

# Building an Idea

SETHSA Workshop — June, 2000

Topic: Writing Excellent Paragraphs (One Well-Developed Idea)  
by focusing on Content — Form — Style  
Speaker: Patricia McFarlane of A Word in Season English Curriculum

**KEY PRINCIPLE:** Writing well-developed paragraphs is a process of steps which require time and thought.  
Learn to use the Writing Process numbered with a circle.

CONTENT and the FIRST STEPS in a WRITING PROCESS:

- ① Gather content for a paragraph by pre-writing - brainstorming - making a list of details for the content of the ¶.
- ② Review the details in the pre-writing and find the main overall idea of the list. Pick something worthwhile about which to write.
- ③ Consider the purpose and the audience with whom you want to communicate and choose a genre and style of writing.

**Creative writing** – no particular structure or style.

There are four basic types of expository paragraphs or purposes for paragraphs:

**Descriptive** - To describe something

**Narrative** - To relate a single happening

**Explanatory** - To explain something

**Persuasive** - To argue, persuade, convince

There are also six methods of developing a paragraph which fall under the category of explanatory or persuasive:

**Example** paragraph - explains something by illustration

**Definition** paragraph - defines

**Process Analysis** or “How to” paragraphs - explains step-by-step how to do something

**Comparison and/or contrast** - compares and or contrasts

**Cause and effect** - shows relationship between causes and effects

**Classification** - categorizes information

BASIC PARAGRAPH FORM

- ④ Choose the details that support the one particular aspect the writer wants to convey to the reader.
- ⑤ Write a **topic sentence** that unifies the details chosen and is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. It states the subject of the paragraph AND the point-of-view that the writer wants to convey.
- ⑥ Set the details in order before beginning a rough draft. An **outline** should begin with the topic sentence followed by details set in order. The outline may be formal or informal.

Title

Topic sentence:

I.

II.

III.

IV.

V.

VI.

Closing sentence.

STYLE

MORE STEPS for the WRITING PROCESS:

- ⑦ Write a **rough draft** (preferably in pencil). Begin with the topic sentence and include twenty descriptive details.

*Twenty Descriptive Details*

5 SENSES	SPECIFICS	THE 5 W's	VIVID WORDS	POETIC DEVICES*
Smell	Color	Who	Vivid nouns	Allusion
Taste	Shape	What	Vivid verbs	Hyperbole
Touch	Size	When	Vivid adjectives	Metaphors/simile
Sight	Texture	Where	Vivid adverbs	Personification
Sound	Number	Why		

\*There are many more poetic devices and descriptive details that you might add to your paper, but these are basic details for you to begin with.

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⑧ **Type** the pencil copy of the rough draft into the computer. The length of a well-developed paragraph should be about 250 words.

⑨ **Edit** the paper after the paper has set for a day so that you can look at the paper more objectively before editing it for CONTENT, second for FORM; third for STYLE which includes grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation. Do not forget to use Spell Check (or a spell checker)!

#### PUBLISH

⑩ **Share the work.** Read the papers to the family, friends, relatives, peers. Publish support group newsletters of student work. Have a special night for families to meet together to hear the best works the students have written.

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The next lesson after you teach writing process for a well-developed basic expository paragraph is to teach the **advanced expository paragraph** which has sub-topic sentences to divide the main idea into three parts. Using the analogy of sorting laundry, think of one huge pile of dirty clothes of many different colors. Then imagine sorting the huge pile into three piles: white clothes, colored clothes, dark-colored clothes, making three piles of items.

#### Title

- Topic sentence:
- I. Sub-topic sentence
    - A. Supporting detail
    - B. Supporting detail
    - C. Supporting detail
  - II. Sub-topic sentence
    - A. Supporting detail
    - B. Supporting detail
    - C. Supporting detail
  - III. Sub-topic sentence
    - A. Supporting detail
    - B. Supporting detail
    - C. Supporting detail
- Closing sentence:

#### Mary Rowlandson's Story

Topic sentence: In Mary Rowlandson's American literature classic narrative of her captivity to the Indians during King Philip's War, Mary cries to God for help in times of trouble, trusts in Him as her source of strength, and gives Him the glory when He intervenes on her behalf.

- I. STS: In her affliction, Mary calls on God in her captivity.
  - A. She is forced to endure hardships.
  - B. She cries out, "Lord, what shall we do?"
  - C. She recognizes her need for someone great and more powerful than herself

- II. STS: After crying out to God for help, Mary trusts in Him to be her source of strength and comfort.
- A. She has no Christian friend near her.
  - B. She only has God to rely on and to place her dependence upon.
  - C. She finds her Bible in her apron pocket and searches the Scriptures to bring her comfort (Psalm 94:18).

STS: Because of God's intervention in her life, Mary gives the glory back to God.

- A. She gives God the credit for helping her overcome her afflictions and for carry her through her trial.
- B. She expresses her gratefulness by quoting the Psalmist of Psalm 107:1.
- C. She praises God for sending her through the trial for her spiritual growth. Concluding sentence: Mary Rowlandson's story demonstrates her plea for help, her trust in God, and her gratefulness for His provisions.

ANY other expository papers of greater length than one paragraph are based on the principles of how to write one paragraph. If your students learn to write the Advanced Expository Paragraphs well, they can write ANYTHING.

## Further Help

### Creative Writing

Creative writing is defined as writing without topic sentences. The skills of creative writing may include imaginative writing; writing with good, detailed content; logical, sequential writing, and vivid word usage. Please refer to *A Word in Season HANDBOOK* for a suggested list of details to incorporate into the content of creative writing. Encourage your students to develop computer skills so that assignments can be easily saved, revised, and reprinted.

### A Review of Basic Expository Paragraphs

The basic expository paragraph is a single paragraph developing one unit of thought with about 250 words. The paragraph must have a topic sentence, a body of content that supports the topic sentence, and a closing sentence.

A topic sentence states the subject of the paragraph and expresses the writer's perspective, outlook, viewpoint, stand, or position on the subject of the paragraph. For example: *John's room is cluttered*. The **subject** is *John's room*. The writer's **point-of-view** is that John's room is *cluttered*.

The body should contain at least three thoughts that support the topic sentence, but five or more is better. To maintain the unity of the paragraph, any sentences placed in the paragraph should be limited to the subject and the writer's point-of-view stated in the topic sentence.

A closing sentence finishes the paragraph and can be a rewording of the topic sentence not a repetition of the topic sentence.

### Four Basic Expository Paragraphs

The narrative paragraph relates an incident (not a long story). The narrative paragraph has a topic sentence that presents the writer's perspective of the tale. For example: *My trip to Mars was exciting*. In this paragraph the body develops the writer's view that the trip was exciting by relating in logical sequence only the exciting events of the trip. Careful selection of details gives the paragraph unity and power.

The descriptive paragraph describes something or someone. The descriptive paragraph has a topic sentence that presents the writer's perspective of the subject. For example: *The sunset at Galveston Beach last night was spectacular*. The paragraph would develop the writer's view that the sunset was spectacular by recounting descriptive details of its beauty. Details that do NOT describe the sunset's loveliness would NOT be included in this paragraph.

The explanatory paragraph explains something such as an idea or a process. The explanatory paragraph has a topic sentence that presents the writer's perspective of the

subject. For example: *Making taffy is an easy task*. The paragraph should develop the writer's view that making taffy is easy by relating in logical sequence the steps of performing the task. Including extraneous information that does not pertain to the steps of easily making taffy should be left out of the paragraph.

The persuasive paragraph convinces the writer's audience of a particular point-of-view regarding an argument. The persuasive paragraph has a topic sentence that states the writer's reasons for his position. For example: *Homer's Greek epic poem The Odyssey is great literature*. Such a persuasive paragraph should present several reasons why this literary work is such a great work. In a well-developed basic expository paragraph, students should present a minimum of three reasons for any argument such as the Odyssey's greatness. Including a point that the writer of the paragraph did NOT like about the book should NOT be included in the paragraph.

Once a student masters the six writing structures listed above—creative, basic expository, narrative, descriptive, explanatory, and persuasive paragraphs—assign the paragraph with sub-topic sentences that is to be practiced in the Greek and Roman Unit.

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### Well-Developed Paragraphs with Sub-Topic Sentences

Paragraphs with sub-topic sentences are like basic expository paragraphs in that they are also single paragraphs that develop one unit of thought. These paragraphs are called by various names: advanced expository paragraphs, three-point paragraphs, parts-ordered paragraphs, and paragraphs with sub-topic sentences.

The thinking to develop this type of paragraph is preparation for longer essays such as the 1-3-1 college essays that are approximately 1,250 words long (or longer depending on the length of each paragraph.)

### Functions of Sub-Topic Sentences

- To divide the body of the paragraph into three or more sections, divisions, or parts.
- To introduce each section.
- To support the subject and viewpoint expressed in the topic sentence.
- To support the topic sentence with *three* or more points which support each sub-topic sentence and thus the topic sentence.
- To unify the paragraph by carrying out the main idea and point-of-view of the topic sentence.

### One-Paragraph Character Sketch

See details in *A Word in Season HANDBOOK* for an explanation on what a critical analysis is. For an example from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, see the outline below and the *Samples of Student Writing: One-Paragraph Critical Analysis*. For more details on this form see *A Word in Season HANDBOOK*. There are also helpful aids in the Teacher's Syllabus in the Appendices.

Note the structure of the following example of a paragraph outline beginning with a topic sentence, supported by sub-topic sentences (I, II, III), supported by points (A, B, C), and ending with a closing sentence.

An 8<sup>th</sup> grader describes the character of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play in the outline below:

Julius Caesar

Topic Sentence: In the play *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare, the character of Julius Caesar portrays ambition, superstition, and pride.

- I. From Shakespeare's descriptions, it is very obvious that Caesar is ambitious.
  - A. Casca says, I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown; yet 'twas not a crown neither, 'twas one of these coronets; and, as I told you, he put it by once; but, for all that, to my think, he would fain have had it" (1.2.235a).
  - B. "Give me my robe, for I will go" [to get the crown] (2.2.107).
  - C. Brutus says in his funeral speech, "If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears, for his love; joy, for his fortune; honour, for his valour; and death, for his ambition (3.2.21-31).
- II. Caesar has a superstitious side as well.
  - A. Caesar says, "Forget not, in your speed, Antonius, / To touch Calpurnia; for our elders say, / The barren, touched in this holy chase, / Shake off their sterile chase (1.2.7-9).  
Caesar says about Fate, "What can be avoided / Whose end is purpos'd by the mighty gods / Yet Caesar shall go forth; for these predictions / Are to the world in general as to Caesar" (1.2.138).
  - B. Caesar has become "superstitious grown of late" (2.1.195).
  - C. When Decius comes to "fetch" Caesar to the "senate-house," Caesar says, "The cause is in my will: I will not come; / That is enough to satisfy the senate: / But for your private satisfaction, / Because I love you, I will let you know: / Calpurnia here, my wife, stays me at home;/ She dreamt to-night she saw my statue, / Which, like a fountain with a hundred spouts, / Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans / Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it: / And these does she apply for warnings and portents, / And evils imminent; and on her knee; Hath begg'd that I will stay at home to-day" (2.2.59-80).
- III. A third aspect of Caesar's personality is his reputation.
  - A. Flavius says, "These growing feathers pluck'd from Caesar's wing / Will make him fly an ordinary pitch, / Who else would soar above the view of men / And keep us all in servile fearfulness" (1.1.76-79).
  - B. "Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world / Like a Colossus; and we petty men/ Walk under his huge legs, and peep about/ To find ourselves dishonourable graves" (1.2.133-136).
  - C. Cassius to Brutus says, "Why should that name be sounded more than yours? / Write them together, yours is as fair a name....Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed, / That he is grown so great?

Closing Sentence: Indeed, Julius Caesar exhibits ambition, superstition, and trust.