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Writing Paragraphs

Skill: Organize a series of related sentences around one topic.

Overview

A paragraph is a well-organized set of sentences that focuses on one “controlling,” or main, idea. A paragraph has a beginning (topic sentence), a middle (body), and an end (a closing or transition to the next paragraph). The topic sentence states what the paragraph will be about, while the sentences that follow it provide details, examples, and descriptions that explain the main idea. The final sentence is used to bring closure if the paragraph is standing alone. If the paragraph is going to lead to another one, the writer will need to make a smooth transition to the next paragraph.

Model

Camping is not for me. Last summer I went on a dreaded camping trip with my parents, my sister Katie, Aunt Anita, Uncle John, and my four cousins, Colleen, Danielle, Meghan, and Jennifer. I was the only boy. By the time we got to the campsite and struggled to set up the tents, I was eaten alive by bugs. While I scratched, Mom sprayed insect repellent, which gagged me. She continued to spray it even though it was landing on the food that was being prepared for our first campsite dinner. The food was nothing to write home about. I managed to get a burger that was burnt on the outside and raw on the inside. Mom told me not to worry. This is the same person who told me that I couldn't bring my computer or cell phone. I had no connection with the outside world. This was particularly scary as nightfall approached. It would have been nice to have a phone because I knew there were wild animals not far away. That's why I slept with one eye open the entire first night. The second day was pretty much a repeat of the first. By the second night, I was counting down the days until my return to civilization—video games, fast food, the mall, TV remote, and my own soft bed.

How to Teach

Begin by writing the model paragraph on chart paper or copying it onto a transparency. Spend a few minutes

examining this model with students. On a piece of chart paper, make a chart like the one on page 8, putting the main idea at the



top (*Why I don't like camping*) and having students help you list the details that support this main idea in the left column (*bugs, food, no computer, no cell phone, wild animals*). Be sure students understand that the details you listed are in this order to show the events of the writer's day in sequence. In the right column, list how the writer elaborated each detail. Explain that you'll take notes in the right column; you won't use complete sentences.

Why I don't like camping...

Details or Reasons	Tell Me More
① bugs	get bitten bug spray gags me
② food	raw hamburgers
③ no contact with the outside world	no computer (no IM) no cell phone (help/emergency)

How to Teach

Next, show students a blank two-column chart. Ask them to suggest topic ideas for a different paragraph, or provide a topic sentence such as "We love to play games outdoors." Together, brainstorm details (list them in the left column) and then examples or descriptions they can use to explain each detail (list them in the right column). Before beginning to write, reread the list of details and talk about how to arrange them. Is there one idea that should go first? Do some ideas fit together? Would it be best to leave a particular one for the

Name: John Date: Dec 14

Paragraph Planner

Topic: Making bead bracelets

Topic sentence:
It's easy to make bead bracelets

Details or Reasons	Tell Me More
① String	need string—should be stretchy, durable + must fit bead hole
② Beads + patterns	choose colors make a pattern
③ How to organize	be careful— all your beads can fall on floor

How will you end your paragraph?
You can make lots of

Use another piece of paper.

Introductory

Name: _____ Date: _____

Idea Organizer

Topic: _____

Topic sentence: _____

Details or Reasons	Tell Me More

How will you end your paragraph? _____

Think about the order in which you will write your details. In the first column, write 1 before the detail that will appear first, 2 before the second, 3 before the third, and so on.

How will you end your paragraph? _____

Intermediate

Name: _____ Date: _____

Starting Off Write

Topic: _____

Topic sentence: _____

Details or Reasons	Tell Me More

How will you end your paragraph? _____

Go back to the topic sentence you wrote at the top of the page. Change it into a question that will grab a reader's attention. Be sure the main idea of the paragraph remains the same.

Use another piece of paper to write your paragraph.

Challenging



end? Invite a volunteer to number the notes in the left column, illustrating a well-thought-out arrangement of ideas. It's much easier to number the ideas before writing than to make major revisions after a draft is written.

Now you're ready to write. With students' help, refer back to the chart and discuss how to phrase each sentence, making sure to include enough detail to support the main idea. Act as scribe as students offer suggestions. As each idea is used, check it off the chart. This helps to keep everyone organized.

Literature Sources for Other Models

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Lasky, K. (1981). *The night journey*. New York: Frederick Warne. (See p. 2, para. 4.)

Smith, R. K. (1987). *Mostly Michael*. New York: Dell Yearling Books (See p. 8, para. 1.)

Facklam, M. (2003). *Lizards weird and wonderful*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. (See "Glass Snakes.")

Teacher to Teacher

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Many students find it difficult to write effective paragraphs because they haven't developed their details or organized their ideas logically. Yet, the problem with asking students to "tell more," without modeling the process of writing a paragraph, is that they may simply list additional ideas rather than write a richer explanation. For

example, "tell me more" about "We love to play games outdoors" could become "At recess we play dodge ball, tag, and basketball." It's fine to include the names of games, but we need to model how to dig deeper, how to extrapolate something more significant, how to get students to connect back to the main idea (why I like outdoor recess) and provide support for it. We might say, "I'm glad you play so many games. Tell me what it is about these games that you like so much."

Using the Tiered Organizers

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When your students can organize thoughts around a main idea, they are ready to use one of the following graphic organizers.

Introductory: **Paragraph Planner**

Students write a topic sentence, provide three details for it, and support each detail with relevant information. They also write a concluding sentence.

Intermediate: **Idea Organizer**

Students write a topic sentence, provide four details for it, and support each detail with relevant information. They also write a concluding sentence. Before beginning their first draft, they arrange the details in a logical order.

Challenging: **Starting Off Write**

Students first complete the same activities as those for the intermediate level, then they revise the topic sentence, changing it into an open-ended question.



Using Figurative Language

Skill: Use hyperbole, metaphors, and similes to make writing more interesting.

Overview

Metaphor, simile, and hyperbole are figures of speech that use comparison to make a point. In a metaphor, the comparison is implied, not directly stated, as in *Give him a shovel and he is a bulldozer* or *She is a songbird*. Similes compare two things that are not usually grouped together using the words *like* or *as*, such as *Your forehead is as hot as fire* or *His muscles are like steel*. Hyperbole is extravagant exaggeration in comparing one thing with another. Usually hyperbole is humorous—*It was so cold, I had icicles for hair* or *Tim ate at least a million pancakes!* In this chapter, we have chosen to focus on using hyperbole, although metaphor and simile can be taught in a similar manner. Hyperbole is a tool that writers with a well-developed sense of voice may choose to use. We recommend that you start with voice in the previous chapter prior to working on the creation of hyperboles.

Models

Boring

Her room was a mess.

The soup was bad.

There were a lot of boats in the harbor.

The meal was expensive.

Vivid

Her room was so messy it made a pigpen look clean.

The soup tasted like dandelions boiled in dirty water with pepper added to taste.

It looked like the whole third fleet had weighed anchor in the harbor.

I could have bought a new house for what that meal cost.



How to Teach

Conduct a mini-lesson on hyperbole in the context of writing, using tall tales, jokes, comical essays, stories, letters, or comic strips as examples. (Point out to students that similes and metaphors, on the other hand, are more likely to be found in narrative text and poetry.)

Explain hyperbole as a technique that helps writers make a point by describing something or an event in an overly dramatic way. Discuss the models above to show how hyperbole exaggerates without changing the meaning of the statement.

Now have students turn their own straightforward statements into hyperbole. To scaffold their writing, start by writing on the board a simple sentence, such as *The boy is very tall*, and then ask a volunteer to think up a funny exaggeration. Students enjoy out-doing one another; invite the class to brainstorm more exaggerations. Some replies might be:

The boy is so tall, the Empire State Building looks short next to him.

The boy is so tall, I felt like an ant when I looked up at him.

That boy is as tall as Mount Everest.

As ideas are accepted, point out that the exaggeration does not change the meaning of the sentence. Students have just taken “very tall” and made it funny.

Name: Kim Date: Oct 23

Happy Hyperbole

Here are some sentences that express happiness. Think of a time when you were really happy and change the sentence in each box into hyperbole. Remember to exaggerate!

<p style="font-size: x-small;">I laughed out loud.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I laughed so loud the window cracked!</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">I jumped with joy.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I jumped so high I was upstairs!</p>
<p style="font-size: x-small;">I had a big smile.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I had a smile as wide as the ocean.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">I was so happy I shouted loudly.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I was so happy I shouted louder than a train whistle.</p>

Draw a picture of what made you so happy. You can exaggerate the picture too!

On a separate piece of paper, write a paragraph that includes two of the exaggerations here and there.

Introductory

Name: _____ Date: _____

Hyper Hyperbole

Think of something you have done lately it could be playing a sport, riding someone, going somewhere, or doing something. Think the event you would like to write about.

In the boxes below, write down four actions that you or another person performed during this event, such as riding a car, throwing a football, eating ice cream, or taking loudly to a friend. Then exaggerate each action with hyperbole.

<p style="font-size: x-small;">Action:</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Action:</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>
<p style="font-size: x-small;">Action:</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Action:</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>

Use lines using the first-person point of view.

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Intermediate

Challenging

Name: _____ Date: _____

Making Sense With Hyperbole

Think of a funny event that you have witnessed. It could be something as simple as your sister walking on her first bike ride or as complicated as watching someone pulling together a computer. Write down a title for the event.

Think about your five senses. What did you see? What did you hear? What did you touch? What did you feel? What did you taste? In the following boxes, write down ideas for an activity of the five senses as possible. Then write a hyperbolic statement that exaggerates the sense.

<p style="font-size: x-small;">See</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Touch</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>
<p style="font-size: x-small;">Taste</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Hear</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>
<p style="font-size: x-small;">Smell</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Feel</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Hyperbole:</p>

On a separate piece of paper, write a humorous account of the event you witnessed using as many of the exaggerations from above as you can.

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