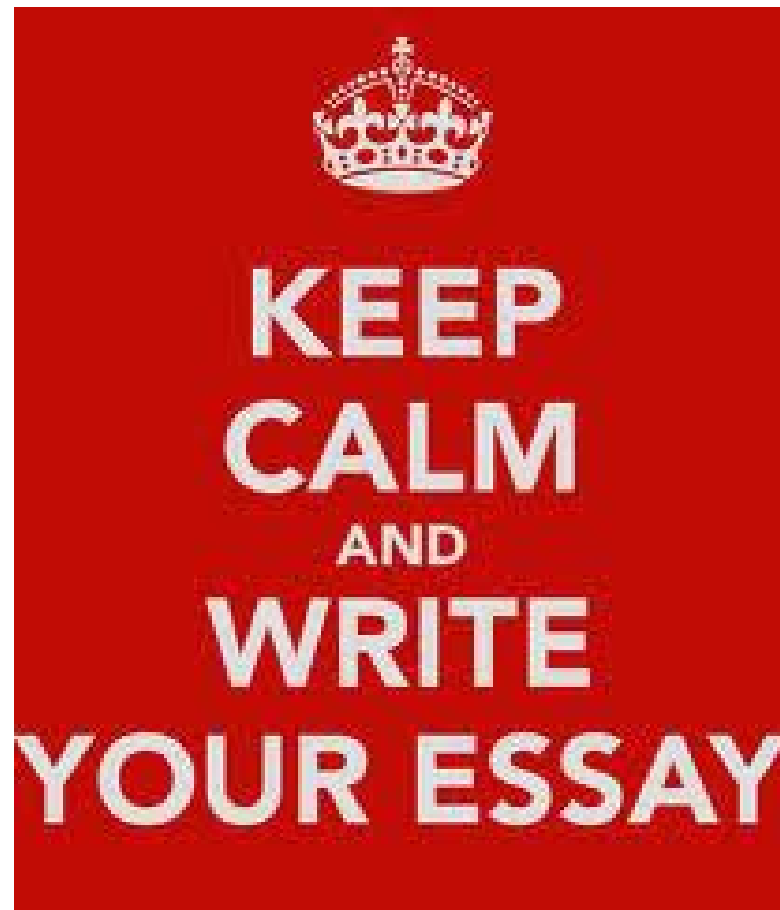


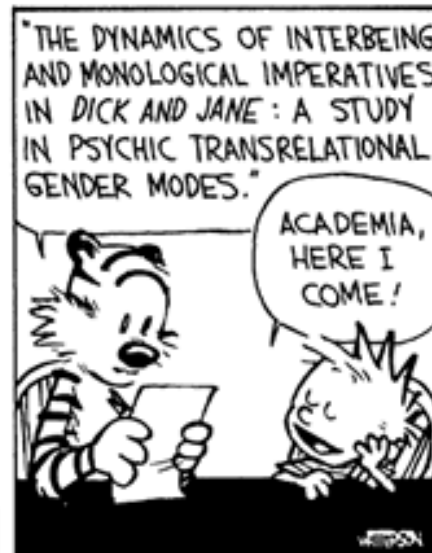
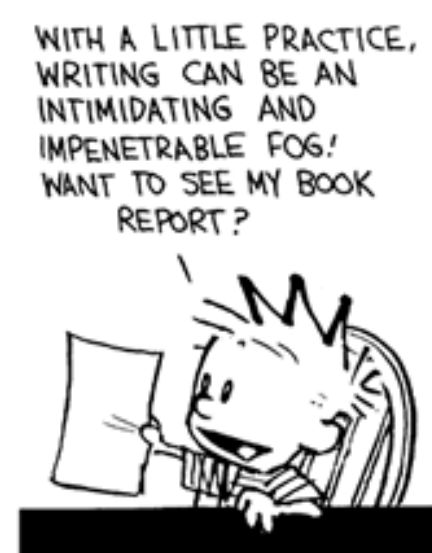
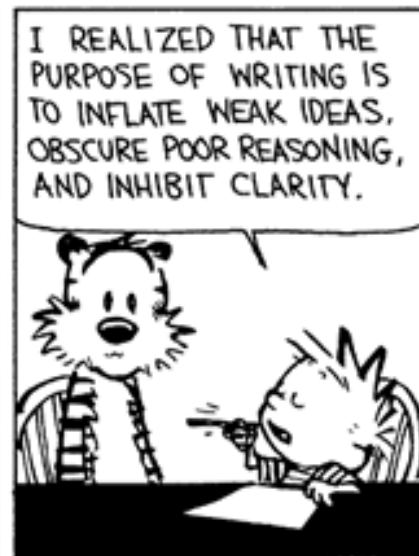
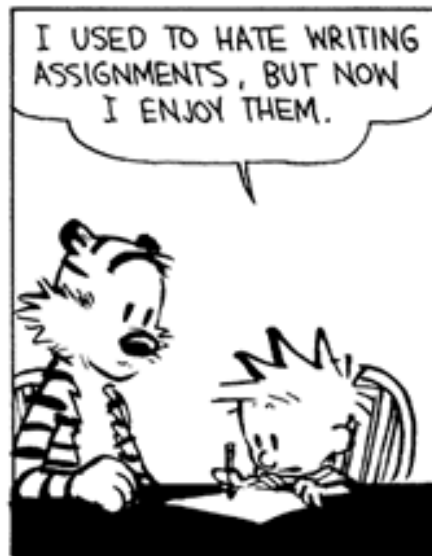
# BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF AN ESSAY



# TODAY'S OBJECTIVES:

- How to compose an introduction
  - Components
  - Thesis statement
- Answering the question!
- Structure
- Back to basics: building blocks of a written assignment
- Clarity of thought, clarity of writing
- Examples





# ESSAY INTRODUCTION

- The introduction to an essay has three primary objectives:
  - Explain the **context** of the essay
  - Give the **answer**: the response to the question or the overall **focus** of the essay (the thesis statement)
  - Describe the **structure** and organisation of the essay



# CONTEXT

- Context includes:
  - the background of the topic
  - the topic scope
  - any essential definitions.
- Introductions often begin with a broad opening statement that establishes the subject matter and background. Don't make it too broad (“Since time began...”), but identify the relevant topic and sub-topic (e.g. human resource management, early childhood development, animal behaviour...).
- To establish the scope, answer basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? Is the essay limited to a particular time period, a particular group of people, a particular country?
- Definitions are often established after the introduction, so only include them here if they are absolutely essential.



## ANSWER / FOCUS

- The most important part of the introduction is the response to the question: the thesis statement. This should **directly address the question** you are being asked to answer.
- An introduction often ends on the thesis statement. It begins with a broad statement and gradually narrows down until it directly addresses the question.
- This order of introduction elements is not set in stone, however. Sometimes the thesis statement is followed by a breakdown of the essay's structure and organisation. Ultimately, you must adapt the order to suit the needs of each particular essay.



# ESSAY THESIS STATEMENT

- The thesis statement forms the core of the essay. It is a direct answer to the assignment question, or response to the assignment topic. It is usually only one sentence long.
- The thesis statement describes a position, by which we mean an opinion or perspective that answers the question. It is also known as the argument. The thesis statement also summarises the evidence and analysis that supports that position.
- The key difference between an opinion and a thesis statement is that a thesis conveys to the reader that the claim being offered has been thoroughly explored and is defensible by evidence. It answers the "what" question (what is the argument?) and it gives the reader a clue as to the "why" question (why is this argument the most persuasive?).
- Make sure that your thesis statement answers the essay question directly



## EXAMPLES:

- **Crap thesis statement:**
  - **World hunger has many causes and effects.**
- **Problems:**
  - “World hunger” in general cannot be sufficiently addressed in a short essay
  - “Many causes and effects” is vague and unspecific
  - There is no indication of the argument being made
  - It does not express a main idea
- **Better thesis statement:**
  - **Hunger persists in rural northern Bangladesh because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.**



# STRUCTURE

- Strong introductions tell the reader how the upcoming [body paragraphs](#) will be organised.
- This can be as easy as outlining the major points that your essay will make on the way to the conclusion. You don't need to go into much detail in the introduction: just signal the major 'landmarks.'
- It can help to identify how all of the paragraphs are organised:
  - Do the paragraphs deal with the issue from earliest to most recent (chronological)?
  - Are the paragraphs grouped by broader themes (thematic)?
  - Does the essay answer several related questions one after the other (sequential)?
  - Do the paragraphs describe two elements and then compare them (contrasting)?
- The essay will be much more readable once the reader knows what to expect from the body paragraphs.



# MIDDLE OR BODY OF THE ESSAY

- Develop each of the points you identified in the introduction *in the order they appear in the Introduction*.
- Be sure this order makes sense. If not, change it. There are some logical frameworks for order, such as **order in time, geographical order, logical sequence** (i.e. we have to understand point 1 before we can understand point 2), etc.
- For longer essays use **section titles** to indicate the sub-topics you are covering



# CONCLUSION

- **Sum up your main points**
- **Add any reflections you might have on why these are important or interesting**



## ORDER IN THE ESSAY: THE USE OF SECTIONS

- Many student essays read like a stream of conscious ramble through everything that came to mind as the essay was being written. A good essay has an introduction, a middle and a conclusion.



# BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS OF A WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

- Words
- Sentences
- Paragraphs
- Sections



# WORDS

- Always have the spell-check of your word processor turned on. Don't ignore the squiggly red-lines.
- Some words sound just like other words with a completely different meaning, eg. **their, there (called homonyms)**. A spell-check will not pick up the misuse of correctly spelled words





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# SENTENCES

A sentence is a complete statement which expresses an action or a state of being. All sentences have two essential parts - a *subject* and a *predicate*.

- Subject: usually a **noun** or a **pronoun** is the 'actor' of the sentence.
  - *You* jump. *Phoebe* will watch.
  - *I* am tired. *I* am going to bed.
- Predicate: a **verb** is the action of the sentence.
  - You *jump*. Phoebe *will watch*.
  - I *am* tired. I *am going* to bed.
- Sentences end with a full-stop or period [.] , a question mark [?] or an exclamation mark [!]



# SENTENCE TYPES

**Simple sentences:** one action

Anthropologists study the social life of humans and other primates

**Compound sentences:** two actions joined together by 'and', 'or', 'but'. Each part of a compound sentence could stand alone.

Archaeologists study the past, but social anthropologists also study contemporary societies.



# COMPLEX SENTENCES

- Sentences which have two actions, but one is subordinate or modifies the other eg.
  - The **boy**, *who was* very young, **did** well on his exams.
  - The **theory**, **which is** difficult to understand, **makes** sense of domestic violence.



# HOWEVER

- Not every group of words with both a noun (subject) and a verb (predicate) is a sentence.
- A SENTENCE MUST EXPRESS A COMPLETE THOUGHT OR ACTION.
- 'When I was in town.'
- 'After he went to work.'



# MODIFYING CLAUSES

- ‘When I ...town’ and “After...work’ ‘although she argues...’ are ***modifying clauses***. They modify or explain something about the main action of the sentence.
- eg. **When I was in town** I saw a group of women protesting outside the Social Welfare department.
- She packed her bags **after he went to work**.
- She does not seem to believe in political action, **although she argues that women are oppressed**.



# CHECKS:

- --look for the modifiers -'when', 'where', 'although', 'if', etc.
- Words like this alert you to the fact that there is still a main action to come.
- Does each sentence express a complete statement or action?
- Does each sentence have both a subject and a predicate?



# CLARITY, ECONOMY, PRECISION

- Good writing has to do with clarity, precision and economy.
- Clarity is knowing exactly what you want to say;
- Precision is choosing just the right words to say it;
- Economy is paring away unnecessary words.

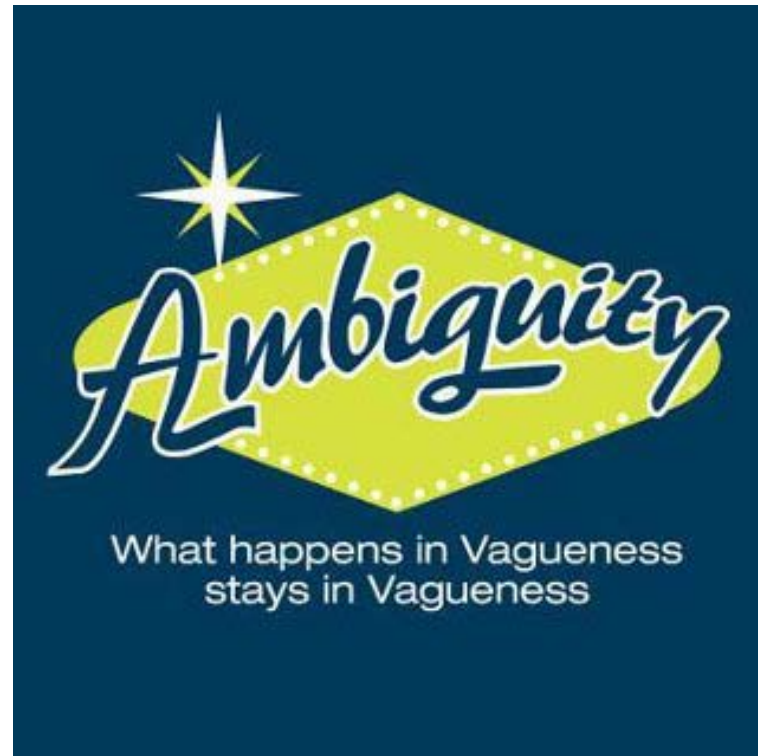


# HOW COULD THIS HAVE BEEN REWORDED TO BE CLEARER?



# CLARITY, ECONOMY, PRECISION

- Help to avoid ambiguity, in which your reader is unsure what you mean



# CLARITY

- A good exercise is to read what you have written and then take out any words which don't directly add to the clarity and precision of what you are trying to say.
- Don't, for example, write, 'Society expects women to be thin'. (What is society? How does it operate? How can something that vague or undefined 'expect'?)
- A more precise sentence might be:
- 'Media images and diet industry advertisements promote the idea that women should be thin.'



# ECONOMY

- She argues that there are three elements, reproduction, production and ideology, that are the fundamental elements of western patriarchy based on male domination. She contends that the way in which these are conceivable in through the notion of the sex-gender system. (41 words)
- She argues that (there are) three elements, reproduction, production and ideology, (that) are (the) fundamental (elements of) to western patriarchy (based on male domination). She contends that (the way in which) these (are analysable is) can be analysed through the (notion) concept of the sex-gender system.
- She argues that three elements, reproduction, production and ideology, are fundamental to western patriarchy. She contends these can be analysed through the concept of the sex-gender system. (27 words)



# PRECISION

- I will argue that, although women and men are placed in an oppositional relationship, there is a dependence of women on men and vice versa. (25 words)
- More economical:
- I argue that, although women and men are seen as opposites, women depend on men and vice versa. (18 words)
- More precise :
- I argue that, although women and men are seen as opposites, definitions of 'woman' depend on definitions of 'man' and vice versa. (22 words)



# PARAGRAPHS

- Paragraphs are groups of sentences which 1) develop an idea and 2) signal changes of direction or pace.
- A paragraph should contain between five and ten sentences.
- Very few ideas can be developed in 1 or 2 sentences.
- Very ideas need more than 10 sentences.



# PARAGRAPHS OF ONE OR TWO SENTENCES

- make the text read jerkily and disrupt the coherence of your argument. They make it difficult for the reader to follow your argument or tell when you are moving on to a new idea.
- If you have a tendency to write one and two sentence paragraphs, re-read the text after you have drafted it and see which of your sentences could be brought together to make a larger coherent paragraph. Quite often you will find that you have taken a series of thoughts which develop a single theme and broken them into chunks.
- Bring them together and check to see if they make sense and develop your ideas.



# GREAT LONG PARAGRAPHS

- are commonly the sign of incoherence and lack of clarity about your argument.
- They tend to make all your ideas run into each other.
- They confuse the reader by not signposting when a new issue is being discussed.
- Again the trick is to re-read, looking for breaks in your argument where you can make a new paragraph.



# EXAMPLE: HANDOUT

- Read introduction on handout (1<sup>st</sup> page)
- How would you grade this essay, based on intro?
- Does it have a thesis statement? If so, what is it?
- How would YOU write a thesis statement for this essay?
- What errors can you find?
  - Incomplete sentences
  - Quotations that stand alone
  - Spelling errors
  - Lack of agreement between subject and object
  - Meaningless “padding”
  - Lack of clear thesis statement



# EXAMPLE: HANDOUT

- Body of Essay
  - Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
  - Does each paragraph develop ***one main idea***, as identified in the topic sentence?
  - Do supporting sentences provide reasons, examples, facts, statistics, or quotes to support, explain, and develop the main idea of that paragraph?
  - Is there a clear and logical flow of ideas?
  - Is there a logical continuity of ideas from one paragraph to the next?
- Conclusions: Read last two paragraphs.
  - Is this a strong conclusion? Why or why not?



## NEXT WEEK: THE NITTY GRITTY

