

Mid-Continent University Writing Tutorial

The Mid-Continent University writing tutorial will provide students basic information on writing for different purposes. The tutorial will address such issues as Sentence Structure, Paragraph and Topic Sentence Structure, Essay and Thesis Statement Structure, and Research Citations. The tutorial is intended for students who need a refresher in prewriting but is not intended to be a comprehensive resource on writing practices.

Sentence Structure

A sentence is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and makes sense by itself. There are four basic sentence patterns: **simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex**. This tutorial will deal with the first three patterns.

A **simple sentence** is defined as one independent clause only. An independent clause is a group of words with a subject and verb and can stand alone as a separate sentence. The sentence does not have to be elementary or simplistic but should present one idea. Since the simple sentence presents one main idea, it is useful for creating emphasis.

Example: Mary called her sister in Hawaii.
Go and prepare for the luncheon. (You is the understood subject in this sentence.)

A **compound sentence** contains two or more independent clauses joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, yet and so) or by a semicolon. The compound sentence presents a balanced relationship between the ideas that are joined. This pattern emphasizes that the ideas are of equal importance.

Example: The man moved to Kentucky in 1993, but he often visited Mississippi and Ohio.
The man moved to Kentucky in 1993; he often visited Mississippi and Ohio.

A **complex sentence** contains at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. A dependent clause is one that has a subject and verb but cannot stand alone as a separate sentence. The dependent clause is introduced by either a subordinate conjunction or a relative pronoun (See list below.). The independent clause is emphasized over the dependent clause in this interrelationship of ideas.

Example: Because a hurricane was moving toward Florida, our vacation was altered.
“Our vacation was altered” is the independent clause. It is the main idea of the sentence.

The young lady believed that he was honest in his proclamation of love.
“That he was honest in his proclamation of love” is the dependent clause.

Using Coordination

Coordination refers to the process of joining simple sentences to form a compound sentence. Coordination presents ideas that together establish an important, parallel relationship.

Don reported Melissa to be absent.
The absentee report showed her present.

Don reported Melissa to be absent, but the absentee report showed her present.

Using Subordination

Subordination refers to the process of joining simple sentences to form a complex sentence. Subordination indicates relationships of ideas where one is subordinate to the other. Subordination is the basis of a mature and effective sentence style. Any independent clause becomes dependent when a **subordinate conjunction** or a **relative pronoun** is placed in front of the clause.

Clarence ran four miles today.
Clarence was feeling unusually strong.
Because he was feeling unusually strong, Clarence ran four miles today.

Subordinating Conjunctions

after	because	provided	whenever
although	before	since	where
as	but that	so that	whereas
as if	if	until	wherever
as long as	in order that	when	while
as soon as	notwithstanding		

Relative Pronouns

that	who
what	whoever
whatever	whom
which	whomever
whichever	

The Paragraph and Topic Sentence

A **paragraph** is a group of sentences that support or develop one particular idea about a topic. Paragraphs vary in length from three to ten or twelve sentences. A paragraph can stand alone or function with other paragraphs to form a longer piece of writing.

A paragraph has three main parts: **a topic sentence, a supporting sentence/s, and a concluding sentence.** The main idea of the paragraph is the **topic sentence.** The topic sentence has two parts: the topic and the focus (controlling idea).

Good communication is an essential ingredient of a happy marriage.
topic focus

Riding the bus is an excellent means of commuting.
topic focus

Most Americans have not given up on marriage as a biblical ideal.
topic focus

. When writers write a topic sentence for a paragraph, they should remember that an effective topic sentence is a complete sentence, includes both a **topic** and **focus**, and takes into account the audience and purpose. The topic sentences must contain a topic and some point (focus) about the topic. The topic in the form of a fragment is not a topic sentence. Before writing the paragraph, writers should have a complete topic sentence that includes both topic and focus. Writers who begin writing with only a topic in mind will probably not produce a coherent and well-developed paragraph.

Essay and Thesis Statement Structure

An **essay** does much the same thing a paragraph does. It begins with a point, and the remaining part of the essay provides details that support and develop that point. A paragraph is a series of sentences about one point, and an essay is a series of paragraphs about one point.

The essay is made up of an **introductory paragraph**, **several supporting paragraphs**, and a **concluding paragraph**. Each of these paragraphs has a specific purpose.

Introductory Paragraph

- Gains the reader's attention
- Presents the thesis statement
- Gives the plan of development

Supporting Paragraphs

- Give details, examples, etc., to support the thesis statement

Concluding Paragraph

- Summarizes
- Concludes
- Restates the thesis

The Stages of the Writing Process

1. Planning

Planning is the strategy of finding and formulating information for the writing assignment.

- Brainstorming
- Interviewing
- Reading

2. Drafting

Drafting is the strategy of organizing and developing information for the writing assignment.

- A rough outline
- Brainstorming
- First Draft
- Effective thesis
 - Focuses on one issue
 - Adapts the scope of the issue to length of the paper
 - Predicts what is to come
 - Outlines the organization of the paper

The thesis statement asserts the main idea of a piece of writing. This statement can emerge at any point in the writing process. Like the topic sentence in a paragraph, the thesis statement should have a topic and a focus.

3. Revising and Editing

Revising and editing are the strategies of reexamining and reevaluating the writing assignment. Revising has to do with content; editing has to do with mechanics.

Reasons for Revising and Editing:

1. To enhance the development of the work
2. To strengthen paragraph structure
3. To sharpen sentences and words and
4. To correct mechanical errors

Research and Citations

Most college and university professors assign research (library or term) papers to students. This assignment is similar to other writing projects in that students must gather information to fulfill a specific purpose. However, it differs from other assignments because the major source of information is not from memory, observation or informal reading. Rather, the sources become books, articles, and documents housed in libraries or accessed on the Internet.

Most scholarly disciplines have their favored style manual or guidelines for writing research papers. At Mid-Continent University, faculty use one of three style manuals: *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, and *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate L. Turabian.

Plagiarism comes from a Latin word plagiarius (kidnapper) and refers to a form of cheating. Alexander Lindey defined plagiarism as “the false assumption of authorship; the wrongful act of taking the product of another person’s mind, and presenting it as one’s own” (Lindey, Alexander. *Plagiarism and Originality*. New York: Harper, 1952, 2). The serious penalty of plagiarism reflects the importance that the public puts on honest information.

All three manuals give guidelines for formatting and documenting research papers.

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association,
Fifth Edition, Chapters 4 and 5

The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,
Sixth Edition, Chapters 4 and 5

A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations,
Seventh Edition, “Appendix” and Chapter 17

DOCUMENTING SOURCES

➤ APA Style

In APA documentation, called parenthetical style, references are cited in text with an author-date citation system and are listed alphabetically in the References section.

Example:

CITATION

He states that “professional theatrical activity in England came to an abrupt halt in 1642”

(Wells, 2000, p. 6).

REFERENCE

Wells, S. (2000). *Shakespeare in the theatre: An anthology of criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

➤ **MLA Style**

In MLA documentation style, also called parenthetical style, writers should acknowledge their sources by keying brief parenthetical citations in the text of the paper to an alphabetical list of works that appears on the last page of the paper.

Example:

CITATION

One critic states that “professional theatrical activity in England came to an abrupt halt in 1642” (Wells 6).

WORKS CITED

Wells, Stanley. *Shakespeare in the Theatre: An Anthology of Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

➤ **Turabian Style**

In the Turabian documentation style, called footnote style, writers should acknowledge their sources by placing a superscript number at the end of the sentence in which they refer to the source. Then the writers cite the source of that citation in a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page that provides information about the source (author, title, and publication facts) plus pertinent page numbers. In most cases, writers list the source at the end of the paper in a bibliography. The bibliography includes any source cited in the paper.

Example:

CITATION

He states that “professional theatrical activity in England came to an abrupt halt in 1642.”¹

FOOTNOTE

¹Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: An Anthology of Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Wells, Stanley. *Shakespeare in the Theatre: An Anthology of Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.