Expository Essay/Paragraph Editing

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_1. Highlight your thesis statement. Circle the Title and the author. Underline the three reasons that prove your argument; are they parallel?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2. Comment on your hook. Is it there? Is it interesting or basic?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3. Underline your summary. Is it 2 sentences or less?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4. Circle your transition words. Do you have one between each idea? Are they more interesting than first/second/for example?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_5. Underline your five most sophisticated words. Are they at the Grade 12 level?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_6. Underline your 3 supporting ideas. Highlight where you explain/analyze how they support your thesis statement. Are your examples specific and detailed?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_7. Do your body paragraphs have a topic sentence that outlines briefly what that paragraph will argue?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_8. Have you used I, we, your, you, us or me anywhere in your composition? If so, get rid of them.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_9. Are your quotes integrated into your sentence? Did you change them so that they fit grammatically? Are they part of one of your sentences?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_10. Do you have a conclusion? Is it interesting? Or repetitive?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_11. Do you use sentence variety? Or is everything basically the same length? Do you vary sentence beginnings?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_12. Do you use humour, stylistic devices or a poetic device somewhere in your essay? Consider using one in your hook or conclusion

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_13. Is your composition in the present tense?

**Improving your writing (all types) English 12**

1. Include an interesting introduction to your topic (hook). Consider using a stylistic device (rhetorical question, analogy, etc.)

2. Have a strong voice in your paper and an appropriate tone (humour, irony, satire etc.). Make sure the tone matches the purpose of your paper. See paper on establishing voice/tone.

3. Transitions: Avoid formulaic transitions like first, for example and in conclusion. Choose more interesting ones that are less common.

4. Include sentence structure/variety (variety of types and deliberate use to create specific effects). Use a mix of short/long sentences and vary sentence beginnings.

5. Quote integration: Make sure quotes are smoothly integrated (proper tense, edit out first/second person) and use only the important part of the quotes. Always explain how they support your argument.

6. Vocabulary: Choose sophisticated and appropriate words.

7. Literary devices: Use a simile, metaphor, irony etc. once or twice in your paper (conclusion or intro)

8. To further develop your writing, make sure you read challenging material to expose yourself to different writing styles and techniques and increase vocabulary. Consider reading a daily article from The Globe and Mail or Macleans if you do not have enough time for whole novels.

**Individual and Appropriate Voice**

Writing is different from other school subjects. In math, reading, social studies, and science, every student is supposed to study the same things and come up with the same answers. But in writing, if everyone writes exactly the same thing, that’s no good — that’s copying, not writing.

Everyone's writing needs to be different from everyone else’s. And the only way that happens is if writers make different choices when they write, choices about the topics they pick, the words they use, the details they include, different beginning and ending strategies, and so on. The set of all the different choices a writer's makes determines, and the collective effect they have on the reader, is what is often called the “voice” in a piece of writing. Voice, sometimes referred to as “tone” or “mood" or even “style,” tells the reader about the writer’s personality in the piece.

Because each of us has a unique personality, each of us has a unique voice in writing, and that is what makes our writing unique. The trick is in letting that voice come through. And the only way that happens is if we make different choices in our writing than other writers make in theirs, choices that reflect who we are inside — our original thoughts and personal feelings, our particular way of seeing things and interpreting them — and writing it all down.

**The Writer Cares About the Topic**

The first choice every writer has to make is what he or she will write about. In order to write well, you have to care about your topic. If you’re not interested in it, your audience probably won’t be interested either. But how can you tell if a writer cares about the topic of a piece? It's not as if writers sign their pieces at the bottom: "I care. I really do. Sincerely, Your Author." This is one of those situations — a situation that often comes up when we look at voice — where we have to look between the lines and make educated guesses.

Does the writer of *Chores* care about her topic? I think she does. First of all, she has chosen a topic from her life, something that she has to deal with on a regular basis. Most of us care about what happens to us in our own lives and that’s why writing about one’s life is probably the most common type of topic writer’s choose. The second thing I notice is a very strong opinion. There’s no doubt about how this writer feels about doing chores. The third thing that tells me this writer cares about her topic is all the detail she includes to support her opinion. If she didn’t care about doing chores, she probably wouldn’t have very much to say about it, and what she did say probably wouldn’t be very detailed. But throughout this piece, over and over, this writer is telling us how chores affect her life and how she feels about that.

**Strong Feelings, Honest Statements**

Expressing our individual personalities has a lot to do with expressing our feelings. Think about it: if everyone felt the same way about everything, we’d all tend to do and say and think the same things; there wouldn’t be much difference between one person and another, and our writing wouldn’t be very different either. Our feelings about things are what tend to make us unique. So if we want our writing to be unique, we have to communicate strong feelings.

The writer of *Chores* certainly has no problem communicating her strong feelings. The piece is packed with emotion in almost every sentence. But are those feelings honest? Does the piece sound genuine, as though the writer really believes what she’s saying? Of course, there’s no way to tell for sure. She could have made the whole thing up. So because we can’t question the writer, we have to question the writing.

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| **Chores!** |
|     Chores! Chores! Chores! Chores are boring! Scrubbing toilets, cleaning sinks, and washing bathtubs take up a lot of my time and are not fun at all.      Toilets! When you’re scrubbing toilets make sure they are not stinky. I’ve scrubbed one before and I was lucky it didn’t stink. I think toilets are one of the hardest things to scrub in the bathroom because it is hard to get up around the rim.      Sinks are one of the easiest things to clean in the bathroom because they have no rims and they are small. I have cleaned one before and it was pretty easy.      Bathtubs, ever washed one? They are big, they are deep, and it is hard to get up around the sides. The bathtub is the hardest, I think, to wash in the bathroom.      All chores are boring, especially making my bed. Cleaning my room is OK because I have to organize, and I like organizing. Dusting is the worst: dust, set down, pick up, dust, set down. There are so many things to dust, and it’s no fun.     Chores aren’t the worst but they’re definitely not the best! |

Is the writing consistent? Are there any contradictions? Does each statement make sense in light of all the others? As I ask myself these questions, and examine the piece more closely, I think she is being honest here, and that her honesty is one of the things about this piece that I like best.

**Individual, Authentic, and Original**

When I read something by one of my favorite writers, I often have the feeling that no one else could have written it. In most good writing, the individuality of the writer comes through. When we sense this individuality, we’re picking up on the writer’s voice.

In *Chores*, I sense the writer’s individuality very clearly. Though I know that many kids her age complain about having to do chores, the way she’s complaining about it strikes me as unique. She has such well-defined and detailed opinions that I can’t imagine another kid expressing these exact feelings in exactly the same way. I think *Chores* shows a lot of individuality and that’s another important reason why it’s such a successful piece.

Another important quality to look for in a writer’s voice is authenticity. Does the writing sound real? Does it sound as though it was written by a real person, or does it sound phony, stilted, awkward? Like honesty, authenticity can be hard to judge. For example, writers often experiment with styles that are not their own, and this can be very successful if it’s done well. Once again, I look for consistency. Does each part of the piece sound like it was written by the same person? And do you get a strong sense throughout the piece of who that person is?

To me, *Chores* seems very authentic. It sounds like it was written by a frustrated 9-year-old girl who doesn’t like to do her chores; the writer’s voice matches is consistent throughout and matches my expectation of how I think this person should sound.

Finally, we can judge a writer’s voice by how original the writing seems. To say that something is original is simply to say that we haven’t seen it before. *Chores* feels very original to me. I’ve never seen a piece on this topic that sounds quite the same. Of course, to someone who had read 20 other pieces just like it, it wouldn’t seem that way.

**Displays a Definite and Well Developed Personality**

Whenever I read something that has a lot of voice, I get the feeling that I’m getting to know the person who wrote it just as if we were hanging out as friends. That isn’t true, of course. I’m not getting to know the person, I’m getting to know the personality that person is presenting through his or her words.

In *Chores,* I feel like I’m getting to know a frustrated little girl who has a pretty good sense of humor and, deep down, a reasonable attitude about doing her chores. She doesn’t like to do chores, but she also knows they’re a part of life we all just have to get through. To me, her personality in this piece seems well defined and successfully developed.

**Appropriate Tone for Purpose and Audience**

If you wrote a letter to your grandma thanking her for a birthday present, you probably wouldn’t want to sound like an angry, frustrated person. If you wrote an article for your school paper about someone on your high school’s football team who had suffered a serious injury, you probably wouldn’t want to seem silly, as though you were making a joke out of it. If you wrote a research paper about global warming, you probably wouldn’t want to sound as casual as you do when you’re talking to your friends. The voice you choose for your writing must match the purpose you are writing for and the people you are writing to. I think the voice the writer uses in *Chores* matches the situation very well.