sentence would then read; “At first, I chose engineering as a career; later, I changed to aviation.”

And now we come to a SECOND TYPE OF ERROR:

SENTENCE NO. 2. “Entering the field of aviation with its rigid requirements in mathematics, physics, meteorology, body-building calisthenics.”

—ANALYSIS: This error, also a very common one, is the INCOMPLETE SENTENCE or SENTENCE FRAGMENT. A sentence-fragment is a wanderer in grammatical space. Here a participial phrase, “Entering the field of aviation with its rigid requirements etc.” is the wanderer, looking for an independent subject to which to attach itself. In this case, by adding an independent clause such as “I might feel discouraged at first,” the PARTICIPLE, “ENTERING,” can now be safely and securely attached to the subject, the person who took up aviation—in this case “I.” The corrected sentence now reads: “Entering the field of aviation with its rigid requirements in mathematics, physics, meteorology, body-building calisthenics, etc., I might feel discouraged at first.”

(For other methods of correcting the SENTENCE FRAGMENT or INCOMPLETE SENTENCE consult your booklet).

(BAND)

(See Supplement to this lesson, SECTION III.)

And now let us turn to the correction of Sentence No. 3.

“For a long time neither my friends nor I were certain which course to take.”

ANALYSIS: This is an error in AGREEMENT. The writer has been confused by the plural “friends” and has made the plural verb “were” agree with it. The verb should be “Was,” which is *singular*, to agree with its nearer antecedent, I. If two parts of a subject are joined by such correlatives as “either...or” or “neither...nor,” the predicate verb agrees in number with the *nearer* of the two. The sentence should read: “For a long time neither my friends nor I was certain which course to take.”

SENTENCE NO. 4....“As hobbies I liked painting, designing, and sometimes to take a trip to some famous art center.”

ANALYSIS: This is an error in parallel structure. ...“Painting” and “designing” are VERBAL NOUNS ending in —ing. To parallel these two the *third* idea, “to take a trip,” must be changed from its infinitive form “to take” to the “—ing” form “taking a trip,” thus making it a verbal noun and making “painting, designing, and taking a trip” all PARALLEL IN STRUCTURE.” The revised sentence should read: “As hobbies I liked painting, designing, and taking occasional trips to some famous art center.”

SENTENCE NO. 5. "The reason I decided to become a nurse is because I have always wanted to help people who are ill or incapacitated."

ANALYSIS: This is an example of the incorrect use of a word—an error in **DICTION**...in this case "because," a *conjunction*, has been incorrectly used in place of the word "that," a *relative pronoun*. This particular error is extremely common. Many people say and write "The reason is *because*" when they should say "The reason is *that*..." "THAT" introduces a noun clause—"I have always wanted to help people who are ill or incapacitated." This noun clause is in *apposition* with the word "reason." To test this merely interchange the two ideas and see whether the meaning of the sentence remains **UNCHANGED**. We interchange and obtain the following: "That I have always wanted to help people who are ill or incapacitated is the reason that I decided to become a nurse." Clearly, there has been no change in the meaning.

SENTENCE NO. 6. "For my first foreign language I studied French, which consumed a large amount of my time."

ANALYSIS: This is a case of faulty or ambiguous reference. As the sentence is written, the relative pronoun "which" incorrectly refers to "French." It is not the *language* French that has been time-consuming in the student's experience but the **STUDY** of it. The revised sentence should read: For my first foreign language I chose French, *the study of which* consumed a large amount of my time."

SENTENCE NO. 7. "Deciding to become a rare-book collector, I showed several to an expert which I had found in an old book shop."

ANALYSIS: This is a case of a **MISPLACED MODIFIER**. It is not the **EXPERT** who had been found, but the **RARE BOOKS**. The adjective clause "which I had found" modifies "several" and should be placed next to it, not **MISPLACED** next to, and modifying **EXPERT**. The sentence should read: "Deciding to become a rare-book collector, I showed several which I had found in an old book shop to an expert"

SENTENCE NO. 8. At first, I devoted many leisure hours to stamp-collecting, but later art absorbed most of my time.

ANALYSIS: This is an **UNNECESSARY SHIFT OF SUBJECT** between one clause and another. The writer starts with the subject "I" in the first clause and then shifts to the subject "art" in the second clause. The sentence should read: "At first I devoted many leisure hours to stamp-collecting, but later I gave most of my time to art."

SENTENCE NO. 9. "When I learned that I had been awarded the algebra medal, I couldn't hardly believe my good fortune."

ANALYSIS: This is a form of a very common error—the **DOUBLE NEGATIVE**. "Couldn't," which stands for "could not" or "barely" has *negative* force...Since a double negative has the force of an *affirmative*, only **ONE** negative should be used when you wish to convey a negative idea. The sentence should read: "When I learned that I had been awarded the algebra medal, I *could hardly* believe my good fortune."

And now, SENTENCE NO. 10 —"My guidance counsellor feels that I would do well in secretarial work and asked me to call for an interview."

ANALYSIS: This is **INCORRECT SEQUENCE OF TENSES**. In the first part of this compound sentence the verb **FEELS** is in the present tense. In the second part, the tense of the verb **ASKED** has shifted to the past. This is, therefore, an incorrect sequence. The sentence should read: "My guidance counsellor *felt* that I would do well in secretarial work and asked me to call for an interview."

...Closing his "Composition Clinic," Mr. Allen offered three final important suggestions:

1. Plan and **ORGANIZE** your work carefully.
2. **PROOFREAD** everything that you write for correct **SPELLING**, **USE OF WORDS**, **CAPITALIZATION**, and **PUNCTUATION**.
3. Test the accuracy of your sentence structure by checking to see that you have eliminated errors involving:

1. The run-on sentence 2. The sentence fragment that masquerades as a complete sentence 3. The faulty or ambiguous reference. 4. The misplaced or dangling modifier. 5. The faulty shift of subject between one clause and another. 6. The lack of agreement between a verb and its subject or a pronoun and its antecedent. 7. The lack of parallel structure. and No. 8. The incorrect sequence of tenses.

(For Practice Exercises on these types of errors see Supplement to this lesson, **SECTION II**.)

EXPOSITION: Organizing and Writing an Essay

I. COMPLETE ESSAY ON "THE EFFECT OF POCKET BOOKS UPON THE READING HABITS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC"

During lulls in battle on three massive fronts—the Pacific jungles, the German cities, and the mountains of Italy—many an American soldier in World War II. carried in his pocket insurance against fatigue, boredom, or worry over impending combat. This insurance was the pocket book. It included books of philosophy, history, science. It included light novels, serious novels, books of humor, poetry, and religious consolation. To a soldier facing battle for the first time the feeling of Stephen Crane's fictional Civil War soldier in "The Red Badge of Courage" were of comparable intensity. Pocket books began to change the reading habits of millions of Americans, not only those of our soldiers but also those of the multitudes at home, some for the better and some for the worse.

Some of the positive ways in which pocket books have changed the reading habits of Americans are the following: Ease of carrying pocket books promotes reading while traveling, waiting for appointments, relaxing out-of-doors, and at other favorable moments. People who would not ordinarily read are stimulated to do so by the attractive design of many pocket books, their compactness, and their appeal to varied tastes. Larger sales of many pocket books help the publisher offer many more titles, reissue important classics, and launch new writers in paperback originals. Larger numbers of books have been made available at a price which the average man can pay. Making books available on a large scale helps to promote more extensive reading. Many good home libraries have been started with an assortment of pocket books as a nucleus.

However, despite their many contributions to education and culture, the publishers of pocket books must consider several undesirable features of these books:

Since pocket books cost as little as many magazines, the public may prefer a complete pocket book to a magazine, causing an appreciable drop in magazine circulation. In their desire to capitalize on the new market in pocket books many publishers have glutted the book stores with lurid and sensational books of dubious literary quality. The presence of too many pocket books on the market may detract attention from finer books, i.e., books outstanding in content, appearance, typography, make-up, etc. The lower cost of pocket books to the buyer will make purchasers favor them in preference to the finer books. Yet, although publishers of pocket books should seriously reexamine some of their present practices, the pocket book revolution has brought many benefits to Americans.

In my own experience, three pocket books have had a deep and abiding influence: H.G. Wells' "Outline of History," skilfully abridged from the lengthy original, which I might never have read in full, gave me a panoramic and comprehensive view of human history and stimulated me to read more extensively in the field. "The Shorter Bartlett's Quotations" presented the distilled essence of some of the finest prose and poetry ever written in a compact, handy reference volume. Cervantes' "Don Quixote," which I read for the first time in pocket book form, was a masterpiece of poignant satire. It left me with the feeling that often the talker, like Sancho the squire, actually accomplishes little in life while Don Quixote, befuddled old knight though he was, has the courage to try to achieve his dreams and ideals through action.

An examination of the balance sheet shows more gains in the case of pocket books than losses. Paper-backs have extended the education of Americans. They have stimulated their intellectual curiosity. They have whetted their literary appetite. Writers of the future will thus have a vast new audience to whom they can offer their wares.

II. EXERCISE IN CORRECTION OF COMMON ERRORS IN COMPOSITION

DIRECTIONS:

1. Find the error.
2. Describe the NATURE of the error.
3. Correct the error.

1. The guest was quite disturbed because in the confusion at the airport she forgets to thank her host.
2. They journeyed through the dense jungle with the help of their guides, which no man had ever explored.
3. When a child plays a strenuous game of ball, sufficient time for rest should be given him.
4. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a beautiful lyrical work it contains a great deal of symbolism it also has many elements of the supernatural.
5. Although we had suspected his guilt for some time.

6. a. The teacher, and sometimes the parents, have strongly stressed the need for better study habits.
b. He interviews every applicant and treats them with courtesy and consideration.
7. It will not be possible to determine the full affect of the atomic tests for many years.
8. The Board hasn't notified but two applicants to appear.
9. First, you must drive straight along the highway; turn right; then continuing for a mile.
10. The mother asked her daughter to fill her prescription.

ANSWERS:

1. "Forgets" should be "forgot." This is an error in SEQUENCE OF TENSES.
2. The sentence should read: "They journeyed through the dense jungle, which no man had ever explored, with the help of their guides." "With the help of their guides" should not have followed the word "jungle." This is a case of a MISPLACED MODIFIER.
3. Corrected version: "When a child plays a strenuous game of ball, one should give him sufficient time to rest. "Should be given him" is incorrect because it is the *passive* voice. This is an UNNECESSARY SHIFT IN VOICE (From active to passive).
4. Corrected version: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a beautiful lyrical work, containing a great deal of symbolism and many elements of the supernatural." This was a RUN-ON SENTENCE.
5. Correct this SENTENCE FRAGMENT or INCOMPLETE SENTENCE by attaching it to a MAIN or INDEPENDENT CLAUSE. "Although we had suspected his guilt for some time, (a subordinate clause), WE WERE UNPREPARED FOR HIS SUDDEN DECISION TO CONFESS." (Main clause)...
6. a. Change "have" to "has" to agree with "teacher." This is an error in AGREEMENT OF SUBJECT AND VERB.
b. Change "them" to "him" or "her." This corrects an error in AGREEMENT OF A PRONOUN WITH ITS ANTECEDENT.
7. Change "affect" to "effect." "Affect" means "to impress" or "influence." "Effect" means "result." This corrects an error in DICTION.
8. The sentence should read: "The Board *has* notified but two applicants to appear." This corrects a DOUBLE NEGATIVE.
9. The corrected version should read: "First, *drive* straight along the highway; *turn* right; then, *continue* for a mile." In this version all the verbs have been placed in the IMPERATIVE MOOD to make them uniform and parallel. This corrects an error in PARALLEL STRUCTURE.
10. The corrected version should read: "The mother, given a prescription by the doctor, asked her daughter to fill it." This clearly identifies the *mother* as the one requiring the prescription and corrects a case of AMBIGUOUS REFERENCE.

III. ADDITIONAL METHODS OF CORRECTING A SENTENCE FRAGMENT

Sometimes, correction of a sentence fragment requires supplying an independent verb to which it can be attached. Suppose the same thought had appeared in this form: "The study of aviation with its rigid requirements in physics, mathematics, meteorology, body-building calisthenics, etc." Here the sentence fragment could only become a "full-grown" sentence if we added a *predicate* —namely, the words "discouraged me" so that it read: "The study of aviation, etc. discouraged me."

A third and very common type of sentence fragment is the one that masquerades as a complete sentence but is really a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE. The same student might have written: "When I studied aviation-----etc." This looks like a complete sentence, but the signpost "when" tells us that we are looking at a *subordinate clause*. We must, therefore, attach this subordinate clause to a MAIN or INDEPENDENT CLAUSE. We do so and obtain the following complete sentence: "When I studied aviation with its rigid requirements in mathematics, physics, meteorology, body-building calisthenics, etc., I was discouraged at first." This last clause, "I WAS DISCOURAGED AT FIRST," is the MAIN or INDEPENDENT CLAUSE to which the "when" clause or SUBORDINATE CLAUSE has been attached to make the combination of the two a COMPLETE SENTENCE.

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Prior to publication, THE ANATOMY OF LANGUAGE was presented to a group of elementary and junior high school teachers in an In-Service Training Course for Teachers of Language Arts in New York City. Here are just a few of the many enthusiastic comments from these teachers:

"Very valuable because the presentation is very logical, the speech very fine; delightful to hear."

"It would correlate and classify various elements of grammar and it would be easier to combine similar ones."

"It enables a teacher to know where (she) is going."

"Fresh ideas on how to present lessons in interesting fashion."

"Very good. . . . Teacher can be assured of a successful language program."

"Enables a teacher to give more interesting and valuable lessons."

"It would be excellent for my own interest and my family's because of daughters who are or will be in the process of taking College Board Exams."

The ANATOMY of LANGUAGE

Writing for *Scholastic Teacher* magazine, Dr. Joseph Mersand, past President of the National Council of Teachers of English, says:

This album written and narrated by Morris Schreiber, a principal in the New York City schools, is subtitled "For college entrance preparation in English and for general cultural improvement." *Eleven* of the sides are devoted to vocabulary and sentence completion and discuss the families of words that deal with the following aspects: time, number, place, people (man's physical aspects; his mental and spiritual aspects), family and religion, education and government, man's senses and emotions, man's work, descriptive terms and word scales, review and mastery test.

One side is concerned with word relationships (analogies). One side deals with writing an effective composition, comprising narration, description, and exposition. The last record suggests some techniques in reading comprehension. A 104-page book accompanies the records which contains not only the material spoken but supplementary exercises.

Mr. Schreiber has written and narrated the entire course, and speaks in a clear, pleasant, and well-modulated voice. He has organized each of the topics in an interesting and logical manner. *Effective motivational introductions* arrest the attention of the listener. Being an *experienced teacher*, he has done more than lecture on ways to improve one's vocabulary, written composition and reading comprehension. Various kinds of exercises—multiple choice, fill-in, matching, frequently are incorporated into each topic.

His suggestions on how to write effective compositions have long been the standard procedures: arranging one's thoughts pro and con on a certain topic (the recording selects the advantages and disadvantages of pocketbooks), having a good opening sentence, and arrangement of ideas with the most important at the end.

His *suggestions* to improve reading comprehension include devices to master the mood of the writer; context clues to acquiring new vocabulary; the writer's development of his ideas; recall and interpretation of specific details; determination of previous content and anticipation of conclusions.

I can see several obvious types of utilization of this album:

1. Personal *self-study and improvement* by juniors and seniors in high schools and adults who do not have a formal, systematic background of these language skills. Taken in small doses and at frequent intervals, growth in language should develop.

2. In groups where a *well-trained teacher is lacking*. I do not believe that any teaching tool can ever take the place of the gifted, resourceful, and creative teacher who is well-grounded in linguistic backgrounds.

3. For *review purposes for any particular aspect of the language arts*. Such a review could be incorporated into regular classroom procedures as a means of enrichment.

4. For any one or any group interested in an *interesting, educationally valid, and well-organized* introduction to the fascinating study of the glories of the English language—in itself a lifetime study.

I should like to see controlled experiments undertaken using these recordings and more traditional methods of teaching. We have much to learn about the most effective means to teach vocabulary, writing, and reading. If such recordings as *The Anatomy of Language* can be proven by adequate research to achieve desirable objectives more economically and more permanently, then more series of this type in other phases of the English Language Arts might be encouraged.

— JOSEPH MERSAND

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