



DBB 308 WRITING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

1

Introduction: The Process of Academic Writing

- ▶ **Academic writing** differs from other kinds of writing, such as personal, literary, journalistic, or business writing. Its differences can be explained in part by its particular **audience**, **tone**, and **purpose**.
- ▶ Whenever you write, consider your **specific audience**, that is, the people who will read what you have written.
- ▶ Second, consider the **tone** of your writing, your style or manner of expression. It is revealed by your choice of words and grammatical structures and even the length of your sentences. The tone of a piece of writing can be, for example, serious, amusing, personal, or impersonal.
- ▶ Finally, the **purpose** of a piece of writing determines its organizational pattern.

- ▶ Writing is a process of **creating, organizing, writing,** and **polishing.** In the first step of the process, you create ideas. In the second step, you organize the ideas. In the third step, you write a rough draft. In the final step, you polish your rough draft by editing it and making revisions.

Step 1: Creating (Prewriting)

- The first step in the writing process is to choose a topic and collect information about it. This step is often called prewriting because you do the step **before** you start writing.

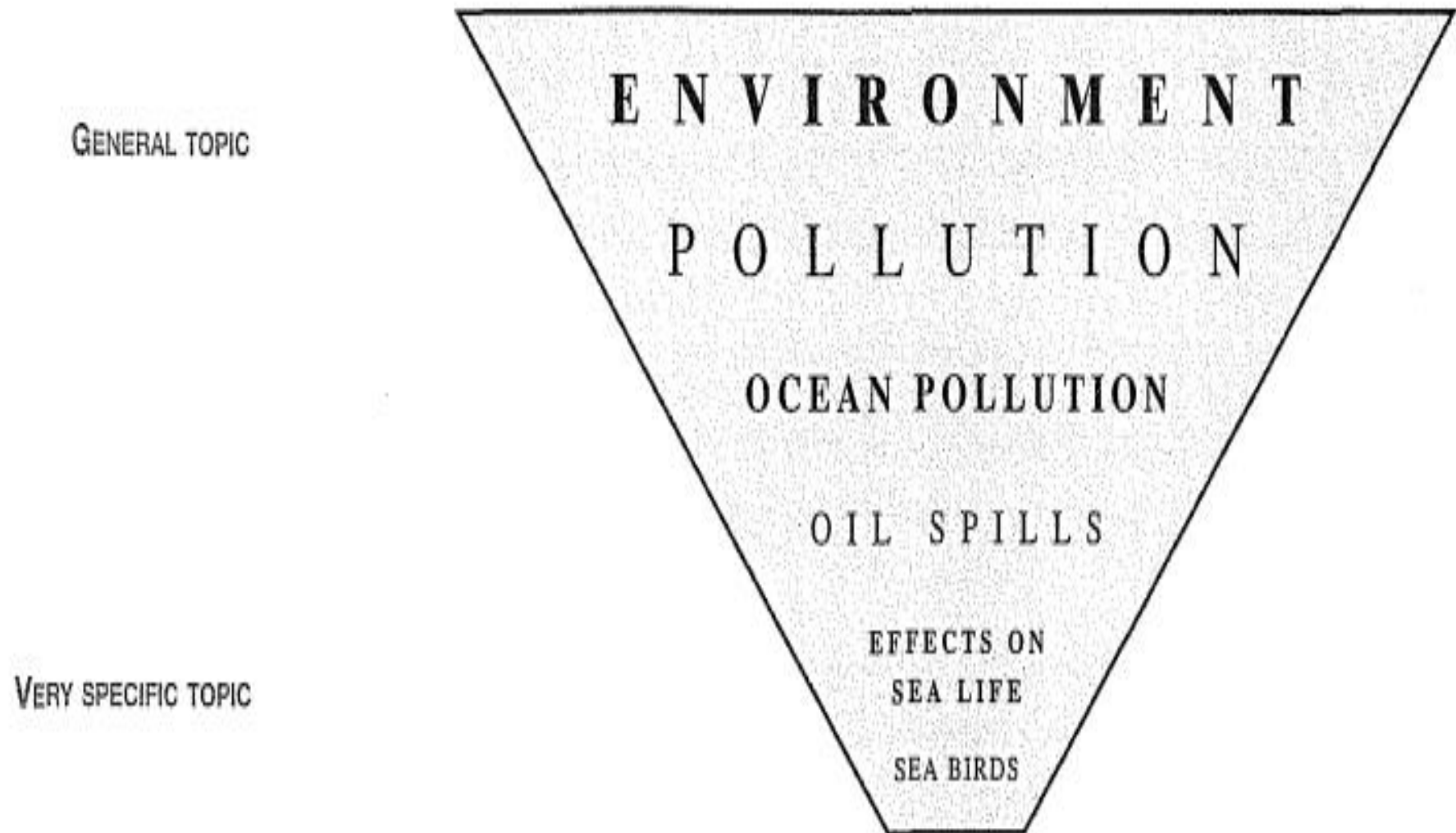
Step 1A: Choosing and Narrowing Down a Topic

- ▶ If you are given a specific writing assignment (such as an essay question on an examination), then what you can write about is limited. However, when you can choose your own topic, here are two tips for making a good choice:
 - ▶ 1. Choose a topic that interests you.
 - ▶ 2. Choose a topic that fits the assignment
- ▶ **Example:** Suppose you are interested in the **environment**, which is a very large topic. You must narrow the topic-perhaps to **environmental pollution**, if that is your interest. Environmental pollution, however, is still a large topic, so you must narrow the topic further, perhaps to one type of environmental pollution, such as **pollution of the oceans**.

Step 1A: Choosing and Narrowing Down a Topic

- ▶ Writing about ocean pollution is still too large because it includes pollution by oil, chemicals, sewage, and garbage. Therefore, you must narrow your topic further, perhaps to **oil** as a source of ocean pollution. You could make this topic even narrower by writing only about the effects of **oil spills on sea life**. For an essay length paper, you should narrow the topic further, perhaps to just one kind of sea life, **sea birds or shellfish**.

The diagram illustrates the process of narrowing a topic.



Step 1B: Generating Ideas

- ▶ After you have chosen a topic and narrowed it, the next prewriting step is to collect information and develop ideas. For some writing tasks, you will need to go to outside sources, such as newspapers, magazines, library books, or the Internet. For other assignments, you can interview friends, classmates, and neighbours to get their ideas and opinions. For still other writing tasks, you can search your own brain and life experiences. Four useful techniques for exploring within yourself are **journal writing**, **listing**, **freewriting**, and **clustering**.

Step 1B: Generating Ideas

- In **journal writing**, you can record your daily experiences, or you can write down quotations that are meaningful to you. A personal journal can be a very rich source of ideas.
- **Listing** is a brainstorming technique in which you think about your topic and quickly make a list of whatever words or phrases come into your mind. Your purpose is to produce as many ideas as possible in a short time.
 - **1.** Write down the general topic at the top of your paper.
 - **2.** Make a list of every idea that comes into your mind about the topic. Don't stop writing until you have filled a page. Keep the ideas flowing. Try to stay on the general topic; however, if you write down information that is completely off the topic, don't worry about it because you can cross it out later.
 - **3.** Use words, phrases, or sentences, and don't worry about spelling or grammar.

Step 1B: Generating Ideas

- Here is an example of the listing technique on the topic of the culture shock experienced by international students in the United States.

Culture Shock	
communication problems	homeless people shocking sight
poor verbal skills	American students
children are disrespectful	classroom environment
new language	unclear expressions
American family life	public transportation is not good
families seldom eat together	need a car
lack vocabulary	use first names with teachers
show affection in public	college professors wear jeans
Americans talk too fast	students ask questions
they are friendly	no formal dress code
people are always in a hurry	no one takes time to cook good meals
use slang and idioms	professor's role
families don't spend time together	children spend more time with friends
on weekends and holidays	than with parents
children are "kings"	use incomplete sentences
lack confidence	poor pronunciation
American food is unhealthy	Americans difficult to understand
everyone eats fast food	students can challenge professors

Practice:

- Brainstorm by listing ideas on:



Characteristics of
a good friend

- ▶ **Freewriting** is a brainstorming activity in which you write freely about a topic because you are looking for a specific focus. While you are writing, one idea will spark another idea.
- ▶
 1. Write the topic at the top of your paper.
 2. Write as much as you can about the topic until you run out of ideas. Include such supporting items as facts, details, and examples that come into your mind about the subject.
 3. After you have run out of ideas, reread your paper and circle the main idea(s) that you would like to develop.
 4. Take each main idea and freewrite again.

Step 1B: Generating Ideas

- **Example:** The student is supposed to write a paragraph about one major problem at his college. He has no idea what to write about, so he starts freewriting about some of the problems that comes to his mind.

Problems at Evergreen College

What is the biggest problem at Evergreen College? Well, I really don't know. In fact, I can't think of one particular problem although I know there are many problems. For one thing, (the classrooms are usually overcrowded.) At the beginning of this semester, Science Hall 211 had 45 students although there were only 31 desks. A few of the seats attached to the desks were broken, so about 20 had to sit on the floor. Besides, (the classrooms are poorly maintained.) In several of my classes, there are broken chairs and litter on the floor. Students even leave their dirty cups and other garbage on the desks. So the rooms are messy. The library is too small and always crowded with students. Not all students really study in the library. Sometimes they talk a lot, and this is really quite distracting to me and other serious students who want and need a quiet place to study. So the present library should be expanded or a new library should be built. Oh yes, I think that (another problem is parking near the campus.) The

- After he finished freewriting, the student reread his paper and circled the main ideas, one of which he will consider as the major problem at Evergreen College.

Step 1B: Generating Ideas

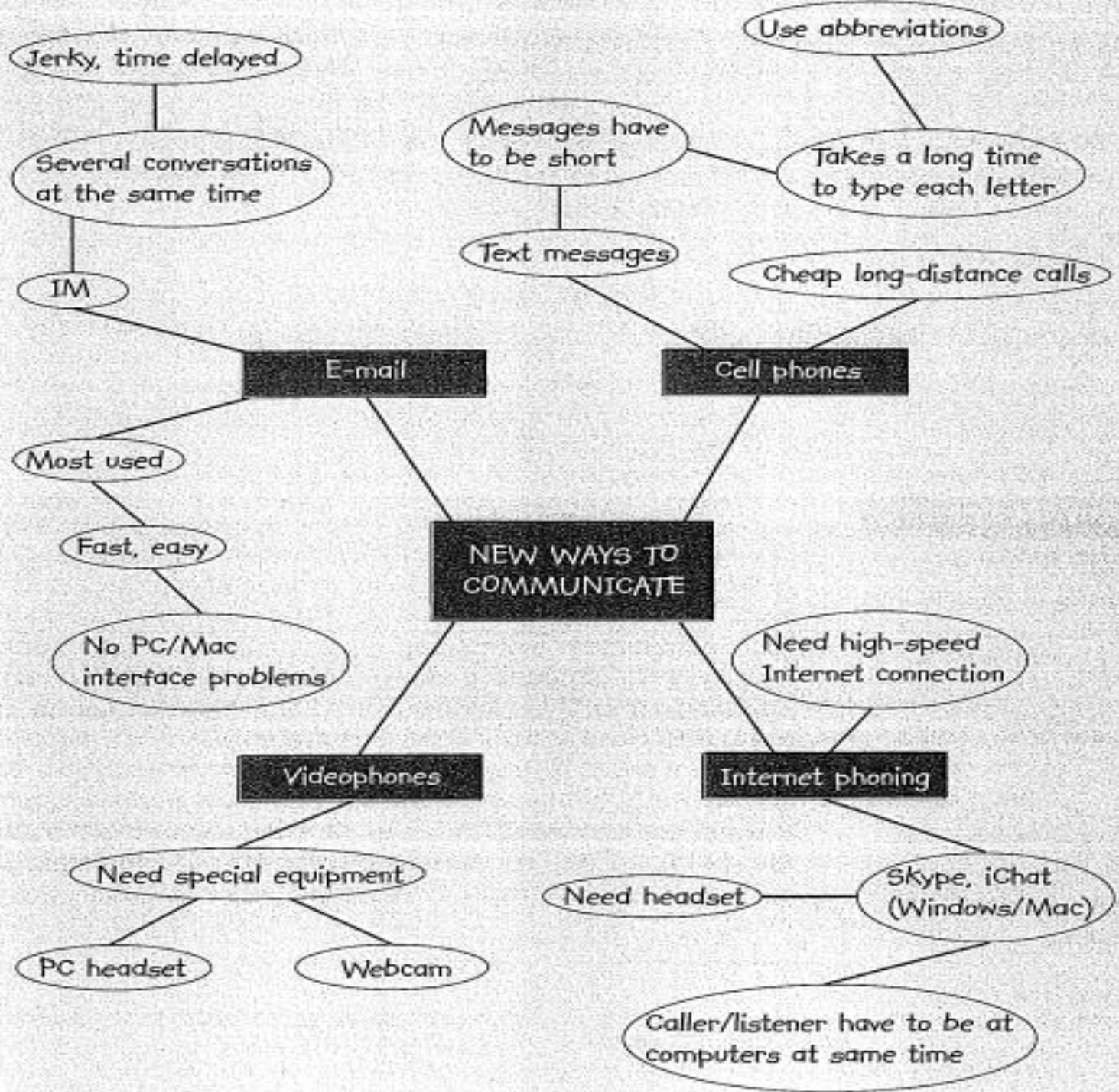
- ▶ Let's say that the student has decided to choose parking as the major problem at Evergreen College. Now that the student knows the topic he wants to write about, he will again brainstorm by freewriting, this time on the parking problem only. His freewriting paper might look like this.

The Parking Problem at Evergreen College

I think finding a parking space close to the campus at Evergreen College is a major problem. There are not enough parking lots for students to park their cars. Therefore, students have to come early to get a parking space, and even then, sometimes they are unlucky and can't get a good parking space. Once I couldn't find a space in the west-side parking lot, and I had to drive in the streets for a half hour before I found one. So I was late for class. Some students are late to class almost every time the English class meets. Some even drop the class, not because they can't handle it, but because they can't find a place to park close to the campus. The teacher warns them time and time again not to be late, but they can't help it. What is the solution to the parking problem? Maybe the college should spend some funds to construct a multilevel parking lot that will accommodate three times as many cars as the present parking lot holds.

Step 1B: Generating Ideas

- **Clustering** is another brainstorming activity you can use to generate ideas. To use this technique, first, write your topic in the center of your paper and draw a «**balloon**» around it. This is your center, or core, balloon. Then write whatever ideas come to you in balloons around the core. Think about each of these ideas and make more balloons around them.



Step : Planning (Outlining)

- In Step 1, you chose topics and narrowed them, and you generated ideas by brainstorming. In Step 2 of the writing process, the planning stage, you organize the ideas into an outline.

STEP 2A: MAKING SUBLISTS

- The two sublists below are the items that describe international students.

Communication Problems

- A.** poor verbal skills
 - lack vocabulary
 - poor pronunciation
 - B.** Americans difficult to understand
 - use incomplete sentences
 - use unclear expressions
 - talk too fast
 - use slang and idioms
-

STEP 2B: WRITING THE TOPIC SENTENCE

- ▶ Finally, write a topic sentence. If the topic is communication problems, a possible topic sentence might be as follows.
- ▶ **One problem that many international students face in the United States is communication with Americans.**
OR
International students in the United States face communication problems with Americans.

STEP 2C: OUTLINING

- An outline is a formal plan for a paragraph.

MODEL

Formal Outline

TOPIC SENTENCE

SUPPORTING POINT

SUPPORTING DETAIL

SUPPORTING DETAIL

SUPPORTING POINT

SUPPORTING DETAIL

SUPPORTING DETAIL

SUPPORTING DETAIL

SUPPORTING DETAIL

CONCLUDING SENTENCE

Communication Problems

One problem that international students face in the United States is communication with Americans.

- A. International students have poor verbal skills.
 1. lack vocabulary
 2. have poor pronunciation
- B. Americans are difficult to understand.
 1. use incomplete sentences
 2. use unclear expressions
 3. talk too fast
 4. use slang and idioms

Because of their own poor verbal skills and because of Americans' way of speaking, international students have a hard time communicating when they first arrive in the United States.

HOMEWORK

- ▶ Follow the steps described above and develop an outline on this topic:
- ▶ **«The advantages of being a linguist»**
- ▶ (Write a topic sentence, at least two main supporting points, supporting details, and a concluding sentence.)

STEP 3: WRITING

- Step 3 in the writing process is writing the **rough draft**. Follow your outline as closely as possible, and don't worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. A rough draft is not supposed to be perfect. Writing is a continuous process of discovery.
- A rough draft that a student wrote from her outline follows.

Communication Problems

¹International students in the United States face communication problems with Americans. ²It is a kind of culture shock to them. ³They soon realize that their verbal skills are poor. ⁴They lack vocabulary, and they have poor pronunciation. ⁵American people don't understand them. ⁶They also speak too softly because they are shy. ⁷Students don't feel confidence when speaking English. ⁸Is difficult for foreign people to understand Americans. ⁹Americans use incomplete sentences, and often they use unclear expressions. ¹⁰Americans talk too fast, so it is often imposible to catch their meaning. ¹¹Americans also use a lot of slangs and idioms. ¹²People do not know their meaning.

STEP 4: POLISHING

- The fourth and final step in the writing process is polishing what you have written. This step is also called revising and editing. Polishing is most successful if you do it in two stages. First, attack the big issues of content and organization (revising). Then work on the smaller issues of grammar and punctuation (editing).

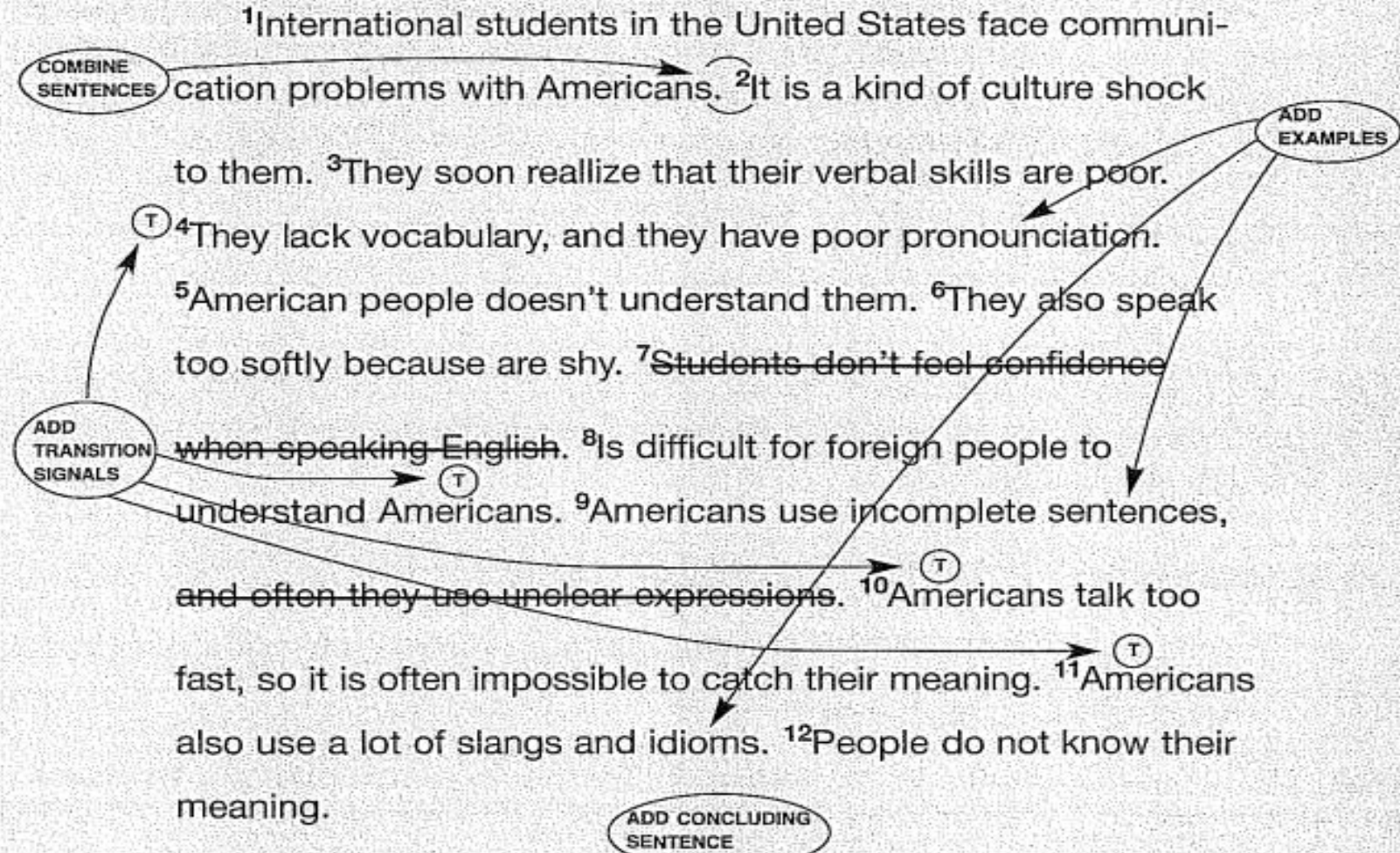
STEP 4A: REVISING

- ▶ After you write the rough draft, the next step is to revise it. When you revise, you change what you have written to improve it. You check it for content and organization, including unity, coherence, and logic. During the first revision, do not try to correct grammar, sentence structure, spelling, or punctuation; this is proofreading, which you will do later. During the first revision, be concerned mainly with content and organization.

- ▶ • Read over your paragraph carefully for a *general* overview. Focus on the *general* aspects of the paper and make notes in the margins about rewriting the parts that need to be improved.
 - Check to see that you have achieved your stated purpose,
 - Check for general logic and coherence. Your audience should be able to follow your ideas easily and understand what you have written.
 - Check to make sure that your paragraph has a topic sentence and that the topic sentence has a central (main) focus.
 - Check for unity. Cross out sentences that are off the topic.
 - Check to make sure that the topic sentence is developed with sufficient supporting details. Does each paragraph give the reader enough information to understand the main idea? If the main point lacks sufficient information, make notes in the margin such as "add more details" or "add an example."
 - Check your use of transition signals.
 - Finally, does your paragraph have or need a concluding sentence? If you wrote a final comment, is it on the topic?

STEP 4A REVISING

Communication Problems



- ▶ Notice the revisions the student marked on her rough draft.
 1. She checked to make sure that her paragraph matched the assignment. The assigned topic was "culture shock." Although her second sentence mentions culture shock, her topic sentence does not, so she decided to combine sentences 1 and 2.
 2. The writer checked the paragraph for unity and decided that sentence 6, which she had added while writing the rough draft, was a good addition. However, she decided that sentence 7 was off the topic, so she crossed it out.
 3. She checked to see if there were enough supporting details, and she decided that there were not. She decided to add examples of poor pronunciation, an incomplete sentence, and an idiom. She could not think of an example of an unclear expression, so she crossed out her reference to unclear expressions in sentence 9.
 4. She also decided to add transition signals such as **first of all**, **for example**, and **also** to make her paragraph more coherent.
 5. She decided to add a concluding sentence.

STEP 4B: EDITING/PROOFREADING

- ▶ The second step in polishing your writing is proofreading your paper for possible errors in grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation.
- ▶
 - Check each sentence for correctness and completeness.
 - Check each sentence for a subject and a verb, subject-verb agreement, correct verb tenses, noun plurals, articles, and so on.
 - Check the mechanics: punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.
 - Check for incorrectly used or repeated words.
 - Check for contractions (*can't, isn't, I'll*, and so on). (Some writing instructors permit them, but others do not. Find out your instructor's preference.)

Example: An Edited Paragraph

Communication Problems

¹One kind of culture shock faced by international students in the United States is ~~the~~ difficulty ~~they~~ ~~have~~ communicating with Americans. ²They soon ^{sp} realize that their verbal skills are poor. ³First of all, they lack vocabulary, and ~~they~~ have poor pronunciation. ⁴American people ~~do~~ ^{so} ~~sn't~~ ^{do not} understand them.

⁵For example, a few days ago, I asked an American student how to get to the library, but because I have trouble pronouncing r's and l's, the student ~~didn't~~ ^{did not} understand me. ⁶I finally ~~have~~ ^{had} to write it on a piece of paper. ⁷~~They~~ ^{International students} also speak too softly because ~~are~~ ^{they} shy. ⁸~~It is~~ ^{It is} difficult for foreign people to understand Americans, too. ⁹Americans use incomplete sentences, such as "Later" to mean "I will" ~~see~~ ^{I will} you later," and "Coming?" to mean "Are you coming?" ¹⁰Also,

I will

"~~Will~~ see you later," and "Coming?" to mean "Are you coming?" ¹⁰Also,

Americans talk too fast so it is often impossible to ~~catch~~ ^{sp} ~~their~~ ^{understand} ~~meaning~~ ^{them}. ¹¹In

addition, Americans also use a lot of slangs ~~and~~ ^{whose meaning nonnative speakers} idioms. ¹²People do not know [^]

~~their~~ ~~meaning~~. ¹³For example, the other day someone said to me, "That drives

me up the wall," and I could not imagine what he meant. ¹⁴I had a picture in my

mind of him ~~sitting~~ ^{driving} ~~in~~ his car ~~driving~~ ^{did not} up a wall. ¹⁵It ~~didn't~~ make sense to me.

¹⁶In short, communication is probably the first problem that international

students face in the United States. ¹⁷After a while, however, their ears get used

to the American way of speaking, and their own verbal ~~skills~~ ^{abilities} improve.

► Sentence structure

1. This student knows that one of her writing problems is sentences that are sometimes too short, so she tried to find ways to lengthen her short sentences in this paragraph.

- She added **When they first arrive in the United States** to sentence 2.
- She combined sentences 3 and 4.
- She combined sentences 11 and 12.

2. She crossed out three words in sentence 1 and changed **sitting in his car driving up a wall** to **driving his car up a wall** in sentence 14 to make these sentences more concise.

► Grammar

3. This student knows that she occasionally makes mistakes with verbs and omits subjects, so she checked carefully for these problems.

- She needed to correct **doesn't** in sentence 4 and **have** in sentence 6.
- She needed to add **they** in sentence 7 and *It* in sentence 8.

► Mechanics

5. The student writer found two spelling errors and added a missing comma.

6. She also eliminated contractions.

► **Vocabulary**

7. In sentence 10, because **catch their meaning** is not standard English and because she did not want to use the word *meaning* in consecutive sentences, she changed the phrase to **understand them**.

8. In sentence 11, **slang** is uncountable, so she crossed out the –s.

9. In sentence 12, *people* is not very specific. **Nonnative speakers** is more appropriate.

10. In the concluding sentence she did not want to repeat the phrase *verbal skills*, so she wrote **verbal abilities** instead.

4C: WRITING THE FINAL COPY

- ▶ Now you are ready to write the final copy to hand in.
- ▶ Following is the final copy of the paragraph about communication problems.

Communication Problems

One kind of culture shock faced by international students in the United States is difficulty communicating with Americans. When they first arrive in the United States, they soon realize that their verbal skills are poor. First of all, they lack vocabulary, and they have poor pronunciation, so American people do not understand them. For example, a few days ago, I asked an American student how to get to the library, but because I have trouble pronouncing *r*'s and *l*'s, the student did not understand me. I finally had to write it on a piece of paper. International students also speak too softly because they are shy. It is difficult for foreign people to understand Americans, too. Americans use incomplete sentences, such as "Later" to mean "I'll see you later," and "Coming?" to mean "Are you coming?" Also, Americans talk too fast, so it is often impossible to understand them. In addition, Americans use a lot of slang and idioms whose meanings nonnative speakers do not know. For example, the other day someone said to me, "That drives me up the wall," and I could not imagine what he meant. I had a picture in my mind of him driving his car up a wall. It did not make sense to me. In short, communication is probably the first problem that international students face in the United States. After a while, however, their ears get used to the American way of speaking, and their own verbal abilities improve.