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From the Ground Up: Developing Foundational Writing Skills

CDE sponsored READING Conference

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I. Grounding Our Work In Research

- Cognitive Demands of Writing

II. Writing Matters: Creating Sentences From Scratch

- Teaching Parts of Speech for Sentence Development
- Using the Clause to Build Sentences of Varying Structure

III. Building a Solid Foundation: Paragraph Skills

- Lists & Categorization
- Graphic Organizers and Webbing
- Basic & Expanded Paragraphs

IV. Word Lists for Writing

Cognitive Demands of Writing

Transcription Skills

- **Motor Component:** Whether students handwrite or type, part of the mind is engaged in letter formation.
- **Spelling:** Even if students are not penalized for spelling, they must still sound out and spell their words so that the reader can understand the text.
- **Mechanics:** Students must adhere to the conventions of writing, not only capitals and periods, but also the mechanical structures necessary to cluster groups of words effectively for meaning.
- **Syntax:** Students must write coherent sentences, including appropriate structure and variety.
- **Vocabulary:** Students must use words that convey their intended message and vary those words to reflect the development of their ideas.
- **Oral Language:** Students use oral language before and more often than they do written language. They must learn the differences between spoken and written communication, and they must learn to turn the ideas they speak into the ideas they write.
- **Text Structure:** Students must be able to apply a knowledge of introductory, supporting, and concluding sentences and paragraphs at an appropriate level of sophistication for their age and grade.
- **Recursive Processes:** Students must proofread and edit their work, taking into account conventions of spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, and idea development.
- **Content:** Topics chosen from students' own experiences contain the most simple and direct content. Eventually, students must write on topics assigned by content-area teachers; they must also write using information retrieved from text they read.
- **Purpose & Audience:** Students must determine their purpose and intended audience. The purpose includes an understanding of the assignment as well as the style or approach the piece should take (e.g., narrative, informative, argument). The audience includes the style of the writing (e.g., blog, letter, essay), the discipline (e.g., English, science), and the person(s) who will evaluate the writing.

Stages of Knowledge	Idea Generation	Parts of Speech	Sentence Parts	Paragraph/ Essay Parts
Definition		learn definition	learn definition	ability to discuss
Identification		recognize in text	recognize in text	recognize in text
Create in Isolation	generate/ categorize list	provide examples in isolated sentences	provide examples in isolated sentences	create using known topic
Create in Application	generate/ categorize list for content-based assignment	use in paragraphs	use in paragraphs	create using content-based topic

Elementary Grammar Reference Sheet (K-3)

Keep two things in mind:

- We teach grammar to improve writing. If you cannot justify teaching a particular concept in terms of improving a student’s writing, don’t teach it.
- The best grammar exercises involve students writing sentences that contain and reinforce various grammatical concepts.

Parts of Speech: Consider the job the word does in the sentence.

• noun	names a person, place, thing, (idea)	John, school, bench, (peace)
• verb	action word (linking, helping)	jump, (am, seem)
• pronoun	takes the place of noun	he, you, they, me
• adjective	describes a noun (or pronoun)	ugly, sleepy, blue
• adverb	describes a verb, (adjective, or other adverb)	quickly, soon
• preposition	begins a phrase (anything a plane can do to a cloud)	in, on, around
• conjunction	joins 2 words or 2 groups of words	and, whenever
• article	<i>teach in adjective family</i>	<i>a, an, the</i>
• interjection	<i>expresses emotion - inessential</i>	<i>whoa!</i>

Sentence Parts: Clauses are the building blocks to all sentence writing.

For all:

simple subject	what’s doing the action (the “doer”)	<u>John</u> went to the store.
simple predicate	main verb (use verb/predicate interchangeably)	John <u>went</u> to the store.
simple sentence (1st and up)	complete thought with one s-v (subject-verb) relationship	John went to the store.
compound sentence (1st and up)	2 complete thoughts, each with its own s-v relationship, joined by comma + and, but, or	John went to the store, but it was closed.

For all teachers and students 3rd grade and up (introductory material):

complete subject	what’s doing the action and its modifiers		<u>My best friend</u> met me here.
complete predicate	main verb/action plus its baggage		My best friend <u>met me here</u> .
clause	group of words with subject and predicate		John went to the store because she is finished
independent clause	clause that can stand by itself	I	John went to the store
dependent clause	clause that cannot stand by itself	D	because she is finished
simple sentence	one independent clause	I	John went to the store.
compound sentence	2 independent clauses joined by comma + for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so	I, fanboys I	John went to the store, but it was closed.
complex sentence	1 independent clause and 1 or more dependent clauses	ID D,I	John went to the store because he needed milk. When John went to the store, he forgot his wallet.
direct object	receives action of verb		John threw the <u>ball</u> .

Introducing Parts of Speech in K-5

Noun	Classroom Naming/Labeling Nature/Street Walk Categorization	
Verb	Classroom Naming/Labeling Nature/Street Walk Conjugation Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow Verb Charades	
Pronoun	Family Tree Passage Reading (pronoun replacement)	
Adjective	Classroom Naming/Labeling Nature/Street Walk Object Description Coloring/Counting Sense Exploration Adjective Charades	
Adverb	Verb Description	
Preposition	Student/Chair Plane/Cloud Paper/Words	
Conjunction	Plus Sign Humans Holding Hands Walk/Direction	

Grammar Builder Sample

adjective

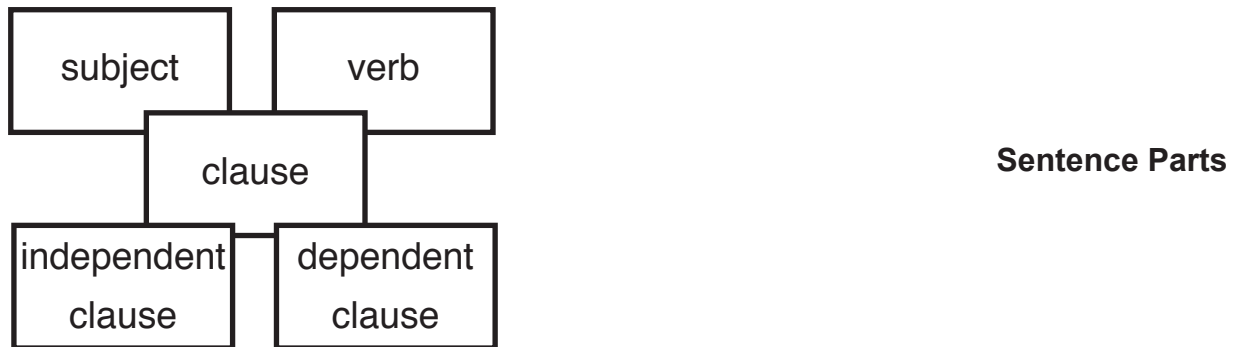
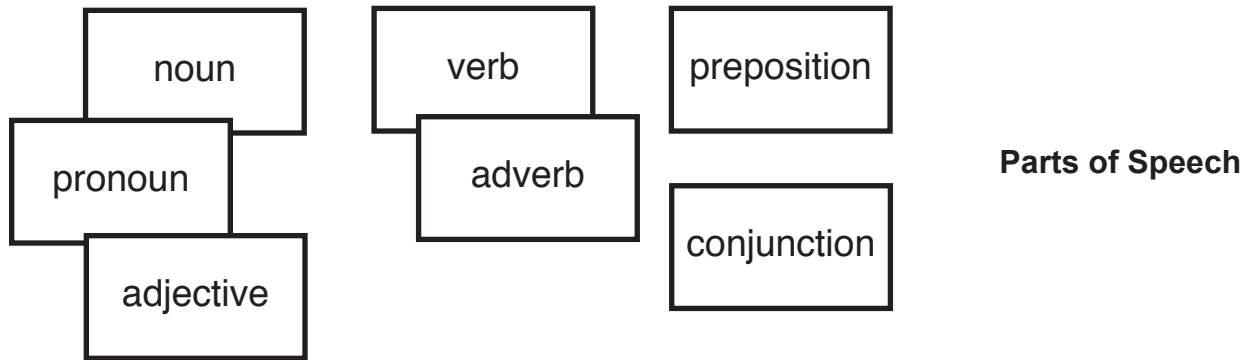
common noun

prepositional phrase

<i>ugly</i>	<i>toad</i>	<i>on the mossy rock</i>

The Warm-Up

Displaying grammar vocabulary cards: During the warm-up and any identifying activities, the teacher (and ideally the students) should display their cards using the layouts below. Students should learn to organize the cards as such independently. This practice will help students internalize the relationships between the different parts of speech. They will understand the way words, phrases, and clauses work together, improve their syntax comprehension, and develop sentence writing and expanding skills.



On the next page: This activity sheet (and similar sheets) have several advantages.

- (1) They move students quickly from “identify” to the text generation activities that truly benefit writing.
- (2) They are interactive, allowing students to work together, share results, and check their work with each other -- in a non-punitive way.
- (3) They are instructive (a rarity for a “worksheet”).

Now It's Your Turn!

IECC: Identify, Expand, Combine, Create

Adjectives

Identify: Underline the adjectives in the following sentences. (Do not include articles.)

1. The hungry green alligator slithered up the muddy shore. (3)
2. The young girl was scared but brave. (3)
3. The frightened girl called to her father in a loud voice. (3)

Check your work!

Expand: Add at least 3 adjectives to each sentence to make it more descriptive.

1. The children and their leaders took vans to a campground.

2. Over a campfire, the children roasted hotdogs and sang songs.

Share: Choose #1 or #2 to share with your group.

Combine: Combine the following short sentences into one longer sentence.

1. My grandfather told jokes at the table. He is friendly. His jokes were funny.

2. My sisters and I listened to the jokes and ate snacks. My sisters were hungry. The snacks were nutritious. Our dad had prepared the snacks.

Check your work!

Create: Write your own sentences.

1. Write a sentence using these adjectives: wise, elderly

2. Write a sentence with at least two of your own adjectives in it:

Share: Choose #1 or #2 to share with your group.

Name: _____ Date: _____

noun = names a person, place, or thing

mother tickets bridge troll playground board

The mother and her daughter bought tickets to see the show.

The nasty troll lived under the wooden bridge.

A rusty nail stuck out of an old board at the local playground.

Nouns To Use

Topic: _____

Use good nouns in your own sentences below:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Sentence Check:

___ Do your sentences start with capital letters?

___ Do your sentences end with proper end punctuation?

Sample Parts of Speech Worksheet

Definition & Examples

Since this is not a quiz or test, provide a definition and plenty of good examples, allowing the student to remind himself of the concept addressed. Additionally, another adult (e.g., study hall teacher, parent) can offer brief assistance if you provide examples.

Differentiated Instruction

Customize this sheet by writing the # of words per sentence the student is to write. If your number is too large, the student is likely to write run-ons or fragments.

Word Choice

Instructors can provide words or collect a student-generated list of words, from which each student can choose 4 to use. Words can come from studied content or reflect a language arts concept being taught (e.g., oo nouns or nouns with the base -port- in them).

Topic

The instructor should not feel obligated to fill in a Topic. If the Nouns to Use are oo nouns, for example, a topic will prove too restrictive.

Nouns
POS-Noun1
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at least words

Name: _____ Date: _____

noun = names a person, place, or thing

mother tickets bridge troll playground board

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Topic: _____

Use good nouns in your own sentences below:

1. _____

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4. _____

Nouns To Use

Sentence Check:

Do your sentences start with capital letters?

Do your sentences end with proper end punctuation?

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Sentence Check

The Sentence Check is customizable. Choose 2-3 items for her to focus particular attention on. These items should be manageable and not too far above the student's current skill level. As a skill becomes automatized, replace it with a new goal. Students should do their sentence check when with you to allow for clarifying questions. Often, I do not mark off for errors on a sheet like this one unless they are on the Sentence Check.

Five-Point Instructional Strategy

New Concept

- a. **Teacher introduces concept and then asks students to explain it, proving understanding.** In most instances, introducing a part of speech or sentence part to your students should take just a few minutes. Students should create (or you should provide) a vocabulary card with term on front, definition and examples on back; explain the term and its definition; and have them explain it back to you or, in the case of large group instruction, to each other. Students can illustrate their cards as well.

Review Concept

- a. **Students explain concept, proving understanding.** The emphasis here is on information your students have learned and can share. With most concepts this will take only a few minutes. Students should begin by verbalizing what they know from memory and then use the concept vocabulary card to elaborate on their understanding.

- b. **Students identify examples of the concept in context.** Have students sort words, sentence parts, or sentences to help them recognize the concept you are teaching. Have them identify examples of the studied element in a larger context. Professionally written sentences, from both textbooks and good literature, sometimes serve this purpose well and also offer material for further discussion.

- c. **Students create their own examples in isolation.** Students must focus primary attention on creating examples of the concept, in isolation and in applied context. Keep the emphasis on student-generated work.

- d. **Students share their examples with the instructor and their classmates.** When the students complete independent practice of a concept at their desks, always allow time to share results. This (a) validates the students' writing, (b) encourages them to write at a more sophisticated level since they anticipate an audience, (c) allows the instructor to check for competence, and (d) provides student-generated examples (whether correct or not) for further discussion and analysis.

- e. **Teacher uses examples, both correct and incorrect, for clarification and further instruction.** As the students share, the teacher writes any incorrect examples as well as any examples that show a new or interesting development that warrants discussion. Since the examples come from the students' own writing on the day in question, the teacher is able to target student difficulties immediately and strengthen class understanding. Using student examples rather than prefabricated, professionally written sentences connects students to the assignment, provides immediacy and relevance, and gives the teacher valuable information about where the students are and what they need next in order to further their writing.

Sentence Frames

Sentence frames prove particularly useful to beginning and struggling writers, writers with word-retrieval or syntax issues, and English language learners. Once students have achieved basic sentence sense and the ability to generate sentences that follow a standard, basic template, providing more sophisticated sentence frames will help students vary their sentence structure.

Foundational Sentence Frame

Subject

+

Verb

+

Object

**Who
or
What**

**is
doing
or did**

**to whom or
what, where,
when, or how.**

Specific Sentence Frames

**Title
or
Author**

**tells
explains
describes**
(choose one)

main idea.

The digit _____

is in the _____ place.

When it comes to _____,

most of us would agree that _____.

I predict that

_____.

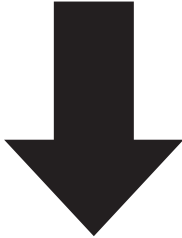
**Though _____
would disagree,**

it is clear that
_____.

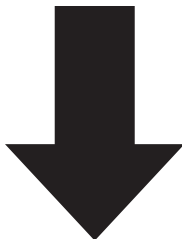
Basic Paragraph Writing - An Overview

Basic Paragraph Writing: A Step-By-Step Process

1. Identify and write the topic.



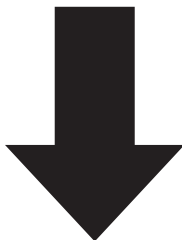
2. Generate a list of items
in support of that topic.
Select a minimum of 3 to use in
your paragraph.



3. Turn the topic into a
topic sentence.



4. Turn selected list items into
supporting sentences.



5. Reword the topic sentence
(perhaps expressing your
opinion of the topic) as the
concluding sentence.

Basic Paragraph Writing: Explanatory Notes

1. The topic can come from the instructor or the student. At least at first, topics should be of interest to the student and in areas where the student has some knowledge in order to reduce cognitive overload. Once the basic paragraph structure is comfortable to the student, content can be taken from course material and outside sources.

2. No matter the length of the writing task, the student begins the assignment by generating a list of ideas. High school students should have little difficulty making lists of at least ten items. Initially, the entire class can generate the list together. Sometimes lists can be stand-alone assignments.

3. Topic sentences are the most difficult type to write. Students sometimes find it easier to generate supporting sentences first, returning to write the topic sentence after they've gotten the supporting information down. As students mature, they need to learn different styles of topic sentences; teachers should plan to continue to introduce and help students practice with different kinds of topic sentences. These sentences should introduce the paragraph but also engage the reader.

4. Students then develop each selected list item into a sentence. Once again, sentence variety will be key in providing an engaging piece. Since the product in total will only be 5 or 6 sentences, transition words are unnecessary. The end punctuation will actually serve as the transition from sentence to sentence.

5. The concluding sentence wraps up the paragraph. Once again, learning a variety of styles will be useful to the student. Too often, students simply repeat the topic sentence at the end of their paragraphs; this is both ineffective and uninteresting. Try telling students to *rephrase* or *reword* their topic sentences (rather than restate). Students may find it beneficial to think about how they *feel* or their *opinion* about the topic.

Generating Lists

List-Generating Activities...

- encourage students to generate ideas
- help students learn to group, identifying similarities/differences
- prepare for everything from a paragraph to a longer essay
- serve as non-threatening tasks (as spelling does not count and syntax is not required)
- allow students to know early on whether they have enough information to generate a paragraph

Recommendations:

Never let a student write even a paragraph without generating a list first. Any writing assignment longer than a few sentences can and should begin with a list. Instructors can scribe for group list-generating activities or ask students to make a list with a partner or independently. Typically, timed lists cause unnecessary anxiety; instead, assign a specific quantity, often 5, 10, or 15. Generating lists makes an excellent bell ringer activity, and students can log their lists in a special section of their binders.

Some Suggested Topics:

(Slashes represent separate list topic ideas.)

about the senses:

- things that are _____ (any color)
- things that are bright
- foods that taste bad/good
- things that make loud noises
- places where you should whisper/shout
- things that are shorter/taller than you are
- fruits/vegetables/dairy products/sweets
- things that are cold/hot
- things that are rough/smooth/soft/hard
- foods that taste sweet/bitter
- things that smell good/bad
- things that can/cannot fit in your pocket
- things that keep you warm/cool
- breakfast/lunch/dinner foods

other list topic suggestions:

- drinks
- things you can do with a potato
- rooms in a house/mansion/castle
- sports
- things to do on a sunny/rainy day
- places you'd like to visit/vacation
- things you'd buy if you had \$1,000,000
- famous people (living/dead) you'd like to meet
- favorite books/movies/stories/T.V. shows
- favorite actors/athletes/musicians
- things to do in _____ (town/city)
- insects/mammals/amphibians/reptiles/
birds/fish
- colleges/camps you'd like to attend
- things that plug in or require electricity
- things I do before going to school/bed
- important inventions
- favorite restaurants
- musical instruments
- tools
- vehicles on land/in the air/for water
- bodies of water
- things you'd want on a deserted island
- places you would not like to visit/vacation
- people you admire
- things you can do in less than a minute
- characters in _____
- favorite places to eat
- zoo/farm/jungle animals
- good/bad animals for pets
- jobs you'd like to try for a day/week/year
- modes of transportation
- favorite video games
- things to take in your tote bag on a plane
- things to take camping/to the beach
- things that cost more than \$ _____

Categorizing

Categorizing Activities...

- encourage students to discover and understand connections between pieces of information
- help students learn to group and organize, identifying similarities/differences
- prepare for all types of writing, particularly longer pieces
- allow students to know early on whether they have enough information in each category to create a supporting paragraph or sub-section of a paper

Recommendations:

Categorizing items on a list is a cognitive activity to be practiced at all grade levels. Sometimes, students will first generate a list and then begin to see similarities and differences between items on that list, creating categories to group similar items. At other times, students will see categories early on in the list-generating stage and list items under each category as they go. Either approach works. Categorization is essential for students who are writing longer, multi-paragraph pieces because it guides them as to which items go into which paragraphs/sections of their paper.

Some Sample Categorizing Activities:

I. Create topic headings (categories) for the following lists:

cow

chicken

sheep

horse

chair

couch

bed

table

milk

water

orange juice

soft drink

police officer

teacher

chef

flight attendant

II. Sort the following items into their appropriate categories:

brushing teeth

supervising recess

going for a swim

grading papers

showering

eating dessert

reading a good book

washing the dishes

leading a class discussion

necessities/routine

job

leisure

III. Strike through the one item in each list that does not belong. For most, there is more than one possible answer. Be ready to defend your answer.

- flashlight, lamp, car, remote control, iPod, calculator, watch
- science focus*: chicken, eagle, buzzard, wren, lion, quail, dodo bird
- history focus*: FDR, JFK, RFK, LBJ, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Barack Obama
- English focus*: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "The Raven," *Hamlet*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Black Boy*

Developing Topic & Concluding Sentences

General Thoughts

If students are in a rut concerning topic and/or concluding sentences, generate several different versions for the same paragraph to show them that variety is possible. At worst you've given them "multiple choice" options. At best you've shown them a way out of their rut so they can generate their own with better structure and more variety.

Topic Sentences

Probably the most difficult component of a paragraph is the topic sentence. Students must be able to do the following simultaneously:

- understand the overall topic
- verbalize it in a complete sentence that engages the reader
- prepare the reader for the rest of the paragraph
- use an appropriate style for the particular assignment

Initially, students who struggle with topic sentences can begin with "There are..." That will usually lead to an acceptable (if not wonderful) topic sentence.

Here are some activities to assist students with generating topic sentences:

- You provide items, and students generate categories into which they fit.
- You provide titles, and students turn them into sentences.
- You provide supporting sentences (see examples on following page), and students generate topic sentences to introduce those supporting sentences.

Concluding Sentences

Concluding sentences also prove challenging for students. They must be able to do the following simultaneously:

- reword or rephrase the overall topic stated in the topic sentence
- provide a reaction or response to the topic

Initially, students who struggle with concluding sentences can begin with "In conclusion" or "To conclude." That will usually lead to an acceptable (if not wonderful) concluding sentence. Since "restate" often leads to a verbatim copy of the topic sentence, use the words *reword* and *rephrase* to teach students about concluding sentences.

Here are some activities to assist students with generating concluding sentences:

- You provide topic and supporting sentences, and students generate concluding sentences to wrap up the paragraph.

Paragraph Development Exercises

The following exercises are designed to reinforce the basic paragraph format and give students practice with the individual elements, especially those that may prove more difficult, such as writing topic sentences. They are presented in increasing difficulty. Some students may need to spend a great deal of time on each of the elements of the paragraph while others will internalize the structure more easily.

Basic Paragraph Structure

Topic Sentence
Supporting Sentence
Supporting Sentence
Supporting Sentence
Concluding Sentence

I. Write supporting sentences for the following topic sentences:

I have several favorite foods.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The beach provides the opportunity for a number of great activities.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

II. Write a concluding sentence for the following supporting sentences:

1. Drinking lemonade, ice tea, and other cold drinks is one way to stay cool.
 2. Turning on a fan or air conditioner drops the temperature in my house.
 3. Going for a quick swim in the mid afternoon cools me down for the rest of the day.
- C.S. _____

III. Write a topic sentence for each set of supporting sentences:

- T.S. _____
1. I love to play frisbee in the soft, green grass of the park.
 2. There is a playground that my little brother loves near the frisbee field.
 3. At the entrance of the park, they have grills where we sometimes barbecue.
- C.S. The park is probably my favorite place on the weekends.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructor: _____ Grade: _____

Template A
Basic Paragraph

Topic _____

- List of 10 Things**
- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Star the 3 items you like best. Each will become a supporting sentence.

Topic Sentence _____

Supporting Sentence 1 _____

Supporting Sentence 2 _____

Supporting Sentence 3 _____

Concluding Sentence _____

Signal Words for Reading, Writing & Notetaking

Direction Change & Contrast: A change in ideas to follow.

alternatively
 although
 as opposed to
 at the same time
 but
 conversely
 despite (the fact that)
 different from
 even so
 even though
 for all that
 however
 in contrast
 in spite of (the fact that)
 instead
 nevertheless
 nonetheless
 notwithstanding
 on the contrary
 on the other hand
 or
 otherwise
 rather
 still
 though
 unlike
 whereas
 while
 yet



Addition: Similar ideas, additional support, or evidence to follow.

additionally
 again
 also
 and
 another
 as an example
 as well
 because
 besides (that)
 equally important
 following this further
 for example
 for instance
 for one thing
 further
 furthermore
 in addition
 in light of the...it is easy to see
 in particular
 in the same vein
 in the same way
 just as
 likewise
 more (than that)
 moreover
 namely
 next
 other
 pursuing this further
 similarly
 specifically
 then
 to illustrate



Conclusion, Summary & Emphasis: Conclusion, summary, or emphasis to follow.

accordingly*
 after all
 all in all
 as a result*
 because*
 certainly
 clearly, then*
 consequently*
 finally
 for the reason (that)*
 generally
 hence*
 in a word
 in any event
 in brief
 in conclusion
 in fact
 in final analysis
 in final consideration
 in general
 in short
 in sum
 in summary
 in the end
 indeed
 last
 lastly
 naturally
 of course
 on account of*
 on the whole
 since*
 so*
 therefore*
 thus*
 to be sure
 to conclude
 to sum up
 to summarize
 truly



Sequence & Time:

after
 afterwards
 always
 as long as
 as soon as
 at first
 at last
 at length
 before
 before long
 currently

during
 earlier
 eventually
 finally
 first... second...
 third
 following
 immediately
 in the first place
 in the meantime
 later
 meanwhile
 never
 next

now
 presently
 recently
 shortly
 simultaneously
 sometimes
 soon
 so far
 subsequently
 then
 this time
 when
 whenever
 while

(* indicates cause and effect)

Note: The bent arrow signifies a change in direction while the two straight arrows represent words that continue in the same direction. The arrow on the right crosses a line to indicate an end point.

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Transitions for Paragraph Writing

Transitional Chains: Used to separate sections of a paragraph that is arranged chronologically.

first/second/third

the first/second/third reason; another reason, still another reason, yet another reason; the main/most important reason; the final/last reason

one; another; the last kind/type

generally; furthermore; finally

in the first place; also; lastly

in the first place; pursuing this further; finally

to be sure; additionally; lastly

in the first place; just in the same way; finally

basically; similarly; as well

for example/instance; another example; yet another example; the final/last example

to begin/first; also; at this point; next/then; when; finally

For opening a paragraph initially or for general use:

admittedly

assuredly

certainly

granted

no doubt

nobody denies

obviously

of course

to be sure

true

undoubtedly

unquestionably

generally speaking

in general

at this level

in this situation