

## CHAPTER 1

# GETTING STARTED: COMPUTERS, GRAMMAR, SENTENCES, AND PARAGRAPHS

### CHAPTER PREVIEW

**In this chapter, you will learn about:**

- The importance of standard English
- Why writing is important
- Writing with the computer
- Writing sentences
- Writing paragraphs: An overview

## Standard English: Who Needs It?

The study of grammar and writing is often dreaded by many students—yet no other skill set affects a college student’s academic and professional success as strongly as the ability to speak and write clearly and persuasively. Almost every class that you will take in college requires writing of some kind. You will be expected to write reports, essays, and term papers that are well organized, logical, and convincing.

Once you leave college, you will see that there is a growing link between a worker’s writing skills and his or her earning power. The Information Age has made email, text-messaging, blogs, and other kinds of electronic writing vital to a surging number of businesses; employees who cannot communicate well in these ways often receive lower positions and pay than they would like. Because of this new focus on written communication in business and other job fields, many employers now ask applicants to answer at least some of their interview questions in writing. Emails, reports, proposals, summaries, text messages, Web site postings, and letters

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are typically required in today's work world. And they must be not only factually accurate but also free of serious mistakes in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

In college, on the job, and in social settings, you will succeed more rapidly and confidently if you show a strong command of **standard written English**.

Fortunately, you already know and unconsciously follow most of the principles of standard written English. The chapters that follow in this book will build on that knowledge. Standard written English is the kind of English that you find in reports, books, newspapers, and articles and that you hear spoken by news announcers on television or radio and by your instructors in classrooms. In informal conversations, of course, you can ignore many of the principles of standard written English. Most **slang**, for example, is perfectly acceptable to many speakers of American English. But if such expressions appear in writing, they can get in the way of the writer's ideas and distract the reader.

The clothes you wear while working on your car or painting your room would not be appropriate for a job interview. The slang you use with your friends would not be appropriate when you speak to a traffic judge whom you are trying to impress. To be a good writer, therefore, you will be expected to follow the principles of standard written English—in other words, to use language that is right for the job. If your writing does not follow those principles—if it is filled with errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation—it will confuse and mislead your reader. It could even convince him or her that you and your ideas should not be taken seriously.

For these reasons, the following chapters will give you a quick review of the parts of speech and then deal with the most serious kinds of errors that writers make. But do not get

### **PREPARING TO WRITE A Collaborative Checklist**

Discuss these questions with other students in your class.

1. Do you find yourself in situations in which writing is important? Explain.
2. What ritual do you follow before you write? Do you like to have music on? Drink coffee? Do you sharpen your pencils, clean your room, or play a computer game? Describe the routine you follow in order to get started.
3. Good writers read. What do you read regularly? Which magazines, books, or newspapers? Who are your favorite authors, or what are your favorite types of books?
4. Bring to class an example of writing by a professional reporter or author whom you like. What do you like about it? Read the example to the class and see if others like it. If they do not, examine their reasons.
5. What are your strengths as a writer? Try to be specific: mention things like ideas, vocabulary, organization, or any other aspect of your writing that does not present problems for you.
6. What are your weaknesses as a writer? Again, try to be specific: mention things like getting started, weak vocabulary, poor spelling, shortage of ideas, and so on.
7. Bring to class some of your own writing that you like. Read it to the class (or have someone else read it). What are their reactions?

### WRITING TIPS According to the Dictionary

The dictionary is a useful resource that you will use in your college classes and for the rest of your life. A dictionary contains much more than definitions. It tells you the history of a word and how it is spelled, hyphenated, and pronounced. Traditional hard-copy favorites of college students and instructors include *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, and *The Random House College Dictionary*. Online dictionaries are helpful when you're working away from your desk and might not have your hard-copy dictionary with you. Try <http://www.merriam-webster.com> and <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.com>. Both Web sites also feature a thesaurus. Ask your instructor for more suggestions.

the idea that the avoidance of errors equals good writing. You will also need practice in writing sentences and paragraphs that are interesting, coherent, and correct.



Learn more about the differences between standard and non-standard English, and when it is appropriate to use each, at <http://www.mywritinglab.com>. Find your instructor's Study Plan and click "Getting Started," then "Standard English: Who Needs It?" You can practice identifying and correcting non-standard English words and phrases in a series of multiple choices items, several paragraphs that need correction, and a short article that needs rewriting.

## Writing with the Computer

The act of writing has become easier because of the introduction of computers. It is simply faster to produce an assignment on a computer than on an old-school typewriter. Of course, it was dramatic and entertaining to tug an error-riddled page from the typewriter, crunch it into a ball, and free-throw it into the wastepaper basket—but in all other ways, the computer is superior to the typewriter. The chief advantage is that the computer allows you to change, correct, and rewrite selected portions of your paper without retyping the whole assignment. The parts of your paper that you do not want to change can remain in their original form and do not have to be retyped.

Just as there are different writing styles among those who use a pen or typewriter, so there are differing practices among computer users. Some writers work directly at the keyboard and compose until they have completed their first draft. Then they revise and edit until they have made all of their modifications and changes. Others write their first draft by hand and then use the computer to prepare their final copy. Still others write at the keyboard, print a copy, and then revise with pen or pencil; they then go back to the computer for further alterations.

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Regardless of the composing style that you prefer, you should not become discouraged at your first attempts to use a computer. As you master it, you will learn that you can move or delete words, sentences, paragraphs, or entire pages; change words, phrases, or sentences; correct punctuation, mechanics, and misspelled words; and copy part or all of the paper to use for other purposes.

In addition to revising and editing, the computer has other uses. In the preparation and formatting of a paper, you can change spacing and margins, incorporate boldface, italicize words and titles, center material on a page, and close any spaces left by deletions and substitutions.

The effect of using a computer will be obvious as you become familiar with its features. The most obvious is that revision is easier: by merely pressing a few keys or moving the mouse, you can shift words, sentences, and entire paragraphs. By putting down ideas as they come to you, you will be less worried about forgetting important points and more likely to draft quickly. After you have written a draft, you can incorporate additional material, and because you can get a clean copy whenever you want after making changes, you will probably revise and edit more than if you had to retype continually.

Using the computer will not make you a good writer. You will still need to arrange your ideas in the most effective and logical order, develop and plan your paragraphs carefully, and use the most appropriate word choice and sentence structure. But for the last, important stage of the writing process—revising and editing—the computer can be an invaluable tool.



Visit <http://www.mywritinglab.com> and click on “Writing with a Computer” to watch a brief animation about creating a “writer’s ritual” for yourself—that is, how to get your schedule, supplies, and mind-set ready for a writing session. In addition, see how keeping a journal can improve the speed and creativity of your writing. You can get a list of journal topics and some practice in writing a journal entry, too.

## Writing Sentences

In each of the following chapters you will be asked to write original sentences that apply the grammatical skills you will have learned in the chapter. Editing exercises are also included, and each will ask you to correct and revise sentences in accordance with these skills.

## EDITING EXERCISE

The following sentences contain some of the most common errors in usage. Rewrite each sentence in standard written English. To help you recognize the errors, you can refer to the chapter indicated after each sentence.

1. She had already took the medicine before we could tell her of the possible side effects. (Chapter 5) **She had already taken the medicine before we could tell her of the possible side effects.**
2. Jake is the pitcher that we'd most like to have on our team. (Chapter 6) **Jake is the pitcher whom we'd most like to have on our team.**
3. Don't worry about tomorrow's exam, it has been postponed until next week. (Chapter 9) **Don't worry about tomorrow's exam; it has been postponed until next week. (Note: See Chapter 9 for additional ways to correct this item.)**
4. Weak and dehydrated, the marathon took every ounce of strength that Rosa had. (Chapter 10) **Weak and dehydrated, Rosa gave the marathon every ounce of strength she had.**
5. If you're hungry, there's some peaches in the fridge. (Chapter 7) **If you're hungry, there are some peaches in the refrigerator.**
6. Sometimes I feel that my schoolwork is overwhelming, but you just have to get organized and work through it. (Chapter 7) **Sometimes I feel that my schoolwork is overwhelming, but I just have to get organized and work through it.**
7. Saturdays are made for sleeping in, seeing friends, and maybe to watch some mindless television. (Chapter 10) **Saturdays are made for sleeping in, seeing friends, and maybe watching some mindless television.**
8. The Road, a novel by Cormac McCarthy, was made into a popular film. (Chapter 11) **Italicize "The Road."**
9. No matter how sincerely I try, I just can't spell very good. (Chapter 2) **No matter how sincerely I try, I just can't spell very well.**
10. Our young nephew seemed proud of hissself for making his sister cry. (Chapter 6) **Our young nephew seemed proud of himself for making his sister cry.**
11. Hey! There's the boy whom tried to steal my iPod! (Chapter 6) **Hey! There's the boy who tried to steal my iPod!**

(continued)

12. You had better set down for the big announcement we are about to make. (Chapter 5) **You had better sit down for the big announcement we are about to make.**
13. Pete lives near work and school yet he still wants to buy a car. (Chapter 8) **Pete lives near work and school, yet he still wants to buy a car.**
14. The kids and the dogs are outside, but they're not going to bathe them today. (Chapter 7) **The kids and the dogs are outside, but the kids aren't going to bathe the dogs today.**
15. Let me lay down for a few minutes before I start cooking dinner. (Chapter 5) **Let me lie down for a few minutes before I start cooking dinner.**
16. Lionel reads short stories and biographies but he likes graphic novels best. (Chapter 8) **Lionel reads short stories and biographies, but he likes graphic novels best.**
17. Garlic is better in pasta than butter. (Chapter 10) **Garlic is better in pasta than butter is.**
18. Sheila asked me are you ready for the rollercoaster ride? (Chapter 11) **Sheila asked me, "Are you ready for the rollercoaster ride?"**
19. Boris visited the grand canyon before driving on to utah and new mexico. (Chapter 11) **Boris visited the Grand Canyon before driving on to Utah and New Mexico.**
20. The hamster gets real nervous when the cat sits nearby. (Chapter 2) **The hamster gets really nervous when the cat sits nearby.**



For further measurement of your skills, log onto <http://www.mywritinglab.com> and click on "Diagnostic Pre-Tests." You will see four tests: Sentence Grammar, Punctuation and Mechanics, Usage and Style, and Basic Grammar. When you complete each test, you will receive an instant score and a chance to review any troublesome concepts.

## The Paragraph: An Overview

Most of the writing that you will be asked to do in college will be in the form of paragraphs. A **paragraph** consists of several related sentences that deal with a single topic, or an aspect of a topic. Paragraphs may stand alone, as in the case of responses to questions on examinations.

Usually, however, paragraphs are parts of longer pieces of writing, such as essays, reports, and term papers. In such cases, paragraphs help your reader by breaking down complicated ideas into manageable parts and relating each part to the main idea or thesis of your composition.

Regardless of whether it is freestanding or part of a larger unit, a well-organized paragraph has three characteristics:

- A good paragraph is *unified*: all of its sentences are related to one main idea.
- A good paragraph is *coherent*: the thoughts proceed logically from sentence to sentence.
- A good paragraph is *developed*: it contains enough information to convey the idea of the paragraph in a reasonably thorough way.

In the following chapters you will practice writing paragraphs that are unified, coherent, and developed. As mentioned, a *unified* paragraph is one about a single idea or topic. The sentence that states the paragraph's topic is the **topic sentence**, and the topic is developed and supported by the specifics in the sentences that follow or precede it. In Chapter 2 you will learn to recognize topic sentences and to write your own paragraphs with topic sentences.

Good paragraphs are *coherent*. This means that the sentences are in the right order with the right connecting words so that the reader is not confused. Chapters 3–6 will introduce you to ways to make your paragraphs coherent so that your thoughts will be easy to follow—from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph.

In addition to being unified and coherent, good paragraphs are *developed*. They contain details and material that fulfill the promise made to the reader in the topic sentence. Several methods of paragraph development are available to you, and they are presented in Chapters 7–11.



Visit <http://www.mywritinglab.com> and click "Getting Started," then "The Paragraph: An Overview" to watch brief animations about some easy guidelines for writing a good paragraph. You can practice recognizing elements of a paragraph's structure and find a variety of topics for writing your own paragraphs.

## Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

The first and last paragraphs of your essay are important. The introduction creates the first impression and therefore must be effective. The conclusion is your last chance to influence or impress your readers and to leave them with a sense of completion.

Some writers write the introduction first, but others prefer to write it after the rest of the essay has been written. Similarly, some write the conclusion first, using it as a kind of final destination point to aim for as they write. Regardless of when the introduction and conclusion are written, they are vital parts of the essay.

## Introductions

A good introduction to an essay performs several jobs. The most obvious is to introduce the subject that you will develop and to pave the way for the thesis statement or controlling idea of the essay. The introduction should also catch the readers' interest, making them want to read on. A good introduction informs readers of the writer's intention and suggests the tone of the essay, indicating whether it will be humorous, angry, or serious.

Here are some suggestions for writing introductions. Paragraphs that follow are student examples.

### Begin with a Direct Statement of Your Topic and Thesis

- Every January, millions of American men and women huddle around their television sets to watch football's Super Bowl. Although typical viewers would probably tell you they're watching the game because they admire the players' abilities or a certain team, they are actually watching the game because it fulfills several of their unconscious needs and desires.

### Begin with a Personal Anecdote

- I was fifteen when my father was transferred to an American base in Japan and our entire family was moved from our home in Texas. Because there would not be an opening in the base school for a semester, and because my parents did not want me to lose any school time, I was enrolled in the nearby public school in Osaka. From that experience I learned the importance of tolerance and understanding of others whose skin, culture, or language might be different. I also learned what it means to be a member of a minority.

### Begin with a Question

- What are the chances of a chemical or biological attack by terrorists on one of our major American cities? How many people would survive? Would such an attack make living conditions impossible for the survivors? These and similar questions are being asked by our government as well as by ordinary citizens as a result of recent terrorist attacks throughout the world.



### Begin with a Quotation

- “To be or not to be; that is the question.” Every year an increasing number of people are answering those words of Hamlet’s by taking their own lives. Suicide is a major cause of death among Americans under the age of twenty-five.

### Begin with an Imaginary Scene or a “What If?” Situation

- Can you imagine living your life without being able to see or hear anyone or anything? As if that were not bad enough, imagine not being able to speak. You would feel totally isolated and cut off from the world. That is how Helen Keller felt, before she met her teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan.

### Begin with a Surprising Statement

- Staying up all night to study before a final exam is one of the most harmful and least productive ways to prepare for a test. Although hundreds of thousands of college students might believe otherwise, psychologists and college counselors say that a good night’s rest is actually more helpful than spending the time cramming.

## Conclusions

The conclusion of your essay, like its introduction, can fulfill several purposes. It can summarize your main points or restate your thesis (avoiding the same words or expressions that were used throughout the essay). It can suggest a sense of “closure” by referring to a quotation or fact used in the introduction. Some introductions ask the reader to do something—to take some action, consider another alternative, or think more deeply about an issue or problem. Other introductions speculate on the future by predicting what will happen as a result of the situation described in the essay.

Your conclusion should be in proportion to the length of the body of the essay. For a short paper, a few sentences are enough. For longer papers, one or two paragraphs would be appropriate. Regardless of length, your conclusion should convey to the reader a sense of completion.

Some suggestions for writing conclusions, with examples from student papers, follow.

### End with a Summary of Your Main Points

- These steps should be reviewed before the actual interview. A neat, organized résumé will let your prospective employer see your qualifications at a glance. A clear idea of the salary you expect gives both you and your interviewer a starting point for a discussion of wages. A businesslike, serious approach to the interview indicates your attitude toward the position. These steps are the best way to prepare for an interview.

### End with a Restatement of Your Thesis

- The facts, as we have seen, do not justify a belief in the existence of life in outer space. Despite the influence of Hollywood, the conditions necessary for life found on Earth cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the universe. Humans are unique, and to think otherwise is to ignore the evidence.

### End with a Fact or Quotation Used in the Introduction

- “All men are created equal” does not mean that all men and women are identical. What the writers of our Declaration of Independence meant is that individuals should be given their rights as unique human beings and respected for their common humanity.

### End by Asking Your Audience to Do Something

- There will be no improvement in our schools until there is a change of attitude in the home. Insist that your children attend classes regularly. Ask them about their assignments and homework. Spend some time every day reading to your children and listening to them read. Stress the importance of punctuality, neatness, and accuracy. By your attitude and behavior you will show that you value education and believe in the importance of the schools.

### End with a Prediction

- If gun control legislation is not passed, the consequences will be tragic for America. As the ownership of guns increases, violence will escalate. Crime involving handguns will multiply, and this country will become an armed camp. Vigilante groups will roam the streets. But there is still time to stop this madness. All it takes is courage on the part of our legislators.



Check <http://www.mywritinglab.com> for animations and exercises about writing introductions, conclusions, and titles. Just click “Getting Started,” then “Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs.” There is also a list of topics with which you can practice brainstorming titles, introductory sentences, and concluding sentences.

## WRITING PARAGRAPHS

This assignment calls for you to write a paragraph of at least six sentences on the topic of your choice. Remember that all of your sentences in the paragraph should deal with a single topic. After you have finished your first draft, look it over for ways to improve it. Will the paragraph be clear and interesting to your reader? Does your paragraph contain any sentences that stray from your topic? Does it have any errors in spelling, usage, or punctuation? Your instructor may ask you to exchange your first draft with another student in your class for his or her suggestions.

### EXERCISE A

A. Describe one of the following:

- a place you have been that you would like to revisit—it can be as close as your own neighborhood, or as far as another continent
- your impressions of a specific piece of technology

B. Tell what happened the last time you had an unpleasant encounter with a person in authority. For example, it may have been an argument with a traffic cop, a dispute with your parents, or a run-in with your boss.

### EXERCISE B

Write an opening paragraph that might begin an informal essay on one of these topics. Use one of the methods discussed in this chapter.

- our immigration laws
- violence in the media
- a graduation requirement that you want to see dropped
- the military draft
- vegetarianism
- why your favorite sport is enjoyable
- women and the “glass ceiling”
- hunting or fishing laws in your region
- capital punishment
- the benefits of knowing a foreign language

### WRITING TIPS In the Beginning

Unless your instructor says otherwise, your assignments do not need title pages. Instead, provide a simple heading on your first page. Starting one inch from the top of the page, key or type (or write) your name flush with the left margin. Below it, key or type your instructor’s name, the course number, and the date. Double-space each line. Double-space twice more, indent five spaces (one-half inch), and begin your paper.