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# Principles of English Writing

Writing is a process in which thinking and learning take place. This process is known as the writing-thinking-learning connection. It's a process that results in a communicative product that conforms to grammatical, syntactical, mechanical, and genre conventions. Significantly, writing also performs recognizable social functions that have increased in importance with the rise of social media.

Writing success is highly dependent on learning and adapting to the implicit rules and genre conventions of a discourse.

To understand the conventions, writers need excellent materials to imitate, or to emulate. They need to be able to identify errors that characterize non-standard English. They need to be able to identify rectifiable weaknesses. They need to be able to discern perspectives, inaccuracies, biases, gaps, and blind spots. They need to be able to identify and analyze the rhetorical and stylistic devices that accomplish writers' use. They also need to be able to analyze, evaluate, and select information, and structure and synthesize the information into logical, meaningful, economical and persuasive writings of their own. Much of this competence not only comes from writing instruction by knowledgeable teachers, but also comes from the process of reading and writing. This chapter will share the principles of language use in writings.

# Unit 1

## Word Choice

One key factor that determines excellent writing style is how well your choice of words matches your readers' expectations, which depends on who those readers are. In formal writing—for example, at university or in the workplace—you need to adhere quite strictly to the conventions of academic and professional writing. If you are writing creatively, you will have a much wider choice in relation to words and can be as imaginative and distinctive as you like. The three central concepts in word usage are style, voice, and tone, with their related concepts of different scope of usage.

Style is generally judged on a writer's choice and command of words and syntax (sentence structure). Voice is what creates your relationship with your readers: what “comes through” about you by your writing, and how you present yourself to your readers. Your readers “hear” your voice and construct your character. Voice is what makes a writer distinctive. Your voice may be authoritative, reassuring, avuncular, sincere, humble, opinionated, knowledgeable, and idiosyncratic. Your purpose of writing affects the voice that you were aiming for. Tone is what creates the effect of your message on your readers. It is always subjective, that is, open to different interpretations by different readers. However, most readers share the opinion that a communication can be cold or friendly, condescending or sincere.

The English language contains over a half million words. However, such a wide choice can make you wonder all the time which choice is best or how to choose.

Word choice can make an enormous difference in the quality of your writing for at least one obvious reason: if you substitute an incorrect or vague word for the right one, you will risk being misunderstood. To help you avoid possible indecision over word choice, this unit offers some practical suggestions for selecting words.

## Selecting the Correct Words

Language has been classified into three categories, or levels, of usage: (1) colloquial, (2) informal, and (3) formal.

Colloquial language is the kind of speech you use most often in conversation with your friends, classmates, and family. It may not always be grammatically correct (e.g. “it’s me”); it may include fragments, contractions, some slangs, words identified as non-standard by the dictionary (such as “yuck” or “lousy”), and shortened or abbreviated words (e.g. “grad school”, “LOL”). Colloquial speech is everyday language. Although it can be used in some writings such as text messages, personal e-mails and letters, journals, and so forth, you should think carefully about using colloquial language in most college essays or in professional letters, reports, or papers because such a choice implies a causal relationship between the writer and the reader.

Informal language is called-for in most college and professional assignments. The tone is more formal than in colloquial writing or speech, and no slang or non-standard words are permissible. Informal writing consistently uses correct grammar; fragments are used for special effects or not at all. Most of your essays in English classes will be written in informal language.

Formal language is found in important documents and serious speeches. Formal writing often uses inverted word order and balanced sentence structure. Most people rarely need to write formally, however, if you are called on to do so, be careful to avoid diction that sounds pretentious, pompous, or phony.

## Selecting the Best Words

In addition to selecting the correct words and appropriate tone, good writers choose words that firmly plant their ideas in the minds of their readers. The best prose not only makes cogent points but also states these points memorably. To help you select the best words to express your ideas, the following is a list of problems of word choice in students’ writing today.

### 1. Do make your words as precise as possible.

“The big tree was hit by lightning” for example, is not as formative or interesting as “Lightning splintered the neighbors’ thirty-foot oak”. Don’t use words whose meanings are unclear:

### Vague Verbs

**Unclear:** She got involved in a lawsuit. [How?]

**Clear:** She is suing her dentist for filling the wrong tooth.

**Unclear:** Tom can relate to Jennifer. [What's the relationship?]

**Clear:** Tom understands Jennifer's financial problem.

**Unclear:** He won't deal with his ex-wife. [In what way?]

**Clear:** He refuses to speak to his ex-wife:

### **Vague Nouns**

**Unclear:** The burglar took several valuable things from our house. [What items?]

**Clear:** The burglar took a television, a tablet, and a microwave oven from our house.

**Unclear:** When I have my car serviced, there is always trouble. [What kind?]

**Clear:** When I have my car serviced, the mechanics always find additional repairs and never have the car ready when it is promised.

### **Vague Modifiers**

**Unclear:** His terrible explanation left me very confused. [Why "terrible"? How confused?]

**Clear:** His disorganized explanation left me too confused to begin the project.

**Unclear:** The boxer hit the punching bag really hard. [How hard?]

**Clear:** The boxer hit the punching bag so hard that it split open.

**Unclear:** Casablanca is a good movie with something for everyone. [Why "good" and for everyone?]

**Clear:** Casablanca is a witty, sentimental movie that successfully combines an adventure story and a romance.

To help you recognize the difference between general and specific language, consider the following series of words:

General → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → → Specific

*food → snack food → chips → potato chips → Red Hot Jalapeño Potato Chips*

*car → red car → red sports car → classic red Corvette → 1966 red Corvette convertible*

*building → house → old house → big old fancy house → 19th-century Victorian mansion*

The preceding examples illustrate varying degrees of generality, with the words becoming more specific as they move to the right. Sometimes in your writing you will, of course, need to use general words to communicate your thought. However, most writers need to practice finding specific language to substitute for bland, vague, or overly general diction that doesn't clearly present the precise picture the writer has in mind. For instance, look at the difference between these two sentences:

1) My date arrived at the restaurant in an old car and then surprised us by ordering snack food.

2) My date arrived at the restaurant in a rusted-out 52 Cadillac DeVille without bumper and then surprised us by ordering a large, expensive bowl of imported cheese puffs.

Which description better conveys the start of an unusual evening? Which sentence would make you want to hear more?

Not all the occasions call for specific details. Don't add details that merely clutter if they aren't important to the idea or mood you are creating.

Most of the time, writers can improve their drafts by giving their language a close look, considering places where a vigorous verb or a "showing" adjective or a specific noun might make an enormous difference to the reader. As you revise and polish your own essays, ask yourself if you can clarify and enliven your writing by replacing dull, lifeless words with engaging, vivid, specific ones. Challenge yourself to find the best words possible—it's a writing habit that produces effective, reader-pleasing results.

## **2. Do make your word choice as fresh and original as possible.**

Instead of saying "My hometown is very quiet", you might say, "My hometown's definition of an orgy is a light burning after midnight." In other words, if you can make your readers admire and remember your prose, you have a better chance of persuading them to accept your ideas.

Conversely, don't fill your sentences with clichés that may cause your writing to sound lifeless and trite, because (1) they are often vague or imprecise, and (2) they are used so frequently that they rob your prose style of personality and uniqueness.

Novice writers often include trite expressions because they do not recognize them as clichés; therefore, here is a partial list of phrases to avoid. Instead of using a cliché, try substituting an original phrase to describe what you see or feel.

crack of dawn	needle in a haystack	gentle as a lamb
a crying shames	bed of roses	blind as a bat
white as a sheet	cold as ice	strong as an ox
depths of despair	hard as nails	sober as a judge
dead of night	white as snow	didn't sleep a wink
shadow of a doubt	almighty dollar	face the music
hear a pin drop	busy as a bee	out like a light
blessed event	to make a long story	the last straw
first and foremost	short pale as a ghost	solid as a rock

It would be impossible to memorize all the clichés and trite expressions, but do check your prose for recognizable, overworked phrases so that your words will not be predictable



and, consequently dull. If you aren't sure whether a phrase is a cliché, but you've heard that it is used frequently, your prose will probably be stronger if you substitute an original phrase for the suspected one.

For example, it's easy to recognize such overused phrases as “last but not least”, “easier said than done”, and “when all was said and done”. But they may pop up in essays almost without a writer's awareness. For instance, using your very first thoughts, fill in the blanks in the following sentence:

*After years of service, my old car finally \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ by the side of the road.*

If your immediate responses were the three words: “coughed, sputtered, and died”, don't be surprised! The writer describing the car wants readers to see the particular old car, not some bland image identically reproduced in readers' minds. As a writer, you also want your readers to “see” your specific idea and be engaged by your prose rather than skipping over canned-bland images.

### **3. Do select simple, direct words that your readers can easily understand.**

Don't use pompous or pseudo-sophisticated language in place of plain speech. Wherever possible, avoid jargon—that is, words and phrases that are unnecessarily technical, pretentious, or abstract.

Technical jargon—terms specific to one area of study or specialization—should be omitted or clearly defined in essays directed to a general audience because such language is often inaccessible to anyone outside the writer's particular field. Although most professions do have their own terms, you should limit your use of specialized language to writing aimed solely at your professional colleagues; always try to avoid technical jargon in prose directed at a general audience. To avoid such verbal litter in your own writing, follow these rules:

1) Always select the plainest, most direct words you know.

**Jargon:** The editor wanted to halt the proliferation of the product because she discovered an error on the page that terminates the volume.

**Revised:** The editor wanted to stop publishing the book because she found an error on the last page.

2) Replace nominalizations (nouns that are made from verbs and adjectives, usually by adding endings such as -tion, -ism, -ness, or -al) with simpler verbs and nouns.

**Jargon:** The departmental head has come to the recognition that the utilization of verbose verbalization renders informational content inaccessible.

**Revised:** The head of the department recognizes that wordiness confuses meaning.

3) Avoid adding -ize or -wise to verbs and adverbs.

**Jargon:** Weatherwise, it looked like a good day to finalize her report on wind tunnels.

**Revised:** The day's clear weather would help her finish her report on wind tunnels.

4) Abandon meaningless words such as “factor”, “aspect”, and “situation”.

**Jargon:** The convenience factor of the neighborhood grocery store is one aspect of its success.

**Revised:** The convenience of the neighborhood grocery store contributes to its success. Remember that a good writing is clear and direct, never wordy, cloudy, or ostentatious.

#### **4. Do enliven your writing with figurative language when appropriate.**

Figurative language produces pictures or images in a reader's mind, often by comparing something unfamiliar to something familiar. The most common two figurative devices are the simile and the metaphor. A simile is a comparison between two people, places, feelings, or things, using the word “like” or “as”; a more forceful comparison, omitting the word “like” or “as”, is a metaphor. Here are two examples:

**Simile:** George eats his meals like a hog.

**Metaphor:** George is a hog at mealtime.

In both sentences, George, whose eating habits are unfamiliar to the reader, is likened to a hog, whose sloppy manners are generally well known. By comparing George to a hog, the writer gives the reader a clear picture of George at the table. Figurative language can not only help you present your ideas in clear, concrete, economical ways but also make your prose more memorable—especially when the image or picture you present is a fresh, arresting one. Here are some examples of striking images designed to catch the reader's attention and to clarify the writer's point:

- An hour away from him felt like a month in the country.
- The atmosphere of the meeting room was as tense as a World Series game tied in the ninth inning.
- The woman's earrings were as big as butter plates.
- The angry accusation flew like a spear, once thrown, it could not be retrieved and it cut deeply.
- Behind her broad polished desk, Matilda was a queen bee with a swarm of office drones buzzing at her door.
- The factory squatted on the bank of the river like a huge black toad.

Figurative language can spice up your prose, but like any spice, it can be misused, thus spoiling your soup. Therefore, don't overuse figurative language since not every point needs a metaphor or simile for clarity or emphasis. Too many images are confusing. Moreover, don't use stale images. If you can't catch your readers' attention with a fresh picture, don't bore them with a stale one.

**5. Do vary your word choice so that your prose does not sound wordy, repetitious, or monotonous.**

Consider the following sentence:

*According to child psychologists, depriving a child of sensory stimulation in the earliest stages of childhood can cause the child brain damage.*

Reworded, the following sentence eliminates the tiresome, unnecessary repetition of the word “child”:

*According to child psychologists, depriving infants of sensory stimulation can cause brain damage.*

By omitting or changing repeated words, you can add variety and crispness to your prose. Of course, don’t ever change your words or sentence structure to achieve variety at the expense of clarity or precision. At all times, your goal is to make your prose clear to your readers.

**6. Do remember that wordiness is a major problem for all writers, even the professionals.**

State your thoughts directly and specifically in as few words as necessary to communicate your meaning clearly.

In addition to the advice given above on avoiding wordy or vague jargon, euphemisms, and clichés, you might also want to know some other tips of choosing right words:

**7. Avoid sexist language.**

**8. Do call things by their proper names.**

**9. Refrain from using texting language in your academic or professional writing.**

**10. Don’t use trendy expressions or slangs in your essays.**

**Exercises**

**I. Underline the vague nouns, verbs, and modifiers in the sentences below. Then rewrite each sentence so that it says something clear and specific.**

1. The experiment had very bad results.
2. The speaker came up with some odd items.
3. The house was big, old, and ugly.
4. The man is a nice guy with a good personality.
5. I felt that the whole ordeal was quite an experience.
6. The machine we got was missing a few things.
7. The woman was really something special.
8. The classroom material wasn’t interesting.

9. The child made a lot of very loud noises.
10. The cost of the unusual meal was amazing.

**II. Rewrite the following sentences, eliminating all clichés, slang, mixed metaphors, and euphemisms; change any texting or sexist language you find.**

1. Anyone who wants to be elected the next congressman from our state must clearly recognize that our tourist industry is sitting on a launching pad, ready to flex its muscles and become a dynamo.
2. I thought the whole deal was sweet, but then my sister goes “whatever”; I think she got a special delivery from the duh truck. G2G, thx, Dude!
3. After all is said and done, agricultural producers may be forced to relocate to urban environments, settling in substandard housing with other members of the disadvantaged class until the day they expire.
4. Both Ron Howard and Shirley Temple were popular child actors; careerwise, Howard moved on to directing movies, but Shirley left show biz to serve Old Glory by becoming ambassadoress to Ghana and Czechoslovakia.
5. Each commander realizes that one day he might be called upon to use the peace-keepers to depopulate an emerging nation in a lethal intervention.
6. Although Jack once regarded Jill as sweet and innocent, he knew then and there that she was really a wolf in sheep’s clothing with a heart of stone.
7. The city councilman was stewing in his juices when he learned that his goals-impaired son had been arrested for fooling around with the funds for the fiscal underachievers’ home.
8. NVR rite lik ds n yr skool r prowork. Srsly. Tlk 2 u l8r. (Never write like this in your school for professional work. Seriously. Talk to you later.)
9. At a press conference on the war in Iraq, former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced the following: “Reports that say something hasn’t happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns, there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

**III. Fill in the blanks with colorful words. You may make the paragraph as exciting or humorous as you wish but avoid clichés. Make your responses as original and creative as possible.**

As midnight approached, Janet and Brad \_\_\_\_\_ toward the \_\_\_\_\_ mansion to escape the \_\_\_\_\_ storm. Their \_\_\_\_\_ car had \_\_\_\_\_ on the road nearby. The night

was \_\_\_\_\_, and Brad \_\_\_\_\_ at the shadows with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. As they \_\_\_\_\_ up the \_\_\_\_\_ steps to the \_\_\_\_\_ door, the \_\_\_\_\_ wind was filled with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ sounds. Janet \_\_\_\_\_ on the door, and moments later, it opened to reveal the \_\_\_\_\_ scientist, with a face like a \_\_\_\_\_. Brad and Janet \_\_\_\_\_ at each other and then \_\_\_\_\_ (complete this sentence and then end the paragraph and the story).

#### **IV. Rewrite the following passage and delete unnecessary words.**

1. The tricolor pottery of the Tang dynasty is best known among people for its exquisite designs, brilliant colors, and vivid images. Making the pottery involves more than 30 processes, which is quite a large number. Baked twice at different temperatures, the clay bases are accented with soft glazes in the colors of amber, green and yellow. Tang pottery was used mainly as burial objects for the dead in ancient China, a custom that has kept many of these old and ancient relics from being destroyed across the centuries that have passed since they were first made so long ago. Each year, archaeologists unearth from the ground more magnificent works from the period of the Tang dynasty. These priceless works are part of China's priceless artistic heritage.

2. If you wish to experience a traditional time-honored Chinese celebration, there are few better choices you can make than the Dragon Boat Festival that falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. This annual event started as part of a ceremonial ritual to commemorate the death of Qu Yuan, a minister of the government during the Warring States period, who is revered and esteemed for his integrity and patriotism. Dragon boat races are the most excitingly thrilling part of the festival, drawing huge crowds of spectators who watch them. Dragon boats are simply canoes that are decorated to look like open-mouthed dragons. The longest boats are powered by as many as 80 strong rowers.

## Unit 2

# Sentence Effectiveness

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To improve your own writing, you must express your thoughts in clear, coherent sentences that produce precisely the reader response you want. Effective sentences are similar to the threads in a piece of knitting or weaving. If any sentence is fuzzy or obscure, the reader may lose the point of your discussion and in some cases never bother to regain it. Therefore, to retain your readers, you must concentrate on writing informative, effective sentences that continuously clarify the purpose of your essay.

Many problems in sentence clarity involve errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, and usage. In this unit you'll find some general suggestions for writing clear, concise, engaging sentences. Your readers only read the words on the page, not those in your mind—so it's up to you to make sure the sentences in your essay express the thoughts in your head as closely and vividly as possible.

### Developing a Clear Style

When you are ready to revise the sentences in your rough draft for clarity, consider the following rules:

#### 1. Give Your Sentences Content

Fuzzy sentences are often the result of fuzzy thinking. Don't pad your paragraphs with sentences that run in circles, leading nowhere; rethink your ideas and revise your writing so that every sentence contributes to the construction of a solid discussion. In other words, commit yourself to a position and make each sentence contain information pertinent to your point.

Sometimes, however, you may have a definite idea in mind but still continue to write statements that alone do not contain enough information to make a specific point in your discussion. Frequently, an empty sentence can be revised by combining with the sentence that

follows, as shown in the examples below. The empty or overly general sentences are underlined.

**Poor:** There are many kinds of beautiful tropical fish. The most popular kind with aquarium owners is the angelfish.

**Better:** Of the many kinds of beautiful tropical fish, the angelfish is the most popular with aquarium owners.

**Poor:** D. W. Griffith introduced many new cinematic techniques. Some of these techniques were contrast editing, close-ups, fade-outs, and freeze-frame shots.

**Better:** D. W. Griffith made movie history by introducing such new cinematic techniques as contrast editing, close-ups, fade-outs, and the freeze-frame shot.

**Poor:** There is a national organization called The Couch Potatoes. The group's 8,000 members are devoted television watchers.

**Better:** The Couch Potatoes is a national organization whose 8,000 members are devoted television watchers.

## 2. Make Your Sentences Specific

In addition to containing an informative, complete thought, each of your sentences should give readers enough clear details to “see” the picture you are creating. Clear, specific details are the only sure way to attract and hold the reader's interest. Therefore, make each sentence contribute something new and interesting to the overall discussion.

The following examples first show sentences that are far too vague to sustain any attention. After rewriting, these sentences contain specific details that add clarity and interest:

**Vague:** She went home in a bad mood.

**Specific:** She stomped home, hands jammed in her pockets, angrily kicking rocks, dogs, small children, and anything else that crossed her path.

**Vague:** His neighbor bought a really nice old desk.

**Specific:** His neighbor bought an oak roll-top desk made in 1885 that contains a secret drawer triggered by a hidden spring.

**Vague:** My roommate is truly horrible.

**Specific:** My thoughtless roommate leaves dirty dishes under the bed, sweaty clothes in the closet, and toenail clippings in the sink.

## 3. Avoid Mixed Constructions and Faulty Predication

Sometimes you may begin with a sentence pattern in mind and then shift to another pattern—a change that often results in a generally confusing sentence. In many of these cases, you will find that the subject of your sentence simply doesn't fit with the rest of the sentence (the predicate). Look at the following examples and note their corrections:

**Faulty:** Financial aid is a growing problem for many college students. [Financial aid

itself isn't a problem; rather, it's the lack of aid.]

**Revised:** College students are finding it harder to obtain financial aid.

**Faulty:** Love is when you start rehearsing dinner-date conversation before breakfast.  
[A thing is never a “when” or a “where”; rewrite all “is when” or “is where” constructions.]

**Revised:** You're in love if you start rehearsing dinner-date conversation before breakfast.

**Faulty:** My math grade is why I'm so depressed. [A grade is not a “why”; rewrite “is why” constructions.]

**Revised:** I'm so depressed because of my math grade.

Many mixed constructions occur when a writer is in a hurry; read your rough drafts carefully to see if you have sentences in which you started one pattern but switched to another.

## Developing a Lively Style

Good writing demands clarity and conciseness—but that's not all. Good prose must also be lively, engaging, and interesting. It should excite, intrigue, and charm the reader; each line should seduce the reader into the next. An article may be written clearly, but perhaps it failed to interest or inform.

You can prevent your readers from losing interests by developing a vigorous prose style that continually surprises and pleases them. As you revise your rough drafts, remember: bored readers are not born but made. Therefore, here are some practical suggestions to help you write lively sentences and paragraphs:

### 1. Use specific, descriptive verbs

Avoid bland verbs that must be supplemented by modifiers.

**Bland:** His fist broke the window into many small pieces.

**Better:** His fist shattered the window.

**Bland:** Dr. Love asked his congregation about donating money to his “love mission” over and over again.

**Better:** Dr. Love hounded his congregation into donating money to his “love mission”.

**Bland:** The exhausted runner went up the last hill in an unsteady way.

**Better:** The exhausted runner staggered up the last hill.

### 2. Use specific, precise modifiers that help the reader see, hear, or feel what you are describing

Adjectives such as “good”, “bad”, “many”, “more”, “great”, “a lot”, “important”, and



“interesting” are too vague to paint the reader a clear picture. Similarly, the adverbs “very”, “really”, “too” and “quite” are overused and add little clarity to sentences. The following are examples of weak sentences and their revisions:

**Imprecise:** The potion changed the scientist into a really old man.

**Better:** The potion changed the scientist into a one-hundred-year-old man.

**Imprecise:** Aricelli is a very interesting person.

**Better:** Aricelli is witty, intelligent, and talented.

**Imprecise:** The vegetables tasted funny.

**Better:** The vegetables tasted like moss mixed with Krazy Glue.

### **3. Emphasize people when possible**

Try to focus on human beings rather than abstractions whenever you can. Next to our fascinating selves, we most enjoy hearing about other people. Although all the sentences in the first paragraph that follows are correct, the revised one is clearer and more useful because the jargon has been eliminated and the focus has changed from the tuition rules to the students.

**Original:** Tuition regulations currently in effect provide that payment of the annual tuition entitles an undergraduate-degree candidate to full-time enrollment, which is defined as registration for three, four, or five courses per semester. This means that at no time may an undergraduate student’s official registration for courses drop below three without a dean’s permission for part-time status and that at no time may the official course registration exceed five. (Brown University Course Announcement)

**Revised:** If students pay their tuition, they may enroll in three, four, or five courses per semester. Fewer than three or more than five can be taken only with a dean’s permission.

Obviously, the revised sentence is the more easily understood between the two because the reader knows exactly who will be affected by the pay cuts. In your own prose, wherever appropriate, try to replace vague abstractions, such as “society”, “culture”, “administrative concerns”, and “programmatic expectations”, with the human beings you’re thinking about. In other words, remember to talk to people about people.

### **4. Vary your sentence style**

Don’t force readers to read through annoying paragraphs full of identically constructed sentences. To illustrate this point, the following are a few sentences composed in the all-too-common “subject + predicate” pattern:

*Soccer is the most popular sport in the world. Soccer exists in almost every country. Soccer players are sometimes more famous than movie stars. Soccer teams compete every few years for the World Soccer Cup. Soccer fans often riot if their team loses. Soccer fans even commit suicide. Soccer is the only game in the world that makes people so crazy.*

Each of us tends to repeat a particular sentence pattern (though the choppy “subject+predicate” is by far the most popular). To avoid overdosing your readers with the same pattern, vary the length, arrangement, and complexity of your sentences.

### **5. Don’t change your point of view between or within sentences**

If, for example, you begin your essay discussing students as “they”, don’t switch midway—or midsentence—to “we” or “you”.

**Inconsistent:** Students pay tuition, which should entitle them to some voice in the university’s administration. Therefore, we deserve one student on the Board of Regents.

**Consistent:** Students pay tuition, which should entitle them to some voice in the university’s administration. Therefore, they deserve one student on the Board of Regents.

**Inconsistent:** I like my photography class because we learn how to restore our old photos and how to take better color portraits of your family.

**Consistent:** I like my photography class because I’m learning how to restore my old photos and how to take better color portraits of my family.

## **Developing an Emphatic Style**

Some words and phrases in your sentences are more important than others and therefore need more emphasis. Three ways to vary emphasis are by (1) word order, (2) coordination, and (3) subordination.

### **1. Word Order**

The arrangement of words in a sentence can determine which idea receives the most emphasis. To stress a word or phrase, place it at the beginning of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. Accordingly, a word or phrase receives least emphasis when buried in the middle of the sentence. Compare the following examples, in which the word “murder” receives varying degrees of emphasis:

**Least emphatic:** For Colonel Mustard murder was the only solution.

**Emphatic:** Murder was Colonel Mustard’s only solution.

**Most emphatic:** Colonel Mustard knew only one solution: murder.

Another use of word order to vary emphasis is inversion, taking a word out of its natural or usual position in a sentence and relocating it in an unexpected place.

**Usual order:** Parents who give their children both roots and wings are wise.

**Inverted order:** Wise are the parents who give their children both roots and wings.

Not all your sentences will contain words that need special emphasis. Good writing

generally contains a mix of some sentences in natural order and others rearranged for special effects.

## 2. Coordination

When you want to stress two closely related ideas equally, coordinate them. In coordination, you join two sentences with a coordinating conjunction. To remember the coordinating conjunctions (“for”, “and”, “nor”, “but”, “or”, “yet”, “so”), think of the acronym FANBOYS; then always join two sentences with a comma and one of the FANBOYS. Here are two samples:

**Choppy:** Imelda brought home a pair of ruby slippers.  
Ferdinand made her return them.

**Coordinated:** Imelda brought home a pair of ruby slippers, but Ferdinand made her return them.

You can use coordination to show a relationship between ideas and to add variety to your sentence structures. Be careful, however, to select the right words while linking ideas. Sometimes when the writers are in a hurry, they join ideas that are clearly related in their own minds but whose relationship is confusing to the reader:

**Confusing:** My laboratory report isn’t finished, and today my sister is leaving for a visit home.

**Clear:** I’m still working on my laboratory report, so I won’t be able to catch a ride home with my sister who’s leaving today.

You should also avoid using coordinating conjunctions to string too many ideas together like linked sausages:

**Poor:** We went inside the famous cave and the guide turned off the lights and we saw the rocks that glowed.

**Revised:** After we went inside the famous cave, the guide turned off the lights so we could see the rocks that glowed.

## 3. Subordination

Some sentences contain one main statement and one or more less emphasized elements; the less important ideas are subordinate to, or are dependent on, the sentence’s main idea. Subordinating conjunctions introducing dependent clauses show a variety of relationships between the clauses and the main part of the sentence. Here are some examples of choppy, weak sentences and their revisions, which contain subordinate clauses:

**Choppy:** Lew makes bagels on Tuesday. Lines in front of his store are a block long.

**Revised:** When Lew makes bagels on Tuesday, lines in front of his store are a block long.

Effective use of subordination is one of the marks of a sophisticated writer because it presents adequate information in one smooth flow. Subordination, like coordination, also adds variety to your sentence construction.

Generally, when you subordinate one idea, you emphasize another, and put your important idea in the main clause. Also, don't let your most important idea become buried under an avalanche of subordinate clauses, as in the sentence that follows:

*When he was told by his boss, who had always treated him fairly, that he was being fired from a job that he had held for twenty years at a factory where he enjoyed working because the pay was good, Henry felt angry and frustrated.*

## Exercises

**I. In this exercise, you will find sentences that contain some of the problems discussed thus far in this chapter. Rewrite any sentences that you find vague, confusing, overly simplistic, or overpacked. You may divide or combine sentences and replace vague words to improve clarity.**

1. There's a new detective show on television. Starring Phil Noir. It is set in the 1940s. According to *TV Guide*.

2. Roger was an awesome guy he was really a big deal in his company.

3. I can't help but wonder whether or not he isn't unwelcome.

4. The book Biofeedback: How to Stop. It is a good book because of all the good ideas the writer put into it.

5. His assistant stole the magician's bag of tricks. The magician became disillusioned.

6. Afraid poor repair service will ruin your next road trip? Come to the Fix-It Shop and be sure. If your car has a worn-out part, we'll replace it with one just like it.

7. I've signed up for a course at my local college, it is "Cultivating the Mold in Your Refrigerator for Fun and Profit".

8. For some people, reading your horoscope is a fun way to learn stuff about your life. Although some people think it's too weird.

**II. Replace the following underlined words so that the sentences are clear and vivid. In addition, rephrase any awkward constructions or unnecessarily abstract words you find.**

1. Judging from the crazy sound of the reactor, it isn't obvious to me that nuclear power as we know it today isn't a technology with a less than wonderful future.

2. The City Council felt bad because the revised tourist development activities grant fund application form letters were mailed without stamps.

3. To watch Jim Bob eat pork chops was most interesting.
4. For sale: very nice antique bureau suitable for ladies or gentlemen with thick legs and extra-large side handles.
5. We don't want anybody to not have fun.
6. My roommate is sort of different, but he's a good guy at heart.
7. After reading the great new book, The Looter's Guide to Riot-Prone Cities, Eddie asked to have a transfer really soon.
8. The wild oats soup was fantastic, so we drank a lot of it very fast.
9. When his new cat Chairman Meow won the pet show, owner Warren Peace got pretty excited.
10. The new diet made me feel awful, and it did many horrible things to my body.

**III. Combine the following simple sentences into one complex sentence.**

1. Norman Bates manages a motel. It is remote.  
It is dangerous.  
Norman has a mother.  
She seems overly fond of knives. He tries to protect his mom.
2. A showman goes to the jungle.  
He captures an ape.  
The ape is a giant.  
The ape is taken to New York City. He escapes.  
He dies fighting for a young woman. He loves her.  
She is beautiful.
3. Rick is an American. He is cynical.  
He owns a café.  
He lives in Casablanca. He meets his former love. She is married.  
Her husband is a French resistance fighter. Rick helps the couple.  
He regains self-respect.

**IV. The following two paragraphs are poorly written because of their choppy, wordy, and monotonous sentences. Rewrite each paragraph so that it is clear, lively, and emphatic.**

1. There is a new invention on the market. It is called a "dieter's conscience". It is a small box to be installed in one's refrigerator. When the door of the refrigerator is opened by you, a tape recorder begins to start. A really loud voice yells, "You eating again? No wonder you're getting fat." Then the very loud voice says, "Close the door; it's getting warm." Then the voice laughs a lot in an insane and crazy fashion. The idea is one that is designed to mock

people into a habit of stopping eating.

2. In this modern world of today, man has come up with another new invention. This invention is called the “Talking Tombstone”. It is made by the Gone-But-Not-Forgotten Company, which is located in Burbank, California. This company makes a tombstone that has a device in it that makes the tombstone appear to be talking aloud in a realistic fashion when people go close by it. The reason is that the device is really a recording machine that is turned on due to the simple fact of the heat of the bodies of the people who go by. The closer the people get, the louder the sound the tombstone makes. It is this device that individual persons who want to leave messages after death may utilize. A hypochondriac, to cite one example, might leave a recording of a message that says over and over again in a really loud voice, “See, I told you I was sick!” It may be assumed by one and all that this new invention will be a serious aspect of the whole death situation in the foreseeable future.

## Paragraph Development

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A paragraph is a series of sentences all relating to the same topic or central idea. The aim of all paragraphs is to communicate to the reader that idea clearly and effectively. There is no hard and fast rule about the length of a paragraph; it depends on the topic and what the writer wants to say. The paragraph should be long enough to develop the idea expressed in the topic sentence sufficiently. It should do what it sets out to do in the topic sentence. Regardless of the length, the paragraph must contain only one idea. Any irrelevant sentences must be eliminated from the paragraph to ensure its unity.

### I. Parts of the Paragraph

There are three parts in a paragraph: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a conclusion. The first and last sentences are general statements about the topic, which tie the paragraph together. The middle sentences contain information, facts, opinions, and examples that support or develop the topic sentence.

#### 1. Topic Sentence

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in the paragraph and limits the topic of the paragraph. The topic sentence is always a complete thought or sentence. Most words in the title are capitalized. Only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized in the topic sentence. The most important sentence of a paragraph is the topic sentence because it contains the main ideas of the paragraph. There are three elements in a topic sentence: the topic, a controlling idea, and the point of view of the writer.

##### 1) *Topic*

The topic is the subject, that is, what is being written about in the paragraph. The main idea expressed in the topic sentence should not be too general or too specific. If it is too

general, it will be difficult to develop in a single paragraph adequately. If it is too specific, there will be nothing left to say to develop the idea in the paragraph. Look at the following topic sentences:

*Everyone can benefit from exercise.\**

This topic sentence is too general. Different kinds of exercise have different benefits. Not all of them can be developed within one paragraph.

*Doing aerobics for thirty minutes a day will strengthen a person's cardiovascular system by twenty five percent.\**

This topic sentence is too specific. There is nothing else that can be said to support this statement in the rest of the paragraph.

*There are three reasons why I exercise every day.*

This sentence is an adequate topic sentence. It limits the discussion of the paragraph to only discussing the reasons that the writer exercises. Telling what those three reasons are and what benefits the writer gains from exercise can be expanded upon in the paragraph.

## 2) **Controlling Idea**

The controlling idea limits the topic of the paragraph to one definite idea or one aspect of the topic that represents a particular idea, feeling, or opinion. The controlling idea must not be too broad, it must be specific enough for the subject to be discussed within one paragraph. Look at these three topic sentences (as shown in Table 2-1). Each has the same topic but contains different controlling ideas.

**Table 2-1**

Topic	Controlling Idea
The Grand Canyon	is noted for its inspiring panorama. (controlling idea: panorama)
The Grand Canyon	is a favorite vacation spot for travelers worldwide. (controlling idea: vacation spot)
The Grand Canyon	is an ideal area to view the geologic history of the earth. (controlling idea: geologic history)

A divided topic sentence is useful in ensuring the sentence has a controlling idea. In a divided topic sentence, the writer specifies or explains the divisions of the topic. Look at the following sentences that illustrate a divided topic sentence:

There are **three** major professional sports in America.

**Five** essential ingredients are required in learning a foreign language.

To become successful, a writer needs **four** basic skills.

All the three divided topic sentences above clearly limit what will be discussed in the



paragraph (three sports, five ingredients, and four skills).

### 3) **Point of View**

A good topic sentence also expresses the point of view of the writer. It may contain the opinion or attitude of the writer. In the following topic sentence:

*Digital cameras make photography easy and fun.*

The writer's point of view is easily determined—it's easy and fun.

Compare with *Steven King has written many books.*

In this statement, the writer's opinion of the works of Steven King is not evident, nor is there any indication of whether being such a writer is good or bad.

## 2. **Supporting Sentences**

The topic sentence is usually fairly general. The supporting sentences that follow it should be more specific and develop the idea expressed in the topic sentence. There are several methods that can be employed to make the supporting sentences more specific. One is to use details, facts, statistics, examples, opinions, research results, personal experience, or anecdotes. For example:

*Seoul is a big city. (no statistics, just a broad statement)*

*Seoul from South Korea has a population of over 10 million people.*

Another method of adding specificity is by using exact names of things rather than writing about them in general terms. For example:

*He is a doctor. (a very general statement)*

*He is a pediatrician who has worked at City Hospital for the last 15 years. (a very specific statement)*

The final method is to use concrete words that allow the readers to imagine the topic being written about in greater detail, and not just in general or abstract terms. For example:

*Mr. Thompson enjoys life.*

*Mr. Thompson is almost always in a good mood, most often has a smile on his face, is quick to laugh, and always sees the positive side even in terrible situations.*

Look at the following paragraph and note the supporting sentences.

(1) The invention of the automobile has provided many benefits to travelers. (2) With a car, travelers are able to travel vast distances in short periods of time. What once took two or three weeks on horseback or horse drawn wagon can now be done in a matter of hours. (3) The comfort enjoyed by travelers, compared to a horse drawn wagon, is amazing. No longer do travelers have to endure the bone-jarring ordeal of riding on a	(1) Topic sentence (2) Supporting 1: Speed  (3) Supporting 2: Comfort
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stiff leather saddle or splinter-infested wagon seat. Their voyage is now made on softly cushioned seats that can be adjusted to fit the sojourners' level of comfort. (4) Travelers are no longer subjected to the harsh elements of the weather. In the past, travelers had to suffer the biting cold of winter and the blistering heat of summer, not to mention the suffering encountered by gale force winds, blinding snow, and drenching rain. Today people can enjoy a soothing and relaxing trip thanks to the totally enclosed interiors that offer air conditioning and heating units in most vehicles. (5) Needless to say, with all the advantages an automobile has to offer, no one would dream of using the expression "Get a horse" today.	(4) Supporting 3: Controlled Environment  (5) Conclusion
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### 3. Concluding Sentence

The concluding sentence is the last sentence of the paragraph. Single paragraph compositions should have a concluding sentence; however, it may not be necessary all the time for a multi-paragraph composition. The function of the concluding sentence is to signal the end of the paragraph. Concluding sentences can either be a restatement of the topic sentence, a summary of the supporting sentences, or contain a final comment about the topic. The concluding sentence in a paragraph should be a general statement that relates to the idea expressed in the topic sentence, and not another fact or detail of support. If restating the topic sentence, it should be expressed in different words, not an exact copy of the topic sentence.

In the above paragraph about automobiles, the concluding sentence was a final comment about automobiles. A concluding sentence that restates the topic sentence could be "The examples mentioned above clearly demonstrate the many advantages of the automobile". A concluding sentence that summarizes the supporting sentences could be "Speed, comfort, and a controlled environment are just a few of the advantages that a modern-day car has over a horse".

Many words or phrases can be used to signal the end of the paragraph in the concluding sentence. Here are just a few:

finally, in conclusion, therefore, indeed, thus, in brief, in summary, as a result, in short ...

Other phrases include:

we can see that ...

it is clear that ...

these examples show that ...

there can be no doubt that ...  
the evidence suggests that ...

## II. Paragraph Character

The information in each paragraph must adequately explain, exemplify, define, or in some other way support your topic sentence. Therefore, you must include enough supporting information or evidence in each paragraph to make your readers understand your topic sentence. Moreover, you must make the information in the paragraph clear and specific enough for the readers to accept your ideas. A well-written paragraph has four characteristics: unity, completeness, cohesion, and continuity.

### 1. Unity

Unity means discussing only one idea in the paragraph, which is presented in the topic sentence. If a sentence in the paragraph does not relate to the topic sentence, it is irrelevant and should be deleted.

Every sentence in a body paragraph should relate directly to the main idea presented by the topic sentence. A paragraph must stick to its announced subject; it must not drift away into another discussion. In other words, a good paragraph has unity.

Now look at the following paragraph, in which the writer strays from his original purpose:

(1) Cigarette smoke is unhealthy even for people who don't have the nicotine habit themselves. (2) Secondhand smoke can cause asthmatics and sufferers of sinusitis serious problems. (3) Doctors regularly advise heart patients to avoid confined smoky areas because coronary attacks might be triggered by the lack of clean air. (4) Moreover, having the smell of smoke in one's hair and clothes is a real nuisance. (5) Even if a person doesn't have any health problems, exhaled smoke doubles the amount of carbon monoxide in the air, which may cause the person lung problems in the future.	Sentence (4) shifts from the topic
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Sentence 4 refers to smoke as a nuisance and therefore does not belong in the paragraph that discusses smoking as a health hazard to nonsmokers.

Sometimes a large portion of a paragraph will drift into another topic. In the following paragraph, did the writer wish to focus on her messiness or on the beneficial effects of her engagement?

<p>I have always been a very messy person. As a child, I was a pack rat, saving every little piece of insignificant paper that I thought might be important when I grew up. As a teenager, I filled my pockets with remnants of basketball tickets, hall passes, gum wrappers, and other important articles from my high school education. As a college student, I became a “boxer”—not a fighter, but someone who cannot throw anything away and therefore it winds up in a box in my closet. <i>But my engagement has changed everything. I’m really pleased with the new stage of my life, and I owe it all to my fiancé. My overall outlook on life has changed because of his influence on me. I’m neater, much more cheerful, and I’m even getting places on time like I never did before. It’s truly amazing what love can do.</i></p>	<p>Shift from the topic of messiness</p>
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This writer may wish to discuss the changes her fiancé has brought her and then use her former messiness, tardiness, and other bad habits as examples to illustrate those changes; however, as presented here, the paragraph is not unified around a central idea. On the contrary, it first seems to promise a discussion of her messiness but then wanders into comments on “what love can do”.

## 2. Completeness

Completeness is similar to unity, except that instead of including sentences that are irrelevant, completeness is ensuring that all the necessary supporting sentences are included to fully explain and support the topic.

For example, if a topic sentence states that three things are needed to obtain a visa and only two are mentioned in the supporting sentences, the paragraph is incomplete. All the three items must be mentioned for the paragraph to have completeness. Another example, if a topic sentence promises to list the steps needed to change a flat tire but neglects to mention that the car must be jacked up before taking off the wheels, the paragraph is incomplete. All the steps needed to change a tire must be included in the paragraph to ensure completeness.

## 3. Cohesion

Cohesion is the smooth, continuous flow of thoughts of the sentences and ideas presented according to some logical principle. Cohesion allows the reader to follow the flow of ideas within the text without effort, confusion, or frustration because all the sentences are connected together and sequenced in a rational order in their support of the topic sentence. If the supporting sentences in the paragraph are arranged without rational order, the paragraph must be lacking cohesiveness.

The principle used in ordering the sentences within a paragraph depends on the kind of paragraph being written. Chronological ordering is appropriate for narratives, which uses a time order of events to relate the sequence in which things happen. An example would be a paragraph about instructions for assembling a model airplane. A descriptive paragraph uses spatial ordering to ensure cohesion. In a descriptive paragraph, items could be described from left to right, top to bottom, front to back, etc. The principles of logic and reason are used in expository paragraphs, which arrange the sentences into a logical pattern.

To ensure cohesion, transition words are used to fill in the gaps between sentences in a paragraph. Usually transition words are at the beginning of a sentence to relate a sentence to the one preceding it, but transition words can come within sentences to connect one idea to another.

#### **4. Continuity**

Continuity is the combined inclusion of the three characteristics mentioned above: unity, completeness, and cohesion. Having all three characteristics in the paragraph ensures that the connection between ideas presented is smooth and even. To achieve continuity in a paragraph, it must have all three of these characteristics.

### **Exercises**

**I. Rewrite the following general statements and make them more specific and suitable as topic sentences.**

1. Italian food is healthy and easy to prepare.

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2. The United States government is over burdened with citizens' complaints.

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3. Natural disasters create havoc for everyone.

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4. The extinction of species of life on earth will have a profound effect on future generations.

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5. Fairy tales are beneficial to children.

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**II. Identify the topic and controlling idea of the following topic sentences.**

1. Children's educational programs on TV are superior to cartoons for young minds.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Hobbies provide people with many benefits.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Learning a foreign language is also about learning the culture of that country.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Controlling idea: \_\_\_\_\_

**III. Read the following paragraphs and write a topic sentence and a concluding sentence for each.**

1. Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Acid rain is the result of pollutants, which are released into the atmosphere from automobiles and industry. It falls back to earth after being trapped by rain and snow. There have been numerous scientific studies of the effects of acid rain on the ecosystem in recent years. Pollutants contained in acid rain destroy plants and animals life when it enters lakes and rivers. Millions of acres of trees and plants have been damaged or destroyed because of the harmful effects of acid rain on these delicate ecosystems.

Concluding sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

It has only recently come under more intense investigation by proponents of western medical practices. Acupuncture involves the insertion of small needles, with the application of heat and electrical stimulation at precise acupuncture points on the body. According to traditional Chinese doctors, the balance of yin and yang (opposing forces that regulate spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental balance) are essential for good health. Blockage of the GI flow (the energy that flows through the body via meridians or pathways) creates an imbalance of yin and yang, which results in health problems or illness. The insertion of needles into the skin during acupuncture treatments unblock these channels and allow energy flows to optimizing, resulting in improved health.

Concluding sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

**IV. The cohesiveness of the paragraph below could be improved with the addition of transition words. Insert the appropriate transition words from the list below in the blanks.**

undoubtedly	furthermore	as a result	in addition
whereas	although	following	nonetheless

Tutankhamen, \_\_\_\_\_ not as notable a pharaoh as Seti I or Rameses II,  
\_\_\_\_\_ gained wide-spread fame because of his tomb. Howard Carter discovered

Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 in the Valley of the Kings. Surprisingly, the tomb was largely intact; \_\_\_\_\_ most Egyptian tombs had been pillaged and plundered over the last 3000 years by grave robbers. The treasures revealed in the tomb include his mummy and solid gold sarcophagus. \_\_\_\_\_ a priceless gold mask, wall paintings, furniture, chariots, statues, jewelry items, weapons, games, clothing, cosmetic equipment, and other artifacts were discovered. \_\_\_\_\_, these items have given archeologists a unique portrait of the life of ancient Egyptian royalty. \_\_\_\_\_, to add to the tomb's myth, \_\_\_\_\_ the opening of the tomb a number of unexplained and mysterious deaths sparked rumors of the mummy's curse. \_\_\_\_\_, it was widely believed that anyone disturbing the peaceful remains of the tomb was doomed to a terrible death. Much more can be learned about the legend and treasures of Tutankhamen by visiting the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

**V. The sentences below are out of order. By noting the various transitional devices, arrange the sentences into a coherent paragraph.**

How to Purchase a New Car

- a If you're happy with the car's performance, find out about available financing arrangements.
- b Later, at home, study your notes carefully to help you decide which car fits your needs.
- c After you have discussed various loans and interest rates, you can negotiate the final price with the salesperson.
- d A visit to the showroom also allows you to test drive the car.
- e Once you have agreed on the car's price, feel confident that you have made a well-chosen purchase.
- f Next, a visit to a nearby showroom should help you select the color, options, and style of the car.
- g First, take a trip to the library to read the current auto magazines and consumers' guides.
- h As you read, take notes on models and prices.

**VI. Rearrange the sentences below which lack a degree of cohesion in a correct sequential order to form a logical paragraph. Rewrite and use the cohesive devices to make a well written paragraph.**

- a The Hope Diamond's unparalleled beauty and uniqueness is attributed to the diamond's unquestioned perfection, large size, and brilliant blue color.
- b The Hope Diamond, one of the world's great treasures, has been enshrouded in

tragedy and mystery for centuries.

- c Her first son died in a car accident at age 9.
- d Death has followed its history.
- e It is alleged that Tavernier stole the Hope Diamond from the stature of a Hindu goddess and was mauled by a pack of wild dogs after selling the stone in Russia.
- f Whether the legend of the Hope Diamond is believed or not, thousands still marvel at its beauty and are allured daily by the museum's display.
- g The next owner, a New York jeweler named Harry Winston, donated the gem to the Smithsonian Institute in 1958.
- h In 1939, the diamond was purchased by Henry Philip Hope (from which the gem gets its current name).
- i According to the legend, Hope went bankrupt because of the curse.
- j She considered the gem a good luck charm: however, tragedy struck her life after the purchase.
- k The curse began with a traveler to India named Tavernier.
- l Her daughter committed suicide at the age of 25.
- m Her husband was committed to a mental institution for insanity and remained there until his death.
- n Many believe that the donation was made in order to rid himself of the diamond's curse.
- o Some attribute the beheading of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI, later owners of the famous diamond, to the curse of the Hope Diamond.
- p An American woman, Evelyn Walsh McLean, bought the diamond in 1910.