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## Benefits

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### **Benefits to Students**

1. Organization of material improves immediately. Students can visually box out their material and know the order and number of paragraphs necessary for answering the question in 5-7 minutes.
2. By following the boxes and connectors, students avoid summarizing the story or event.
3. Students cannot forget to write an introduction and a conclusion.
4. Reading comprehension and conceptualization increase. In order for students to box the information for their essays, they must be able to understand what they are being asked to do. This approach teaches them how to answer the question completely.
5. Students will be able to determine from the information they've written in the boxes whether the examples they've chosen are appropriate for answering the question.
6. This approach saves time and allows students to have immediate feedback.
7. Students can focus on writing good sentences because the information necessary for answering the question has already been written in the model. They need only to take the information and write it in sentence form.

### **Benefits to Teachers:**

1. Instructors will write better questions. By drawing up a model for their own essay questions, instructors can determine whether the question is stated clearly and logically, thereby avoiding future problems.
2. Grading becomes easier because instructors can tell whether students' ideas are included in the model before reading their essays.
3. Instructors know immediately how their students are conceptualizing ideas. Just by looking at their sheets, it is possible to determine whether students understand the question, and what their thought processes are.
4. Instructors can provide immediate feedback to students and help them to make corrections before they rewrite. This avoids rewriting mistakes.
5. Instructors can communicate to parents exactly where their children's strengths and weaknesses in writing lie.
6. This approach can be used for teaching essay writing, report writing, and outlining.

### **Benefits to Parents:**

1. Parents will know immediately how their children are conceptualizing ideas.
2. Parents will be able to know exactly where their children's strengths and weaknesses in writing lie.
3. From understanding the process, it is possible for parents and teachers to discuss the children's writing in a clear and understandable manner.
4. Parents will have a better understanding of their children's ability in reading comprehension.

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## PROCEDURE

What follows is the method I use to teach to my students. For all essay writing, the approach is similar. Flexibility and versatility are necessary to accommodate the levels of the individual student.

Using the blackboard as a visual tool, take your students through the following steps, and have them copy the information into their notebooks:

1. Review the purpose of an essay question and how it differs from a creative composition. The major difference is that an essay question asks the students to prove something using facts to support an answer. Therefore, students need to be selective and use only information that will answer the question.
2. I have divided the essay question into two parts : situation and directives.
  - \*A. Situation: This information is located in the first sentence or two of the essay question. When students find it difficult to begin the topic sentence or introductory paragraph, have them put this information into their own words. This information becomes the first sentence of the introductory paragraph. For the full-length literature essay, students will need to cite the TAG (title, author, genre), and the thesis statement (argument to be presented).

For the full-length social studies essay, students might cite areas to be discussed in the body of their essay. This provides students with at least two sentences for their introduction, the minimum number needed to constitute a paragraph. Of course, older students or those whose skills are a bit more developed will produce more.
  - B. Directives: These are words that tell students exactly what they need to do in order to answer the essay question. Some frequently used words are: explain, cite, tell, describe, demonstrate, refer, examine, show, choose, provide, give, compare, contrast, define, how, why, and what.

At this point, explain to your students that what they will be seeing next is a way for visually mapping out their essay. There will be a series of boxes and connectors; the number of boxes will vary according to the number of directives given in each essay question. Two boxes that remain constant are the introduction and the conclusion. The key to the success of the approach is that for each directive given in the question, students should draw a connector and a box, and label the box. Connectors are used to link boxes where information is related.

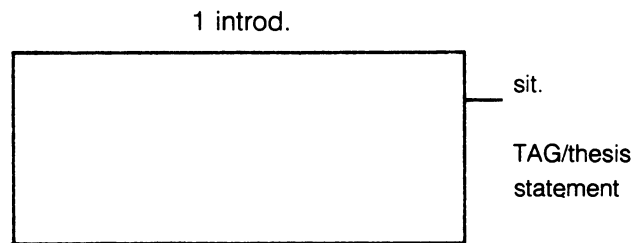
\*Sometimes essay questions are written that include only directives. In such instances, students would need to create their own situation based on the information that the directives are asking. However, for students who have trouble developing the introductory paragraph, it is important that the situation be included in the essay question (see Model Question).

Before continuing to the next step, review the purpose of the essay and the two parts. Then, write on the board an essay question that you have already used with your students, either for paragraph writing or essay writing. The reason for using something with which they are familiar is to make it easier for them to comprehend the approach the first time. Or, if you prefer, use the example provided .

Sample essay question : Full-length Literature Essay (four or more paragraphs)

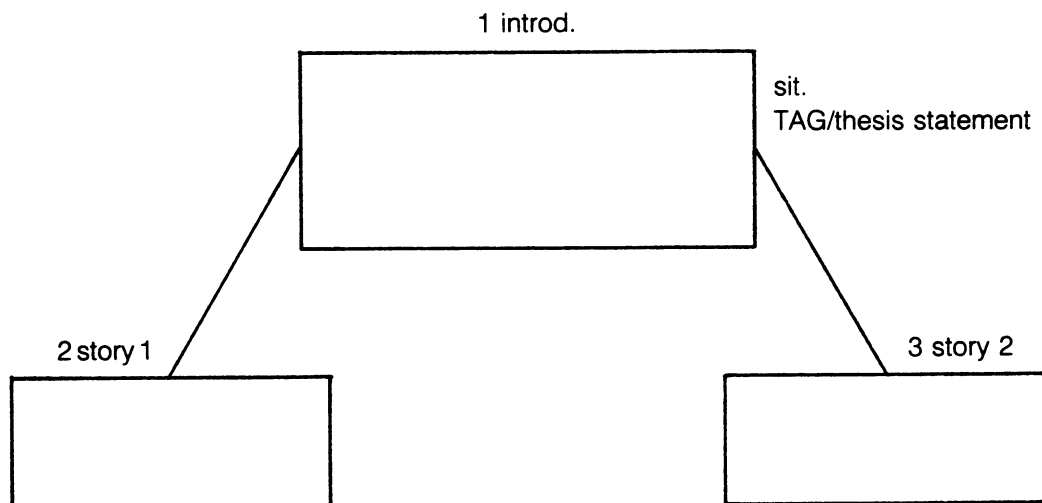
People often make decisions that affect others. From your reading, choose two stories and a character from each. Tell what decision each character made and how it affected someone else. Provide an example for each to support your ideas.

1. Ask your students to find the situation. They should respond with “People often make decisions that affect others.” Have them draw a box in the center of their paper toward the top and label it “1 Introduction.”



Next, have them label to the side “situation,” “TAG / thesis statement.”

2. Now ask your students to find the first directive—“choose two stories.” Draw a connector and a box from each side of the introduction and label them “2/story #1,” and “3/story #2,” respectively.



3. Locate the remaining directives and draw the appropriate number of connectors and boxes, labeling the boxes along the way. After all of the directives have been used, draw a connector from the last box on both sides of the diagram and draw the last box, “4/ conclusion.” The model will look like this:

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## Model Question

Questions must be well written to make it possible for students to answer them. As instructors, sometimes we know exactly what kind of information we want to ascertain from our students, but somehow what they write is different from what we want. This problem occurs for one of three reasons: Students have not prepared for the essay; students are experiencing reading comprehension difficulty; or the question was not clearly stated.

Writing the essay is a very involved process that evaluates students' ability to comprehend the question, choose appropriate information to answer it, and then organize the material so that it makes sense. Therefore, the type of information included and the choice of directives used in the essay question are very important. Here are three hints for writing good essay questions:

1. Include the situation or problem as part of the essay question. Students who are experiencing problems beginning their introductory paragraph can simply put this information into their own words and use it as the first sentence of their paragraph. Students who are experiencing difficulty comprehending the purpose of an introductory paragraph can "copy" the situation from the essay question until they are capable of writing their own.
2. Decide exactly what kind of information you wish to ascertain from your students and how you would like them to organize their essay. Then write your directives accordingly.
3. Be as specific as possible. One of the most difficult concepts for students to understand is that of substantiating their ideas using specific examples from the material studied. Tell them how many examples to provide to support their ideas.

One way to be certain that your essay question is clearly written and organized is for you to cluster the question before giving it to your students. If you can cluster the question without any difficulty, so can your students.

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Sample essay question: literature essay question that is vague:

How is trust violated in *The Pigman*, by Paul Zindel?

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For students whose essay skills are highly developed, there will be no problem in writing the essay. Students will automatically know that their introduction will include something about violating trusts, the TAG, and a thesis statement. Specific examples will also be included in the body of the essay, and they will know that they must develop at least two situations that illustrate a violation of trust. However, for those students who are not at this skill level, this essay question will present some problems.

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Sample essay question: same literature essay question

Trust is a very important aspect in any relationship. A violation of this trust

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## Persuasive Essay

The purpose of the persuasive essay is to have students try to convince an audience. Depending on the essay question, students may or may not actually name the audience that they are addressing in their introductory paragraph; however, knowing their audience and mentally placing themselves in their audience's position will help students determine what kinds of reasons to use in their argument. In addition, their audience will also determine the tone and word choice of their essay.

The question is designed in a similar way to that of other essay questions; however, sometimes the situation and directives are separate, as in the example cited below.

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### Sample A: three paragraph essay

Situation:	You want to have a party at your house after graduation, but first you must get your parents' permission.
Directives:	Provide three reasons that will convince your parents that you should have this party. Provide one example for each reason stated.
Audience:	parents

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The clustering model will look something like the one on the following page: