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Section 1: Writing

The Writing Process

1. Prewriting

- Select a topic and narrow it.
- Decide on your purpose and audience.
- Gather details to help you develop your topic.
- Organize and strengthen your list of details.

2. Writing

- With your purpose and audience in mind, begin to write.
- Do not be concerned with grammar or mechanics yet; just write.

3. Responding

- Share your writing with others and learn from their comments and suggestions.

4. Revising

Ask yourself these questions about your writing:

- Did I stick to my topic?
- Does my writing have unity? (Does each sentence relate to those around it and to the main idea?)
- Have I included all the important details?
- Do I have strong and interesting topic sentences?
- Do the ideas flow smoothly? (Is it easy to read aloud?)
- Are the ideas in a logical order?
- Is the language vivid and precise? (Will the reader know *exactly* what I mean?)
- Have I accomplished my purpose?

5. Editing

- Correct all mistakes in grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
- Replace vague words and phrases with precise words.

6. Evaluating

- Judge the quality of the work.
- Share it with others.
- Submit it to your teacher.
- Publish it.

The Thesis

All good writing contains a thesis. Every sentence in the writing in some way points back to the thesis. It is the main idea, the controlling thought, the theme. When you write essays for school, you must have a thesis: a point that you are proving, a concept you are explaining, something that the rest of the writing illustrates, explains, or describes. Everything in an essay should relate to the thesis and help prove it.

The Thesis in Standard Essays and Research Papers

The first paragraph of an essay or research paper must contain a thesis. Do not confuse a thesis with a topic. A topic is simply a general idea of what the paper is about. **A thesis is a complete sentence that clearly states what your writing will prove.**

Topic: Walt Disney

Thesis: Walt Disney's animated characters provide more than entertainment; they introduce children to significant social and personal values.

See the difference? *All good writing contains a thesis!*

Creating a Thesis for Research Writing

You may be wondering, "How do I find a thesis?" You don't actually find one; you create one of your own. A thesis is not something you copy from another source. You make it up according to what you learned from that source. Here are some ideas for creating a thesis:

- Gather information about your topic.
- Create source cards and take preliminary notes.
- As you study the information, consider what elements of the topic you are most interested in, how much information is available, and what you have learned about it so far.
- Identify "areas of focus" about which you have plenty of information.
 - For example, if your topic was Benjamin Franklin, you might find a great deal of information about his scientific discoveries, his role as a statesman in early America, and his writings. These become your areas of focus.
- Determine what the areas of focus have in common or what they prove about the topic.
 - For example, you might notice that Benjamin Franklin was active in a variety of professions. He did a lot of different things with his life.
- Write your thesis so that it *clearly states* what you will be able to prove using the information you have gathered.
 - Benjamin Franklin was a versatile man whose scientific inventions, statesmanship, and writing still influence our world today.

What Does an Essay Look Like?

Although there are many effective ways to write an essay, one standard method in schools is the five-paragraph essay. All Fairfield students should become proficient with this format.

Heading (Name, Date, Period)

Title

Introductory Paragraph

I. **Capture attention** and introduce your topic starting with one or a combination of the following: a quotation, an alarming fact, an intriguing question, or a disagreement with a common belief. Funnel your ideas down to a specific point. At the end of the first paragraph, **clearly state your thesis**.

Developmental Paragraph #1

Begin with a **topic sentence**. Be sure that it covers one element of the thesis and uses language similar to that in the thesis. Structure the rest of the paragraph as follows:

- **1st general example**
 - Specific details to support example
 - Transition
- **2nd general example**
 - Specific details that support example
 - Transition
- **3rd general example**
 - Specific details to support example
- **Clincher statement:** Restate the topic sentence in different words.

Developmental Paragraph #2

Begin with a **topic sentence**. Be sure that it covers a second element of the thesis and uses language similar to that in the thesis. Structure the rest of the paragraph as follows:

- **1st general example**
 - Specific details to support example
 - Transition
- **2nd general example**
 - Specific details that support example
 - Transition
- **3rd general example**
 - Specific details to support example
- **Clincher statement:** Restate the topic sentence in different words.

Developmental Paragraph #3

Begin with a **topic sentence**. Be sure that it covers a third element of the thesis and uses language similar to that in the thesis. Structure the rest of the paragraph as follows:

- **1st general example**
 - Specific details to support example
 - Transition
- **2nd general example**
 - Specific details that support example
 - Transition
- **3rd general example**
 - Specific details to support example
- **Clincher statement:** Restate the topic sentence in different words.

Concluding Paragraph

Begin with a summary sentence in which you **restate the thesis in different words**. Be convincing! Then broaden out again to general ideas (like those you started with in your first paragraph). Use any or a combination of the following: quotation, conclusions drawn, summary of major points. **DO NOT** add new ideas. Conclude with a powerful final sentence that solidifies your thesis in the reader's mind.

Sample Essay

Francis Falcon
August 26, 2002
Period 1

Three Simple Steps to Writing an Essay

You stare in horror at the vastness of the empty page! The blinding whiteness stares back, offering nothing. The assignment is due tomorrow, but you can't seem to get started. Does this happen to you when you try to write an essay for a class? If so, fear no more because once you understand a few simple concepts, writing school essays is a snap. The three most important things you must include in a scholarly essay are an introduction that contains a thesis, supporting paragraphs that prove or explain your thesis, and a conclusion that restates your thesis. Essays that contain a clear thesis, supporting paragraphs, and a solid conclusion are more effective and will earn higher grades at Fairfield.

Every essay must contain a thesis. A thesis is a complete sentence that clearly states what your writing will prove or explain. It usually appears near the end of the introductory paragraph. The thesis is important for many reasons, the most important of which is that a clear thesis shows that you actually have something to say. Many writing problems arise when students sit down to write, but they haven't thought about the topic, and they don't actually have anything to say about it. Writing that does not contain a thesis is often just a jumbled series of unrelated thoughts that may (or may not) relate to some general topic. Such writing has no point to make and is usually boring and unmemorable. A clear thesis statement is a writer's best friend because it gives direction to the writing. It answers the question "What are you trying to say?" Keeping your thesis in mind as you write forces you to stick to your topic and present only that information that your audience needs to know. The thesis of this essay is stated in the final sentence of the first paragraph. A clear thesis is a vital part of any school essay, but it is not the only thing you need.

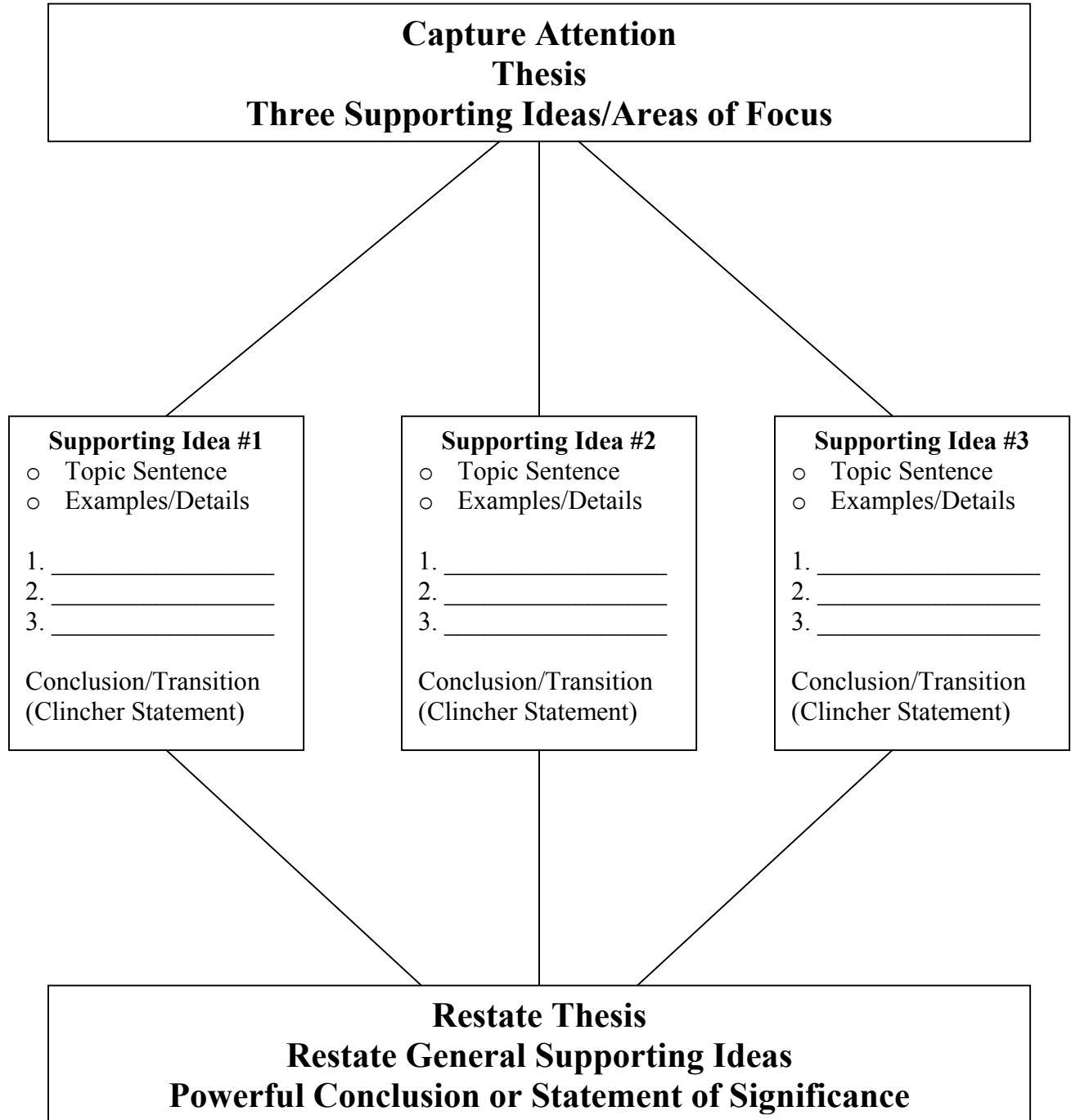
Every essay must contain supporting paragraphs that support the thesis. A supporting paragraph contains information that proves or explains some aspect of your thesis. For example, in this essay there is a paragraph about each of the three elements of a good essay: thesis, supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. In order to write an effective supporting paragraph, you must first have a topic sentence. A topic sentence is to a paragraph what a thesis is to an essay: it is what all the details in the paragraph help prove or explain. The three body paragraphs in this essay (this one, the one above it, and the one below it) begin with topic sentences. This is a good format to follow because then the reader knows from the beginning of the paragraph what you are going to discuss in the paragraph, and you (the writer) know what it is you should be writing about. Good paragraphs also contain plenty of details, examples, and evidence that prove the topic sentence. In order to express exactly what you mean, such details and examples are a must; without them, you do not communicate clearly. Your reader may misinterpret a vague generalization, and then you have not done your job as a writer, which is to express your meaning clearly. Also, make sure your supporting details and examples are specific! Do not write, "They always do stuff," when what you mean is "The sixth grade boys tease the girls at lunchtime." Notice how the first quoted example doesn't tell the reader anything; the second is very specific. If the body of your essay is made up of clear, specific details and examples, you are more than half way there.

Every essay must contain a conclusion paragraph. A conclusion paragraph serves three purposes. It restates the thesis in different words, briefly reminds the reader of the main points of the essay, and draws the writing to a powerful close, ideally with a memorable final statement that will stick in the reader's mind long after s/he is finished reading. The conclusion paragraph is actually somewhat like the introductory paragraph turned upside-down. The restatement of the thesis usually comes first, then the restatement of the main points, and finally a memorable clincher statement. Do not discuss new material in the conclusion paragraph. It is only to restate and summarize material that was presented in the body of the essay. If you have made it to the final paragraph of an essay assignment, you're job is practically done because you don't need to think of many new things to write; you just have to restate things you have already said. A good conclusion paragraph cements your ideas in the reader's mind.

In conclusion, a good essay contains three things: a thesis, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph like this one. The secret to writing a good school essay is simple: say what your are going to say (introduction), say it (body), say what you said (conclusion). It may sound silly, but this is the basic format used in all scholarly publications at all levels. Learn it well, practice it often, and the horror of the empty page will haunt you no more.

Essay Format

A Visual Example



Essay Outline Format

I. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

II. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

III. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

IV. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

V. _____

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Six-Trait Self-Review Guide Sheet

These are six important traits of good writing that students at Fairfield are expected to know and use in their own writing. Use this guide sheet to check your own writing assignments.

Ideas and Content

- U The writer seems to be writing from experience and shows good insight.
- U Supporting details are relevant to the thesis and give the reader important information besides just general knowledge.
- U The writer sticks to the main idea and leaves out details that do not matter.
- U The writer is in control and develops the topic in an enlightening or entertaining way.
- U The writer “shows” (with details and description) rather than “tells.”

Organization

- U Details fit where they are placed; information is delivered at the right moment.
- U Sequencing is logical.
- U The paper captures attention with the introduction.
- U The paper contains a satisfactory conclusion
- U The writer uses transitions to move from idea to idea, sentence to sentence, and paragraph to paragraph.
- U The details in the paper lead up to a clearly stated main point (thesis).

Voice

- U The writer has given thought to what the reader will think and feel.
- U The paper is honest and written from the heart.
- U The writer cares about the topic, has the courage to say what s/he thinks, and has put something of him/herself in the paper.
- U The reader feels that the writer is talking directly to him/her.

Word Choice

- U Words are specific and accurate; the writer says exactly what s/he means.
- U The writer uses powerful verbs and specific, concrete nouns.
- U The writer uses striking phrases and constructions, but the language sounds natural.
- U The language is colorful, vivid, snappy, and alive.

Sentence Fluency

- U The paper is easy to read aloud.
- U The writing has a rhythm and flows.
- U The sentences make sense; no words are left out; everything is crystal clear.
- U Sentences have variety both in length and structure.

Mechanics

- U There are no errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or grammar.
- U Paragraphing is correct.
- U The paper is easy to read.

Sample Resumé

FRANCIS FALCON
951 N. Fairfield Road
Kaysville, Utah 84037
(801) 402-7000

OBJECTIVE: To show that I can succeed at Fairfield Junior High because of my desire to learn, willingness to work hard, and friendliness

EDUCATION: Fairfield Junior High School 2000-2002
Completed 8th Grade
Areas of Special Interest: Science, Writing

SKILLS: Desire to learn
Read 35 books from Accelerated Reader list
Attended Falcon Academy
Improved G.P.A. every term

Willingness to work hard
Spent extra hours practicing musical instruments
Volunteered for Layton Youth Court
Took responsibility for home chores

Friendliness
Acted as “Secret Pal” for new 7th graders
Worked well in classroom groups
Participated in lunchtime activities

EXPERIENCE: Child Care—Jane Rogers—1999-2002
Cared for three young children, light housework

Yard Maintenance—John Smith—1997-2000
Mowed lawns, raked leaves, shoveled snow, operated several machines

ACHIEVEMENTS: Citizenship Honor Roll—Fairfield Jr.—2001
Life Scout Award—2001
Symphonic Band—2000-present
Ballet Lessons—Clytie Adams School—1997-present
Wasatch Thunder Competition Soccer Team—1996-present
Presidential Medal of Fitness Award—1996

REFERENCES: Available upon request

Sample School Application

****Please read instructions on reverse side****

Activity: _____

**Application
Due Date:** _____

FAIRFIELD JUNIOR HIGH ACTIVITIES APPLICATION

Name: _____ **Grade:** _____ **Student ID:** _____

Address: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

1. Why are you interested in participating in this activity?
2. What skills or previous experience do you have in this type of activity?
3. How does participation in this activity fit with your goals for the future?
4. Are you willing and able to commit to all requirements of this activity? (After-school/evening time, travel to other schools, etc. Be sure you understand the requirements before the application process.)

Yes No (Circle one)

Signature _____

Please submit this completed application with a copy of your resume to the Counseling Center by the due date. Your most recent report card will be added to the application. Check the guidelines on the back of the application to be sure it has been filled out correctly. Thank you.