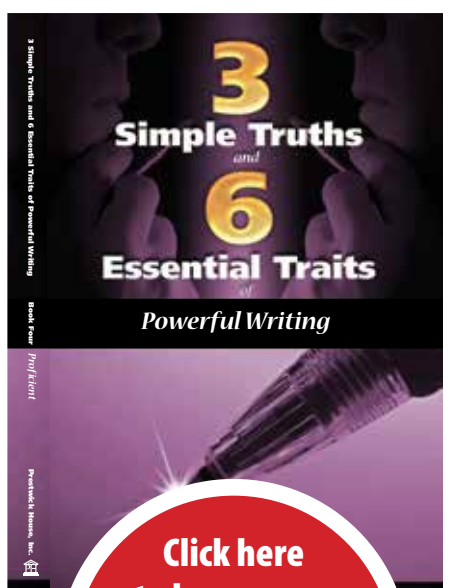




3 Simple Truths and  
6 Essential Traits™

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BOOK FOUR

# PROFICIENT

3

**Simple Truths**  
*and*

6

**Essential Traits**  
*of*

*Powerful Writing*



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*Powerful writing really says something.*

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## TRAIT TWO:

### ORGANIZATION

## Unity and Coherence

Remember that the two key issues to consider when organizing a long, complex work are *unity* and *coherence*. Unity is the quality that *every sentence in a paragraph* and *every paragraph in an essay or paper* relates to a single topic.

*Coherence* deals with *how* the individual parts relate to the whole.

### Make Yours Better!

First there were eight. Then there were nine. Then there were eight again. Then there were twelve. Finally, there were eight and three dwarfs. We're talking about planets, of course, and a debate has been raging since 1930, when Pluto was first discovered, about whether this tiny chunk of ice was, or a planet.

From the very beginning, Pluto's designation as the ninth planet was debated. It simply was too odd to be a true planet. While the other eight planets orbit the sun in essentially the same plane, Pluto's orbit is a full 17% off. The orbits of the other eight planets are essentially round, while Pluto's is "eccentric," oval-shaped, with the sun not at its center. In fact, at the point in orbit when it is closest to the sun, it is actually closer than the eighth planet, Neptune. This means that Pluto's orbit actually crosses Neptune's—and no other planet has an orbit like this.

Still, many early twentieth-century astronomers had been searching for over a decade for a ninth planet, and when Pluto was observed, they were all too willing to admit the tiny oddball into the club.

As early as 1978, however, Pluto's identity as a planet had been called into question. Some famous planetariums, in fact, refused to include Pluto in their charts and models of the solar system. The issue back then was the discovery of Charon, another body that exhibited some of the characteristics of a planet and some of the characteristics of a moon. As other Pluto-like objects were discovered in Pluto's neighborhood, most notably a body called 2003 UB313 (nicknamed Xena), most astronomers argued that, if Pluto was

- The first paragraph seems to introduce a discussion of a debate. We expect to be asked to consider the pros and cons of the issue.
- To begin with historical background is tempting, but not necessarily the best organization. Points of argument are implied, but not really laid out for the reader.
- The essay still focuses on historical background. It needs to reveal the purpose.

## Essay Critique

There is nothing wrong with the organizational pattern of this essay. The historical background of the debate is presented in chronological order. The introduction might not be tightened up to better represent the author's purpose. More space should be dedicated to the characteristics of planets that were debated. If the passage ends on a philosophical note, then the fact that this is a *reflection* more so than a debate should be clarified earlier.

This essay receives a  
score of **10** on the:

## Organization Rubric

### **14 = ACCOMPLISHED**

The **organizational plan** of the essay seems inevitable given the topic, purpose, and audience.

**13 = The essay flows** so that the reader gets a sense of where the discussion is leading and understands how it has been put together.

**12 = The structure of** the essay helps the reader understand the information and follow the point.

**11 = The organizational plan** is clear, original, and logical. It does not detract from the reader's appreciation of the discussion, but does not enhance it either.

### **10 = PROFICIENT**

The **organizational plan** of the essay is clear and original, and appropriate; but is not necessarily the best plan for the subject, purpose, and audience.

## Reviewing the Principles of Unity and Coherence

The following essay contains a lot of information. Much of it, however, is irrelevant and leads the reader off on tangents so that the main idea and the author's purpose become lost:

Chemically, it's called *cyanoacrylate*. Generically, it's called "super glue," and it's sold under such trademarked brand names as *KrazyGlue*™. Nearly every household in America has a bottle, and nearly everyone who's ever used it has a tale to tell. Some of the stories of unfortunate accidental gluings would lead one to the conclusion that super glue is a menace to society and should never have been released into the general public. When you look beyond the hype and examine the truth of most of these claims, however, you begin to realize that super glue is no more dangerous than the library paste or rubber cement it replaces.

After all, a person could wrap a length of kite string around his neck and strangle himself, so does that mean we should take kite string off the market? And how many accidental electrocutions are there every year? Clearly we must stop the production and consumption of electricity immediately.

There are, of course, the horribly embarrassing stories of the men and women who had the grave misfortune of sitting on a public toilet seat that someone had smeared with superglue. Variations of this urban legend range from having the paramedics remove the seat and parading the humiliated victim through the store to the ambulance to the victim's freeing himself or herself and walking through a crowded restaurant to find help. One British version of the story has the hapless victim push the "button" and set off the "alarm" while stuck in the stall.

Other urban legends have to do with exploding biscuit tubes, and car hoods dented by misdirected elephants. Basically, an urban legend is anything that is currently in the oral tradition, exists in numerous versions, all of which have actually happened to someone who knows someone who knows the person who is telling the tale. In order to be an urban legend, the tale must be purported to be true.

Blatant hoaxes, like warnings about non-existent computer viruses, or the desire of a supposedly dying youngster to be in the Guinness Book of World Records for having the most post cards from all over the world can sometimes cause nuisances. The problem with the latter hoax was that it inundated this tiny post office in Scotland with postcards from well-meaning good Samaritans for *years*.

Still, one commonly related superglue mishap is true and occurs frequently: the accidental gluing of inappropriate body parts. Hospital

## Exercise 2: Revising for Coherence



*The following extended essay is very informative and appropriately documented. It is hard to follow, however, because the writer has not paid attention to those aspects of word choice and sentence structure that contribute to a coherent paper.*

*Rewrite the essay, adding any necessary transitional elements and revising any sentences that do not make clear the relationship between the pieces of information provided.*

*After you are done, explain why you made the changes you did.*

Washington Irving, American author, short story writer, essayist, and poet, is today regarded as the Father of the American short story. Although he is best known today simply as the writer of two classic short stories, as the first American to make a living solely from his writing, he is an essential figure in the development of an American culture—at least an American literary culture.

Irving was born in New York City in 1783. He was the youngest of eleven children. He was also the son of a wealthy merchant. His mother was the English granddaughter of a clergyman. He developed a passion for reading stories about voyages and adventures. *Robinson Crusoe* and the stories of Sinbad, the sailor, were among his favorites. Irving would grow up to become a world traveler. He would earn no small part of his income from his travel writing.

Irving studied law, but never showed too much interest in practicing. He was admitted to the New York bar in 1806, but had already begun to develop a career as a writer, writing for journals and newspapers (Scott 233). He also began his travels, touring Europe from 1804 to 1806. On this trip, he visited Marseilles, Genoa, Sicily, and Rome. He experienced a personal tragedy. This tragedy would have an impact on the rest of his life. He'd earlier become engaged to Matilda Hoffman. She died suddenly, at the age of seventeen, in 1809. The heartbroken Irving would never marry. Years later he wrote to a friend that he dreamed of his "beloved Matilda" every night (Amyliss 17).

Irving was already beginning to build a career and reputation as a writer. His first major work, *A History of New York*, by the imaginary "Dietrich Knickerbocker" (1809) was amazingly popular. The work was about an American city. It was written by an American author. In his award-winning biography of Washington Irving, Josias Scott notes that this *History of New York* would become so influential that "Knickerbocker" would later be used to identify the first American school of writers (154). This school of writers was called the *Knickerbocker Group* (154). Also, any New Yorker who could trace his or her



## Exercise 4: Rhetorical Mode, Purpose, and the Research/Extended Essay Topic



Following are some of the research topic-ideas mentioned in Trait One. Each one suggests a number of different approaches to satisfy different purposes. List which modes of development would be most effective in attaining your purpose, and explain why.

As these are all research paper or extended essay topics, you should assume your audience to be your teacher, professor, or an academic committee.

### For example:

#### Sources of...

The Clutter Family killings and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* as America's first piece of "journalistic fiction"

*to inform the reader of where Capote collected material for his work*

- *description of the various sources and the information Capote got from each*
- *narration of Capote's relationship with the killers and how it developed*
- *definition of key terms used within the sources*
- *definition of what you are counting as a source in your paper*

*to persuade the reader that, in addition to his interviews with the killers, A, B, and C were also sources for In Cold Blood*

- *description of the various witnesses, newspaper accounts, investigators, etc., and the information (or viewpoints) Capote probably got from each*
- *narration of Capote's interviews with witnesses and others involved in the crime and how he developed his relationships with these sources*
- *definition of key terms used within the sources and the role each source played in the crime or the investigation*
- *definition of what you are counting as a source in your paper*

## Topic Selection Do's and Don'ts

### DO

- Do** choose a topic that is important to you.
- Do** identify the *essential you*.
- Do** think in terms of thesis and support.
- Do** answer the question being asked.
- Do** address all variations of the specific question in the specific application.
- Do** consider as many topics and approaches as you can.

### DON'T

- Don't** choose a topic because you think it will impress the committee.
- Don't** merely rehash what might be inferred from the rest of your application.
- Don't** ignore the question and answer your own version of it.
- Don't** write a general, one-size-fits-all essay for use on multiple applications.
- Don't** begin to write about the first idea that pops into your head and risk not developing a much better idea that might come later.
- Don't** fall into the trap of believing that a vague prompt invites a vague topic.

**Warning:** Two of the all-time most popular general topics that every admissions officer warns against are what is commonly called the “jock essay” and the “travelogue.” This does not mean that—if your participation in sports or your world travels are indeed what you *must* write about to communicate your essential self—you can't write about them. It does, however, mean that you should know from the very beginning that you will be including yourself in a huge stack of essays on a similar topic and you must develop the unique *youness* of the topic in order to be successful.

**Time Clue:** Even if you are a terrible procrastinator, you should actually allow yourself several weeks to think about—and jot down—various potential topics.

