

DESCRIPTIVE OUTLINES *

The descriptive outline (developed by Kenneth Bruffee) . . . involves a careful mini-analysis of the *meaning* and *function* of each paragraph [in a piece of writing]. Here are the steps.

For the whole piece:

- Write a "says" sentence: a one-sentence summary of what the whole piece is *saying* --its main point.
- Write a "does" sentence: a one-sentence summary of what the whole piece is *doing* or trying to do or accomplish with readers.

Do the same for each paragraph or section:

- Write a "says" or summary sentence.
- Write a "does" sentence that tells how that paragraph or section is *functioning* in the strategy of the whole essay, or what it is trying to do to readers.

It's not so easy to write these sentences--especially "does" sentences which explain the *function* a paragraph is performing. Here is an example of a "does" sentence:

This paragraph introduces an objection that some readers might feel, and then tries to answer that objection.

Avoid letting your "does" sentence just summarize or repeat your "says" sentence. The key is to *keep out of your "does" sentence any mention of the content of the paragraph*. You shouldn't be able to tell from a "does" sentence whether the essay is about cars or ice cream.

Here is an ineffective "does" sentence--it's really just a disguised "says" sentence:

This paragraph states the idea that women's liberation has affected men more than it has women.

To fix it, remove any mention of any of the ideas in the paragraph--and talk only about form or function:

This paragraph introduces the main point of the essay in a way that tries to surprise the reader or violate his expectations.

* Excerpted from Sharing and Responding, by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff (New York: Random House, 1989), 38-39.

Sample “Does” statements: vocabulary for academics writing about readings

Note-- this is only a sample of possibilities, not an exhaustive list. The items on the list are not mutually exclusive; a paragraph usually does more than one of these things at the same time; keep this in mind as you try to articulate what a particular paragraph is doing in an essay.

types of things that a paragraph might do:

tells a story; narrates	gives examples (use this sparingly)
proposes an alternate solution	explains (use this sparingly)
lists; catalogues; itemizes; enumerates	gives a description; describes (use this sparingly)
shows how something is done	shows why something is done
analyzes; takes apart something	provides reasons, evidence, support
provides a syllogism	cites an authority; refers to...
provides inductive reasoning	offers a hypothesis; makes an educated guess
compares; contrasts	criticizes alternate positions
defines a term	projects the future
supports with statistics	anticipates possible criticism from others
uses an analogy to...	qualifies the argument; concedes points
defends an idea	paraphrases
introduces	reiterates; restates
summarizes	appeals to a reader's emotions
invokes imagery	shocks its reader

evaluates; explains why something is good or bad, or what it is good or bad for

synthesizes; puts multiple ideas together and shows their relationship

establishes context of an argument; gives a history or background needed to understand an argument; contextualizes

general vocabulary for discussing how a reading works

shows	suggests	defends
explains	criticizes	offers
gives	attacks	proposes
provides	challenges	argues
supplies	supports	describes
claims	hypothesizes	reasons
concludes		

"THE GREEK DECISION" BY JEREMY BORAKS

Fraternities supply the social life for many students in the United States. For more than a century they have been home to numerous amounts of bustling college men. Over the years many people have looked at fraternity people as a real nuisance. Many people who have been in the gray area whether to get involved have been shunned away because of the way the Greek area is perceived in the community. When looking into the social scene at a university you must make a concerted effort to examine the fraternity system. When making the decision whether to get involved or not, please consider the positives as well as the negatives. Keeping an open mind and listening may give you a better sense of what the Greek area is actually about.

Fraternities have gotten a bad rap over the many years of their existence. In reality, a fraternity does many things which they don't get any credit for. While I was a brother at the Pike chapter in Colorado, the brotherhood worked with the Special Olympics on an annual basis. We would work with mentally handicapped people at a local ski resort, helping them race through gates on the mountain. The feeling you get when helping a person with a handicap is like climbing to the peak of mount Everest without a harness on. The look on these beautiful human beings' faces when they finished the ski race was second to none. Being involved in the fraternity system has allowed me to get involved in events such as working with these people.

While pledging Pike two years ago, I was unsure if I really wanted to be associated with the system. I thought that if I joined I would be giving up on finding friends that were diverse. What I found out was that a fraternity has people from all walks of life. There were people from the east, west, north and south, and all were somewhat different in their individual way. There were people who believed in God and others who felt that God was a figment of society's imagination. There are many other things that made each person unique in his own little way. This was the deciding factor that pushed me to the house because I could have my own identity and I could still get involved. Being active in the fraternity has allowed me to gain some very important knowledge about decision making. I am the assistant treasurer and in charge of the taxes for the Theta Mu chapter and its employees. This will give me something to make the recruiter want to hire me when I am applying for a job. The recruiter will think that I am the cherry at the top of an ice cream sundae and will hire me over another less qualified individual. There are many great opportunities to get ahead in the future by actively working for the house, today. Working for the house will reap immediate rewards because results will be seen as soon as the work is completed. Chipping in to get a goal accomplished will help you in group decision making in the future.

Since moving to the University of Massachusetts I have been involved in sports through the fraternity. This has allowed me to get close to some guys that I may have never come in contact with, otherwise. When playing in a tight game, my brothers and I had to work as a team to win. They selected me to shoot the final shot to win the game. My heart went into my throat, but I

wasn't going to let my team down. When the shot went up, the only thing I could think of was what if I missed and the other team was victorious. When the shot finally swished through the nylon net I let out a shriek in victory as my teammates embraced me, giving me the feeling that I fit in. These types of stories remind me about how positive a fraternity setting can be.

The negatives that are associated with a fraternity are very real and must be fact'd in when choosing whether or not to join. When joining a house, you must now be responsible for the actions of all the members. A member of my house was arrested for vandalism a few years ago leaving the reputation that our who's house was a bunch of punks and anytime we mentioned that we were members, people wanted to smite us with a silver sword. The members must work very hard to regain the confidence in the community due to the actions of just one member.

Fraternities can be very diverse in the make up of a single house, but in joining a house you are cutting up the university population and entering into only one piece of the pie. Joining Pike opened up many doors for me, but lost a very important relationship due to my association with the Greek system. My friend felt that I was neglecting our year long friendship for a bunch of superficial friendships that would only be limited to partying. You must sacrifice something in order to gain something else if that something else is more important to you. I'm not saying that I am glad about losing this friend but it is a choice I had to make.

The relationships formed in the fraternity are not always peaches and cream like some outsiders perceive. Of course, you join a fraternity because you like the brotherhood, but there are always certain individuals who you would like to see take an eternal trip to the small, bone chilling planet of Pluto. When I was a pledge at the house at the University of Colorado there was a brother who was as big as a large oil tanker and as mean as a cobra. He would always go out of his way to make me look like a bumbling idiot. At parties he would call me over to where he was standing and verbally abuse me in front of his overweight girlfriend. She would laugh and all I wanted to do was sock her in her distorted face. This guy is someone that I still dislike today and if this was the individual I met first while pledging I might have decided to remain an independent. These ogres that aren't pleasant may ruin it for their fraternity and may ruin it for me, the pledge.

When making a decision whether to join the Greek system or remain independent you must weigh the positives and negatives. Once you have looked carefully at both sides of the fence, then you should make an educated decision. This decision will effect your life until the day you die.

Descriptive Outline

One Reader:

First Paragraph

- Says: that many people view fraternities negatively and he wants his readers to keep an open mind and listen to what he has to say.
- Does: asks people to consider changing their minds about his topic.

Second Paragraph

- Says: that fraternities work with handicapped people.
- Does: appeals to readers' social conscience.

Third Paragraph

- Says: fraternities are made up of people from diverse backgrounds.
- Does: counters one of the most prevalent arguments against his subject.

Fourth Paragraph

- Says: discusses how a fraternity allowed him to have the sort of experience which would help him in the job market.
- Does: gives a bread-and-butter sort of reason for readers to see his subject favorably.

Fifth Paragraph

- Says: through participating in fraternity sports teams, the author felt he fit in.
- Does: gives another positive aspect of his topic.

Sixth Paragraph

- Says: how being a member of a fraternity can sometimes cause others to connect you with an undesirable member.
- Does: shows a negative side of his decision (although I don't think this is necessarily a negative).

Seventh Paragraph

- Says: that deciding to join a fraternity caused him to lose a good friend.
- Does: gives another negative side of his decision.

Eighth Paragraph

- Says: he has to associate sometimes with members he doesn't like.
- Does: gives another negative side of his decision.

Ninth Paragraph

- Says: that anyone deciding whether or not to join a fraternity should look at all sides because this is an important decision.
- Does: ends with a conclusion that seems more open minded or less partisan than much of the essay.

Another Reader:

For the whole essay

- Says: I feel a conflict of messages: fraternities are good; the problems are very serious.
- Does: I feel: a conflict of functions: trying to persuade us to agree with you; telling us to make up our own mind.
- Says, first paragraph: Keep an open mind about deciding whether to join a fraternity.
- Does, first paragraph: Establishes the topic in an extremely general manner.
- Says, second paragraph: Fraternities engage in productive activities, for example, the Special Olympics.
- Does, second paragraph: Attempts to surprise reader and supply insight into the general topic.
- Says, third paragraph: The final factor that made me want to join the fraternity was diversity.
- Does, third paragraph: Supplies further insight into the topic.
- Says, fourth paragraph: The skills I have gained in decision making will help me in the job-hunting process.
- Does, fourth paragraph: Gives the reader an idea of my duties; uses an analogy to make a point.
- Says, fifth paragraph: I won a basketball game for my team.
- Does, fifth paragraph: Describes feelings of camaraderie. Implies that these feelings apply to the overall message.
- Says, sixth paragraph: Everyone is responsible for each other.
- Does, sixth paragraph: Addresses the negative side of the topic and explains it.
- Says, seventh paragraph: I had to sacrifice a friendship for my fraternity.
- Does, seventh paragraph: Continues the work of paragraph six; reveals some private aspects of my own character.
- Says, eighth paragraph: Some people in the fraternity are antagonistic.
- Does, eighth paragraph: Describes a confrontation; continues to address negative aspects.
- Says, ninth paragraph: Be careful when you decide whether or not to enter a fraternity.
- Does, ninth paragraph: Gives the reader a warning.