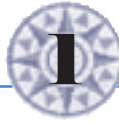


# Chapter 1



You are  
here.

## THE GENERAL IDEA AND TOPICS

### UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING

Now that you've decided to study this book, you are “en route” to discovering how to write effectively. There are many ways to reach this objective. Our “route” is just one of these and is quite simple. Once we begin, you will understand why we call it “a way to effective writing.”

As we start our trip, let's talk about the concept of the **general idea**.

**The general idea is the idea expressed in the first paragraph of a text; it's the idea that will state the subject to be developed in the text.**

Let's take a look at an example:

When looking at a newspaper, we see the following headline: **Severe Thunderstorm Causes Widespread Damage and Chaos in Rush-Hour Traffic.**

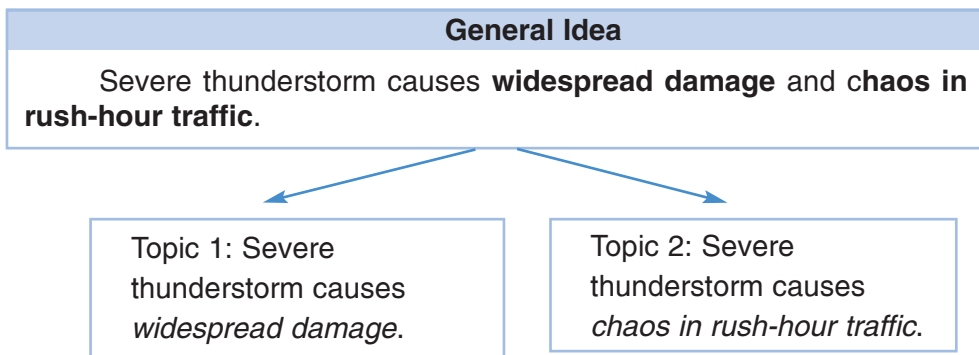
As you can see, the headline in the newspaper gives a general idea of the subject that will be dealt with in the article that follows. For our purposes, we can consider the general idea to be similar to a newspaper headline.

One part of the general idea in the above headline indicates that the article will talk about the damage caused by the thunderstorm. There is, therefore, in the **general idea**, what we can call a **topic: widespread damage**.

In the same way, there is reference to the chaotic traffic conditions caused by the thunderstorm. So we see that there is another **topic** included in the **general idea: chaos in the rush-hour traffic**.

To clearly show what we mean by **topic**, let's simplify it by saying that a **topic is a theme that is contained in the general idea**. The general idea, therefore, can contain one, two, or more topics.

What we've just explained can be visualized in the following way:

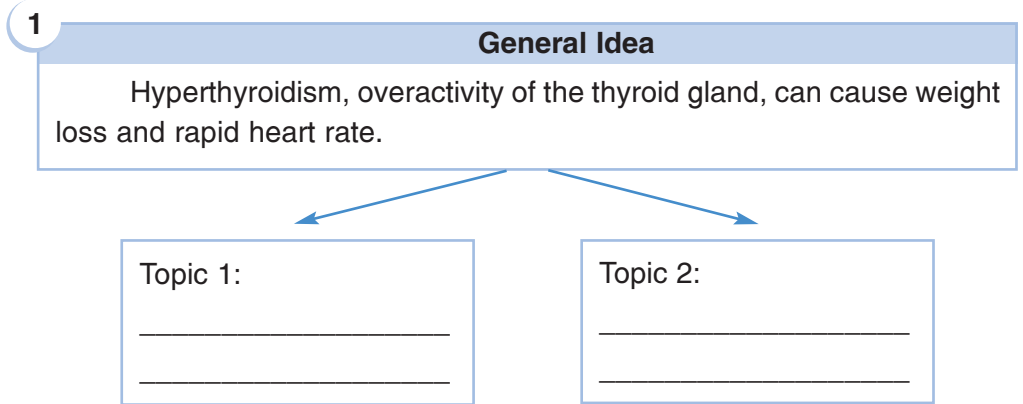


It's easy, isn't it?

Let's practice a little.

## Exercise I

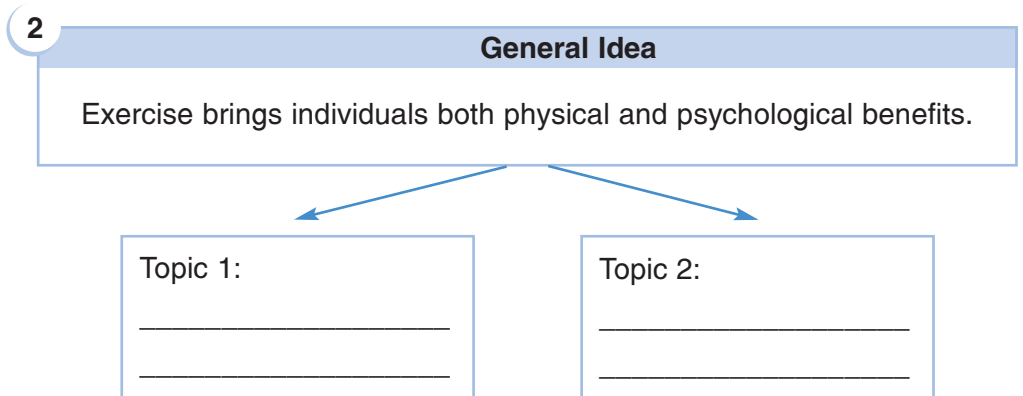
Write out the two topics that are expressed in each of the following general ideas.



**Answers:** Topic 1: Hyperthyroidism can cause weight loss.

Topic 2: Hyperthyroidism can cause rapid heart rate.

Answers equivalent to those suggested should be considered correct.



**Answers:** Topic 1: The physical benefits of exercise.

Topic 2: The psychological benefits of exercise.

Answers equivalent to those suggested should be considered correct.

# Chapter 3



You are here.

## CREATING THE TOPIC SENTENCE

### UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING

As you already know, the general idea expresses the subject that will be developed in a text. The general idea is linked to its topics, and as was pointed out in Chapter 1, each topic is a theme which is part of the **general idea**.

Each topic paves the way for the details that you intend to develop and, therefore, each topic is a link between the general idea and its corresponding group of details.

**Each topic contained in the general idea has to be amplified and stated** in a sentence. This is called the **topic sentence**.

Each **topic sentence** mentions each topic included in the general idea and expands on it, serving as a link to the details. Since the topic sentence expresses the topic in an expanded form, it, in reality, substitutes it.

How can we create a topic sentence?

We begin by selecting the topic we want to treat in our text. Then we think about it and jot down any details that come to mind, that is, jot down things we know and want to mention in our text. These notes can be in a condensed form. For example:

*General idea:* Studying human nature is an endeavor that fascinates many people, especially because of the existence of different temperaments and preferences, even within the same cultural group.

*Topic 1:* Different temperaments.

*Details:* Talk about the temperament of violent individuals, give examples, narrate an event that you know of or witnessed, justify the action that took place in this episode;

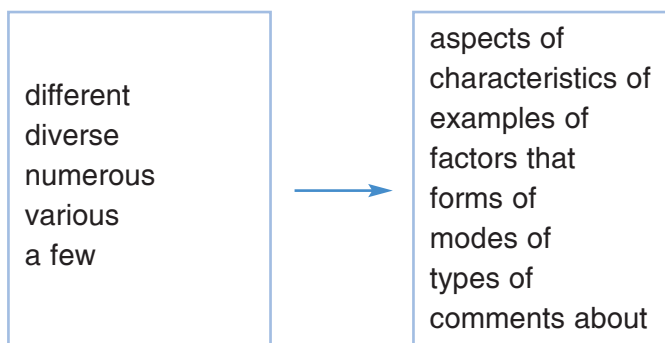
talk about the temperament of individuals who are calm, give examples;

talk about the temperament of individuals who are affectionate, narrate the case of a person you know, etc.

Once we've decided on the details that will be included in our text, we're ready to write a topic sentence linking those details with the part of the general idea that corresponds to the topic expressed in our topic sentence.

Try to find an expression or word that is general enough to encompass the different types of details that were selected. Take a look at the lists of words and expressions below.

### **Expressions used in a general sense:**



We can use other equivalent expressions.

So, which of the expressions mentioned would be appropriate for the details that we chose as examples?

If we talked about different aspects, would we be covering the different types of details? Would we be covering the brief narrative that we are going to include? What do you think? If you answered yes to both questions, you were right.

And, if we used any of the other expressions listed, would it be appropriate for all the types of details? Once again, the answer is yes.

It's not really that difficult at all, is it? The expression that we choose to use is the one that best encompasses the types of details that we are going to include in our text.

## Exercise I

1

### General Idea

Dengue fever is easily spread but difficult to eradicate.

### Details

Here are some details that are related to the facility with which dengue fever spreads. Choose the general expression that would best encompass these details.

- |                                 |                               |                          |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • puddles                       | 1. various characteristics of | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • discarded tires               | 2. different factors that     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • uncovered water storage tanks | 3. different forms of         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • uncapped discarded bottles    | 4. numerous aspects of        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • some types of plants          | 5. a few comments about       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                 | 6. various types of           | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Suggested answer:**

2. different factors that

# Chapter 12



## CREATING THE CONCLUSION

### UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING

You've already learned a lot and have pretty much mastered the steps to write a text in an organized way. Once again, just to refresh your memory, let's review the steps we've talked about so far.

Begin by jotting down on scrap paper the details and the topics that you are going to use in your text. Afterwards, create the general idea, expand on it using some basic comments about some of the details, and create the introduction. Then, write your text by reversing this order. Write down the introduction and develop the text, that is, take the topics, write the topic sentences, and then develop the corresponding details.

In addition to what we've already said about coherence and the use of connectives, is there anything else missing? What about the conclusion?

The conclusion of a text is very important and greatly influences the reader's opinion of the text. It's the last thing the writer says. It makes an impression on the reader, and for this reason, it should be well written and summarize or reemphasize the main points of the text.

Keeping this in mind, you have probably realized that, in the conclusion, you can emphasize a point, summarize the main points, suggest something, etc. To make your work easier when writing a conclusion, here are some options you might want to consider.

A conclusion can:

1. summarize the subject developed in the text;
2. emphasize a point mentioned in the text;
3. make an appeal;
4. give suggestions;
5. provide incentives;
6. encourage analytical or critical reflections;
7. express agreement or disagreement on an issue dealt with in the text, etc.

To create a conclusion, you can use one of the above suggestions. You can also use more than one; the important thing is that you get your ideas across to your reader and point out what you consider important. Now is the time to include your comments. Remember, though, that it is essential that your conclusion be coherent with what was said in the text.

Let's practice a little using what we've been talking about. Do the following exercise:

- a) Choose five of the eight texts for which you wrote introductions in the previous chapter.
- b) Select the type of conclusion that you feel is most appropriate and logical for each text you chose. Don't forget that you can combine two or more of the options given.
- c) Write complete texts, putting together the introduction, the topic sentences and the corresponding details, and the conclusion that you will create.

So, you've finally reached the point where you're going to be writing complete texts.

Now you are able to write a text in an organized way. You are prepared to write a text that is coherent, and you know how to use connectives effectively. If you use what you've learned so far, you will be writing clear and logical texts. Being a writer, however, is more than this.

If you don't consider yourself a natural-born writer and want to increase your capacity to write, as well as become more adept at dealing with a variety of subjects, do a lot of reading. We already mentioned the importance of reading in a previous chapter, but it bears repeating here, for reading is indeed essential in developing your writing skills.

In the following chapters, we are going to talk about some different approaches to writing that you can use in developing your texts.

# Chapter 14



## EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT TOPICS

### UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING

Your English teacher may give you a theme to develop as a writing assignment. Or you may have to write a composition on a midterm or final test for your class. If you are going to take a proficiency exam, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL®) or the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English, you will also have to write a text on a specific theme. Let's take a look at how these themes, whether assigned by your teacher or specified on an exam, may be presented.

When you are given a theme, the topics may be either **explicit** or **implicit**. What does this mean? Let's examine these terms.

The **explicit** topics, as the name implies, are those which are clearly stated in the theme. All you need to do is copy them and develop your text.

The **implicit** topics are those which are implied. In this case, it's necessary to use the theme as a basis to come up with topics that are logically related to it.

Coming up with topics is almost like creating subject matter to develop the theme. When doing this, though, it's important to be objective in your approach. You must be careful not to stray from the main idea or theme of your text.

So the most important thing to keep in mind when coming up with topics is to make sure, as we mentioned above, that they maintain a logical relationship to the theme. Obviously, when the topics are enumerated in the theme, this logical relation already exists, and you don't have to be concerned about it. When coming up with topics that are implied, though, you have to be careful not to distance yourself from the theme and begin writing about topics that wander off the subject being discussed.

When coming up with topics, you don't have to be concerned about separating explicit and implicit topics. When planning and writing a text, all topics should be dealt with in the same manner.

Let's practice with some themes that might be assigned by your teacher or appear on an exam. See if you can come up with topics logically related to these themes.

## Exercises

Create at least three topics for the following themes. Check the suggested answers only after you have come up with your own topics.

**Theme 1** – Contrast “pencil-and-paper” communication with communication via cell phones.

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### Suggested answers:

- a) “Pencil-and-paper” – a centuries-old means of communication.
- b) Cell phones – a symbol of modern technology.
- c) The technological evolution of communication.

**Theme 2** – Censorship is not the way to improve the quality of TV programs.

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**Suggested answers:**

- a) The average content of TV programs.
- b) TV censorship – what’s necessary and what isn’t.
- c) Improving the quality of TV programs.

**Theme 3** – To preserve the culture of a country is to preserve its identity.

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**Suggested answers:**

- a) The diverse manifestations of a nation’s culture.
- b) Culture – evolution over generations.
- c) Traditional festivals and the preservation of culture.

**Theme 4** – The family is not extinct. Rather, the roles of its “actors” have changed.

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**Suggested answers:**

- a) The individual as an “actor” in a family.
- b) The evolution of the concept of the family.
- c) A view of the modern family.

**Theme 5** – Wanton violence is one of the worst forms of violence.

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**Suggested answers:**

- a) Forms of violence.
- b) Social causes of urban violence.
- c) Possible reasons for unprovoked violence.

# Chapter 18



## IDEAS FOR WRITING: PICTURES AND QUOTATIONS

### UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING

Pictures are able to stir up the memory, provoke emotions, and stimulate the imagination. Therefore, they can be a source of ideas for writing.

It may happen that you are asked to look at a picture and then write a text about it. The procedure to develop your text using a picture instead of words as a basis for the theme is the same. Form a general idea based on the picture. Then come up with a group of topics related to this general idea and develop your text.

Quotations can also be used as a starting point for a text. You can come up with a theme for a text by getting ideas from the information or opinions expressed in quotations from a book, a newspaper, on a Website, etc.

In each of the following exercises, we are going to give you a picture and some quoted material related to it. Use these pictures and the ideas expressed in the quotations to develop the theme for your text.

## Exercise I



“Every woman, man, youth and child has the human right to a secure place to live, which is fundamental to living in dignity, to physical and mental health, and to overall quality of life. The right to housing is explicitly set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and other widely adhered to international human rights treaties and Declarations. Despite widespread recognition of the human right to adequate housing, the UN Centre for Human Settlements estimates that over 1 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing, and 100 million are homeless.”

Reproduced with permission from The People’s Movement for Human Rights Education (PDHRE): <http://www.pdhre.org/rights/housing.html>

## Some comments on the development of your text

Before reading these observations, study the picture, read the quotation from the Website of PDHRE again, and create the general idea. Once you've interpreted these on your own, see in what aspects your interpretation coincides with ours.

The drawing, in our opinion, shows the suffering of the homeless. The following topics may come to mind:

- the severity of the homeless problem in urban areas;
- the living conditions of the homeless;
- the social causes of the homeless problem.

These topics are just suggestions. You can come up with different topics which will be just as valid as these.

Now use your knowledge of and thoughts on the problem to develop your text. Describe the problem and defend your point of view, selecting, organizing and showing the relationship between the arguments, facts, and opinions. Suggest proposals to solve the problem discussed in your text.

Your text should be at least 15 lines long.