

TIP

In addition to helping generate material, clustering often suggests ways to organize ideas and details.

Use clustering or another type of diagramming to organize the details about a best or worst job that you created for the previous activity (page 23).

ACTIVITY 4

Technique 5: Summarizing

Often, you can gather ideas and details about your topic in the work of other writers. When you *summarize* someone else's work, you condense that person's ideas and put them into your own words. Always shorter than the original, a summary is an effective way to combine new information with what you already know.

Always make sure to use your own words throughout the summary. Also, give the source of your information credit by identifying the author. For example, you might write, "Dr. Henry Davison claims that eating a lot of fiber is important to good digestion." Activities involving both summarizing and identifying sources can be found in numerous different sections throughout this book.

Writing a Topic Sentence and Preparing a Scratch Outline

After reading over the information you have gathered through one of the prewriting techniques just discussed, write a working topic sentence. A topic sentence expresses the *point* you want to make about the *subject* of your paragraph. This point, discussed further in Chapter 3, should be clearly stated and narrow, and it should be drawn from the ideas you have recorded in your prewriting.

In Chapter 1, you read Gene Hert's paragraph entitled "My Job in an Apple Plant," which responds to an assignment that asked students to discuss their best or worst jobs. Look back to Gene's freewriting (pages 20–21); you'll notice that he rewrote his first attempt, narrowing his focus to only one job in the second version. His working topic sentence emerged when he wrote his second version: "The job I remember most was the worst job I ever had." As with any other aspect of writing, however, a working topic sentence can and often should be revised for clarity and exactness. Gene revised his topic sentence in the final version of his paragraph (page 4): "Working in an apple plant was the worst job I ever had."

Once you have composed a topic sentence, you should prepare a scratch outline, which can be the *single most helpful technique* for writing a good paragraph. Though a scratch outline usually comes after you have written a working topic sentence, it may even emerge as you complete your freewriting, questioning, or other type of prewriting activity.