

Objectives

This composition section prepares the students for more complicated and more sophisticated compositions. Learning to organize the topic by choosing rooms and furniture helps keep the composition focused. Learning to make an organized plan before starting the composition breaks the writing process into smaller and easier steps.

Organization

My students begin learning organization by writing a simple paragraph about my classroom.

We start by making a list of six items in the room. A six item plan will allow them to write a seven sentence paragraph that starts with a topic sentence.

The topic sentence clearly states the topic of the paragraph.

The Furniture

The students select six items in the room and write them in the margin of their paper.

windows

flag

filing cabinets

senior pictures

TV

lectern

Three Ways to Organize

Chronological Order: The way things occurred in time, usually from oldest to most recent.

Order of Importance: Arrange items by relative importance, usually from least important to most important.

Spatial Order: Arrange items as they occur in the space they occupy.

Organizing the Furniture

Then organize the furniture on the plan by numbering them in spatial order.

6. windows

1. flag

4. filing cabinets

5. senior pictures

3. TV

2. lectern

Topic Sentences

We first dissect a flawed topic sentence.

I will be writing about Room 180.

The main topic of the of the paragraph will be “Room 180,” but that is put at the end of this topic sentence. Do not announce “I will be writing” since it is obvious. The use of “I” will be off the topic in this type of paragraph.

A Topic Sentence

Room 180 is my Freshman English classroom.

This topic sentence has the main topic at the beginning of the sentence. This topic sentence stays on the topic, and it says something of substance about the topic.

Writing the Topic Sentence

Try to begin the topic sentence with a main idea. In this case the main idea is “Room 180.”

Then make a general statement that does not contain any of the “furniture.” Say something of substance about the topic in the topic sentence.

Weak: Room 180 has many items.

Stronger: Room 180 contains many items that are commonly found in a classroom.

A Paragraph

- (1) Room 180 is my Second Block classroom.
- (2) In the front of the room to the right is the flag.
- (3) The teacher's lectern is below the flag.
- (4) There is a TV suspended from the wall on the left.
- (5) Two filing cabinets sit against the left wall.
- (6) Along the same wall are several frames of senior pictures.
- (7) There are six sets of windows in the back of the room.

Checking the Paragraph

Sentence (1) is the topic sentence. Sentences (2) and (6) have their main ideas at the end of the sentence. Sentences (4) and (7) have their main ideas in the middle of the sentence. Sentences (3) and (5) have their main ideas at the beginning of the sentence where the main idea is often placed. The sentences with weak structure are easy to reorganize.

Reorganizing Sentences

Rewriting sentences (2) and (6) to move their main ideas to the the beginning of the sentence is easy.

In the front of the room to the right is the flag.

Simply move the main idea in sentence (2) to the beginning *The flag is to the right in the front of*

the room. Sentence (6) can be flipped over just as easily. *Along the same wall are several frames of*

senior pictures. Rewritten the sentence reads:

Several frames of senior pictures are along the same wall.

More Improvements

Rewriting sentences (4) and (7) to move their main ideas to the beginning of the sentence is also easy. There is a TV suspended from the wall on the left. There are six sets of windows in the back of the room. Both sentences begin with “there.” Simply remove the “there” and move the main idea to the beginning of the sentence. A TV is suspended from the wall on the left. Six sets of windows are in the back of the room.

Main Ideas

Since sentences (3) and (5) have their main ideas at the beginning, they do not have to be rewritten. Reorganizing sentences to move the main ideas to the beginning is usually easy. With practice, fewer and fewer sentences will need this editing.

Referring to the plan for main ideas makes writing organized sentences much easier.

New and Improved

Room 180 is my Second Block classroom.

The flag is to the right in the front of the room. The teacher's lectern is below the flag. A TV is suspended from the wall on the left. Two filing cabinets sit against the left wall. Several frames of senior pictures are along the same wall. Six sets of windows are in the back of the room.

Organizing a Composition

The classic five-paragraph composition is a starting point. These compositions are made up of an introduction, three body paragraphs and a conclusion. Once this style of composition is learned, more sophisticated compositions are only a few steps away.

Houses, Rooms & Furniture

Begin the composition by making a plan. We can think of our topic as being like a house that holds several rooms. We need to select which of those rooms we will be writing about. Then we need to decide which pieces of furniture we will write about. Once these decisions are made and put into a list, the writing of the composition is quite easy.

The Plan

My brown-brick apartment.

Kitchen

stove

refrigerator

coffee pot

cabinets

sink

microwave

Living room

TV

recliner

couch

stereo

plants

coffee table

Spare room

bookcase

weights

plants

TV

maps

chair

Organizing the Plan

After the plan is made, simply number the rooms and the furniture using spatial organization. After the plan is reorganized, writing the three body paragraphs for the composition will be very easy. The topic sentences for each paragraph will use the room name as its main idea. Each support sentence use the furniture name for its main idea.

A Reorganized Plan

My brown-brick apartment.

2. Kitchen

6. stove

1. refrigerator

3. coffee pot

2. cabinets

4. sink

5. microwave

1. Living room

5. TV

1. recliner

2. couch

4. stereo

3. plants

6. coffee table

3. Spare room

1. bookcase

3. weights

2. plants

4. TV

6. maps

5. chair

The Introduction

Introductions are five sentences long. Since paragraphs begin with a topic sentence, the introduction should begin with a topic sentence. The next three sentences should be general sentences that spark interest in the topic. The last sentence of the introduction is the thesis sentence.

The Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is the last sentence of the introduction. The thesis statement should clearly state the topic and narrow the topic to give the focus of the composition.

This thesis statement is neither narrow nor focused: *I'm going to write about sports.*

This thesis statement has a narrow focus: *High school sports include boys' sports, girls' sports and intramurals.*

Writing the Introduction

Use the plan to help with the introduction. The main topic “the house” should be the main idea in the topic sentence. The main idea and the three room names may be mentioned or alluded to in the thesis. A good plan makes all of the composition easy to write except the three general sentences in the introduction. Choose interesting main ideas for these sentences, but don’t mention any rooms or furniture.

An Introduction

(Topic sentence) My brown-brick apartment is in Arcadia. (Three general statements) The apartment is about 20 years old. The brown carpet needs to be replaced. The white walls are freshly painted. (Thesis statement) My apartment has three main rooms. (Alternate thesis) The living room, kitchen and spare room are the most important rooms in my apartment.

Body Paragraphs

The body paragraphs are written the same way the “Room 180” paragraph was written. Begin with a topic sentence using the name of the room as the main idea.

Then write a sentence for each item on the plan for that room. Make sure that the name of the piece of furniture is the main idea in each of these sentences.

A Body Paragraph

(Topic sentence) My living room is just inside the front door. (Support sentences) The recliner is to the right of the door. The couch is on the left of the recliner. Plants hang from the ceiling in front of the window. The stereo is on the bottom shelf of the entertainment center. The TV is just above the stereo. The coffee table in the center of the room is an antique box.

Transitions

Use transitions to show the connection between body paragraphs. The transition belongs in the topic sentence of the second and third body paragraphs.

Linking transitions show the connection between the two body paragraphs. Linking transitions are words such as **next, another, before, after, second, third etc.**

Echo transitions repeat a key word from the previous body paragraph.

Examples of Transitions

The kitchen is next on the plan. The following sentences will serve as both topic sentence and transition.

1. The kitchen is the next room.
2. The kitchen is the second room.
3. The kitchen is to the left of the living room.

Sentence 3 has the best detail.

Another Body Paragraph

(Topic sentence with transition) **The kitchen is to the left of the living room.** (Support sentences) **The refrigerator is to the left of the entrance. The cabinets start above the refrigerator and continue around the kitchen. The coffee pot is below the cabinets. The sink is at the far end of the kitchen. The microwave sits on the counter. The stove is next to the microwave.**

The Last Body Paragraph

(Topic sentence with transition) The spare room is down the hall and to the left.

(Support sentences) A bookcase full of books is against the wall to the left. Plants hang in front of the window. The weights sitting on the floor are quite dusty. A small TV sits on a stand in the corner. A chair is opposite the TV. Maps of South America and Africa are on the wall.

Writing the Conclusion

The conclusion brings the composition to an end by restating the main ideas of the composition. Begin by restating, not repeating, the thesis sentence. Then restate the main ideas from each of the body paragraphs.

A Conclusion

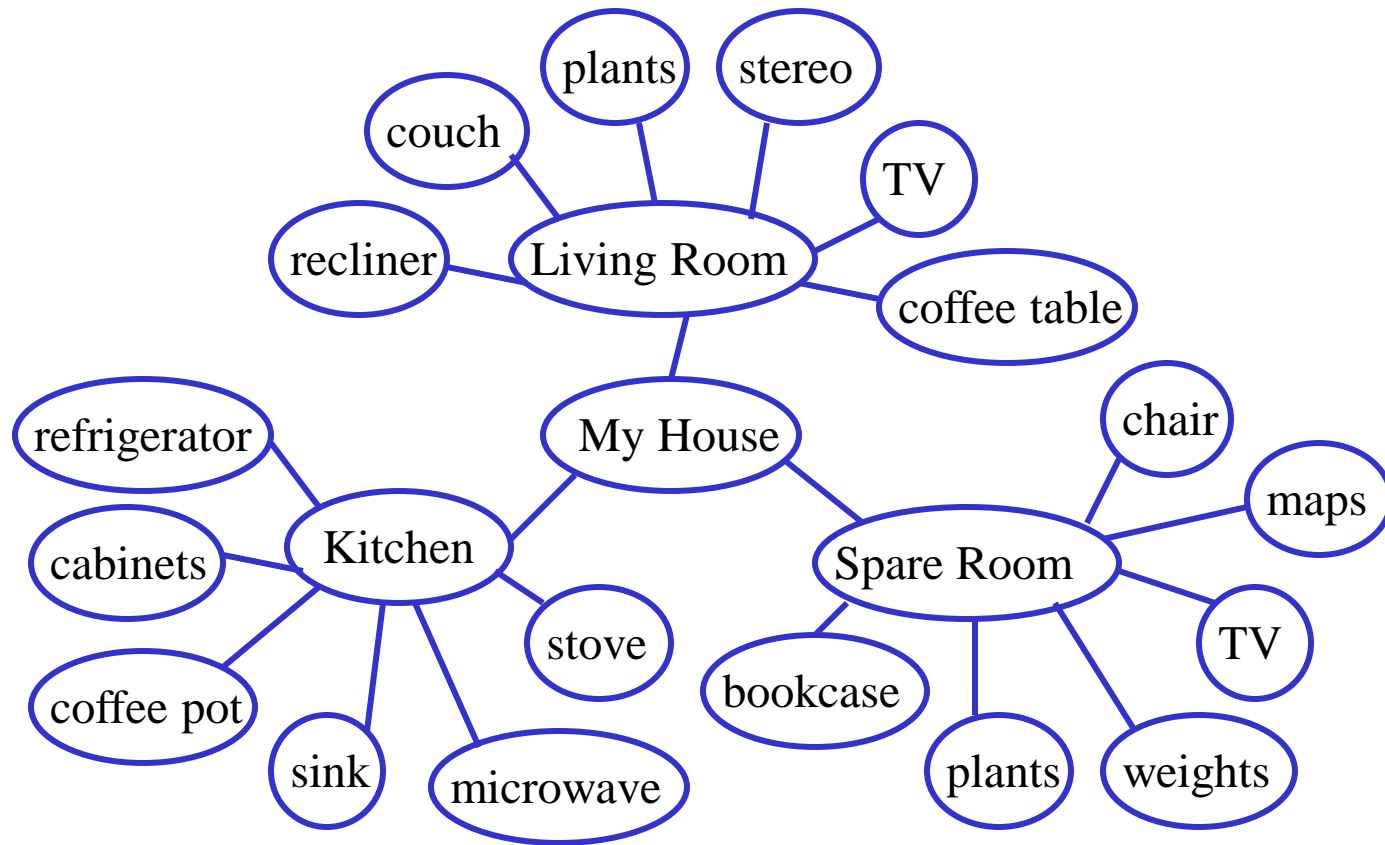
(Restated thesis sentence) The three main rooms in my apartment are important.

(Restated topic sentences) My living room is in the front of the apartment. The kitchen is next to the living room. The spare room is in the back of the apartment.

Spider Webs

My students learn to make their plan as a list. That is not the only way to plan a composition. Many writers prefer a spider web technique of planning. With the spider web the main idea of the composition and the focus of the thesis sentence is in the center, and the subtopics, the rooms and furniture, radiate from the main idea.

A Spider Web



Prompts

Prompts are words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs that are used to build a composition. Using the main ideas from the prompt in the thesis statement makes writing the thesis easy.

Circle the main ideas in the prompt then make these ideas main ideas in the thesis.

Prompt to Thesis

A prompt: How will you spend the \$1,000 you saved this summer?

The prompt's use of you lets us know we may write about ourselves. Spend, \$1,000 and this summer will become the main ideas in the thesis statement. Just a little thought give us this thesis statement.

I will spend the \$1,000 I saved this summer on clothes, my car and Christmas gifts.

Now we know the three main rooms for the composition also.

Entertainment Center Concept

Some pieces of furniture deserve more than one sentence in a composition. We discuss how these ideas are like the entertainment center in the living room. The entertainment center can be discussed as one subject, or it can be broken down into its separate parts: TV, stereo, DVD player etc. This allows the students to write about more complex ideas.

Comparison-Contrast

Comparison-contrast compositions show how two things are alike or different with a focus on one. If the topics are more alike, the differences are dealt with in the first body paragraph and the similarities are dealt with in the next two body paragraphs. If the two topics are more different, the similarities are dealt with first, and the differences last.

Comparison-Contrast Thesis

Since a comparison-contrast composition deals with two topics, the thesis statement should state both topics and show whether the focus is on similarities or differences. A complex sentence beginning with **although** or **even though** can contain all of these ideas. The focus of the composition should be in the second part of the sentence.

Even though apples and oranges are both fruit, they are different in taste and uses.

Comparison-Contrast Plans

A good plan will make writing comparison-contrast compositions easy. We can still use our rooms and furniture, but the planning will be a bit easier if the plan is put on a grid. Each of our rooms will get two names, and each room will have two sections.

When the plan is completed, it will have the main ideas for the topic sentences and for the support sentences.

A Comparison-Contrast Plan

		Apples	Oranges
1. Topic sentence	Similar fruit	2. seeds 4. peel 6. juicy	3. seeds 5. peel 7. juicy
8. Topic sentence	Different taste	9. sweet 11. firm texture 13. edible peel	10. tart 12. quite juicy 14. inedible peel
15. Topic sentence	Different uses	16. cider 18. neat snack 20. pies	17. juice 19. messy snack 21. marmalade

Writing the Comparison- Contrast Introduction

Once the plan is complete, writing the comparison-contrast composition is simple. The introduction begins with a topic sentence introducing both topics. Three general sentences then kindle the reader's interest. The thesis sentence shows whether the focus on the topics is on similarities or differences.

Body Paragraphs for Comparison-Contrast Compositions

Use the two names of the room as the main idea in the topic sentence. Then follow the plan for that room in a zigzag through the list. This technique lets the reader see the relationship between the two topics. Use transitions between body paragraphs to continue to show the relationship between the topics.

A Body Paragraph

Apples and oranges are both grown on fruit trees. Apples have seeds close to the core. Oranges also have their seeds near the center of the fruit. The peel of an apple covers and protects the fruit. An orange also has a protective peel. Apples have a tasty juice. Orange juice is also quite tasty.

Transitions and Topic Sentences

The transition should show whether the two topics are alike or different. Usually the transition can be combined with the topic sentence. Topic sentences for the second and third body paragraphs could be written like this:

A main difference between apples and oranges is in their taste.

Another difference between apples and oranges is in the way each fruit is used.

Comparison-Contrast Conclusions

The conclusion for a comparison-contrast composition is similar in structure to any other conclusion. Begin by restating the thesis sentence. Then restate each of the main ideas from the topic sentence of each body paragraph. This will result in a four-sentence conclusion that neatly ties the composition together.

Adaptations

Once the students have learned to start by getting organized, transferring this technique to other styles of writing is simple. Paragraphs, compositions, reports, letters and even stories are easier to write if main ideas are circled and a plan is made. Breaking down the writing process into smaller steps makes the steps easier to take.