

# The Art and Science of Paragraphing

While writing, like dancing, allows for creativity and the unexpected, established patterns often form the basis of any variations.

- Ken Hyland

## What does this writer achieve in his paragraph?

On his thirteenth day underground, when he'd come to the edge of the known world and was preparing to pass beyond it, Marcin Gala placed a call to the surface. He'd traveled more than three miles through the earth by then, over stalagmites and boulder fields, cave-ins and vaulting galleries. He'd spidered down waterfalls, inched along crumbling ledges, and bellied through tunnels so tight that his back touched the roof with every breath. Now he stood at the shore of a small, dark, pool under a dome of sulfurous flowstone. He felt the weight of the mountain above him—a mile of solid rock--and wondered if he'd ever find his way back again. It was his last chance to hear his wife and daughter's voices before the cave swallowed him up.

"Base camp, base camp, base camp," he said. "This is Camp Four. Over." His voice travelled from the handset to a Teflon-coated wire that he had strung along the wall. It wound its way through ...

## 1 Question scaffolding (beginner)

### Assignment

Write a paragraph about you.

### A. Circle the words and phrases that describe you.

adventurous  
social  
quiet

play games  
stay home  
meet friends  
watch television  
visit family  
like sports  
use a computer

### B. Answer the questions. Complete sentences about you.

1. What word describes you?

I am \_\_\_\_\_

2. What do you do? Use *I* with verbs.

a. I \_\_\_\_\_

b. I \_\_\_\_\_

c. I \_\_\_\_\_

d. I \_\_\_\_\_

**2 Grammar before writing** (high beginner)

**A. Write sentences about your nature experience. You may also add your own words to the columns.**

subj	past verb	that	subject	past perfect
I We	realized noticed thought	that	the weather our luck our situation	had changed. had improved. had gotten worse.
			the wind the rain the storm	had stopped.

**B. Choose one of your sentences. Write the next sentence in a story.**

**3 Paragraph awareness** (high beginner)

**A. Read the paragraphs. Circle the number of the essay that shows good paragraphing.**

<p>1. Many travelers like to visit zoos to see animals from different countries. Usually the animals are separated from people and each other, but a zoo in Denmark is changing the rules.</p> <p>Zootopia will be different in several ways. First, it will not have lonely animals. The animals that are social will be together. Second, the builders will hide all the walls, so people and animals will not feel separated. Third, people will use a variety of transportation methods to move through the zoo.</p>	<p>2. Many travelers like to visit zoos.</p> <p>They can see animals from different countries. Usually the animals are separated from people and each other, but a zoo in Denmark is changing the rules. Zootopia will be different in several ways. First, it will not have lonely animals.</p> <p>The animals that are social will be together. Second, the builders will hide all the walls, so people and animals will not feel separated. People will use a variety of transportation methods to move through the zoo</p>
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**B. Talk to a partner. Explain your choice.**

**4 Identifying paragraph aims** (low intermediate)

**Underline the first sentence of each paragraph. Answer the questions with a partner.**

- What is the main focus of the first paragraph?
- What is the main focus of the second paragraph?
- Circle words or phrases that helped you decide.

**Desert City**

In the past, Dubai was a quiet desert city, but it changed quickly. After international business came, the economy grew quickly. Dubai needed many new buildings, so the government went to work. Workers built a modern airport and big hotels. The city opened universities, hospitals, and shopping centers.

Now Dubai is a modern city. It is in a desert, but there are green parks, flower gardens, and large water fountains. There are many office buildings and the largest skyscraper in the world. People from different countries live here. They enjoy sports and fishing. At Ski Dubai, children play in the snow. Dubai is interesting because it became a famous international city in a short time.

**5 Flipped Peer Review** (intermediate)

**Exchange drafts with a partner. After you read your partner's draft, ask the questions below to help the writer explain his or her ideas. Then switch.**

1. What do you think people know/don't know about this topic?
2. What do you like about your paragraphs? What strategies can you use to improve them?
3. What is the message of the conclusion? What did you learn about (the topic) that you did not know before?
4. Do you have any questions for me?

**6 Revision Checklists** (intermediate)

*The following points can be used for conferencing (or summarizing comments on a paper) and used to guide revision of content.*

**Read my comments on your paper and the checklist below. Make notes and bring them when we conference about your draft.**

- € The first paragraph leaves me with questions. I would like more context so I can understand better. Develop background with *who, where, when* details.
- One or more of your paragraphs is short. Consider your options:
  - 1) Cut a short paragraph if it is not important.
  - 2) Put the information in another paragraph.
  - 3) Develop the paragraph by adding supporting information, examples, explanations, and facts.
- One or more of your paragraphs is long. You might have two main ideas, or even three that could each be developed as a paragraph with a topic sentence and supporting details.
- Sometimes you go back to a topic that you wrote about in a previous paragraph. (See my comment.) What do you want to do about this? Move the information or cut it?
- In then conclusion you get to show what you learned. Can you add a sentence or two that explains what the information in your paper means to you or other people?

**References**

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