



**QUINSIGAMOND**  
Community College

# Contextualized Developmental Education: A Comparative Study

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Kirsten Daigneault  
Quinsigamond Community College  
MCCWDTA  
Research Report

## **Contextualized Developmental Education: A Comparative Study**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The Educational Developmental Center (EDC), through the MACCWDA grant, was commissioned to create contextualized developmental modules in the industry sectors of Healthcare, IT, and Advanced Manufacturing. Quinsigamond Community College was instrumental in the development of the aforementioned modules. In the spring of 2013, Quinsigamond Community College ran three pairs of developmental courses, with one section in each pair contextualized and one section not contextualized. Two pairs were ENG 096, Intermediate Writing Skills, one day pair and one evening pair, and the other was MAT 090, Basic Math Skills. The purpose of this study was to see if, in comparison to the non-contextualized sections, the contextualized curricula had an effect on the students enrolled in the contextualized sections.

### **Introduction**

Contextualized sections differ from non-contextualized sections in several ways. First, it is important to understand, however, that the content covered in both sections must be the same because of departmental examinations. Contextualization differs, though, in providing a relevant career-based backdrop through which the student can apply the content to real-life workplace situations. In doing so, the student understands that basic reading, writing, and math skills do not exist in a vacuum, but rather have relevance to the student's life with immediate applications. The overview of all modules is as such:

- **24 Contextualized Modules** with more in development
- **Standards:** Common Core and Adult Basic Ed
- **Industries:** Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, Information Technology
- **Math Topics:** Measurement/ Estimation/ Modeling, Charts/Graphs/Tables/Data Analysis/ Statistics, Percents/Fractions/Decimals, Rates/Ratios/Proportions
- **Literacy Topics:** Oral Communication, Written Communication, Integrate and Present Information; Read and Comprehend Technical/Informative text

Within the twenty-four modules, there are several instructor adaptable components, usable depending on course/ student needs:

- **Description:**
  - Industry Sector; Content Area; Core Topic/Skill
- **Standards:** Common Core State and Adult Basic Ed
- **Industry:** Overview
- **Glossary:** Hover-over throughout module
- **Scenarios for 8<sup>th</sup> Grade/ High School Levels:** How the skill is used in the workplace
- **Core Instructional Context with Example Activities and Assessments:** Focused on adult learner
- **Learning activities:** Contextualized to the scenario
- **Test items:** Contextualized to the scenario
- **Project:** Contextualized to the scenario
- **Additional resources:** Multimedia, and/or other resources and links
- **Instructor Adapted Materials** if available: Lesson plans, PPTX files, links, any other shared resources.

Within the contextualized courses, the instructors adapted the modules, creating lessons that included PowerPoint presentations, videos, hands-on learning activities, small group, large group, and individualized instruction. The students also had the opportunity to explore each industry sector and research the careers used as the background for the contextualized instruction.

## **Method**

A likert scale eleven question survey was designed in conjunction with the EDC and approved by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. The survey was subsequently entered into QCCPET, the Quinsigamond College Computerized Program Evaluation Tool. Students in all courses, both contextualized and non-contextualized participated in the online survey. The likert statements are as follows:

### English:

1. The book helped me develop my writing skills.
2. The handouts helped me develop my writing skills.
3. The lectures helped me develop my writing skills.
4. The group activities helped me develop my writing skills.
5. My confidence as a writer has increased because of this class.
6. This class has increased my interest in writing.
7. I better understand how to apply writing to real world problems outside the classroom.
8. I am better able to write for a variety of purposes.

9. I am more aware of how writing is used in the workplace (e.g. in Healthcare, Information Technology, or Advanced Manufacturing).
10. This class kept my attention most of the time.
11. This class has made me more optimistic about my future.

Math:

1. The book helped me develop my math skills.
2. The handouts helped me develop my math skills.
3. The lectures helped me develop my math skills.
4. The group activities helped me develop my math skills.
5. My confidence in my math skills has increased because of this class.
6. This class has increased my interest in math.
7. I better understand how to apply math to real world problems outside the classroom.
8. I am better able to use math for a variety of purposes.
9. I am more aware of how math skills are used in the workplace (e.g. in Healthcare, Information Technology, or Advanced Manufacturing).
10. This class kept my attention most of the time.
11. This class has made me more optimistic about my future

The QCCPET online survey was administered by each instructor during class time in order to ensure maximum participation. Absentee students received a follow-up email, and the survey remained open until the end of May, 2013. The results of each question were then calculated via an ANOVA using a level of significance of  $p < .05$ . The data was consequently tabulated to discern as to whether the contextualization either had an effect or did not have an effect regarding the areas covered in the survey.

Because the students were assigned to their classes through the Quinsigamond Community College Registrar’s Office and Academic Advising Center, quasi-experimental design was used. A treatment – the contextualization – was administered to the experimental group (Group A – the contextualized classes) and it was withheld from the control group (Group B – the non-contextualized classes). The independent variable was the use of contextualization in the classroom, and there was one dependent variable: the modification of the students’ writing/ math process. The following is a diagram of the design:

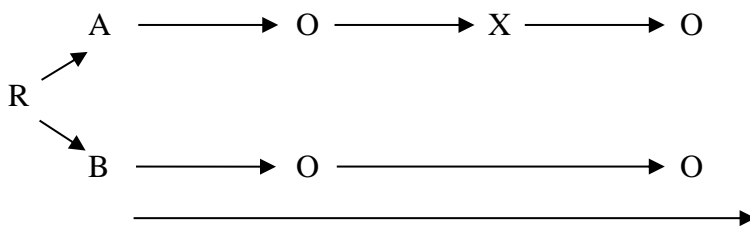


Figure 1. Research Design Model

## Results

The results are demonstrated in the following table:

**Table 1: Final Survey Results for Contextualized v. Non-contextualized Courses, Spring 2013**

Survey Question	Day English Sections	Evening English Sections	Math Sections
1. The book helped develop skills.	No difference	Strong difference	No difference
2. The handouts helped develop skills.	Difference	No difference	No difference
3. The lectures helped develop skills.	<i>Strong difference</i>	<i>Slight difference</i>	No difference
4. The group activities helped develop skills.	Slight difference	No difference	No difference
5. Confidence has increased.	<i>Strong Difference</i>	<i>Strong difference</i>	No difference
6. Increase in interest in writing/ math.	Strong difference	No difference	No difference
7. Can apply writing/ math to real world problems outside of class.	No difference	Strong difference	No difference
8. Able to use skills for variety of purposes.	No difference	Strong difference	No difference
9. Aware of how skill is used in workplace. (HC, IT, AM)	<i>Strong difference</i>	<i>Strong difference</i>	No difference
10. Class held attention most of time.	<i>Strong difference</i>	<i>Slight difference</i>	No difference
11. Class made student more optimistic about future.	<i>No difference</i>	<i>No difference</i>	No difference

Overall, in developmental writing, contextualization affected the students' perceptions of their confidence in their abilities to write and how writing skills are used within the workplace. Contextualization also affected the students' ability to pay attention in class. In the morning section, contextualization increased students' interests in writing while in the evening section, contextualization enabled students to apply writing to real life situations and enabled students to use writing for a variety of purposes.

In developmental math, conversely, contextualization had no effect.

### **Additional Information for ENG 096 40 and 70, Intermediate Writing Skills**

For the spring 2013 pilot, additional data was available for the evening sections of Intermediate Writing Skills. ENG 096 40, the non-contextualized section, was held on Mondays at 4:00 with an enrollment of seventeen students. Sixteen students completed the course, resulting in a retention rate of 94%. The contextualized section, ENG 096 70, was held on Mondays at 7:00 with an enrollment of fourteen students. Two students never attended, and of the remaining twelve, eleven completed, resulting in a 92% retention rate. The attendance rate was identical for both classes at an overall 93%.

The students in both classes did relatively well. The average grade for the non-contextualized section was an 81% while the contextualized section did slightly better at 83%. In analyzing the final grades

using an ANOVA, it was found that statistically, there was no difference in the overall final grades between the contextualized and non-contextualized sections.

In ENG 096, Intermediate Writing Skills, the students must pass a departmental final exit exam in order to move forward to the next level English course. In the non-contextualized section, out of the sixteen students who took the exam, twelve passed, resulting in a 75% pass rate. In the contextualized section, seven of the eleven students passed the exit exam, resulting in a 64% pass rate.

Finally, in the non-contextualized section, of the sixteen students that started in the class, ten are still attending Quinsigamond Community College, resulting in a 63% persistence rate. Of the eleven students in the contextualized section, eight are still attending, resulting in a 73% persistence rate.

Course materials from both sections are included at the end of this report.

### **Suggestions for Future Contextualized Implementation**

- It was suggested that if instructors are going to choose to incorporate contextualization into their courses, departmental exams should also be contextualized to reflect the backdrop and the modified content replicated in the classroom.
- If possible, contextualized courses should be limited to one industry sector per course. In other words, rather than incorporating modules from all three sectors for one course, run one Healthcare course, one IT course, and one Advanced Manufacturing course.
- Incorporate contextualization early in the semester. The earlier students are acclimated to the backdrop of contextualization, the sooner they can reap the benefits, thereby improving retention and persistence.
- Repeat the study, but with the goal of tracking the students throughout their educational paths at Quinsigamond Community College. Track full retention, persistence, final program choice, rate of graduation, and rate of transfer. Finally, engage person to person and efollow-up to see if contextualization has any effect on those areas of student success.

Course Materials

Syllabi

PowerPoints

## ENG 096 Intermediate Writing Skills Spring 2013

**Section:** 40, Mondays, 4:00 PM, Room 307S: Non-contextualized

**Instructor:** Kirsten Daigneault

508 854-4353

[kdaigneault@gcc.mass.edu](mailto:kdaigneault@gcc.mass.edu)

Room 261A

Mailbox # 164

Office hours are by appointment.

### ENG 096 COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course helps students develop writing competence by practicing writing paragraphs and essays. Students learn to write unified, supported, coherent essays using grammatically sound sentences. Assignments focus on writing a variety of paragraphs and essays in order to prepare for college-level writing courses. **To continue to the next level of English courses, students must pass the departmental final exit examination (or appropriate placement on the placement exam).**

**Prerequisite:** Passing the ENG 095 departmental writing final examination or appropriate placement score. This developmental English course cannot be used to satisfy degree or certificate requirements. F/S/SU

### Course Goals and Outcomes

*GOAL: Introduce and Review the Pre-Writing Process*

- Outcome: Student examines different audiences and purposes for writing
- Outcome: student practices idea generation strategies
- Outcome: student prepares a writing plan or outline for each assignment

*GOAL: Improve and refine sentence structure and language usage*

- Outcome: student correctly uses subject and verb forms
- Outcome: student recognizes and writes complete sentences (including compound and complex sentences), avoiding fragments and run-ons
- Outcome: Student effectively uses punctuation as needed

*GOAL: Write essays displaying unity, support, coherence, and appropriate sentence structure*

- Outcome: student creates unity by developing a main point or thesis (unity)
- Outcome: student writes sentences and paragraphs that support the thesis with facts, details and examples (support)
- Outcome: student develops appropriate order (time, space, and/ or importance) to connect ideas (coherence)



- Outcome: student links sentences and paragraphs together using transitions (coherence)

*GOAL: Identify patterns of development in essays (types of essays)*

- Outcome: Student produces *at least two* different types of essays (for example: narration, description, and/ or illustration)

*GOAL: Improve the ability to revise one's own work*

- Outcome: student recognizes and creates unified paragraphs and essays
- Outcome: student recognizes and provides adequate support in essays
- Outcome: student recognizes and produces coherence in essays
- Outcome: student identifies individual writing challenges and develops strategies to address those challenges (going to the lab to see a tutor, keeping a grammar log, using a revision checklist, etc)

*GOAL: Write a minimum of four graded assignments, including at least two essays*

*GOAL: Maintain effective system of record keeping/academic organizational strategies*

## **Accommodations**

Every effort will be made to meet the individual needs and various learning styles of the students in this course. It is of the utmost importance that you inform me at the beginning of the semester of your particular needs. If you have concerns about this course, please make an appointment with me. If your concerns are about a learning disability or another specific need, please make an appointment with a learning specialist at Disability Services, Room 246A. All information is strictly confidential.

## **Attendance**

Students are expected to attend all classes. If there are extenuating circumstances, please contact the instructor immediately. Attendance will be taken at every class. If the student is not present when attendance is taken, the student will be marked absent. If the student leaves before class is dismissed, the student will be marked absent. A student's average will be reduced by one letter grade per absence if a student misses more than

- 1 class during the semester

## **Course Requirements**

The student will

- meet weekly at all designated class times with the instructor to learn and practice strategies for improving writing skills.
- allow up to six hours per week of preparation outside of class.

- check your Qmail in order to read announcements, clarify assignment information, and download handouts.
- use a variety of sentence structures in a comprehensive essay.
- develop writing plans for each assignment.
- show evidence of audience awareness in all assignments.
- demonstrate a clear purpose for each assignment.
- write an appropriate introduction, thesis, development, and conclusion in a comprehensive essay.
- develop a writing portfolio of at least 5 writing assignments, including at least two paragraphs and three or more carefully developed essays.
- pass a departmental assessment in both grammar/mechanics and essay.
- generate thoughtful questions about assignments and bring questions to class or post them to the class through your QMail.
- collaborate with other students as directed by the instructor, such as to clarify assignment information, give feedback on assignments, or discuss reading assignments.
- display willingness to work cooperatively with other students from different educational, cultural and social backgrounds.
- exhibit a high level of responsibility and punctuality.
- use technology appropriately.
- discuss any concerns, problems, questions that pertain to your progress in the course immediately with the instructor.

## **Textbook**

### **Required text:**

English Skills with Readings, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition; John Langan, McGraw-Hill.

## **Determining Students' Skills**

At the beginning of this course the student's skills are ascertained by the CPT test and a writing sample. Each student will participate in a program to strengthen his/her skills through individual and classroom instruction.

## **Class Procedures Include**

- Mini-lectures and demonstrations
- Assessment through regular in class writing activities and assignments
- Cooperative learning activities (group work)

## **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

Our purpose in the classroom is to seek the truth; this work requires trust and honesty between teacher and student. If we are not honest about what we know and don't know, our learning will always be impaired. Because our teaching and learning depends on this honest communication, we expect all students to understand what plagiarism is and why it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism means taking someone else's ideas or words and presenting them as one's own. The offense can take many forms including cheating on a test, passing in a paper taken from the Internet or from another student, or failing to properly use and credit sources in an essay. Sometimes the issue is subtle, involving getting too much help on an assignment from someone else. In every instance, plagiarism means cheating both oneself and the owner of the source. Since the cheating sabotages a student's learning experience, consequences range from **no credit for the assignment** to **failure for the course** and possible **expulsion from the college**.

Any student considering plagiarism should recognize the consequences and consider alternatives. Students uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism may request help from faculty or from appropriate college services.

### **Method of Evaluation**

- The final grade reflects
  - Paragraph and essay writing assignments (80 %)
  - Portfolio (20 %)
- *Students must pass the final exam in order to **qualify** for ENG 100.*

### **Course Schedule by Weeks** (subject to change by the instructor)

#### **Week 1: 1/28**

Introduction: Course goals and requirements; the syllabus as contract; writing assessment. Activate your QMail and log on to your ENG 096 course portal page through The Q for next week.

#### **Week 2: 2/4**

Chapters 1, 2, and 3: The writing process, paragraph format, prewriting, the topic sentence, supporting details, and creating an outline for "Job" paragraph.

#### **Week 3: 2/11**

Chapter 37: The Comma

Chapter 3 continued if necessary: further work/ discussion on outline for "Job" paragraph.

Chapter 4: Coherence

In-class draft work if time.

#### **Week 4: 2/18 – Presidents' Day - no class**

#### **Week 5: 2/25**

Chapter 4 continued: pp. 158-160: Evaluate "Why I Bought a Handgun" and "Apartment Hunting" for coherence. Bring this prepared for in class discussion.

In class group paragraph revision exercise: to be passed out in class.

Individual paragraph revision: DRAFT of paragraph due in class. Final revised copy will be due by the end of class.

**Week 6: 3/4**

Paragraph review and return; in class writing assignment in Communication Skills Center.

**Week 7: 3/11**

Chapter 18: The Essay, writing first thesis, creating the essay outline; in class writing review

**3/18: Spring Break – no class**

**Week 8: 3/25**

Chapter 18: pp 345 – 349. Read the three essays and answer the ten questions on pp. 348 and 349. Have this prepared for in class discussion.

Chapters 22 and 23: Fragments, run-on sentences, and other grammar concerns.

In class group essay revision exercise: to be passed out in class.

Outline check: Bring in either your outline work or your rough draft material to class.

**Week 9: 4/1**

In class essay revision work: Have an electronic copy of your essay available. Your final, polished, typed essay is due by the end of class.

**Week 10: 4/8**

Group Exercise: Develop a 400-word essay

Writing strategies

- Review of outlining and revision strategies
- Portfolio review

**Week 11: 4/15 Patriots' Day – no class**

**Week 12: 4/22** Diagnosing the Essay – in class activity. You need to bring in three different colored highlighters and a blue pen. In class writing.

**Week 13: 4/29**

Troubleshooting the Departmental Writing Exam: What Should I Expect, What Should I Do, and What Shouldn't I Do? In class writing.

**Week 14: 5/6**

Portfolio preparation, conferences, assessment, in class writing.

**Week 15: 5/13**  
**Departmental Final Exam**

**Please note, missed in class writing will receive a grade of “0” and may not be emailed to the instructor if the student is absent. Also, students absent for the final exam will need to take the Accuplacer to qualify for ENG 100. Final departmental exam make-ups are not given.**

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**Instructor:** Kirsten Daigneault

508 854-4353

[kdaigneault@gcc.mass.edu](mailto:kdaigneault@gcc.mass.edu)

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Introduction: Course goals and requirements; the syllabus as contract; writing assessment.  
Chapters 1 and 2: The writing process, paragraph format, and prewriting.  
Discussion: How does the course content apply to you outside of class?  
Activate your QMail and log on to your ENG 096 course portal page through The Q for next week.

#### **Week 2: 2/4**

Chapter 3: The topic sentence, supporting details, and creating an outline.  
Video: "What is Medical Coding?"  
Contextualized Writing Scenario: "What's the Right Code?"  
Writing Assignment: Writing a rebuttal paragraph.

#### **Week 3: 2/11**

Chapter 37: The Comma

Chapter 4: Coherence

Peer review of rebuttal paragraphs. Final version is due by the end of class.

#### **Week 4: 2/18 – Presidents' Day - no class**

#### **Week 5: 2/25**

Video: "The Key Forms of Business Writing: Email"

Online Article (link to be QMailed): "How to Send Tactful Emails from a Technical Support Desk"

Contextualized Writing Scenario: "Keeping a Clear Record"

Writing Assignment: Using your Qmail to write a "How to..." email.

### **Week 6: 3/4**

Peer review of "How to" emails. Final version due by the end of class.

### **Week 7: 3/11**

Chapter 18: The Essay, writing first thesis, creating the essay outline; in class writing review

Contextualized Writing Scenario: "Getting it Down in Writing"

Video: "Job Accident Humor"

Activity: Writing an Accident Report – The Importance of Details

### **3/18: Spring Break – no class**

### **Week 8: 3/25**

Chapter 18: pp 345 – 349. Read the three essays and answer the ten questions on pp. 348 and 349. Have this prepared for in class discussion.

Chapters 22 and 23: Fragments, run-on sentences, and other grammar concerns.

In class group essay revision exercise: to be passed out in class.

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### **Week 9: 4/1**

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Classmate #2:

If a class is missed, a classmate contact should be called to find out what was missed.

# ENG 096

## Chapter One Non-contextualized

### The Writing Process (p.3)

- Start with a clearly stated point – either a topic sentence for a paragraph or a thesis for an essay.
- Provide support for the point.
- Organize and connect the support.
- Revise and edit the support.

## The Difference Between Talking and Writing

- “I had a great day.”

What’s next? What do we do when we speak?

Do we always feel the need to fill in the details?

- Today was wonderful for several reasons.
  - Reason 1
  - Reason 2
  - Reason 3

## The Structure of the Paragraph (p. 6)

For the purposes of this class, we are going to follow a certain paragraph structure:

Topic Sentence

Major Detail 1

Minor Detail

Major Detail 2

Minor Detail

Major Detail 3

Minor Detail

Read the “Apple Plant” paragraph on Page 6.

Fill in the three reasons – the missing major details. Also fill in the missing minor details.

### Some Quick Tips to Remember (p. 8)

- State your point in the first sentence – your topic sentence. For right now, we are working on the paragraph.
- Give THREE reasons to support the point.
- Introduce each reason with a transition: *first of all, second, most importantly.*
- Provide *minor details* to develop each reason.
- Remember that a paragraph should be around seven sentences long.

## Chapter 2

“I can’t come up with any ideas!!!! How do I put anything on paper? How do I get rid of this ‘blank slate’ feeling in my head?”

Turn to page 16 in your books.

## Prewriting!!!!

- Discover a point – possibly through *prewriting*.
- Develop solid support for the point – often using more *prewriting*.
- Organize the support, putting it in a coherent order using an outline
- Write a rough first draft.
- Revise and then edit to ensure an effective, error-free paper.

## What is Prewriting???

Prewriting is a technique you can use to think about and develop a topic and get words on paper when you might not be able to think of anything to say. When you prewrite, don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Prewriting does not have to make sense to anyone but YOU.

## Kinds of Prewriting

- Freewriting
- Brainstorming/ Listing
- Clustering/ Mapping



## Freewriting (p. 17)

- Looks like a paragraph.
- Wants to be a paragraph.
- It's NOT a paragraph.
- Write whatever comes to mind.
- Do NOT worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation.
- Time yourself for five, ten, or fifteen minutes.
- Never stop writing. If you draw a blank, repeat the last word: ben, ben, ben, (Get sick of that? Start to rhyme: hen, len, fen, ten.

Here is a sample. The topic is "Family."

What can I say I love my family, I have always loved y family. Yhey are awesome, I have my threekids they are greay I have two girls nd a son. My son is a terror, his name is Aidan, but we call him Buddy, he is my little buddy he is three but to ne he feels like he is going in five, I lobe my daughters they are hordan and dillan they are none and six, omg my daughter dillan she is a handfull, she backtalks all the tome. and

Go through the freewriting and  
ask:

Who or what will be the topic of my  
paragraph? Your answer needs to be  
a NOUN.

### Brainstorming/ Listing (p. 20)

- Think of it as a grocery list.
- The same grammar and time rules apply.
- If you like outlines, you will like brainstorming.
- One of the most popular types of prewriting.

Here is a sample. The topic is  
“School.”

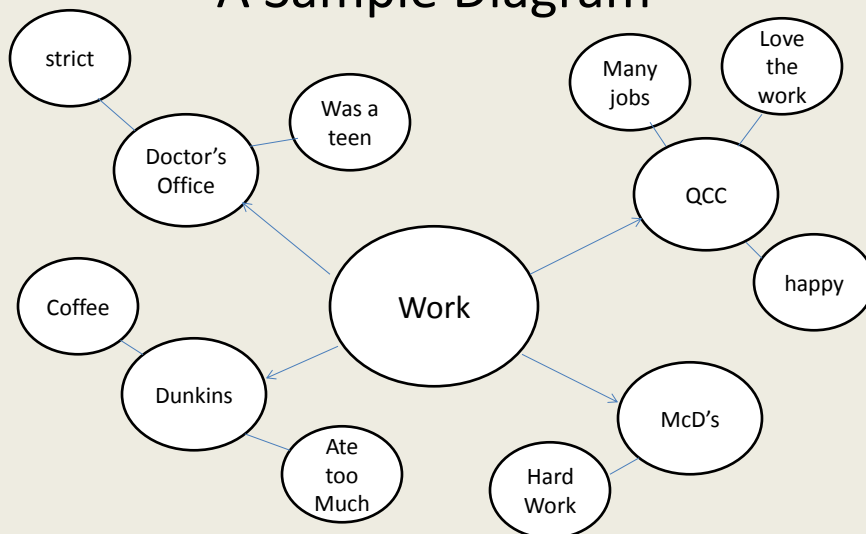
- Classes
- Great teachers
- I love my math class.
- The commute to school is terrible.
- Parking
- Walking from class to class.
- Remembering kindergarten
- My mom getting me dressed in preschool.

Go back, look in the list, and ask yourself, who or what will be the topic of my paragraph? Remember, your answer needs to be a NOUN.

## Clustering/ Mapping (p. 22)

- If you are a visual learner, you will like this technique.
- If you are a kinesthetic learner, you will like this technique.
- Can you remember faces, not names?
- Do you dream in color?
- When taking a test, can you visualize where the material is in your book, even if you cannot remember the answer?

### A Sample Diagram



Go through the diagram and ask:

Who or what will be the topic of my paragraph? Your answer needs to be a  
**NOUN.**

**LET'S TRY IT!!!!!!!**

## Chapter 3

### The Topic Sentence and Support for the Topic Sentence

Narrowed Topic + Main Point = Topic Sentence

#### **Writing a Topic Sentence from a Question**

- You will be given a question (like “What is the best or worst job you have ever had and why?”).
- Narrow the topic. Pre-write if necessary (free-write, list, cluster), and narrow down the topic to a specific person, place, thing, or idea (a noun).
- **Work → My job as a salad maker at McDonald’s**
- “Work” is the general topic, and “My job as a salad maker at McDonald’s” is the narrowed topic.

- Using your narrowed topic as the subject, answer the question in a complete sentence. It's also like reading the narrowed topic and then asking, "Yeah, what about it?" Your main point needs to include a verb.
- **Work → My job as a salad maker at McDonald's → (what about it?) It *is* the worst job I have ever had.**
- Put both the narrowed topic and the main point together into one sentence to form the topic sentence.
- **My job as a salad maker at McDonald's is the worst job I have ever had.**

- Pre-write again if necessary to generate your three major details.
- **My job as a salad maker at McDonald's is the worst job I have ever had.**
- **1: First of all, the pay was horrid.**
- **2: Second, my schedule was never consistent.**
- **3: Worst of all, though, was my nightmare of a boss.**

Go to p. 55 in your books.

Let's look at the point (the topic sentence) and the support. Remember. The point is always the most general sentence under which the support can follow.

## Point and Support

The point – the topic sentence – is the most general sentence under which the supporting details will follow. Look at #1:

P: This has been a wonderful week.

The support answers the question, "Why?" or "In what way?" or "How so?"



## The Support

- I won \$100 in the state lottery.
- I scored a 96 on my chemistry exam.
- My boss just gave me a raise.

## Look at #2. What is the Point?

- Some people have POOR EATING HABITS.
- Some people skip breakfast.
- Some people always order supersize portions.
- Some people always eat almost no fruits or vegetables.

## Look at #4. What's the Point?

- There are DEFINITE ADVANTAGES to having a cat as a pet.
- Cats are clean and do not require much attention.
- Cats like living indoors and are safe to have around children.
- Cats are inexpensive to feed and easy to keep healthy.

## Look at p. 67. What are the two parts of the Topic Sentence?

There are TWO PARTS of the topic sentence. EVERY topic sentence must contain both parts.

1. The narrowed topic (the limited topic).
2. The main point (the attitude).

Narrowed topic + main point = topic sentence

## Look at p. 68, Activity 10.

1. Billboards should be abolished.
2. My boss is an ambitious man.
3. Politicians are often self serving.
4. The house provided every comfort a young person could want.
5. Television commercials are often insulting.

## Errors in Topic Sentences, p. 65

1. The Announcement. You are going to tell me what you are going to write about.
  - My car is the concern of this paragraph.
  - The subject of this paper is going to be my apartment.
  - I want to talk about increases in the divorce rate.

What is present in these sentences? What's missing?

## 2. A Statement that is too Broad

This statement is too general to cover the scope of a paragraph – just 7 to 10 sentences. Statements like these might be more appropriate for a thesis in an essay.

- Many people have issues with there cars. (What people? What issues? What kinds of cars?)
- The places where people live have different effects on their lives. (What places? What people? What effects?)
- Many people have trouble getting along with others. (What people? What kinds of trouble? What others?)

## 3. A Statement that is too Narrow

Statements that are too narrow should appear as details in a paragraph. They are usually statements of fact that we cannot prove as true in 7 to 10 sentences.

- My car is a Ford Focus. (This is a statement of fact).
- I have no hot water in my apartment at night. (Another statement of fact. We cannot come up with three MDs to support this statement.)
- Almost one of every two marriages ends in divorce. (This is a statistic. It is too narrow to be a main idea.)

## Effective Topic Sentences

- I hate my car (in many ways, for several reasons).
- My apartment is a terrible place to live (for several reasons, in many ways).
- The divorce rate is increasing for several reasons.

## LET'S WRITE!!!! P. 70, Activity 12.

1. Thomas Jefferson was very well educated.
2. The dance was a failure for many reasons.
3. The service at the restaurant was bad for many reasons.
4. The people who settled the American frontier faced many challenges.
5. The horror movie was a disaster for many reasons.

## Chapter 3

### The Topic Sentence and Support for the Topic Sentence

#### **Contextualized**

Narrowed Topic + Main Point = Topic Sentence

#### **Writing a Topic Sentence from a Question**

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## How can we use these writing skills in real life?

- Let's watch a video about how writing skills are used in the Healthcare field:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIOpme1vBs>

## Read about Medical Coding

You are a [medical coder](#), working in the claims processing office at a large medical center in Boston. The medical center gets paid by [insurance](#) companies and individuals based on the services they provide to a patient. Each service provided by medical staff—whether it is an office visit with a physician, having blood drawn and tested, having a [cyst](#) removed, or having [anesthesia](#) before surgery—has a [Current Procedural Terminology \(CPT\)](#) code. Since there are thousands of medical services, there are thousands of CPTs—and they change all the time. As a medical coder, it is your job to read through a patient's medical record, identify the services and treatments they have received, and determine the correct codes for each service. It is essential that you understand the medical terminology used in the medical records so that you can identify the services that a patient has received; you also need to pay very close attention to detail so that you don't miss any CPTs that should be included or use the wrong one. Sometimes you have to follow up with one of the [physicians](#) or other medical staff to make sure that you understand correctly what services a patient received. You may do this over the phone or through email, which is preferable because then you have a written record of the exchange. If you have a conversation with the medical staff, you need to take notes in the patient's medical record. In either case, you need to ensure that your communication is clear and professional, and that your written records are accurate.

## More about Medical Coding

Once you identify the correct codes for a patient, the billing information is sent to the [insurance](#) company. Since [insurance](#) companies want to ensure that they only pay for services that a patient has received, they may require more information or threaten not to pay for a service if they suspect that a service was not performed. When this occurs, you need to respond to any questions from the [insurance](#) company. This often means that you have to clarify information with medical staff by writing to them for more detail or having a conversation and taking clear and accurate notes. You then write a [rebuttal](#) to the [insurance](#) company, defending or correcting the billing. These rebuttals must be well-written, clear and professional. You must ensure that you address any questions posed by the [insurance](#) company and that the information you provide is accurate and understandable. If you fail to do so, the [insurance](#) company may not pay or may even press [legal charges](#) against the medical center for overbilling—that is, charging the [insurance](#) company more than is actually owed.

## In what ways might Medical Coders have to write?

- Written follow up with a physician.
- Writing notes in a patient's record.
- Writing medical code.
- Responding to questions from an insurance company.
- Clarifying information with staff.
- Writing rebuttal letters to the insurance company.

## What is a rebuttal?

- **Rebuttal**: An attempt to contradict or disprove an argument by offering a counter argument or countervailing proof.
- In a rebuttal letter, you would be disproving an argument or a claim by offering a counterargument with proof.

## What should I keep in mind when writing a rebuttal paragraph?

- Know the opposing viewpoint thoroughly. You can't present a convincing rebuttal without knowing exactly what it is you're opposing. An effective rebuttal should not be mere name calling, but a well-planned, systematic deconstruction of the opposing side's viewpoint.
- Write a topic sentence that states the opposing viewpoint and follow it with your stance. This will allow you to move into the body of your rebuttal.
- Form your rebuttal point by point. State each reason you believe the claim is wrong. Use evidence to back up your opinion. Avoid ambiguous (unclear) language. This will make it appear as if you are trying to avoid key issues.
- Avoid beginning your rebuttal by stating that everything the opposing side says is wrong or a lie. They've had their say. You are writing an opposing view that negates what they've said and presents solid evidence that your audience can verify.
- Your concluding sentence should state what you want in resolution.



## Sample Professional Rebuttal Paragraph

Dear Very Bad Insurance Company,

I am writing to you on behalf of patient, Jane Doe to request reconsideration of a claim recently denied by your company. Tylenol Halcefate 10% was provided to her on 2/1/2013, and Ms. Doe has been under my care for treatment of maxifolixar disease since 2001. You have indicated that Tylenol Halcefate is not covered by Very Bad Insurance Company because there is not yet a generic available. Tylenol Halcefate is indicated for the management of adult maxifolixar disease. Due to the presence of maxifolixar disease, I have administered Tylenol Halcefate as an essential part of her treatment. I would appreciate a reconsideration of the claim. To further support the necessity of this patient's treatment with Tylenol Halcefate , I am including the following information: (List additional information attached to appeal including patient history, diagnosis, past treatments and product information such as package insert). Based on the above facts, treatment with Tylenol Halcefate is appropriate for this patient. I would appreciate a reconsideration of this claim. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact our office. Thank you in advance for your immediate attention to this request.

## How could this rebuttal be outlined?

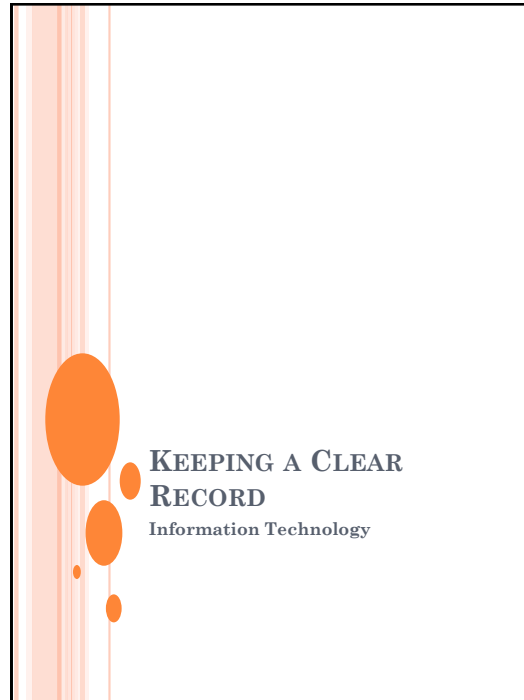
<small>Topic Sentence</small>	The claim denying John Doe's use of medication X should be granted for the following reasons.
<small>Major Detail 1</small>	First, medication X is primarily used for the following condition which John Doe has suffered from since 2010.
<small>Minor Details</small>	
<small>Major Detail 2</small>	Second, without medication X, John Doe's quality of life will greatly decrease.
<small>Minor Details</small>	
<small>Major Detail 3</small>	Most importantly, withholding medication X could shorten John Doe's life span by several years.
<small>Minor Details</small>	

## Writing Assignment: Choose One

- Choose a medication. It can be a prescription medication or an over the counter medication that is available by prescription. You are a Medical Coder and Biller, and your patient has been denied coverage for this medication. You must write a rebuttal letter asking for coverage for your patient.
- You are a Medical Coder and Biller, and you just received a letter from BB Insurance Company that they are not going to pay the claim for Jane Smith because they never received the pre-authorization forms. You look in her file and the copies are there, stamped and dated correctly. You check with her primary care physician, and the preauthorization process was completed within the required time. You know the paperwork was sent even though BBIC claims they never received it. Write a rebuttal letter to handle the denial of this claim.

## Resources

- [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)
- Medline Plus:  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/mplusdictionary.html>



## WHAT IS “IT” LIKE?

- From computer programmers to [web developers](#), and from network administrators to technical support specialists caring for the IT infrastructure, there are information technology (IT) careers available in every sector of the economy. While some people in this field work for IT companies, IT skills and services are needed in fields as wide-ranging as financial services, medical services, biotechnology, engineering and environmental services<sup>1</sup>. The IT industry designs, develops, manages and supports the hardware, software, multimedia and networks we depend on in our daily lives and businesses. IT has revolutionized our world—from the ways we communicate to how we find information to how businesses operate. Job growth in the US IT industry is high and is projected to continue for many occupations within the industry. The field is constantly growing and changing and there are high levels of competition which makes it important for IT workers to keep updating their skills and to understand the latest technologies.

## DO YOU NEED WRITING SKILLS??

- YES!!!!!!
- The complexity of the IT industry, including the rapid pace of change in technology, requires workers to continuously upgrade their skills. Jobs in this industry require good problem-solving, critical-thinking, and reasoning; clear and professional communication; and a strong background in reading and writing. Thus, in addition to technical skills specific to each job, literacy skills are crucial for success in all occupations across the industry. Literacy is essential in this field as it is heavily dependent on written and oral communication, and workers need to be able to read, understand, and implement highly-technical content. Workers in this industry must communicate with clients, colleagues, and other departments and staff, including executives.

## LET'S WATCH A VIDEO!

- What do Computer Support Specialists really do?

[http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ\\_rep.asp?next=occ\\_rep&Level=&optstatus=111111111&jobfam=15&id=1&no\\_deid=2&socode=151151&stfips=25&x=54&y=12](http://www.careerinfonet.org/occ_rep.asp?next=occ_rep&Level=&optstatus=111111111&jobfam=15&id=1&no_deid=2&socode=151151&stfips=25&x=54&y=12)

## HOW MUCH DO THEY MAKE?

### State and National Wages

The wage occupation **Computer support specialist** aggregates data for these 2 occupations:  
Computer Network Support Specialists — Computer User Support Specialists.

		2011				
Location	Pay Period	10%	25%	Median	75%	90%
United States	Hourly	\$13.93	\$17.78	\$22.91	\$30.08	\$38.03
	Yearly	\$29,000	\$37,000	\$47,700	\$62,500	\$81,200
Massachusetts	Hourly	\$18.02	\$21.81	\$27.58	\$35.18	\$44.21
	Yearly	\$37,500	\$45,400	\$57,300	\$73,200	\$92,000

## HERE IS YOUR SCENARIO:

- You are a Tier I Help Desk staff member. You work in the **IT Department** of a medium-size consulting firm. You have been assigned the task of answering email requests for computer technical support by employees.
- Each time you receive an email, you open a new **ticket** in an electronic **database**. You document in clear and concise language the issue the person is experiencing. You can then either call or email the person if it's necessary to gather additional information to help you understand and resolve the problem. You are supposed to continuously update the **ticket** to document the important details in each interaction.
- Based on the information you gather, you analyze possible causes of the reported problem. You research solutions in a company **troubleshooting** manual and/or the company's online **database** to address the causes you have identified. If you are able to resolve the problem, you either email or call the client and help the client work through the solution, attempting to fix the problem based on your analysis. If you are unable to resolve the problem within 15-20 minutes, you are supposed to bring the issue to a more experienced Help Desk staff member until a resolution is found. You must carefully document in clear and grammatically correct language the solution and the outcome before closing the **ticket**.

## HOW TO SEND TACTFUL EMAILS FROM A TECHNICAL SUPPORT DESK (ARTICLE)

- I work in technical support, which has given me many opportunities to develop the skill of phrasing things carefully. If you're in an IT department or technology company, you doubtlessly have to deal with emails from irate people who've just spent hours struggling with a piece of unhelpful software. These users often have a preconception of technical support as being "unhelpful", "slow" or "rude" and so it really helps to have some tactful phrases in your writing toolkit.

## WHEN IT'S A CASE OF "USER ERROR"

- Don't say "It's your fault" or "You've done it wrong." This is likely to annoy or upset the user, and escalate a potentially tricky situation. Instead, try opening your email with something that doesn't sound like you're blaming them:
  - "Perhaps that section of the manual wasn't very clear."
  - "I'm sorry you're having problems with that."

- Then use the main body of your email to give clear and concise help. It may be tempting to dash off as quick a message as possible, but you won't save any time if the user then emails back because they're still stuck.
- "Lots of people struggle with this, so let me take you through it step-by-step..."
- "This is how it's supposed to work"

- Close your email by inviting them to let you know if they're still having trouble at all:
- "Just let me know if you've got any more questions."
- "Email us if you're still having problems once you've tried the above."
- Putting it all together, here's an example of how not to do it:
- "There's an 'I forgot my password' button for a REASON, idiot."

- And here's how to make someone's day a little brighter:
- "Sorry to hear you're having trouble logging in. I've checked on our end, and we're not experiencing any system downtime. Just click on the 'I forgot my password' button and it'll send your account details straight to your inbox. Let me know if you don't receive that email, or if you have any more problems at all, and I'll be glad to help."

### WHEN THE BUG OR PROBLEM IS YOURS

- If there's a problem on your end, it's a good idea to apologize. Don't go over the top in prostrating yourself for every tiny thing, but do make it clear that you've acknowledged that there's something wrong. Using phrases like "slight bug", "temporary problem", "minor issue" are much more likely to calm worries than "catastrophical error" or "huge mistake" (even if the latter are more accurate...)



- Starting your email with a brief “Sorry” or an acknowledgement that there is something wrong, will help calm down the user instantly:
- “Sorry about that.”
- “Yes, I’ve managed to repeat the problem you reported.”
- Let them know what’s being done to fix the situation (unless you can fix it on the spot before emailing them back). Don’t make any promises you can’t keep, but do give some idea of likely timeframes for a solution:
- “Our programmers are looking into it at the moment.”
- “We’re hoping to have it back up and running by the end of the day.”

- Close your email by apologizing for the inconvenience to them, especially if there’s going to be a long delay in getting the problem fixed. And reassure them that they’ll be informed as soon as it is sorted out – otherwise you’ll risk them sending hourly emails demanding to know if there’s any progress.
- “My apologies for the inconvenience in the meantime.”
- “Let me know if there’s anything else I can do to help.”
- “We’ll email again as soon as it’s working.”

- This sort of email is not likely to meet with a good response (especially if your boss sees it):
- “Yeah, that’s our fault, huge screw-up. We’ll get it fixed soonish.”
- This is much more likely to lead to a happy user who is confident that you’ve got the situation under control.
- “Sorry about that. I can see there is a slight problem, and we’re investigating exactly what the issue is. We’ll get back to you as soon as it’s working again – it should be sorted out within a couple of days.”
- Keep a list of the above phrases on hand for those moments when you need to tactfully unruffle feathers and unfray nerves: it’ll make your job a lot easier!

### EMAILING: WHAT DO YOUR EMAILS LOOK LIKE?

- Think about your emails?
- Do they contain “text speak?”
- Do they make sense?
- Have you ever wished you could have pressed an “unsubscribe” button?
- Then watch this video!
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=887bWEduy8I>

## WHAT DO YOU KNOW HOW TO DO??

- Computer Support Specialists know “how to” do many things about computers.
- What is your “specialty?”
- Do you know how to bake a cake?
- Do you know how to change a tire?
- Do you know how to set up a computer?
- What do you know how to do that you can explain in a cohesive email?
  
- Let’s brainstorm!

## HELPFUL TIPS

- **Transitional Expressions:**
- **Beginning a Process** (at)first, initially, begin by
- **Continuing the Process** second, third step, until, after(ward), then, next later, before, when, while, as soon as, as, upon, during, meanwhile
- **Ending a Process** finally, at last
- 
- **Checklist**
- 
- **This is a checklist to help you when writing a Process Paragraph**
- \* Narrow the topic. Think of who you are writing to
- \* Make a topic sentence that clearly states what your process result will be
- \* Free write or brainstorm some ideas that might help with the process
- \* Drop unnecessary information that are not necessary in the process
- \* Make a outline with the steps of how you will write it.
- \* Write a draft of the process and use transition expressions to indicate order
- \* Revise
- \* Proofread to make sure that you have no errors in grammar or spelling, punctuation, or mechanics

## HERE IS A SAMPLE “HOW TO” PARAGRAPH

- There are some specific steps involved in writing a good paragraph or essay. The first step is brainstorming. Writers can use techniques like free-writing, mind-mapping and outlining/planning to help them brainstorm. In this first stage, it's important for a writer not to edit but to let ideas flow and to simply get them down on paper. **After brainstorming comes the first draft.** This is the step where the writer's ideas start to come together and take shape. There may be some grammatical errors or other small mistakes in the first draft, since many writers just try to put their ideas on paper before editing their mistakes. The first draft is also where writers should develop a topic sentence or thesis to guide the structure of their essay. **Finally, there is the last step, which is the final draft.** This is when writers edit their work. Writers should take care at this stage that all sentence structure and punctuation is correct, and that their work is formatted correctly (typed, double spaced, etc.). To conclude, writing a good paragraph is not easy, but everyone can be a successful writer by following some basic steps.

## ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

### Ways to make Breaking up Easier

Breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend can be easier said than done, but here are five steps that may help the breaking up process. First, try to distance yourself by suddenly becoming busier than usual. Whenever s/he calls, tell him/her that you are busy and you cannot talk. The next step is to calmly tell the other person how you are feeling. Then gently let him or her know that you do not want to be together anymore. Then make sure to be sensitive of his or her feelings and answer any questions that he or she may have. For example, if the person starts to cry, use kind words to help comfort him or her. After everything is said and done, take some alone time for yourself because everyone has feelings to sort out after a break up. Finally, go out with friends and meet new people. With these five steps it will make the breaking up process smooth for both parties.



## A FINAL EXAMPLE

### Winter Driving

If you drive in winter conditions, knowing five steps possibly can save your life. First, be sure your car is ready. Check the tires' tread and air pressure, the battery, and the antifreeze. Second, stock your car with emergency roadside supplies. Have a flashlight, jumper cables, and a shovel. Third, practice winter driving in an empty parking lot. When you skid, ease your foot off the gas and steer the car in the direction you want the front end to head. Next, know your route in advance so your hands do not leave the steering wheel and your eyes do not leave the road in an attempt to find directions on a map. The final step is to know what to do if you do get stuck, stalled, or stranded. Stay in your car where you will be warmer. Tie a bright piece of cloth or a marker on your antenna. Run your car long enough to remove the chill. Do not leave your car and attempt to walk long distances for help. Following these five steps will lead to safer winter driving and could save your life.

## YOUR ASSIGNMENT

- You will be writing a “how to” email/ paragraph to me.
- You may choose any topic you like, but you must follow standard paragraph format.
- You may have more than three major detail groups, but you may not have less.
- You do not have to email me your final, polished copy until class next week after peer review.
- You can work on the document in Word and then copy and paste it into your email.
- PLEASE see me with questions.