

Grading Analytical Essays



Levels 8-12

If a student desires to get an “A” we feel he should know just how to do so! Feel more than free to share the grading rubric as a self-proofing guide for students at this level.

Students should be required to never submit work without doing self-evaluations. Before he hands in his draft, have him complete a proofing sheet (just a checklist of those skills that you think he can be held accountable). He can use the rubric in this document as his proofing sheet, or you can give him a bulleted list that includes more detail (for sentence and paragraph proofing) if you so desire.

For expository analytical essays, the following criteria are suggested as elements to be inserted within a larger, more general proofing sheet on his paper as a whole:

- * The general format is correct for the type of essay attempted (Example: five paragraphs for an expository essay; four for certain types of compare/contrast essays, etc.)
- * There is a clear thesis.
- * The thesis paragraph introduces the correct number of supportive categories.
- * The body paragraphs are balanced in size and content (no paragraphs are oversized or skimpy).
- * All paragraphs are properly formulated according to proper style, and have an ample number of accurate facts included.
- * The overall flow of the paper is clear. Good use of transition words, phrases, or sentences such that the reader is carefully led through the argument of the essay.

Grading the Essay

- * “A” papers will have all of the above features almost completely correct.
- * “B” papers are graded down because of issues with one or two significant aspects of an essay. In terms of the grading rubric, a “B” paper would have the majority of check marks fall into the “Good” column.
- * “C” papers indicate some real issues, and these can be with any of the rows of the rubric, where at least half of the check marks overall fall into the “Fair” column.
- * “D” work is seriously flawed for any number of reasons. There are usually at least two of three main elements missing structurally, or two of three body paragraphs are seriously flawed, or perhaps there simply is no introductory or concluding paragraph at all. Usually, paragraphing issues alone will not cause a paper to be graded this low. The paper will have other issues: neatness, lateness, grammar and punctuation, or content issues that accompany the paragraphing issues. In terms of the rubric, usually most of your check marks wind up in the “Fair” to “Poor” columns.
- * “F” work is failing. As with “D’s,” “F’s” are not usually given for failure in just one area, like paragraphing. Rather, it’s the result of a combination of failures that give the student an overall failing grade. Using the rubric, you would see almost all check marks falling into the “Poor” column.

Numerical Grades

To arrive as a grade, work down the chart, checking off elements as they appear on your student’s draft.

- * Assign 40 points each for the Structure and Content rows (10 points per box).
- * Assign 10 points each for the Style and Mechanics rows (2.5 points per box).
- * Adjust how many points you give for each box according to the number of checks in each one. For instance, in “Mechanics” if you’ve checked two or three bullets in any one box, give 3-4 points or that box; if just one is checked, give 1-2 points. Total the points and write the grade at the top.

There are various point-to-grade schemes. Here’s the one that we recommend:
A+ 100-98 pts.
A 97-94 pts.
A- 93-90 pts.
B+ 89-88 pts.
B 87-84 pts.
B- 83-80 pts.
C+ 79-78 pts.
C 77-74 pts.
C- 73-70 pts.
D+ 69-68 pts.
D 67-64 pts.
D- 63-60 pts.
F below 60 pts.



Analytical Essays

Name _____ Date ___/___/___ Grade: _____

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Structure _____/40 possible points. Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> No clear thesis. <input type="checkbox"/> Poor, or non-existent paragraphing for student's level; missing one or more paragraph. <input type="checkbox"/> Facts not arranged logically in paragraphs. <input type="checkbox"/> Did not follow assignment properly. <input type="checkbox"/> Poor parallelism.	<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis not well defined. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphs are too few, or are widely disproportionate. <input type="checkbox"/> Some facts are not arranged logically in paragraphs. <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't follow assignment well. <input type="checkbox"/> Serious parallelism issues.	<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis could be better defined or presented earlier. <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphing good, but could use some improvement. <input type="checkbox"/> A few key facts are not logically placed. <input type="checkbox"/> Some variance from assignment instructions. <input type="checkbox"/> Some faulty parallelism.	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear thesis. <input type="checkbox"/> Correct number of paragraphs for the essay type attempted. <input type="checkbox"/> Facts are arranged in clear and logical fashion under strong topic sentences. <input type="checkbox"/> Executed assignment exactly as directed. <input type="checkbox"/> Perfect parallelism throughout.
Content _____/40 possible points. Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis is insupportable or wrong. <input type="checkbox"/> Very few facts are presented. <input type="checkbox"/> Poor representation of required research. <input type="checkbox"/> Too much "setting" and/or opinions unsupported by facts.	<input type="checkbox"/> Thesis is not supported by facts. <input type="checkbox"/> Weak on facts: some are presented, but not enough to prove the thesis. <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient research <input type="checkbox"/> Too opinionative w/o fact backup.	<input type="checkbox"/> Good thesis but not the best choice of supportive categories or facts. <input type="checkbox"/> Many good facts, but some key facts left out <input type="checkbox"/> Adequate research for the assignment, but not outstanding. <input type="checkbox"/> Too opinionative in places.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong thesis, amply supported by three strong categories <input type="checkbox"/> Many strong, specific, and important facts support the author's points <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent research is evident throughout. <input type="checkbox"/> Paper rests on facts, no opinions alone.
Writing Style _____/10 possible points. Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor writing. <input type="checkbox"/> Sentences are structurally inadequate. See marked paper. <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks flow of style; wooden and/or awkwardly statements. <input type="checkbox"/> Several instances of tenses changing inappropriately, or disagreement between subjects and verbs, or missing antecedents. <input type="checkbox"/> Much informal language inserted in this formal piece of writing.	<input type="checkbox"/> Overall writing is disappointing. <input type="checkbox"/> Sentences are mixed: some are good; some need work. See paper. <input type="checkbox"/> Transitions and flow need much improvement: reader can't follow author's argument. See paper. <input type="checkbox"/> Style errors like wrong tense changes, or missing antecedents. See paper. <input type="checkbox"/> Use of informal language, slang, or phrases out of place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Good, basic writing. <input type="checkbox"/> Sentences lack excellent syntax. See marked paper. <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks excellent flow—transition words, ordering of phrases, and subordinate clauses. <input type="checkbox"/> Style causes some confusion: tense changes, missing antecedents. See paper. <input type="checkbox"/> Instances of informal, or slang, phrases are out of place.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent writing. <input type="checkbox"/> Great sentence structure throughout. <input type="checkbox"/> Variety of sentence structures clarifies the author's message. <input type="checkbox"/> Good tense use, subject/verb agreement, and clear antecedents throughout. <input type="checkbox"/> Formal language appropriate to the essay is used throughout.
Mechanics _____/10 possible points. Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Messy paper: inattention to neatness or improper formatting. <input type="checkbox"/> Punctuation/capitalization is well below ability. <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling is well below ability/level. <input type="checkbox"/> Student did not spend adequate time on this assignment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Not as neat as the student is capable of. <input type="checkbox"/> Punctuation & capitalization is below ability. <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling is below ability. <input type="checkbox"/> General aspect of paper is "a rush job"; not well done."	<input type="checkbox"/> Neat, but some formatting improvement is called for. <input type="checkbox"/> Several errors in punctuation/capitalization. <input type="checkbox"/> Footnoting/citation errors. <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling errors. <input type="checkbox"/> Generally: "hurried; not as good as could be."	<input type="checkbox"/> Very neat, clean copy, properly formatted. <input type="checkbox"/> Almost perfect obedience to the rules of punctuation/capitalization. <input type="checkbox"/> Almost all citations are proper. <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling is done well. <input type="checkbox"/> Careful work, excellently done.

Analytical Essays



Levels 8-12

There are related sections of *Writing Aids* that may help you as you learn to write essays.

They include the Essay Planning Worksheet, the Paragraph Construction section, and the section on Transition Words and Sentences.

Also, see the Expository Essay Grading Rubric.

What Is an Analytical Essay?

In French, the word “essay” means, “to try.” Very simply, it is “a try” at something. Specifically, an analytical essay is a **try at proving an assertion (thesis) using organized, reasoned arguments based on facts.**

In analytical essay writing, the reader is looking for two things. Both are equally important:

1. Content: Have you presented accurate and complete information (facts)?
2. Structure: Have you organized this information into a logical, reasoned argument that supports your thesis?

Content: Essay writing is fairly straightforward for anyone who already knows how to write strong paragraphs and should you no trouble. To write an essay, one states the assertion (thesis) and then supports it with well-chosen facts or arguments. As long as your content is accurate and on point, essay-writing is not much different from composing reports.

Structure: This is what will be new to you. All good, basic, expository essays have one basic overall structure, which is similar to that of a basic paragraph. Simply put, the essayist will:

1. Tell the reader what he is going to say (introduction)
2. Say it (body)
3. Then tell him what he said (conclusion)

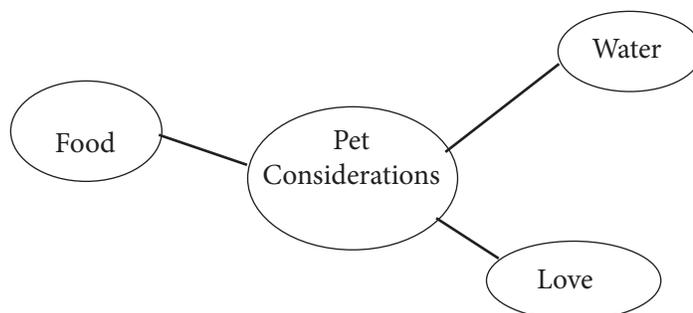
Explore the Expository Essay Grading Rubric with your teacher. Go over it with her and note the various criteria for each area: content, structure, style, and mechanics. A top essay will have strong elements of all four of these categories.

Tips For Successful Essay Construction

Prewriting

Your old friends—the graphic organizers—will continue to be of use to you, if you are happy with them. Refer to the prewriting outline content on the page 2 as your teacher shows you just how to use the familiar tool to organize your ideas for the new essay format. For the basic, expository essay you will want to cluster the following:

1. A thesis phrase that expresses a debatable opinion, put in a circle in the center of the page, with three circles placed around it and attached with lines to it.
2. Three supportive categories of points, which will become the topic sentences of three supportive paragraphs, will then be filled into the three circles.
3. Now, he needs at least three supportive facts to fill in his three categories. These go in circles that are joined to the appropriate category circle.





Sample Essay Topic and Content

Let's say that your assignment is to support the assertion that taking care of a pet is a big responsibility, and the pet's needs should be considered *before* the pet is purchased, not afterwards.

Sample Thesis: Children buying pets should consider that all pets need three basic things for survival: food, drink, and love.

Supportive categories: food, drink, and love.

What do normal, domestic pets need?

1. We have had pets (birds, dogs, a guinea pig, and fish).
 - If we had neglected to feed them, they would have died.
 - All animals need food to survive; some need special foods.
 - Consider what your pet will eat, and whether you will be able to provide regular feeding for it before you adopt your pet.
2. All animals need water.
 - Consider who will keep the water container clean and filled.
 - The pet store man told me that my pet hamster would die if I let the water bottle get moldy.
 - Figure out who will water the pet when you are away from home!
3. I believe all pets need love.
 - Maybe fish don't, but all other pets (at least, all mammals) do.
 - Dogs grow fat and sad without exercise.
 - Cats purr when they are stroked.
 - My rat nuzzles my ear, and my bird nibbles my fingers.
 - Pets (at least mammals and birds) will give love back when they get it.
 - I think they would die without it.

Conclusion: When you give your pet food, water, and love, you have given him basically all he needs. He doesn't need toys, or a nice cage to live. These are great to provide, but if you are considering a pet, consider first whether you can reliably provide the three basic necessities of life.

NOTE: If you don't want to use clustering, you don't have to. Informal outlines (like the one above) will be just as effective.

- * In this case, you note the thesis at the top of the page, and then list three supportive categories with at least three supportive facts indented under each category.
- * Yet another alternative for prewriting is to use our Essay Planning worksheet.

Drafts: Looking at Each Section of the Essay

Thesis Paragraph: Tell Them What You're Going to Say.

Of all the elements of the analytical essay, the newest skill you will learn (and the most important to the general structure of your essay) is the construction of the thesis (or introductory) paragraph. Basically, this paragraph contains: the thesis statement and the summary (usually two to three sentences long) of the points you intend to make in support of this thesis. The writer can also add an interesting opening sentence or two to attract the reader's attention, but the main point is the thesis. Good theses are:

- * Simply and clearly stated.
- * A matter of opinion, not fact. It is a statement that must be proven true.



A Matter of Opinion

When thinking about the thesis statement, you should seek to assert that which is *not* a fact in and of itself.

- * For instance, “Labrador retrievers may have black or tan fur.” This is not disputable.
- * However, consider this statement from our prewriting opposite: “Pets need three things to live.”
 - This is disputable.
 - Maybe someone else thinks that pets need different things, or could live without one of your three items.

The essay’s body will go on to support the thesis; however, if the thesis is not debatable, there is no need for a proof. Thought it is debatable, do not write the thesis as an “I think” statement. The thesis should not read, “I think pets need three things to live.” You should state what is really your opinion as a fact, and in the third person.

Here’s an example: “Pets need three basic things to live comfortable and happy lives. Children should not get a pet without considering whether they can reliably provide these things.” You “have the floor.” It’s your turn to express yourself, and you should do so in the confident expectation that your evidence (in the body of your essay) will sufficiently prove your point.

After the Thesis Statement

The remainder of the thesis paragraph contains at minimum three sentences. Each of these sentences contain a kernel idea (a category of facts) that you will expand into three body paragraphs, which will contain factual information that proves to your reader that your thesis is correct.

The Body of the Essay: “Say It!”

The body of a three-point essay consists of three fact-filled, well-constructed paragraphs, whose topic sentences state the points introduced in the thesis paragraph in support of the thesis. Each body paragraph has as many sentences as it takes to provide the factual information for that category, as well as any arguments that belong to the category. If you are well-versed in paragraph construction, there’s very little new here, except perhaps the concept of **parallelism**.

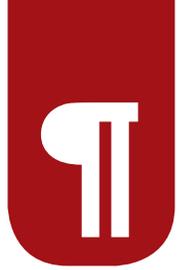
Parallelism dictates the order in which the body paragraphs are arranged. If, in our example, the writer said in the thesis paragraph that food was the first thing a potential pet purchaser needed to consider, than the body paragraph on food needs to be placed first. Parallelism should be maintained throughout the essay: you should introduce your three categories in the opening paragraph and follow them with three body paragraphs *in that order*. In the conclusion, which restates the thesis paragraph, this parallelism should be maintained as well.

The Conclusion of the Essay: “Now, tell them what you said.”

For your purposes, the conclusion paragraph can simply restate the thesis paragraph, using slightly different words. You need not use three full sentences, one per category paragraph. Instead, in summing up, you can say something like, “We said that pets need three things to thrive: food, water, and love. These things must be thought of before the pet is purchased.”

After restating your thesis and main categories, the excellent concluding paragraph will add a “twist”—one last statement that arises from the proofs given so far, but delights the reader with one additional thought. In our example, you might make a final statement, like, “Pets don’t need toys or fancy cages to survive. They need basics, but they need them consistently. Of course, if a pet owner wishes to provide deluxe elements to his pet, there are many interesting options open to him!”

Analytical Essays



Levels 8-12

Why Teach Analytical Essay Writing?

Teaching analytical essay writing is essential to a classical high school education. There is no substitute for this skill, and learning it thoroughly has a multitude of benefits, including the following:

- * Students learn to prewrite all pieces.
- * Students learn to be well organized in writing.
- * Students learn to think logically.
- * Students learn to use facts to support arguments, rather than vague, unsupported assertions.
- * Students learn to analyze and synthesize facts and arguments.

Research shows that before puberty, children simply don't have the "gray matter" to learn analytical essay writing. Such essay writing demands a mature process:

- * First, the formulation of a thesis (debatable opinion, not unlike a scientific theory).
- * Next, the selection of supportive data from research.
- * Third, the organization of this data into well-constructed and interesting paragraphs.
- * The points must flow within the paragraphs, and the paragraphs must follow a logical progression. All data in these paragraphs must support the thesis, in essence, proving it.
- * Finally, the mature essay will end with a "synthesis" or conclusion that arises from the analysis.

These skills—selecting data, seeing and analyzing relationships between facts or events, and synthesizing new constructs based on logical argument—are the highest order of thinking skills, and pre-pubescent students simply don't usually have the "hardware" to compute this way. According to researchers¹, students are only beginning to gain these abilities in 6th to 8th Grades. Their brains will continue to mature and develop the necessary neural connections into their early 20's. We feel that there is simply no better way to help your student develop himself as a writer and thinker during these years than by teaching and repeating (and repeating, and honing, and repeating) essay-writing abilities.²

Many students will struggle with the demands of essay writing at first. Your student may say that it's too hard, or boring, or that he can't write. Though there is a variety of gifts among writers, anyone can learn to write a presentable essay, and almost all people can learn to write a good one! Please read through the notes below, then use the corresponding Talking Points document to teach them to your student. Then, have him do the week's assignment. Then, as always, make sure that you, or someone who is competent, corrects his work and gives him feedback as soon as possible.

What Is an Analytical Essay?

In French, "essay" means, "to try." Very simply, it is "a try" at something. Specifically, an analytical essay is *a try at proving an assertion (thesis) using organized, reasoned arguments based on facts*. Analytical essays are somewhat formal and, especially at the start, it is good to require your student to stick closely to the formula we teach you here, much as you did when teaching him to write basic paragraphs. In their most basic format, analytical essays employ the expository genre: a student selects facts that prove his central thesis. However, advanced essayists can tackle analytical essays that use the persuasive genre (they seek to change the position of the reader) or that involve compare and contrast writing. Start with the basics: teach him the elements of a formal, expository analytical essay.

1 "Getting Inside a Teen Brain" by Sharon Begley. *Newsweek*, February 28, 2000. This is only one recent authority that holds this position. There have been many others down through time, reaching as far back as the writings of Dorothy Sayers and Jean Piaget.

2 Though handbooks from other publishers introduce pieces they call "essays" in earlier years, we feel strongly that it is not until the post-puberty years that analytical essays should be required. In our Redesigned year-plans, therefore, we offer assignments for reports for younger students, not essays. If you are using *Writing Aids* with Classic volumes, you'll notice a distinction between "essays" and "analytical essays" in the Writing Component in general.



In analytical essay writing, the reader is looking for two things. Both are equally important:

1. Content: Have you presented accurate and complete information (facts)?
2. Structure: Have you organized this information into a logical, reasoned argument that supports your thesis?

The content part of essay writing is fairly straightforward for anyone who already knows how to write strong paragraphs and should give your student no trouble. To write an essay, one states the assertion (thesis) and then supports it with well-chosen facts or arguments.

Structure: This is what will be new to your student, so explain slowly and make sure he understands. All good, basic, expository essays have one basic overall structure, which is similar to that of a basic paragraph. Simply put, the essayist will:

1. Tell the reader what he is going to say (introduction)
2. Say it (body)
3. Then tell him what he said (conclusion)

Put our Expository Essay Grading Rubric for high school students (found in the Supplements section) before your student at this point and go through it slowly with him, explaining the key elements of both structure and content. These are the elements on which he will be graded. In the rubric, note that there are rows for style and mechanics as well as content and structure. Grade “A” essays have high marks in all four rows!

Prewriting and Analytical Essays

Over the years, students have learned different methods of organizing their thoughts using various prewriting strategies. Those old friends—the graphic organizers—will continue to be of use to him. For the basic, expository essay that we are teaching first, he will want to cluster the following:³

1. A thesis phrase that expresses a debatable opinion, put in a circle in the center of the page, with three circles placed around it and attached with lines to it.
2. Three supportive categories of points, which will become the topic sentences of three supportive paragraphs, will then be filled into the three circles.
3. Now, he needs at least three supportive facts to fill in his three categories. These go in circles that are joined to the appropriate category circle.

If students don’t want to use mind maps, they don’t have to. Informal outlines will be just as effective. In this case, the student notes the thesis at the top of the page, and then lists three supportive categories with at least three supportive facts indented under each category.⁴ Yet another alternative for prewriting is to use our Essay Planning worksheet (found in Supplements) to plan the essay.

If your student is at all confused about the overall structure of his essay, we suggest that he fill out a sample essay, like the one on page 3, on an Essay Planning worksheet.

³ You can see an example of this description on the Talking Points document.

⁴ Again, see Talking Points for this alternative arrangement for prewriting.



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Supportive categories: food, drink, and love.

What do normal, domestic pets need?

1. We have had pets (birds, dogs, a guinea pig, and fish). If we had neglected to feed them, they would have died. All animals need food to survive; some need special foods. Consider what your pet will eat, and whether you will be able to provide regular feeding for it before you adopt your pet.
2. All animals need water. Consider who will keep the water container clean and filled. The pet store man told me that my pet hamster would die if I let the water bottle get moldy.
3. I believe all pets need love. Maybe fish don't, but all other pets (at least, all mammals) do. Dogs grow fat and sad without exercise. Cats purr when they are stroked. My rat nuzzles my ear, and my bird nibbles my fingers. Pets (at least mammals and birds) will give love back when they get it. I think they would die without it.

Conclusion: When you give your pet food, water, and love, you have given him basically all he needs. He doesn't need toys, or a nice cage to live. These are great to provide, but if you are considering a pet, consider first whether you can reliably provide the three basic necessities of life.

Looking at Each Section of the Essay

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- * Simply and clearly stated.
- * A matter of opinion, not fact. It is a statement that must be proven true.

A Matter of Opinion

When thinking about the thesis statement, the student should seek to assert that which is *not* a fact in and of itself. For instance, "Labrador retrievers may have black or tan fur." This is not disputable. However, consider this statement from our prewriting above: "Pets need three things to live." This is disputable. Maybe someone else thinks that pets need different things, or could live without one of your three items. The essay will go on to support the thesis; if the thesis is not debatable, there is no need for a proof.

The student should be cautioned, however, against writing the thesis as an "I think" statement. The thesis should not read, "I think pets need three things to live." The writer should state his opinion as a fact, and in the third person. Here's an example: "Pets need three basic things to live comfortably and happy lives. Children should not get a pet without considering whether they can reliably provide these things." The writer "has the floor." It's his turn to express himself, and he should do so in the confident expectation that his evidence (in the body of his essay) will sufficiently prove his point.

For those students who have taken geometry, an apt analogy can be made: they know that each proof starts with an assertion that is not necessarily true. The task is to show by a series of known truths that the assertion is demonstrably true as well. Thesis statements are like the opening assertion.



After the Thesis Statement

The remainder of the thesis paragraph contains at minimum three sentences (later, these can be modified into phrases, but for the beginner, require three separate sentences). Each of these sentences contain a kernel idea (a category of facts) that the writer will expand into three body paragraphs, which will contain factual information that proves that the thesis is correct.

The Body of the Essay: “Say It!”

The body of a three-point essay consists of three fact-filled, well-constructed paragraphs, whose topic sentences state the points introduced in the thesis paragraph in support of the thesis. Each body paragraph is comprised of as many sentences as it takes to provide the factual information for that category, as well as any arguments that belong to the category. If the student is well-versed in paragraph construction, there’s very little new here, except perhaps the concept of parallelism.

Parallelism dictates the order in which the body paragraphs are arranged. If, in our example, the student said in the thesis paragraph that food was the first thing a potential pet purchaser needed to consider, than his paragraph on food needs to be placed first. Parallelism should be maintained throughout the essay: the student should introduce his three categories in the opening paragraph and follow them with three body paragraphs in that order. In the conclusion, which restates the thesis paragraph, this parallelism should be maintained as well.

The Conclusion of the Essay: “Now, tell them what you said.”

The conclusion, for beginning essay writers, can simply restate the thesis paragraph, using slightly different words. The beginner student need not use three full sentences, one per category paragraph. Instead, in summing up, he can say something like, “We said that pets need three things to thrive: food, water, and love. These things must be thought of before the pet is purchased.”

After restating his thesis and main categories, the excellent concluding paragraph will add a “twist”—one last statement that arises from the proofs given so far, but delights the reader with one additional thought. In our example, the student may wish to make a final statement, like, “Pets don’t need toys or fancy cages to survive. They need basics, but they need them consistently. Of course, if a pet owner wishes to provide deluxe elements to his pet, there are many interesting options open to him!”