

Lesson Plan on Paragraph Structure
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Course: Writing seminar on *Hamlet*

Lesson objective: To teach the gentle art of paragraphing.

Total estimated time: 55 min.

Additional outcomes: Practice “diagnosing” weaknesses and revising

Assignment sequence that’s underway: Any!

Work completed before class (optional): Students have recently submitted a draft, copies of which they bring to class for this paragraphing workshop.

FYI: This lesson plan is scaffolded to build from working with the structure of a single paragraph to generalizing about paragraph structure, applying the new knowledge, and then getting students to revise their own writing, using what they’ve learned.

1. Hand out a “paragraph puzzle” envelope to each pair, then instruct them to organize the sentences to restore the paragraph’s structure. Circulate among the pairs while they’re working to give them encouragement, hints, etc. (10 minutes)
2. Hand out the paragraph puzzle solution, then lead a discussion: How did you know the order in which the sentences should go? Hint for your discussion: Start at the beginning of the paragraph (“How did you know the first sentence was the first sentence?”), then work your way to the end. Discuss alternative orders and why the writer may have chosen to order her sentences as she did. (10 minutes)
3. Lead a discussion: What are some of the excellent qualities of the paragraph that we’ve just reconstructed? Hint for your discussion: Use a gimmick to elicit the qualities—every quality begins with an “F.” Record F’s on the blackboard. (15 minutes)
 - **Flow** - how each sentence follows the one before it
 - **Focus** - how the paragraph revolves around a single main idea
 - **Function** - what role the paragraph serves in the essay.
 - ☐ Ask the group what some typical functions are—e.g.:
 - Introductory paragraphs: to introduce a context and posit a thesis
 - Background or Keyterm paragraph: Usually after the intro; to supply background or define a key term or concept
 - Counterargument paragraphs: to entertain arguments of those who might disagree with the thesis
 - Demonstrative paragraph: to provide support for a sub-claim of the thesis
 - Concluding paragraphs: to sum up the argument while also drawing out implications

- **Form** - how the paragraph is shaped; follows form

☐ Ask the group how paragraphs with different functions will be formed, or organized (e.g. a demonstrative paragraph usually opens with a claim, then provides evidence and analysis of the claim).

4. Hand out the sample paragraph, and read it aloud (or ask someone to read it).
Lead a discussion: What is your assessment of this paragraph in terms of the 4 F's? Then ask the group to make suggestions for revision. (10 minutes)
5. (Optional or later class) Ask students, in pairs, to assess one of the paragraphs of their draft (which they would helpfully have brought to class) in terms of the F's. (10 minutes)