

• **The first sentence you write should be a rephrasing of the question**

into a statement. For example, if the question is "What are some of the problems a student can encounter when sitting in the back of the classroom?" your first sen-

tence might be "Students can encounter numerous problems when they sit in the back of the classroom." Don't try to elaborate on that, simply restate the question.

• **In your second sentence, state how many points you're going to cover**

in your answer. For example, "This paper will deal with four primary problems."

By stating how many points you're going to cover at the beginning, you'll show your

teacher that you're organized. Generally, the more points you include in your an-

swer, the better, although you don't want to go overboard.

• **Devote one short paragraph to each of your ideas.** Begin each paragraph

with a number, first, second, third and fourth. It's usually a good idea to put your

strongest answer in the first paragraph, your second strongest answer in the sec-

ond, and so on. When it's time to present your second point, start a new paragraph.

• **Underline the key words in your topic sentence.** For example, you may

write, "First, the biggest problem students encounter when sitting in the back of the

classroom is being distracted by students in front of them." Then, in two to four sen-

tences, elaborate on what some of those distractions are. Give specific examples of

the more common distractions.

• **Know when to stop.** Once you've covered your main points, stop. You don't

need to summarize what you've written.

• **If you've been asked to compare or contrast two things, use the two-**

paragraph approach. If you're comparing two items, devote one paragraph to de-

scribing the characteristics of the first item and a second paragraph to describ-

ing the characteristics of the second. This approach also works when you're contrast-

ing two phenomena. In that case, you'll describe the uniqueness of the first item in

the first paragraph and the uniqueness of the second item in the second paragraph.

You can use the signal phrase "on the other hand" as a transition between the two

ideas.

—Sara Jane Coffman in *How to Survive at College*