

Composition Writing – A How To Guide Curriculum Map

Its aim is to help students write various types of compositions from grades six through the first years of secondary school. It will be helpful for students at higher levels of education who have had difficulty with writing in earlier years.

The resource contains many work sheets which can be used individually by students or in groups. Many of these work sheets are most useful if completed by pairs of students. It is also advisable for students to discuss the ideas generated by the work sheets in larger groups.

Much of this resource is written from a students perspective, teachers may give students the pages which they need to use as they write their compositions at home.

Lesson One: What is a Composition?

- Definition, Paragraphing, Unity and Coherence, Transitions, Types of Compositions

Lesson Two: Writing an Exposition

- Purpose, Techniques of Explanation, Newspaper Reports, Fact and Opinion, Essays, and Reports

Lesson Three: Writing a Narrative

- What is Narration, The Elements of Short Story Writing, The Guiding Principles of Short Story Writing, Differences between Narration and Exposition, Creating Suspense

Lesson Four: Writing a Description

- Factual and Literary Description, Techniques of Literary Description: Specific Detail, Precise Nouns and Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs, Imagery, Words which Suggest Sound

Lesson Five: Using the Writing Process

- Prewriting, Writing the First Draft, Editing and Revising, Writing the Final Copy



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

The purpose of an exposition is to explain. There are many kinds of expositions, such as the following:

- the persuasive essay or argument
- a feature article for a newspaper
- a business memo
- a research paper
- a newspaper editorial
- a report
- a letter

Outside of school, many people must write various kinds of expositions in both their jobs and their personal lives. Letters, memos, sometimes even recipes, e-mail and so on have become very necessary part of our lives. So it is important that students learn to write expositions.

There are many ways by which a writer may explain. A writer may explain by:

- giving reasons or causes (explaining *why* something occurs)
- comparing (showing how two or more things are the same)
- contrasting (showing how two or more things are different)
- defining (explaining what something means)
- providing facts or evidence
- showing how to do something

Sometimes it is very difficult to explain something. We have all listened to people give directions on how to get to a certain place. Some people can do this well, whereas others have a great difficulty explaining. The exercises which follow should help students to explain more effectively.

EXERCISE 1 ON EXPLANATION

To try your skills in explanation, write a brief exposition (one or more paragraphs) on the following topics. Use the techniques for explaining which is given after each topic.

1. Why does a zebra have stripes? (Give reasons.)
2. I am like my mother or my father. (Use comparison.)
3. How is a star different from a planet? (Use contrast.)
4. What is chlorophyll? (Define.)
5. Why is Celine Dion (or any other famous singer) very popular? (Provide facts or evidence.)
6. How to make a peanut butter sandwich. (List the steps in order.)
7. Why did Columbus sail to the New World? (Give reasons.)
8. How is American football different from Canadian football? (Use contrast.)
9. What is a terrarium? (Define.)



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

EXERCISE 2 ON EXPLANATION

What technique or techniques of explanation would you use if you were writing an exposition on each of the following topics? Write your answer in the space provided. In the column headed Why explain why you have chose each technique.

TOPIC	TECHNIQUE(S)	WHY
1. Is a harmonica different from a mouth organ?		
2. My favorite sports figure is...		
3. I would like to live in the city (or the country).		



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

NEWSPAPER REPORTS

Newspaper reporters use many of the techniques for explanation outlined here. In order to write a good article, reports often use what they call *the four w's and the h*. These are questions which they must answer in order to write an accurate report. These questions are:

- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

The reporter needs to know who are involved in the story, when the story occurred, where it occurred, why it happened and how it happened. If the reporter can find the answers to these questions, the story will be accurate, detailed and probably interesting.

EXERCISE ON NEWSPAPER REPORTING

Pretend you are a reporter for a newspaper. Find the answer to the five questions (who? when? where? why? how?) on one of the following stories. Then write the story.

1. An activity which has just occurred or will be occurring at your school, such as a sports game, a dramatic or musical event, or a school announcement.
2. A planned or current concert tour by your favorite singer or band.
3. A trip that you family has made or plans to make.
4. An interesting event from history or science, such as a discovery or an invention.



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

FACT OR OPINION

It is important for all human beings to be able to tell the difference between facts and opinions. Unfortunately, many people cannot do this, and these people often express their opinions as if they were facts.

A **fact** is something that is true, something that really happened. Often what we think happened and what did happen are not the same. That is because we notice or remember only certain things, and we may not notice or remember things that are important. In addition, when we talk or write about something that happened, we sometimes use our judgment and our feelings. This use of judgment and feelings is called an **opinion**.

Sometimes when people use their opinions as if they were facts, there is not a serious problem. We often hear people say, “I just saw a bad movie.” A statement like this one is an opinion. Someone else might see the same movie and call it a “good movie”; this too would be an opinion. In most cases, expressing an opinion like this one will do no harm. But sometimes the expressions of opinions as if they were facts will do harm. Throughout history, there have been people who considered certain groups to be inferior to themselves and this has led to prejudice and poor treatment of others.

A good opinion is one which is based on facts. When you wake up ill in the morning your mother may express the opinion that you have the flu. Unless your mother has particular knowledge of medicine and health, her opinion may or may not be a valid one. A doctor with his knowledge may discover the following facts: your temperature is 102°; you are breathing more heavily than you usually do; your heart rate is faster than normal; you have nasal congestion; etc. Based on these facts, he may conclude that you have the flu. This conclusion, however, is still an opinion. His opinion may be the same as your mother’s opinion, but because of the facts on which he has based it, it has more weight.

Not all opinions, therefore, are of equal value. Two people may hold the same opinion, but only one may know the facts. People sometimes say, “Everyone has a right to an opinion.” Note that this statement is also an opinion, but is it a valid opinion? Does a person have a right to an opinion which is not based on fact (called an **unfounded opinion**) if that opinion will hurt other people? Is an unfounded opinion from a person who knows little or nothing about the subject of equal value to the opinion of an expert in that subject?

It is important for the writer of expositions (especially essays or arguments which are statements of opinion) to know the difference between opinions and facts, and to use facts to support opinions. There are several ways for a writer or speaker to avoid expressing unfounded opinions. Some of these are:

- Do enough research, learn enough, to have a basis for forming an opinion. Do not form an opinion based on little knowledge. Then use this knowledge to support the opinions that you present.
- Avoid using generalizations. Sentences beginning with “Everyone knows...”, or “All the students in my class...” usually have not been researched. Often the writer or speaker is expressing his or her own opinion and trying to make it sound important by saying that this opinion is held by “everyone” or “all the students in my class”.
- Do not say that something “is”, if it only “may be”. “This statement is true” is not the same as “this statement may be true.” Similarly, “It may be beneficial” for people to do a certain thing or behave a certain way might be a more accurate way of expressing an idea than by saying, “It is beneficial...”
- Watch out for unfounded opinions expressed by other people, both in writing and in speaking.

Learning how to use both facts and opinions is helpful in writing or reading expositions. This helps us to read a newspaper more critically and to judge the opinions of others. It also helps us to write essays and reports (coming up in the next few pages).



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

EXERCISE 1 IN FACT AND OPINION

In small groups, decide if each of the following statements is a fact or an opinion. Provide reasons for your answer.

1. *Nirvana* is the greatest rock group of all time.
2. Everyone in the class knows that O.J. Simpson is not guilty of murdering his wife.
3. Everyone in the class believes that O.J. Simpson is not guilty of murdering his wife.
4. In his criminal trial, O.J. Simpson was found not guilty of murdering his wife.
5. The best movie I have ever seen is *Jurassic Park*.
6. Mark McGuire is the best player who ever played for the St. Louis Cardinals.
7. If parents spent more time with their children, the children would grow up to be happier human beings.
8. Light travels in straight lines.
9. Columbus discovered America in 1492.
10. Jamaican people love to laugh and you can often see their smiling faces and know that they have a good sense of humor.
11. Science is a harder subject than English.

EXERCISE 2 IN FACT AND OPINION

What follows is an editorial for a newspaper. It did not actually appear in any newspaper, but assume that it did. In small groups, decide what statements are fact and what are opinion. Provide reasons for your answer.

What is wrong with teenagers these days? They don't know how to behave. They don't know how to dress. They have no respect for their elders.

We hear these kinds of statements all the time. But over 2 000 years ago in ancient Greece, Aristotle said much the same thing. It seems as if every generation is bent on putting down teens.

But what about the good teenagers? There are many of them and they are rarely mentioned in the newspapers or on television. What about Boy Scouts whose apple sales help to teach people to care about other human beings? What about the young boy in London, who last week saved three cats and a dog from a burning barn? What about the Olympic hopefuls who spend their days in training to be the best they can be? What about all those kids who play soccer, and baseball, and hockey, and basketball, and too many sports to mention? What about all those teenagers who work at the fast food restaurants and gas stations who are always polite and always willing to go the extra mile to help a customer? What about all those young adults who sit in classrooms in this nation and try their best to learn so that their country and their own future will be secure?

Yes, it's easy to pick on teenagers if you want to make unfounded generalizations which have no relationship to the facts. It's easy to read about one bad apple and say that the whole basket is bad. But why? Those good apples make awfully good pies if you aren't prepared to throw them out.



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

ESSAYS AND REPORTS

Fact and opinion become very important when a student is writing an essay or a report. As the earlier sections of this resource have shown, opinions are only worthwhile if they are based on facts. But there are occasions for writing where opinion is not considered important.

An essay is essentially an argument; that is, it is a judgment, an opinion or a point of view. It is important that this point of view be based on facts, observation or evidence. To this extent, an essay is **subjective**; this means that it is the expression of a personal opinion. Because it is an opinion, it is **arguable**; this means that the opposite point of view is also arguable.

“Donovan Bailey is the 1996 Olympic Gold Medalist in the 100 meter dash” is not arguable; it is a fact. “Donovan Bailey is the fastest man in the world” is arguable; the argument can be supported by evidence such as Bailey’s time in the 1996 Olympics 100 meters, but not every man in the world has been tested under similar conditions. So one could also argue that other people are faster runners than Donovan Bailey. Thus, people could argue that Michael Johnson is a faster runner by citing his time in the 200 meter race at the Atlanta Olympics.

A **report** simply states the facts. Usually a report tells of the findings of the writer’s research, and therefore there is no need for any opinions to be expressed. Thus, a report tends to be **objective**; this means that it deals only with information which can be considered factual. Because this information is presented objectively, it is **not arguable**. Some reports, however, do call for recommendations based on the facts presented--and this part of any report is arguable and is therefore like an essay.

A report on Kenya (or any other country) might consider its population, land area and major population centers, its imports and exports, the topography of the country, or other factors. In this report, the writer researches the information and presents the information to the reader. It is not usually necessary for the writer to make any personal comments or judgments on the information presented.



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

ESSAYS AND REPORTS

An **ESSAY** means a **PERSUASIVE ESSAY** or **ARGUMENT**. Often students in school are asked to write a **REPORT**, that is, a summary of research findings without a specifically expressed argument.

Arguments and Reports differ in **PURPOSE** and in **ORGANIZATION**:

	ESSAY	REPORT
PURPOSE	• to be subjective: to argue a specific point of view • to provide evidence to support this point of view	• to be objective: to present findings from research • to provide examples from the research
ORGANIZATION	• statement of thesis: overall argument and supporting arguments • explanation of each argument in turn, followed by presentation of evidence and examples • conclusion	• statement of scope and purpose of the report • summary of findings citing examples and sources • conclusion and recommendations if required



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

SAMPLES OF ESSAYS AND REPORT TOPICS

Students usually are not asked to write essays in elementary school, but may be asked to do so in secondary school. Often elementary students are asked to write reports. The chart which follows shows the different approaches to a topic required by essays and reports.

	ESSAY	REPORT
Topic 1: The Senate	• The Senate should be abolished. • The Senate performs a useful check on government	• The organization of the Senate, including the number of members, how they are appointed, what areas they represent, etc.
Topic 2: Erosion	• A particular planting technique is more helpful than another in preventing soil erosion. • Many economic disasters might have been averted if farmers had taken measures to control erosion	• The advantages and disadvantages of various methods to control erosion. • Areas of the earth where erosion poses particular problems to the way of life of the inhabitants



2. WRITING AN EXPOSITION

EXERCISE 1 ON ESSAYS AND REPORTS

What follows are some topics which may be suitable for writing essays or reports. In the spaces provided write some ideas which you might use for an essay and for a report.

TOPIC	ESSAY IDEAS (arguments)	REPORT IDEAS (facts)
1. Women in Sports		
2. My Family		
3. My Chosen Career		