



# The All-You'll-Ever-Need Writer's Guidebook!

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## Introduction

As a writing tutor, I have spent a great deal of time trying to figure out the best way to explain a very complicated system of language in the least threatening manner possible. I have worked extensively with both native speakers and English learners, and I have found that there are a great number of students in both groups who experience frustration and confusion when it comes to the finer points of the written language. This is, in part, because English is an extremely difficult language to pin down. It is built from the bits and pieces of hundreds of other languages, over many years. Explaining the "how" and "why" of our grammar or writing system can be an almost insurmountable task.

Initially, I only wanted to make a pamphlet for my own use, with reminders of things that I had learned, or ways of explaining concepts that I had found effective. Here and there, I would share some of the things that I had learned with other tutors and students. Over time, I found that I had amassed an absurd amount of diagrams, sketches, and ideas. After giving it some thought, I decided that my Honors thesis would be best served by taking this information and doing something with it that could benefit others.



## Objectives

My aim with this book was simple. I wanted to make English grammar and college-level essay writing accessible to people who found either difficult. The guide's purpose, on that front, is two-fold.

The first goal is to bridge the gap between what students may or may not have learned in past, and what they need to know to write successfully at the college level. This guide is intended to reach people who are not getting the help they need, particularly English language learners, who have few resources (beyond their professor or a tutor) currently at their disposal.

The second goal was to help fellow tutors. As a tutor, it can be difficult to think up an explanation for a very complex concept in a way that is not only understandable, but also approachable. Additionally, most of the time, tutors have to think these things up on the spot. My hope is that this, for tutors, will be a resource filled with different ways to look at and explain grammar and writing concepts.

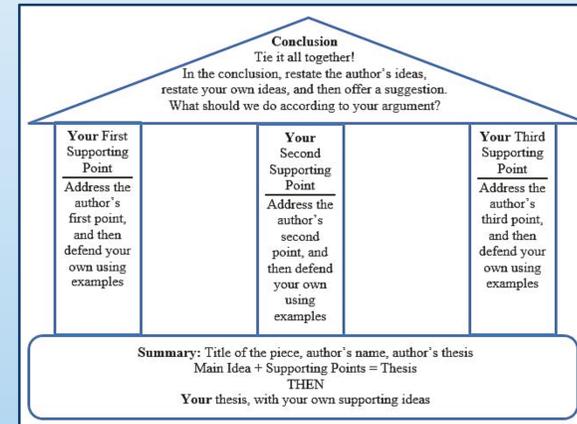
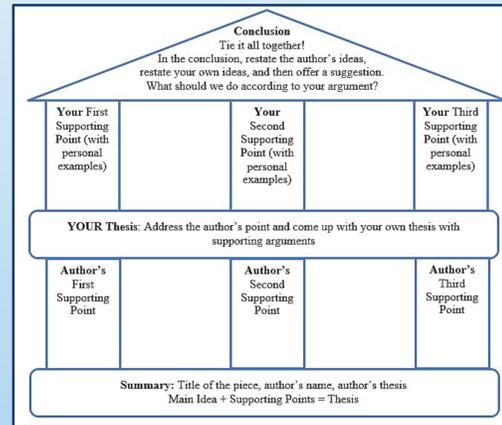
The guide is broken up into several sections. There is an index, followed by an introduction, which explains how this guide can be navigated. After that, there is a section dedicated to the common grammatical issues found in student papers. The grammar section is further broken down into subsections, so that it is easier to read. After the grammar unit, there is a heading for essay content. This is where students can go to read about thesis statements, finding reputable sources, and how ESL (English as a Second Language) students write, as compared to native speakers. After that, the guide transitions into talking about essay structure as it pertains to the two formats used most commonly here at SNHU, the "Nine Paragraph" essay, and the "Five Paragraph" essay. The next section is dedicated to citation. There are headings for MLA, APA, and Chicago/Turabian formats, as these are the most commonly used at this school. The next three entries are short, mostly covering things that have already been addressed in past sections. Here, students will find a page explaining punctuation marks and their uses, a longer list of prepositions with the word meanings, and a glossary of the technical terms used within the guide.

At the very end, I have included a few pages for footnotes, a page of works consulted and helpful materials, and a full list of sources.

## Excerpts from the Section on Essay Structure

The section of the guide dedicated to structure addresses the "Nine-Paragraph Essay" used in English 099 classes, and the "Five-Paragraph Essay" used in all other classes. Many students have trouble transitioning from one format to the other, so challenge in this chapter is to define both formats, and then offer help with breaking down and restructuring "Nine-Paragraph" essays so that they fit the "Five-Paragraph" design.

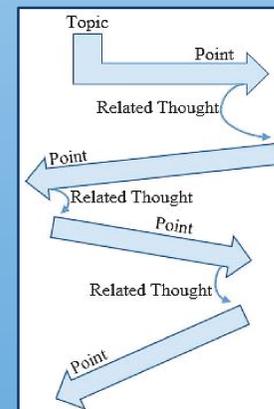
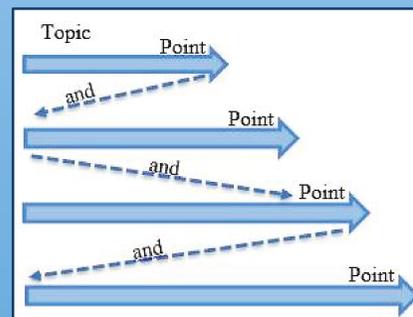
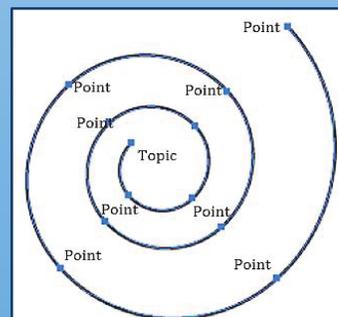
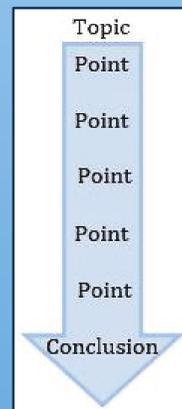
Below are two images I created to better explain both kinds of essays. The graphic on the left represents a "Nine-Paragraph" essay, while the one on the right is a "Five-Paragraph" essay. To make the idea a little easier to understand, I compared each essay to a house. Each "floor" of the house has its own thesis statement, and is the basis for three "supports," which represent the supporting ideas in the argument. The essay is topped off with a conclusion, which (like a roof) holds the essay in and protects it, by summarizing the main ideas in the essay, and then offering a final thought.



## Excerpts from the Section on Cultural Thought Patterns as They Pertain to Writing

This section draws inspiration primarily from an educational text detailing the ways in which writers from different languages structure their ideas. When working with ESL students, it can be extremely helpful to understand in part how the student may be accustomed to writing, and how writing in English may differ. One author suggests that, while many English learners may be told that their essays lack structure, this is not actually the case. The essays are not lacking in structure, they are simply structured differently, something that likely stems from the student's native language (Kaplan, p. 13). Recognizing these patterns can aid tutors in helping students restructure their ideas on the page.

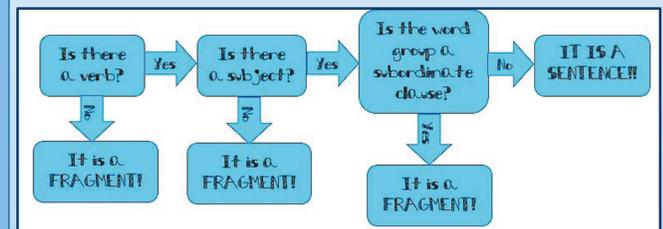
Beneath are my own recreations of the images offered in the original text. Robert Kaplan, the author of the work I am referencing, explains that English speakers tends to favor writing that is linear. The "top-down" approach is generally considered appropriate for essays, as is depicted in the far left image below (p. 14). Oriental language speakers (people who speak Mandarin, Korean, and Japanese, to name a few) tend to favor a different approach, however. Refer to the second image from the left. These essayists often write around a subject in an almost spiral-like fashion, without ever stating the main idea outright (p. 17). Students who write like this might be considered repetitive or indirect, when they are actually just writing in a different style. Kaplan also mentions Semitic languages (like Arabic and Hebrew), which tend to make extensive use of parallel structure (p. 15). Essays written by students who speak a Semitic language natively are likely to be perceived as full of run-on sentences, as many of the ideas are linked (as is demonstrated in the third image depicted below). Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian) have a completely different structure. Romance language speakers (represented in the far right graphic) tend to allow more room for digressions, something that English writers are generally discouraged from doing (p. 18).



## Excerpt from the Section on Grammar

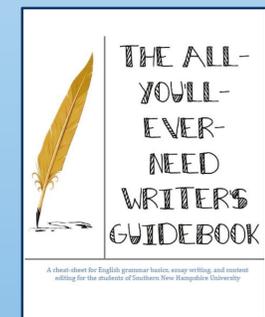
The section dealing with grammar within the guide is by far the longest. This segment outlines common sentence errors, word errors, and verb tenses. The first section, sentence errors, looks at what a sentence consists of (subjects and verbs), fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, and comma rules. The next section deals with word errors, more specifically pronouns, article use, and prepositions. Finally, the section on verb tenses talks about the twelve main tenses, under the headings of past tenses, present tenses, and future tenses. Each topic is listed in the index at the beginning of the guide. This is to make finding answers a little bit easier.

The chart below is an example of one of the graphics I created to explain grammatical concepts (in this instance, fragmented sentences).



## Conclusions

Overall, the response that I have seen related to this resource has been positive. I have started to use it during tutoring sessions, and it has really helped both me as a tutor, and the student. Other tutors with whom I have spoken have also expressed that the guide is a valuable tool. Moving forward, I hope that this resource proves useful, and that future tutors and students add to it.



## Partial Reference List

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 Kaplan, Robert B. "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education." *Language Learning* 16.1-2 (1996): 11-25. Print.  
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## Acknowledgements and Contact Information

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Selina Marcille, who (aside from being a constant source of encouragement and information) has been a wonderful mentor throughout this process.

If you have any questions or are interested in the subject in any way, please feel free to contact me at [sarah.hamilton@snhu.edu](mailto:sarah.hamilton@snhu.edu).