



# WRITING CENTER

## Writing Style

---

CONTENTS *Click on any heading below to jump directly to that topic.*

ILLUSTRATION AND EXAMPLE PARAGRAPHS ..... 1

DESCRIPTIONS ..... 4

SIMILES AND METAPHORS..... 7

PARALLELISM..... 8

USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE ..... 9

NUMBERS ..... 12

### ILLUSTRATION AND EXAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

An **illustration** paragraph includes anecdotes or descriptions to support the points you make in your essay. Illustrations can be personal or hypothetical stories that explain your ideas.

An **example** paragraph includes specific evidence to support your points. Examples can be from texts, points in history, events, media, real-life instances, and more.

To be effective, illustrations and examples must be relevant, strong, and properly used. Most importantly, you will need to explain or analyze HOW or WHY the illustration or example is relevant to your idea.

### WHEN TO USE ILLUSTRATIONS OR EXAMPLES

Whether you employ one or several illustrations or examples will depend on the complexity of the thoughts expressed in the essay and on your own creativity.

One long, well-constructed, vivid illustration or real-life example may help convey the point of your paragraph. However, the more involved or difficult your central idea, the more illustrations or examples you may need, each varying slightly in subject matter but tending toward the same objective: effective support of your thesis and main points.

### HOW TO CONSTRUCT ILLUSTRATION OR EXAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

1. Start with a topic sentence and supporting sentences that introduce the idea.
2. Introduce the illustration or example and include details of the illustration or example. Be specific.
3. Conclude with a sentence or sentences explaining or analyzing how or why the illustration or example connects to and expands your idea.

## Writing Style

---

### ILLUSTRATION OR EXAMPLE PARAGRAPHS: SAMPLES

The samples below follow the above organizational pattern. Note that each paragraph starts with a topic sentence that introduces the idea, and ends with a concluding sentence that explains or analyzes how the idea and illustration or example connect.

**Note:** The illustrations and examples are *italicized*.

### SAMPLE ILLUSTRATION PARAGRAPH: PERSONAL STORY

When the child has acquired some language, we get some extraordinary glimpses of this fantastic world: *When my friend David was two and a half years old, he was being prepared for a trip to Europe with his parents. He was a very bright child, talked well for his age and seemed to take in everything his parents had to say with interest and enthusiasm. The whole family would fly to Europe (David knew what an airplane was), they would see many unusual things, they would go swimming, go on trains, meet some of David's friends there. The preparation story was carried on with just the right amount of emphasis for a couple of weeks before the trip. But after a while, David's parents noticed that he stopped asking questions about "Yurp" (as he called "Europe") and even seemed depressed when he heard his parents talk about it. The parents tried to find out what was troubling him. He was most reluctant to talk about it. Then one day, David came out with his secret in an agonizing confession. "I can't go to Yurp!" he said, and the tears came very fast. "I don't know how to fly, yet!"* This humorous glimpse into David's very literal world shows how language and meaning develop in young children.

– Selma H. Fraiberg, *The Magic Years*

### SAMPLE ILLUSTRATION PARAGRAPH: HYPOTHETICAL STORY

It is a commonplace observation that work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. *Thus, an elderly lady of leisure can spend the entire day in writing and dispatching a postcard to her niece at Bognor Regis. An hour will be spent in finding the postcard, another in hunting for spectacles, half-an-hour in a search for the address, an hour and a quarter in composition, and twenty minutes in deciding whether or not to take the umbrella when going to the pillar-box in the next street.* The total effort which would occupy a busy man for three minutes all told may, in this fashion, leave another person prostrate after a day of doubt, anxiety, and toil.

– C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law*

## Writing Style

---

### **SAMPLE EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH: TEXT EVIDENCE**

All good readers know, of course, that they are living instead of merely reading. In other words, they know that they are adding untold knowledge and understanding to their lives, becoming wiser, more experienced in the ways of the world. *Don Quixote shows them the transforming power of the human imagination—how dreams can make life not only bearable, but exciting, no matter what one pays for such excitement. King Saul proves to them how costly goodness itself can be and alas! often is; for Saul was a good man, even a noble one, who paid dearly and ironically for his very sense of honor. No tragic hero in any Greek play is more tragic than Saul. Tess of the D'Urbervilles brings all good readers not only to tears, but to a new understanding of outraged innocence, a new pity for all who live. Dostoyevsky shows them through his three Karamazov brothers how dangerous a mere intellect can be, how much more perilous is the mind than are the affections, no matter how misguidedly one loves.* Life may well be circumscribed for many of us, but it is never circumscribed for any of us once we learn how to read.

– Mary Ellen Chase, “Why Teach Literature?”

### **SAMPLE EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH: MOVIE EVIDENCE**

Many famous movies in the past have had a definite effect on the fads which take hold of the viewers. *A recent example of such a condition can be witnessed in the box office blockbuster, Jaws. Author Peter Benchley made the entire country shark crazy. People are hoarding everything from shark teeth to shark repellent, boosting the sagging economy of the United States and giving inflation a bite where it counts. A year ago, people saw The Towering Inferno, The Poseidon Adventure, and Earthquake. After these movies left their scars on Americans, a craze developed for disaster games. These were soon marketed for folks who gathered around the boards to see who could survive the biggest disaster and be, therefore, declared the winner. An earlier “disaster” film, Bonnie and Clyde, gave birth to an incredible revival of the pin-striped suit and long skirt. This craze was renewed in 1974 by Robert Redford's wardrobe in The Great Gatsby.* Such fads and fashions look pretty dull; however, as the movie industry jumps into UFO's and casts Dustin Hoffman as the captured Martian, perhaps Americans will begin to build saucer-shaped homes and dye their freckles green.

– Gabe Quintanilla

## Writing Style

---

### DESCRIPTIONS

Writers use **descriptions** to help readers experience and understand an object, person, place/event, action, or emotion. To add descriptions to your writing, be specific and use your senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste.

### HOW TO WRITE DESCRIPTIONS

Brainstorm and ask yourself questions about what you want to describe. Then choose concrete adjectives, adverbs, strong verbs, and unique similes and metaphors to describe your answers. You don't have to describe everything in detail. Choose the best, most descriptive words and phrases that will help immerse your reader in your essay.

<b>Description of:</b>	<b>Brainstorm Questions</b>
<b>Objects</b>	What is the size, color, weight, etc.? How does it look, smell, taste, sound or feel?
<b>People or Animals</b>	What are their physical characteristics? What are their personality characteristics? How do they smell, sound, or feel?
<b>Places or Events</b>	Where is this? What is happening? What makes it different? How does it look, smell, taste, sound or feel?
<b>Actions</b>	What strong verbs describe the actions? How does it look, smell, taste, sound or feel?
<b>Emotions</b>	What does the emotion feel like physically? How does it look, etc.?

**EXAMPLES:** The following examples show how writers use description to set scenes and describe people and things.

**Note:** Descriptive adjectives, adverbs, strong verbs, similes and metaphors are *italicized*.

### Example: Descriptive Words and Phrases

He *clasps* the crag with *crooked hands*,  
Close to the sun in *lonely lands*,  
*Ring'd* with the *azure world*, he stands.  
The *wrinkled sea* beneath him *crawls*; He  
watches from his *mountain walls*,  
And *like a thunderbolt* he *falls*.

-From Alfred Tennyson's "The Eagle"

## Writing Style

<b>Description of:</b>	<b>Brainstorm Questions</b>	<b>Adjectives, Adverbs, Strong Verbs, Similes and Metaphors</b>
People or animals	What did his legs look like?	crooked hands
Place	What did the sea look like?	wrinkled
Action	How did the eagle fly?	like a thunderbolt, he falls

### Example: Describing a Place or People

It was *lit by thousands and thousands of candles* that were *floating* in midair over *four long tables*, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with *glittering golden plates and goblets*. At the *top of the hall* was another *long table* where the teachers were sitting [...] *The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns* in the *flickering candlelight* [...] Harry looked upward and saw a *velvety black ceiling dotted with stars* [...] It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all, and that the Great Hall didn't simply *open on to the heavens*.

– From J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

<b>Description of:</b>	<b>Brainstorm Questions</b>	<b>Adjectives, Adverbs, Strong Verbs, Similes and Metaphors</b>
Place	How was the hall lit?	thousands and thousands of candles floating in midair
	What did the table look like and what is on it?	long table, glittering golden plates and goblets
	What did the ceiling look like?	velvety black ceiling dotted with stars; like it opened on to the heavens
People	Who was there? What were they doing? What did they look like?	the hundreds of faces of students staring at teachers looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight

### Example: Describing a Person

The flowers were unnecessary, for two o'clock a greenhouse arrived from Gatsby's, with innumerable receptacles to contain it. An hour later the front *door opened nervously*, and Gatsby, in a *white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie*, hurried in. He was *pale*, and there were *dark signs of sleeplessness beneath his eyes*.

– From F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

## Writing Style

<b>Description of:</b>	<b>Brainstorm Questions</b>	<b>Adjectives, Adverbs, Strong Verbs, Similes and Metaphors</b>
Person	Who was there? What are their personality characteristics? What are their physical characteristics? How is he dressed?	Gatsby opened door nervously, hurried dark signs of sleeplessness beneath his eyes, pale white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie

### Example: Describing a Place, Actions, or Emotions

Janie was *stretched on her back* beneath the *pear tree* soaking in the *alto chant* of the *visiting bees*, the *gold of the sun* and the *panting breath of the breeze* when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a *dust-bearing bee* sink into the *sanctum of a bloom*; the *thousand sister-calyxes* arch to meet the *love embrace* and the *ecstatic shiver* of the tree *from root to tiniest branch* *creaming in every blossom* and *frothing with delight*. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt *a pain remorseless sweet* that left her *limp and languid*.

– From Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

<b>Description of:</b>	<b>Brainstorm Questions</b>	<b>Adjectives, Adverbs, Strong Verbs, Similes and Metaphors</b>
Place or event	Where was the place? Who or what was there? How did it look? What did you hear or feel?	beneath the pear tree Janie, bees, flowers, trees gold of the sun panting breath of the breeze, chant of the visiting bees

## Writing Style

Description of:	Brainstorm Questions	Adjectives, Adverbs, Strong Verbs, Similes and Metaphors
Actions	What was happening?	Janie stretched on her back, soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace of the bees tree shivering tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight
Emotion	What did it physically feel like?	a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid

### SIMILES AND METAPHORS

**Similes** and **metaphors** are phrases that serve as descriptive comparisons. Writers use similes and metaphors in literature, poetry, memoirs, personal narratives, scholarship essays, and more. If you find it difficult to describe ideas, events, and feelings, using similes and metaphors may make it easier.

#### SIMILES

A **simile** is saying something is **similar** but not the same as something else. Similes compare two items by using the words **like** or **as**.

For example, a famous poem by Robert Burns begins, "My love is **like** a red, red rose." The writer's feelings for his lover are **like** a rose: blooming, beautiful, etc.

#### Other Examples

Her hair was **like** silk.

He is **as mean as** Oscar the Grouch.

The ship went down **like** lead.

It was light **as** a feather.

She is busy **as** a bee.

Her gaze was **like** ice.

#### METAPHORS

A **metaphor** implies that two things are the **same**: their characteristics are interchangeable. It's a more powerful comparison than a simile.



## Writing Style

---

For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo uses the metaphor, “Juliet is the sun.” Seeing Juliet is interchangeable with seeing the morning sun: she’s welcoming, beautiful, warm, etc.

### Other Examples

Her hair **was** silk.

He **is** Oscar the Grouch.

Dead fish **are** polished marble.

Those figures **are** fishy.

Salesmen **are** sharks.

She **is** a busy bee.

### PARALLELISM

**Parallelism** is when two or more phrases or clauses in a sentence have the same grammatical structure. Keeping the elements similar in construction helps the reader to better understand your writing and gives it rhythm and order. Your writing may sound choppy or awkward when phrases or clauses are not parallel.

- **When elements are parallel in thought, use parallel forms to express them.**

When you make any kind of list, put all items in the same form.

**Example:** NON-PARALLEL: Lee liked scuba-diving and also liked when she water-skied on her vacation.  
PARALLEL: Lee liked **scuba diving** and **waterskiing** on her vacation. *By using -ing words, the sentence emphasizes parallelism.*

If one form of a verb is mixed with another form of the same verb in a sentence, the parallel structure is lost. Instead, list all the elements as **-ing** words or infinitive (**to**) forms of verbs.

**Example:** NON-PARALLEL: cooking, to eat, have cleaned  
PARALLEL: cooking, eating, cleaning  
PARALLEL: to cook, to eat, to clean

- **Balance a noun with a noun, a verb with a verb, a modifier with a modifier, and so on.**

Words of the same kind should be used to do the same kinds of jobs in a sentence.

**Examples:** NON-PARALLEL: She is charming and has beauty.  
PARALLEL: She is **charming** and **beautiful**. *Both attributes are now adjectives.*



## Writing Style

---

NON-PARALLEL: We like tacos and to eat enchiladas. ***tacos** is a noun, while **to eat enchiladas** is a combination of a verb form and a noun.*

PARALLEL: We like **to eat tacos** and **enchiladas**. ***tacos** and **enchiladas** are now objects of the verb.*

PARALLEL: We like **tacos** and **enchiladas**. *Both foods are now nouns.*

- **Use parallel constructions for words joined by such connectors as *and, but, nor, or*.**

**Example:** NON-PARALLEL: Our baby is cute and behaves well. ***Cute** is a modifier; **behaves well** is a form of a verb.*

PARALLEL: Our baby is **cute** and **well-behaved**.

- **Use parallel structure with such constructions as *either...or, neither...nor, not...but, not only...but also, both...and*.**

**Examples:** NON-PARALLEL: Either going for a ride or to lie in the sun is my idea of a good time.

PARALLEL: Either **going for a ride** or **lying in the sun** is my idea of a good time.

NON-PARALLEL: Not only was he a fine man, but also a good writer. ***was he a fine man** contains both a subject (**he**) and a verb (**was**); **a good writer** contains neither.*

PARALLEL: He was **not only a fine man**, but **also a good writer**.

- **Make sure that parallel groups of words in a sentence have parallel structure.**

**Example:** NON-PARALLEL: I promise to be a good husband and that I will help clean the apartment. *One group of words begins with the **to** form of a verb, and the other does not.*

PARALLEL: I promise **I will be a good husband**, and **I will help clean the apartment**.

## USING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

The success of your writing is dependent upon your audience's reception of what you have written. You must not only follow proper grammatical rules and citation style guides, but you also must use appropriate language when writing your paper. In formal writing, contractions, euphemisms, slang, jargon, and biased language are all examples of language that you should avoid using.

## Writing Style

---

### CONTRACTIONS

Contractions are the combination of two words into one shorter word and are often used in speech or informal writing. In certain situations in formal writing, contractions may be appropriate; for example, when directly quoting someone else in a paper or when constructing fictional dialogue for a character. However, in most formal writing, contractions should not be used.

#### Examples of Contractions

##### Original Words

Do not  
Is not  
Can not  
He/she will  
It is  
We are  
What is

##### Contraction

Don't  
Isn't  
Can't  
He'll/she'll  
It's  
We're  
What's

**Examples:** INFORMAL: After reading the poem, it isn't clear if there's a reliable narrator.

FORMAL: After reading the poem, it is not clear if there is a reliable narrator.

### EUPHEMISMS

Euphemisms are words or phrases that are used as a figure of speech in place of literal words or phrases. Often euphemisms are used to soften or lessen the impact of a difficult, uncomfortable, impolite, or harsh concept. Though euphemisms can be an effective literary device in creative writing, avoid them in formal, academic writing. These phrases do not state the truth of the matter and can be misconstrued if your audience is unfamiliar with the euphemism you are using.

#### Examples of Euphemisms

##### Euphemism

Bun in the oven  
Senior  
Between jobs  
Thin on top

##### Actual Meaning

Pregnancy  
Old  
Unemployed  
Bald

## Writing Style

---

**Example:** INFORMAL: When the tumor was discovered, the zoo's veterinary team decided the best course of action was to put the tiger to sleep.  
FORMAL: When the tumor was discovered, the zoo's veterinary team decided the best course of action was to euthanize the tiger.

### SLANG

Much like contractions, slang is often used in spoken language and informal writing but is not appropriate in formal writing. Using slang makes your written work less formal and therefore less reliable. Also, your audience may not be able to relate to or understand the slang you are using. Slang includes shortened words or phrases (ex: **ttyl** instead of talk to you later, **u** instead of you, **brb** instead of be right back) and colloquialisms.

**Example:** INFORMAL: The speech that MLK gave in DC was the bomb bc it has now become such an important moment in the Civil Rights Movement.  
FORMAL: The speech Martin Luther King Jr. gave in Washington D.C. was poignant because it has now become such an important moment in the Civil Rights Movement.

### JARGON

Jargon refers to words or phrases that are specific to a group of people, often associated with a specific profession. Depending on your audience, using jargon could alienate your readers. For other audiences, however, using jargon is appropriate. For example, if you are giving an informative speech on the job responsibilities of a nurse to your classmates, you may want to keep the language general, but explain any complicated or specific terms, such as technical terms for medications. By keeping your language generic, your audience, who are not all nurses, will better understand you. However, if you are writing a paper for your capstone project in nursing school, you will want to use all the technical terminology in your writing that you have learned.

**Example:** JARGON: We need to take data points to determine if there has been a response to the intervention.  
GENERIC: Go check to see if the plan worked.

### BIASED LANGUAGE

Make sure you are keeping your audience in mind as you are writing. So as not to offend or alienate your readers, be mindful of the language you are using. Whenever possible, use generic, gender-neutral language.

## Writing Style

---

**Example:** INFORMAL: She tried to book an appointment in the Writing Center with a tutor, but she could not find a time.

FORMAL: The student tried to book an appointment in the Writing Center with a tutor, but they could not find a time.

INFORMAL: The policemen were told they needed to man the entrance to the park overnight.

FORMAL: The police officers were told they needed to staff the entrance to the park overnight.

### NUMBERS

There are several options for formatting numbers. The following alternatives are all correct; whichever you choose, however, be consistent.

#### 1. Spelling Numbers

One way to spell numbers is to spell out those that require two words or less, but use numerals for any number that requires more than two words.

**Examples:** She reserved **seven hundred** seats for the **ten** groups.  
Her best friend was moving exactly **1,237** miles away.

Another way is to spell out the numbers one through nine, but use numerals thereafter.

**Examples:** He had **two** cars, **three** kids, and **one** wife.  
He was **31** years old and had an old dog who was **14**.

2. Use numerals for the day of the year, the year, and for times of day. Use either **AM** and **PM**, or **a.m.** and **p.m.** Whichever you choose, be consistent.

**Examples:** The baby arrived around **10 AM** on July **28, 1993**.  
I scheduled my tutoring appointment for **3 p.m.** on May **9**.

3. Spell out numbers that begin a sentence, or rewrite the sentence.

**Examples:** INCORRECT: 460 dollars was too high a price.  
CORRECT: **Four hundred sixty** dollars was too high a price  
CORRECT: The **price of \$460** was too high.

4. Use an **apostrophe** to indicate **omissions in dates**.

**Examples:** The class of **2009** = the class of **'09**  
A **1997** Chevrolet = A **'97** Chevrolet

## Writing Style

---

5. It is optional to use an apostrophe to indicate certain special types of plurals, such as numerals, numbers acting as words, and terms. Either is correct. Whichever you choose, however, be consistent.

**Examples:** Her **3's** look like **8's**.

Her **3s** look like **8s**.

He likes reading about the **1950's**.

He likes reading about the **1950s**.

**Note:** To avoid confusion, it is best to use apostrophes for lower case letters.

**Example:** CONFUSING: She's learning **as** and **is** in cursive handwriting.

BETTER: She is learning **a's** and **i's** in cursive handwriting.

6. When spelling them out, separate compound numbers (twenty-one to ninety-nine) and fraction numerators and denominators with a hyphen.

**Examples:** twenty-six

two-thirds

7. For business and technical writing, write numbers greater than ten as numerals and repeat in parentheses.

**Example:** The interest on the note was **fifty (50)** dollars.

9. Use numerals and decimal points for prices.

**Examples:** INCORRECT: Model airplanes used to cost **one dollar and ninety-eight cents**.

CORRECT: Model airplanes used to cost **\$1.98**.

10. Remember, BE CONSISTENT in your treatment of numbers. Related numbers should be treated similarly. Do not use numerals for some and words for others.

**Examples:** INCORRECT: Their five children range in age from ten to 22.

CORRECT: Their five children range in age from **10** to **22**.

CORRECT: Their five children range in age from **ten** to **twenty-two**.

**Note:** When it helps to clarify the message, an exception may be made by using a combination of numerals and words.

**Examples:** The entrée includes **two 10-ounce** filets.

The clerk counted out **20 one-dollar** bills.