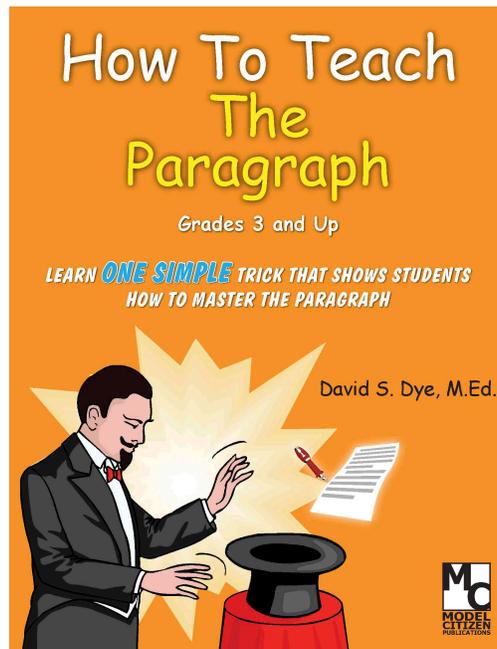


For a video demonstration of this product, visit:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRgczXRFTiY>

How To Teach the Paragraph



From David Dye's Writing Workshop:
The Complete Writing Program

Staff Development information is
available at CreateBetterWriters.com

Step 2 – Learning the Five Parts: Let the students try to guess the five parts of a good paragraph.

Number 1 – 5 on the board. Have the students number 1-5 on their papers. Let the students try to guess the five parts of the paragraph. Make a game out of it. Offer five raffle tickets or a small prize to the student who can name the #1 part of a paragraph. (The list is in

- | A Good Paragraph |
|-------------------------------------|
| 1. One Main Idea |
| 2. Topic Sentence |
| 3. 5-7 Sentences |
| 4. Closing Sentence |
| 5. Indent; Spelling and Punctuation |

order of importance.) Offer four raffle tickets for the student who guesses the second item and so on. As the students correctly name an item on the list, write it on the board in its proper sequence. If the students say “Topic Sentence”, put it next to number two and repeat this for all five steps. The class will have fun, and it will get them thinking about everything they’ve ever been taught about writing. This is a great time of review, even if they don’t discover all five. For the classes that aren’t coming close, give as many hints as you can until they get it.

When finished, heavily emphasize that a paragraph is about ONE MAIN IDEA. Do call and response over and over: “What is a paragraph about?” The class will respond, “ONE MAIN IDEA”. Look each student in the eyes and ask, “What is a paragraph about?” The student responds, “ONE MAIN IDEA”. Ask them during math, on the way to lunch, and when you see them on the playground. It should become a reflex, like when a doctor taps your knee with that little hammer. A paragraph is about ONE MAIN IDEA!

Step 2 Summary:

- A. Number 1 – 5 on the board.
- B. Have the students number 1-5 on their papers.
- C. Let the students try to guess the five parts of the paragraph.
- D. As the students guess correctly, write the items on the board in the correct sequence.

Step 3 – Memorize the Five Parts of a Paragraph

First, ask the class, “Who can name one item on the list without looking?” Next ask, “Who can name two items without looking?” Keep going until someone can name all five. If you’re giving out a prize of some kind (Jolly Ranchers, Raffle Tickets, etc.) the kids will be studying frantically while another student is answering.

Part I – The Basics

Step 1 – Assessment: Students Write a Paragraph.

I've taught third through eighth grade, and every year I begin with the paragraph. With this system, if a student can write a good paragraph, they will be able to write anything from stories to essays to research reports. In the next few steps you will learn one simple trick that will make paragraph writing incredibly easy. If you continue with *How To Teach the Five Paragraph Essay* and *The Complete Writing Program*, you will see how easy it is for you students to transition almost effortlessly to the essay, story writing and much more.

On the first day of school, ask students to write a paragraph about something that they did over the summer. This is a nice, broad topic and allows you to spot key mistakes right away. Will the students write about several different activities or just one? Will they stick to one main idea? How many sentences will they write? The only help I give them is to say that I am checking to see if they know how to write a paragraph. "What ever you think a good paragraph should be, show me!" is all I say.

You may want to repeat the process on the second day. Maybe they were rusty from the long summer break. You can have them write another paragraph about something else that they did over the summer.

Finally, take the students' second paragraphs, read them, and make a list. Check off how many students had a topic sentence, closing sentence, at least four supporting details, and stuck to one main idea. You will use this information later to show them how close (or far) they are to writing strong paragraphs.

Step 1 Summary:

- A. Give a paragraph pretest.
- B. Make a checklist: Do the students know how to write a topic / closing sentence?
 - Do the students use supporting details?
 - Do the students stick to One Main Idea?

Introduction

In my writing workshops I present this lesson to show teachers how to teach the paragraph. I've run into teachers who have taken my workshop years in the past who continue to praise this technique. It's quick, powerful, and effective. Best of all, if you are using *The Complete Writing Program* (available at CreateBetterWriters.com), the quick learners move on to bigger and better things, leaving you time to reinforce this essential skill with the rest of your class.

Notice that I referred to paragraph writing as an essential skill. You may have already known that by instinct, but make it the dominant thought on your mind as you teach writing. The paragraph is the foundation of great writing. If a student can write an intelligent, well-organized paragraph, they are well on their way to great writing.

Overview

Here I will review the steps. At times, two or three steps can be done in a day. Follow each step at your class's pace. Take your time if you must; this is a crucial skill. After the overview, I will explain the steps in greater detail.

Paragraph Writing – Overview

Part I – The Basics

- Step 1 – Assessment: Students write a paragraph (p. 2)
- Step 2 – Learning the five parts of a good paragraph (p. 3)
- Step 3 – Memorize the Five Parts of a Paragraph (p. 3)
- Step 4 – The Paper Set-Up (p. 4)
- Step 5 – Write a Paragraph Together: The Prewrite (p. 6)
- Step 6 – Write a Paragraph Together: The Paragraph (p. 7)

Part II – Improving the Parts of a Paragraph

- Step 7 – Topic Sentences (p. 9)
- Step 8 – Closing Sentences (p. 11)
- Step 9 – Paragraph Assessment (p. 13)
- Step 10 – Practice, Practice, Practice (p. 13)
- Step 11 – The Perfect Paragraph (p. 15)
- Appendix A (p. 17) / Appendix B (p. 20)