

# Rhetorical Grammar for Expository Reading and Writing

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STUDENT VERSION

MODULE 4: VALUE OF LIFE

## Verbs in Expository Writing

### Activity 1

#### Guided Composition

This activity is based on Chris Jones, “Roger Ebert: The Essential Man.”

The purpose of this activity is for you to write a paragraph on the topic of this module. Your teacher will read a paragraph while you listen, and then read it again while you take notes. You will then write your own paragraph based on what you heard using your notes.

#### Noticing Language

What is wrong with these sentences? How do you know?

1. In 2010 Roger Ebert is sitting down to watch a movie with other movie critics.
2. He came to the screening room since 1976.
3. Today Ebert has decided to watch only one film. He did not have the time or energy for more.

#### Rhetorical Grammar Concepts

The materials labeled Rhetorical Grammar Concepts are for your reference as you do the activities in this unit.

#### Identifying Complete Verb Phrases

##### Complete Verb Phrases

- Have a grammatical subject (I, you, it . . .)

*Example:* <sup>subj</sup>Ebert has thyroid cancer.

- Express a time (tense), completion (aspect), or duration

*Example:* He <sup>verb</sup>lost (past tense) the ability to talk after one of his surgeries.





## Activity 2

### Identifying Verbs, Subjects, and Time Frames

Double-underline the complete verb phrases and underline the subjects in the following paragraph. Circle the time markers. Remember a time marker can be implied by the context of the passage. Fill in the chart below. In the fourth column, label the time frame of the verbs: **past** or **present/future**.

Earlier today, Ebert's publisher sent him two copies of his newest book, *Great Movies III*. Ebert turned them over in his hand. He wrote most of the book while in hospital beds. Then he put the copies on a shelf in his office. Ebert's readers have asked him to write his autobiography next, but he looks up from his laptop and shrugs at the thought. He's already written a lot about himself, and he does not want to say the same things twice. Besides, tonight he has a review to finish. He returns his attention to his laptop. Its glow makes white squares in his glasses. Music plays. Words come.

**Rhetorical purpose:** Why do you think the writer switches time frames?

	Subject	Verb Phrase	Time Marker	Time Frame
1.	publisher	sent	earlier today	past
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				

### Activity 3

### Using Basic and Perfect Verb Tenses in Expository Writing

Fill in the blanks in these paragraphs adapted from “Roger Ebert: The Essential Man” with the correct basic and perfect tenses. Use the simple past, present, or future and the present and past perfect. Circle the time markers. Check to make sure the verbs agree with the subjects.

Roger Ebert does not remember (not remember) the last thing he ate. He \_\_\_\_\_ (not remember) the last thing he drank either, or the last thing he \_\_\_\_\_ (say). Of course, those things \_\_\_\_\_ (exist); those lasts \_\_\_\_\_ (happen). They just \_\_\_\_\_ (not happen) with enough warning for him to remember. The doctors \_\_\_\_\_ (tell) him they were going to give him back his ability to eat, drink, and talk. But the doctors \_\_\_\_\_ (be) wrong. On some morning or afternoon or evening, sometime in 2006, Ebert \_\_\_\_\_ (take) his last bite and sip, and he \_\_\_\_\_ (speak) his last word.

Now his hands \_\_\_\_\_ (do) the talking. They \_\_\_\_\_ (be) delicate and long-fingered. He \_\_\_\_\_ (wear) his wedding ring on the middle finger of his left hand. He \_\_\_\_\_ (lose) so much weight since he and Chaz were married in 1992 that it \_\_\_\_\_ (not stay) where it belongs, especially now his hands \_\_\_\_\_ (be) so busy. He \_\_\_\_\_ (develop) a rudimentary kind of sign language. If he \_\_\_\_\_ (touch) his hand over his heart, it \_\_\_\_\_ (mean) he’s telling the truth. Sometimes, when he \_\_\_\_\_ (be) outside wearing gloves, he \_\_\_\_\_ (have) to draw letters with his fingers on his palm. That \_\_\_\_\_ (be) his last resort.

**Rhetorical purpose:** Why do you think the writer switches time frames?

## Using Progressive Tenses

Progressive tenses are used to describe an event or action **in progress** or ongoing at a time in the past, present, or future. The emphasis is on the duration (length of time). Progressive tenses are usually used with active verbs such as “writing” and “sitting;” they are much less frequent with state-of-being verbs such as “be” and “seem.”

### Examples:

#### Past Progressive Tense

Ebert was soon writing movie reviews again (after) his first surgery.

(“Was writing” describes an action that was happening at a time in the past; that action was interrupted by another action or event in the past, “his first surgery.”)

#### Present Progressive Tense

Roger Ebert is sitting down to watch a movie.

(“Is sitting down” describes a present action that is occurring at the present moment.)

## Activity 4

## Using Verb Tenses to Express Time Relationships

The following timeline gives dates for the main events in Roger Ebert’s life. Using these dates, information from “Roger Ebert: The Essential Man” by Chris Jones, and your own commentary, write a brief biography of Roger Ebert. Try to use a variety of verb tenses, including the simple present and the future. You may use the passive when appropriate.

**Example:** *Roger Ebert was born on June 18, 1942, in Urbana, Illinois. While he attended the University of Illinois from 1960-64, he worked as a reporter for the school paper.*

June 18, 1942	born in Urbana, Illinois
1960 - 1964	attends the University of Illinois; works as a reporter for the school paper, the <i>Daily Illini</i>
1967	begins writing movies reviews for the <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>
1975	receives the first Pulitzer Prize for film criticism
1976 - 1999	Co-hosts television programs <i>Sneak Previews</i> , <i>At the Movies with Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert</i> , and <i>Siskel at the Movies</i> with Gene Siskel

1992	marries trial attorney Charlie "Chaz" Hammel-Smith
1999	Gene Siskel passes away
2000	<i>Ebert &amp; Roeper &amp; the Movies</i> begins airing with co-host Richard Roeper
2002	diagnosed with thyroid cancer
2003	returns to work after surgery on his salivary glands and aggressive radiation treatment
mid-2006	cancer returns to his jaw; his carotid artery bursts following surgery, and he almost dies
mid-2006 to 2013	is unable to eat, drink, and talk
2008 to 2013	writes an on-line journal

Now underline the subjects and double-underline the verbs in your biography. Circle time markers. Finally, add any needed time markers and edit the verbs so they accurately express the relationship among events in Ebert's life. Check for subject-verb agreement and correct punctuation.

*(On April 4, 2013, after taking a "leave of presence" from reviewing movies, he died. His wife Chaz Ebert, said, "No struggle, no pain, just a quiet, dignified transition.")*

#### Alternate Activity 4

### Using Verb Tenses to Express Time Relationships

Fill in the blanks in this short biography of Roger Ebert with the correct basic and perfect tenses. Also note that some verbs are passive. Circle the time markers. Check to make sure you have formed the verbs correctly.

Roger Ebert was (be) born on June 18, 1942, in Urbana, Illinois. While he was attending (attend) the University of Illinois from 1960-64, he worked \_\_\_\_\_ (work) as a reporter for the school paper. He \_\_\_\_\_ (begin) writing movie reviews for the Chicago Sun-Times in 1967. He \_\_\_\_\_ (receive) the first Pulitzer Prize for film criticism in 1975. A year later he \_\_\_\_\_ (begin) cohosting movie programs on TV with Gene Siskel. After Siskel \_\_\_\_\_ (die) in 1999, he \_\_\_\_\_ (co-host) *Ebert & Roeper & the Movies* with Richard Roeper. He \_\_\_\_\_ (be) diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2002.

## Activity 5

He \_\_\_\_\_ (return) to work after he \_\_\_\_\_ (undergo) a year of treatment. Two years later he \_\_\_\_\_ (be) the first film critic to receive a star on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame. In mid-2006 his cancer \_\_\_\_\_ (return). Following surgery, his carotid artery \_\_\_\_\_ (burst). Now he no longer \_\_\_\_\_ (eat), \_\_\_\_\_ (drink), and \_\_\_\_\_ (talk), but he still \_\_\_\_\_ (communicate) with the world through an on-line journal that he \_\_\_\_\_ (keep) since 2008. He \_\_\_\_\_ (know) that he \_\_\_\_\_ (die) eventually, but he \_\_\_\_\_ (say) the journal \_\_\_\_\_ (save) him.

**Rhetorical Purpose:** Why do you think the writer switches time frames?

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### Choosing a Time Frame for a Purpose

Read the following passage from the beginning of Jones’ article and then answer the questions that follow.

For the 281st time in the last ten months Roger Ebert is sitting down to watch a movie in the Lake Street Screening Room, on the sixteenth floor of what used to pass for a skyscraper in the Loop. Ebert’s been coming to it for nearly thirty years, along with the rest of Chicago’s increasingly venerable collection of movie critics. More than a dozen of them are here this afternoon, sitting together in the dark. Some of them look as though they plan on camping out, with their coats, blankets, lunches, and laptops spread out on the seats around them. . . .

The lights go down. Kraus starts the movie. Subtitles run along the bottom of the screen. The movie is about a film director, Harry Caine, who has lost his sight. Caine reads and makes love by touch, and he writes and edits his films by sound. “Films have to be finished, even if you do it blindly,” someone in the movie says. It’s a quirky, complex, beautiful little film, and Ebert loves it. He radiates kid joy. Throughout the screening, he takes excited notes — references to other movies, snatches of dialogue, meditations on Almodóvar’s symbolism and his use of the color red. Ebert scribbles constantly, his pen digging into page after page, and then he tears the pages out of his notebook and drops them to the floor around him. Maybe twenty or thirty times, the sound of paper being torn from a spiral rises from the aisle seat in the last row.

The lights come back on. Ebert stays in his chair, savoring, surrounded by his notes. It looks as though he’s sitting on top



of a cloud of paper. He watches the credits, lifts himself up, and kicks his notes into a small pile with his feet. He slowly bends down to pick them up and walks with Chaz back out to the elevators. They hold hands, but they don't say anything to each other. They spend a lot of time like that.

1. What is the time frame for this passage? How do you know? When did the events actually happen? What time frame would you expect?
2. Does Jones ever shift to a different time frame within this passage?
3. Which verb tenses does he use?
4. Why did Jones make this choice of time frame? What is the effect on the reader?
5. When would it be appropriate for you to do something similar in your own writing?

## Activity 6

### Editing Student Writing

This activity is based on a student essay on the Value of Life module.

Underline the subjects and double-underline the verbs in the paragraphs below. Circle the time markers, and notice the places where the time frame changes. Then cross out each verb that is not correct, and write the correct word in the space above. (Note: The writer of this student essay has used and cited an outside source, an article from the magazine *Newsweek*, to respond to the topic about the value of life.)

Life was a precious commodity like a diamond. But unlike a diamond, life have no set monetary value. There is many arguments against putting a monetary value on life, but one of the most impressive comes from Alephonsion Deng. He is one of the 26,000 Sudanese Lost Boys who forced to flee violence in their country in the 1980s. In the essay "I Have Had to Learn to Live with Peace," he describes his ordeal in the Sudanese desert. "We are crossing a thousand miles of war-ravaged country without the hope of sanctuary. Bullets had replace food, medicine, shelter, and my loving parents. I lived on wild vegetables, eat mud from Mother Earth, and drink urine from my own body" (Deng 16). He had to walk across an entire country

from refugee camp to refugee camp, always with the thought of death before him. He does not have the luxury of being able to go down to the grocery store when he ran out of food. He have to scavenge for whatever he could get his hands on. After what he go through, he would probably say that it was impossible to give something as valuable as life a dollar value. Life is more valuable than any gem on Earth. That is why it will not have a monetary value and never should.

Deng, Alephonsion. "I Have Had to Learn to Live With Peace."  
*Newsweek* 31 October, 2005: 16.

**Rhetorical Purpose:** Why do you think the writer switches time frames?

## Activity 7

### Editing Your Guided Composition

Return to your guided composition from Activity 1.

- Underline the subjects and double-underline the verbs in your guided composition. Circle the time markers, and notice the places where the time frame changes. Why did you change time frames? Then cross out each verb that is not correct, and write the correct word in the space above.
- Put a question mark in the margin next to any verbs or time markers that you are unsure about.
- Exchange your paragraph with a partner, and discuss any questions you have about your partner's editing. Check with your teacher if you can't agree on an answer.

## Activity 8

### Editing Your Own Writing

Select a paragraph from your essay on Value of Life.

- Edit the paragraph, making sure you have used time markers as needed and that the verbs are correct.
- Put a question mark in the margin next to any verbs or time markers that you are unsure about.
- Exchange your paragraph with a partner, and discuss any questions you have about your partner's editing. Check with your teacher if you can't agree on an answer.
- Now edit the rest of your essay for verb errors.