



## **Composition Practice – Syllabus**

**Course Description:** This course will briefly review concepts taught in *The Composition* while allowing the student to practice one complete composition each week, in order to gain confidence before moving on to our other composition-based classes. This class is for students who have already completed *The Composition* or who have prior experience but need additional practice in writing basic compositions.

### **Course Outline:**

**Week One:** Review of Composition Foundations

**Week Two:** Review of the Introduction

**Week Three:** Review of the Conclusion

**Week Four:** The Composition Body – Common Error 1

**Week Five:** The Composition Body – Common Error 2

**Week Six:** Narrative & Descriptive Compositions

**Week Seven:** Expository and Persuasive Compositions

**Week Eight:** Keep Practicing!

**Grading Information:** All assignments will be graded using the *The Beginning Writer* grading rubric and averaged to receive a final course grade.



## Composition Practice

### Lesson One: Review of Composition Foundations

#### SAMPLE LESSON

Throughout this class, we are going to review the concepts discussed in *The Composition*. Then, each week, you will write a new composition so that you can get lots of practice—and confidence—in these skills! Let's get started!

Remember that any strong composition begins with **a clear main idea**. This idea is what provides the direction for what is written in the composition. The main idea is the foundation: if you have a strong foundation, you will have a strong composition; if you have a weak foundation, your composition may be sloppy or confusing. Review below the topics and main ideas we presented in *The Composition*.

- **TOPIC 1:** The beach
- **MAIN IDEA 1:** Going to the beach with my family
  
- **TOPIC 2:** A train
- **MAIN IDEA 2:** Describing a train arriving at and departing from the station
  
- **TOPIC 3:** George Washington
- **MAIN IDEA 3:** General facts about George Washington

Now think about how many different main ideas you could come up with for each of the given topics.

#### THE BEACH

- Our family's beach trip in May
- General ideas about going to the beach with my family
- My favorite part about the beach
- Describing how the beach looks, smells, sounds

## **A TRAIN**

- Different kinds of trains
- How a train works
- The history of trains
- Describing a train's arrival and/or departure
- Describing how a train looks inside and out
- My recent train trip to Washington, D.C.

## **GEORGE WASHINGTON**

- Washington's childhood
- Washington's beginning in politics
- Washington's presidency
- Well-known characteristics of George Washington
- General, brief biography of George Washington's life

If you begin a composition only with a topic, the composition will be difficult to write. You will not have clear direction. In order to be successful at writing a composition, you must first begin with a **clear main idea**.

## **BRAINSTORMING –**

With a clear main idea, you now must think of all of the details that would help to explain your main idea. If the main idea you have chosen is “different kinds of turtles,” you will then write down all of the different kinds of turtles you know of. Your brainstorm list, in no particular order, might include the following:

- marine/sea turtles
- loggerhead turtles
- leatherback turtles
- Kemp's ridley and olive ridley turtles
- green turtles
- hawksbill turtle
- flatback turtles
- aquatic turtles
- red eared sliders

- mud turtles
- land turtles
- box turtles
- wood turtles
- painted turtles
- map turtles
- common musk (stinkpot!) turtles
- snapping turtles

## FOCUSING –

Ideally, your brainstorming list should be pretty full. (If you find you are having a hard time coming up with a list while brainstorming, you may want to change your main idea.) If your brainstorming process went well, you will probably have too much information. As you might see above, there are many different kinds of turtles. In order to write a successful composition, you will need to focus.

1. First, look at your main idea. If your brainstorm list is long enough, you may want to make the main idea *even more* specific. For example, our brainstorm list contains multiple types of sea turtles as well as multiple types of aquatic turtles. **This is a good place to FOCUS the main idea, if we want or need to.** We could now decide to write a composition about “different types of sea turtles” or “different types of aquatic turtles.” Maybe, we want to write a composition about “the differences between sea turtles and aquatic turtles.” Or, maybe we want to write a composition about “the differences between aquatic turtles and land turtles.” In this case, we are going to stick with the original topic, but remember that you are always welcome to—and sometimes must—change your main idea after brainstorming. This is normal and okay!
2. Next, try to find some things in your list that go together so that you can create categories. Above, we have listed numerous types of turtles, but we have listed only three main categories which will become the structure of our composition: (1) marine turtles; (2) aquatic turtles; (3) land turtles.
3. Once you have simplified and focused your categories, reasons, or steps as necessary for the given topic, you should now list some basic details for each. Do not feel like you have to write these details out in complete sentences. You only need to get the ideas on the page, even if you are only writing one word for each detail. Your list might look something like this:

- **sea turtles** – also called marine turtles; seven species of sea turtles; six can be found throughout the oceans, both warm and cool; the flatback turtle is only found in Australia; each type of sea turtle has different eating, sleeping, swimming, and mating habits and preferences; sea turtles can range in size from 2-8 feet long and 55-1500 lbs; sea turtles typically live somewhere between 50-80 years, but some live even longer.
- **aquatic turtles** – typically have leathery, smooth, soft-like shells; popular as pets; swim and like to bask in heat; are omnivores – fish (or fish pellets) and dark leafy greens; typically grow to between 4-12 inches; typically live 20-40+ years in captivity.
- **land turtles** – typically confused with tortoises; there are only two main types of land turtles – box and wood turtles; size between 5-9 inches; box turtles live 25-35 years, though some live longer; wood turtles may live up to 50+ years; also omnivores – like worms, bugs, caterpillars, snails, slugs, and fruits and vegetables; mostly traverse land, but do like to sit in small pools of water; both box and wood turtles can swim but do not have webbed feet like aquatic turtles and are not very good swimmers; usually found in forests and grasslands, or near small streams.

## OUTLINING –

With a focused brainstorm list, you can now complete the final step in composition planning: **creating an outline**. Remember that the topic and main idea create a map for your composition. So think of creating the outline like looking at a map to see several different ways to get somewhere. The outline helps you figure out the BEST way to get where you need to go.

For every idea you choose to focus on, you will create a separate paragraph. You should follow the same structure you learned in *The Paragraph* and practiced in *The Composition*. Each paragraph should have a clear topic sentence that states the topic of that paragraph. Then, you will add two to four (occasionally five!) detail sentences which explain and/or describe the topic of that paragraph. Lastly, you will add a concluding sentence which helps connect the supporting details back to the paragraph's topic sentence or to the main idea of the composition.

**Remember – when constructing an outline, you do NOT need to write complete sentences for all of the supporting details if you do not want to. You can write just a handful of words that give you an idea of how your paragraphs will be constructed. If you want to write complete sentences, it will save you time when you prepare to write the body of the essay, but again, you are not required to write complete sentences.**

Along with this lesson, we have attached three sample outlines and their corresponding compositions so that you can see the planning and writing of a three-paragraph, four-paragraph, and five-paragraph composition in action. We encourage you to review all of these documents before you begin this week's assignment.

### **FINAL NOTES –**

A clear main idea, a detailed brainstorm list, and a well-structured outline provide a foundation for a strong and successful composition. Throughout this class, we encourage you to put these skills into practice *each week!* Writing a composition doesn't need to be a big guessing game. If you practice the ideas we discussed in this lesson, writing a composition will become simpler each time.

You may want to break up the steps throughout the week. On Day 1, choose your main idea and brainstorm; on Day 2, write an outline; on Day 3 & 4, write the composition; on Day 5, edit and format the composition properly. You may be overwhelmed if you try to complete everything in a single day, so breaking the process into smaller steps can really help!

**Assignment 1:** This week, we are writing about **birthdays!** We are supplying the topic, but you have to come up with a **clear main idea**. Perhaps you can write about what you did on your most recent birthday or perhaps you can write about your dream birthday party; maybe you want to write about the best birthday present you have ever received (or given!) or maybe you want to write about how to make an amazing birthday cake. The choice is up to you!

After you have chosen your main idea, remember to **brainstorm** and **outline**. (You can do these steps on the computer, but brainstorming and outlining are often easier done by hand. We have attached a planning document with this week's lesson. Feel free to print this and use it for your brainstorming and outlining.) If you need help with these steps during the week, please feel free to reach out!

When you are ready, **write a composition** of 3-5 paragraphs. Remember that your composition should include (1) an introduction paragraph which states the topic/main idea and hooks the reader; (2) 1-3 body paragraphs that each contain a topic sentence, focused supporting details, and a concluding sentence; (3) a conclusion paragraph which restates the topic/main idea and gives closure to the composition.

**Format the composition properly:** add your name and the date to the upper left-hand corner of the page; add a title, centered above the composition; write one sentence after the other; indent the first line of each paragraph; and left-align the text. Justified text is optional but not required.

**Note:** You are *not* required to submit any of your brainstorming or an outline with your weekly homework. **You must only submit the final composition.**