Techniques to Enhance Your Writing

Example/Illustration

*Example/illustration* is one of the most simple, straightforward techniques you will master and use. It is also the one you will *always* continue to use in writing your future papers, because all papers, whether argumentative or informational, need the support that good illustrations provide. When you use example/illustration in your writing, you make a statement, and then you offer an example that shows (illustrates) what you mean.

*Tips:*
Although this is a very straightforward technique, there are still detours and dead ends to avoid.

- Examples without a point do not help your paper. Make sure that your example has a point and that the point is the one you’re trying to make.
- Beware of piling on too many examples, but make sure that you give adequate, specific examples that show, explain, or prove your point and offer details to support your examples.
- Beware, too, of lack of transitions between examples. Be particularly wary of the phrase, “For example.” How many times can you reasonably use this phrase in an example essay before it becomes repetitive or redundant? That’s up to you—but repetition is often an indication of a lack of imagination, and it certainly won’t endear you to your reader.

Classification

*Classification* is writing that organizes, or sorts, people or items into categories. It uses an organizing principle: how the people or items are sorted. The organizing principle is directly related to the purpose for classifying. For example, you may choose to write about four food groups and how they contribute to proper nutrition.

*Tips:*

- When you classify, you are demonstrating the common denominators among ideas or objects that may appear different. Your task is to make sense of a group of people or items by organizing them into categories.
- Make sure you have a purpose for sorting the people or items.
- Give examples or explanations of what, why, and how each item fits into each category.
**Compare/Contrast**

*Comparisons* are discussions in which the writer shows similarities between two or more ideas or things; *contrasts*, are discussions in which a student indicates differences between two or more ideas or things.

**Tips:**
- Use subjects that have enough in common to be compared/contrasted in useful ways.
- Make sure you have a purpose for using the compare/contrast technique—either to help readers make a decision or to help them understand the subjects.
- Arrange your points in a logical order.

**Cause/Effect**

A *cause* is what made an event happen. An *effect* is what happens as a result of the event. Your writing may include causes, effects, or causes and effects.

**Tips:**
- If you are writing to explain causes, present real causes; if your purpose is to explain effects, offer real effects. Make sure that you don’t confuse something that happened before an event with a real cause or something that happened after an event with a real effect. For example, if you had nachos on Tuesday and get the flu on Wednesday, chowing down on nachos is not the cause of getting the flu nor is getting the flu the effect of eating nachos—you just happened to come down with the flu the next day.
- Provide sufficient and detailed examples or explanations of the causes and/or effects.

**Argument**

The good news about offering an *argument* in your writing is that, unless you’ve been living by yourself in a cave for the past 18 years, you probably already know how to argue. The bad news is that here in college, you’ll need to be persuasive, not loud. The point is not to beat an idea to death, but to invite the reader to look squarely at opposing points of view and conclude that the side you’ve chosen to argue is, after all, the most reasonable argument. *Argument*, then, is writing that takes a position on an issue and gives supporting evidence to persuade someone else to accept, or at least consider, the position or even to take (or not take) an action.

**Tips:**
- Take a strong and definite position in your writing.
- Offer solid reasons and supporting evidence to defend your position.
- Consider and offer opposing views.
✓ Be very, very careful about holding up as self-evident a truth that is substantially (if not wholly) subjective.

Example:
The abortion issue comes to mind: one person’s fetus is another person’s human being. They’re both premises, but they’re both subjective premises (no matter what your religion says to the contrary) that must be argued reasonably before you can move onto your thesis. If your premise is based on the infamous three words, “Because it is,” you know it’s time to dig a bit deeper and explain why it is.

✓ Deductive and inductive lapses happen frequently.

Example:
How about the always fun “Real men don’t eat quiche. Cynthia doesn’t eat quiche. Therefore, Cynthia is a real man”? You may be so persuaded by your own belief system or point of view that you won’t suspect there are people out there, including professors, who do not tolerate logic fallacies.

✓ Be aware of audience, voice, and tone in the paper. Particularly if you’re arguing a controversial topic, there will be strong possibility of venturing into an area where emotions run high and logic gets trampled. Acknowledge the opposing argument and attempt to address what is most compelling and troublesome in that position.

✓ Don’t lapse into the first, or ESPECIALLY, the second person:
  - First person may be acceptable if there is a useful anecdote you can offer from your own experience.
  - Second person implies that your reader has become either the target or the accomplice of the writer, neither of which ought to be the case.

✓ The tone should not become condescending, superior, or otherwise degrading to the reader or any opposition group.
  - Words like “obviously,” “of course,” “surely,” “without a doubt,” and so on, are almost always an indication either of the irrational or the unreasonable.
  - Be sure, in other words, of diplomacy: that you convince and do not offend.