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Introduction

Knowing how to write a clear and well-organised paragraph is the foundation for success in any future writing that students experience. When students realise that longer pieces of writing are written one paragraph at a time, they will become more capable and confident writers.

This book will enable you to take the essential unit of good writing, the paragraph, and teach it to your students in its many forms. The activities may be modified to your students' abilities and needs, using the variations at the bottom of each page or your own adaptations. (Cover the 'For Younger Students' text before duplicating each page.)

Getting Started

In this section, you will find pages to introduce the basic concepts of paragraph writing. Included are pre-writing activities, such as generating ideas and brainstorming.

Paragraph Parts

Next you will find a section on the parts of a paragraph, which includes the basics of main ideas, topic sentences, supporting and body sentences, transitions, and conclusions.

Kinds of Paragraphs

This section introduces seven different kinds of paragraph writing: narration, explanation, description, comparison and contrast, persuasion, opinion, and definition. An activity is provided for each one.

Paragraph Practice

This section will give students the opportunity to practise all that they have learnt so far. The paragraph starters in this section can be used in many different ways and whenever you wish. In addition, they will make good story starters.

Putting Paragraphs Together

In this section, students will be introduced to the basics of letter and essay writing, as they learn to put paragraphs together to create longer forms of writing.

Paragraph Plans

In this section you will find a worksheet which can be used frequently until students are confident about writing paragraphs. A post-writing checklist is also included for students to check their own paragraphs to make sure they have included the essentials.

Fun with Paragraphs

Your students will be rewarded for their diligence with the fun activities in this section, which will also act as a review of the concepts they have learnt.

When your students have completed this book, they will be on their way to being creative and capable writers who understand the importance of the paragraph to their writing projects.



Lots of Ideas

To write a paragraph, you need an idea. A good way to get ideas is to ask lots of questions. What do you wonder about? Why is the grass green? What if it was purple instead? What makes you laugh? What would it be like to live underground? Keep a notebook for writing down all of your questions and ideas. Here's a page to get you started. Answer the questions below. (You may not have the answers to some of them, but write what comes to your mind and you may learn more about what interests you). Later, you may want to use these ideas for writing paragraphs, stories or reports.

What is your favourite animal? _____

Why does it rain? _____

Why do we have bugs? _____

What is your favourite holiday? Why? _____

If you were to invent a lolly, what would it be like?

Would you like to go to space? _____

Challenge: Keep a 'What If?' notebook. Record all the 'what if' questions you can think of, such as, 'What if there was no gravity?' or 'What if we could trade places with our parents?' When you have time to write or you need inspiration for a journal entry, use an idea from your 'what if' notebook.

For Younger Students: Have students list three things about which they are curious (example: bugs, buildings, dinosaurs, etc.) Have them think of one question that they would like to ask about each subject. (For instance, 'What is the tallest building in the world?') They can write each question (with help as required) at the bottom of a sheet of paper and fill in the remaining space with an illustration. Post these around the room to keep the curiosity going; and when they are ready, help the children find the answers to their questions.



A Storm in Your Brain!

Thinking of new ideas is like having a storm in your brain! You need to write the ideas before they flash and disappear. You can brainstorm by yourself, with the class, with your friends or with your parents. Here are the rules for brainstorming:

1. Write down all the ideas.
2. Don't think about whether you like them or not, just write them down.
3. Let all the ideas come out—they don't need to make sense.
4. When you are finished and no more ideas are coming, look at your ideas and circle the ones you like best.

Here is a list of words that some students wrote when they were thinking about the word 'play':

fun, after school, all summer long, play clothes, toys, basketball, dolls, silly, laughing, jumping, exciting, friends, backyard, park, swimming pools, slides, recess, games, skipping, hopscotch

The students used the words to write paragraphs. Here is what one student wrote about her favourite things to do after school with her friends.

I love to play after school with Mindy and Heather. We play dress-up and even put clothes on Mindy's cat. Sometimes we skip on Heather's big, smooth driveway. Sometimes we go to my house and play dolls with my little sisters. We play until our mothers call us to come in.

On the back of this paper, brainstorm a list of ideas for the word 'holiday.' Your teacher may ask you to do this with a partner or with the whole class.

Challenge: If you think you are ready, use your brainstormed list, or the one above, to write a paragraph.

For Younger Students: Play word association games as a whole class or in pairs. You may wish to prepare some word lists in advance. Explain to students that coming up with related words quickly is a form of brainstorming.



All the Right Stuff

A paragraph is like a mini-story. Just like a story, it has a beginning, a middle and an end.

The Beginning

The first sentence of a paragraph is called a topic sentence because it tells what the paragraph will be about. Here is an example of a topic sentence:

My dog thinks she is a human.

The Middle

All of the sentences that come after the topic sentence tell more about the topic. For example:

Firstly, she can open doors. She jumps up and opens the door with her paws, and then she walks into the house to see if there is anything to eat. After that, she makes herself comfortable on the couch.

The End

The last sentence of your paragraph is the closing or conclusion. This sentence can say what the paragraph is about and tell what it means to you. Here is a closing sentence for the paragraph above:

And so, my dog thinks she is human, and I haven't told her that she is a dog because I don't want to hurt her feelings.

Can you fill in the middle sentences in this paragraph?

I love birthday parties!

I get really excited when I get a birthday party invitation!

Challenge: Write the closing sentence for a paragraph. Trade with a partner and have him or her write the beginning and middle parts while you do the same. Did he or she write what you had in mind?

For Younger Students: Using the paragraph, write the first sentence and the beginning of the second sentence, and allow the student to orally fill in the rest of the paragraph as you write his or her words. When completed, allow students to draw a picture to illustrate their birthday paragraphs.



What's the Big Idea?

A paragraph should tell the reader about one idea. If you have lots of ideas, you will need to write lots of paragraphs. Each paragraph needs just one main idea.

In the Ideas Bank below, you will find four ideas or topics. There are four lists on this page that need a main idea. Take the ideas from the box and write them at the top of the lists below.

Ideas Bank	
favourite foods	toys
summer	television

1. The Main Idea: _____

cartoons on Saturday morning movies my favourite show

2. The Main Idea: _____

pizza French fries nuggets

3. The Main Idea: _____

trains dolls basketballs

4. The Main Idea: _____

swimming holidays no school

Challenge: Cut out the main ideas and the items from each list (enlarging them first might be a good idea). You should have 20 slips of paper. Mix them up and see if you can arrange them with the main ideas and the details together. A matching game could also be played with these ideas. If two slips of paper are related, they may be taken. If not, turn them back over and let the next player try.

For Younger Students: Use the four main ideas and, as a class, have students brainstorm words and ideas that are related. For instance, 'favourite foods' would inspire many responses about their personal favourites. Be sure they understand that they are brainstorming for ideas and details about a topic.