

Part I Focus On: Expository Compositions

The aim of an 'expository composition' is not to agree or disagree with a given idea, nor is it to propose solutions to a given problem. In an expository composition, the writer comes up with his/her own ideas in response to questions such as:

- How has something changed? How might it change in the future?
- What does a certain word or concept mean?
- What qualities does someone require in order to do a certain job?

TASK A

Below are three writing topics. Discuss your views on each one and give examples.

Topic 1: Ideas about what makes someone a good teacher vary widely. Students often have preferences for different styles of teaching particular to certain teachers. Similarly, there are frequent changes in the official criteria for entry into the teaching profession and assessment of teacher performance. In your opinion, what skills, knowledge and/or personal qualities define a good teacher? Discuss your ideas, with examples.

Topic 2: Academic success is not based solely on the ability to study hard and achieve high grades, but also on certain personal qualities. What personal qualities and aptitudes do students require nowadays, in order to succeed in higher education? Are the qualities necessary for academic success at university level different from those that are important in high school? Discuss your ideas, with examples.

Topic 3: In the past, the whole purpose of schooling was for young people to acquire a good stock of theoretical knowledge in traditional subject areas. Nowadays, however, education experts agree that classroom teaching should also help young students to develop other attributes besides academic ability. In your opinion, what might these attributes be, and how can classroom teaching encourage students to develop them? Discuss your ideas, giving appropriate examples.

TASK B

Thesis statements in expository compositions

A thesis statement summarizes your ideas in the first paragraph. It tells your reader what your composition is about and helps to guide your writing and keep it focused. As you write, you may want to go back and revise your statement.

Below are three thesis statements. Which topic in Task A does each one belong to?



1. In my opinion, there are two attributes in particular that schooling should focus on developing: an ability to interact with others, and an ability to think independently. Increasing the amount of group work in the classroom can go a long way to helping young students develop both of these crucial life skills. _____
2. Although there are contrasting opinions about what it means to be a 'good teacher', I believe that there are two qualities in particular that are always key to effective teaching: a patient and understanding attitude toward learners, and a love of knowledge for its own sake. _____
3. The personal qualities and attributes one needs in order to succeed in both university and school are quite similar. For academic success, qualities like discipline, work ethic, good communication skills and the ability to work well under pressure are all important qualities to have, in my opinion. _____

Part II Topic Warm-up: Vocabulary

Tip

Brush up on topic vocabulary

When writing on a specific topic like education, it is really important that you use accurate vocabulary related to the topic in question. Consistently using the right word or phrase will get you a good grade for vocabulary. Experts on second language acquisition agree that one of the keys to assimilating new vocabulary is to actually use new words and phrases in writing original sentences. When keeping a record in your notebook of the new vocabulary you encounter, it is a good idea to come up with your own example sentences for each item and write these down as well.

TASK C

1. In the sentences below, replace the parts in blue with the correct word or phrase from the box.
2. Then, write your own example sentences to illustrate the meaning of any words and phrases in the box that you found particularly interesting (e.g. because they are new to you, or because of the concept they express). Read each of your example sentences in turn to a partner, but without mentioning the key word or phrase whose meaning each one exemplifies. If your example sentences are clear, your partner should be able to guess the missing word or phrase in each one.

- high-flier • the three R's • academic probation • lifelong learning • grade inflation • enroll in • careers orientation
- vocational training • academic courses • comes top of the class • instruction
- make the grade • rote learning • short attention span • fellow students • transferable skills • freshman year
- enrollment • literacy • academically inclined • offers guidance • continuous assessment • dropout rate

1. Over 60% of candidates achieve the top grade on the exam, due to *a situation in which high academic grades become so common that they mean little* _____.
2. The course is demanding and the *number of people who quit before completing their studies* _____ is unusually high.
3. Although *courses in which students read and write a lot but do not learn practical skills* _____ do not prepare students for a specific profession, graduates can find work in numerous professional fields.
4. The adult college offers *preparation for a specific job or profession* _____ for students who have decided which job they wish to do.
5. His poor academic performance at university came as a shock, as he had always been a *person whose academic performance is exceptional* _____ in high school.
6. She is a very intelligent girl who always *performs better than other students* _____.
7. The establishment of the new adult education college shows the government's commitment to supporting *the idea that people should be able to go on receiving education at any age* _____.
8. If they are to *meet the required standard of academic performance* _____ in higher education, students need to cultivate good study habits.

9. Students in their *first year at university* _____ often struggle with the demands of higher education.
10. *The number of people who register on a course of study* _____ is up again, for the fifth year running.
11. Students who *make arrangements to start attending* _____ these courses often have a clear idea of their long-term career goals.
12. He's on *a trial period in which he may be expelled if his poor academic performance fails to improve* _____, so if he fails the next exam he could be thrown off the course.
13. By age fifteen, many students from poorer backgrounds still fail to meet national standards in *the ability to read and write* _____ and mathematics.
14. He enjoys reading and learning new things. Clearly he is *naturally interested in theoretical subjects* _____.
15. The latest educational methods no longer focus exclusively on *Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic: often said to be the three most important things to be taught in school* _____.
16. Classroom *teaching* _____ by the teacher can only achieve so much. Students also need to learn independently.
17. Each student has a personal tutor who, among other things, *gives advice* _____ when it comes to considering options for after graduation.
18. *Assistance with choosing a career path and taking the first steps to getting a job* _____ should ideally begin when students are at a young age.
19. Some believe that, due to the huge amount of information online, people who use the Internet frequently have a *low ability to focus on one task for a sufficient length of time* _____.
20. Academic courses may not relate directly to a specific field of work, but they do allow students to develop *skills that are of use in various jobs* _____, such as skill at writing and doing presentations.
21. Though an emphasis on *memorizing information* _____ seems old-fashioned, it does improve a number of mental abilities.
22. She formed a study group with several *other students in the same class or on the same course* _____, so that they could revise for the exam together.
23. *A policy in which students' grades for a course depend on their work throughout the course, rather than on just one exam at the end* _____ can be a lot less stressful for students than the traditional method of a single final exam.

Part III Analyzing a Task

TASK D

Read the topic below and answer the questions that follow.

Many successful companies establish their headquarters in buildings that have been carefully designed to optimize employees' work performance. It has been suggested that the same principle should be applied to schools. In your view, what features might define the perfect school building? How would these features help students reach a high level of academic performance? Discuss your ideas, with appropriate examples.

1. Does this composition task prompt you to look at arguments for and against changing the design of school buildings? _____
2. Does this task present you with a problem that you must analyze and suggest solutions to? _____
3. What are the two questions in this task that you need to respond to? Underline them. _____

TASK E

Read the first paragraph of the model composition. Underline the thesis statement. What points will the writer discuss in the body of the composition? Then, read the rest of the composition. How does the writer organize these ideas?

The design of a building influences the performance of the people working and studying in it. Schools are no exception. What type of building design would provide the best educational setting? In my view, there are two main features that would make for the ideal school building: classrooms with impressive views, and carefully planned seating arrangements.

The idea of classroom windows looking out onto attractive views may at first seem bizarre. Teachers usually admonish students who they catch staring out of the window during class time. It is as if students must have their eyes constantly on the whiteboard, the teacher, or their textbooks; otherwise, they are not really concentrating. Yet it has been shown that concentration and mental acuity actually improve when people allow their gaze to wander. Contemplating varied visual stimuli helps the mind to assimilate information on a deeper level, in much the same way that dreaming during sleep consolidates memory formation and data storage in the brain. Moreover, a pleasant view can boost students' mood, facilitating learning. Classrooms with large windows and expansive views therefore make perfect sense.

Like this concept of a 'classroom with a view', the idea of alternative classroom seating arrangements might appear somewhat unorthodox, yet incorporating this feature into the design of school buildings could have significant pedagogical benefits. The traditional image of students slouching listlessly in rows of desks, staring blankly at the front of the class, where a teacher struggles to keep their attention from drifting while lecturing at length about some dry mathematical phenomenon or other, is all too familiar. Imagine, however, a math class with clusters of students gathered around separate tables, eagerly engaged in examining a real-life math problem and sharing their ideas. Instead of strictly regimented rows of desks, the ideal classroom should have a variety of more relaxed furniture arrangements, in order to facilitate different kinds of classroom activity and interaction.

Intelligent companies have already implemented more up-to-date design concepts into their work premises, in order to ensure employees can work to the best of their abilities. It is high time schools followed suit, in order to enrich students' learning experiences. In my view, the first two steps to achieving this are: designing classrooms to have interesting views, and altering seating arrangements to encourage student interaction.

Part IV Analyzing the Model Composition: Content



One-sentence summaries

A composition should be clear and coherent. Having read it, anyone should be able to summarize the main ideas in just one sentence. Whenever you read a text, see if you can do this. Write down your one-sentence summary in your notebook. By learning to summarize extended pieces of writing as clearly and succinctly as possible, you will not only improve your reading comprehension skills, but you will also appreciate how well-written texts are crafted for clarity and coherence.

TASK F

Below are three summaries. Which one best describes the model composition on page 20?

- There are advantages and disadvantages to having students sit at rows of desks.
- Two features of building design can aid learning: window views, and proper seating plans.
- The best ways to make sure students don't lose their focus in the lesson is to have relaxed furniture arrangements and encourage collaboration.

Compare the summary that you chose with the thesis sentence in the model composition. What do you notice? What does a comparison of the summary and thesis sentence tell you about the function of a thesis sentence?

TASK G

Choose the correct option to answer the questions.

- Why does the writer say the idea of 'a classroom with a view' might seem odd?
 - Looking around while working usually reduces concentration.
 - Students are normally told off for looking out the window.
 - Most traditional classrooms have windows of limited size.
 - The concept has been tried and it did not have the desired effect.
- What does the writer say about dreaming?
 - It has been shown to enhance school grades.
 - It should be encouraged during class time.
 - It helps the mind absorb new information.
 - It is not usually seen as helpful to learning.
- According to the writer, seating arrangements can help students to...
 - communicate better with each other.
 - listen more closely to the teacher.
 - relax after a stressful examination.
 - chat with each other during recess.
- In the final paragraph, the phrase "follow suit" means...
 - "set an example".
 - "be an exception".
 - "come up with new ideas".
 - "do the same thing".

Part V Analyzing the Model Composition: Grammar / Syntax

Grammar

Connecting ideas

Connectors link a new idea with another idea in a previous sentence or in a previous part of the same sentence. They can be used for:

- **Giving reasons and results:** as a result, consequently, so, therefore, insofar, in that
E.g.: *Classrooms with large windows and expansive views therefore make perfect sense. (paragraph 2)*
- **Comparing and contrasting:** after all, however, instead, nevertheless, on the other hand, alternatively, in any case, on the contrary, even so, although, whereas, yet, by contrast
E.g.: *Yet it has been shown that concentration and mental acuity actually improve when... (paragraph 2)*
- **Adding information:** above all, after all, besides, furthermore, in addition, likewise, moreover, similarly, what's more, as well
E.g.: *Moreover, a pleasant view can boost students' mood, facilitating learning. (paragraph 3)*
- **Condition:** if so, if not, otherwise, as long as, assuming (that), on condition that, provided (that), so long as, supposing (that), unless
E.g.: *...students must have their eyes constantly on the whiteboard, the teacher, or their textbooks; otherwise, they are not really concentrating. (paragraph 2)*

Tip

Use connectors with care.

Some students make the mistake of overusing connectors, with the result that their writing sounds mechanical and does not flow naturally. **Therefore**, remember to use connectors sparingly, only when they serve to highlight an important logical connection. (For example, do you think the word 'therefore' is really necessary in the previous sentence? Or would this paragraph flow better without the connector 'therefore'?)

TASK H

Circle the correct option.

1. Shy students should be given the opportunity to speak in small groups, **otherwise** / **besides** they may never overcome the anonymity associated with large groups.
2. The way teachers plan lessons in advance is crucial to ensuring students meet the required learning objectives. **Even so** / **Similarly**, the most meticulously planned lesson can still go wrong if teachers lack the necessary experience and skill to manage a classroom effectively.
3. Education should provide opportunities to develop respect for your fellow students and their ideas. **Yet** / **In that** reality is often different.
4. Traditionally, education is primarily thought of as the acquisition of knowledge. **Nevertheless** / **As a result** education also helps shape students' morals and beliefs.
5. **Although** / **Supposing** most students find group work satisfying, others feel reluctant to work in groups.

TASK I

Complete the following texts in a logical way. Pay attention to the connectors.

1. I expected my teacher to be impressed with my essay. Instead _____
_____.
2. If the examination is postponed, I can go with you on the excursion. If not, _____
_____.
3. This time you had better turn in your assignment on time, otherwise _____
_____.
4. As a result of our class's poor performance on the test, _____
_____.
5. Forcing children to take part in activities they don't like may demotivate them, and likewise _____
_____.

Grammar

The Gerund

A 'gerund' is a verb that ends with '-ing'. Gerunds can act as:

- a subject E.g.: *Contemplating random visual stimuli helps the mind to assimilate information on a deeper level*
- an object (of a verb or of a preposition) E.g.: *In my view, the first two steps to achieving this are...*

One characteristic feature of English, especially written English, is the use of gerunds as the subject of a verb.

TASK J

Use your own ideas to complete the following sentences.

1. Revising the night before an exam can _____.
2. Praising children too much causes them to _____.
3. Changing schools mid-way through the school year might _____.
4. Getting top grades should not _____.
5. Reading for pleasure helps students to _____.

Now, complete the following sentences by adding a gerund after the preposition. The first item has been done for you, as an example.

6. Education should also be concerned with *instilling moral values, such as social responsibility*.
7. Students should be credited for _____.
8. There are numerous educational benefits linked to _____.
9. The educational program should focus primarily on _____.
10. Students need guidance if they are thinking about _____.

Part VI Analyzing the Model Composition: Vocabulary

Using descriptive vocabulary

TASK K

Below is an extract from the model composition on page 20. Some parts have been changed, in order to sound less descriptive. For items 1-11, write the words that are actually used in the model composition. For each item, with a partner, discuss why the writer of the model composition used these words. What extra information and emotion is added by using these words and not the more neutral words that were substituted in the extract? You may need to use a dictionary to help you.

Tip

Using your memory

First, find and read the relevant passage in the model composition on page 20. Then, as you fill in the gaps with words from the original text, try to do so from memory, without looking back at the text. This is a good way to train your memory and to assimilate the words and phrases from the model composition.

“The image of students sitting in their chairs, looking at the front of the class, where a teacher tries to keep them interested while talking for a long time about mathematics, is all too familiar. Imagine, however, a math class with small groups of students sitting at separate tables, spending time examining a real-life math problem and telling each other their ideas.”

1. sitting = _____
2. in their chairs = _____
3. looking = _____
4. tries = _____
5. keep them interested = _____
6. talking for a long time = _____
7. mathematics = _____
8. small groups = _____
9. sitting at = _____
10. spending time = _____
11. telling each other = _____

Part VII Analyzing the Model Composition: Rhetoric

Tip

Joining two main ideas

- The 'thesis sentence', usually the final or the penultimate sentence in the introductory paragraph, is a key part of any composition, as it states clearly the main ideas that the writer will explore in the rest of the composition.
- In the ECPE exam you are allowed thirty minutes in which to write a composition - enough time to explore only a few main ideas related to the topic. You can express these ideas together in the thesis sentence.

TASK L

Look at the thesis sentence from the model composition on page 20. Underline the two main ideas to be examined in the main body of the composition that follows.

"In my view, there are two main features that would make for the ideal school building: classrooms with impressive views, and carefully planned seating arrangements."

TASK M

In the model composition, the writer joins the two main ideas together using a very simple technique: listing one idea after the other, after a colon (:). There are various ways in which main ideas can be introduced.

Items 1-4 are thesis sentences taken from various compositions about education. Fill the gap in each with ONE correct word. Then, match each sentence to one of the techniques underneath.

1. In my view, continuous assessment is beneficial in that it both reduces pressure on students _____ makes life easier for teachers.
2. Not only does distance learning make university study possible for students who cannot attend the university campus, _____ it also enables adult students to organize their study to fit in with their existing obligations.
3. Successful teachers are those who possess two main qualities: _____, an almost perfect knowledge of their particular subject; and secondly, certain attitudes and personality traits that will help them work with young people.
4. _____ from offering students practical advice on matters such as writing résumés and attending interviews, careers orientation services should also prepare students to enter today's flexible work market, in which the need to frequently change jobs and even careers has become the norm.

_____ introduce the first idea with 'firstly' and the second with 'secondly'

_____ introduce the first idea with 'both' and the second with 'and'

_____ introduce the first idea with a conjunction and a verb with an '-ing' ending

_____ introduce the first idea with 'not only' and the second with 'but also'

Part VIII Time to Write



Start with your thesis statement.

Before you start writing, it is a good idea to come up with a one-sentence summary of the ideas you plan to include. You can also include this one-sentence summary in the introduction of your composition, as the thesis statement. By referring back to your one-sentence summary/thesis sentence as you write, you can ensure that your composition is organized, coherent, and relevant to the topic.

Choose one of the composition topics below, complete the summary, and then write an expository composition about the topic. As you write, try to use some of the language features you have studied in this unit, so that your composition gets a high score for Grammar, Vocabulary, and Rhetoric.

TOPIC 1

Educational practices have been transformed over the past few decades. The way young people are taught in schools is still changing rapidly today. In your opinion, what are two of the most significant changes in educational methods that will occur in the near future? How will these changes benefit learners of school age? Discuss your ideas, with examples.

SUMMARY

There are two main features of the current educational system that are set to change in the near future: the way _____ and the way _____.

TOPIC 2

Many students choose to enrol at universities in a foreign country. In your opinion, in what ways do young people benefit from going abroad to follow a course of study? Give your opinions, with appropriate examples.

SUMMARY

By studying abroad, not only do students _____ but they also _____.

TOPIC 3

People make the decision to learn a new language for many different reasons, whether it be for professional development, foreign travel, or purely for personal interest. In your opinion, what are the most important benefits of mastering a second language? Discuss your ideas, with examples.

SUMMARY

In addition to _____*, people who acquire fluency in a second language also _____.

*use a gerund here