

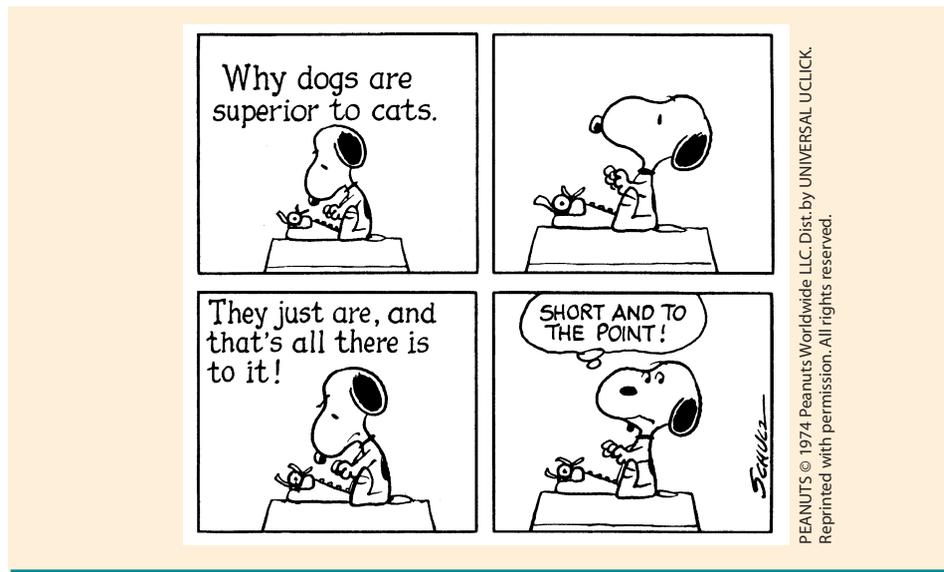
# 2

## Becoming a Better Writer

What, in a nutshell, do you need to become a better writer? You need to know the basic goals in writing and to understand the writing process—as explained on the pages that follow.

### Two Basic Goals in Writing

When you write a paper, your two basic goals should be (1) to **make a point** and (2) to **support that point**. Look for a moment at the following cartoon:



See if you can answer the following questions:

- What is Snoopy's point in his paper?

Your answer: His point is that \_\_\_\_\_

- What is his support for his point?

Your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

### Explanation

Snoopy's point, of course, is that dogs are superior to cats. But he offers no support whatsoever to back up his point! There are two jokes here. First, he is a dog and so is naturally going to believe that dogs are superior. The other joke is that his evidence ("They just are, and that's all there is to it!") is a lot of empty words. His somewhat guilty look in the last panel suggests that he knows he has not proved his point. To write effectively, you must provide *real* support for your points and opinions.

## Writing Paragraphs

A **paragraph** is a series of sentences about one main idea, or **point**. A paragraph typically starts with a point (also called the **topic sentence**), and the rest of the paragraph provides specific details to support and develop that point.

Look at the following paragraph, written by a student named Carla.

### Three Kinds of Bullies

*There are three kinds of bullies in schools. First of all, there are the physical bullies. They are the bigger or meaner kids who try to hurt kids who are smaller or unsure of themselves. They'll push other kids off swings, trip them in the halls, or knock books out of their hands. They'll also wait for kids after school and slap them or yank their hair or pull out their shirts or throw them to the ground. They do their best to frighten kids and make them cry. Another kind of bully is the verbal bully. This kind tries to hurt with words rather than fists. Nursery-school kids may call each other "dummy" or "weirdo" or "fatty," and as kids get older, their words carry even more sting. "You are such a loser," those bullies will tell their victim, making sure there is a crowd nearby to hear. "Where did you get that sweater—a trash bin?" The worst kind of bully is the social bully. Social bullies realize that they can make themselves feel powerful by making others feel unwanted. Bullies choose their victims and then do all they can to isolate them. They roll their eyes and turn away in disgust if those people try to talk to them. They move away if a victim sits near them at lunch. They make sure the unwanted ones know about the games and parties they aren't invited to. Physical, verbal, and social bullies all have the same ugly goal: to hurt and humiliate others.*

- What is the point of the paragraph on the previous page?

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- What are the three specific details that Carla has provided to back up her point?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

The above paragraph, like many effective paragraphs, starts by stating a main idea, or point. In this case, the clear point is that there are three kinds of bullies in schools. An effective paragraph must not only make a point but also support it with specific evidence—reasons, examples, and other details. Such specifics help prove to readers that the point is a reasonable one. Even if readers do not agree with the writer, at least they have the writer’s evidence in front of them. Readers are like juries: they want to see the evidence for themselves so that they can make their own judgments.

As you have seen, the author of the paragraph provides plenty of examples to support the idea that there are physical, verbal, and social bullies. To write an effective paragraph, always aim to do what the author has done: begin by making a point, and then go on to back up that point with strong specific evidence.

## Writing Essays

Like a paragraph, an essay starts with a point and then goes on to provide specific details to support and develop that point. However, a **paragraph** is a series of sentences about one main idea or point, while an **essay** is a series of paragraphs about one main idea or point—called the **central point** or **thesis**. Since an essay is much longer than one paragraph, it allows a writer to develop a topic in more detail.

Look at the following paragraph, written by Carla after she was asked to more fully develop her paragraph on bullies.

### *A Hateful Activity: Bullying*

*Eric, a new boy at school, was shy and physically small. He quickly became a victim of bullies. Kids would wait after school, pull out his shirt, and punch and shove him around. He was called such names as “Mouse Boy” and “Jerk Boy.” When he sat down during lunch hour, others would leave his table. In gym games he was never thrown the ball, as if he didn’t exist. Then one day he came to school with a gun. When the police were called, he told*

*Introductory  
Paragraph*

them he just couldn't take it anymore. Bullying had hurt him badly, just as it hurts so many other students. Every member of a school community should be aware of bullying and the three hateful forms that it takes: physical, verbal, and social.

**First  
Supporting  
Paragraph**

First of all, there is physical bullying. Bigger or meaner kids try to hurt kids who are smaller or unsure of themselves. They'll push kids into their lockers, knock books out of their hands, or shoulder them out of the cafeteria line. In gym class, a popular bully move is to kick someone's legs out from under him while he is running. In the classroom, bullies might kick the back of the chair or step on the foot of the kids they want to intimidate. Another classic bully move is to corner a kid in a bathroom. There the victim will be slapped around, will have his or her clothes half pulled off, and might even be shoved into a trash can. Bullies will also wait for kids after school and bump or wrestle them around, often while others are looking on. The goal is to frighten kids as much as possible and try to make them cry. Physical bullying is more common among males, but it is not unknown for girls to be physical bullies as well. The victims are left bruised and hurting, but often in even more pain emotionally than bodily.

**Second  
Supporting  
Paragraph**

Perhaps even worse than physical attack is verbal bullying, which uses words, rather than hands or fists, as weapons. We may be told that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never harm me," but few of us are immune to the pain of a verbal attack. Like physical bullies, verbal bullies tend to single out certain targets. From that moment on, the victim is subjected to a hail of insults and put-downs. These are usually delivered in public, so the victim's humiliation will be greatest: "Oh, no; here comes the nerd!" "Why don't you lose some weight, blubber boy?" "You smell as bad as you look!" "Weirdo." "Fairy." "Creep." "Dork." "Slut." "Loser." Verbal bullying is an equal-opportunity event, with girls as likely to be verbal bullies as boys. Meanwhile, the victim retreats further and further into his or her shell, hoping to escape further notice.

**Third  
Supporting  
Paragraph**

As bad as verbal bullying is, many would agree that the most painful type of bullying is social bullying. Many students have a strong need for the comfort of being part of a group. For social bullies, the pleasure of belonging to a group is increased by the sight of someone who is refused entry into that group. So, like wolves targeting the weakest sheep in a herd, the bullies lead the pack in isolating people who they decide are different. They roll their eyes and turn away in disgust if those people try to talk to them. They move away if a victim sits near them at lunch or stands near them in a school hallway or at a bus stop. No one volunteers to work with

**Concluding Paragraph**

*these victims on class activities, and they are the ones that no one wants as part of gym teams. The bullies make sure the unwanted ones know about the games and parties they aren't invited to. As the victims sink further into isolation and depression, the social bullies—who seem to be female more often than male—feel all the more puffed up by their own popularity.*

*Whether bullying is physical, verbal, or social, it can leave deep and lasting scars. If parents, teachers, and other adults were more aware of the types of bullying, they might help by stepping in before the situation becomes too extreme. If students were more aware of the terrible pain that bullying causes, they might think twice about being bullies themselves.*

- Which sentence in the introductory paragraph expresses the central point of the essay? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many supporting paragraphs are provided to back up the central point? \_\_\_\_\_

## The Parts of an Essay

Each of the parts of an essay is explained below.

### Introductory Paragraph

A well-written introductory paragraph will normally do the following:

- Gain the reader's interest by using one of several common methods of introduction.
- Present the thesis statement. The **thesis statement** expresses the central point of an essay, just as a topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph. The central idea in Carla's essay is expressed in the last sentence of the introductory paragraph.

### Four Common Methods of Introduction

Four common methods of introduction are (1) telling a brief story, (2) asking one or more questions, (3) shifting to the opposite, or (4) going from the broad to the narrow. Following are examples of all four.

- 1 **Telling a brief story.** An interesting anecdote is hard for a reader to resist. In an introduction, a story should be no more than a few sentences, and it should relate meaningfully to the central idea. The story can be an experience of your own, of someone you know, or of someone you have read about. Carla uses this method of introduction for her essay on bullying:

Eric, a new boy at school, was shy and physically small. He quickly became a victim of bullies. Kids would wait after school, pull out his shirt, and punch and shove him around. He was called such names as “Mouse Boy” and “Jerk Boy.” When he sat down during lunch hour, others would leave his table. In gym games he was never thrown the ball, as if he didn’t exist. Then one day he came to school with a gun. When the police were called, he told them he just couldn’t take it anymore. Bullying had hurt him badly, just as it hurts so many other students. Every member of a school community should be aware of bullying and the three hateful forms that it takes: physical, verbal, and social.

- 2 Asking one or more questions.** These questions may be ones that you intend to answer in your essay, or they may indicate that your topic is relevant to readers—it is something they care about. If Carla had used this approach, here is how her introductory paragraph might look:

When you were a kid, were you ever pushed around by bigger children? Were you shoved aside in hallways or knocked out of your seat in classrooms? Were you ever called hurtful names like *fatso*, *worm*, *dogface*, or *retard*? Or were you coldly ignored by other students? Did they turn their backs on you, pretending you didn’t exist? If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” then you were a victim of one of three forms of bullying: physical, verbal, or social.

- 3 Shifting to the opposite.** Another way to gain the reader’s interest is to first present an idea that is the opposite of what will be written about. Using this approach, Carla could have begun her essay like this:

For many children, school is a happy experience. They like their teachers, they see their friends on a daily basis, and they feel comfortable and welcome. But for the victims of bullies, school is a nightmare. Every day they must face someone bigger or meaner than they are and endure humiliation in a variety of forms—physical, verbal, and social.

- 4 Going from the broad to the narrow.** Broad, general observations can capture your reader’s interest; they can also introduce your general topic and provide helpful background information. If Carla had used this method of introduction, she might have written first about typical problems in growing up and then narrowed her focus down to one problem: bullying.

*Many unpleasant parts of growing up seem unavoidable. Pimples happen, voices crack, and students worry all the time about their looks and their changing bodies. In time, the pimples disappear, the voices deepen, and the worries recede. But one all-too-common aspect of growing up, bullying, can have lasting negative results. Young people should not have to put up with bullying in any of its forms—physical, verbal, or social.*

### **Supporting Paragraphs**

The traditional school essay has three supporting paragraphs. But some essays will have two supporting paragraphs, and others will have four or more. Each supporting paragraph should have its own topic sentence stating the point to be developed in that paragraph.

Notice that the essay on bullying has clear topic sentences for each of the three supporting paragraphs.

### **Transitional Sentences**

In a paragraph, transitional words like *First*, *Another*, *Also*, *In addition*, and *Finally* are used to help connect supporting ideas. In an essay, transitional sentences are used to help tie the supporting paragraphs together. Such transitional sentences often occur at the beginning of a supporting paragraph.

- Look at the topic sentences for the second and third supporting paragraphs in the essay on bullying. Explain how those sentences are also transitional sentences.

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## Concluding Paragraph

The concluding paragraph often summarizes the essay by briefly restating the thesis and, at times, the main supporting points. It may also provide a closing thought or two as a way of bringing the paper to a natural and graceful end.

- Look again at the concluding paragraph of the essay on bullies. Which sentence summarizes the essay? \_\_\_\_\_ Which sentences provide closing thoughts? \_\_\_\_\_ How many closing thoughts are there? \_\_\_\_\_

## A Note on a Third Goal in Writing

A third important goal in writing is to organize the supporting material in a paper. Perhaps the most common way to do so is to use a **listing order**. In other words, provide a list of three or more reasons, examples, or other details. Use signal words such as *First of all*, *Another*, *Secondly*, *Also*, and *Finally* to mark the items in your list. Signal words, better known as **transitions**, let your reader know that you are providing a list of items.

- Turn back to page 13 and look again at the paragraph on bullies. What signal words does Carla use to mark each of the three kinds of bullies?

\_\_\_\_\_

You'll note that she uses *First of all* to introduce the first kind of bully, *Another* to introduce the second kind of bully, and *worst* to introduce the last kind of bully.

### Practice 1: Using a Listing Order

Read the paragraph below and answer the questions that follow.

#### Drunk Drivers

People caught driving while drunk—even first offenders—should be jailed. For one thing, drunk driving is more dangerous than carrying a loaded gun. Drunk drivers are in charge of three-thousand-pound weapons at a time when they have little coordination or judgment. Instead of getting off with a license suspension, the drunk driver should be treated as seriously as someone who walks into a crowded building with a ticking time bomb. In addition, views on drunk driving have changed. We are no longer willing to make jokes about funny drunk drivers, to see drunk driving as a typical adolescent stunt, or to overlook repeat offenders who have been lucky enough not to hurt anybody—so far. Last of all, a jail penalty might encourage solutions to the problem of drinking and driving. People who go out for an evening that includes drinking would be more

likely to select a designated driver. That person would stay completely sober. Bars might promote more tasty and trendy nonalcoholic drinks such as fruit daiquiris and “virgin” piña coladas. And perhaps beer and alcohol advertising would be regulated so that young people would not learn to associate alcohol consumption with adulthood. By taking drunk driving seriously enough to require a jail sentence, we would surely save lives.

- What is the writer’s point in this paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What transition introduces the first supporting reason for the point?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What transition introduces the second supporting reason? \_\_\_\_\_
- What transition introduces the third supporting reason? \_\_\_\_\_

The author’s list of reasons and use of transitions—*For one thing*, *In addition*, and *Last of all*—both help the author organize the supporting material and help the reader clearly and easily understand the supporting material.

Another common way to organize supporting details is to use a time order. In **time order**, supporting details are presented in the order in which they occurred. First this happened; next, this; after that, this; then this; and so on. The events that make up a story are almost always organized in time order.

### Practice 2: Using a Time Order

Read the paragraph below, which is organized in a time order. In the spaces provided, write appropriate transitions showing time relationships. Use each of the following transitions once: *Before*, *Then*, *When*, *As*, *After*.

#### An Upsetting Incident

An incident happened yesterday that made me very angry. I got off the bus and started walking the four blocks to my friend’s house. \_\_\_\_\_ I walked along, I noticed a group of boys gathered on the sidewalk about a block ahead of me. \_\_\_\_\_ they saw me, they stopped talking. A bit nervous, I thought about crossing the street to avoid them. But as I came nearer and they began to whistle, a different feeling came over me. Instead of being afraid, I was suddenly angry. Why should I have to worry about being hassled just because I was a woman? I stared straight at the boys and continued walking. \_\_\_\_\_ one of them said, “Oooh, baby. Looking fine today.” \_\_\_\_\_

I knew what I was doing, I turned on him. “Do you have a mother? Or any sisters?” I demanded. He looked astonished and didn’t answer me. I went on. “Is it OK with you if men speak to them like that? Shouldn’t they be able to walk down the street without some creeps bothering them?” \_\_\_\_\_ I spoke, he and the other boys looked guilty and backed away. I held my head up high and walked by them. An hour later, I was still angry.

The writer makes the main point of the paragraph in her first sentence: “An incident happened yesterday that made me very angry.” She then supports her point with a specific account of just what happened. Time words that could be used to help connect her details include the following: “As I walked along”; “When they saw me”; “Then one of them said”; “Before I knew”; “After I spoke.”

## The Writing Process

Even professional writers do not sit down and write a paper in a single draft. Instead, they have to work on it one step at a time. Writing a paper is a process that can be divided into the following five steps:

- Step 1:** Getting Started through Prewriting
- Step 2:** Preparing a Scratch Outline
- Step 3:** Writing the First Draft
- Step 4:** Revising
- Step 5:** Editing

### *Step 1: Getting Started through Prewriting*

What you need to learn, first, are methods that you can use to start working on a writing assignment. These techniques will help you think on paper. They’ll help you figure out both the point you want to make and the support you need for that point. Here are three helpful prewriting techniques:

- Freewriting
- Questioning
- List making

### **Freewriting**

**Freewriting** is just sitting down and writing whatever comes into your mind about a topic. Do this for ten minutes or so. Write without stopping and without worrying in the slightest about spelling, grammar, and the like. Simply get down on paper all the information that occurs to you about the topic.

Below is part of the freewriting done by Carla for her paragraph about bullies. Carla had been given the assignment, “Write about the types of bullying that go on in school.” She began prewriting as a way to explore her topic and generate details about it.

### Example of Freewriting

*Bullying is part of school most of the time teachers dont have a clue. I really never thought about it and was just glad I wasn't part of it. At least for the most part. I'd see some physical stuff but kind of turned my head not wanting to look at it. The worst thing with girls was words, they meant more than physical stuff. I rember once being called a name and it stung me so bad and it botherd me for weeks. . . .*

Notice that there are problems with spelling, grammar, and punctuation in Carla’s freewriting. Carla is not worried about such matters, nor should she be—at this stage. She is just concentrating on getting ideas and details down on paper. She knows that it is best to focus on one thing at a time. At this point, she just wants to write out thoughts as they come to her, to do some thinking on paper.

You should take the same approach when freewriting: explore your topic without worrying at all about writing “correctly.” Figuring out what you want to say should have all your attention in this early stage of the writing process.

### Practice 3: Freewriting

On a sheet of paper, freewrite for at least ten minutes on the best or worst job or chore you ever had. Don’t worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Try to write—without stopping—about whatever comes into your head concerning your best or worst job or chore.

## Questioning

**Questioning** means that you generate details about your topic by writing down a series of questions and answers about it. Your questions can start with words like *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*.

Here are just some of the questions that Carla might have asked while developing her paper:

### Example of Questioning

- *Who was bullied?*
- *Who were the bullies?*
- *When did bullying take place?*
- *Where did it happen?*
- *Were there different kinds of bullying?*
- *Why were some kids teased and bullied?*

### Practice 4: Questioning

On a sheet of paper, answer the following questions about your best or worst job or chore.

- When did you have the job (or chore)?
- Where did you work?
- What did you do?
- Whom did you work for?
- Why did you like or dislike the job? (Give one reason and some details that support that reason.)
- What is another reason you liked or disliked the job? What are some details that support the second reason?
- Can you think of a third reason you liked or did not like the job? What are some details that support the third reason?

### List Making

In **list making** (also known as **brainstorming**), you make a list of ideas and details that could go into your paper. Simply pile these items up, one after another, without worrying about putting them in any special order. Try to accumulate as many details as you can think of.

After Carla did her freewriting about bullies, she made up a list of details, part of which is shown below.

### Example of List Making

*some bullies were physical  
boys would push kids around  
kids would be tripped in hallways  
some kids would cry  
names would be used  
“dummy” or “creep” or “fairy”  
no one would sit near some kids  
some kids never chosen for games . . .*

One detail led to another as Carla expanded her list. Slowly but surely, more supporting material emerged that she could use in developing her paper. By the time she had finished her list, she was ready to plan an outline of her paragraph and to write her first draft.

### Practice 5: List Making

On separate paper, make a list of details about the job (or chore). Don't worry about putting them in a certain order. Just get down as many details about the job as occur to you. The list can include specific reasons you liked or did not like the job and specific details supporting those reasons.

## Step 2: Preparing a Scratch Outline

A **scratch outline** is a brief plan for a paragraph. It shows at a glance the point of the paragraph and the support for that point. It is the logical framework on which the paper is built.

This rough outline often follows freewriting, questioning, list making, or all three. Or it may gradually emerge in the midst of these strategies. In fact, trying to outline is a good way to see if you need to do more prewriting. If a solid outline does not emerge, then you know you need to do more prewriting to clarify your main point or its support. And once you have a workable outline, you may realize, for instance, that you want to do more list making to develop one of the supporting details in the outline.

In Carla's case, as she was working on her list of details, she suddenly discovered what the plan of her paragraph could be. She realized she could describe different kinds of bullies.

### Example of a Scratch Outline

*There are three kinds of bullies.*

- 1. Physical*
- 2. Verbal*
- 3. Social*

After all her preliminary writing, Carla sat back pleased. She knew she had a promising paper—one with a clear point and solid support. Carla was now ready to write the first draft of her paper, using her outline as a guide.

### Practice 6: Scratch Outline

Using the list you have prepared, see if you can prepare a scratch outline made up of the three main reasons you liked or did not like the job.

\_\_\_\_\_ was the best (*or* worst) job (*or* chore) I ever had.

*Reason 1:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Reason 2:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Reason 3:* \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 3: Writing the First Draft

When you do a first draft, be prepared to put in additional thoughts and details that didn't emerge in your prewriting. And don't worry if you hit a snag. Just leave a blank space or add a comment such as "Do later," and press on to finish the paper. Also, don't worry yet about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. You don't want to take time correcting words or sentences that you may decide to remove later. Instead, make it your goal to develop the content of your paper with plenty of specific details.

Here are a few lines of Carla's first draft:

#### First Draft

*There are different kinds of bullies that can be seen in schools. One kind of bullying that goes on is done by physical bullies. You see kids who will get pushed around on the playground. You see kids getting shoved into lockers and that kind of stuff. There was a girl I knew who was a real bully and a bit crazy because of a really bad home life. She would shove gum into another girl's hair and would also pull her hair. Other bullying went on with words and the calling of names. There were awful names that kids would use with each other, words included "creep" and "wierdo" and names that I don't even want to write here. . . .*

#### Practice 7: First Draft

Now write a first draft of your paper. Begin with your topic sentence stating that a certain job (or chore) was the best or worst one you ever had. Then state the first reason why it was the best or the worst, followed by specific details supporting that reason. Use a transition such as *First of all* to introduce the first reason. Next, state the second reason, followed by specific details supporting that reason. Use a transition such as *Secondly* to introduce the second reason. Last, state the third reason, followed with support. Use a transition such as *Finally* to introduce the last reason.

Don't worry about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Just concentrate on getting down on paper the details about the job.

### Step 4: Revising

Revising is as much a stage in the writing process as prewriting, outlining, and doing the first draft. **Revising** means that you rewrite a paper, building upon what has been done, to make it stronger and better. One writer has said about revision, "It's like cleaning house—getting rid of all the junk and putting things in the right

order.” A typical revision means writing at least one or two more drafts, adding and omitting details, organizing more clearly, and beginning to correct spelling and grammar.

Here are a few lines of Carla’s second draft.

### Second Draft

*There are three kinds of bullies in schools. First of all, there are the physical bullies. They are the bigger kids who try to hurt smaller kids. They’ll push kids off of swings in the playground or shove them into lockers. Other examples are knocking books out of the hands of kids or waiting for them after school and slapping them around or yanking their hair. Another kind of bullying is by verbal bullies. The aim here is to hurt with words rather than with fists. A victim will be called a “creep” or “weirdo” or “fatty” or will be told “You are such a loser.” . . .*

Notice that in redoing the draft, Carla started by more concisely stating the point of her paragraph. Also, she inserted transitions (*First of all* and *Another*) to clearly set off the kinds of bullies. She omitted the detail about the crazy girl she knew because it was not relevant to a paragraph focusing on bullies. She added more details, so that she would have enough supporting examples for the types of bullies.

Carla then went on to revise the second draft. Since she was doing her paper on a computer, she was able to print it out quickly. She double-spaced the lines, allowing room for revisions, which she added in longhand as part of her third draft, and eventually the paragraph on page 13 resulted. (Note that if you are not using a computer, you may want to skip every other line when writing out each draft. Also, write on only one side of a page, so that you can see your entire paper at one time.)

### Practice 8: Revising the Draft

Ideally, you will have a chance to put the paper aside for a while before doing later drafts. When you revise, try to do all of the following:

- Omit any details that do not truly support your topic sentence.
- Add more details as needed, making sure you have plenty of specific support for each of your three reasons.
- Be sure to include a final sentence that rounds off the paper, bringing it to a close.

## Step 5: Editing

**Editing**, the final stage in the writing process, means checking a paper carefully for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other errors. You are ready for this stage when you are satisfied that your point is clear, your supporting details are good, and your paper is well organized.

At this stage, you must **read your paper out loud**. Hearing how your writing sounds is an excellent way to pick up grammar and punctuation problems in your writing. Chances are that you will find sentence mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. This point is so important that it bears repeating: *To find mistakes in your paper, read it out loud!*

At this point in her work, Carla read her latest draft out loud. She looked closely at all the spots where her writing did not read easily. She used a grammar handbook to deal with the problems at those spots in her paper, and she made the corrections needed so that all her sentences read smoothly. She also used her dictionary to check on the spelling of every word she was unsure about. She even took a blank sheet of paper and used it to uncover her paper one line at a time, looking for any other mistakes that might be there.

### Practice 9: Editing

When you have your almost-final draft of the paper, edit it in the following ways:

- Read the paper aloud, listening for awkward wordings and places where the meaning is unclear. Make the changes needed for the paper to read smoothly and clearly. In addition, see if you can get another person to read the draft aloud to you. The spots that this person has trouble reading are spots where you may have to do some revision and correct your grammar or punctuation mistakes.
- Using your dictionary (or a spell-check program if you have a computer), check any words that you think might be misspelled.
- Finally, take a sheet of paper and cover your paper, so that you can expose and carefully proofread one line at a time. Use your handbook to check any other spots where you think there might be grammar or punctuation mistakes in your writing.

## Final Thoughts

You have a paper to write. Here in a nutshell is what to do:

- 1 Write about what you know. If you don't know much about your topic, go onto the Internet by using the helpful search engine Google. You can access it by typing

**www.google.com**

A screen will then appear with a box in which you can type one or more keywords. For example, if you were thinking about doing a paper on a topic involving bullying in schools, you could type in the keywords *bullying in schools*. Within a second or so you will get a list of over 83 million articles on the Web about bullying in schools!

You would then need to narrow your topic by adding other keywords. For instance, if you typed *solutions to bullying in schools*, you would get a list of more than 3 million items. If you narrowed your potential topic further by typing *solutions to cyberbullying in schools*, you would get a list of 358,000 items. You could then click on the items that sound most promising to you.

Using Google will help you get more information quickly about a given topic; it will also suggest ways you can narrow down your potential topic. For example, you might decide, after looking through a number of articles about cyberbullying, that you will write an essay on the steps that schools should take to prevent cyberbullying.

Keep in mind two notes of caution about use of the Internet:

- Never for a moment believe that “If it’s on the Internet, it must be true.” Technology today allows anyone to publish anything at any time. For a given article, an author or information provider should be clearly identified. That author or information provider should be a knowledgeable, qualified, impartial, and reliable authority on the data presented.
  - Do not use someone else’s words in writing your paper. That would be *plagiarizing*—in a word, stealing. Use other people’s ideas only as a springboard for developing your own thoughts about a given topic.
- 2 Use prewriting strategies to begin to write about your topic. Look for a point you can make, and make sure you have details to support it.
  - 3 Write several drafts, aiming all the while for three goals in your writing: a **clear point**, **strong support** for that point, and **well-organized support**. Use transitions to help organize your support.
  - 4 Then read your paper out loud. It should read smoothly and clearly. Look closely for grammar and punctuation problems at any rough spots. Check a grammar handbook or a dictionary as needed.