



UNIVERSIDAD DE LAS AMÉRICAS, A.C.

Ciudad de México

GUIDE
Academic Writing

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INTRODUCTION

The *Universidad de las Américas, A.C.* educates its undergraduate students by including an area of General Studies providing them with the basic academic skills of oral and written communication in Spanish (**Developing Written Communication Skills I and II**) and in the English Language where students develop communication skills to guarantee the professional proficiency of this language.

In the first semesters, all undergraduate students from whatever major join a **common core of general education**. The emphasis on the subjects in this area is placed on the **development of a series of exercises in fundamental skills** necessary for all majors. Students are expected to produce a number of **academic compositions** that will become a habit while studying at the university.

As students come from such diverse academic backgrounds in written composition, the university needs to present students with uniform model formats for **academic writing**. These model formats will undoubtedly prepare and be indispensable for their majors. The criteria set by these models for academic writing will be standard throughout the university. Content is just as important as the presentation.

This **Academic Writing Guide** will provide students with the necessary basic writing models to enhance this skill while studying at the university.

Spring 2006

I. FORMAT FOR ACADEMIC WRITING COMPOSITION

1. Identity of Author

All academic writing should have the identification and pertinent information about the student author placed in the upper right-hand corner of the margin, printed with Arial –10 font and appropriately spaced as shown in the following example.

Universidad de las Américas
Licenciatura in...
Course... Section...
Professor...
Last Name...Given name...
Student Number...
Title...
Delivery Date...

The above information will be used for all academic writing up to and including five pages. For more extensive writing such as research papers, a cover page will include the same information but will be formatted by centering it on an entire page lengthwise. See the following given example.

Universidad de las Americas, A.C.
English Language Center
Advanced English 2 – EN412-21 Professor Christie Jelen
“Fiction Coming True” By Karen Perez Villareal Student Number 74405
21 October 2005

2. Type of Paper and Font

Use letter-size white paper without margins and illustrations. Use Arial – 12 in black ink.

3. Page

Use a Word Processor to print your pages. Each page should average between 260 – 340 words. Remember to maintain at least two lines after a title before ending a page. A page should not end with one line when it corresponds to the beginning of a paragraph; nor should a page begin with the last line of a paragraph from the previous page. At the same time, avoid the use of excessive spaces caused by transcript errors.

4. Spaces, Indentations, and Margins

The writing on the page should be double-spaced, with 25 – 27 lines per page and 65 – 70 key strokes per line, with a 2.5 cm. or one-inch margin on either side of the page. There should be no separation between paragraphs and they should be justified. If the research paper requires binding, then the left-hand margin may be extended to 1 ½ inches.

Indent each new paragraph with 3-5 key strokes using the indent key for essays and research papers in essays and research papers written in Spanish indent from the second paragraph on.

5. Titles and Subtitles

Center the title of the composition, use a capital letter for the first word of the title and for all content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). If the page has subtitles or graphic material, the number of lines should change. However, in Spanish only capitalize the first word and proper names. Titles of published works must be underlined or put in italics.

6. Numeration of Pages

For essays, pages should be stapled and numbered from the second page on and the number placed in the center of the bottom margin.

For research papers number from the second page on and place the number with your last name in the center of the bottom margin.

7. Indexes, Divisions and Subdivisions

Assignments which exceed 15 pages require an index that can follow one of two models. The first and more traditional is a combination of Roman and Arabic numerals with capital and small letters followed by a period. The order is always I. A. 1. a. and should not alter (category, subtitle, detail, breakdown). Each subdivision moves two places toward the right and uses two free spaces after the last point of each symbol. It is obvious that each subdivision needs at least two members. It would be illogical to have a I without a II or an A without a B. The second model uses a decimal format, the advantage of which is the use of only one code of symbols: Arabic numerals. As a result, there is no restriction in the elaboration of sub-themes, a very important advantage when more extensive assignments are involved. Each writer can choose whatever model they like best. Above all, what the student should avoid is to invent, use a combination of both models or as in the case of the traditional model, alter the order or the hierarchy of the symbols.

8. Neatness of the Writing Composition

The neatness of the writing is an indispensable factor. No hand-written assignments will be accepted.

II. CONTENT OF ACADEMIC WRITING

While the aspects of a specific theme of academic writing are established by each professor for each course, the following criteria for its elaboration should be met from the beginning:

1. Structure of the Writing

An Academic Writing Composition should consist of three basic components:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

2. Editing the Composition

Edit the writing for the correct use of spelling, punctuation, grammatical, syntactical and lexical aspects.

3. Sources

Include a complete and consistent reference to all documented sources.

All writers develop a body of supporting ideas which have been influenced by their knowledge and way of thinking. However, if the references to these ideas are in some way unusual or different and if the writer wishes to present this new data or a different viewpoint to the majority of readers when presenting a theme, they must give recognition to the author who has generated this idea. For this reason, it is important that students cite all the information taken from the source either by using direct quotations (giving credit to the author for his/her words) or by paraphrasing (using your own words to express what the author is saying but giving him/her the credit) and then, by correctly listing all your source materials under the bibliography (see Research Paper Model on page 14).

In relation to documented sources, they should be cited according to an appropriate documented style. In the area of the Humanities, the MLA or Modern Language Association guideline is recommended. On the other hand, assignments in the area of Psychology and Human Communication as well as the Political

Sciences follow the APA or American Psychology Association guideline. The Law Department might consider using the guidelines suggested in “The Blue Book”: A Uniform System of Citation.

4. Types of Composition

All ready-to-hand-in compositions for Spanish and English courses, whether they be paragraphs, essays, or research papers must comply with these specified guidelines.

a. Essay

The essay is a short composition on a particular theme or subject and generally reflects a personal viewpoint using an analytical, speculative, or interpretative approach and it can include examples or anecdotes to keep the interest of the reader. It is not as extensive as a research paper but meets with certain criteria – that is – an introductory paragraph which clearly defines a thesis statement or the main idea of the essay; the body paragraph/s which provide the supporting examples for the thesis statement; and finally, the conclusion which gives the reader a restatement or summary of the main points. It doesn't have to include footnotes, references or documented sources.

The basis of an essay's content is the paragraph that includes a thesis statement as well as secondary or modifying sentences.

The sentence that expresses the main idea of an essay is called the **thesis statement**. A thesis statement, by expressing the main idea, prepares the reader for what is to follow. In this way, it performs the same function as the topic sentence but covers an entire essay rather than a single paragraph. Like the topic sentence, it contains a statement of the writer's approach to the topic he or she is writing about. That is, a thesis statement announces the topic and presents the ideas that will support or prove this point of view. A thesis that only announces the topic is not complete; it must include the supporting ideas also. All of this appears in one complete sentence somewhere in the first paragraph in the essay. For the purpose of this course, you can put your thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph of your essay. In addition, many instructors require that the thesis statement be contained in one sentence. Other instructors permit two sentences if the writing requires it.

As the writer, you want to compose a thesis statement carefully so that it accurately reflects the content of your essay. If you find that your thesis statement and the rest of your essay don't match, reorganize your writing. The following tips will help:

1. It states the essay's **subject** – the topic that you are discussing. (What)
2. It reflects the essay's **purpose** – either to give readers information or to persuade readers to agree with you. (Why)
3. It includes a **focus** – your assertion that conveys your point of view. (How)
4. It uses **specific language** – vague words are avoided. (How)
5. *It may give the major subdivisions of the essay's topic. (How)*

(See figures 1 and 2)

You can see that writing an essay is essentially the same as writing a paragraph: an essay is just longer. The chart below shows you how the parts of a paragraph correspond to the parts of an essay.

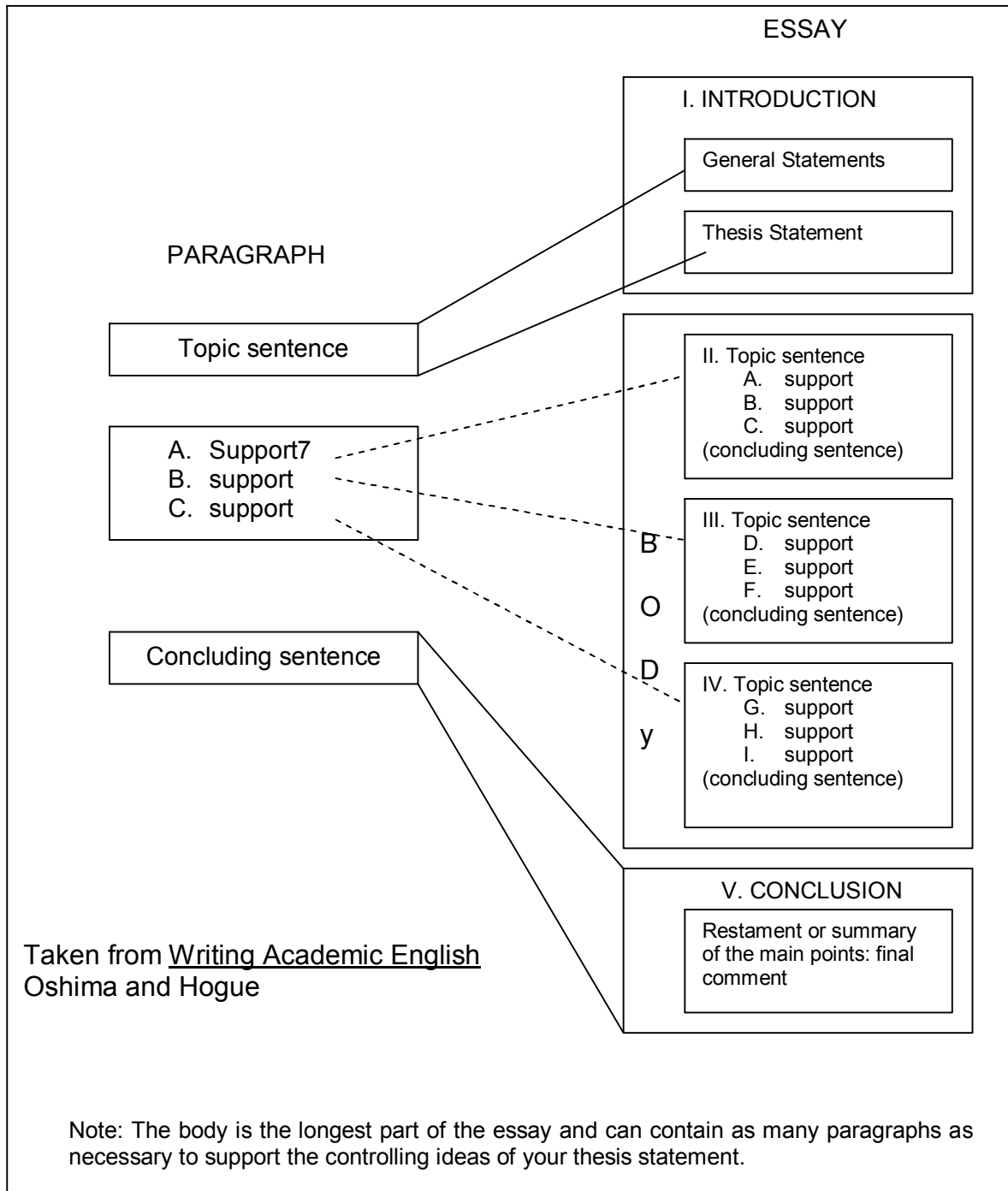


Figure 1. Paragraph and Essay Structure

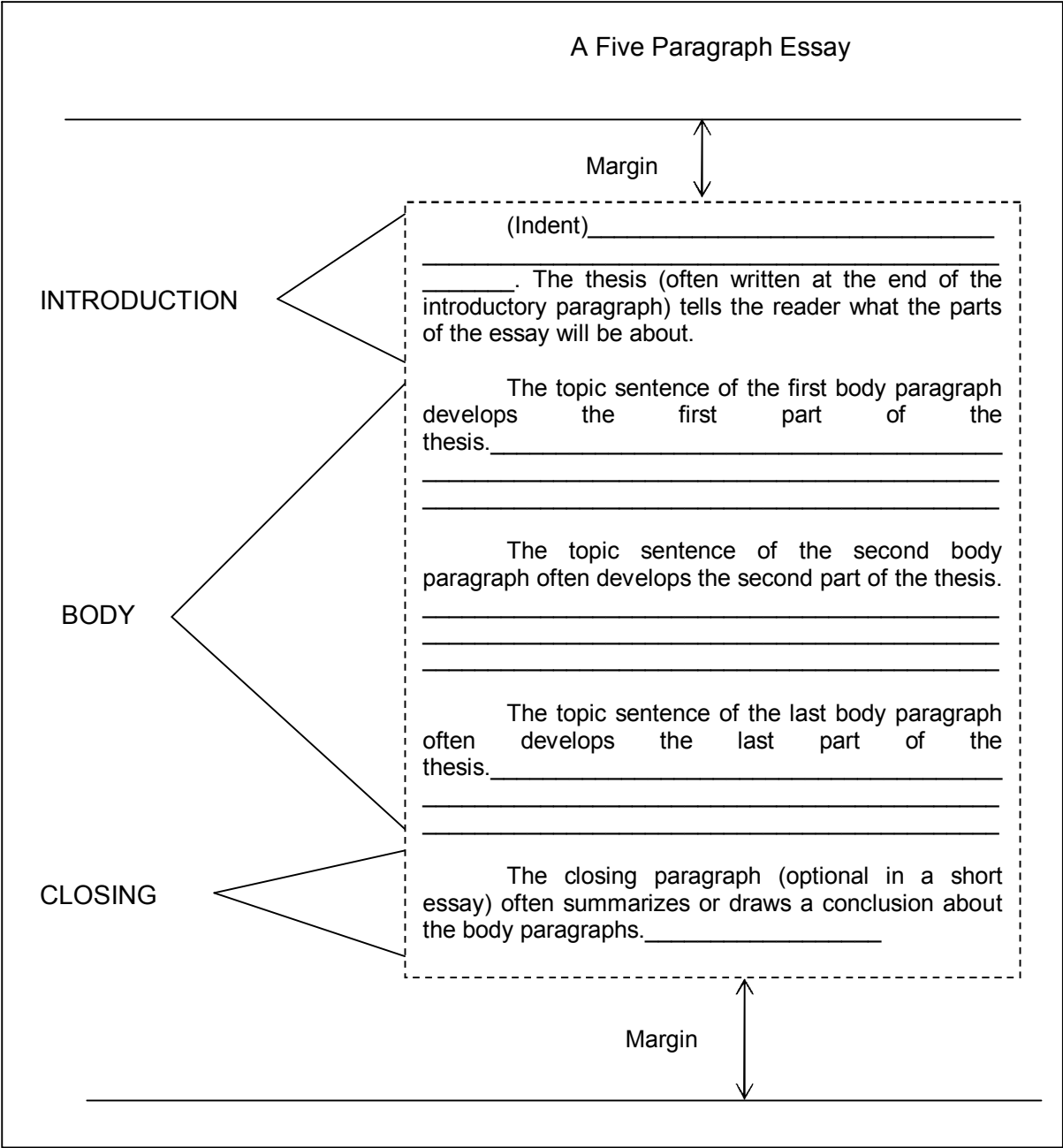


Figure 2: Structure of a five-paragraph essay

b. The Research Paper

A research paper is a much more extensive writing assignment as it requires a thorough investigation on a particular theme and uses scientific research techniques. Its primary objective is didactic and is directed toward a predetermined audience. The content is divided into chapters.

In the following pages you will find an example of an essay where its parts are clearly identified: the introductory paragraph with the thesis statement, the body paragraphs and the conclusion. Also, at the end of the document an example of a research paper is presented, with a cover page, some paragraphs and the page with a list of the works cited.

Example of an essay

Tourists: A Blessing or a Problem?

Are tourists good for a country? This question can be looked at from various points of view. Firstly, tourism should be considered in relation to a country's economy. Secondly, it can be seen in terms of its effect on the countryside and environment. Thirdly, the influence of the tourist industry on culture must be taken into account. The following paragraphs will discuss each of the mentioned ideas.

First of all, the economy of a country often benefits as a result of tourism; foreign visitors come and spend their money, and this creates jobs for those who run hotels and restaurants. However, there are also certain drawbacks. Whereas the people directly involved in the industry may benefit, others may find that they are worse off. This is because the cost of living goes up and goods become more expensive since tourists are prepared to pay more for them.

Secondly, as far as the effect on the environment is concerned, tourism is often a bad thing. While it is true to say that development results in better roads being built and improvements for poorer areas, it is sometimes harmful. In some countries, huge hotels and skyscrapers have ruined areas of unspoilt beauty. A newer trend...ecotourism has been very successful in some areas. However, this concept is still questionable.

Thirdly, the cultural influence of tourism is difficult to measure. In some countries foreign influence can destroy the local way of life. On the other hand, countries which do not encourage tourism may miss the benefits that foreign technology and investment can bring. In addition, as people travel more, they can become aware of and feel warmer toward other cultures. As a result, new friendships are formed.

In conclusion, it can be seen that tourism has both advantages and disadvantages. If it is controlled properly, it can be good for a country, but there will always be a danger that it may do a great deal of harm. How does this apply to your own country?

Example of research paper

Universidad de las Américas, A.C.

English Language Center

Advanced English 2 – EN412-21
Professor Christie Jelen

“Fiction Coming True
By Karen Perez Villareal
Student Number 74405

Universidad de las Américas, A.C.
English Language Center
EN360-21
Professor Christie Jelen
October 21, 2005

“Fiction Coming True”

How many times in your childhood did you hear stories about fairies, gnomes or sirens? Maybe this is not a common question, but nevertheless, it is very interesting. Since many years ago, lots of cultures have had the custom of telling about fantastic things using imaginative, creative stories about the elemental spirits of nature. However, what happens when we assimilate that situation and consider it as a probable reality?

When philosophers wonder about the elemental spirits of nature, they begin to ask questions about mankind. For example, U.S. philosopher, author, and naturalist Thoreau (1906) revealed his feelings by writing ". . . I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one . . . Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature -- to come in contact with it -- rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The solid earth! The actual world! The common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? Where are we?" (p. 1).

For me personally, the elemental spirits of nature are like invisible spheres in a crystal box; even if at first glance people cannot see the spirits, they are always going to be there. Consequently, spirits of nature represent a different kind of life in this reality.

The elemental spirits of nature are a specific kind of energy that interacts with human beings. These spirits of nature are beings living at the same time as humanity. The spirits are the expression of the material's energy, and this energy cannot be easily seen by humans because human beings are accustomed to perceiving only things that have obvious and visible characteristics. The spirits usually live among the trees, plants, rivers, mountains, stones, and minerals, etc. The belief of the existence of different ways of life as elementals goes back to before the appearance of some religions and "belief in the existence of nature spirits...is common to all cultures throughout history" notes researcher and writer Melair (2001) in the web site Spiritual Studies (p. 1).

Meanwhile, the Global Oneness Foundation, based in Stockholm, Sweden, is funding an 8-year project by building an internet community with the goal of uniting people around the globe and transforming the planet through an increase in spiritual awareness. Its web site is huge and contains many articles about the spirits of nature and in particular the elementals. Research from the Global Oneness web site defines "elementals" as "a sub-class of nature spirits that are a part of the life force of all things in nature" (2004, p. 3). To refer to the spirits, it is necessary to know and understand what are the basic elements from which elemental spirits come from and what and how they are represented in this planet. They are categorized according to the four elements, plus each one of the following elements represents a different form of mankind's reality -- Earth, Wind, Fire and Water (Global Oneness, p. 3).

The Earth group makes reference to the home of the gnomes, fairies and dwarves who travel and live all over the planet. The gnomes are always in continuous movement and like to live beneath the rocks, in the trees and sometimes underground. In an influential book titled *Los Espiritus Elementales de la Naturaleza*, Livraga (2001), the founder of the New Acropolis philosophy movement, argues that "the fairies have a similar human aspect and they could be represented in multiple varieties. Many countries identify them as witches...because of the old myth about Merlin in the saga of King Arthur, where Morgana appears as a fairy" (Trans. Mine, p. 28). It seems fairies love to be far away from any kind of human life, and the moon guides them.

The next group of interesting spirits -- classified as Sirens, Nymphs, Odinas, and Nereidas -- comes from the Water group. The Sirens are the spirits of the surface of the sea, and "since their existence they have been related with music" declares McDonald (1999) a reporter in the BBC

television program The Faerie Realm. Also, Sirens have the face of a woman and body of a fish. They produce beautiful sounds similar to human voices. Trinity University classics professor Stofan (1997) describes the famous myth titled Jason and the Argonauts as "a tale about a big ship that loses control because of the seduction and beautiful voices of the Sirens" (p. 2). Furthermore, English literature teacher Dunne (2004) of the American School in Mexico City believes that "the Nereidas are powerful 'spirits of nature'...who are used to protect and escort Aphrodite, and they come from the foam of the ocean." In addition, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1995) in their article titled "Spirits" reveals that "the Odinas live in rivers and can swim very fast while the Ninfas live in springs . . . they both are feminine and beautiful spirits" (p. 389).

The third element of Wind is where the elves live. Very beautiful and small, their bodies can be masculine or feminine. Author Wilcox adds, "The light excites them and the darkness calms them down" (Stofan, p. 3).

The last group is the element of Fire, and this is where the salamanders live. These spirits are the most different from the other spirits and the human forms. They seem to like black snakes. University of Toronto professor Stewart observes in an article titled "Faeries, Nature Spirits and Elementals" that "fire spirits are less complex and have less volition but are immensely powerful through their continuing interaction with all the other beings and elementals of a place...this is why we feel distinct sensations when around them" (1999, p.1). Researcher Myers, however, also points out in the same article "people who try to connect themselves with them should have experience and be able to maintain the contact" (Stewart, p. 2).

In conclusion, the elemental spirits of nature have always been like a bridge between the gods and humans. People who introduce spirits of nature into their lives have an extra door to open and explore what happens

and how to deal with the circumstances in their lives and beliefs. To summarize, the elemental spirits of nature exist in the same world and in the same context -- the only difference is their representation in this world.

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