

Bower Reading

Teaching tips

Narrative topics — stories and such — have a natural chronological organization. So, students usually do not have much trouble organizing their writing. Thus, it is usually not as important for the students to have done a lot of preparation before writing a summary of a story.

However, essay topics have no such natural organization. With such topics, students often have a great deal of trouble organizing their writing — especially in a second language. Thus, it is quite important that much of the following reading lesson will also serve to prepare the students to write — in a way, this is a bonus we receive for planning ahead.

Today's material has been designed with matriculation students in mind.

As part of pre-reading, ask several students to describe their own personality characteristics.

Relate their descriptions of themselves to the notion of self-concept.

Write the title of the passage on the board and ask the class to predict the contents of the passage.

We are now ready for the reading activity itself. Distribute Worksheet 1 which contains the reading passage.

Notice that the topic sentences have been removed from three of the paragraphs.

Ask the students to read the passage quickly to get a rough idea of its contents. With the students, discuss the content of each paragraph. Ask them to think of possible topic sentences.

Now, distribute Worksheet 2, containing the three missing topic sentences (Activity 1). These are not arranged in order (The order of the topic sentences is as follows: paragraph 3, paragraph 4, paragraph 2).

Ask the students to read the passage again, and match the appropriate sentences to the paragraphs.

Discuss with the students why the topic sentences should be placed where they are. This is a good time to discuss topic sentences and supporting sentences.

Tell the students that this knowledge will help them later in the assignment when they write a summary.

Now, have the students do Activity 2 of Worksheet 2. This activity focuses them on the organization of the essay. Although the main idea of an essay is usually found in the first paragraph, in this essay it is actually found in the second paragraph.

The authors have used the first paragraph to define the notion of self-concept. Thus, it is not until the second paragraph that the reader is presented with the main idea of the whole essay: namely, that your self-concept is a product of your experience.

Take the time to make sure that the students seem to understand the main ideas in the essay.

In addition to teaching about essay organization, this activity is also helping clarify the main idea of the essay. This activity thus provides some advance preparation for the writing task at the very end of the lesson.

Hand out Worksheet 3. The first part of this worksheet deals with vocabulary. Notice that the students are required to find the vocabulary words and decide what they mean *as they are used in the essay!* The structure of this activity forces the students to pay attention to the words in context — something that greatly helps the learning process.

The following section, "From general to specific," returns to reading (and writing) again, but this time, the segment shows how writers start with an abstract, general statement but then clarify it with concrete, more specific examples.

In addition, among other things, this particular segment also shows how ideas can be made clearer through contrasts.

Finally, the lesson ends with a short writing assignment. Notice that in a way much of the preceding lesson has been designed as preparation for this writing assignment.

Worksheet 1

Your self-concept: a product of experience

How you behave depends in part on your 'self-concept' — by what you think about your strengths, your weaknesses, your personality. You use your self-concept when you predict to yourself whether you will succeed or fail at something. Your self-concept influences your hopes, your dreams, your moods and your actions.

As we grow up, we develop ideas about what normal behavior is from what our parents, teachers and other adults tell us and from what we see them do. That is, from teaching and from examples, we learn the values, norms, and other rules of conduct of our culture.

The norms tell us what is considered appropriate and normal behavior. For example, eating moderately at mealtimes is acceptable; eating non-stop all day long is unacceptable. Resting at the end of a workday is normal; sleeping all day is laziness. The media also strongly influence what we think is normal behavior for girls versus boys, for children versus adults, for pupils versus teachers, for husbands versus wives, and for parents versus children.

For example, compared to her friends, Joyce may be exceptional in athletics, average in reading, and poor in maths. Adults constantly make comparisons of different aspects of the way children behave — how intelligent they are, how beautiful they are, what kind of manners they have, how hard they work, how well they get along with other children, and so on. In addition, adults describe children as loving or spiteful, friendly or mean, reasonable or selfish, cooperative or uncooperative, outgoing or shy. As we grow up, these descriptions and comparisons are applied to all of us — first by adults, increasingly by our peers, and eventually by ourselves.

For instance, we may say to ourselves, 'I'm a good badminton player, but I'm not too good at playing music.' We judge ourselves not only on our athletic, artistic, and scholastic talents, but also on how well we get

along with others.

These comparisons by ourselves and others are important because they are directly connected to who is 'successful' in the culture. People who equal or exceed a positive norm are rewarded by gifts, promotions, money, praise and admiration. Presumably, they are then 'successful.' Those who fall short of what is expected receive disapproval, loss of privileges, demotions, penalties and other punishments. As a result, people become nervous if someone examines the way that they do things closely because they fear punishment for possible failure.

Worksheet 2

Activity 1:

Below are the three missing topic sentences. These are not arranged in order. Read the passage again and try to match these topic sentences with the correct paragraphs. Copy these topic sentences into the spaces provided.

Society tends to judge us largely on the basis of how we compare with what is considered normal.

Having learned the standards, the beliefs, and the norms of our own culture, we gradually begin to describe ourselves in terms of how we deviate from the norm.

We all acquire our self-concept from our own experience — from what other people tell us about ourselves and from what we notice about our own behavior.

Activity 2:

1. What is the main idea of the whole essay?
 - a. We are constantly judged by the norms of our society.
 - b. How we behave depends upon our self-concept.
 - c. Our self-concept is the product of our experience.
 - d. The norms of society gradually become our norms.
2. In which paragraph is the main idea of the essay first presented to the reader?
3. Reread the first paragraph. What is the purpose of the first paragraph?
 - a. to give the main idea of the whole essay.
 - b. to tell the reader what self-concept means.
 - c. to explain why we are assertive.
 - d. to show how we are influenced by the norms of society.

Worksheet 3

Vocabulary

Many words have more than one meaning. In this exercise, you will have to examine how words and phrases are used in this essay and then decide what the right meaning of the word is.

Instructions:

- (1) Find each of the words and phrases from Column A in the essay and then underline them twice.
- (2) Then, study each word or phrase in the sentence that you found it in and decide its meaning. Choose the meaning from Column B that best describes the way the word is used in the essay. Put the appropriate letter in the blank spaces.

| | | |
|----------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| _____ peer | a. | in contrast with |
| _____ promotion | b. | be friendly with somebody |
| _____ demotion | c. | to stare at something |
| _____ mean | d. | those of our own age and group |
| _____ moderately | e. | to be given a worse job |
| _____ get along with | f. | full of hate, spite |
| | g. | a special sale at a store |
| | h. | a little cruel |
| | i. | to be given a better job |
| | j. | not too much, not too little |

From general to specific

The general concepts in this passage are often made clearer by presenting more concrete examples. In this case, many of these examples are presented in the form of contrasts — contrasts at the word-level, contrasts at the phrase level, and so on. Find these sentences in the text and complete the contrasts below.

1. The norms tell us what behaviors are considered appropriate. For example,
_____ _____ _____ _____ is acceptable;
_____ _____ _____ _____ is unacceptable.

Resting at the end of a workday is normal;

sleeping _____ _____ is laziness.

2. Find these sentences in the text and complete the contrasts below.

The media also strongly influence what we think is normal behavior for

for *girls* versus *boys*,
for _____ versus _____,
_____, _____,
_____, _____.

Adults label children as loving or spiteful,
 _____ or _____,
 _____,
 _____,
 _____.

3. Good writers often first state an idea in a general way, and then illustrate it with specific examples. In this essay, for example, the authors present the idea in a very general way, present it a second time in a more specific way, and finally present it again, with even more specific examples.

Compare the parts of the paragraph given here with the last paragraph of the essay and fill-in the blanks. Can you see how the writing becomes more specific at each level?

- a. very general: (both positive and negative)

These social comparisons are important because they are hooked directly into the pay-off system of the culture.

- b. more specific:
(positive)

People who _____
 or _____ a positive
 norm are rewarded ...

- b. more specific:
(negative)

Those who _____
 _____ what is expected ...

- c. most specific:
(positive)

by gifts,
 _____,
 money,
 praise and
 _____.

- c. most specific:
(negative)

receive _____,
 loss of privileges,
 _____,
 penalties and
 other punishments.

Writing assignment

Imagine that this essay was actually a talk given by two important psychologists and that you are there on behalf of your class. Write a short summary of the talk for the other members of your class. (150 words or less)

Your self-concept: a product of experience

Whether or not you are assertive is determined by your self-concept — by a blueprint or mental picture that you maintain of your strengths, your weaknesses, your personality. You call your self-concept to mind when you predict whether your performance will succeed. It influences your hopes, aspirations, moods and actions.

We all acquire our self-concept in much the same way — from what other people tell us about ourselves and from our observations of our behavior and its consequences. As we grow up, our parents, teachers and other adults gradually impart by instruction and example the values, norms, and other rules of conduct of their culture. The norms tell us what behaviors are considered appropriate. For example, eating moderately at mealtimes is acceptable; stuffing oneself all day long is unacceptable. Resting at the end of a workday is a reward that is deserved; sleeping all day is laziness. The media also teach us an enormous set of norms about behaviors expected from girls versus boys, from children versus adults, from pupils versus teachers, from husbands versus wives, and from parents versus children.

We tend to be judged in society largely according to how we measure up to the relevant norms. Thus, with respect to her peers, Joyce may be exceptional in athletics, average in reading, and poor in mathematics. Adults constantly make comparisons about all aspects of the behavior children — their intelligence, beauty, manners, work habits, ability to play with other children, and so on. In addition, adults label children as loving or spiteful, friendly or mean, reasonable or selfish, cooperative or uncooperative, outgoing or shy. As we mature, these comparisons and labels are applied to all of us — first by adults, increasingly by our peers, and eventually by ourselves.

Having internalized the standards and beliefs of those who judge us, we gradually come to describe ourselves in terms of how we deviate from the norm. For instance, we may say to ourselves, ‘I’m a good bridge player, but I’m pretty stupid at balancing the checkbook.’ We make such self-judgments not only about our athletic, artistic, and scholastic talents, but also about our social and personal adjustments.

These social comparisons are important because they are hooked directly into the pay-off system of the culture. People who equal or exceed a positive norm are rewarded by gifts, promotions, money, praise and admiration. Presumably, they are then ‘successful.’ Those who fall short of what is expected receive disapproval, loss of privileges, demotions, penalties and other punishments. Consequently people become anxious when their performance is being closely evaluated because they fear punishment for possible failure.

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Sharon Anthony Bower and Gordon H. Bower

Asserting yourself, 1976, pages 26-27.