

## Getting your point across

### Content, Clarity, Language

The main goal of the English Language Program is learning how to get your point across. (The corresponding goal is learning how to identify the other's point.)

#### **Doing a homework assignment that asks for multi-sentence answers.**

The most effective procedure for doing this takes a little more time, but it pays off in the long run.

1. Analyze the question so that you know exactly what it is asking.
2. Decide what ideas are required to answer the question directly to the point and fully.
3. Design the first sentence of your answer. (See "Lack of clarity in content" below.)
4. Answer orally, using the cues.
5. Check the text to see whether your answer is grammatically correct.
6. Write the answer.
7. Check content and clarity; then check articles, prepositions, grammar (noun number, subject-verb agreement, and tense are the most common problems), spelling, and pronunciation.
8. Write your corrected sentence on a clean sheet of paper.

*Don't copy thoughtlessly or mechanically from the article, Use the article only as a reference.*

#### **Common problems**

**Tunnel-vision analysis.** Another cause of mistakes is deficiency in the skill of accurate analysis. We call this deficiency tunnel vision analysis because it results from not seeing and therefore not recognizing *all* the elements in a lexical phrase or a grammar pattern *and* its environment. This skill is important not only in learning English; the ability to accurately analyze—to recognize the details *and* the whole pattern—is important in almost any work you do. If you can't see something accurately, you can't act on it effectively. Practice in accurately analyzing English can help you to acquire the skill and habit of accurate analysis in other areas not related to English, so start *now* at working to acquire this skill.

**Senseless answers.** Be aware of what you are saying. Too often, the student thoughtless copies from the text, with the result that the answer doesn't make sense.

**Incorrect analysis of the question.** If you don't understand the question accurately, you won't be able to write the answer accurately. Before you think about an answer, think about the question. Take a minute to identify all of the requirements in the question: underline the words that express the requirements.

**Lack of clarity in content.** Once you understand the question and know the answer, you still have to express it clearly. Be sure that your answer clearly hits the point of the question. 1) Whenever possible, use the language of the question in the first sentence. This will help in two ways: it will ensure that the main point of the question is clear to you and will therefore guide you in crafting your answer; and it will make the answer clearer to the reader (again, because it is the main point). 2) Also, be sure that the answer to the question is in the first sentence; this first sentence should perform the same role as the topic sentence of a paragraph. Do this 1) to keep your explanation sharply focused on the question and 2) to ensure easy understanding.

**Carelessness.** Carelessness can cause disastrous mistakes. An employer considers carelessness a dangerous trait in an employee, because it can cost the employer a lot of money and headaches. And careless mistakes and their cousin messiness can make a waste of your effort; they cause conscious or unconscious prejudice *against* your work. Don't think *form vs. substance*, think *form and substance*. Get into the *habit* of avoiding careless mistakes, for after you graduate and start working. Don't put off formation of this habit until you get a job, thinking that when you get a job you will suddenly be able to turn in careful work. Careful work is a skill, and a skill is a habit.