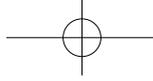
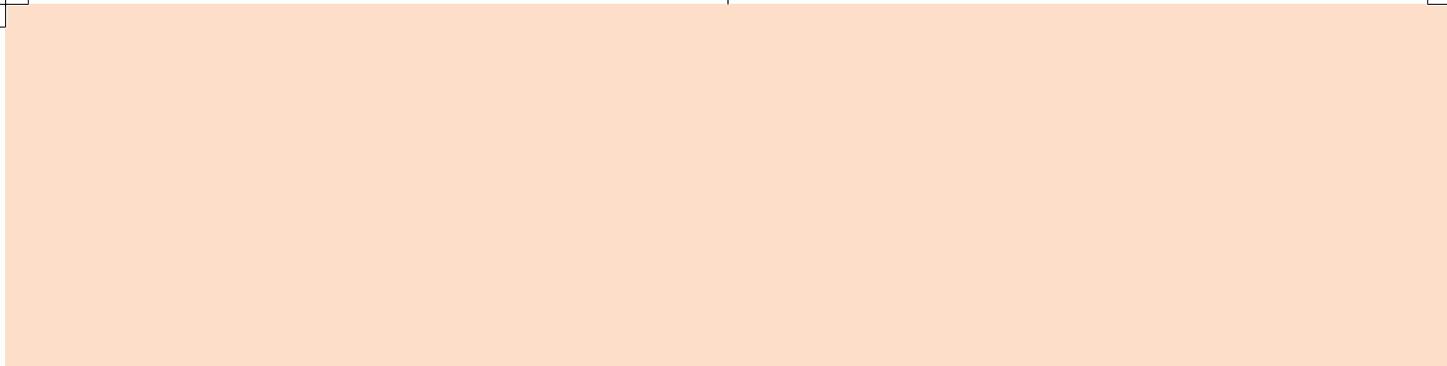


Map of the Book

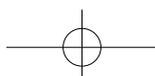
Unit topic	Writing skills	Readings on the topic
Unit 1 My First Day at College P. 1	Part I The Summary (An Overview) Part II The Paragraph (An Overview)	1. The First Day of School 2. My First Day of Middle School 3. School Is Bad for Children
Unit 2 When the Truth Came Out P. 25	Part I Story Outlining Part II The Narrative Paragraph	1. The Scar 2. Never Cry Wolf 3. Cyber Step-Mother 4. "Merry Christmas!"
Unit 3 Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover P. 45	Part I Story Summary Part II The Descriptive Paragraph	1. Silk Parachute 2. Mr. Jones 3. Hearts and Hands
Unit 4 A Learning Moment P. 69	Part I The Essay Summary Part II The Paragraph (Supporting Details)	1. Permission to Fail 2. In and of Ourselves We Trust 3. A Note in My Mailbox



Readings written by your peers	Writing assignments
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. My First Day of College2. My First Day of Classes at College3. My First Phonetics Class	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Write a summary in about 150 words of the first half of the story "Half a Day."2. Write a paragraph of 200–300 words about your first day at school/college/any new place.
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I Was Wrong2. My Chinese Teacher3. My Grandma	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. From the position of an objective narrator, write a summary of "The Boy and the Bank Officer" in about 150 words.2. Write a paragraph of about 150 words describing an incident in which some truth finally came out or a misunderstanding was cleared up.
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Man on the Bus2. Two Men on the Bus3. Beyond Appearance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. With the help of your outline in Activity 1, summarize "The Midnight Visitor" in chronological order in about 150 words.2. Write a paragraph of 150–170 words about a lesson you learned from judging a person by his/her appearance.
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Flying a Kite2. A Moment of Enlightenment3. A Learning Experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Write a summary of the essay "The Green Banana" in 150–200 words.2. Write a one-paragraph essay of 200–300 words about a learning moment you have experienced.



Unit topic	Writing skills	Readings on the topic
Unit 5 A Tough Decision to Make P. 89	Part I Flashbacks in Story Summary Part II Paragraph Organization (I)	1. Render Unto Larry's 2. A Doctor's Dilemma 3. Forgive Me, Davey
Unit 6 My Hobby/Pastime P. 115	Part I Essay Outlining Part II Paragraph Organization (II)	1. Passports to Understanding 2. Pet Love 3. A Fiddle and the Law
Unit 7 Memorable Gifts P. 137	Part I The Summary (Do's and Don'ts) Part II The Paragraph (Unity and Coherence)	1. Almie Rose's Christmas Present 2. The Greatest Gift of All 3. From the Heart
Unit 8 Practical Writing (I) P. 159	Part I Short Letters/Notes Part II Campus Notices	





Readings written by your peers	Writing assignments
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Grandma's Prompt Decision2. A Tough Decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Write a summary of the story "After Twenty Years" in about 200 words. You can summarize the story either with the flashback or in chronological order.2. Write a one-paragraph essay about a difficult decision you or someone you know had to make.
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Football—My Favorite Sport2. The Wisest Decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. As an objective narrator, summarize how Mandela benefited from this gardening in about 150 words.2. Write a paragraph of about 150 words on either of the topics:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why you pursue a hobby/pastime• How you have benefited from a hobby/pastime
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A Gift of Friendship2. A Birthday Gift to Mom	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read "Christmas Day in the Morning" and summarize it in about 150 words.2. Write a paragraph of 200–250 words about a memorable gift you received or gave someone.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Write an invitation.2. Write a letter/note to apologize.4. Write a thank-you letter.5. Write a notice.



Unit 1

My First Day at College

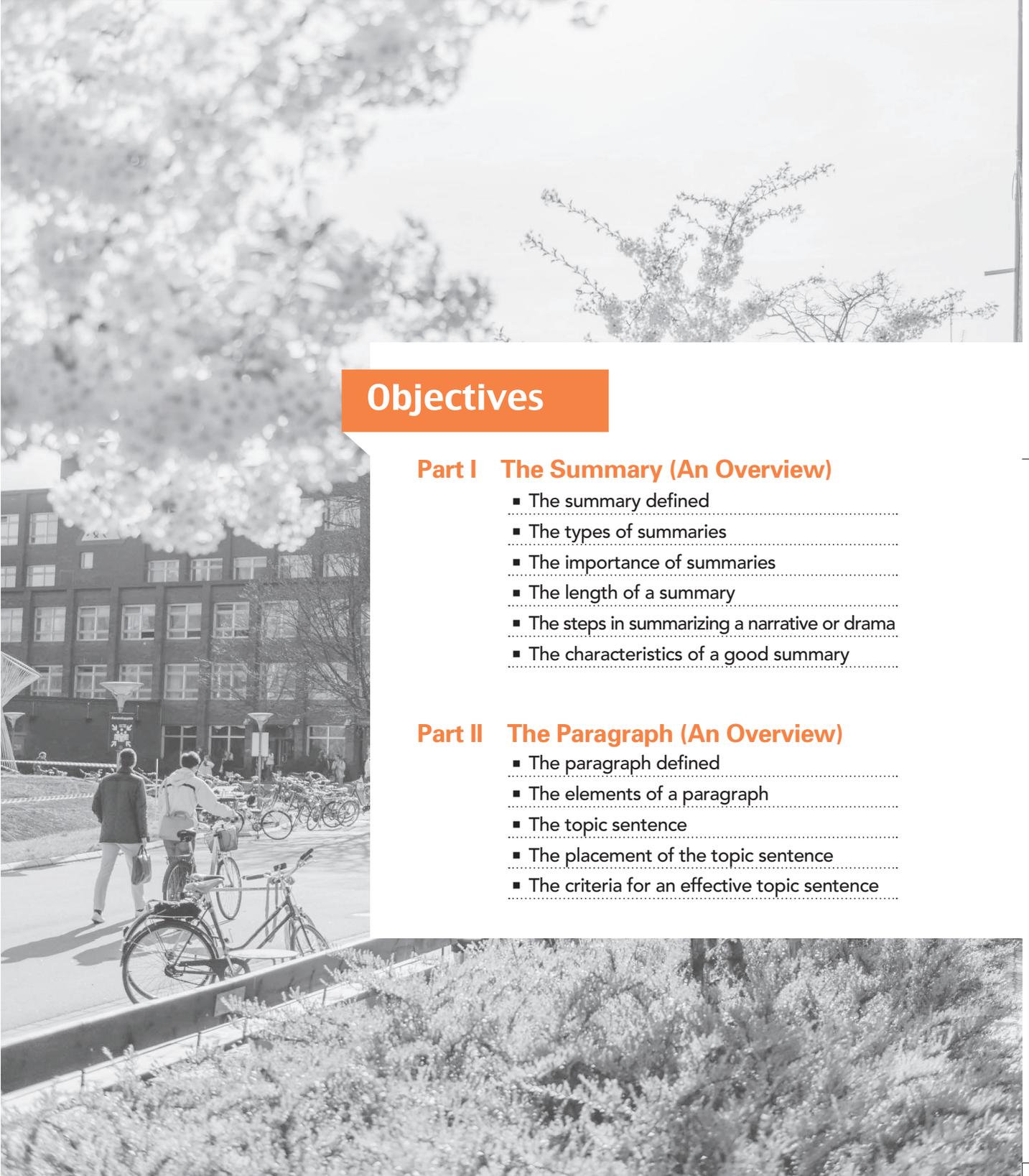
Objectives

Part I The Summary (An Overview)

- The summary defined.....
- The types of summaries.....
- The importance of summaries.....
- The length of a summary.....
- The steps in summarizing a narrative or drama.....
- The characteristics of a good summary.....

Part II The Paragraph (An Overview)

- The paragraph defined.....
- The elements of a paragraph.....
- The topic sentence.....
- The placement of the topic sentence.....
- The criteria for an effective topic sentence.....





I

Part

The Summary (An Overview)

Guidelines

The summary defined

A summary is a piece of writing that gives the main ideas or facts of an article, a story, novel, play, etc.

The types of summaries

- The summary of a story (narrative or drama), usually called a plot summary.
- The summary of an essay, usually called a content summary.

The importance of summaries

- Students often encounter examination questions that require them to summarize.

- Newspaper or broadcast reporters often summarize the latest news stories.
- Employees are often told to report briefly on developments in their departments.
- ...

The length of a summary

This depends on the purpose for which it is to be used. Generally, a summary should be no more than one-third to one-fourth the length of the original.

The method of summarizing a narrative or drama

- Read the text carefully to understand it thoroughly.
- List the main events in the order in which they were presented in the original work.
- Leave out unimportant details such as long descriptions of people, places or objects.
- Reduce conversations into a brief account of what has been said.
- Add nothing that is not in the text.
- Preserve the mood (the way the original text makes you feel) and the tone (the general feeling or attitude the original expressed).

The characteristics of a good summary

- Accurate, that is, it truly reflects the views, tone and mood of the piece.
- Objective, that is, it does not introduce any of your own ideas into the piece.
- Complete, that is, it does not leave out important facts or ideas.
- Balanced, that is, it gives equal attention to each main idea.

Activity 1 Distinguishing a good summary from a poor one

- ① Read the following passage from “Half a Day” by Naguib Mahfous and the three summaries of it. Indicate which of the summaries is the best, and what is wrong with the other two.

Original text

I walked by my father’s side, clutching his right hand. All my clothes were new: the black shoes, the green school uniform, and the red cap. They did not make me happy, however, as this was the day I was to be thrown into school for the first time.

My mother stood at the window watching our progress, and I turned towards her from time to time, hoping she would help. We walked along a street lined with gardens, fields planted with crops, pears, and date palms.

“Why school?” I asked my father. “What have I done?”

“I’m not punishing you,” he said, laughing. “School’s not a punishment. It’s a place that makes useful men out of boys. Don’t you want to be useful like your brothers?”

I was not convinced. I did not believe there was really any good to be had in tearing me away from my home and throwing me into the huge, high-walled building. (158 words)

Summary 1

The first day I went to school, I was wearing new clothes: a pair of black shoes, a green school uniform, and a red cap. I held my father’s hand tightly as we walked there.

From time to time I turned round to look at my mother, who was standing at the window. I hoped she would tell my father not to punish me by sending me to school, but she didn’t.

When I asked my father what I had done wrong, he said that school was not a punishment, but a place to turn boys into useful men. Still I couldn’t understand why I should go to that place. (110 words)

Summary 2

The day my father took me to school, I was not happy. I thought school was a punishment and asked him what I had done wrong. He said that school would make me a useful man. But what he said did not convince me. (44 words)

Summary 3

The first day of school, my father took me there. I didn’t want to go. I asked my father why they decided to send me to that high-walled building and what I had done wrong. Then he explained what a school was for, but I didn’t believe him at all. How I hated the place that looked like a prison! (59 words)

Activity 2 Summarizing orally

- ▶ Summarize orally the following two passages from “Half a Day,” making your summary one-third to one-fourth the length of the original.

Passage 1

When we arrived at the gate we could see the schoolyard, vast and full of boys and girls. “Go in by yourself,” said my father, “and join them. Put a smile on your face and be a good example to others.”

I hesitated and clung to his hand, but he gently pushed me from him. “Be a man,” he said. “Today you truly begin life. You will find me waiting for you when it’s time to leave.”

I took a few steps. Then the faces of the boys and girls came into view. I did not know a single one of them, and none of them knew me. I felt I was a stranger who had lost his way. But then some boys began to glance at me in curiosity, and one of them came over and asked, “Who brought you?”

“My father,” I whispered.

“My father’s dead,” he said simply.

I did not know what to say. The gate was now closed. Some of the children burst into tears. The bell rang. A lady came along, followed by a group of men. The men began sorting us into ranks. We were formed into an intricate pattern in the great schoolyard surrounded by high buildings; from each floor we were overlooked by a long balcony roofed in wood. (218 words)

- ▶ Before you summarize Passage 1, answer the following questions to help you select important details you think should be included in the summary.

1. Was the boy one of the first to arrive?

2. What did the boy’s father tell him to do at the school gate?

3. The boy knew none of the children in the yard, did he?

4. How did he feel? Excited, happy, or lost?

5. How did he get to talk to another boy? What did he learn about the other boy?



6. What happened when the gate was closed?

7. Who were the men and the lady that came along after the bell rang?

8. What did the men do?

Passage 2

“This is your new home,” said the woman. “There are mothers and fathers here, too. Everything that is enjoyable and beneficial is here. So dry your tears and face life joyfully.”

Well, it seemed that my misgivings had had no basis. From the first moments I made many friends and fell in love with many girls. I had never imagined school would have this rich variety of experiences.

We played all sorts of games. In the music room we sang our first songs. We also had our first introduction to language. We saw a globe of the Earth, which revolved and showed the various continents and countries. We started learning numbers, and we were told the story of the Creator of the universe. We ate delicious food, took a little nap, and woke up to go on with friendship and love, playing and learning.

Our path, however, was not totally sweet and unclouded. We had to be observant and patient. It was not all a matter of playing and fooling around. Rivalries could bring about pain and hatred or give rise to fighting. And while the lady would sometimes smile, she would often yell and scold. Even more frequently she would resort to physical punishment.

In addition, the time for changing one’s mind was over and gone and there was no question of ever returning to the paradise of home. Nothing lay ahead of us but exertion, struggle, and perseverance. Those who were able took advantage of the opportunities for success and happiness that presented themselves. (256 words)

🔴 Before summarizing Passage 2, list the important facts in the space below.

Writing Assignment 1



Write a summary in about 150 words of the first half of the story “Half a Day.”

Half a Day

Naguib Mahfous

I walked by my father’s side, clutching his right hand. All my clothes were new: the black shoes, the green school uniform, and the red cap. They did not make me happy, however, as this was the day I was to be thrown into school for the first time.

My mother stood at the window watching our progress, and I turned towards her from time to time, hoping she would help. We walked along a street lined with gardens, fields planted with crops, pears, and date palms.

“Why school?” I asked my father. “What have I done?”

“I’m not punishing you,” he said, laughing. “School’s not a punishment. It’s a place that makes useful men out of boys. Don’t you want to be useful like your brothers?”

I was not convinced. I did not believe there was really any good to be had in tearing me away from my home and throwing me into the huge, high-walled building.

When we arrived at the gate we could see the schoolyard, vast and full of boys and girls. “Go in by yourself,” said my father, “and join them. Put a smile on your face and be a good example to others.”

I hesitated and clung to his hand, but he gently pushed me from him. “Be a man,” he said. “Today you truly begin life. You will find me waiting for you when it’s time to leave.”

I took a few steps. Then the faces of the boys and girls came into view. I did not know a single one of them, and none of them knew me. I felt I was a stranger who had lost his way. But then some boys began to glance at me in curiosity, and one of them came over and asked, “Who brought you?”

“My father,” I whispered.

“My father’s dead,” he said simply.

I did not know what to say. The gate was now closed. Some of the children burst into tears. The bell rang. A lady came along, followed by a group of men. The men began sorting us into ranks. We were formed into an intricate pattern in the great schoolyard surrounded by high buildings; from each floor we were overlooked by a long balcony roofed in wood.

“This is your new home,” said the woman. “There are mothers and fathers here, too. Everything that is enjoyable and beneficial is here. So dry your tears and face life joyfully.”

Well, it seemed that my misgivings had had no basis. From the first moments I made many friends and fell in love with many girls. I had never imagined school would have this rich variety of experiences.

We played all sorts of games. In the music room we sang our first songs. We also had our first introduction to language. We saw a globe of the Earth, which revolved and showed the various continents and countries. We started learning numbers, and we were told the story of the Creator of the universe. We ate delicious food, took a little nap, and woke up to go on with friendship and love, playing and learning.

Our path, however, was not totally sweet and unclouded. We had to be observant and patient. It was not all a matter of playing and fooling around. Rivalries could bring about pain and hatred or give rise to fighting. And while the lady would sometimes smile, she would often yell and scold. Even more frequently she would resort to physical punishment.

In addition, the time for changing one’s mind was over and gone and there was no question of ever returning to the paradise of home. Nothing lay ahead of us but exertion, struggle, and perseverance. Those who were able took advantage of the opportunities for success and happiness that presented themselves. (632 words)

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II

Part

The Paragraph (An Overview)

Guidelines

The paragraph defined

A paragraph is a self-contained unit of a discourse in writing dealing with a particular point or idea.

The elements of a paragraph

A paragraph contains the following information:

- a topic (the subject matter the paragraph deals with);
- a main idea (the controlling idea, or the point the writer is making about the subject matter, usually stated in a topic sentence);
- supporting details (evidence, facts or specific ideas that develop the main idea).

The topic sentence

- It states the main idea of a paragraph;
- It controls/determines the rest of the sentences in the paragraph (all other sentences in the paragraph should support this main idea);
- It is the writer's comment on the topic of the paragraph.

The placement of the topic sentence

- It is most frequently placed at the beginning of the paragraph. (To give the reader a clear idea of what will follow—facts or examples that support the main idea.)
- It sometimes comes last. (To sum up the paragraph's content, the reasoning proceeding from specifics—facts or examples—to a conclusion, what is stated in the topic sentence.)
- It can, at times, be simply implied rather than clearly stated.

The criteria for an effective topic sentence

- It states the main idea of the paragraph accurately and clearly.
- It conveys one main idea. (A paragraph that tries to list two topics or make two points at the same time splits the focus and gives you too much to deal with in a single paragraph.)
- It presents the main idea precisely. (A topic sentence should be sufficiently specific.)
- It makes a discussable point. (A topic sentence should state your opinion, point of view, or feelings on the topic, not an established fact. It should give you something to say.)

Activity 3 Practicing topic sentences

➤ Identify the topic and the topic sentence in the following paragraphs.

1. Around the office I work in, they changed the paper towels several months ago. The new ones are nowhere near as good as the brand they had for years, and it takes three to do what one of the old ones would do. Somebody in the company decided it would look good if they bought cheaper paper towels. It is just incredible that smart people decide to save money in such petty ways. (73 words)
2. America's great contribution to mankind has been the invention of mass production. We showed the world how to make things quickly, inexpensively, and in such great numbers that even people who didn't have a lot of money could afford them. Automobiles were our outstanding examples for a long time. We made cars that weren't Rolls-Royces, but they were good cars, and just about everyone could scrape together the money to buy one. (72 words)
3. I told him [my dad] about the first time I stole a tube of lipstick and how I felt equal amounts of thrill and guilt. Then the second time, when I took a teen magazine, the guilt faded as the thrill grew. I told him about the third time, and the fourth and the tenth. Part of me wanted to stop the confession, but it gushed out like an open fire hydrant. I said, "Each time I stole, it got easier—until now. I can see how wrong it was." Hot tears bit my face as I said, "Please forgive me. I'll never do it again. Stealing was easy; getting caught is hard." (113 words)

➤ Point out which of the following topic sentences make a discussable point and turn the dead-end topic sentences into discussable ones.

1. My grandma is 68.
2. It is important to form good habits when you are young.
3. Smoking is harmful for the health.
4. My uncle smokes.
5. Xiao Li went to the library after class.
6. The National Library offers a variety of services.
7. Boys will be boys.
8. English is a Germanic language.
9. Learning English is not a breeze.
10. College offers a rosy future for the boy.

➤ **Point out which of the following topic sentences are not specific enough or too specific, and turn them into effective ones.**

1. Too many traffic accidents occurred last month.
2. Great changes have taken place in my hometown.
3. Computers are widely used in schools.
4. The restaurant owner listened to my complaints patiently.
5. I watched a CBA game yesterday.
6. In some poor areas, farmers still use water buffaloes to plow the land.
7. The children wear old-fashioned school uniforms.
8. On my first day of school, my father drove me there.
9. There are many important days in my life.
10. The Chinese family has changed a great deal over the last fifty years.

➤ **Supply a topic sentence for each of the three paragraphs, and put it in the right place.**

1. A lion, who was stalking a deer in the forest, almost stepped on a mouse one morning. "Please, Mister Lion," squeaked the mouse. "Don't eat me. Why, I'd barely be mouthful for you." "You're right," said the lion, and he carefully stepped around the tiny creature. Later that same day, the mouse found the lion trapped in a net which had been set by hunters to capture wild animals. With his sharp teeth, the mouse soon gnawed the ropes, and the lion was free. "Thanks a lot, little friend. Now, how can I repay you?" the lion asked. "Never mind," the mouse said. "After all, you let me go free earlier today." (112 words)

The sentence that best states the central idea of the paragraph is _____.

- a. He who laughs last laughs best.
- b. One good turn deserves another.
- c. A friend in need is a friend indeed.
- d. The weakest can help the strongest.

The topic sentence would be best positioned _____.

- a. at the beginning
- b. after the fifth sentence
- c. after the seventh sentence
- d. at the very end

2. Eating almonds is said to be very beneficial in lowering bad cholesterol while providing the body with ample amounts of vitamin E. Vitamin E promotes good blood circulation and keeps the arteries supple, so they help your heart to keep beating

with youth and vitality. Almonds are very filling and packed with fiber, so they also contribute to regular and healthy bowel habits. (63 words)

The sentence that best states the central idea of the paragraph is _____.

- a. Almonds are low in calories.
- b. Almonds help protect our heart.
- c. Almonds have certain health benefits.
- d. Almonds contain small amounts of Vitamin E.

The topic sentence would be best positioned _____.

- a. at the beginning
- b. right after the first sentence
- c. right before the last sentence
- d. at the end

3. How much sleep do you need? This depends a great deal on the individual. It varies according to personality type—some of us are “night-people” and are more alive in the evening and others are morning people, brighter early in the day. The kind of work you do, how much sports or other vigorous activity you perform each day, the food you consume before bedtime, the amount of stress you experience, etc., all play a part in how much rest you really need; there is no set rule. People who practice regular meditation find that they need less sleep, as the body is regenerated through relaxation, and stress is kept to a minimum. One thing is for sure... (118 words)

The sentence that best states the central idea of the paragraph is _____.

- a. A good night’s sleep is one of the simplest and most effective rejuvenating secrets!
- b. You can decide at any time how much rest you should allow yourself!
- c. We all need a certain amount of regular sleep to function and to look and feel refreshed!
- d. There is no extra charge for a nap or a good night’s sleep; the best things in life are free!

Activity 4 Readings on the topic

🕒 Read the following essays on the topic and respond to the questions.

(1)

The First Day of School

Karl Krahnke

1 I have been teaching for seventeen years now. For the last three years I have been teaching the second grade at Washington Elementary School. Most of what

happens on the first day of school every year is not new for me. But I still approach each new school year differently.

2 One way that each year is different is that I always hope that each year's new students will be different. I hope that this year's students will be smarter, better behaved, and more ready to settle down and start acting as though they are in school and not on vacation. I also hope that the new students will not cry, will have their lunch money, and will know what bus they are supposed to take to get home or whether their parents will be picking them up.

3 Another way I hope new school years will be different is that I hope I will be better prepared. I know that I have started school years before, so I should be ready to help the students organize their supplies and put them in the blue and red storage boxes at the back of the room. I should be ready for the children to get tired and start to fall asleep by two o'clock in the long afternoon. I should be ready to check that the students can write their names and can recognize their names when they see them.

4 But I am always surprised at the beginning of school. This year, for example, I had twenty-three students. On the first day, six of them had forgotten to bring lunch money and did not have lunches of their own. I had to lend them money so they could eat in the cafeteria. Most of them knew how to get back home, but one little boy, Manfred, got on the wrong bus, and I had to pick him up and drive him home. He cried all the way.

5 I was also surprised this year when three of the students did not seem to be able to read, and one of them could not write her name. I had given them easy books to read after lunch; while I was trying to make some lists of students' names for the office, I noticed that the three children were looking at the pictures in the book but not at the writing. I stopped and asked them what they were reading, but they did not seem to know. I hope that they were just confused and afraid on the first day of school and that they will be able to read along with the other children.

6 In general, though, the first day of school is an exciting one, for the children and for me. They are excited to get away from home and to be with a lot of other children of their age. They look forward to the new year in school and ask me a lot of questions about what we will do during the year. I am excited because I have a new group of students to teach, and I look forward to watching them learn writing, mathematics, etc. and try to understand the community and

world they live in. Although it is sometimes difficult, it is very satisfying to be a teacher and to know that I am helping so many children become useful and educated adults. (563 words)

Questions to think about

1. Does the teacher think the things described in the first four paragraphs are normal for the first day of school?

2. Is the topic sentence of the concluding paragraph stated or implied?

3. Do the rest of the sentences in the concluding paragraph relate to the main idea expressed in the topic sentence?

(2)

My First Day of Middle School

Patty Hansen

- 1 The morning of the first day of the seventh grade, I had the same dream I had started having around the end of the sixth grade.
- 2 My hands were clammy as I turned my combination lock, but it wouldn't open. I gave up and started to run down the hallway. As I ran, the hall seemed to get longer and longer. I could feel the tears forming. I was late, late, late, late for my first class on my first day of middle school. As I ran, people were watching me and they were laughing... laughing... laughing... then the bell rang! In my dream, it was the school bell. But as I sat up in bed, I realized that it was my alarm clock jarring me awake.
- 3 In my heart, I knew I would never make it. Everything was too different.
- 4 I was used to walking to school, and now I had to walk six blocks to the bus stop so that I could take the bus to and from school. I hated buses. They made me carsick from the jiggling and the smell of the fuel.
- 5 I had to get up for school earlier than in the past, partly because of having to be bussed to school and partly because I had to take better care of myself now that I was in my preteen years.
- 6 In middle school, I would have to learn the rules and personalities of six

different teachers instead of just one. There would be different kids in all my classes, kids I didn't even know. I had never made friends very easily, and now I would have to start all over again.

7 I would have to run to my locker between classes, remember my combination, open it, put in the books from the last class and take out different books... and make it to the next class all within *five minutes*!

8 No one had ever told me that growing up was going to be so hard, so scary, so unwelcome, so... unexpected. I was the oldest kid in my family—in fact, in my entire neighborhood—and no one had been there before me, to help lead me through the challenges of middle school.

9 I was on my own.

10 The first day of school was *almost* everything I feared. I didn't remember my combination. I wrote the combination on my hand, but my hand was so sweaty that it came off. I was late for every class. I didn't have enough time to finish my lunch; I had just sat down to eat when the bell rang and I had to go back to class. I wasn't sure what teachers went with which subject and they had all assigned homework... on the very first day of school! I couldn't believe it.

11 But the first day wasn't like my dream in another way. In my dream, all of the other kids had it together and I was the only one who was the nerd. In real life, I wasn't the only one who was late for classes. Everyone else was late, too. No one could remember his or her combination either, except one boy. Most of the kids realized that everyone else was going through the same thing they were going through. We were bumping into each other in our rush to get to the next class, and books were flying everywhere. Yeah, there was laughter in the hallway, but most of it was the laughter of kids sharing a common experience: complete hysteria!

12 As the weeks went by, it became easier and easier. Pretty soon I could twirl my combination without even looking at it. I hung posters in my locker, and finally felt like I was at home. I learned all of my teachers' names and decided who I liked the best. Friendships from elementary school were renewed and made stronger, and new friends were made.

13 I still didn't like the bus; it did make me carsick. I even threw up on the bus once. (At least it was on the way home, not on the way to school.) I went to dances and parties, and I started to wonder what it would feel like to be kissed by a boy. The school had track tryouts, and I made the team and learned how to jump the

low hurdles. I got pretty good at it, too. First semester turned into second, and then third. Before I knew it the eighth grade was just around the corner. I had made it through. Next year, on the first day of school, I would be watching the new seventh graders sweating it out just like I did—just like everyone does. I decided that I would feel sorry for them... but only for the FIRST day of the seventh grade. After that, it's a breeze. (816 words)

Questions to think about

1. Why did Patty Hansen start having nightmares about middle school around the end of the sixth grade?

2. What did she find on her first day at middle school?

3. What is the main idea of the concluding paragraph? Is it stated in a topic sentence or is it implied?

4. Do you think the concluding paragraph also conveys the controlling idea of the essay?

(3)

School Is Bad for Children¹

John Holt²

1 Almost every child, on the first day he sets foot in a school building, is smarter, more curious, less afraid of what he doesn't know, better at finding and figuring things out, more confident, resourceful, persistent and independent than he will ever be again in his schooling—or, unless he is very unusual and very lucky, for the rest of his life. Already, by paying close attention to and interacting with the world and people around him, and without any school-type formal instruction, he has done a task far more difficult, complicated, and abstract than anything he will be asked to do in school, or than any of his teachers has done for years. He

- 1 The passage is the first half of an essay that first appeared in 1969 in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The author raises the miseducation problems in American schools. In the second half, John Holt puts forward specific suggestions as to what needs to be done.
- 2 **John Holt** (1923–1985): a teacher and writer who became widely and unfavorably known in the 1960s and 1970s for advocating that children control their own learning.

has solved the mystery of language. He has discovered it—babies don't even know that language exists—and he has found out how it works and learned to use it. He has done it by exploring, by experimenting, by developing his own model of the grammar of language, by trying it out and seeing whether it works, by gradually changing it and refining it until it does work. And while he has been doing this, he has been learning other things as well, including many of the “concepts” that the schools think only they can teach him, and many that are more complicated than the ones they do try to teach him.

2 In he comes, this curious, patient, determined, energetic, skillful learner. We sit him down at a desk, and what do we teach him? Many things. First, that learning is separated from living. “You come to school to learn,” we tell him, as if the child hadn't been learning before, as if living were out there and learning were in here, and there were no connection between the two. Secondly, that he cannot be trusted to learn and is no good at it. Everything we teach about reading, a task far simpler than many that the child has already mastered, says to him, “If we don't make you read, you won't, and if you don't do it exactly the way we tell you, you can't.” In short, he comes to feel that learning is a passive process, something that someone else does to you, instead of something you do for yourself.

3 In a great many other ways, he learns that he is worthless, untrustworthy, fit only to take other people's orders, a blank sheet for other people to write on. Oh, we make a lot of nice noises in school about respect for the child and individual differences, and the like. But our acts, as opposed to our talk, say to the child, “Your experience, your concerns, your curiosities, your needs, what you know, what you want, what you wonder about, what you hope for, what you fear, what you like and dislike, what you are good at or not so good at—all this is of not the slightest importance, it counts for nothing. What counts here, and the only thing that counts, is what we know, what we think is important, what we want you to do, think, and be.” The child soon learns not to ask question—the teacher isn't there to satisfy his curiosity. Having learned to hide his curiosity, he later learns to be ashamed of it. Given no chance to find out who he is—and to develop that person, whoever it is—he soon comes to accept the adults' evaluation of him.

4 He learns many other things. He learns that to be wrong, uncertain, confused, is a crime. Right Answers are what the school wants, and he learns countless strategies for prying these answers out of the teacher, for conning her into thinking he knows what he doesn't know. He learns to dodge, bluff, fake,

cheat. He learns to be lazy. Before he came to school, he would work for hours on end, on his own, with no thought of reward, at the business of making sense of the world and gaining competence in it. In school he learns, like every buck private, how to goldbrick, how not to work when the sergeant isn't looking, how to know when he is looking, how to make him think you are working even when he is looking. He learns that in real life you don't do anything unless you are bribed, bullied, or conned into doing it, that nothing is worth doing for its own sake, or that if it is, you can't do it in school. He learns to be bored, to work with a small part of his mind, to escape from the reality around him into daydreams and fantasies—but not like the fantasies of his preschool years, in which he played a very active part.

5 The child comes to school curious about other people, particularly other children, and the school teaches him to be indifferent. The most interesting thing in the classroom—often the only interesting thing in it—is the other children, but he has to act as these other children, all about him, only a few feet away, are not really there. He cannot interact with them, talk with them, smile at them. In many schools he can't talk to other children in the halls between classes; in more than a few, and some of these in stylish suburbs, he can't even talk to them at lunch. Splendid training for a world in which, when you're not studying the other person to figure out how to do him in, you pay no attention to him.

6 It is a rare child who can come through his schooling with much left of his curiosity, his independence, or his sense of his own dignity, competence and worth. (951 words)

Questions to think about

1. What topic does John Holt deal with in this passage?

2. What is wrong with primary schooling, according to Holt?

3. Is the main idea of the fourth paragraph stated in a topic sentence or implied?

4. In what other ways is the child miseducated at school, according to Holt?

5. Paraphrase the concluding sentence.

6. What is the function of the last paragraph? How does it relate to the opening paragraph of the passage?

Activity 5 Readings written by your peers

► Read the passages written by your peers and respond to the questions.

(1)

My First Day of College

Gong Yiduo

On registration day, my uncle came to the university with me. A breeze blew into our taxi, and I felt so comfortable that I thought I would have a bright future. At the same time, I was a little nervous because I was not sure whether I would get along with my teachers and my fellow students. The faces of young men and women like me came into view when I got there. I was excited because I realized college was a turning point in my life and in four years I would become a useful member of society. After going through all the complicated formalities, I went to the dormitory, eager to meet my roommates. To my disappointment, they were all from Beijing. As my family lives in Zhuhai, miles and miles away, I would be lonely when they went home at weekends and on holidays. But soon, my misgivings disappeared, for the four girls were all warm-hearted. We had much in common and began talking about our lives in high school and the places we had been to during vacations. Two of them took me to a department store to buy daily necessities. On the way, we chatted happily. We talked about ourselves and they told me a lot about Beijing, and promised to take me to the Summer Palace nearby when I settled down. “A good beginning, isn’t it?” I said to myself. That night I went to bed thinking happily that tomorrow would be another good day. (251 words)

(2)

My First Day of Classes at College

Wan Ye

It was my first day of classes at college, and I thought I truly began my life at BFSU (Beijing Foreign Studies University) that day. I got up early in the morning to prepare. I

was full of expectation and looked forward to the new lessons. However, the day turned out to be a great mess. The first class was Oral Work. The teacher told us to listen to a recorded dialogue between a man and a woman. But I simply couldn't catch anything and had no idea what they were talking about. It made me even more nervous when I found some of my classmates seemed to know almost everything and could answer any question the teacher asked. When the teacher asked me a question about the relationship between the man and the woman, I couldn't say a single word. As a top student in high school, I was hurt so badly that I wished, at that moment, I had never come to BFSU. Luckily, the Intensive Reading Class followed. There, things seemed to be a little better. At least, I could understand most of what the teacher said. I felt relieved that I didn't have any more lessons that day. Two were enough to drive me mad. I realized that my life at BFSU wouldn't be all smooth sailing. Just as Naguib Mahfouz says about his first day of school, "Nothing lay ahead of us but exertion, struggle, and perseverance." (243 words)

(3)

My First Phonetics Class

Li Xin

In our first phonetics class, the teacher gave each of us a piece of paper with a phrase on it. She then told us to read it. When my turn came, I read, "an—old—cap." "No, you cannot read the phrase that way," the teacher said, "Say it like this: an old cap. Link the 'an' and 'old.' That's 'liaison.'" I was shocked. None of my teachers of English at middle school had ever told me to read a phrase that way. When a classmate finished reading her phrase, the teacher said with a smile on her face, "What a beautiful British accent!" I was puzzled. What accent do I speak with? After learning English for six years at one of the best schools in Beijing, I didn't know! I felt humbled by the discovery, but because of my pride, this harsh fact was almost unacceptable to me. As soon as the class was over, I rushed to a garden. As a top student at high school, I didn't know how to say an English phrase properly and I didn't even know what accent I spoke with! I felt hurt, tears ran down my face, and I wept bitterly. I had no idea how long I sobbed. Finally my tears dried and I calmed down. I said to myself, "Cindy, you know what you have to do. It's not late. Starting from tomorrow, come to this garden and practice oral English and reading aloud every day." (246 words)

Questions to think about

1. Do all the essays make a point?

2. Is there a topic sentence in each passage? If so, where is it located?

3. Which passage do you like best? Give your reasons.

Writing Assignment 2

Write a paragraph of 200–300 words about your first day at school/college/any new place. Don't merely list a series of things you did that day; choose something special, something you will remember for a long time. Here are some questions for you to think about.

Questions about your first day at primary/secondary school

- How old were you when you first went to primary/secondary school?
- What was the name of the school?
- Did one of your parents take you to the school on the first day?
- How did you get to the school? How did you get home after school?
- What was the name of your first teacher? How did you like him/her?
- Do you remember anything special about the first day of school? Were you excited? Were you happy? Did you cry?

Questions about your first day at college

- How did you get to the city where your college is?
- On which day did you arrive?
- Did your parents come with you? If so, how long did they stay?
- How did you like the campus? Was it what you had expected? Was it as good as you thought it would be?

