

English for Study Purposes

Unit 1: What Makes Good Writing

Student's File EFSP 1.1

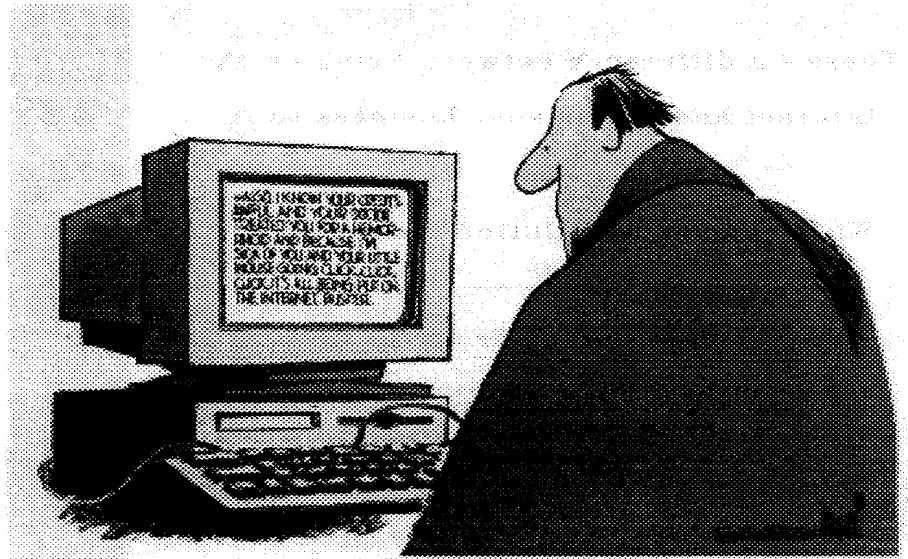
Corporations have rights - but so do individuals

In your morning paper you find an entry form for a lucky draw sponsored by a perfectly respectable company. To win a family vacation, all you need to do is to send in your name, address, occupation and details of how often you use the company's products. What could be easier? So you fill in the form. You may not realize it, but by answering those questions, you are giving away one of today's most sought-after commodities: personal information. With the data you and hundreds of other hopefuls send in, the company can assemble a detailed dossier on its customers. This allows it to target new clients, plan budgets and figure out ways to keep your business. For the cost of a family holiday, it has acquired priceless information.

Thanks to the ubiquity of technology, all kinds of businesses are storing, manipulating and sometimes trading your personal data these days. For some people, such activities raise the specter of Big Brother, the totalitarian government so powerfully depicted by George Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Much of the time, though, big business has more

they do already have the capability to assemble profiles of individuals and their actions. In a worst case scenario, this could put undue power in the hands of unscrupulous individuals or overzealous law enforcers.

The way to guarantee that data are used for responsible purposes is to give people the right to say what can be done with their personal information. They must be able to decide whether their data can be circulated, as well as to understand how such information is used or processed. At the moment, few countries in Asia require companies to disclose what they gather and keep about individuals. Obviously, if customers do not know what is known about them, they cannot demand to control or correct that information. The consequences could be serious. The finance and insurance industries, for instance, should be open to requests for correction of information. If a company turns down a loan application or denies insurance to an individual, it should be making those decisions based on the most up-to-date data.



Companies that gather and use personal information should also begin paying more attention to their own security. Criminals, too, have found that information means money, so companies owe it to their customers to keep their data in the utmost confidence. One example of the harm that could spring from lax data security: Since the beginning of this year, more than 300 people in Hong Kong have received cellular phone bills of up to \$2,000 on average - even though none of them owned a handset. Frauds had used copies of the victims' ID cards as well as their addresses to open accounts in their names.

benign and, indeed, more welcome intentions. When companies know who we are and what we want, they can better cater to our needs and desires. Nonetheless, the multiplication of ways our personal data are obtained and used should give pause for reflection.

What is privacy and why is it so important? Most people think about it in a limited, emotional and immediate sense. After all it is disconcerting to know that complete strangers have as intimate a knowledge of us as our friends or family. But privacy also has an important political function. It is a crucial component of the freedom to act independently. Few intrusions into our lives limit autonomous action more than being watched. As computers become more powerful and data-gathering more ubiquitous, the potential for encroachment on personal space becomes more real. It should be said that at the moment at least, corporations are more interested in mass patterns and group habits, but

Some groups contend that organized data-gathering should be banned altogether. And there is no argument that this would protect privacy -- by the simple technique of not giving companies the opportunity to invade it. But this is neither a practical nor a desirable solution. On balance, the use of personal information by companies does benefit the consumer. Equally the information flow has become crucial to businesses' competitiveness. Turning off the tap could put Asia's corporations at a disadvantage in the world market.

Besides, the spread of personal information has become a fact of modern existence. To eliminate it altogether might mean the eradication of modern conveniences. Just think - a world without automatic teller machines, credit cards or cellular phones. So to maximize the rewards and reduce the risks, regulations are required. Asia's governments should be thinking about legislation that balances the protection of privacy with the requirements of commerce.

Student's File EFSP 1.2

Paragraph One - an intensive analysis

If you are doing this course, you have probably had some trouble with your English, and are trying to find ways in which to improve. There is no magic pill you can take which will suddenly solve all your problems, but it would probably help if you slowed down and looked at language in a little more detail, and became more aware of where it is that you are going wrong.

So, let us look very closely at some pieces of writing. The first is an editorial from Asiaweek.

Look first at the heading as it will help us focus on what the writer wishes to communicate to us. In this case the heading also gives us an idea of the structure of the passage. There will be arguments on the side of the corporations, then arguments on the side of individuals, and a final balance or compromise.

Now let us look carefully at the first paragraph and see what we can learn from it.

Paragraph 1

Read paragraph one

The first 4 sentences ask us to imagine something. They create a picture of a situation. This is a very good way to start a discussion. The writer is trying to involve the reader. We are directly addressed (you). The tone is almost conversational, especially the rhetorical question (What could be easier?) We are drawn into the passage, and the exact point of what we are reading is held back for a moment to intrigue and engage our interest.

The fifth sentence brings us to the main point that the writer wants us to think about: personal information is worth a lot to business.

Sentences 6 and 7 explain this in some detail, and sentence 8 highlights the point of the story and repeats the main point in a slightly different form. Direct repetition is annoying and boring. Emphasis by means of re-wording is helpful.

You are giving away one of today's most sought-after commodities: personal information..... it has acquired priceless information.

English prepositions cause a lot of difficulties to learners. It can be worthwhile sometimes to look at some in detail. Make a list of all the prepositions in the first paragraph. There are 13. Your teacher will go through them with you.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ | 10. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ | 11. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ | 12. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ | 13. _____ |
| | 9. _____ | |

Student's File EFSP 1.3

Let us examine the verbs, their forms, tenses and usage. Look at the first paragraph again.

you find – main verb. Simple present is used as we are being asked to imagine an everyday event.

sponsored – past participle. You can imagine it to be a relative clause – “which has been sponsored”.

To win – an infinitive to express purpose

you need – main verb

to do – infinitive after ‘need’

to send – infinitive as a noun phrase (for example: “All you need to have is money”). The infinitive and the gerund are ways of putting verbs into positions that belong to nouns. *Ice-cream is nice. To sing is fun. Eating is pleasant.*)

you use – part of an indirect question.

What could be easier? – the modal form is used because there is an implied *if* – i.e. if you did it, what could be easier?

you fill – main verb

You may not realise it – modal verb as it's only a possibility

by answering – gerund

you are giving – a second main, *but* joins the two main clauses so there is no problem. The continuous tense is not essential, but covers the long-term consequences.

sought-after – irregular verb: seek, sought, sought. Compound adjective.

you...send in – part of a relative clause. (Insert *that* after *data* to see it clearly.)

the company can assemble – modal

This allows – main verb

to target – infinitive – noun phrase [This allows it freedom]

plan – bare infinitive

and figure out – bare infinitive

ways to keep – *way* is often followed by an infinitive. e.g. *the best way to study*

it has acquired – present perfect. By the time someone gets the holiday prize, it already has the information and will be able to use it for some time into the future.

Student's File EFSP 1.4

To connect, to refer, and to emphasise

Look at the connectives in paragraph one.

Sentence 1: nil	5: but (contrast)
2: and	6: and
3: nil	7: and
4: So (a bit informal)	8: nil

Many learners overuse connectives, especially heavy ones like 'Furthermore' and 'Moreover'. Good English learners use them lightly.

Look at reference points: Underline the pronouns. Can you say what the pronouns refer to?

Sentences 1 – 8

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Look at vocabulary: Some interesting words to think about

sought – irregular verb seek

data – unusual plural: datum, data. [medium, media]

dossier – you can probably guess it means file

***hopefuls** – a very unusual form. You can take an adjective (handicapped), put the definitive article (the), and make a group noun – (the handicapped), but you cannot add an s. hopefuls = hopeful people. Do not try to use other adjectives in this way. It is an exceptional case.

Look at emphasis: How a writer uses emphasis to persuade the reader about something

a perfectly respectable company – the author emphasises this is normal and not done only by immoral companies.

all you need to – emphasises how little you need to do

one of today's most sought-after commodities – note that such a phrase uses a plural: one of ... commodities

Student's File EFSP 1.4a - More about words

Parallelism. (Writing in English especially likes groups of three. Did you notice the title of EFSP 1.4.?*)

your name, address and occupation and details [four nouns]

This allows it to target...plan...and figure out...[three infinitives]

There is a strong belief in the power of three:

The Father, Son and Holy Ghost

The beginning, the middle and the end

To seek, to strive and not to yield

To love, honour and obey

Faith, hope, and charity

Morphology (word-forms) – a few selections:

lucky – a number of adjectives are formed by adding *y* to a noun.

luck – lucky

sweat – sweaty

health – healthy

dirt – dirty.

They form adverbs with – *ily*.

respectable – [*able* is a common adjective suffix. For phonetic reasons it can appear as *-ible*]. It has a generally passive sense – can be respected

can be read

can be enjoyed

vacation/occupation/information – *-tion*, common noun ending (usually abstract nouns)

realise – *-ize* verb suffix – *to make, industrialize, privatize* [can be spelt *ise*]

personal – *-al* adjective suffix

customers – *-ers* very common suffix for people who do something (officers, workers.)

Sometimes you need to add the suffix to words that already have similar endings:

murder → murderer

labour → labourer

business – *-ness* usually an ending for abstract nouns.

priceless – *-less*, adjective suffix. *hopeless* = having no hope. (Strangely, something having no price, which is beyond price or very valuable, is priceless.)

You will find it much easier to master correct, grammatical English, if you can identify the parts of speech, and learn how they fit together.

Note also the correct use of the *colon* in *sentence five* – the noun phrases on either side explain each other.

To sum up: the first paragraph establishes the topic of the value of personal data, and attracts us to read on by making an argument to involve us on a personal level.

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7

Paragraph 2

We will approach the second paragraph in rather less detail.

The second paragraph asks whether corporations can get information on us. It sees arguments on both sides, but decides that on balance, the situation is acceptable as long as we are careful. In other words, there is a problem, but it is one we can handle coolly.

Sentence 1:

(i) Can you give a phrase that could replace 'Thanks to'?

(ii) Can you work out the meaning of ubiquity?

(iii) Which is the main verb?

(iv) Comment on storing, manipulating and sometimes trading.

(v) Do you know, what the root man in manipulating means? [manufacture, manual, manicure]

(vi) Why is the continuous tense used?

Sentence 2:

(i) What do such activities refer to?

(ii) What is the main verb?

(iii) What can you infer about Orwell's novel?

Note: raise the specter = produce the ghost = remind of something bad.

For some people, a way of introducing an opinion you do not agree with yourself.

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7 (cont...)Sentence 3:

- (i) Which word shows us this sentence disagrees in part with the one before?

- (ii) Which is the main verb?

- (iii) Why do we find the form welcome, not welcomer?

- (iv) What is the purpose of using 'indeed'?

Note: it is easy to exaggerate and overuse words like 'Always'. It is safer to use less strong phrases, such as 'Much of the time' (frequently, often).

Sentence 4:

- (i) Which is the main verb?

- (ii) What is the reference of they and our?

Note the correct form of the indirect question form:

who we are
what we want

The subject and verb are not inverted

who are we ✗
what want we/what do we want ✗

Notice the balance:

who and what
needs and desires

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7 (cont...)

Sentence 5:

- (i) Give a phrase similar in meaning to 'Nonetheless'.

Note: This is the first heavy connective we have met.

- (ii) Which is the main verb?

- (iii) What is the subject of are obtained?

- (iv) Why is 'should' used?

- (v) What words connected with multiplication can you think of? Give also their parts of speech.

Paragraph 3

Read the paragraph.

The writer has described the situation, and identified a medium-sized problem. He now analyzes the problem for us. The first sentence of the paragraph gives the paragraph a very clear structure.

- (i) What are the main verbs of each sentence?

- (ii) Give references for the pronouns in the first two sentences:

1st 'it'

2nd 'it'

3rd 'it'

us/our

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7 (cont...)

(iii) Find three examples of parallelism.

(iv) What parts of speech are:

privacy

important

freedom

independently

limited

(v) Can you work out the meanings of:

disconcerting

autonomous

profiles

scenario

undue

overzealous

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7 (cont...)

- (vi) Underline the connectives (words and phrases)

Comment on their use.

Paragraph 4

Paragraph 4:

The passage is following a fairly common pattern:

Situation

Problem

Solution

This paragraph (as its first sentence makes very clear) tells us how to deal with the problem, that is, the threat to our privacy.

- (i) Underline the subject of the main verb of every sentence.
 (ii) Find all the adjectives in the paragraph.
 (iii) How many passive verbs appear?

- (iv) Can you find any examples of parallelism?

- (v) What is the implication of 'At the moment'?

- (vi) The consequences could be serious. Why 'could be'?

- (vii) Explain the uses of the definite and indefinite articles in the paragraph.

- (viii) Discuss the main connectives.

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7 (cont...)

Paragraph 5

Paragraph 5 also makes suggestions about how to prevent the problem from becoming serious, but it is separate from the paragraph before as it discusses a slightly different area.

- (i) Which is the topic sentence?

- (ii) Explain the verb forms in the first three sentences.

- (iii) Comment on the word-form of the word 'security'.

- (iv) What is the reference of 'their' in sentence 2?

- (v) How many plural nouns are there in the paragraph?

Paragraph 6

Paragraph 6 discusses some other possible solutions, but it rejects them as too extreme. This is signalled right at the start by 'Some groups.....', then at the start of the third sentence, we find the 'But'. The passage suggests we follow a middle path.

Accept

Accept with controls

Reject

- (i) Give another word for 'contend'.

- (ii) Underline the connectives and comment on them.

- (iii) In sentence 4, why does the writer use 'does'?

- (iv) Comment in full on 'Turning off the tap'.

Student's File EFSP 1.5 - Paragraphs 2-7 (cont...)**Paragraph 7**

Paragraph 7 as we should expect, pulls together argument. It rejects extreme measures and calls for moderate regulation that balances the needs of businesses and the rights of individuals.

- (i) List all the nouns.

- (ii) Make three comments on the paragraph, its words and grammar.

It is hoped that this examination of a passage has helped you to become more aware of how arguments are structured, words chosen and grammar used to create meaning. This should help you improve your writing and reading.