

**PLANNING A COMPOSITION**

Writing a composition takes some planning. First, you need to decide on a main idea and collect information or details about it. (See pages 1–4, “Finding Ideas.”) Then you have to find a way to put all your ideas together. A good plan can help you find your way.

**EARLY PLANS**

An *early plan*, sometimes called an *informal outline*, is a way to organize your ideas. First, put your ideas into related groups. Then arrange the groups in an order that will make sense to the reader.

**GROUPING.** Look at the information you have. Group notes that have something in common. Write a heading that identifies what each group of notes has in common.

**ORDERING.** There are many ways to order ideas in compositions. *Chronological*, or time, *order* presents events in the order that they happened. You could use chronological order to tell about the process of taking a photograph or baking a cake. *Spatial order* presents details according to their location. You could use spatial order to describe a limestone cave or an amusement park. *Logical order* presents related ideas together. For example, you could use logical order to organize information about dinosaurs. First, you could tell about the plant-eaters, and then you could tell about the flesh-eaters.

**EXERCISE 1 Making an Early Plan**

Working with a partner, use logical order to organize the following notes on forest fires by putting the notes into three groups. Then, on your own paper, write a heading for each group, and arrange the notes within the groups in a way that makes sense.

*lightning, another cause of fire*  
*people carelessly flipping lighted matches into wooded areas*

*loss of many birds' and animals' lives in fires*

*people—cause of 90 percent of all forest fires*

*lack of food, wildlife die*

*some fires deliberately set*

*teach people to appreciate the value of their forests*

*smoldering campfires left by campers*

*fish poisoned by streams clogged with ashes*

*could increase the number of lookout towers*

*train more firefighters*

## FORMAL OUTLINES

A *formal outline* is more structured than an early plan. It uses letters and numbers to label main headings and the ideas that belong below the headings. A formal outline can have either topics (single words or phrases) or complete sentences. Here is a topic outline for a composition.

Title: *The Life of Julia Ward Howe*

Main Idea: *Julia Ward Howe was one of the great women of the nineteenth century.*

- I. *Her life*
  - A. *Born in New York, New York, 1819*
  - B. *Educated at home and in private schools*
  - C. *Married head of the Perkins Institute for the Blind*
  - D. *Died in Newport, Rhode Island, 1910*
- II. *Her writing*
  - A. *Wrote books of poetry*
  - B. *Wrote two plays*
  - C. *Wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"*
  - D. *Wrote nonfiction books about women*
- III. *Her other achievements*
  - A. *Founded New England Woman Suffrage Association*
  - B. *Became president of Association for the Advancement of Women*
  - C. *Elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters*

### EXERCISE 2 Making a Formal Outline

Using the early plan you made in Exercise 1, make a formal topic outline on your own paper. Be sure to use letters and numbers to label the main headings and ideas.

**WRITING INTRODUCTIONS**

The first part of a composition is the *introduction*. It's a little bit like the topic sentence in a paragraph. The introduction serves two important functions.

1. **CAPTURING THE READER'S INTEREST.** A good introduction grabs the reader's attention. It makes the reader want to read the rest of the composition.
2. **STATING THE MAIN IDEA.** A good introduction also states the main idea. It tells the reader what the composition will be about.

**WAYS TO WRITE INTRODUCTIONS**

There are many ways to make an introduction interesting.

- **Ask a question.** The writer asks a question and then answers it.

Why did dinosaurs die out? Some scientists think that a huge meteor crashed into earth, sending up clouds of dust that blotted out the sun for years. Plants died, and so did the animals that fed on plants.

- **Tell an anecdote.** An *anecdote* is a short, interesting or humorous story. Most people like stories, so starting a composition with a brief story is an excellent way to capture the reader's attention.

Not long ago, a German shepherd disappeared from a campsite near Tucson, Arizona. After searching the area for two weeks, the dog's owner gave up and left. Four months later, the dog limped into its owner's yard. The owner lives in Selah, Washington, one thousand miles from Tucson. The Dog is just one of many animals that have traveled amazing distances to return home.

- **State an interesting or startling fact.** Curiosity also makes a reader want to read on. An exciting statement of fact creates curiosity.

Arctic terns can travel more than half a million miles during their lifetimes. They nest in the Arctic area and fly south to Antarctica in the fall. The distance between their summer and winter homes is eleven thousand miles.

**EXERCISE 3 Identifying Types of Introductions**

On the line below each introduction, write the technique used to get your attention.

1. You might say that a crocodile's toothbrush is a small flock of birds. While people clean their teeth with toothbrushes and toothpaste, crocodiles use a different method. After a meal, a crocodile opens its mouth wide. Small birds, called plovers, enter the crocodile's mouth and pick food from between its teeth.  

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2. Have you ever flown a kite on a windy day? If you have, you probably learned something about wind currents.  

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3. At least one flower makes noise when it blooms. The yellow evening primrose, which opens only at night, makes a popping sound because it opens so quickly. This story is one of many that I heard from my grandfather, who owned a flower shop in Boston's North End.  

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4. Dwayne opened one eye and glanced at the alarm clock. It was 7:45 A.M.! School began in fifteen minutes. He leaped out of bed and scurried to find his clothes. In his rush to get dressed, he broke a shoelace and had to look for another one. Then, on his way to school, Dwayne took a shortcut through a vacant lot, ran over a broken bottle, and ruined a tire of his bicycle. Dwayne's story may sound exaggerated, but it's not. Being in a hurry frequently causes accidents.  

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**WRITING CONCLUSIONS**

The *conclusion* is the last part, the ending, of a composition. It should make your readers feel that your composition is complete. In your conclusion you need to tie together the ideas in the composition and connect them to your main idea.

**WAYS TO WRITE CONCLUSIONS**

- **Refer to your introduction.** In the introduction about pets that travel amazing distances, the writer refers to the distance the German shepherd traveled.

**Introduction:** Not long ago, a German shepherd walked to his home in Selah, Washington, from a campsite in Tuscon, Arizona, one thousand miles away.

**Conclusion:** The bond between pets and their owners is sometimes so strong that nothing—not even a trip of a thousand miles—will keep them apart!

- **Close with an interesting comment.** Another way to end your composition is to leave your readers with an interesting statement that clearly signals the end.

Meat-eating plants are interesting, but they are not at all dangerous to people. Plants big enough to swallow people are the stuff of science fiction and musicals like *The Little Shop of Horrors*.

- **Restate your main idea.** One direct way to wrap up a composition is to restate your main idea in different words. The following conclusion restates the idea that the dinosaurs died out when a giant meteor crashed into earth.

Did a great disaster cause the dinosaurs to die out? While there are still many unanswered questions, the evidence connecting a huge meteor and the extinction of the dinosaurs is strong. Maybe someday soon this connection will be confirmed.

**EXERCISE 4 Writing a Conclusion**

Read the introduction and the body of the following composition. On your own paper, write a conclusion by using one of the techniques on the previous page. Then get together with two of your classmates and discuss your conclusions. Why did you choose one technique over another? Which technique do you think creates the best conclusion for the composition?

What did English children in 1662 enjoy watching that children of today also enjoy? They enjoyed watching the comic actions of puppets in puppet shows. The stars of those early English puppet shows were known as Punch and Judy. Today, children around the world enjoy the performances of several different kinds of puppets, including hand puppets, rod puppets, and marionettes.

The most familiar kind of puppet is the hand puppet. Finger puppets, glove puppets, and Muppets are all hand puppets. For a finger puppet, the puppeteer uses two fingers to represent the puppet's legs. To operate a glove puppet, the puppeteer slips the body of the puppet figure over his or her hand. The puppeteer's thumb goes into one arm and a finger or two goes into the other arm. Muppets are familiar to any child who has ever seen the television show *Sesame Street*. The puppeteer puts his or her fingers into the Muppet's upper face and a thumb into the Muppet's jaw. A glove hides the puppeteer's other hand and forms the Muppet's body.

Another kind of puppet is the rod puppet. Rod puppets are controlled by rods or sticks attached to various parts of the puppet's figure. The puppeteer is usually below the stage and unseen by the audience. Rod puppets are part of a traditional form of entertainment known in Japan as doll theater. The rod puppets of doll theater are about four feet tall. They are controlled by puppeteers who appear on stage dressed from head to toe in black.

A third kind of puppet is the marionette. The movements of marionettes are controlled by strings. To work the marionette, the puppeteer moves a wooden frame to which the strings are attached. The strings lead to the puppet's head, shoulders, hands, and knees. By moving the strings, the puppeteer can make a marionette walk, sit, dance, and even kick a soccer ball.