**Self-Assessment Checklist**

1. Read the checklist Category items below.
2. Check your paragraph against each Category item.
3. Enter your comments in the table.
4. Provide at least 2 sentences to explain how your paragraph met or did not meet the checklist Category item as listed.

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| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Comments** |
| Purpose and Audience |   |
| Thesis, Topic Sentences, and Evidence |   |
| Organization |   |
| Paragraph Development |   |
| Checking Coherence and Clarity |   |

**Self-Assessment Checklist Category Items**

**Checking Purpose and Audience**

Before beginning an essay, consider both the purpose for writing it and the audience who will be reading it. There are a few questions to ask when analyzing an audience, as follows:

* Who are they?
* How much do they already know about the subject?
* What language should be used?

These questions should be answered before beginning a draft and should inform the way the essay is structured.

Consideration of audience is particularly important during the introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, a relevant, proportionate amount of context for the topic should be incorporated based on who the likely or intended audience members are. When writing an introduction, be sure to provide enough information so that the audience can follow the discussion or argument, but take care not to overload readers with background information or take too much time explaining basic ideas that are likely already known.

Keeping the audience in mind is equally important in the conclusion. The identity of the intended audience affects whether authors simply summarize the information from earlier in the essay, recommend a course of action, or link their ideas to other concepts in the field of study. For example, recommending a course of action to an audience of experts could be construed as patronizing, whereas a general audience might feel cheated if a problem has been identified and no solution has been presented.

**Checking Thesis, Topic Sentences, and Evidence**

The thesis statement is the single most important sentence in an essay. It should succinctly state the main arguments to be explored in the text, and it limits the scope of topics to be covered. All topics presented in the thesis statement should be addressed in the body paragraphs, and no topics should be presented if they fall outside the range of the thesis. A thesis statement should be phrased as a declarative statement, and it should be written as a single sentence, or at the most, two sentences. A thesis statement sets the agenda for the topics to be addressed in the body paragraphs of the essay, and it should be presented in the introductory paragraph of the essay, often as the final sentence.

When building paragraphs, it is important to start with a single controlling idea that will be explained in the topic sentence. Topic sentences are typically the first sentence in a body paragraph, and they are essentially a mini thesis statement for each body paragraph. Each topic sentence must directly serve to support the thesis statement through its own smaller argument. Then, each sentence in the paragraph will support the argument made in the topic sentence. This structure ensures that the entire essay fits together and works to prove the main argument given in the thesis statement.

Consider the following example of a topic sentence:

Patients should not try to hide medically relevant information from their physicians.

The entire paragraph must be unified around that controlling idea, which means that none of the sentences in the paragraph can cover information that is not directly related to the controlling idea. Each sentence must provide evidence that directly relates to that point and builds support for that idea. The followings sentence could be added: There are many reasons why patients lie to their doctors, such as fear, embarrassment, or not understanding the potential importance of the information. Further, “general privacy and security concerns may lead to withholding behaviors, such as lack of trust, stigma, or concerns about insurance rates” (Walker, Johnson, Ford, & Huerta, 2017, para. 20).

Even with that one relevant piece of evidence, the paragraph still does not feel well-developed. More explanation and support are needed before the idea can hold credence. Consider the following additions to the above example sentences:

Patients should not try to hide relevant information from their physicians. There are many reasons why patients lie to their doctors, such as fear, embarrassment, or not understanding the potential importance of the information. Further, “general privacy and security concerns may lead to withholding behaviors, such as lack of trust, stigma, or concerns about insurance rates” (Walker, Johnson, Ford, & Huerta, 2017, para. 20). When patients have engaged in behavior that is illegal or morally questionable, they may fear the repercussions when the doctor finds out. Generally, that information comes out in the patient examination, and being forthcoming about such information can aid in the diagnostic process. However, details that may seem insignificant to the patient can take on great importance to the physician and can provide vital clues that are necessary for diagnosis. Consequently, keeping important information from a physician is not a good idea.

The paragraph is now both well-developed and unified, with every sentence relating directly back to the controlling idea that medically relevant information should not be kept from doctors.

**Checking Organization**

In addition to being unified and well-developed, paragraphs must be well-organized, with transitions made between ideas in the paragraphs and with the ideas being organized in a logical and understandable format. Keep an eye out for paragraphs that do not fully support the topic sentence, that comprise a haphazard collection of sentences with no discernable point, or that inappropriately combine separate topics that should be separated into multiple paragraphs. The beginning of a new thought is the cue for beginning a new paragraph. For example, a park district proposal for adding exercise classes for senior citizens and toddlers would discuss the needs of each age group in separate paragraphs.

The basic structure of a body paragraph can be broken down as follows:

1. The topic sentence makes an argument in support of the larger argument in the thesis statement.
2. Supporting evidence expands the topic through a good mix of examples, paraphrasing, summary, and a writer’s own ideas.
3. A summary sentence connects to the thesis and prepares for the next point.

**Checking Paragraph Development**

Paragraphs provide the evidence to support the main claim and thus, the overall essay. The relevance, sufficiency, specificity, and completeness of the evidence determine the quality of the overall writing, so effective paragraph development is crucial.

The most common reasons that a paragraph is ineffective are as follows:

* It is disjointed.
* It is a combination of multiple major points.
* It is off-topic from the rest of the essay.
* It is lacking in sufficient explanation or depth.

The argument essay should include persuasive writing in every paragraph, which is driven by the topic sentence. Persuasion should be a key component of each of the body paragraphs. Each body paragraph is a chance to increase the persuasiveness of the overall argument, perhaps by including additional points that bolster the larger argument, highlighting the important aspects of supporting data, or underscoring the overall argument while introducing pieces of evidence.

**Checking Coherence and Clarity**

Paragraphs require coherence to be clear to the reader. *Coherence* is the logical and meaningful connection between the sentences in a paragraph. Sometimes, an argument simply needs to have a list of facts and figures to be effective, but good written communication requires more than that. It is possible to achieve coherence in a number of ways, such as using repetitive terms, synonyms, pronouns, transitions, or creating parallel structures.

In a unified essay, all of the components effectively relate to one another. Body paragraphs provide the evidence to support the main claim and thus, the overall essay. The relevance, sufficiency, specificity, and completeness of the evidence determine the quality of the overall writing, so effective paragraph development is crucial. The body of the essay tackles different aspects of the overarching argument. All of the evidence relates to the thesis statement, and no part of the paper veers away from the topic at hand. Unity is achieved by logical presentation of ideas, whereas coherence is achieved by word choice and the details that are provided.

Also, be sure to use clear language. Unfamiliar jargon or language should be defined; in fact, if a general audience of people less familiar with the topic is being targeted, extremely specific terms should be avoided altogether. In contrast, if the anticipated audience comprises specialists on the topic, the essay should employ language and ideas typical of a discussion on the subject. For example, a nursing student who writes a paper about nursing for an English class will likely use simpler terminology than would be used in a paper for a class in the nursing curriculum. An instruction manual in a workplace setting, however, will presume an audience of individuals who are not at all familiar with the topic being described; the manual will have to be more general and use language and ideas appropriate for a large, diverse group.

**Reference**

Walker, D. M., Johnson, T., Ford, E. W., & Huerta, T. R. (2017). Trust me, I’m a doctor: Examining changes

in how privacy concerns affect patient withholding behavior. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *19*(1), e2. http://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.6296