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**Topic Sentence-**The main idea of a paragraph, grabs your attention

**Details-**Descriptions of the topic sentence. Why? Who? How? What? When? Where?

What is the topic sentence?

1. Last night Sarah and I were walking the trail. All of a sudden, we heard the sound of an animal, a big animal. We walked faster. We heard it again. It was getting closer, and we were frightened. I began to run. Sarah followed. We made it home safely, but were scared to death!
2. Today, special effects artists do amazing tricks. King Kong, for instance, used to move jerkily, but with computer graphics King Kong moves smoothly. Why? A computer moves both camera and model to create a realistic blur.
3. Thinking of getting a new pet? What will it be? Cat, dog, hamster? Ever think of something different, a bat, for instance? Our science class will build our own bat houses with directions provided by Bat Conversation International (BCI) in Austin, Texas. By building these houses, the bat will reduce the insect population. These nocturnal animals feed on many insects, such as mosquitoes, eating as many as 3,000 in one night!

**Transition Words-**Help keep paper organized (see handout for transition words)

**Introduction-**a good introduction grabs your reader’s attention and refuses to let go. But, what is a good way to begin your writing? Here are some suggestions:

Action: “Sit close now, and I’ll tell you. Me and Otto were racing down East Street, on our bikes like we always did, flapping in the wind, leaves scattering every which way.

Conversation: “Where’s Papa going with that ax?” said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

Question: “Did you see Spirit Hawk dancing on the wind?”

Startling Fact: Contrary to what some people think, most of our learning takes place out of school.

Announcement: This is not a cookbook for the gourmet. These recipes are strictly for the cook on a tight budget.

Personal Experience: I’m glad I didn’t cry when my teacher led me to the office. Instead, I shook like a leaf!

How You Felt: My hands were sweaty! My teeth wouldn’t quit chattering. Prickly fingers ran up my spine. What would happen next?

**Conclusion-**a way to end your paragraph or story

A variety of ways to end….

Close with a question that involves the reader:

*Alfred decided that was the last time he’d ever go on a trip to Mexico. And who could blame him?*

Close with a personal comment or response:

*Seeing a drop of water under a microscope makes a person look at a river with new eyes.*

Close with a strong statement suggesting the final conclusion you hope your reader will draw:

*How teachers see their students makes all the difference in how the students see themselves.*

Close with a forceful argument, nudging the reader in a particular direction:

*Cruelty to animals must be stopped now.*

HINT: DO NOT close your paper or story by saying, “This has been a paper about…” Unless your reader dozed off, he/she already knows what you said. You must leave the reader something to think about. Close with a bang, not a whimper.

StyLe

Think of style in terms of clothing. Would you have style if you wore the same thing every day? No! You wear scarves, jewelry, hats, etc. to make your outfit more appealing and fashionable. Some days, you wear bright colors and other days you wear darker colors. Wearing one outfit and one color every day would be boring. The same is true for your paper. Try to “spice” up your paper by using different words or different sentence structures.

Which sounds better?

Chuck was stuck on an island. Chuck was desperately stranded on the deserted island.

Which sounds better?

To meet his safety needs, Chuck builds a fire, because he wants to stay warm. He finds shelter, because Chuck wants to be protected from the storm.

To meet his safety needs, Chuck builds a roaring fire to stay warm from the cold winds. Shelter in a cave also protects him from the dangerous thunderstorm.

**Colors for Style**

*Revising Your Writing with Colors*

Step 1

The first step will help you get rid of all those boring “be” verbs and replace them with exciting verbs like dashed, darted, collapsed, and captured. Using a colored pencil or crayon, circle every “be” verb you can find in your paper. When you are finished, count the number of “be” verbs and write the number at the top of your paper. When revising, cut this number in half. Look for:

be being been am are was were is would

My mom is special to me. She is very important. We are best friends. When I was little, she was there for me always. I am lucky to have her in my life.

Step 2

This step will help you vary your sentence length and uncover fragments and run-ons. You will need two different colors for this step. Using one color, underline the first sentence on your paper. You’ll have to look for end punctuation to make sure you stop in the right place. Next, using these two colors, underline every sentence in your paper, remembering to alternate colors. When you are finished, you should evaluate your sentence lengths. Are all of your sentences short? Are all your sentences long? Did you notice any really short or long sentences that could be a fragment or run-on? Make changes when you revise-your pattern of sentence length should vary.

My mom is special to me. She is very important. We are best friends. When I was little, she was there for me always. I am lucky to have her in my life.

Step 3

The third step of this process will help you change the beginning of your sentences. Using just one color, put a box around the first word or phrase of every sentence in your paper. Do you notice a pattern? Do a lot of your sentences start with the same word or phrase (e.g., I, So, When, The, My)? Make your sentences start in a variety of ways.

My mom is special to me. She is very important. She is my best friend. She is always there for me. I am lucky to have her in my life. I love her a lot.

Step 4

Now lets find some of those really bland, simple words like *very, got, get, stuff, and so*. Get rid of them! Using another color, simply cross these words out and replace them with more vivid words. In some cases, you may not need to replace the word at all.

My mom is special to me. She is very important. She is my best friend. She is always there for me. I am lucky to have her in my life. I love her a lot.

Overused Words

* Awesome

-Overwhelming, grand, splendid, breathtaking, tremendous, remarkable

* Bad

-awful, appalling, shocking, wicked, faulty, naughty, severe, regretful, unhealthy, difficult, rotten, decayed

* Beautiful

-Gorgeous, stunning, attractive, lovely, scenic, delightful, pleasing

* Big

-gigantic, large, immense, considerable, bulky, vast, spacious, tall, older

* Good

-excellent, respectable, moral, superior, enjoyable, pleasant, skillful, helpful, well-behaved, lovely

* Great

-immense, huge, famous, noble, magnificent, wonderful, horrendous, absolute, important countless

* Happy

-pleased, joyful, cheerful, delighted, cheery

* Interesting

-attractive, motivating, appealing, exciting, fascinating, remarkable

* Look

-seem, appear, come across, gaze, stare, glance, glare, glimpse

* Nice

-pleasant, polite, kind

* Really

-actually, in fact, truly, thoroughly, genuinely, sincerely, especially

* Said

-spoke, recounted, declared, stated, cried, shouted, replied, voiced

* So

-as a result, therefore, consequently

* Very

-extremely, awfully, especially, incredibly, dreadful