MAIN BODY PARAGRAPHS - EXAMPLES

One method people often use to explain their ideas is to cite examples which typify what they have just said. "For example" is one of the most widely used transitions between a statement and its development. Even when these words are not employed, examples are frequently used to explain or clarify what has been said. Often, their mere mention suggests a great deal of additional information. This is especially true if the examples are selected carefully so that they are typical and precise.

For example, if I were to say, "I like to read novels," I would not be telling my reader much about my reading habits. Even if I were to say, "I like to read historical novels such as Roots, Trinity, and The Thornbirds," the reader would have a good idea of the kind of novels I prefer. Not only would I have given the names of specific books, but I would have also indicated that I enjoy historical novels involving family chronicles that have evolved over several generations. Or, I might have said that I enjoy historical novels such as the works of James Michener, Leon Uris, and Irving Wallace. Now the informed reader would know that I prefer novels that emphasize action and significant historical events. In any case, my sentence will have used examples to develop my basic thought.

The words, "for example," "such as," "for instance," "notably," and "to illustrate" are often used to introduce the examples.

EXAMPLES:

Often, examples are employed along with other methods of development in a paragraph. However, there are times when an entire paragraph may rely on examples as its primary or sole technique of development. Sometimes one lengthy example will be offered while at other times numerous individual examples will be given. Examples of such paragraphs follow.

A. In a paragraph in which I discuss problems people encounter in learning English, I might choose to use numerous examples to demonstrate how idioms cause confusion. The topic sentence is underlined.

Once the non-native speaker of English has achieved some mastery of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, he may still find himself perplexed about many expressions people use. He will probably wonder how anyone can "put his foot in his mouth" or "fly off the handle." And he may be thoroughly confused by the teacher who tells him to stop "beating around the bush" when there is obviously no bush in the classroom. How someone can be "snowed under" in the middle of July in Texas or

Each sentence gives an example and lists specific details.

1. He will probably . . .
   "put his foot . . ."   "fly off . . ."

2. And he may be . . .
   "beating . . ."

3. How someone can . . .
   "snowed . . ."
"fit to be tied" may be equally perplexing. Even his classmates' resolution to "hit the books," "burn the midnight oil," and "brush up on Spanish" may not be immediately understood. Worse yet will be admonitions to "cut corners" where there are no corners and to "get off your high horse" when he has never been near a horse in his life. Yet these are only a few of the hundreds of apparently non-logical expressions peculiar to many English-speaking people.

4. Even his classmates . . . "hit the books . . ." "burn the . . ." "brush up on . . ."

5. Worse yet will . . . "cut corners" "get off your high horse"

B. One paragraph in an essay about ways people deal with negative feelings might use an extended example such as the one in the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined.

Lynn, my college roommate, had what the rest of us considered a strange way of dealing with tension. Instead of talking incessantly or eating a candy bar as most of us did when we were under pressure, Lynn worked math problems whenever she was nervous. A chemistry major, she was very good at math and found working a difficult equation an absorbing challenge. Before a history exam or an oral presentation in her literature class, Lynn "relaxed" with calculus. While preparing for her role in "Our Town," she mastered differential equations, and every time she had a fight with her boyfriend, she voluntarily tutored the worst mathematician on campus. Even when it came time to prepare for graduation and job interviews, Lynn reviewed symbolic logic to put her mind at ease while all her friends nervously rehearsed interview techniques.

One person, Lynn, is described as an example of how someone might deal with negative feelings.

Her approach is contrasted with the more ordinary approach of her friends.

Note all the specific details in the example.

Lynn worked math problems; her friends ate candy bars and talked.

Kinds of pressure -- history exam, oral presentation in literature class, role in "Our Town," fight with boyfriend, graduation preparations and job interviews.

Kinds of math problems-- a difficult equation, calculus, differential equations, tutoring, symbolic logic.
EXERCISES:

Below you will find two more paragraphs that use examples as the primary means of development. Beside each, identify the examples and supporting details. The topic sentence of each is underlined.

A. One reason newcomers to America have difficulty understanding what is said to them is the fact that American pronunciation is often very sloppy. For example, the sentence "I’m going to go to the store" will often sound like, "I’m gonna go to the store." The statement, "I should have done my homework," frequently is heard as "I shudda dun my homework" while "please don’t ask me" comes out "Pleenz doan as me." "Can" becomes "kin," "let me" equals "limmie," "don’t know" is "dunno," and "didn’t do" sounds like "din do." All the "should have," "could have," and "would have"'s are similarly corrupted. Whatever can be said in a sloppy manner will be said that way much of the time.

Example one. Specific details.
Example two. Specific details.
Example three. Specific details.
Others.

B. My neighbor is a person who puts her anger to work for her. If her children come home from school to find the garage all neatly arranged or the windows sparkling, their first reaction is to wonder why she was angry. They know their mother often washes walls, scrubs floors, or rearranges furniture to relieve tension. Over the years, Helen has learned to take advantage of her need for activity when something or someone upsets her. Not only does her excess energy find a constructive outlet, but as her anger fades, she often discovers answers to the problems which provoked her in the first place.

Extended example. Specific details.

C. Choose a topic and develop a paragraph or two using examples. Some possibilities might be as follows:

1. Many hobbies provide good exercise.
2. Spelling causes many problems for me.
3. When I read for enjoyment, I prefer magazines.
4. Performing routine maintenance on one’s car is a good way to save money.
5. Housekeeping requires a variety of skills.
ANSWERS:

A. Example one.

"I'm going to go to the store."
Specific detail - "gonna" for "going to"

Example two.

"I should have done my homework"
Specific detail - "shudda" for "should have"

Example three.

"Please don't ask me."
Specific detail - "pleez" for "please," "doan" for "don't," "as" for "ask"

Others. "kin" for "can," "limmie" for "let me," "din do" for "didn't do," and corrupted "should have," "could have," and "would have"'s

B. Helen is described as a person who puts her anger to work for her.

Specific details - She cleans the garage, washes windows, washes walls, scrubs floors, rearranges furniture, and her anger fades. She discovers answers to her problems.

C. Since paragraphs will vary, ask an instructor to evaluate your work.