**Unit 1 In-Class Activities: Paragraph structure, topic sentences and transitions**

**Creating and using an outline to guide your writing**

It can be a little daunting when you first start to put your ideas down on paper, whether you are writing a lab report, an essay, or even a blog post about some aspect of science. For this reason, it is a good idea to create and use an outline to help you produce a logical, organized piece of written work. In these in-class activities, you will work with a partner/partners to learn how to do this. You will hopefully see the value in doing so because you should be able to see how your own piece of writing improves by the end of the class, based on the use of this outline.

**Activity 1: (work together, then alone, 15 minutes)**

Imagine you have been asked to write a short answer (approximately 200 - 300 words) to the prompt: **What is a simple science experiment and which skills are needed to work effectively with other people when performing one?**

Spend a couple of minutes talking to a partner (or to two people if you are working in a group of three) about the things you would want to include in your answer. Then, try to write an answer to the prompt on your own (**each person must write their own answer**).

**Activity 2: (work together, 15 minutes)**

Now you are going to create an outline to help guide your response to the same prompt. There are a number of steps that you should follow when producing your outline:

1. Determine the purpose of your written answer, and who your audience is.
2. Brainstorm all of the ideas you want to include in your written answer.
3. Group related ideas together (these will form separate paragraphs).
4. Order the information that will go into each paragraph from general to specific.
5. Devise sub-headings that can be applied to the information that will form each paragraph (this will help you write effective topic sentences later).

In reality, you will have longer to do this when preparing to write something, but the principle holds for any piece of writing (such as this short answer). Try to produce a numbered outline that looks something like contents page in a book by the time you have worked through points 1 – 5 above. This will be your outline.

**\*\* Each pair/group is likely to have a slightly different outline, depending on the content they decide to include in their answer to the original prompt. However, to make sure you are all on the right general path, your instructor will show an example of an outline for this prompt before you move on to Activity 3. \*\***

**Activity 3: (work alone, and then together, 15 minutes)**

Now you are going to use the outline you just created to re-write a short answer (approximately 200 – 300 words) to the prompt: **What is a simple science experiment and which skills are needed to work effectively with other people when performing one?**

**Hints**

* Focus on the organization of ideas into the different paragraphs
* Order the information in each paragraph from general to specific
* Once you have your first draft, replace the sub-headings for each paragraph with a **topic sentence** to begin each paragraph (this should explain the point of the paragraph to your readers)
* Once you have done this, add in **transition words and phrases** to link each sentence with the next one.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic Sentences** | **Transition Words and Phrases** | |
| **Good ones should:** | **Feature** | **Good Examples** |
| Signal the main point of the paragraph a reader is about to read | Signal the point at which a new direction is being taken in the writing | **Secondly,**  **In contrast,**  **However,** |
| Be general enough to allow the other sentences to develop the point it makes, but not so broad that the other sentences cannot justify the statement it makes | Link sentences smoothly together to provide a logical flow of ideas | “… confirmed this. **Nevertheless**, some people refused to believe the result…” |

**Activity 4: (work together, remaining time)**

Read the short answer you have just written, and then re-read your initial answer (the one you wrote in Activity 1, before you had produced a quick outline to help guide the logical development of your written answer). Discuss the difference in quality with your partner/partners. If you have time, exchange written answers and comment on the progression you have all made.

**Further resources and help on writing effective, more comprehensive outlines**

Hopefully, these in-class activities will have shown you the benefit of creating and using an outline to guide your writing. When you write longer pieces of work, the benefits will be more visible. For further resources, please see Purdue’s Online Writing Lab (specifically see: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/02/).