

Basic Paragraph Practice

Writing Step-By-Step

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INTRODUCTION

Basic Paragraph Practice: Writing Step-By-Step is a program that was created to provide students with a strategy for writing paragraphs. Specifically, this program teaches students how to respond to a question by writing a paragraph. In this binder, 100 questions are provided in addition to a basic graphic organizer. Some of the questions are simple, while others are more thought-provoking. By answering these questions, students will learn and practice a process that can be used whenever they are asked to answer a question in paragraph form.

This program was created because many students have difficulty writing paragraphs. Writing can be especially challenging for students with learning differences. When faced with a journal topic, essay question, or standardized-test question, students can have difficulty deciding what to write, how much to write, and in what order to write. In addition, when students are given a blank page on which to write, some may become anxious when they see how much empty space must be filled with words. They might not realize that they need to write only as much as is necessary to answer the question or address the topic.

The five-step process presented in this program helps students organize their thoughts.

The steps are:

1. Read the question.
2. Write a topic sentence that rephrases the question.
3. Write three detail sentences.
4. Write a concluding sentence that rephrases the topic sentence.
5. Rewrite the sentences in paragraph form, making sure to indent the first sentence of the paragraph.

Program Components

Research and Standards

Basic Paragraph Practice: Writing Step-By-Step uses methodology that is both research-based and standards-based. Applicable quotes from the research and a list of standards addressed in this binder can be found on page viii.

Practice Pages

To receive the maximum benefits this program offers, first have the students answer the questions on the practice pages (pages ix – xiii). Once students have successfully completed the practice pages, they can advance to the activity pages.

Activity Pages

The 100 activity pages can be used as a daily journal assignment or for other writing practice. After writing their paragraphs, you may opt to have students share their writing with the class.



THE FIVE-SENTENCE PARAGRAPH


Explain to students that it is important for everyone to know how to write a good paragraph. Many short-answer and essay questions require an answer that is not written as a fragment or a single sentence but rather as a group of sentences that all tell about the same main idea in paragraph form.

Tell students that they are going to learn how to write a five-sentence paragraph using a graphic organizer. Students will write each sentence of the paragraph in its own box. This step shows them that they must include all the parts of the paragraph. The last step will be to rewrite the five sentences in paragraph form. By using this format, students will not leave out any important parts of a paragraph. The goal of this program is to get students to become comfortable enough with the paragraph-writing process that they are able to write a complete five-sentence paragraph without the graphic organizer.

Make one overhead transparency of Sample Worksheet A (see page ix) and a photocopy of Sample Worksheet A for each student. Work through the sample worksheet together as a class. The descriptions below provide suggestions for properly guiding the students through Sample Worksheet A.

1. Read the question.

Tell students they are going to learn how to write a five-sentence paragraph. Explain that some questions can be answered with complete sentences that comprise a list, while others can be answered with a descriptive paragraph. Let students know that this graphic organizer can be used to answer any question. Also, ask students to carefully read the question. Encourage them to whisper the question to themselves. This technique often helps auditory learners to process information.



TOPIC
What are three things you do every day?

2. Write a topic sentence that rephrases the question.

Inform students that the first sentence in a five-sentence paragraph is called the topic sentence. With this sentence, students will introduce the topic of the paragraph. The topic sentence helps the reader understand or identify the main idea of the paragraph. It should repeat the question being asked. For example, “What are three things you do every day?” is the question in Sample Worksheet A. Every sentence in the paragraph will be about the topic named in the topic sentence.

Examples of a good topic sentence for this paragraph are:

Example 1: There are three things I do every day.

Example 2: No matter what day of the week it is, I always do three things.

Example 3: As part of my daily routine, I do three important things.

THE FIVE-SENTENCE PARAGRAPH Continued

Tell students that at the beginning of this learning process they can write their topic sentences simply, like Example 1. As they become comfortable with writing topic sentences, they can make their sentences more complex and interesting, like Examples 2 and 3.

Once students have written their topic sentence, tell them to read the question and the topic sentence to themselves. Ask them if the topic sentence rephrases the question.

TOPIC SENTENCE Write your TOPIC sentence in the box.

Topic Sentence

There are three things I do every day.

3. Write three detail sentences.

Tell students that the next three sentences make up the body of the paragraph. The three sentences after the topic sentence are called the detail sentences. Each of these sentences explains or gives an example of the topic sentence. Tell students to brainstorm three things that support the topic sentence. If the topic sentence is “There are three things I do every day,” students should think of three things they do every day. Tell students to write the first thing in a complete sentence in Detail 1 box. Explain to students that their sentences can be as simple or complex as they want.

BODY Write each DETAIL sentence in its box.

Detail 1

One thing I do every day is eat breakfast.

Tell students to write the second thing in a complete sentence in the Detail 2 box.

Detail 2

Also, I walk the dog daily.

Tell students to write the third thing in a complete sentence in the Detail 3 box.

Detail 3

Every evening, I watch television.

THE FIVE-SENTENCE PARAGRAPH Continued

4. Write a concluding sentence that rephrases the topic sentence.

The concluding sentence is the last sentence of the paragraph. In this sentence, students should rephrase the topic sentence. Remind students that “I do three things every day” is the topic sentence. Ask them to think of a way to rephrase the topic sentence, and then write it as a concluding sentence in the Conclusion box.

Examples of good concluding sentences are:

Example 1: These are the three things I do every day.

Example 2: Although I do a variety of things on different days, I do these three things every day.

Example 3: Among other activities, I do these three things daily.

Tell students that at the beginning of this learning process they can write their concluding sentence simply, like Example 1. As they become comfortable with writing concluding sentences, they can make their sentences more complex and interesting, like Examples 2 and 3.

Once students have written their concluding sentence, tell them to read the topic sentence and the concluding sentence to themselves. Ask them if the concluding sentence rephrases the topic sentence.

CONCLUSION Write your CONCLUSION sentence in the box. (Reword the topic sentence.)

Conclusion

These are the three things I do every day.

5. Rewrite the sentences in paragraph form, making sure to indent.

Tell students to read over the sentences in the boxes to make sure they are happy with what they have written. If necessary, give them a few minutes to make changes. Then, tell students to rewrite the five sentences in a complete paragraph, making sure to indent the first line and to have all the sentences follow each other, leaving no blank spaces in between them. Rewriting the sentences helps students become comfortable writing a block of text. It also helps them understand how the sentences relate to each other. Each sentence has a purpose, and together they are parts of a whole: the paragraph.

After completing the first practice page as a group, make an overhead transparency of each remaining practice page (pages x – xiii). Also, make a photocopy of the practice pages for each student. Walk students through the remaining practice exercises by giving them time to complete the sheets on their own. Then, review the practice pages on an overhead projector with the class. Once students have completed the practice pages, they should be prepared to complete the worksheets on their own.

For an extra challenge, add the phrase “and why?” to the end of many questions. By doing this, students will have to explain their answers, not just give one-word or very brief answers. This activity leads to the writing of more complex sentences within the structure of the five-sentence paragraph. Note: Some of the questions already have the phrase “and why?” added to them to help students better understand what ideas they need to express in their answer.



RESEARCH AND STANDARDS

Research on teaching writing to students with special needs and writing difficulties has shown that modified instructional strategies are critical to improving performance. The graphic organizer in this program was developed based on the research regarding teaching writing to students with special needs. Sousa states that a useful modification for students with writing disorders is to “encourage graphic organizers. Preorganization strategies such as the use of graphic organizers will help students get their main ideas in order before tackling the writing process” (2001).¹

To meet the needs of students with special needs, the activity sheets in this binder present one task per page. This approach helps students gain confidence in their writing abilities. As Sousa notes, “students with special needs are likely to be more successful if taught fewer concepts in more time” (2001).¹

Waldron states that students who struggle “should never be given work above their current ability level. When students know they cannot be successful in a task, they refuse to try” (1992).² To allow all students to achieve success, regardless of their ability level, the activity pages in this program are presented at the simplest level possible. Building students’ confidence in their writing skills is as important as honing the skills. Teachers can modify questions in order to make them more challenging, if desired.

Basic Paragraph Practice: Writing Step-By-Step meets both state and national standards (including the Standards for the English Language Arts, sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association) regarding writing instruction. As students complete the worksheets in this binder, they will:

- learn an effective, visual strategy for writing coherent paragraphs.
- learn to clearly communicate their main idea and support it with appropriate details.
- write for the purpose of answering given questions.
- produce cohesive five-sentence paragraphs.

¹ Sousa, D.A. (2001). *How the Special Needs Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

² Waldron, K.A. (1992). *Teaching Students With Learning Disabilities*. San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.



TOPIC

What are three things you do every day?

TOPIC SENTENCE Write your TOPIC sentence in the box.

Topic Sentence

BODY Write each DETAIL sentence in its box.

Detail 1

Detail 2

Detail 3

CONCLUSION Write your CONCLUSION sentence in the box. (Reword the topic sentence.)

Conclusion

Copy your complete paragraph (all five sentences) into the box.



TOPIC

What makes you happy, and why?

TOPIC SENTENCE Write your TOPIC sentence in the box.

Topic Sentence

BODY Write each DETAIL sentence in its box.

Detail 1

Detail 2

Detail 3

CONCLUSION Write your CONCLUSION sentence in the box. (Reword the topic sentence.)

Conclusion

Copy your complete paragraph (all five sentences) into the box.



TOPIC

Where are the last three places you went?

TOPIC SENTENCE Write your TOPIC sentence in the box.

Topic Sentence

BODY Write each DETAIL sentence in its box.

Detail 1

Detail 2

Detail 3

CONCLUSION Write your CONCLUSION sentence in the box. (Reword the topic sentence.)

Conclusion

Copy your complete paragraph (all five sentences) into the box.



TOPIC

Pretend you won \$100 in a contest. What would you do with the money?

TOPIC SENTENCE Write your TOPIC sentence in the box.

Topic Sentence

BODY Write each DETAIL sentence in its box.

Detail 1

Detail 2

Detail 3

CONCLUSION Write your CONCLUSION sentence in the box. (Reword the topic sentence.)

Conclusion

Copy your complete paragraph (all five sentences) into the box.
