

Chapter 4

ILLUSTRATION

Effective writing in any form depends upon illustration, examples that provide details and facts. When you give an example, you offer specific information about a general category. France is an example of the category, *country*, while the Pacific is an example of the category, *ocean*. Examples make writing vivid and illustrate the points you wish to make.

Examples are used mainly to support other writing strategies. Rarely will you find a piece of writing based solely on illustration. Randall Williams uses examples to support his narrative about growing up poor in “Daddy Tucked the Blanket.” James Michener includes examples in “Return to Paradise,” his descriptive essay about the South Pacific.

In later chapters, strategies that focus on explanation will use examples in support of their main points. These strategies include process analysis, comparison and contrast, classification, definition, and cause and effect. When you write persuasively you may also use examples to illustrate your position.

If you are writing about a personal experience you will need to provide the examples from memory. If you are unfamiliar with the subject, you will need to gather examples from experiences of others or from books. In either case, if the examples you use are well chosen and relevant the reader is likely to accept your assertions.

Whether your purpose is to narrate, describe, explain, or persuade, use examples that are appropriate and accurate. Be sure these examples support your thesis and illustrate the points you are trying to make. While quality is more important than quantity, you will need to present enough examples to illustrate your point. Your writing will be more convincing if you offer specific examples rather than broad generalizations.

Chapter Selections

Sweet Potato Pie by *Eugenia Collier*

SWEET POTATO PIE

by Eugenia Collier

Born in Baltimore in 1928, Collier attended Howard University, Columbia University, and the University of Maryland. Much of her professional career has been spent as an English professor, most recently at Howard University. Her poems and stories have appeared regularly in Negro Digest, Black World, TV Guide, and The New York Times. Her story “Marigolds” won the 1969 Gwendolyn Brooks Award for Fiction. Collier has also written scholarly articles on black American literature. She wrote “Sweet Potato Pie” as a gift of love to an old friend. His family, she says, “exemplified the strength of the black family . . . so often assailed, put-upon, oppressed, but still prevailing because of their own toughness of spirit and love for each other.” In the excerpt presented here, Collier uses examples to describe the culture of Harlem.

Word Alert

ancestral	related to or from ancestors
boisterous	rowdy, noisy, exuberant, high-spirited
epic	extending beyond the usual in size or scope
flitting	to move about rapidly and nimbly
Garvey Day	in honor of Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) who preached black nationalism and pride in the 1920s
Harlem	This residential and business section of Manhattan in New York City is one of the largest black communities in the United States.
hawkers	those that hawk wares; peddlers
livid	discolored by bruising
mythic	imaginary or fictitious
ominously	having a menacing or threatening aspect
panorama	an unlimited view of all visible objects over a wide area
saucily	flippant and bold in manner or attitude
saunter	stroll; to walk in an idle or leisurely manner
savor	to delight in, to enjoy, to relish

siren songs an alluring utterance or appeal, especially one that is seductive or deceptive

thongs crowds

Whenever I come to Harlem I feel somehow as if I were coming home—to some mythic ancestral home. The problems are real, the people are real—yet there is some mysterious epic quality about Harlem, as if all black people began and ended there, as if each had left something of himself. As if in Harlem the very heart of blackness pulsed its beautiful tortured rhythms. Joining the throngs of people that saunter Lenox Avenue late afternoons, I headed for Charley’s apartment. Along the way I savored the panorama of Harlem—women with shopping bags trudging wearily home; little kids flitting saucily through the crowd; groups of adolescent boys striding boldly along—some boisterous, some ominously silent; tables of merchandise spread on the sidewalks with hawkers singing their siren songs of irresistible bargains; a blaring microphone sending forth waves of words to draw passersby into a restless bunch around a slender young man whose eyes have seen Truth; defeated men standing around on the street corners or sitting on steps, heads down, hands idle; posters announcing Garvey Day; “Buy Black” stamped on pavements; store windows bright with things African; stores still boarded up, a livid scar from last year’s rioting. There was a terrible tension in the air; I thought of how quickly dry timber becomes a roaring fire from a single spark.

ACTIVE READING

The Active Reading exercise gives you an opportunity to reread the paragraph with a critical eye. By answering the questions that follow, you will extend and sharpen your understanding of the selection. This activity will help you become a more efficient reader and a more effective writer.

1. The narrator begins by telling us the setting for this paragraph and how she feels about it. What place is the author writing about?
2. The narrator says she feels as if she is coming home. What does this place feel like to her?

The narrator says that even though the problems and people are real, there is “some mysterious epic quality” about the place. This gets the reader’s attention which is maintained by the author’s use of examples to illustrate her point.

3-5. What three examples of this mysterious quality does the author present?

6. “Joining the throngs of people that saunter Lenox Avenue late afternoons, I headed for Charley’s apartment.” This sentence serves which of the following purposes?
 - a. shows the narrator as part of the group
 - b. acts as a transition from a general description to specific examples
 - c. takes the reader from the abstract to the concrete
 - d. all of the above
7. The narrator says, “Along the way, I savored the panorama of Harem—“ Does she experience this as pleasant or unpleasant? What word in this statement tells you so?

The author describes the sights and sounds of Harlem. This panorama is made vivid for the reader with examples that illustrate the “beautiful tortured rhythms of Harlem.” Identify the people or things described by the phrases below.

8. _____ with shopping bags trudging wearily home
9. _____ flitting saucily through the crowd
10. _____ striding boldly along—some boisterous, some ominously silent
11. _____ spread on the sidewalks
12. _____ singing their siren songs of irresistible bargains
13. _____ sending forth waves of words
14. _____ into a restless bunch
15. _____ whose eyes have seen Truth
16. _____ standing around on street corners or sitting on steps, heads down, hands idle
17. _____ announcing Garvey Day
18. _____ stamped on pavements
19. _____ bright with things African
20. _____ still boarded up
21. _____ from last year’s rioting

Throughout the paragraph we see the rhythms of Harlem as both beautiful and tortured. At the end, the author summarizes by describing the atmosphere on the street and by offering her opinion.

22. What word best describes the feeling in the air?
- tense
 - joyful
 - relaxed
 - sad
23. In the closing the narrator says, “I thought of how quickly dry timber becomes a roaring fire from a single spark.” What opinion is the author expressing here?
- large amounts of dry timber in the street are dangerous
 - people should be careful when handling matches
 - people in Harlem are like dry timber ready to ignite and riot again
 - all of the above
24. To what does the author compare “a terrible tension in the air”?
- dry timber
 - a roaring fire
 - a single spark
 - all of the above
25. The author uses transitional words and phrases to link ideas in this paragraph. List at least five.
26. The author’s primary purpose in this selection is to:
- inform
 - persuade
 - entertain

The Active Reader exercise can be scored using the answer key and grading grid. Enter your grade in the progress chart.

GUIDED WRITING

The Guided Writing exercise at the end of this chapter (page 95) provides topics and plans for writing paragraphs and essays that use examples. Select a topic and write an illustrative paragraph by following the suggested guidelines.

GUIDED WRITING

This part of the chapter will help you apply what you have learned about writing paragraphs and essays that use examples. Choose one of the topics listed below for each writing assignment you do. If you want to write about something else, ask your instructor if the topic is appropriate for writing that uses examples. Follow the plan that applies to write your composition. Submit your completed composition to the instructor for evaluation. When you receive a grade for this work, enter it in the progress chart.

WRITING TOPICS

- Describe or tell about a place filled with people and action. Use examples to illustrate the panorama of life that makes this place memorable.
- Describe a visit to a fair or marketplace. Use examples that stimulate the senses: sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch.
- Choose a holiday experience to tell about and use examples to show how and why it was special for you.
- Tell about pretending to be somebody other than who you are: dressing up for Halloween or acting in a play. Was there a time when you needed to present yourself as somebody else or were mistaken for another person? Use examples to illustrate one of these situations.
- Write about a person whose lifestyle you admire and tell why. Offer examples that illustrate the most important aspects of the way this person lives.
- Write about an elderly person that you know who might be characterized as a long liver. Give examples of their prescription for a long life: how they live, eat, and what they do on a daily basis.

PREWRITING: GENERATING IDEAS

Now that you have selected a topic, you will need to gather information and generate ideas before you begin to write. If you are writing about a personal experience you will probably rely on your memory, other people's input, and your own creativity for generating examples. Other topics may require that you use reference works to collect information for your composition.

First, decide the major point(s) of your paragraph or essay. Then create a list of examples for each point that you wish to make. Use this list as you follow the plan for writing an illustrative paragraph or essay. Every writing strategy can use examples to illustrate points the writer wishes to make. "Sweet Potato Pie" is a descriptive paragraph that uses many examples to give the reader a panoramic view of Harlem. "Tricks! Treats! Gangway!" uses examples to tell a story about Halloween. "The Secrets of the Centenarians" uses many examples to explain how it is possible for people to live long lives.

WRITING PLAN: THE PARAGRAPH

1. Decide the point of view of the narrator, first or third person. Write an introduction that gets the reader's attention and present your topic at the beginning of the paragraph.
2. Whatever primary writing strategy you choose, use as many examples as necessary to develop your topic adequately and reinforce the point you want to make.
3. In a narrative, provide specific details about what is happening, to whom, and why. In a descriptive paragraph, appeal to as many of the five senses as you can. If you are explaining a process, present facts and explanations.
4. Write a conclusion to your paragraph that restates the topic and repeats an overview, summarizes, or expresses an opinion.
5. To create unity in your writing, make sure that each sentence in the paragraph relates to the topic. Your writing will be coherent if ideas follow one another in a logical pattern and sentences flow smoothly from one to the other. Use transitions to link or connect ideas. The list of transitional words and phrases at the back of this book is for your use and reference when you write.

6. Use variety in your choice of words to maintain reader interest. Where appropriate, use figurative language to increase the impact of your words and to stimulate the reader’s imagination. The most commonly used figures of speech are the simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole. Definitions of literary rhetorical terms can be found in the Glossary.
7. The title of your paragraph should be a word or phrase that tells what you are writing about and captures the reader’s interest. Create a title for your first draft and review it before making it final.

WRITING PLAN: SHORT AND EXTENDED ESSAYS

While short and extended essays are similar—both have introductory and concluding paragraphs—the extended essay has more development paragraphs. “Tricks! Treats! Gangway!” is a short narrative essay that uses description and examples. “Secrets of the Centenarians” is an extended essay that explains and supports its thesis about long lived and many examples.

Introductory Paragraph(s)

1. Decide the narrator’s point of view. Is the narrator of the essay involved in the action (first person), or an observer outside the action (third party)?
2. Write an attention-getting opener for your essay. Tell what the essay is about by introducing your topic and purpose. This is the thesis statement, the main idea to be supported throughout the essay.
3. Use your introductory paragraph(s) to set the tone for the essay, your attitude toward the subject. The tone of an essay might be serious or humorous, formal or informal.
4. State your plan for the development of this essay. An extended essay may contain more than one introductory paragraph.

Development Paragraph(s)

1. Each development paragraph can be used to examine a different aspect of your subject. Let the reader know your topic or focus for each new paragraph.
2. Set the tone for the paragraph, your attitude toward the subject. The tone might be serious or humorous, formal or informal.

3. Whatever primary writing strategy you choose, use as many examples as necessary to develop your topic adequately and reinforce the points you want to make.
4. In a narrative, provide specific details about what is happening, to whom, and why. In a descriptive essay, appeal to as many of the five senses as you can. If you are explaining a process, present facts and explanations.
5. If you are writing an extended essay, use the development paragraphs to include more details and examples that support and illustrate your thesis.
6. All sentences in a paragraph should relate to the topic and to one another. All paragraphs in an essay should support the topic and follow some logical order. Use transitions to link ideas within paragraphs and to make connections between paragraphs. Refer to the list of transitional words and phrases at the back of the book.
7. Use variety in your choice of words to maintain reader interest. Where appropriate, use figurative language to increase the impact of your words and to stimulate the reader's imagination. The most commonly used figures of speech are the simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole. Definitions of literary and rhetorical terms can be found in the Glossary.

Concluding Paragraph(s)

1. Restate the thesis in some way for emphasis. Use your most powerful example(s) in your conclusion for greatest impact.
2. Present an overview, summarize the major points, offer an opinion, or reach a conclusion that reinforces the point of your essay
3. More than one paragraph may be used to conclude an extended essay.
4. The title of your essay should be a word or phrases that tells what you are writing about and captures the reader's interest. Create a title for your first draft and review it before making it final.

CHECKLIST FOR REVISION

1. My composition has a first or third-person point of view. I begin with a strong statement that gets the reader's attention, introduce my topic, and set the tone. If the composition is an essay, I state my thesis in the opening paragraph(s).

2. Each development paragraph examines a different aspect of my subject. My essay includes enough examples to develop the topic adequately and reinforce major points.
3. In a narrative I provide specific details about what is happening to whom, and why. In a descriptive composition, I appeal to the five senses. In explaining a process I present facts and explanations.
4. In an extended essay, I use the development paragraphs to include more details and examples that support and illustrate the thesis.
5. In concluding my paragraph or essay I present an overview, summarize, offer an opinion, or reach a conclusion that reinforces my point. I use my most powerful examples(s) here for greatest impact.
6. Sentences within each paragraph relate to the topic. Development paragraphs follow a logical order and support the point of the essay. I use transitions to link ideas within paragraphs and to make connections between paragraphs.
7. I use variety in my choice of words to maintain reader interest. Where appropriate, I use figurative language to increase the impact of my words and to stimulate the reader's imagination.
8. I revised the form and content of my work, and read each draft closely to find and correct errors in mechanics: punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, and usage.
9. The title of my paragraph or essay tells what I wrote about and captures the reader's interest.

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