paragraphs relatively short? Can you find another transitional paragraph in the Kouwenhoven selection?

6. This model includes one other type of paragraph, a *concluding paragraph*. Notice in the concluding paragraph that the phrase "otherwise irrelevant components" echoes the thought stated in the introductory paragraph. What is the effect of such restatement? Does the concluding paragraph summarize Kouwenhoven's ideas about the unity of Manhattan's skyline? What is the effect of presenting a brief summary in a concluding paragraph?

COHERENCE

In addition to transitional paragraphs, this composition makes frequent use of transitional and linking words and phrases. Notice that paragraph 2 is linked to the first paragraph by repetition of the phrase "this paradoxical result." Point out at least five other transitional or linking words and phrases.

Now You Try It

Write an expository composition on some aspect of the community in which you live. You may write about the buildings, the people, the politics, the social life, the recreational facilities, the job opportunities, or some other aspect of your own choosing. Begin with an introductory paragraph that states the controlling idea. Use three or more developmental paragraphs that explain, clarify, and support the idea. End with a concluding paragraph that summarizes your main points. Be sure to use transitional expressions and, if necessary, transitional paragraphs so that readers can easily follow your thought.

LESSON **18**

Organizing an Analysis

Almost any subject can be analyzed: an organization, a person, a language, a problem, a mechanism, a structure, or a piece of literature. Since analysis, by its nature, breaks a subject down into parts, writers often use this "breakdown" when they are organizing essays based on an analysis. In the following model notice how C. L. Wrenn's analysis of the English language affects the organization of his essay.

48 C. L. Wrenn in *The English Language*

[1] The English language is spoken or read by the largest number of people in the world, for historical, political, and economic reasons; but it may also be true that it owes something of its wide appeal to qualities and characteristics inherent in itself. What are these characteristic features which outstand in making the English language what it is, which give it its individuality and make it of this worldwide significance?

[2] First and most important is its extraordinary receptive and adaptable heterogeneousness – the varied ease and readiness with which it has taken to itself material from almost everywhere in the world and has made the new elements of language its own. English, which when the Anglo-Saxons first conquered England in the fifth and sixth centuries was almost a "pure" or unmixed language – which could make new words for

new ideas from its own compounded elements and had hardly any foreign words – has become the most "mixed" of languages, having received throughout its history all kinds of foreign elements with ease and assimilated them all to its own character. Though its copiousness * of vocabulary is outstanding, it is its amazing variety and heterogeneousness which is even more striking: and this general receptiveness of new elements has contributed to making it a suitable and attractive vehicle in so many parts of the world.

[3] A second outstanding characteristic of English is its simplicity of inflection – the ease with which it indicates the relationship of words in a sentence with only the minimum of change in their shapes or variation of endings. There are languages, such as Chinese, that have surpassed English in the reduction of the language in the matter of inflections to what looks like just a series of fixed monosyllabic roots: but among European languages, taken as a whole, English has gone as far as any in reducing the inflections it once had to a minimum. A natural consequence of this simplifying of inflection by reduction, however, is that since the relationship of words to each other is no longer made clear by their endings, this must be done in other ways.

[4] A third quality of English, therefore, is its relatively fixed word order. An inflected language like Latin or Russian can afford to be fairly free in the arrangement of its words, since the inflections show clearly the proper relationship in the sentence, and ambiguity is unlikely. But in a language which does not change the forms of its words according to their relationship in the sentence-significance, the order of the words is likely to be relatively fixed; and a fixed word order in relation to meaning in the sentence takes the place of the freedom made possible by the system of inflections.

[5] Another consequence, fourthly, of the loss or reduction to the minimum of the inflections which English once had, is the growth of the use of periphrases or roundabout ways of saying things, and of the use of prepositions to take the place of the lost inflections. The English simplified verb uses periphrases and compound

* **copiousness:** abundance.

tenses made with auxiliary verbs to replace the more elaborate system of tenses that once existed (though tenses had already become fairly simple before the Anglo-Saxons came to England). Similarly, English, which once had nearly as many case endings as Latin, has come to use prepositions instead of these, as can easily be seen if one translates any piece of Latin into English.

[6] A fifth quality of English – though this, like the loss of inflections and its consequences, is shared with some other languages – is the development of new varieties of intonation to express shades of meaning which were formerly indicated by varying the shapes of words. This is perhaps somewhat comparable (though only in a small way) to the vast use of intonation in Chinese as a method of expressing meaning in sentences which would otherwise seem like series of unvarying monosyllabic roots. Consider, for instance, the wonderful variety of shades of meaning we may put into the use of the word *do*, merely by varying the intonation – that is, the pitch and intensity, the tone of the voice.

[7] Not all the above qualities are in themselves necessarily good, nor have they all contributed to the general success of English. But it seems probable that of them all it is the adaptable receptiveness and the simplicity of inflection that have done most in this regard. On the other hand, the very copiousness and heterogeneousness of English leads to vagueness or lack of clarity. Its resources are too vast for all but the well educated to use to full advantage; and such phenomena as "pidgin English," "journalese," jargon, woolliness of expression and slatternly speech and writing, are everywhere likely to be met with. It may fairly be said that English is among the easiest languages to speak badly, but the most difficult to use well.

The Writer's Craft

1. An introductory paragraph should arouse the reader's interest and state the topic of the composition. Does Wrenn's opening paragraph accomplish both of these objectives? The topic of the selection is presented in the form of a question. Do you find this technique effective? Why?

2. The first characteristic discussed by Wrenn is the heterogeneousness of the language. He stresses the importance of this characteristic. The second characteristic mentioned is the simplicity of inflection in the English language. Are the third, fourth, and fifth characteristics related to this simplicity of inflection? Would you understand the third, fourth, and fifth characteristics as well if you did not know what was meant by "simplicity of inflection"?

3. There are good reasons for the order in which Wrenn treats the first two characteristics. Are there equally good reasons for the order of the last three? Would it really matter if the sixth paragraph had been placed fourth, or if the fifth paragraph had been placed sixth? In other words, is Wrenn's order for paragraphs 4, 5, and 6 an *arbitrary* one? When is an arbitrary arrangement of paragraphs justified?

4. Whatever method of organization a writer uses, he should make his organizational plan clear to the reader. Is Wrenn's organizational plan made clear? How?

5. In each of Wrenn's five developmental paragraphs, the topic sentence appears in the same position. What is this position? Why is this position for the topic sentence especially useful in an essay of analysis?

6. One of the functions of a concluding paragraph is to summarize. Does Wrenn's last paragraph summarize the content of the essay? What else does it do?

WORD CHOICE: EXPRESSING PRECISE MEANINGS

The nature of Wrenn's subject makes it necessary for him to include some words that he knows may be unfamiliar to his readers: *heterogeneousness* (line 10), *inflection* (line 28), *periphrases* (line 54), and *intonation* (line 76). He does, however, try to make the meanings of these words clear to the reader by giving a brief definition in context. This is a technique you may find useful when you write about subjects that have special vocabularies.

Now You Try It

Select a topic which can be carefully and logically analyzed. Write an essay of analysis that begins with an introductory paragraph, contains three or more developmental paragraphs, and ends with a summary paragraph. The following questions may suggest a topic for you to use:

a. What is an atom?
b. What are the three branches of our national government?
c. What are the essential characteristics of slang?
d. What features characterize all popular dances?
e. What are the reasons for the popularity of folk songs?
f. What is a "good" college?
g. What are the essential parts of a short story?
h. What are the characteristics of a successful student leader?
i. What makes a student newspaper outstanding?

LESSON 6

Skills of Description

Description is writing that presents the various attributes of persons, objects, and places. Some description, such as a police-wanted notice or a naturalist's detailed description of a bird, is intended primarily to convey information. Other description is intended not so much to convey information as to suggest to the imagination the impression that something makes on the senses. It is this last type of description that you will be concerned with in this lesson.

In the following passage, Wallace Stegner describes the prairie town of his early childhood. He has returned for a visit after an absence of many years. Notice that he is more concerned with giving his impression of the change in the appearance of the town than with telling exactly how it looks.

25 Wallace Stegner in *Wolf Willow*

My town used to be as bare as a picked bone, with no tree anywhere around it larger than a ten-foot willow or alder. Now it is a grove. My memory gropes uneasily, trying to establish itself among fifty-foot cottonwoods, lilac and honeysuckle hedges, and flower gardens. Searched for, plenty of familiarities are there: the Pastime Theater, identical with the one that sits across Main Street from the firehouse in my mind; the lumber yard where we used to get cloth caps advertising De Laval

Cream Separators; two or three hardware stores (a prairie wheat town specializes in hardware stores), though each one now has a lot full of farm machinery next to it; the hotel, just as it was rebuilt after the fire; the bank, now remodeled into the post office; the Presbyterian church, now United, and the *Leader* office, and the square brick prison of the school, now with three smaller prisons added to it. These are old acquaintances that I can check against their replicas in my head and take satisfaction from. But among them are the evidences of Progress — hospital, Masonic Lodge, at least one new elevator, a big quonset-like skating rink — and all tree-shaded, altered, and distorted, and made vaguely disturbing by greenery. In the old days we all used to try to grow trees, transplanting them from the Hills or getting them free with any two-dollar purchase from one of the stores, but they always dried up and died. To me, who came expecting a dusty hamlet, the change is charming, but memory has been fixed by time as photographs fix the faces of the dead, and this reality is dreamlike. I cannot find myself or my family or my companions in it.

The Writer's Craft

SELECTING DETAILS

A well-written description is like a skillfully executed drawing: its effect is as much the result of what is left out as of what is put in. The writer includes the details he considers important — those that contribute to the impression he wants to convey — and omits the details he considers unimportant — those that do not contribute to the dominant impression.

Wallace Stegner begins this passage with two contrasting statements in which he describes his town as it used to be — "bare as a picked bone" — and as it is now — "a grove" (lines 1–3). To help the reader visualize the differences that the years have made, Stegner supplies a number of details. Where once there were only a few scrubby trees, none larger than a "ten-foot willow or alder," now there are "fifty-foot cottonwoods, lilac and honeysuckle hedges, and flower gardens" (lines 2–5). Some town landmarks, such as "the Pastime Theater," "the lumber yard," and "two or three hardware stores," still remain nearly as

they were when he was a boy (lines 6–17). Among these "old acquaintances," however, are "evidences of Progress" that he doesn't recognize: a hospital, a Masonic Lodge, a new elevator, a skating rink (lines 8–21). But the greatest difference between the town of the present and the town of his boyhood, and the dominant impression that Stegner wants to convey, is the disturbing presence of the trees. Everything, the familiar and the unfamiliar, is "tree-shaded, altered, and distorted, and made vaguely disturbing by greenery" (lines 21–23). In the concluding sentences of the passage, he explains the effect that the trees have upon him, contrasting his recollection of "the old days" when trees "dried up and died" with the present "dreamlike" reality (lines 23–30).

After selecting details that contribute to a single dominant impression, the writer must make these details specific. Notice how Stegner links his boyhood memories to several of the town landmarks. The lumber yard, for example, is not just any lumber yard; it is "where we used to get cloth caps advertising De Laval Cream Separators" (lines 9–10). Find one or two more town landmarks that he has treated in the same manner.

USING SENSORY DETAILS

Many of the specific details in a good description are sensory. A writer most often tells you how something looks, but he may also tell you how it sounds, smells, tastes, or feels if such details contribute to the impression he wants to convey.

In this passage, Wallace Stegner is primarily concerned with the change that the trees have made in the appearance of his town and with the effect of this change upon his own feelings. Since the change is entirely visual, he appeals mainly to your sense of sight. What words and phrases does he use to help you *see* the following features of the town?

the trees, shrubs, and flowers (lines 1–5)
the familiar landmarks (lines 6–17)
the new buildings (lines 20–23)

ORGANIZATION

Good description is the result of careful selection and systematic arrangement. The writer must decide not only which details to include but also in what order to present them. Often he begins each paragraph of his description with a general statement and then proceeds to support this statement with appropriate details. Notice that Stegner or-

ganizes his paragraph in essentially this way but that instead of beginning it with just one general statement, he begins it with *two*. In the first statement he recollects that his town "used to be as bare as a picked bone"; in the second, he observes that "Now it is a grove." Similarly, in the rest of the paragraph, he alternates between recollection and observation, first noting the familiar landmarks, then the unfamiliar. Finally, he concludes with two sentences in which he summarizes his reaction to the changed appearance of the town.

USING SPECIFIC WORDS AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

A good writer chooses his words carefully, always preferring the specific noun to the general, the exact verb to the vague, the precise adjective to the trite. He may also use figures of speech to make his details more vivid and effective.

Look back over the passage, noting where Stegner makes especially apt or specific word choices and where he uses figures of speech – similes, metaphors, or personifications. (For definitions of these figures of speech see pages 76–77).

Did you particularly note Stegner's use of specific nouns? Not content with the general term *tree*, he mentions three kinds – willow, alder, and cottonwood. He specifies two kinds of hedge – lilac and honeysuckle. He also uses proper nouns, such as *De Laval Cream Separators*, quite frequently. How many proper nouns can you find? What is their effect? Try replacing them with less specific nouns. Do the sentences in which they appear suffer as a result?

If you looked carefully, you should have been able to locate two similes, two metaphors, and a personification in the passage. The first simile, of course, is in the first line: "My town used to be as bare as a picked bone." Writers often begin descriptive passages with metaphors or similes. Do you think this particular simile is effective here? Try substituting a phrase, such as *a desolate place*, for *as bare as a picked bone*. Is anything lost? What is the other simile in this passage? Do you find it as effective as the first one?

Stegner uses figures of speech when he wants to tell you how he feels about something. For example, instead of saying simply that the trees bother him, he says, "My memory gropes uneasily, trying to establish itself among fifty-foot cottonwoods . . ." (personification) In much the same manner, he speaks of the "square brick prison of the school" (metaphor) instead of saying that he used to hate school. Do you think that the figurative approach is more effective than the direct in these instances? Can you find the second metaphor?

Now You Try It

Decide on a person, a place, or an object to describe. Choose a person whom you once disliked but whom you now have come to like and respect. Or choose a town – or perhaps a house – in which you once lived and to which you recently have returned for a visit. Next, decide what general impression you wish to convey and what general statement you wish to make. Then, in a paragraph of about 250 words, support this statement with details.

If your subject has changed with the passage of time, or if your attitude toward your subject has changed, you may wish to make *two* contrasting statements, just as Stegner did in his passage. For example, you might make one general statement, such as "Mr. O'Neill always appeared to me to be a most formidable man," and follow it with another, such as "I know now, however, that his brusque manner and stern expression conceal a warm and generous nature." In this case, of course, you would make sure that your paragraph contained details supporting both statements, or you would separate the statements and let each introduce its own paragraph.