

THE "WRITE" STUFF

Springfield College

School of Human Services

DEVELOPING YOUR IDEAS

Have you ever had the feeling that your paper was "light-weight"? Have you ever been told that you need to do more "analysis" but you didn't know how to do it? Have you felt "blocked" about what to write? Then read on and try these ideas:

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

You've heard of it. Try using it! Let's say that you're writing an essay about adult learning programs. You could **compare** how leading programs in the city are alike and **contrast** how the best program--ours, of course!--is different from the others. Then, go the next step. Try to figure out **why** these programs have the similarities they do; **how**, or in what ways, the best program is different from the others; and **why** these differences are significant.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Cause and effect are extremely useful tools, also! Let's go back to that paper on adult education. You could discuss the primary **causes**--the reasons-- why adult students didn't go to college when they were 18 years old. Do a high number of them have learning disabilities and therefore believed they were not "college material"? Were many of them "financially challenged"? Did some of them have young children to raise and support? If you can figure **why** these students delayed pursuing higher education, you can probably come up with some effective strategies to ensure their success now that they're in college. For example, should the programs they enter provide strong academic support? Generous scholarships and loans? Help with childcare? You could also discuss the **causes** behind these students' return to college. Career advancement? Personal growth and development?

Look at **effects**, too. How do adult students' lives change as a result of returning to college? Do they earn more money? Report higher levels of job satisfaction? Of personal satisfaction? Are their children more likely to graduate from high school, and maybe to attend college, too?

NARRATIVE

Nothing grabs your reader's attention more than a story. You can rattle off a lot of facts and figures about adult learners, and they'll be interesting, but if you profile one or two adult students in your essay, your reader will get emotionally involved. Wouldn't you want to read an essay that told you the real story about the woman sitting next to you in class today from start to finish? Wouldn't you care more about her if you knew her story? Wouldn't you understand her better than you do now?

DESCRIPTION

If you describe the situation, problem, or condition you're writing about in detail, your readers will be able to put themselves in the scene and thereby understand it better. For example, if I were writing a paper about our program, I might start off like this: "It's 9:27 and class starts in three minutes. The hallway is crowded with students --most of them clutching a large, styrofoam cup of Dunkin' Donuts' coffee-- scurrying to their classes. Soon every one of the brown padded chairs in Room 101 is occupied and the room is abuzz with chatter. It's a scene you'd encounter in any college, right? Wrong. Today is Saturday; the students in Room 101 will occupy these chairs until 5:30 p.m.; and their average age is 42. Welcome to Springfield College School of Human Services--Boston Campus." (This is an example of comparison and contrast, too--it indicates how we are like and unlike "typical" colleges.)

DEFINING

We often assume that our readers know the same things that we do, but they don't! For example, what is "Humanics" anyway? If you don't know, why would your readers know? Try defining specialized terms. Usually you'll give your readers information they didn't know that they didn't know!

CHRONOLOGY

A "chronology" is a time-line, a history. (How's that for an example of "defining"?) Chronologies are wonderful tools for helping readers set information into a context. Wouldn't your boss be impressed to learn that you're attending a college that's more than 100 years old and was started to educate YMCA professionals? For that matter, wouldn't you like to learn more about your institution's august history? (Check out the website!)

STATISTICS, FACTS, & EXAMPLES

These, of course, are the "bread and butter" of essay-writing. Nothing can better "prove" your points or convince your audience. Did you know, for instance, that SHS's graduation rate is twice as high as the typical adult education program's rate (approximately 60% to 30%)? Impressive, isn't it? That fact alone "proves" that we're doing something right! You might have to do a little research to "get it right," but it's fun and rewarding to learn more about the issues that you care about!