

# ***THE LOGIC PAGE***

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## COHERENCE

'Coherence' is a general term that refers to the logical unity of a piece of writing. A coherent essay fits together logically; it is easy to follow because the different parts are clearly related. A coherent writer

- knows what s/he wants to say
- thinks logically & has a clear '*line-of-argument*'
- uses logical connectors/transitions to help readers follow the argument

The following paragraph suffers from a coherence problem; it is *incoherent*.

Par. #1: *I had money in my pocket. Yesterday, I went downtown. I wanted to buy some new clothes. I received my tax return yesterday. My girlfriend was complaining about the old blue jeans and torn t-shirts I like to wear. I didn't want to buy new clothes. I felt pretty rich. I decided to buy some new slacks and nice dress shirts. I bought the RRSP's last year and the refund was nearly \$1,000. She prefers more formal clothes and I'm more comfortable in casual clothes.*

The separate sentences are easy to understand, but they are not clearly related to each other and so they seem mixed up; the logical sequence is not clear, and therefore the paragraph is not coherent. The writer needs to reorganize the paragraph, employing logical connectors/transitions to help the reader can more easily follow the passage. Here is one possible rewrite which uses '**time**' and '**cause/effect**' connectors to improve coherence:

Par. #2: *I got a \$1,000 income tax return yesterday **because** I bought some RRSP's last year. That's a lot of money, **so** I was feeling pretty rich and decided to go downtown and buy some clothes. I prefer old blue jeans and torn t-shirts, but my girl friend prefers more formal clothes. That's why I spent my tax refund on new slacks and dress shirts.*

Please note that the content of par. #1 is identical to that of par. #2. The difference is that par. #2 presents the content logically and coherently.

## **'LINE-OF-ARGUMENT': Patterns & Principles...**

The term *line-of-argument* refers to a logical/argumentative 'thread' that leads the reader through an essay, and ensures overall coherence. This 'logical line' must be apparent to readers, or they will get lost and bored. This is why **logical connectors** ('transitions') are so important. Words and phrases like *'therefore'*, *'but'*, *'nevertheless'*, *'to illustrate'*, *'in contrast'* indicate the writer's particular logical structure: they create a line-of-argument. **Without clear logical connectors, essays can be hard to follow.**

No fixed rules exist for developing a line-of-argument. However, most arguments follow one of these common logical patterns:

- 1) **Generalization/Illustration** (*includes 'definition'*)
- 2) **Cause/Effect**
- 3) **Comparison/Contrast**
- 4) **Process**
- 5) **Chronology** (not common in literary argumentation)

*[n.b. "Listing" is a basic pattern, but it is absorbed into the above categories: you can list causes, effects, illustrations, similarities, differences, etc. See below.]*

To develop a coherent line-of-argument, you need to identify exactly your main idea, and your logical pattern. The more precisely focused your idea, the easier it will be for you to develop the logical pattern. Ask yourself if you are trying to

- a) **analyze causes?**
- b) **analyze effects?**
- c) **support an idea with examples/illustrations?**
- d) **discuss similarities/differences between characters/stories/ideas?**
- e) **explain how a story/essay works?**

In our short literary arguments, you will always need *a sharply-focused main idea, a clear line-of-argument, and connectors that make the logical pattern easy to follow.*

In summary....

- 1) **a focused *main idea* leads to a specific *line-of-argument***
- 2) **a *line-of-argument* requires *logical development***
- 3) ***logical connectors* 'guide' the reader through this development**

We might divide academic/literary essays into two general types:

1) ***Evaluative Essays***: *this type expresses the writer's general opinion of an essay/story, or of some aspect of the essay/story. For example:*

- "Politics and the English Language" is an effective essay.
- The structure of the essay "Politics and the English Language" is confusing, and greatly weakens the essay.

2) ***Analytical Essays***: *instead of evaluating, the analytical essay attempts to explain how some aspect of a story/essay works. The analysis may lead to a 'positive' or 'negative' conclusion, but the objective is to explain a process, not judge an outcome. For example:*

- In "Politics and the English Language", the extensive examples George Orwell supplies in the essay's first section serve an important function.
- Although the structure of "Politics and the English Language" may seem confusing at first, the different sections of the essay are logically connected

To repeat, an 'evaluative essay' begins with a general opinion, or assessment; the writer then attempts to support this opinion by referring to the text. In a way, the evaluative essay is defensive: the writer tries to defend his/her opinion.

An 'analytical essay' often implies an opinion, but its main goal is to analyze/explain HOW some aspect of the essay/story works. (*n.b. In academic literary writing, analytical essays are much more common than evaluative essays.*)

A line-of-argument can take many forms, so there is no simple model you can follow. However, to repeat, you should ask yourself a few key questions as you focus your ideas and prepare to write your essay:

- Are you evaluating or analyzing?
- Does your thesis reflect your overall purpose?
- Can you identify your line-of-argument?
- What logical pattern is most appropriate for your main idea?  
(Do you need to give *reasons*? Look at *effects*? *Illustrate* a general idea? Show *similarities*? Show *differences*? Explain a *process*?)

## Logical Pattern #1 [a.k.a. 'transitions'] 'Listing/Addition'

*Listing/Addition* is the simplest, most common logical pattern. It involves adding one thing to another, and creating a list. In its basic form, **listing identifies a 'list category', and then provides the list, with relevant details.** (*The key list connectors are 'also', 'in addition', 'furthermore', and 'moreover'.*) We can make an almost endless variety of lists. For example, if the topic is Vancouver Community College, we might come up with various lists:

- reasons why VCC was built
- key dates in VCC's history
- differences between VCC and UBC
- effects of budget cutbacks on VCC
- types of concrete that were used in the construction of VCC

All these topics fit into a 'list pattern', but obviously, the 'list category' of each will be different—one lists **reasons**, another **dates**, another **differences**, and so on. Listing cannot be avoided; however, lists tend to get boring quickly. Counting numbers isn't very exciting, after all. If you are trying to analyze or interpret a story/essay in 500 words or less, you should not list more than two items; each item should be focused, explained, textually supported, and developed.

Listing works best with 'causes' or 'effects', 'examples/illustrations' and 'similarities/differences'. To illustrate, I might choose the first topic from the list above—Why VCC Was Built. First, I must identify the list category = "I'd like to look at two key reasons why VCC was built." Next, I need to identify the two key reasons: *'First, Vancouverites wanted easy access post-secondary education'*, and *'In addition, the provincial government had surplus money it wanted to invest in post-secondary education'*. Of course, I can't just state these items numerically, or I'll be finished in several sentences. After focusing the list, I need to discuss and analyze each item on that list. Re: Item #1, I might explain **why** Vancouverites wanted easy access to post-secondary education? Re: Item #2, I might explain **why** the government had surplus money. In this case,

- my general pattern would be 'listing'
- my list category would be 'reasons why VCC was built'
- my list items would be two key reasons
- my discussion of the items would focus on cause/effect analysis

**IDENTIFYING 'LIST CATEGORY':** When you list, *it is absolutely essential that you first identify the list category*. If you don't, you will confuse your reader. Read the short passage below:

*In Ottawa, the prime minister spoke to the media yesterday about his new plan to make Employment Insurance premiums more accessible. Furthermore, the premier of BC took a brief holiday to relax after the recent election campaign. Also, our Defense Minister met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington.*

The logical connectors 'furthermore'/'in addition' tell us that the writer is making a list. However, the '*list category*' is not clear. What connects a) the prime minister of Canada making a news announcement, b) the premier of BC taking a holiday, and c) the defense minister showing up in Washington? If the reader can't see the connections, he will feel frustrated. So let's help the reader by identifying the list category first.

Several interesting news items appeared in the Globe and Mail yesterday. First, *in Ottawa, the prime minister spoke to the media about plans to make E.I. more accessible. The paper also had a piece on the BC premier's plans to take a vacation after the pressures of the recent election in that province. Another interesting item in the paper concerned a meeting between our Minister of Defense and a five-star Pentagon general; this meeting took place in Washington.....*

Now the reader understands the connection between the items. Below, you will see some 'list items'; can you identify the 'list category? You will need to use inference. You may come up with different categories; be as specific as possible.....

1. Bananas, mangoes and papayas.
2. Apples, peaches and nectarines.
3. Steven Harper, Barack Obama, David Cameron.
4. Google, Facebook, Twitter.
5. Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, Ambleside Park
6. Vladimir Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro
7. Samsung, Apple, Dell.
8. Malaria, cholera, dysentery

## Logical Pattern #2: 'Example/Illustration'

The '*example/illustration*' pattern is as common and important as the '*listing*' pattern, which it can resemble. In general, examples are briefer and more concrete than illustrations, but *both give concrete form to an abstract idea or opinion*. Since we all spend a lot of time stating ideas and giving opinions, providing examples is a natural part of both conversation and writing. When using example/illustration, you must

- *make sure the general point you're illustrating is very clear*
- *make sure your 'example' isn't another generality*
- *make sure your example is as specific as possible*
- *make sure your example directly supports your general point*

So: If I say, "George W. Bush was a terrible president", I express a general idea. You might ask me to explain, and I might say, "He made bad policy decisions." But this is not a real example, it's just a *narrowing* of the idea. I now need to give specific examples of 'bad policy decisions'. In the paragraph below, notice that the overall pattern is 'list of reasons'; the specific examples/illustrations give concrete form to these reasons:

*"George W. Bush was a bad president for a variety of reasons. First, he made bad policy decisions. For example, he approved the invasion of Iraq, and this cost many lives and incredible expenditures the USA can't afford. Bush also approved the use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques', which the rest of the world sees as torture, thereby undermining America's claims to be a moral model for the world. In addition, George W. Bush was simply too ignorant a man to be an effective president. To illustrate, when asked in a 2005 interview what he thought of the Bolivia's new leader, he said, "Where's Bolivia?" Finally, he was a bad president because....."*

n.b.

- 1) 'example/illustration' must clearly relate to the idea they illustrate
- 2) the best examples are the most concrete

*If you're not sure whether your example works, ask yourself this: "What is an example of what?" In the paragraph above, the 'decision to invade Iraq' is a clear example of a 'bad policy decision'—it works. If you can't answer the question, you should reconsider your idea/example relationship very carefully.....*

*Here are various statements; some are **general ideas** that need example/illustration. Others are **specific examples** of a general idea. If the statement is an idea, try to come up with possible examples/illustrations. If the statement is an example/illustration, try to figure out what idea it is illustrating.*

1. **Weekly, I spend only \$7 on gas for my Toyota Matrix.**
2. **The Toyota Matrix is a fantastic car.**
3. **Violent crime is getting out of hand in the Lower Mainland.**
4. **Last month, there were 7 murders in the Lower Mainland.**
5. **English is a flexible language.**
6. **Government statistics say unemployment in Canada has increased 7.6% in the last six months.**
5. **Michael Jackson was not happy with how he looked.**
6. **In 1996, Michael Jackson underwent two cosmetic surgeries to change the shape of his nose.**
7. **Canadian civil servants tend to be quite polite.**
8. **Rafael Nadal, the number one tennis player in the world, comes from Spain.**
9. **Kids who spend too much time on the computer as they're growing up often lack necessary social skills.**

## Logical Pattern #3: Cause/Effect

The basic idea of 'Cause/Effect' is self-evident. If I say, "*I worked 12 hours today, so I'm really tired*", I am identifying a **cause** and its **effect**. 'So' is a logical connector that identifies the c/e relationship. Obviously, the cause leads to the effect:

*cause* = 'worked 12 hours'  
*effect* = 'really tired'

People have a natural impulse to figure out why things happen, and to consider their consequences. This explains why the cause/effect pattern is so common, not only in essay writing, but in conversation. Causes and effects are closely related and can sometimes blur into each other. In the above example, 'really tired' is the effect of 'working 12 hours'. However, the effect might also be a new cause: '*Because I was so tired, I skipped dinner and went to bed at early.*'"

*cause* = 'really tired'  
*effects* = 'skipped dinner and went to bed early'

Analytical and argumentative essays almost always involve cause/effect analysis, sometimes of complex propositions. It's a good idea to distinguish clearly between 'cause analysis' or 'effect analysis'.

Imagine you are asked to comment on environmental pollution; you could focus your discussion on the **causes**, or on the **effects** of pollution.

**Cause Analysis:** A simple 'cause analysis' of environmental pollution might point to *vehicle emissions* as a major contributing factor. However, a deeper 'cause analysis' would look at underlying causes: Why do most of us insist on driving cars despite their obviously negative consequences? One underlying cause might be *advertising* which makes cars look cool and sexy. Another underlying cause might be *the lack of public transportation*. Obviously, analyzing underlying causes is both more complicated and more interesting than simply mentioning obvious, superficial causes.

**Effect Analysis:** A simple 'effect analysis' might point to *bad air quality* as a major consequence of environmental pollution. This is true, but fairly obvious. What about the long-range effects of toxic air? One long-range effect might be *new illnesses* caused by the toxins. Another long-range effect might be the *extinction of sensitive animal species* (like the butterfly). Another might be *global warming*, which will lead to melting polar ice caps. Obviously, looking at long-range effects will lead to a more complicated discussion than looking at the immediate and obvious effects of pollution.

...to summarize...

- Cause/effect statements identify a *specific cause that leads to a specific effect*.
- Causes and effects are closely linked; *causes lead to effects which can become new causes*.
- Essays can focus on either '*cause analysis*' or '*effect analysis*'.
- Superficial causes are obvious; *underlying causes* are a) more interesting, and b) require more complex analysis
- Immediate effects are obvious; *long-term effects* are a) more interesting, and b) require more complex analysis.
- In practice, '*cause/effect analysis*' usually requires concrete examples/illustrations (see above).

*Here are a few general topics; for each, brainstorm a 'cause analysis' and an 'effect analysis' essay. Distinguish between a) superficial & underlying causes, and b) immediate and long-term effects.*

1. Smoking cigarettes.
2. Child abuse.
3. Tax deductions for large corporations.
4. Popularity of smart phones.
5. High cost of houses in Vancouver.

## Logical Pattern #4: Comparison, Contrast & Concession

**COMPARISON** identifies similarities between things/people:

*"George Orwell worked as a journalist; similarly, Ernest Hemingway spent time writing for various newspapers."*

Remember, in comparison/contrast, you must have a reason for linking the two 'items'. Comparing Orwell and Hemingway makes perfect sense: both are famous writers who lived at the same time and tried to develop clear, concrete writing styles. Therefore, it's reasonable to compare the two writers, just as it's reasonable to contrast them. If the link between the two 'items' isn't clear, the comparison will be confusing. Consider this sentence:

*"Like Adolf Hitler, Mahatma Ghandi read books by the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche."*

This is a puzzling statement: what links Ghandi and Hitler? Why compare these two characters at all? It would make more sense to compare/ contrast a) Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, or b) Mahatma Ghandi and Nelson Mandela.

**CONTRAST** is more complex than COMPARISON. Generally, it identifies an 'opposition' of some type. There are several types of 'opposition' relationships:

a) Unexpected Result: When one fact/event does not logically follow from another.

*"Ernest Hemingway was rich and famous; **nevertheless**, he committed suicide."*

b) Direct Opposition: When two things are directly opposite in some way.

*"Although similar in some ways, Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell differed in many respects. For example, Hemingway loved big-game hunting; **in contrast**, George Orwell found the unnecessary killing of animals immoral."*

**CONCESSION** is related to CONTRAST because it shows an 'opposition'; however, it operates on a structural level, rather than on a sentence level. Basically, concession acknowledges an opposing point of view, and thereby helps focus the essayist's idea:

*"It's true that George Orwell often struggled to make a living from his writing; Ernest Hemingway, in contrast, sold millions of books and became a wealthy man. Nevertheless, it remains that Orwell is a much more important writer than Hemingway. "*

The essayist **concedes** that Hemingway was more financially successful than George Orwell; this is important because a) it's a fact, and b) if this isn't acknowledged, someone might use it to argue that Hemingway's book sales prove he is more important than Orwell. The essayist uses **concession** to counter this argument in advance. Now the essayist needs to support this idea by explaining/illustrating why Orwell is 'more important'.

**CONCESSION** can be very useful in evaluative or argumentative essays, especially for students who aren't sure how to organize an introduction. Basically, you begin by '**conceding**' a point to the other side, and then '**transitioning**' to your main idea. This is what happens in the Orwell/Hemingway example above. Here is another example of concession, here used as a possible introduction to an analysis of the two main characters in Edith Wharton's famous short story, "Roman Fever":

*"Most readers find Alida Slade, the dominant figure in Edith Wharton's 'Roman Fever', an evil woman who in the end gets exactly the punishment she deserves. Obviously, some of Mrs. Slade's behaviour reveals bad judgment, and even some cruelty. Nevertheless, a close reading of this story reveals that she is fully human, and deserves both sympathy and understanding from the reader...."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Here are some random ideas; for each, write a brief introduction (3-5 sentences) that uses concession to focus the thesis. Try to imagine the general line-of-argument....

1. **Vancouver is a more exciting city than Toronto.**
2. **Barack Obama is a terrible president.**
3. **Studying literature is more useful than studying mathematics.**

## Logical Pattern #5: Definition/Defining Your Terms

The **DEFINITION** pattern is less focused than other key logical relationships: it is possible to define a thing or a concept in various ways. However, clear definitions often involves illustration, so they are best seen as a form of the 'generalization/example' pattern.

When writing or speaking, we often use terms which are not immediately clear to our readers/listeners. Some terms have various meanings, and some people interpret specific terms in different ways, so it is sometimes necessary that you define your terms as clearly as possible. Imagine you meet a poor homeless person who claims he is highly successful. You might call the person crazy, or you might ask him to define the term '*success*'. The poor person might respond this way:

*"Most people believe success is related to money. For example, many think that Donald Trump is successful because he's very rich. However, he looks greedy and unhappy to me. Personally, I define success differently. For me, success is a measure of my personal freedom, not my bank account. Last week, an Italian billionaire named Giotto killed himself, and left a note saying he did it to escape all of the pressures he had to deal with every day. I believe the person who can do what he wants when he wants is truly successful. That's why I think I'm successful."*

At other times, we encounter terms used in specific contexts, and we need establish the meaning in that particular context. For instance, one of our essays uses the term '*shopping agnostic*'. To explain what it means, you must **DEFINE** the term, as used by the author.

*"The dictionary defines an agnostic as someone who has no faith in a supreme being. But in 'The Temple of Fashion', Joyce Nelson uses the word differently. When she refers to 'shopping agnostics', she means those who have no faith in the 'redemptive' quality of shopping."*

Often, a definition requires examples or illustrations. Abstractly defining the term 'love', for example, can be tricky and vague. To be clear, I might use a specific **EXAMPLE** or **ILLUSTRATION**.

Below, you will find two different 'definitions' of love. Both are clear and valid.

1. *"Yesterday, I saw an elderly couple. They must've been more than 80 years old. They were holding hands and laughing and whispering in each others' ear. That's my definition of love."*
2. *"Many people think love is that thing between men and women that draws them together. I call that desire. For me, love must be selfless, and it must focus on more than one's spouse and one's kids. In my opinion, Mother Theresa embodies the true spirit of love."*

In literary argumentation, DEFINITION usually operates as a STEP in an argument. You may need to define an idea/concept before getting into your argument. For example, imagine you read a story that has several characters, each with good and bad qualities, and your teacher asks you to identify the *hero* of the story. The term '*hero*' is quite flexible, so you must first define what YOU mean when you use this word. The key point to remember is that you can often 'slant' a definition so that it fits into and supports your thesis. Maybe one character in the story *sacrifices* himself for another: that's heroic. Maybe another character acts *bravely*: that's heroic. Maybe a third character is always absolutely *honest*, even when it's not in his best interest: that's heroic, too. Self-sacrifice, bravery, and honesty are all heroic qualities. Depending on how YOU define the word 'hero', you can present each of the characters as heroic. Therefore, it's essential that you define your terms at the beginning; then you can illustrate how the specific character fulfills your definition.

exercise: provide short, focused definitions of the following terms; you might use 'concession' as part of your definition [see below]

1. insanity
2. greed
3. literature
4. patriotism
5. propaganda

## **FACTS, INTERPRETATIONS, & OPINIONS**

**A. Facts:** Facts can be proven with data; they are impossible to dispute. The statement '*Vancouver is located on the west coast of Canada*' is factual; no sane person could rationally dispute it. Sometimes, facts are drawn from common knowledge. For example, I can say '*Smoking is bad for a person's physical health*', even if I don't personally understand all the research that has gone into proving the ill effects of tobacco. Other times, general statements are so logically obvious that they can be called 'facts'. For example, no one could reasonably deny this statement: '*Children whose parents physically and sexually abuse them tend to be unhappier than children whose parents treat them lovingly and humanely*'. Although we may not have scientific data to support this idea, most people can easily accept the statement as 'factual'.

**B. Interpretations:** Interpretations draw conclusions from facts. The statement '*Vancouver is a beautiful city*' may seem factual, but it's really an interpretation of certain facts—that Vancouver is located on the ocean, that it is surrounded by mountains, that it has many parks and green areas. 'Beautiful' is a reasonable conclusion because most people find beaches, mountains and greenery very attractive. But it is not an undeniable fact; 'beauty' is a subjective concept and not everyone finds beaches, mountains or greenery so beautiful. A Bedouin used to living in the wide-open deserts of Morocco might find Vancouver is a gloomy, oppressive, unpleasant city. Interpretations aren't 'right' or 'wrong'; they are more or less strongly supported by the facts they cite. Remember that it is possible to interpret the same facts quite differently; this is what politicians specialize in.

**C. Opinions:** In general, an opinion is more of a personal feeling than an interpretation of specific facts. Consider the statement '*Vancouver is boring*': what facts clearly and objectively support this idea? Probably, the person making this statement isn't thinking about objective facts at all; s/he is probably expressing a subjective point of view. Very likely, s/he really means, 'I feel bored in Vancouver'. This opinion can be explained and defended, but it should not be confused with a fact, or even a sound interpretation of specific facts. So....

Fact:           **Canada is the second largest country in the world.**

Interpretation:   **Most Canadians enjoy a pretty good standard of living.**

Opinion:         **Canada is the best damned country in the world!**

*FACT, OPINION, or INTERPRETATION?* Try to categorize the following statements as facts, interpretations, or opinions. Don't worry if you see two possibilities; just think about the differences.....

1. Abortion is legal in Canada.
2. Abortion is murder.
3. Ernest Hemingway won the Nobel Prize for Literature.
4. Ernest Hemingway did not deserve to win the Nobel Prize.
5. Bill Gates is rich.
6. Bill Gates is a generous, humane individual.
7. Regular exercise is good for the health.
8. Pablo Picasso is a great artist.
9. Pablo Picasso was an abusive, greedy man.
10. Dogs are very popular pets.

## **Deductive and Inductive Logic:** 2 Approaches to Analysis/Argument

Many people distinguish between two basic kinds of argument: **inductive** and **deductive**. Induction begins with specific observations/details, and then derives a general idea from these specifics. Deduction begins with a general idea or concept, and then illustrates this idea with specific details.

*Induction:* "I've noticed that every time I kick a ball upwards, it comes back down, so I guess the next time I kick it up, it will come back down, too."

*Deduction:* "Newton's Law of Gravity says everything that goes up must come down. Therefore, if you kick the ball up, it'll come back down."

**Induction** derives a general idea from specific details; it is based on observation, not a pre-existent idea. When Dr. Smith sees a patient with watery eyes, a sore throat, and congested sinuses, he will conclude that the patient has a cold; the observed details lead logically to this conclusion. He has gone from detail to idea, using inductive logic.

**Deduction** uses an idea, theory or known fact to arrive at specific conclusions or conjectures. Inductive logic first leads Dr. Smith to the conclusion that his patient has a cold. Now he uses deductive logic: generally, colds require specific measures, such as plenty of rest and lots of liquids, so he tells his patient to take it easy and drink a lot of water. Here, the doctor uses a general idea—his patient has a cold—to arrive at specific recommendations.

1) Deductive Approach: Evaluative essays are always deductive, because they begin with a general reaction to a story (or element of that story). This is the general idea, which the writer needs to support/illustrate with specific details. For example:

**"Andrea, the protagonist of Ann Beattie's *Janus*, is not a sympathetic character."**

2) Inductive Approach: Analysis tends to be inductive. Instead of starting from a general idea, the writer lets observation of details lead to an idea or thesis that 'fits' the observations. The goal here isn't to prove an idea with supporting details, but to show how specific details lead to a larger thesis/conclusion. For example:

**"In Ann Beattie's *Janus*, Andrea's lies and deceptions reveal her true character."**

