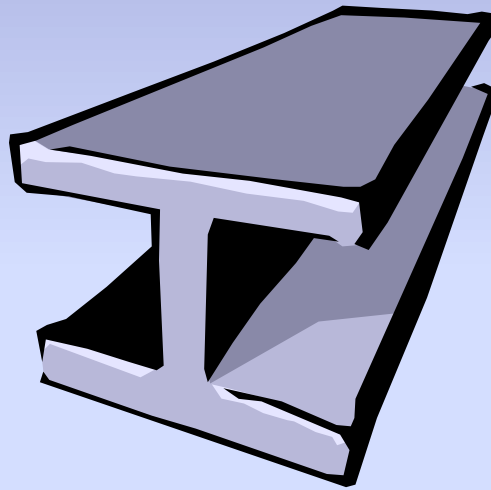


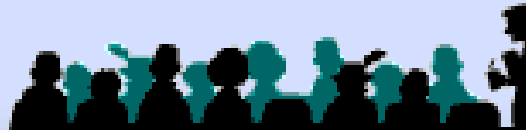
Personal Narrative Writer's Workshop



AP English Language & Composition

Theme, Meaning or Purpose...

A personal essay must have a theme or meaning, a purpose for sharing the story or personal experience.



The Structure of the Essay Supports its Purpose...

An essay writer must have a reason or purpose for telling a personal story or writing about an experience or character.

A writer must make meaning of his or her life experience.

Meaning is sometimes revealed as, or even after, the writer writes about a life experience. Using this strategy, the writer may jump right into the story, without a formal introduction. But, the writer must then focus on clearly weaving the theme or meaning into the essay, reinforcing it in the revision process.



To convey meaning, a writer must...



- **Discuss an abstract idea** (*the beauty of love, the harshness of learning justice, the rewards of hard work, the disillusionment of love, the satisfaction of justice, coping with failure despite hard work*) **that is essential to (that “fits”) his or her story**
- **Convey a lesson learned** (*I now know that...What this experience made me realize is...This experience gave me an understanding of...*)
- **Share his or her perspective of a universal experience** (*peer pressure, first kiss, coping with stress, the loss of a loved one, learning the hard way*)

After choosing the story (plot) an essay writer must...

Introduce the meaning, purpose or theme in the **introduction**

Weave the theme or idea throughout the **body** of the essay. All the sub-stories and details contained in the story must support the main or “revelant idea.” **A story generally builds to a peak or climax near the end of the body.**



Re-focus, re-assess, expand on, or discuss the theme or idea in the **conclusion**

Let's take a closer look at the **STRUCTURE** of an essay by examining the parts...

- **Introduction**
- **Body**
- **Conclusion**
- **Transition Sentences**

The Introduction...

The introduction is often called “the lead.”

A good lead must have a “hook” or a “grabber” – a strong statement that “grabs” the readers’ attention or “pulls readers in.”



Most importantly, an introductory paragraph must define the essay’s meaning or theme. The purpose of the essay must be clear.

A lead may be one single paragraph or may extend to several paragraphs.

The Introduction...

A solid introduction will:

- **Pique the reader's interest**
- **Set the scene - background or context**
- **Reveal tension or conflict**
- **Interpret an experience (briefly)**
- **Identify the theme or idea that the writer will explore**

The Body...

The body consists of the bulk of the story, the paragraphs that tell the story and develop the theme through examples and detailed experiences that build upon each other.



The details a writer includes are often called the “supporting details,” details that support the theme or main idea, details that are relevant to the story.

The Conclusion...

A conclusion widens the lens and wraps up the essay (draws everything together) without summarizing or repeating what has already been written.

A conclusion resolves the tension or conflict.

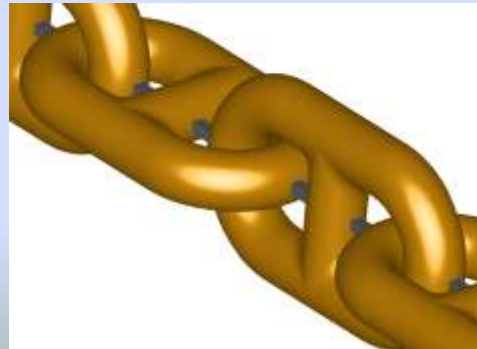


A conclusion discusses, re-frames (puts in perspective) or reflects on the universal theme, idea or life lesson.

A conclusion lets the reader know what the writer knows “now” that he/she didn’t know “then” (before the experience).

Transition Sentences...

A writer must create connections between paragraphs. As you already know, the first sentence of a paragraph is the “topic sentence,” which guides the content of the entire paragraph. The last sentence of each paragraph is just as important. It is a transition sentence and must “urge readers on” to the following paragraph.



A Final Pointer...



The ideal essay shows readers how they might apply what the writer learned or how they might connect to the writer's experiences by acknowledging similar experiences.

- **This essay is bigger than you.**
 - **What can others learn from your experience?**
 - **How can readers identify with your ideas?**
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- **REMINDER: 2ND DRAFT DUE MONDAY!**

Activity...A Critical Reading Workshop

1. In the left margin, bracket each section – intro, body, conclusion and label them.
2. Review the contents of each part. *Is there a hook? Is the theme or idea clear? Does the introduction make your audience want to read on? Do you reflect at the end? Is your theme developed throughout?* Make additions or revisions.
3. Double underline the hook in your lead or intro.
4. Circle a sentence that your theme and label it.
5. Place a squiggly line under the sentences that discuss or reflect on the theme.
6. Check your topic sentences—in a word or two (in the margins) summarize the topic of each paragraph.
7. Check your topic and transition sentences – write a brief comment near each explaining why that sentence (the first) makes readers want to continue or how it (the last of each paragraph) smoothly connects to the next paragraph.

