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## UNIT 3: WRITING A COMPOSITION

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through the unit, you should be able to:

- understand the nature and structure of composition writing
- identify different types of composition
- be aware of the different steps in writing a composition

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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A composition is the act of putting together parts, according to a plan, to form a whole. A composition can be a poem, a piece of music, as culture, or a painting. A composition organically grows from the first paragraph you have written. You have studied paragraph writing in Unit 2. You will find that in a paragraph you write about a particular topic but what you want to convey in a composition is more comprehensive and requires several paragraphs. A paragraph is also a part of a composition.

Therefore, in this unit you will be made aware about the different types of compositions, organizing a composition and tips to write a composition.

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## 3.2 TYPES OF COMPOSITION

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We have already mentioned what is a composition and before we move any further, we shall tell you briefly about the four broad types of composition. When you had looked at these types, you might have noticed that each of these compositions has a different style of writing and organisation pattern even though the structure is same for all the types of compositions.

Let us look at the examples to make you understand the differences more clearly.

*Example*

**Topic 1.** 'Do you think that the homemaker leads a more pleasant life than a career woman?'

**Topic 2.** 'My most embarrassing moment'.

When you have to write on the topics 1 and 2, you will find that you cannot possibly write about them in the same way. The first topic suggests a discussion and the second is a very personal topic which suggests the narration about the moment. Thus, it is clear to you that each composition is different. It also differs from each other because different people would write on the same topic for different readers and for different reasons.

Let us look at another topic to understand how on one topic you may write differently depending on what you want to convey to the readers.

*Example*

**Topic: 'Growing up to be a Dog'.**

On this topic, if you are asked to write, you may write the story of your pet dog or you may write facts about a puppy's growth to adulthood.

Thus, when you write about the story of your pet, you are narrating a story, and it is known as **narrative composition**. If you write facts about puppy's growth, it is called an **expository composition**, if you write a description of your pet, it is known as **descriptive composition** or if you argue how a dog is the best pet among other animals, then it is known as **argumentative composition**.

Also, keep in mind when you choose a topic for composition, it is important for you to decide which of the four types of composition you wish to write. But no composition has to be based on only one type. You will find that a composition will be organised according to the type it belongs to, but it will also use techniques from other types of composition as well.

### 3.2.1 Expository Composition

What do you think is an Expository Composition? In simple terms, it means writing to explain, inform, clarify or persuade the reader. The paragraphs are organised in a coherent manner to help the readers understand the topic and provide factual information. It is usually written in a direct manner where you state the theme first and then your views.

*Example*

*'Nothing could be more important to the development of the infant Indian langur than its relationship with its mother.'*

In the above sentence,

The concept of growth from childhood to adulthood of the Indian langur is mentioned, which is stated in the first line, and then information on the importance of its relationship with its mother is stated.

### **3.2.2 Argumentative Composition**

In this composition, you state reasons, deduce inductions, evaluate evidence or infer information to support or disapprove your opinion about a topic given. To develop the argument you use evidence, state it logically or coherently to persuade the reader.

*Example*

*Even though it is in public interest for people to be well immunized, healthy individuals are unwilling to pay much for vaccines.*

To write an argumentative composition about this, you will have to state whether you support this statement or not, why do you support it or not, and the reasons for supporting or not supporting it with evidence. Here you will argue about your opinion and try to persuade the reader of your opinion.

### **3.2.3 Narrative Composition**

In a narrative composition, you usually write an account of an actual or imagined event or incident. In this composition you include chronology (that is, the order in which the events take place), description, and the writer's point of view. It includes verbs which are very precise and vivid, specific details to help the reader to read the story. A short story is an example of narrative composition.

### **3.2.4 Descriptive Composition**

In a descriptive composition, you wish to present a picture of an object, scene, person or situation through the use of words. You will affect the reader by appealing to his/her senses and imagination.

*Example*

*Before long, you are taken to your table in the well-decorated dining room. The room is quite large; the tables are round, and the chairs are made of dark wood. You can hear soft music which is rather soothing. This adds to the atmosphere and once a week they have someone playing the piano.*

The description above is a brief review of a restaurant or a café and probably written for a newspaper.

### Check Your Progress 1

Read the beginnings of the excerpts given below. Identify the types of compositions in all the excerpts

given below

(a)

One day when I was traveling in a car, it suddenly started raining and I could not see what was in front of me. Suddenly I heard a loud noise and my car was in the air.

(b)

It is very difficult to find houses on rent in Delhi in a good location. This situation has arisen because people from different parts of India choose Delhi to pursue higher education or look for employment.

(c)

Mobile phones should be allowed in the schools due to various reasons. Firstly, it helps to contact the children in case of emergency. Secondly, it helps to get information from apps and tools which would help them to fare better in studies.

(d)

The chair was huge and comfortable to sit. It was in the middle of the hall and can be seen from the entrance of the house. It had an orange cushion and blue footstool to keep your feet up.

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### 3.3 STEPS TO DO BEFORE WRITING YOUR COMPOSITION

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It has been mentioned earlier, a composition is an organized piece of writing with an introduction, body and ending. We shall now discuss with you the steps to do before you write the composition. These steps will help you to organise the materials which you have collected to write the composition, it will organise your thoughts and plan to write it.

To begin with, you must know who you are writing for. Keep in mind **the interests of the reader** and his/her level of ability. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- For whom I am writing, and why?
- How can my writing appeal to him/her?
- How much does s/he already know about the subject I am writing on?

The next step is to collect enough information on your topic to write a number of paragraphs on the topic. You must know enough to define, elaborate and illustrate your theme.

### 3.3.1 Decide on your Topic

How do you choose your topic? Either it is given to you or you have to select one from the choices you have been given. If you have to choose a topic on your own, then there are some suggestions from where you can choose or decide your topic:

- i. Reading newspapers and magazines and watching television programmes will keep you informed of daily happenings, conflicts, problems etc.
- ii. Talking to friends, colleagues as well as teachers can raise interesting questions and make you aware of different viewpoints.
- iii. Hobbies, sports, art and dramatics can also help you to decide on a topic.
- iv. When you have to write academic assignments and you have to decide the topic, then libraries, archives and the Internet will help you choose the topic and collect the information.

### 3.3.2 Limit your Topic

When you choose a topic, it should not be too general, i.e. covering a broad area of experience. Such a composition will be difficult to manage – it may have too many general statements which may not be supported by examples and illustrations. Therefore, the next possible action is to limit your topic – to reduce the scope of your composition.

You may wish to write about ‘Surviving in the times of Covid 19, ‘Kindness to animals’ or ‘Drought conditions in India’. These topics cover very broad areas of experience and knowledge. You will have to select certain aspects of the topic for your composition. Unless you do so, your writing will not be well-organised but a collection of paragraphs on very different aspects of the same subjects.

Once the topic is limited, it should be stated very clearly in the opening paragraph. Then you can develop the main idea in the body of the composition.

Example:

Imagine you have decided to write a composition on ‘Animals’, but this is a very broad topic, it does not indicate which aspect of animals you want to cover, so narrow it down to ‘wild life’ but that is too broad an area to write a composition, so it can be narrowed it down to ‘The big cats’. This topic is good but it will be difficult to cover all the big cats.

Therefore, you can write the composition from another angle, i.e. writing about a particular animal: ‘India’s experience in saving the tiger’, or specifically on the less well known ‘The white tiger’, then you can write a nice composition with details, anecdotes, examples and illustrations.

### 3.3.3 Gather and Arrange the Information Collected

When you plan to write a composition, you will explore your sources of information to gather facts and arrange them according to some order. Once you have all the information in your

mind, jot down all the points: facts, ideas, opinions, feelings and illustrations on paper and then arrange these in some order. This is necessary because:

- not all the ideas you have jotted down will be directly related to your theme; some will have to be discarded
- you may also find that much of what you have jotted down is not worth writing about
- much of the information jotted down is commonly known and will only make the composition dull
- there may be repetition of ideas
- you may discover that you do not have enough details to write a worthwhile composition

Please keep in mind that the details and facts make a composition interesting. Also, besides all the sources available, you should be aware that your own thinking and self-exploration can be one of the richest resources available to write the composition.

After you have identified the sources, there are some tips to identify the ideas you are going to include in your composition:

- i. To encourage your thinking, underline all important words in your topic: e.g. ‘Lizards are friendly creatures.’ Often students just miss out a significant word in the topic they have chosen. In such cases the composition is usually out of focus.
- ii. Having analysed the topic, jot down random thoughts as they occur to you.
- iii. All ideas, suggestions or facts that have something in common should be placed in one group.
- iv. The ideas could be arranged according to some logical order. We list here some of the more important logical orders. You have already read about them in the previous unit.
  - a. spatial sequence
  - b. chronological sequence
  - c. cause and effect
  - d. information in decreasing order of importance
  - e. information in increasing order of importance

By now you will have a fairly good idea about your topic – how you wish to begin and where you would like your composition to end. You might even have a topic sentence written out, but do not start writing yet. You have to make your outline first.

Example: Grouping of ideas

Imagine you are asked to write on a topic, “*Smoking should be banned in public places*”

The ideas on this topic can be grouped as follows:

Group 1 – *How it is not good for health*

- i. *Smoking is dangerous to health*
- ii. *Scientific studies – reasons for not allowing to smoke in public places*

Group 2 – *Problems for people who do not smoke*

- i. *Unfair to people who do not smoke*
  - ii. *Studies show that passive smokers are at high risk*
- Group 3 – *Safety issues and Government measures*
- i. *Problems due to throwing of cigarettes in public places*
  - ii. *Safety issues and concerns*
  - iii. *Steps to be taken to avoid such situations*
  - iv. *Government rules to be implemented strictly*
  - v. *Suggestions and recommendations*

You will notice about the points which are mentioned here – there is a general flow of ideas from one group to the other, these are linked by arguments of how smoking is dangerous in public places and its effects on non-smokers.

Grouping helps you to see the relationship between ideas. However, it is not necessary to cover all the items of a group in one paragraph, or to write a paragraph on each item. Therefore, it is better for you to include those points which are important to state your view point very clearly.

### 3.3.4 Construct your outline

Now you are at the final step of the pre-writing stage – constructing an outline. An outline is like a roadmap which helps you to stay on the right path to reach your destination without any waste of time or effort.

- If you have prepared a good outline, you don't have to fend for ideas
- You will not stray away from the topic
- It will help you to state your points briefly without repetition

#### A sample outline

Introduction:

Humans are responsible for progressive destruction of environment; they must change their attitude and work harder to save their environment

Body

1. Humans responsible for environmental damage – politically, industrially and individually
  - a) Government does not plan use of resources; this causes waste and pollution
  - b) Privately owned industry causes waste and pollution as it aims at large profits with small investments
  - c) Through needs, carelessness and laziness, individuals cause damage to the environment.
  
2. Government, industry and individuals are now beginning to realize that they should prevent further damage
  - a) In collaboration with international agencies, through enactment of laws, government is trying to save the environment



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## 3.4 FACTORS TO KEEP IN MIND BEFORE WRITING YOUR COMPOSITION

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To understand how a composition is written you will need to study its major components: **the beginning, the body and the conclusion**. However, before we come to the actual composition itself, let's give you a few guidelines for choosing a proper title for your composition.

- The title should be clear enough, short and to the point, so that the reader is sure of the subject and the ideas it reflects
- It should arouse interest and make a person want to read the composition

### 3.4.1 The Beginning

The beginning of the composition is also referred to as the introduction, the introductory paragraph, or the opening paragraph. It is not necessarily limited to one paragraph; it can also be one sentence or two or three sentences depending on the topic and the length of the composition.

The opening paragraph should state the subject or the main idea of the composition. When you write the opening paragraph, you can write it in a number of ways, depending on the purpose of communication. Does it seek to explain, argue, narrate or describe? For instance, if you are writing an expository composition, you will state the topic immediately and exactly. This requires a business-like approach, and you should come straight to the point.

*Example:*

*'Nothing could be more important to the development of an infant Indian langur than its relationship with its mother.'*

In this opening sentence, even without the title, you can make a correct guess about the subject of the composition, and how it is going to develop.

Not only is the main idea clear, but the topic is also indicated in the opening paragraph. The beginning also gives an idea of how the rest of the composition will be organized.

Let us look at another introduction:

*'Science has obviously multiplied the power of the war-makers; the weapons of today can kill more people more secretly and more unpleasantly than those of the past.'*

Here too you know how the composition will proceed.

You need to keep in mind the following points when you write your introduction:

- The opening should arouse **the interest and curiosity of the reader**.
- **It should take you straight to the point of the topic** you are writing about instead of beginning with broad general statements.

*Example*

*'Many people are involved in the building and setting up of a new office: architects, bankers, bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, and so on.'*

- Begin your **composition with a short, factual sentence** which will make the reader think about it and want to read more.

*Example*

‘ *Some teenagers live in a world of their own.*’

- Amuse the reader by a funny remark, an anecdote, or a simile, metaphor, analogy or a quotation.

*Example*

‘*America has a thousand lights and weathers and we walk the streets, we walk the streets forever, we walk the streets of life alone!*’ (metaphor)

‘*My mother was always throwing out new ideas; some of them were rather wild; others were so simple and sensible that they very nearly amounted to genius; but the application of them was sometimes rather autocratic.*’ (witty)

### Check Your Progress 3

What do you think should be the correct beginning for the composition of the title given below? Choose from the options given below the title.

#### How to make Chapatis

- The chapatis are round in shape and made from wheat flour.
- To make chapatis, first we need to understand that the round shape of the chapati is due to the technique used by the person who rolls it.
- In India, you will find different varieties of chapatis. Some are made from flour or chickpea flour or white flour.
- We know chapatis by different names roti, phulka in India and roshi in Maldives. It is an essential part of the daily intake in most of the Indian houses in North India. It is usually prepared with water and wheat flour.

Now you have read how to write the beginning of any composition .Keep in mind you have looked at merely one part of the beginning, which is how to catch the attention of the reader. This is known as **lead**; the other two parts are **bridge** and the **thesis statement**. The bridge connects the lead to the topic and it consists of connecting sentences. The last part is the thesis statement which tells your reader the main points that you will mention in the essay. Look at this example:

*We know Chapatis by different names roti, phulka in India and roshi in Maldives. It is an essential part of daily intake in most of the Indian houses in North India [LEAD]. It is usually prepared with water and wheat flour. In India, you will find different varieties of chapatis. Some are made from flour or chickpea flour or white flour. It is very popular all over India but the major problem faced by many young Indians is how to make chapati round and keep it soft [BRIDGE].This can be easily solved with the help of tips and techniques used by experienced women who make 50 chapatis a day in an Indian household[THESIS STATEMENT].*

## Check Your Progress 4

Write the introduction with the help of the main points mentioned below:

- a) How to reduce air pollution: reduce traffic congestion, encourage different types of public transportation, industries to be outside cities, encourage walking for short distances
- b) Benefits of exercise: increase in stamina, build confidence and keep healthy
- c) Social media: advantages and disadvantages

### 3.4.2 The Body

Your opening paragraph has stated the topic, limited it, and in doing so, has aroused the interest and curiosity of the reader. Now you have to tackle the body of the composition. Here your concern should be to develop the topic and to concentrate on the use of language to express your thoughts clearly. Only then will the reader be able to follow the ideas in your composition.

At the pre-writing stage, you have read how to group your ideas and write an outline. What you further need to know is how to use language to make your ideas lucid. You can do it in two ways:

- a) To use signposts: phrases or words which enable the reader to follow the writer's thinking.

But the question will be how do you recognise a signpost?

- Topic sentences of paragraphs become signposts through a composition.
- Other signposts are words or phrases which tell the reader about the sequence or design of the composition – what you have done, are doing, will do next or later, will not do at all. The expressions *firstly*, *in the first place*, *secondly*, *further*, *for example*, act as signposts.
- Paragraphing and indentation of quotations also act as signposts to the reader.

Example

*“Mobile phones should be allowed in the schools due to various reasons. Firstly, it helps to contact the children in case of emergency. Secondly, it helps to get information from apps and tools which would help them to fare better in studies.”*

The first phrase: *due to various reasons* is a signpost. It indicates the feeling of the writer about the subject. S/he is giving reasons for mobiles to be used in the school. The phrase ‘firstly’ in the second sentence, and the word ‘secondly’ in the third sentence, are both signposts to the reader telling him/her the reasons for allowing the use of mobile phones.

- b) To use inter-paragraph transitions: words or phrases which tie the beginning of a new paragraph to the one that goes before it. For example

**Repetition:** At the beginning of a new paragraph pick up a key word or phrase occurring at the end of the preceding paragraph.

*Example*

....But the element which is constant and common in all of them is change.  
*Change is the master key.*

*'.....The bringing to an end to the life say, a spastic child, by the deliberate refusal of the full esthetical care, seems morally indefensible.'*

Even if the idea of *bringing someone's life to an end* is based on compassion...'

**Question and answer transition:** The question comes at the end of one paragraph and the answer is the first sentence of the next one.

*Example*

*'.....Why cannot we be honest and say whatever comes into our heads?'*

The answer is that we are not good enough.'

The opening sentence summarises, in a subordinate phrase or clause, the idea of the previous paragraph; the main clause which follows the topic of the new paragraph. *If* and *while* clauses are generally used in such cases.

*Example*

*'If we were to measure freedom by standards of nutrition, education and self-government, we might rank the United States and certain nations of Western Europe very high.'*

**Pronouns** such as *it, this, that, these, those*, can be used to refer to a key noun of the last sentence of the previous paragraph.

*At four weeks, tripping over itself, it ventures forth and discovers the world---or at least that part of it within a safe three or four feet of its mother.*

*As its excursions into the world grow bolder, the maturing infant Indian langur begins to encounter age-mates.*

Words and phrases showing logical relationships can be used to link paragraphs. Some of these expressions are:

*Therefore, however, but, consequently, thus, and so, even so, on the other hand, for instance*

*Example:*

*The sight of the dog, the faithful sentry of the previous night, being finished of in that brutal manner was somehow more horrifying than many things he had seen in the war.*

*But, as a soldier he could see the reasons why the dog had been killed.*

### **3.4.3 The Ending**

You have developed the topic through your composition, and you have mentioned all you want to write and you feel now that the composition should end. So, you should end it properly with a concluding paragraph.

As the beginning, so is the ending important and the reader tends to remember it. You should be aware that whereas the beginning of a composition introduces and excites, the ending should tie it up, round it off, or summarize the main idea.

*Example:*

*"Present-day insects have spread to every habitable area on the face of the globe."*

This is the opening sentence of a composition on insects which is developed through successive paragraphs.

When you will read the ending of this composition, you will see that it is done by summarizing the discussion and stressing the theme of the composition:

*“Wherever there is sufficient moisture, warmth and food to support life, there the insects are well-established. Both in the number of species and in number of individuals, the insects exceed any other visible form of life on the earth.”*

- In a descriptive or narrative composition, the end comes naturally at the end of the description or narrative.

Example:

This is the beginning of an article on the travelling theatre of Maharashtra:

*“They are always on the move but they are not nomads.... They are the Tamashawalas, the traditional performers who bring a few moments of undiluted happiness...”*

The ending of this composition is suggested through new beginnings.

*“Performance over, they return to their worn-out tents and shoddy existence. With the next sunrise they are once again on the move, dishing out dreams in the form of entertainment.”*

Here are some other ways in which composition can end, depending on your purpose and in what way you wish to influence your reader.

- An ending can suggest a remedy or a course of action.
- An ending can offer a value judgment.
- An ending can include thinking ahead based on the discussion in the composition.

When you write a concluding paragraph, do not start the concluding paragraphs with phrases such as: now I will conclude with, now I end up saying. They reduce the force of the idea presented in the sentence that follows.

**Also do not introduce a new idea in your ending paragraph. The ending you have written should strengthen the ideas you have presented in your composition.**

### Check Your Progress 5

Given below are extracts from different passages marked 1, 2 and 3. Each of them has sections, one of which is an ending. Choose the ending.

1 a) Words are the tools of writers, the tools they use to give form and shape to the medium in which they work – ideas.

b) Without the proper word the idea is never expressed. In the beginning is the word.

.....  
.....  
.....

- 2 a) Even in her deep anguish the rag woman’s tear-stained face beamed. The goat was dead; a white heap still lying on the mud floor.
- b) From the neighbouring stalls in the Tuesday *haat* of the village she purchased by a barter of rags the two objects that were to make the motif of her life for months to come: three pumpkin seeds....and a month-old goat youngling.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- 3 a) The Study Centres of Indira Gandhi National Open University are part of the detailed programme of the University....
- b) The face-to-face contact in the shape of tutorials at the University Study Centres is different from what takes place in conventional colleges.
- c) In other words, Study Centres and Regional Centres will act as the means through which the university will take the education to the doorsteps of the student.

### 3.5 REVISION

As a writer you will benefit greatly if you pause frequently to reread your drafts. Rereading often leads to further discovery – you may add an example, choose different vocabulary, add or subtract ideas ,etc. You will often find that rereading leads to substantial rethinking and revising and this certainly improves your composition. Of course, errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling also need to be checked. It is also a good idea to have someone else read your draft if they are willing. They will give you another perspective that you may be missing.

Finally, learn to reflect on your writing. Ask yourself questions such as ‘Is my essay interesting?’ ‘Will it be clear to my reader?’ ,‘Is the paragraphing adequate? What examples can I add to make my point clearer? And so on.

### 3.6 LET US SUM UP

These are some of the points which we have touched upon in this unit.

- You should choose a topic about which you know a great deal.
- You should know who your reader is; that is, you should be aware of his/her level of understanding, interests and needs.
- When choosing a topic, you must know your sources of information.
- To do justice to your topic you must limit it in such a way as to make sure your composition reads smoothly and will cover the theme fully.
- It is only after limiting the topic that you start collecting and ordering your data. The grouping of ideas should follow a logical sequence.
- The outline is the most important part of the pre-writing stage.
- The beginning of the composition tells the reader about the subject-matter. The writer should make the opening interesting by plunging straight into the theme if possible.

- The beginning of the composition includes beginning known as the *lead*, *bridge* and the *thesis statement*.
- The body of the composition develops the main ideas. Some of the techniques of development are illustration, description, definition and elaboration. Different types of composition require different techniques.
- The ending or conclusion of a composition should not come suddenly. There are several ways in which you can give a satisfactory ending to your composition.
- Revise your first draft to check for errors.

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## 3.7 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

(a), the narration (b) expository (c) argumentative (d) descriptive

### Check Your Progress 2

Suggestions:

You can start with the advantages and then disadvantages about the topic; make sure the introduction, advantages, disadvantages are in separate paragraphs. The ending should reflect your opinion.

### Check Your Progress 3

d-c-a-b

### Check Your Progress 4

Write the answer in your own words.

### Check Your Progress 5

- 1 b) This last sentence summarises the idea stated in 1 a) about the importance of words to a writer.
- 2 a) Here the ending of the narrative is obvious. The goat dies.
- 3 c) “In other words.....” is a phrase which introduces a repetition of the ideas in the earlier sections.