

Levels of Detail

Assigning levels of detail is especially useful in paragraph development and cohesion. The levels of detail exercise can be used to generate more specific details in your writing or as a revision tool to check on the depth of your description. Although levels of detail can add depth to description and cohesion in paragraphs, they will not necessarily make your writing descriptive in nature. That is, they can help you get from the abstract to the more specific and concrete, but they will not make the specific and concrete more lively and/or interesting for the reader.

When considering levels of detail, assign the topic sentence (or main idea sentence of a paragraph) the number one (1). Assign each sentence that elaborates on the topic sentence the number two (2). Then, assign each sentence that elaborates on a level two sentence the number three (3), and so on. Remember, if a sentence simply restates a sentence that has previously appeared in the paragraph or provides no new information from the previous sentence, it should be assigned the same number. The goal is to make all of your paragraphs contain level five (5) or six (6) sentences. In fact, when you get to that level it will be more difficult to assign levels.

Example:

College students can be divided into several groups. One group is those who cling-on to their high school friends. They go home every weekend and have their room with pictures of everyone at home. Then there are those who only come to party. They go out every night and like to tell everyone what they did. Then there are those who constantly study and do not like to be social. They never get involved or stay away from school.

(1) College students can be divided into several groups.

(2) One group is those who cling-on to their high school friends.

(3) They go home every weekend and have their room with pictures of everyone at home.

(2) Then there are those who only come to party.

(3) They go out every night and like to tell everyone what they did.

(2) Then there are those who constantly study and do not like to be social.

(3) They never get involved or stay away from school.

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College students can be divided into several large groups. First, there is the athletic group, the people who are associated with sports. Second, there is the group of people who like to spend all of their time in the library studying. Finally, there is the group who never studies and is always out partying. These are the groups that make up college.

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College students can be divided into several large groups. Most commonly are those who are in school to learn. Therefore, they put priority on their studies. In contrast, there is a large group of students who only attend school to party and make friends. Least common are those who hate school but are forced by their parents to attend. It is evident that students are in school for very different reasons.

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The following paragraph provides some difficulties in assigning levels of detail. Try to figure out what those difficulties are and why they make assigning levels of detail difficult.

College students can be divided into several large groups. The first group, the enthused, motivated and outgoing students know how to maintain a healthy balance between partying and studying. They are interested in many subjects and activities, and in the long run they receive the best education--one that is well rounded. Next are the worriers, jocks or snobs. This group is too concerned about a particular thing such as friends, sports, or schoolwork, to really enjoy college life.

They are too one-sided to receive a well-rounded education. The final group of students consists of the people that could care less about receiving a well-rounded education. These are the lazy, unmotivated and disoriented students who don't know what they want out of life or college. This group is into having a good time and never doing any work. Later in life, they realize that college was a waste of time and money for them. Many students are a mixture of all three groups, but most can find their niche in one.

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Women in today's job market succeed only by pursuing advanced degrees in their prospective fields. The women in my own family have successfully pursued bachelor's as well as master's degrees, allowing them to be competitive in their jobs. Both my mother and my aunt work full time in the health care field. My aunt is a nurse educator. She trains young women to become nurse managers. My mother is a director of patient registration and medical records. She manages the records of two large university affiliated hospitals in the greater Cleveland area.

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The shopping center was swarming with frantic last-minute shoppers like ourselves. We went first to the General Store, my favorite. It carried mostly knickknacks and other useless items which nobody needs but buys anyway. I was thirteen years old at the time, and things like button and calendars and posters would catch my fancy. This day was no different. The object of my desire was a 75-cent Snoopy button. Snoopy was the latest. If you owned anything with the Peanuts on it, you were "in." But since I was supposed to be shopping for gifts for other people and not myself, I couldn't decide what to do. I went in search of my sister for her opinion. I pushed my way through the throngs of people to the back of the store where I found Susan. I asked if she thought I should buy the button. She said it was cute and if I wanted it go ahead and buy it.