

ESSAY 1: WRITING EXERCISE 4

Part I – Topic Sentences are Transitions

Choose the best among the several topic sentences for each paragraph below.

1. I saw around Velva a release from what was like slavery to the tyrannical soil, release from the ignorance that darkens the soul and from the loneliness that corrodes it. In this generation my Velva friends have rejoined the general American society that their pioneering fathers left behind when they first made the barren trek in the days of the wheat rush. As I sit here in Washington writing this, I can feel their nearness. (from Eric Sevareid, "Velva, North Dakota")
 - a. Family-sized farms are not productive.
 - b. I grew up on a family-sized farm, near a town called Velva.
 - c. Many politicians deplore the passing of the old family-sized farm, but I'm not so sure.
 - d. People moved away from the cities in the late nineteenth century, in search of fertile land for farming.

2. The first is the wear-and-tear hypothesis that suggests the body eventually succumbs to the environmental insults of life. The second is the notion that we have an internal clock which is genetically programmed to run down. Supporters of the wear-and-tear theory maintain that the very practice of breathing causes us to age because inhaled oxygen produces toxic by-products. Advocates of the internal clock theory believe that individual cells are told to stop dividing and thus eventually to die by, for example, hormones produced by the brain or by their own genes.
 - a. There are two broad theories concerning what triggers a human's inevitable decline to death.
 - b. Some scientists believe that humans contain an "internal time clock" which forces them eventually to die.
 - c. We all must die some day.
 - d. My biology professor gave an interesting lecture Thursday.

3. The strictest military discipline imaginable is still looser than that prevailing in the average assembly-line. The soldier, at worst, is still able to exercise the highest conceivable functions of freedom -- that is, he or she is permitted to steal and to kill. No discipline prevailing in peace gives him or her anything remotely resembling this. The soldier is, in war, in the position of a free adult; in peace he or she is almost always in the position of a child. In war all things are excused by success, even violations of discipline. In peace, speaking generally, success is inconceivable except as a function of discipline.
 - a. Soldiers need discipline.
 - b. We commonly look on the discipline of war as vastly more rigid than any discipline necessary in time of peace, but this is an error.
 - c. Although soldiers are not always disciplined, they serve an important social function in wartime.
 - d. In times of peace, soldiers often convert easily from wartime pursuits to the discipline necessary successfully to compete in even the most competitive marketplace.

4. In Montreal, a flashing red traffic light instructs drivers to careen even more wildly through intersections heavily populated with pedestrians and oncoming vehicles. In startling contrast, an amber light in Calgary warns drivers to scream to a halt on the off chance that there might be a pedestrian within 500 meters who might consider crossing at some unspecified time within the current day. In my home town in New Brunswick, finally, traffic lights (along with painted lines and posted speed limits) do not apply to tractors, all terrain vehicles, or pickup trucks, which together account for most vehicles on the road. In fact, were any observant Canadian dropped from an alien space vessel at an unspecified intersection anywhere in this vast land, he or she could almost certainly orient him-or-herself according to the surrounding traffic patterns.
 - a. People in Calgary are careful of pedestrians.
 - b. Although the interpretation of traffic signals may seem highly standardized, close observation reveals regional variations across this country, distinguishing the East Coast from Central Canada and the West as surely as dominant dialects or political inclinations.
 - c. People in Montreal drive faster than people in Alberta, and Maritimers generally don't pay any attention to traffic signals at all.
 - d. Canadians do not follow traffic signals properly.

Part II – Dividing Paragraphs

Choose the place in the following passages where a shift in emphasis or topic suggests that a new paragraph should have been started.

1. [1] The separation of "play" from "work" is a problem only in the human world. [2] So is the difference between art and nature, or an intellectual accomplishment and a physical one. [3] As a result, we celebrate play, art, and invention as leaps into the unknown; but any imbalance can send us back to nostalgia for our primate past and the conviction that the basics of work, nature, and physical labour are somehow more worthwhile or even moral. [4] In the same way, we have explored our sexuality as separable from conception: a pleasurable, empathetic bridge to strangers of the same species. [5] We have even invented contraception -- a skill that has probably existed in some form since our ancestors figured out the process of birth -- in order to extend this uniquely human difference. [6] Yet we also have times of atavistic suspicion that sex is not complete -- or even legal or intended-by-god -- if it cannot end in conception.
2. [1] The broad range of positive characteristics used to define males could be used to define females too, but they are not. [2] At its entry for woman Webster's Third provides a list of "qualities considered distinctive of womanhood": "Gentleness, affection, and domesticity or on the other hand fickleness, superficiality, and folly." [3] Among the "qualities considered distinctive of manhood" listed in the entry for man, no negative attributes detract from the "courage, strength, and vigor" the definers associate with males. [4] Lexicographers do not make up definitions out of thin air. [5] Their task is to record how words are used, it is not to say how they should be used. [6] The examples they choose to illustrate meanings can therefore be especially revealing of cultural expectations. [7] The American Heritage Dictionary (1969), which provides "manly courage" and "masculine charm" also gives us "Woman is fickle," "brought out the woman in him," "womanly virtue," "feminine allure," "feminine wiles," and "womanish tears."
3. [1] Neo-conservatives such as U.S. President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher lament the collapse of traditional social values: family, work, patriotism, restraint. [2] They are right, of course. [3] There has been a deep erosion of traditional values, but the process began several hundred years ago. [4] What we are witnessing today is, perhaps, the culmination of a long historical process, a process accelerated by the policies of Mr. Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher. [5] Ironically, it is the very marketplace morality at whose shrine the neo-conservatives worship that produces the social disintegration they lament. [6] The pursuit of individual self-aggrandizement, individual gratification, individual pleasure has led more and more of us into the scramble for wealth and power. [7] Ambition and hedonism prevail. [8] Can any society survive when its citizens are all engaged in a furious competition to carve up the spoils?
4. [1] A subterranean lavatory is not, in itself, a mysterious place. If cleanliness is next to godliness, it may seem perverse to go underground in search of it; but that is a minor paradox. [2] Busy streets simply demand a small collection of toilets and handbasins at this corner or that -- so it was in Toronto in the early years of this century, and so it remains in such cities as London and Paris, which continue to acknowledge the merits of the gentle, periodic descent. [3] It is not a mystery that they appeared. [4] It is rather a mystery that they disappeared. [5] Toronto's first one seems to have been built just as Queen Victoria was exhaling for the last time. [6] No one is quite sure -- records were not kept until five years later. [7] Like many more or less obscure painters from the hazier centuries, the birth of the downstairs lav in Toronto must be noted as "circa 1901." [8] But while the demise of such painters was quite often recorded, that of the underground lavatory remains troublesome.