



The GED Language Arts, Writing Test

Organizing Writing



Frances L. Roberson, M.A.

ABE/ASE/GED/ESL Teacher

Vocational Counselor

Grant Writing Specialist

California Distance Learning Project

www.cdlnonline.org

GED

Video Partner



Passing the GED Writing Test

I find that the harder I work, the more luck I seem to have.

Thomas Jefferson, President

Video 5 Focus: how to organize writing for clarity and effectiveness

You Will Learn From Video 5:

- That an organized piece of writing is easier to read.
- That writing is partly inspiration but needs a plan to organize it.
- That it is important to introduce the topic in such a way as to get the audience comfortable with it.
- That all good writing has a set structure and sequence.
- That having a sense of purpose always affects structure.



Words You Need to Know:

While viewing the video, fill in the correct word or phrase:

Answers are on page 15.

1. Good writing structure consists of a _____, _____ and _____.
2. Supporting details consist of _____, _____, and/or _____.
3. In a GED Essay, the _____ is a restatement of the essay question in your own words.
4. Each statement in a paragraph relates to and supports the _____.



Points to Remember:

- The purpose of business writing is to evaluate products, people, and opportunities, or influence what people think, feel, and do.
- Personal writing's purpose is to inform, entertain, and clarify.
- Effective writing is where you "show" rather than merely "tell."

ORGANIZATION

Organization is as important in writing as it is in everyday life for several reasons: it saves time, it keeps us on track, it relieves stress, and it helps us to reach our goals.

Think for a moment of how it is on Monday morning when you have to get to work or school, catch a bus, or get the kids out the door. What if you can not find your shoes? How about if you can not decide what to wear and are rummaging through your closet? Where are your keys? What is for breakfast since you didn't get any new cereal and you are all out? All of these circumstances produce stress, waste time, and generally create an unsatisfactory environment. In writing, the same problems and unsatisfactory environment exist with a lack of organization.



While writing may consist of a great deal of inspiration, good writing contains a plan to organize those inspired random thoughts. Content without organization creates no order, which leads to no understanding. Simplicity is the key, and things that belong together are kept together, so jumping around is eliminated. Structure, organization, and sequence help the writer achieve his or her purpose, and they help the reader to follow the main idea. Structure makes it easy for the reader because information is presented in a logical and useful manner.

It's fairly easy to organize your writing for clarity, accuracy, and effectiveness. The graphic organizers demonstrated in the last lesson show that once information is gathered and arranged in one place, then the writing part becomes much easier. The organization of the writing can be achieved using the gathered information in three simple steps: beginning, middle, and end.

THREE-STEP WRITING STRUCTURE

<u>Informal Structure</u>	<u>Writing Structure</u>	<u>Purpose of Writing Structure</u>
beginning	introduction	Introduce topic to get reader interested and then state thesis.
middle	body	Show proof to back up thesis.
end	conclusion	Restate the thesis and summarize proof.

Remember, purpose and audience will dictate how each of these steps will be developed. In business, your purpose is to evaluate and/or compare products, people and opportunities. You will want to influence customers, clients, or employees in how they think, feel, or act. Outside of business, you will want to provide information, entertain, or clarify, but not try to sell anything—except your ideas—to friends, family, and other interested parties (like GED scorers).

The easiest three-step writing structure consists of 4-5 paragraphs as follows:

INTRODUCTION:

- 1-2 sentences to inspire interest
- plus a thesis statement sentence

BODY:

- 2-3 paragraphs
 - each containing a topic sentence
- each containing at least 2 or more supporting sentences

body: paragraph 1

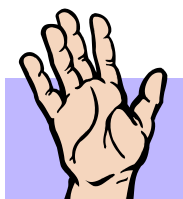
body: paragraph 2

body: paragraph 3

CONCLUSION:

- restate thesis statement from **INTRODUCTION** possibly using different wording
- briefly summarize “proof” from **BODY**

Here are some handy suggestions to make your organizing easier:



- ❖ Gather information with pre-writing lists, brainstorming, graphic organizers, Venn Diagrams.
- ❖ Use 3x5 cards to list topic sentences and proof, and you can shuffle the order as needed.
- ❖ Verbalize as you create (except on GED test!).
- ❖ Think of your hand as a 5-paragraph essay with the thumb as **INTRODUCTION**, three fingers as the **BODY**, and little finger as **CONCLUSION** to help create framework and keep on topic

INTRODUCTION

The Introduction's purpose is twofold:

- ◁ to interest the reader in continuing to read the piece, and
- ◁ to state the main reason for writing: the idea that will be discussed, the argument to be given and defended, or the point of the writing.

The main idea—thesis statement—needs to be put in the introductory paragraph. Although it can be, it is rarely the first sentence in the paragraph. It is usually the last sentence. Before stating the thesis, it is a good idea to catch the reader's interest. To do that, tell a personal story, include some interesting statistics, or give a quote. Look at these examples of interest-catching statements:



My grandmother always used to say that if I wanted to go somewhere in life, I had to set a goal and work hard toward it...

Dear Mr. Carpenter:

Are you aware that 50% of families with young children take their family vacations within 30 miles of home?...



When Ben Franklin said, "A penny saved is a penny earned," he could have been talking about today's savings account system...

After using a creative and interesting way to catch the reader's interest in the first one or two sentences, then you are ready to give the thesis statement to summarize what you are going to say or where you are going to go in this piece of writing. This is usually done in the last sentence of the Introduction paragraph.

If you have used pre-writing in the form of graphic organizers or lists, then the thesis statement will be very clear to you. In a GED Essay question, the thesis statement will be merely a restatement of the required prompt (essay question) but in your own words.

In the following Introduction paragraphs, see if you can identify the thesis statements.

Answers are on page 15.

I could hear the waves slapping hard on the beach, covering the sounds of what few other visitors there were. The wind was cold and brisk and smacked sand into my face. It didn't matter. I discovered the beach in the fall was a wonderful place for many reasons.



Amber struggles with the baby seat and has to heave the grocery bags into the trunk. While she loved the sporty, red, two-door car, that was BB, before baby. Now she's convinced that a four-door minivan is the correct vehicle for her in her very busy life as Mommy.

Remember, the Introduction is where you create an interest in reading your writing as well as stating your main idea. Once you have your reader "hooked," then you can go to the body of the writing and prove your thesis statement.

BODY

The body of the writing is where you will actually address and prove your main idea and attempt to influence your reader's opinions.

You may choose to compare or contrast, a good organizational approach to argue that one thing, person, place, idea, or event is better than another. When you compare, you deal with similarities, and when you contrast, you deal with differences. When using both compare and contrast in the same writing, they are most effective in separate paragraphs.

Identify the following sentences as either compare or contrast. Check the box.
Answers are on page 15.

Compare

Contrast

Hiking is just as good in Alaska as in Hawaii.
 There are wolves and grizzlies in Alaska, but not in Hawaii.
 Snow activities are very popular in Alaska, but there is no snow in Hawaii.
 Both Hawaii and Alaska have interesting native cultures.

You may also decide to show “cause and effect.” This is often used for business writing, and is a common means of answering a GED Essay topic.

Cause is the reason for something happening, while effect is the result. Some examples:

1. The driver was speeding (CAUSE) and got a ticket (EFFECT).
2. Carol wasn’t paying close attention while she was painting (CAUSE), and now her walls look like they have stripes (EFFECT).
3. She got depressed (EFFECT) after breaking up with her boyfriend (CAUSE).

Fill in this chart with an appropriate cause or effect: (There could be various answers, but see page 16 for some possibilities.)

Cause	Effect
1. When you lie	1.
2.	2. you may get sick.
3. When you run up the stairs	3.
4.	4. so he failed the course.

Here are some clues as to whether you’re being asked to write an essay on cause or effect:

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Effect</u>
what are the causes of...	what effect does...
tell why...	what results are...
explain...	show the consequences...

On the GED Test, you may be asked to write a story about something that happened in the past, or perhaps you will want to write a story for personal reasons. We call this a narrative essay, and you will be asked to use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge.

Narrative essays utilize a chronological order, and sequence is very important. It ensures that there is no jumping around and that supporting details are presented in a logical order. This serves to keep the ideas “flowing” smoothly and the reader engaged. To keep an orderly sequence, think words like “first,” “secondly,” “then,” “next,” “later,” and “finally.” The first sentence in the paragraph is usually the topic sentence, so here is where you will often find these words. Look at these examples:

- “Then we headed down Interstate 80 until we reached the next town.”
- “Finally, my friend’s characteristic that amuses me the most is her tendency to see paranormal behavior in her pets.”
- “First of all, let me say that I am a big sports fan.”

When writing a personal narrative, then these transition words become even more important. After introducing the characters, you'll want to relate events: "this happened, then this happened, finally, this happened..."

Bobby and Joey were my two best friends from eighth grade. It seemed we could always find some trouble to get into, especially that Halloween.

First, we made our costumes as gory and frightening as possible.

Then, after going to the dance and scaring all the girls, we

Finally, we arrived at the old haunted house on Fifth Street where the police and our parents caught up with us

Persuasion essays are another type used on the GED Test as well as in business. They provide examples and reasons as evidence to convince the reader to do, believe, or buy something. They also rely on transition words to indicate more reasons are coming. These include: "additionally," "furthermore," "also," "as well as," "besides," "together with." Transition words useful for examples as well as reasons include: "for example," "to illustrate," and "for instance."

- "Furthermore, the crowds leave with the last of the warm weather."
- "For example, consider the advantages of having two extra doors."
- "To illustrate, in a vacation to Hawaii, I can pursue all the water sports like catamaran sailing and snorkeling that are missing from landlocked North Dakota where I live."

In the following essay, fill in the blanks with some transition words that would strengthen the evidence: Answers are on page 16.

Today, it seems everyone is suffering from some stress-related problems. Work, traffic, kids, school, all seem to bring on headaches, nervousness, irritability, body aches, and heartburn. I've found that practicing yoga is a nifty way of minimizing the stress and getting rid of the symptoms.

....., yoga improves blood pressure...

....., yoga limbers up the body and improves coordination...

....., yoga increases concentration...

The number of paragraphs in the body of your writing will depend on the purpose of your writing and the amount of proof or evidence needed. Usually, we are talking about 2-3 paragraphs, with each paragraph serving to prove or support the thesis statement.

Just as the thesis statement gives structure to the whole piece of writing, the topic sentence in each paragraph gives structure to the paragraph. It tells the reader what is coming. Every sentence in the paragraph will then serve to support or prove the topic sentence. If a sentence does not, then it needs to be eliminated.

Use examples, reasons, facts, or personal anecdotes in support of the topic sentences. In other words,

SHOW!

DON'T JUST TELL!

In this instance, words are often better than pictures to “show,” because the reader will be hooked into the reading by forming pictures in his/her head based on his/her own experiences. Can’t you just see the little red, sporty car, or the waves smacking onto the beach? Haven’t we all “heaved” bags into the trunk?

However, these words should be descriptive, active, attention-getting. We want the reader to “see” our ideas to understand them. Look at the two paragraphs on page 5 to see what words are used. Adjectives used include: hard, cold, brisk, few, wonderful, sporty, red, two-door, correct, and busy. Verbs that also painted the pictures include: slapping, smacked, discovered, struggles, heaves, loved, and convinced.

Always use the most active verb possible to describe something. Avoid the use of the passive verbs *was*, *were*, and static verbs that lack movement such as *am*, *is*, *are*, *be*, *being*, *been*, *had*, *have*, *has*, *do*, *did*, *does*, *could*, *should*, *would*. Here are some you could use:

adjust	apply	assist
balance	believe	build
clarify	compose	conclude
define	demonstrate	develop
elevate	evaluate	explain
finish	focus	fulfill
grasped	grouped	guided
halted	handled	hosted
illustrate	indicate	invent
join	judge	justify
kindle	knit	know
lead	lessen	limit
maintain	manage	motivate
need	negotiate	note
observe	operate	organize
plan	prepare	provide
qualify	query	quote

report	restore	reveal
show	suggest	support
teach	train	tend
uncover	unite	update
value	verify	view
widen	withstand	work
yearn	yell	yield
zero in	zoom	

PRACTICE

Replace the underlined word or phrase with one of the words from the list. Answers are on page 16.

1. Bob is going to draw pictures for his new book. _____
2. I'm trying to make this clear for you. _____
3. The doctor raised the patient's head above his feet. _____
4. The speaker is trying to encourage the salesmen to sell more. _____
5. He held on tight to the wallet. _____

Regardless of the type of essay, whether it's compare/contrast, cause and effect, narrative, or persuasive, adding specific details contributes much in the way of interest and keeps your reader engaged. Which sentences of the pairs below help you "see" the story:

- The driver was speeding and got a ticket.
- The driver was doing 80 mph in a 40 mph zone and got a \$350 ticket.
- First, we made our costumes as gory and frightening as possible.
- First, we tore our costumes, added fake dripping blood, and topped them off with a Freddy mask.

Use the Body of your writing to support and prove your thesis statement. But **DON'T JUST TELL, SHOW** your reader!

CONCLUSION

If you've made your supporting information specific, detailed, interesting, and appropriate for your audience and purpose, then you have accomplished your goal of entertaining or convincing the reader. The conclusion, then, is just a wrap-up and should not include any new points.

The best conclusions merely restate the thesis statement and summarize the supporting evidence or proof. Good words and phrases to use in the conclusion are "thus," "in conclusion," "in sum," and "so you can see."

Here's the essay from Lesson 4. Look at the conclusion. It is not long, not complex, and contains no new information. It is merely a rewording of the thesis and supporting statements (that are actually the topic sentences for each paragraph) following a transition phrase.

How I Can Lose Weight

Over the years, I've tried the grapefruit diet, the beer diet, the high fiber diet, and many more I can't remember. They all worked for awhile. Now I realize, though, that there are several things I can do that will help me lose weight permanently.

I know now that the proper diet is one good way to lose weight. A balanced diet with protein, some carbohydrates, and good fats like olive oil is very important. This should include low-fat meats and dairy. When I eat out, I need to watch my fats, and I should increase the fruits and veggies in my diet. My doctor could give me a good diet to go by.

Exercise is fundamental to any good weight-loss program. I could jog sometimes and start walking to work every day, and these are pretty inexpensive things to do. I just need a good pair of shoes. I could lift weights—even if it's a couple of soup cans—and it isn't too expensive to buy an exercise video these days. Of course, I could join a gym where I could run, walk, bike, lift weights, and do some other exercises as well.

But, you know, the one thing I've learned is that it's always easier to lose weight if I have a supportive environment. I could join Weight Watchers or one of the other support groups that are out there. It's always good to be with other people who understand what you are going through, because then they are always eager to help and give you tips and encouragement. Even exercising with a good friend would help me stick to my program.

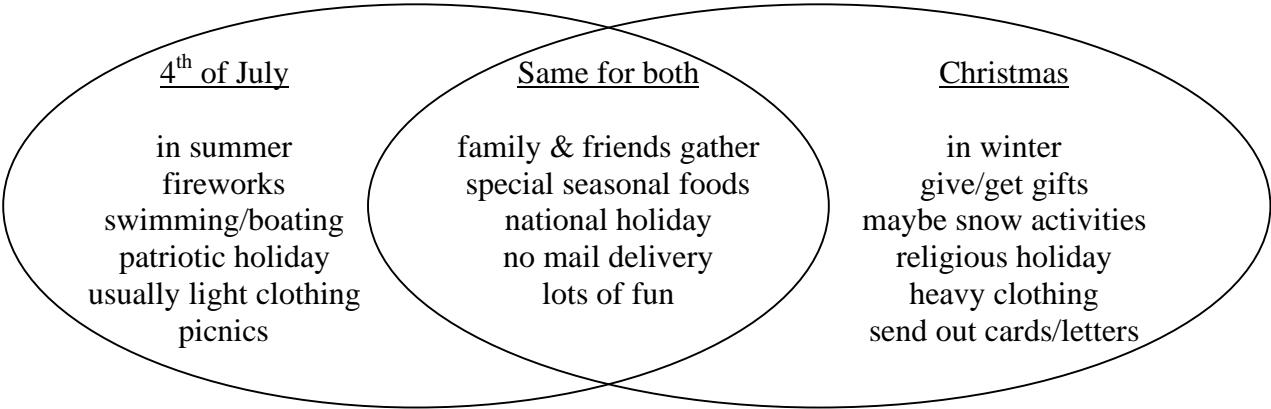
(CONCLUSION)

So as you can see, I can lose weight permanently if I get on a proper diet, start exercising, and surround myself with people who are supportive of my efforts to lose weight.

Exercise 1

Below is the Venn Diagram from Lesson 4. Prompt: “Write a 4-5-paragraph essay about your two favorite holidays. Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.” Be sure to include a thesis statement, topic sentences, a conclusion, active verbs and adjectives to **SHOW** the reader, as well as transition words and phrases.

One example is on page 16.



Exercise 2

Here’s information for a persuasive business letter. Use the thesis statement and topic sentences to write a conclusion that you think would be appropriate for the letter.

One example is on page 17.

Thesis statement: “It is important to have health insurance at every stage of life.”

Topic sentences:

- “An infant or child is predisposed to many types of childhood illnesses and accidents.”
- “A young adult needs health insurance because of accidents on and off the job, pregnancy and childbirth, and the need for physicals and preventive care.”
- “A senior adult needs to have regular checkups, flu shots, and care for the diseases of aging.”

GED EXERCISE

Read the following selection and choose the best answer for each question. Answers are on page 17.



A

The first steam locomotive was invented in 1797 in England but it wasn't used until 1812 and then only in mines. In the United States, the first railroad came about in 1827, and by 1833, there were 380 miles of rail track in use here. By 1840, there was 2800 miles of track and, by 1860, there were 30,000 miles.

B

The extensive use of the railroad to carry troops and supplies on both sides in the Civil War led president Lincoln to sign the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862. This was to create a transcontinental railroad that was completed with the "Golden Spike" in 1869.

C

The next half century was the "golden age" of railroads with 254,000 miles of track at its peak in 1916--until the Great Depression forced many railroad lines into bankruptcy. By World War II, cars, trucks, buses, and planes had took over much of the work from railroads, and the railroads never quite recovered.

D

By the late 1950s, steam engines had been retired, and diesel engines had taken over much of the load; however, railroad market share continued to be taken over by plains and huge trucks that effectively moved people and freight.

E

The creation of Amtrak in 1970, new technology, and the creation of new short lines and regional railroads lead to the movement of 1.38 trillion ton-miles of freight by 1998. This record in tonnage and safety were not enough to return railroading to its heyday.

1. Paragraph A: **The first steam locomotive was invented in 1797 in England but it wasn't used until 1812 and then only in mines.**

- 1) capitalize locomotive
- 2) remove capital on England
- 3) remove apostrophe in wasn't
- 4) put comma after England
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

2. Paragraph A: **By 1840, there was 2800 miles of track and by 1860, there were 30,000 miles.**
- 1) change there were 30,000 miles to there was 30,000 miles
 - 2) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 3) change period to exclamation point
 - 4) change there was 2800 to there were...
 - 5) remove comma after 1840
3. Paragraph B: **The extensive use of the railroad to carry troops and supplies on both sides in the Civil War led president Lincoln to sign the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862.**
- 1) put a period after supplies
 - 2) remove capital letters from Civil War
 - 3) put a capital P on president
 - 4) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 5) put a capital R on railroad
4. Paragraph C: **The next half century was the “golden age” of railroads with 254,000 miles of track at its peak in 1916--until the Great Depression forced many railroad lines into bankruptcy.**
- 1) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 2) remove capitals from Great Depression
 - 3) capitalize century
 - 4) change its to it's
 - 5) change period to question mark
5. Paragraph C: **By World War II, cars, trucks, buses, and planes had took over much of the work from railroads, and the railroads never quite recovered.**
- 1) remove capital on War
 - 2) remove comma after II
 - 3) change had to have
 - 4) change took to taken
 - 5) remove comma after railroads
6. Paragraph D: **By the late 1950s, steam engines had been retired, and diesel engines had taken over much of the load; however, railroad market share continued to be taken over by plains and huge trucks that effectively moved people and freight.**
- 1) remove comma after retired
 - 2) change semi-colon to comma
 - 3) capitalize market share
 - 4) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 5) change plains to planes

7. Paragraph E: **The creation of Amtrak in 1970, new technology, and the creation of new short lines and regional railroads lead to the movement of 1.38 trillion ton-miles of freight by 1998.**
- 1) run-on sentence
 - 2) put a comma after short lines
 - 3) change lead to led
 - 4) sentence is correct as it stand
 - 5) remove capital A on Amtrak
8. Paragraph E: **This record in tonnage and safety were not enough to return railroading to its heyday.**
- 1) capitalize railroading
 - 2) change its to it's
 - 3) change were to was
 - 4) capitalize heyday
 - 5) sentence is correct as it stands

ANSWERS & EXPLANATIONS

Page 1: Words You Need to Know

1. beginning, middle, end OR introduction, body, conclusion
2. reasons, facts, or examples
3. thesis statement
4. topic sentence

Page 5: Thesis statements

“I discovered the beach in the fall was a wonderful place for many reasons.”

“Now she’s convinced that a 4-door minivan is the correct vehicle for her in her very busy life as Mommy.”

Page 5: Compare Contrast

- compare
- contrast
- contrast
- compare

Page 6: Cause and Effect (There are other possibilities as well.)

1.you could hurt someone's feelings.
2. If you eat too much candy...
3.you could trip and fall.
4. He never studied,...

Page 7: Transition Words (These are just possibilities; there may be others you can use.)

- For example,
- Additionally,
- Furthermore,

Page 9: Practice

1. illustrate
2. clarify
3. elevated
4. motivate
5. grasped

Page 11: EXERCISE 1 (one possible example)

There are many holidays throughout the year including Halloween, Memorial Day, and Thanksgiving, and I really enjoy the decorations and having the days off from work for some of them. But my two favorite holidays are 4th of July and Christmas.

Independence Day is a favorite of mine because it's in the summer. There's boating, swimming, and picnics. We get to run around in shorts and swimsuits, and enjoy all the great foods of summer like watermelon, potato salad, and hotdogs. Since it is a patriotic holiday, we also get to see grand fireworks displays.

Christmas is a favorite of mine, too, because it's a wonderful holiday filled with cards and gifts, and seasonal foods like pumpkin pies, turkey, and dressing. Since it's in the winter, we may get to bundle up in heavy clothes and enjoy snow and cold-weather activities such as ice skating and skiing. The music, the ornaments, the Christmas tree all create quite a sensation for the eyes and ears!

While each holiday has its own distinctive characteristics, they are both alike in some ways. Both holidays are national holidays, so I don't have to work. More importantly, they both give us an opportunity to get together with family and friends and have lots of fun.

In conclusion, although other holidays offer certain benefits throughout the year, 4th of July and Christmas are my favorites because they bring together friends and family, great seasonal foods, outstanding outdoor activities, and loads of fun.

Page 12: EXERCISE 2 (one possible example)

As you can see, having health insurance is extremely important at every stage of life. If you have a child who has childhood illnesses such as chickenpox or colds, or you're an adult who needs physicals for work or medical care for exercise accidents, you'll find medical attention is very expensive without some health plan. Mature adults, especially, find the cost of health care beyond their means on a fixed budget. So see what our health care coverage can do for you.

Page 13-15: GED EXERCISE

1. 4) The comma is needed to separate two independent clauses before the conjunction but.
2. 4) Miles is plural and must have the plural verb form were.
3. 3) Capitalize President when used as a title or referring to a specific president as it is here.
4. 1) This sentence is correct as it stands.
5. 4) "To take" is an irregular verb, and it uses the irregular form taken with the participle had.
6. 5) The correct spelling is planes.
7. 3) The correct spelling is led.
8. 3) Record is singular and must have the agreement of the singular verb form was.