

Limiting for Satisfying Discussion Superficial knowledge vs. deep understanding

The composition of an inexperienced writer is often a series of general statements, and it reads like a list, not a discussion. In such writing, even “supporting sentences” for general statements are, in effect, no more than additional general statements. They provide a superficial statement of the writer’s opinion, but they don’t provide enough explanation for the reader’s deep understanding of the opinion, nor enough support to gain the reader’s appreciation of the opinion. Clarity and credibility are weak.

A truly satisfying composition is not a series of general statements, it is a discussion. A good composition presents a general idea, presents different aspects of the general idea, and then elaborates on each aspect. (Examples of elaboration are definition, description, consequences, imagining...)

In a paragraph of conventional length, we have to limit the central idea to a scope that is small enough to allow full and satisfying growth.

This paragraph has excellent organization and coherence and cohesion. What do you think of the development of its central idea?

I believe that Hong-suk is much more attractive to women than I am because he is kinder, more eloquent and richer than I am. The first reason that he is more attractive than I am is that he is always kind to women who meet him. For example, when a woman asks him about her homework in English class he always explains clearly to her how to do it. On the other hand, women in English class have a tendency to consider that I am impolite to them because I don’t answer their questions. Another reason that Hong-suk is more attractive than I am is that he is eloquent. For instance, even at his first meeting with a beautiful woman he can express his feelings of how beautiful she is. In contrast, if I went on a date with the woman he dated I would be at a loss to express my feelings. The last reason that women feel attracted to Hong-suk much more than me is that he is rich. Whenever he goes on a date with a woman, for example, he always buys a present for her. I, in contrast, don’t have much money for presents. Considering that he’s kinder, richer and more eloquent than I am, women will like him more.

This paragraph is a string of general statements. The central idea is “Hong-suk is more attractive to women than I am.” Major supports are that 1) he’s kinder, 2) he’s more eloquent, and 3) he has more money. The claim that he is kinder is slightly clarified by he explains homework. One general statement is supported by another general statement, which is supported by another general statement. And that’s all. The reader knows the writer’s opinion, but can’t really appreciate it..

If a more mature writer wrote about the same idea, she would 1) limit the central idea to one reason (not three reasons), and then 2) present deeper support to give the reader a deeper appreciation of my idea.

Hong-suk is much more attractive to women than I am, and one reason for this is his eloquence and my lack of it. Even at his first meeting with a beautiful woman he can express his feelings of how beautiful she is. On his very first date with B, for instance, the first thing that he did, even before he said “Glad to meet you,” was smile and exclaim, “My oh my, what a nice dress that is!” Miss B blushed and grinned gratefully. And then he immediately followed through with, “I mean, it shows off your lovely form perfectly.” At this, Miss B blushed an even deeper red, and squirmed, and you could see tears of gratitude welling in her eyes. Like many other girls Hong-suk has met, she was his completely from that moment. But he didn’t stop there, he kept on charming her that way the whole evening, finally making her his slave for life. In contrast, if I went on a date with the woman Hong-suk dated, I would be at a loss to express my feelings. I would say, “Glad to meet you,” and wait for her to reply, “Glad to meet you.” Then I would say something entirely useless like, “My name is Y.” After that, if she hadn’t left already, I would manage to come up with the most interesting expression in my repertoire: “Nice weather, isn’t it? But they say it may rain tonight.” Then she would frown and say, “Certainly not,” then look at her watch and say, “Well, I must be going. I promised my mother I would be home early tonight. Don’t call me, I’ll call you.” And she would leave my life forever, as so many other girls have done in the same way. If I had just one-tenth of Hong-suk’s eloquence the girls would stay with me long enough to see what a great guy I am.

Quality support does not always have to be factual events or data. It can also be more specific—therefore deeper—elaboration.

What do you think of this composition? Is it a superficial presentation of the writer's main idea, or is it a satisfying discussion?

I prefer to watch a movie with Nam-yong than with Shin-uk, because of several differences in their movie-going habits. Their first difference is that Nam-yong is more punctual than Shin-uk. Nam-yong usually tries to be punctual and always shows up, whereas Shin-uk is usually late, or sometimes breaks the appointment. I don't like the person who is late because I don't want to waste my time. The second one is about the kind of movie we see. Nam-yong, like me, likes romantic movies. But Shin-uk likes dramas, not romantic movies. I like to eat fast foods, like pizza and hamburgers, before or after watching a movie. Nam-yong has an Americanized taste for food, so she loves fast foods too. On the other hand, Shin-uk likes to eat Korean traditional foods. When considering the movie-going habits of these two, going to the movies with Nam-yong is more joyful.

A mature writer would limit the number of supports to just one part of one of the three reasons (punctuality, not keeping the appointment) that the student used in the paragraph above. If he did this, he would be able to give the reader deeper understanding and would probably get the reader to really appreciate his idea. How about this example of using a combination of imagined example and consequence (instead of factual events) for lower-level support?

I prefer to going out with Nam-yong to going with Shin-uk because Nam-yong is better than Shin-uk at coming on time. Going to a movie is a good example. Nam-yong never comes late, so I can always enjoy the movie that I see with her. If the bus that she was on broke down about halfway to our appointment, she would not let that stop her from getting there on time. She would get off the bus and take a taxi, knowing all the while that the taxi fare would cost a big part of her monthly allowance. Because she shows up on time we are always able to get good seats, we can chat a little before the movie starts, and we never have to worry about missing the first part of the movie, which is often crucial to understanding. Inconsiderate Shin-uk, on the hand, so unlike Rolex Nam-yong, seldom shows up for our appointments on time, which usually ruins the movie I see with her. If we are supposed to meet at a coffee shop near the theatre an hour before the movie starts, Shin-uk will stroll casually into the coffee shop with just ten minutes left. She will say, "Oh, I'm so sorry, but I was out late last night and got up late this morning." Then we will try to get tickets, but of course the line will be stretched around the corner, and I will have to spend a big part of my monthly allowance buying scalper's tickets. If we do manage to get the tickets, we will find seats way at the back of the theatre, and we will have missed the first ten minutes of the movie by the time we sit down. Without popcorn! Thirty minutes later we will still be trying to figure out who is who in the movie, and by the time the climax happens we will still not have learned enough to really appreciate it. My advice if you have friends like Nam-yong and Shin-uk: invite Never-late Nam-yong to movies you want to see and Slow-show Shin-uk when you want a good meal.