Teaching Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Writing: Don't Get Stuck!

The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery

A Free Teaching-Writing Resource Presented by:

"Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay"

Please Note: This ebook is not a part of the *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* curriculum. However, I do recommend that teachers who use the curriculum also read this once they are getting results with the program. I hope that all the teachers who use my curriculum and all the teachers who don't find this teaching resource of equal value.

Don't get stuck! That's the recurring theme that runs throughout this ebook. Are you feeling stuck or behind when it comes to teaching paragraph and multi-paragraph writing? By the end of this ebook, you will have a new paragraph and multi-paragraph framework that will keep you moving forward.

Be sure to print this out for a better reading experience and to help with active reading. Please help others find this valuable resource by Tweeting, Pinning, bookmarking, and linking to this page!

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Section A: Introduction

A-1: Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum *AND* Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

I discuss teaching writing across the curriculum quite a bit throughout this ebook. Although I don't discuss ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** in the body text beyond this little section, I did create the program while teaching writing across the curriculum. I hope that both the ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** curriculum and this ebook empower teachers to take control of teaching writing and help them get results!

As you will see, I went through all of the trials, tribulations, and frustrations of learning how to teach writing that so many teachers do. In fact, although I could write well enough to get straight A's while getting my teaching credential, I didn't know much about grammar or writing.

As a teacher, I could turn pages in grammar and writing curriculums as well as anyone, but I ~~quickly~~ slowly discovered that the lessons (isolated skill drills) didn't add up to much progress in my students' writing across the curriculum. This led me to develop systems that helped me hold my students accountable for proper writing skills across the curriculum, which led me to teach writing across the curriculum more and more.

For the most part, I trust the math and the reading curriculum to do their job. But in teaching writing, there is no better curriculum than a teacher who takes charge of teaching writing. In fact, Writer's Workshop and the Six Traits of Writing were largely developed to help teachers be in charge of teaching writing. Furthermore, numerous books have been written with the sole purpose of helping teachers understand how to teach writing. Let's look at the various types of choices that teachers make to teach writing effectively.

Teachers use and choose various types of writing curriculums to get results:

1. Required Writing Curriculums
2. Optional Writing Curriculums
3. Supplemental Writing Curriculums
4. Language Arts Curriculums that Relate to Writing: Required, Optional, and Supplemental

Whether teachers realize it or not, they are in charge of teaching writing in seven ways:

1. Teachers choose which optional or supplemental writing curriculums to use.
2. Teachers choose how to connect various language arts instruction to writing.

3. Teachers choose (to a large degree) how to use various writing curriculums.
4. Teachers choose how to respond to students' writing and grade students' writing.
5. Teachers choose how to teach writing across the curriculum.
6. Teachers use and create systems to manage a classroom full of writers.
7. Teachers understand and possibly determine what the big goals and small goals are, and they guide the class forward to meet those goals.

In teaching writing, more than in any other subject—the teacher is the curriculum. But many teachers don't realize this, which is why many teachers struggle with their writing curriculums. It's quite common for frustrated teachers to rant and rave that their compendium of writing lessons is not producing the writing results they want, expect, or need to get.

Well, decades of research says that teachers should not expect to get writing results with those lessons—that is, those isolated skill drills. I quote the following research on the homepage of my website. In *The Neglected 'R'*: *The Need for a Writing Revolution*, the National Commission on Writing wrote this: "Decades of research have shown that instructional strategies such as isolated skill drills fail to improve student writing."

As you read on, I hope you see that you too can take charge of teaching writing. You will also see that I have chosen not to blend in talk about ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay***. I didn't want readers to feel that I was angling. In fact, a careful reader will understand that although ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** is an extremely helpful tool that gets results, teachers will still need to continue forward after they get those results. The program does not bring teachers or students to the end of the line. In fact, it's more likely to create a new beginning. It creates the framework and the foundation that makes everything else you teach about writing stick.

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay is a powerful tool that will help power you through these Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery. And once your students have the writing success that ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** brings, you will have the foundation you need to get real results teaching writing across the curriculum. Furthermore, you will still be able to use your collection of writing lessons that you own or are required to use—but you will use them as the research says works. In other words, you will use them as quick mini-lessons that you teach between real writing assignments.

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

The fastest, most effective way to teach students organized multi-paragraph essay writing… Guaranteed!

This is the last time I mention the curriculum in the body text, so please read this carefully and then check out the homepage:

Do you teach beginning writers? Do you teach struggling writers? ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** is the missing piece of the puzzle that makes everything else you teach about writing and grammar work. It gets students writing! Put simply, ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** is the fastest, most effective way to teach students organized multi-paragraph writing… Guaranteed!

✓ **Beginning Writers**	✓ **Struggling Writers**
✓ **Remediation**	✓ **Review**

A-2: The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery

For whom is this ebook intended? What is its purpose? This ebook provides a framework for teaching paragraph and multi-paragraph writing. It's not exactly a how-to guide, as it deals with theories, debates, models, misunderstandings, goals, problems, and solutions. By the end of this ebook, you should be able to look at every single one of your students' writing and understand what is going on with their paragraphs. Furthermore, you will clearly see how you might move forward.

Here are a few questions you may want to consider while reading:

1. What's good and bad about your students' paragraph writing?
2. How will you get your students to the next level of paragraphing?
3. Is what you are teaching your students about paragraphs correct and true?
4. Are you teaching paragraphs and whole compositions correctly? Is there a different way? Is there a better way?
5. Do you understand all the issues and concepts involved in paragraph and multi-paragraph writing?
6. What should your goals be in teaching paragraph and multi-paragraph writing?
7. Should you be more rigid or more flexible in your approach to teaching paragraphs?

The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery

Students learn to write paragraphs in stages, so it behooves teachers to understand what those stages are or might be. Below you will find an analysis of ten stages of paragraph and multi-paragraph mastery. As you will see, this is not a list of ten blissful stages. In fact, we hope to pass through many of these stages as quickly and effortlessly as possible—or better yet—never enter. Surely, we would all prefer to jump straight to Stage 8 and skip all the paragraph frustration and confusion.

But the reality of teaching writing is that if you teach a class full of student writers, you will certainly have students in a few different stages of paragraph mastery. Furthermore, some of these students will be stuck in that stage, and it will be your job to help them move forward and find the light.

The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery:

Stage 1: Single Short Paragraph – Problematic: Beginning or Struggling Writer

Stage 2: Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written: The One Good Paragraph Theory – The Building Block Theory – Isolated Paragraphs

Stage 3: Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consciousness Writing

Stage 4: Single Long Paragraph – Contains Organized Hidden Paragraphs

Stage 5: Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs

Stage 6: Multi-Paragraph – Organized but Uneven Paragraphing

Stage 7: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Formulaic Paragraphs

Stage 8: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural Paragraphs

Stage 9: Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style

Stage 10: Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style – Organized, Fully Developed, Natural Paragraph Style

We will cover many topics beyond these Ten Stages. In one sense, the stages serve as a backdrop for exploring problems, solutions, and theories in teaching writing. I challenge a number of beliefs about paragraphs and teaching paragraph writing with the hope that we can all teach writing better if we understand the truth about paragraphs.

What truth am I talking about? Not my truth. I'm talking about the truth that we all see when we go to the library and examine a collection of books, magazines, and newspapers from different genres, for different audiences, and from different sections of the library. I'm also talking about the truth that we all see when we analyze how the best writers in each grade level create paragraphs independently across the curriculum and on writing assessments.

A-3: Ten Stages and Ten Essays: Creating the Ten Stages

To create this "Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery" model, I analyzed and reflected on four areas of knowledge:

1. Paragraph Theory: I have studied the entire history of the paragraph, which includes the modern research on paragraphs.
2. Paragraphs in Professional Writing: I've studied and analyzed paragraphs in books, magazines, and newspapers—in different genres, for different audiences, and from different sections of the library.

In order to diagnose the good and the bad in student paragraph writing, we must analyze how students write when left to their own devices—that is, when they write independently. So…

3. I reflected on personal experience teaching writing across the curriculum in both elementary and middle school classrooms. *Focus:* Daily Writing Across the Curriculum.
4. I analyzed several collections of released student writing samples (mostly grades 3-10) from state writing assessments. *Focus:* Writing Assessments.

As you can see, I focused on writing that students produce INDEPENDENTLY, not guided writing.

The foundation of this *Ten Stages* model is an analysis of actual student writing; therefore, if you analyze your students' paragraph and multi-paragraph writing, much of what follows will ring true. On the other hand, much of what follows is also an exercise in opinion—opinion based on experience and analysis.

I explain each stage in a short to medium size essay. For each stage, I examined a number of student writing samples. Then I reflected on what I saw using all of my experiences teaching writing and all of the teaching-writing theory I could recall. Here is a list of questions that I tended to answer:

1. Is this kind of paragraph writing good or bad? Why?
2. Why do students write like this? What causes students to write like this?
3. What do students who write like this believe or understand about writing and paragraphs?
4. What kind or method of instruction has created this kind of student writing?
5. What can teachers do to improve this kind of writing?
6. How does this stage of paragraph writing fit in with or compare with the other stages of paragraph and multi-paragraph writing?
7. What is the best kind or style of paragraph writing? Is there a best?

Be sure to read all Ten Stages, as it's all intertwined and interconnected. In every stage, I discuss several concepts about how to get results teaching writing and teaching paragraphs to students.

A-4: Paragraphs: A Little Background Information

I will assume that the teachers reading this know what most textbooks and worksheets say about paragraphs, so I won't repeat all that. I do want to address three topics that provide a different kind of insight into paragraphs—and more importantly, teaching paragraphs:

1. The History of Paragraphs
2. The Truth about Paragraphs: Paragraph is a Noun *AND* Paragraph is a Verb
3. The Truth about Paragraphs: Paragraphs are a Whole *AND* Paragraphs are a Part of a Whole

a) The History of Paragraphs

Paragraphs are such a fundamental topic in modern writing instruction that it's important to understand a bit about the history of the paragraph. Over 2,000 years ago in ancient Greece, paragraphs were born into a world of mayhem and chaos. Mayhem and chaos existed because ancient Greek writing consisted of a long string of letters, without any punctuation marks or capitalization of any kind. I told you so. This ancient writing truly was a world of mayhem and chaos!

But then change appeared on the horizon! The paragraph mark sprang to life and became the world's first punctuation mark. The paragraph mark began as a small line—a mark—but over time it became an indent. For 2,000 years, if curriculums taught paragraphs at all, they taught them in the context of being a punctuation mark, and there was no discussion of theory. What did this paragraph mark do? It divided the text—just as it does today.

Before 1866, just two books addressed paragraph theory: TWO! And they did it briefly. Then in 1866, Alexander Bain single-handedly created the paragraph revolution when he wrote a book called *English Composition and Rhetoric*. In this book, he laid down six rules for paragraphs, and these six rules remain the foundation of modern paragraph theory even today. These six rules were quickly simplified and reduced into three basic concepts: 1) Unity, 2) Coherence, and 3) Emphasis.

So what did writers do about paragraphs before 1866? They wrote them! Unfortunately, they had no rules or guidelines to fall back on or guide them. Writers were expected to use good judgment and sound logic to divide their whole compositions into paragraphs. Actually, writers did have one thing to fall back on—two thousand years of classical rhetoric. But the ancient world created classical rhetoric for oratory (public speaking), so it does not address paragraphs. However, division and invention (development) are essential components of classical rhetoric, and these concepts probably helped writers construct paragraphs.

Before 1866, curriculums taught writers to think logically, and they left it up to the logical thinker to create paragraphs. This was not a foolproof system, which is why Alexander Bain's six rules of paragraphs were so helpful. They brought a much-needed logic and theory to a neglected topic. Plenty of theorists since Bain have tried to create a better theory of paragraphs, one that more accurately reflects how the best writers create paragraphs, but no other theory has caught on.

The next big year for the paragraph was 1909. This was the year that Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villiers Denny devoted an entire curriculum to the paragraph: *Paragraph Writing: A Rhetoric for Colleges* (1909). These two theorists saw the paragraph as a mini-essay and as a building block for whole compositions. To be clear, the curriculum did teach mini-essays. But in our modern world with a modern audience, many of these mini-essays would be better if the writer had divided them into two or more paragraphs. This is especially true for young writers who write rather short whole compositions. But still, 1909 is an important year in the history of the paragraph because it is the year we began our obsession with isolated paragraphs.

For thousands of years, curriculums did not teach paragraphs at all, and then in a matter of 50 years, we have a popular university curriculum devoted entirely to isolated paragraphs. I believe the truth of teaching paragraphs lies somewhere between these two extremes. It's a disservice to our students to focus too heavily on isolated paragraphs, and it's a disservice to omit them entirely. Put simply, we must teach students about paragraphs (nouns) and also how to paragraph (verb).

b) The Truth about Paragraphs: Paragraph is a Noun *AND* Paragraph is a Verb

For at least 100 years, dictionaries have stated that the word *paragraph* is both a noun and a verb:

Webster's Dictionary (1913)	Oxford Dictionary (2016)
Paragraph	**Paragraph**
➡ **Noun:** A distinct part of a discourse or writing; any section or subdivision of a writing or chapter which relates to a particular point, whether consisting of one or many sentences.	➡ **Noun:** A distinct section of a piece of writing, usually dealing with a single theme and indicated by a new line, indentation, or numbering.
➡ **Verb:** To divide into paragraphs.	➡ **Verb:** Arrange (a piece of writing) in paragraphs.

How does this noun-verb paragraph relationship work? Well, next time you write a page or more, see if you hit the *Delete* key to merge two paragraphs into one or hit the *Enter* key to divide one

paragraph into two. In short, we write paragraphs (nouns), and we also paragraph (verb). Most teachers understand this dual nature of paragraphs when writing, but they seem to wish it did not exist when teaching writing.

This noun-verb paragraph relationship connects to our next paragraph concept.

c) The Truth about Paragraphs: Paragraphs are a Whole *AND* Paragraphs are a Part of a Whole

Teaching students how to write paragraphs is challenging because paragraphs are two things:

1. **Paragraphs are a Whole:** Each paragraph in isolation contains its own Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis. This means that multi-paragraph writing is a matter of addition—we add new paragraphs.
2. **Paragraphs are a Part of a Whole:** A paragraph contributes to a whole composition—the whole composition has its own Unity, Coherence, and Emphasis. This means that multi-paragraph writing is a matter of division—we divide the whole topic and each paragraph is a fraction of the whole, which means that each paragraph contains a fraction of the whole truth or information that we are putting forth.

I simplify all this by calling it *Two Levels of Beginning, Middle, and Ending*. Nearly all high scoring papers on state writing assessments give "the feeling" of having two levels of beginning, middle, and ending:

1. Beginning, middle, and ending in the paragraphs.
2. Beginning, middle, and ending in the whole composition.

Whether we write something long or short, in the real world, we must always think on these two levels. We may begin to write a single-paragraph memo, note, email, or short answer and then realize that the issue is more complicated than we thought, and therefore, we have a paragraphing decision to make. This question is constant: Should I wrap up this paragraph and begin a new paragraph?

The decision to keep a piece of writing as a single paragraph is no different than the decision to divide the piece of writing into two paragraphs. It's a paragraph decision. Writers make their paragraph decisions using a logical understanding of the topic, along with an understanding or intuitive sense of a variety of paragraph concepts: Unity, Coherence, Division, Development, Elaboration, Emphasis, and Pattern.

Section B: The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery!

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In general, the higher the stage, the better the writing—but this is not always the case. Some stages are equal with other stages; they are just different styles of paragraphing or a different set of problems.

The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery:

Stage 1: Single Short Paragraph – Problematic: Beginning or Struggling Writer
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Stage 3: Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consciousness Writing
Stage 4: Single Long Paragraph – Contains Organized Hidden Paragraphs
Stage 5: Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs
Stage 6: Multi-Paragraph – Organized but Uneven Paragraphing
Stage 7: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Formulaic Paragraphs
Stage 8: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural Paragraphs
Stage 9: Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style
Stage 10: Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style: Organized, Fully Developed, Natural Paragraph Style

Stage 1: Single Short Paragraph – Problematic: Beginning or Struggling Writer

On state and district writing assessments, many beginning and struggling writers write a single short paragraph. These paragraphs are rarely well written and rarely score well. Put simply, these paragraphs are Short and Problematic. The nature of a state or district writing assessment is two-fold:

1. Students receive a topic that requires no outside knowledge. Everything students need to know about the topic is contained within their brain, and they only need to transform that information into written words.
2. Students receive sufficient time to write a fully developed piece of writing, as well as sufficient time to go through the entire writing process with that piece of writing. In other words, students receive a lot of time!

On writing assessments, even in third grade, students have a topic and the time that requires them to write more than a single short paragraph. So why don't these students write more? What's going on with these reluctant writers?

Of course, some students have serious issues that we must not minimize. However, with other students, writing is just difficult and something they don't like to do. These struggling writers are also reluctant writers. They don't want to write, they don't like to write, and they are somewhat afraid to write. Why are they like this?

The answer to this question is surprisingly simple—and you already know the answer. Just think of something that you don't like to do, want to do, or are afraid to do: e.g., dance, sing, give a speech, play a sport, etc. Now ask yourself this question: Why do you feel that way? Your reasons are nearly the same reasons that reluctant writers have for not wanting to write. Here are a few reasons why our reluctant writers are so reluctant:

1. Reluctant writers don't want to be wrong, and they don't want to be told they are wrong. Reluctant writers don't want to fail. They don't want to face public humiliation after putting out effort. Reluctant writers don't want to be judged. They don't want to do something that they believe will make them look foolish.
2. Reluctant writers don't want someone else to criticize their writing, control their writing, and tell them what to do. They don't want to write the way the teacher wants them to write. They want to be free to write as they see fit—or not write at all.
3. Reluctant writers don't want to be told after the fact that they should have applied writing skills that they have not been taught or that they don't understand. How can they be expected to do something when they have not been taught how to do it or don't understand it?
4. Reluctant writers enjoy the compassionate (or hostile) tug-of-war that they have with the teacher. It's extra attention!
5. Reluctant writers have developed learned helplessness. They know that their writing won't be good and that they will be criticized—so they won't even try.

What's the solution here? Well, this topic requires a multi-page exploration. Certainly, with special needs students, it's an even more complicated topic. But for now, I will just say this: I began my teaching career at the tail end of a bilingual debacle. My first class was a wonderful group of 3rd grade ELL students—and the system had failed them. Some were students who I sensed would succeed despite this rocky educational start, but the majority lacked basic language skills in any language—and I was seriously worried for them. These students were true non-writers.

But that did not stop me from making them write. Truthfully, I was ignorant about writing and teaching writing, so I didn't fully care what the writing looked like—but write they must. Eventually, a few teachers commented that *they sure do write a lot*, which was not exactly a compliment. However, I had created students who were willing to write, and students who were willing to learn to write. That had not been the case before.

Many teachers and students get STUCK before they even get going. They get stuck in the small stuff—and they stay stuck there—and they never move on to real writing. Over **50 years of research shows that isolated skill drills and grammar instruction do not improve student writing**. Now, I didn't stay stuck on small stuff, and I did get my students writing—but unfortunately, I was forced to deal with a large amount of poor writing. But in a sense, this is how you learn to teach writing. A huge part of teaching writing is getting students to write, and then knowing how to deal with and improve poor student writing.

I'm happy to say that after a couple of years of teaching writing, teachers would get my students and ask, "How did you get them to write like that?" Yes, it did take me a couple of years to figure out how to turn these non-writers into reasonably competent writers. But even in that first year, those students standardized test scores soared, and I thought it had something to do with the fact that I had been the first person to insist that they write. Writing is concrete. Writing is active thinking. If we are not in school to write, I don't know what we are in school for.

Please note, I never let my students write without care, but if they are presenting the best writing they are capable of producing at the moment—then they keep writing! And we'll keep figuring out how to make it better and better! I don't have any students that write just one short paragraph when it's time for a state writing assessment.

Unfortunately, teachers sometimes turn struggling writers into reluctant writers and non-writers. Teachers try to control and take ownership of their struggling students' writing, and when they can't, frustration and other negative emotions leak out. Embarrassed, confused, and frustrated, these students decide not to write, or they become so stressed over writing that they can't write.

Stage 2: Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written: The One Good Paragraph Theory – The Building Block Theory – Isolated Paragraphs

Have you ever heard a teacher say this? "I just want my students to be able to write one good paragraph." What these teachers usually mean is that they want their students to be able to write a paragraph that contains amazing and varied sentence structure, stunning vocabulary, profound content, an intriguing and coherent structure—and all without a single grammatical error. These teachers believe that once their students can do this, the move to fantastic whole compositions will be easy. Unfortunately, I have not found this to be the case. In fact, I think that the biggest error in all of teaching writing is to teach students that the word "paragraph" is only a noun.

Early in my teaching career, I went through a stage where I spent an inordinate amount of time on single paragraphs (isolated paragraphs) and grammar. What I learned was this: Everything falls apart

when the students receive an open-ended, complex, multi-part writing prompt—and plenty of time to fill a page. Students get the prompt, and they write and write and write! The problem is that these students only know how to write a single paragraph (noun); they don't know how to paragraph (verb). The writing quickly devolves into stream-of-consciousness writing. Now, this wouldn't be such a terrible problem if this situation didn't perfectly describe state and district writing assessments.

I used to teach my students that a single paragraph was the building block of a whole composition, and that if they could write just one good paragraph, then they could write a whole composition—or even a book! I now see that while this is not false, it's not true, either. Paragraphs in a whole composition must fit together in a way that creates unity, coherence, and emphasis for the whole composition. Put simply, the paragraphs work together to form a coherent whole. A whole composition is not just a series of isolated paragraphs.

Highlighting this point is the fact that one of the most important aspects of writing is the skill of SELECTING the paragraphs that do belong and LEAVING OUT or EDITING OUT the paragraphs that don't belong. Student writers and professional writers alike frequently take wrong turns into dead-end alleys. We must remove these digressions, even when we find them quite dear. Yes, this is why we have the writing process, and this is why we revise—but the goal is also to come reasonably close on the first try. In short, a long string of isolated paragraphs is unlikely to create an effective whole composition. In reality, each paragraph should BUILD ON or be a CONTINUATION of what came before.

Of course, some writing does treat each paragraph as a building block in much the same way that an encyclopedia treats each article as a self-contained unit. In other words, the articles are not supposed to combine to make a bigger point. While we can treat each paragraph as a self-contained unit, the outcome is usually formulaic writing. (We will discuss formulaic writing later.)

If all it takes is the ability to write just one good paragraph, then why isn't everyone who can write one good paragraph an author? Why is writing a thesis or a dissertation for a master's degree or a doctorate such a daunting task? Can't people just write One Good Paragraph—one after another?

The truth is that a paragraph in isolation uses completely different thinking from a paragraph as a part of a whole composition. In one sense, a paragraph as a part of a whole composition is like rubbing your head and patting your stomach at the same time. We must think about or consider at least two main ideas at the same time—the big picture main idea and the small picture main idea.

For this reason, it's not a good use of time to focus on just one good paragraph for too long. Here is an alternative plan that will help you avoid being stuck on just One Good Paragraph. Please note, I could list many more alternatives plans—all better than being stuck on just One Good Paragraph.

a. An Alternative Plan to Teaching Just One Good Paragraph:

1. Teach one decent paragraph. Then teach three decent paragraphs that you know are all connected. Now help your students see how they all connect and form a whole. Now have your students practice adding simple introductions and conclusions to these connected strings of paragraphs.
2. Now help your students edit and revise these whole compositions.
3. Now move back and teach students a number of different paragraph patterns that use different ways of making logical points. This time make them good (or even excellent) isolated paragraphs. Now alternate between working on isolated paragraphs and series of two or three connected paragraphs.
4. Now let your students write across the curriculum and see how your students use all these new ideas in creating whole compositions.
5. Now teach them how to edit and revise these new whole compositions, which contain a deeper level of thought, along with nice introductions and conclusions.
6. Now teach your students more paragraph patterns, along with a few new whole-composition patterns, while also analyzing exemplars written by real writers in the real world.
7. Rinse and Repeat: Always remember to cycle back as necessary. Don't treat this as a straight line, but instead as recursive. When you spiral back to what your students need, you will keep them interested and motivated.
8. <u>All the while</u>, teach grammar, mechanics, and writing strategies, and hold students accountable for what they learn across the curriculum.

Staying stuck on one good paragraph creates a stagnant writing environment. Spiraling back and branching out is always a better choice, which is why most curriculums spiral, branch, and cover many topics.

Unfortunately, many curriculums spiral and branch but don't build any real skills. This is why determined teachers become so focused on (possibly obsessed with) achieving specific goals. Goals are certainly healthy, but when a teacher refuses to move forward or branch out until students reach a specific goal, it wastes class time and causes classroom management problems. How many teachers have finally (and wisely) decided to put aside a goal for a while, only to return to it a couple of weeks later and discover that their students were able to achieve the goal quickly and easily? A battle of wills is usually a waste of time.

Conclusion: No modern teaching-writing theory or model places any value on writing just one good paragraph. As I said before, the building block theory of isolated paragraphs is not exactly false, but it's not true either. I think most new teachers want to believe this theory is true because it makes things simple for them: "If I can just get my students to write one good paragraph, then my students will be able to write a book."

To be fair, as long as the teacher stays in complete control of the writing situation and the writing process, the results may not be half-bad. But it's a little disappointing to discover the reality of the matter on an important writing assessment, where the students have a lot of time to write and the writing process is completely out of the teacher's control.

b. Make the Paragraph the Unit of Composition: What Does That Mean?

In his classic book *The Elements of Style* (1918), William Strunk said, "Make the paragraph the unit of composition." He did not say to make the paragraph the unit of writing instruction. The difference between those two statements is important.

In fact, Strunk does not treat the paragraph as a building block, as he largely explains how to divide the whole composition into paragraph parts. Now, he does advise writers to create a topic sentence and a concluding sentence for each paragraph. But he does not advise writers to create one paragraph and then create another paragraph and then another paragraph, which would be the building block theory. His instruction is primarily on how to divide the whole.

As relates to student writing, here is the point he should have made: A writer should not attempt to write a whole composition sentence by sentence. (That's what students want to do.) If the writer writes sentence by sentence, the writer will likely ramble on about things that are of no great importance. Instead, writers must identify main points that they want to make or find main ideas that they want to explain, and then use a paragraph to tell their readers about each. While the pencil is moving, writers must be aware of the main idea or main point that they are working on—i.e., proving or explaining etc.

To some degree, this is how the mind already works. Beyond pleasantries, when we see another person, our mind starts searching for a big idea—something important to talk about: "How was your weekend? What are you doing? What is that? Where are you off to? What's for dinner? Can you help me with something? What's new? Did you go to the meeting last night?" In fact, we start big—even if it's a small topic: e.g., "I love your jacket!" Put simply, it's quite difficult to begin with a detail, as whatever we begin with is perceived as a main idea. Our first words are intended to start a conversation, not end it.

When a student arrives home from school and states, "I got an A on the math test," or "School was so much fun today," the student is stating the beginning of a paragraph (or whole composition) in the form of a topic sentence (or thesis statement). The rest of that paragraph is already in the student's brain (although in an unorganized form), and if given a chance, the student will provide the details that finish the paragraph. In other words, our mind does a good job of sifting through the details and determining which is a substantial size main idea or main point to discuss. As I discuss later, the bigger problem is the ability to create organized, meaningful, and important details that relate to the main idea or main point.

In reality, every single sentence and idea can be a detail, a main idea/topic sentence, or even a controlling idea/thesis statement for a whole composition. For example, getting the A on the math test could be a detail supporting the fact that school was so much fun today, or it may be the most important main idea of the day. In fact, we could argue that the best writers spend paragraphs or pages on things that lesser writers state in a single sentence. A writer could write an entire page about a glance between two strangers—or it could be a single paragraph—or just a single detail in a story.

Writing a paragraph has two components: #1) Create a Main Idea or Main Point, and #2) Create Details that Prove or Support that Main Idea or Main Point. As discussed prior, the process of creating a paragraph in isolation is a simpler kind of thinking than creating a paragraph as a part of a whole composition. Creating a main idea that belongs in a whole composition uses the same kind of critical thinking that creating details for a paragraph does. But let's put that aside for now and consider what it takes to create a paragraph—any paragraph.

c. #1 Create a Main Idea or Main Point

There is nothing easier in all of writing than creating a list of possible main ideas for a whole composition. In fact, it's so easy that it seems that writing should also be easy. I suppose it is our need to say something important and discover truth that makes writing a challenge. Having said that, teachers should harness this natural ability to come up with main ideas to get students writing!

We come up with or create main ideas and main points in four ways:

a) <u>We Just Know</u>: When we understand our topic, we usually have a good idea of what is most important: e.g., The student who returns home from school and blurts out that she got an A on the math test knows what is important. Likewise, if we believe that eating red meat is unhealthy, we know what our main idea is, even if we don't have a list of details ready to support that position.

b) The Usual Topics and Questions: The Six W's are an excellent place to begin: Who? What? Where? Why? When? How? Furthermore, every topic has aspects that jump out as being significant even to young students. When we combine these two approaches, creating basic main ideas is quite easy. Take for example *The Revolutionary War*: Who fought? Why did they fight? How long did the war last? Where did the fighting take place? How did it begin? How did it end? What were some important events? How did the war affect people? Who were some important people? Why do people need to know about this war? What's important about it? Was it right or wrong to fight it?

c) We Think, We Sort, We Select: Sometimes we don't know what our main point or main idea is. We must rack our brain, sort through many details, and figure out what they add up to, or what the most important or unifying idea is. It looks something like this: "What am I trying to say? Hmm… What am I trying to say?" Naturally, we should use the writing process so that we don't need to over-rely on this kind of thinking.

d) The Writing Process: We prewrite, write, and rewrite as a means to generate ideas, sort through those ideas, and discover our important main ideas. Then we make those main ideas better and we get rid of the ones that don't belong.

Creating the main point or the main idea is probably easier than creating the details. For one thing, any idea can be the main idea, and that's not true with details. Details must relate to and support the main idea, which requires a higher level of critical thinking. Of course, creating highly-effective main ideas that relate to and support the whole-composition thesis statement or controlling idea requires this same kind of critical thinking.

Main ideas are also easier to create and deal with than details because we use fewer of them, which means they require fewer decisions. Making decisions is one of the most difficult parts of writing.

d. #2 Create Details That Prove or Support the Main Idea or Main Point

Anyone can create a main idea by expressing his or her opinion, "We must go to war!" The difficult part is creating and organizing the details—i.e., the details that make that statement true and persuasive, and that those who disagree can't easily refute.

People often begin writing a composition because they are excited about an important main idea. Unfortunately, finding the important details is more of a challenge. Writers often abandon a piece of writing when the details seem petty, ridiculous, illogical, or unimportant. They discover that the main ideas aren't worth writing about because the details don't seem important or valuable. They read the details and think, "Who else would *really* want to read this?"

What if we had to support all of our opinions with logical, organized proof? We would lose a great deal of conversation in the world. Creating details that support or prove our main ideas and opinions is challenging. It requires sound logic, critical thinking, and judgment. We must sort through all of the possible details and figure out which are the most relevant, the most important, the most logical, and the most interesting. We must also figure out how to arrange these details.

e. The Relationship between Main Ideas and Details in Isolated Paragraphs and Whole Compositions

The writing process would not exist if the relationship between ideas were as simple as just filling in the blanks. Ideas in writing are hierarchical (detail, main idea, thesis), but the writer must still figure out which ideas belong and where they belong in the hierarchy. Writers constantly ask themselves questions to help them figure out what they are trying to say and how to say it: "What am I trying to say? How can I prove that? Does my reader need to know this? What does my reader need to know? Will this make sense to my reader? Is this important? Is this interesting? Is this necessary? Is there a better way? Am I saying what I am trying to say? Does this belong? Is this a digression? Am I off track here?"

"The Quadrant of Important and Interesting Ideas" is a nice illustration of the types of main ideas and details we want to include in our writing. Naturally, important and interesting is the ideal, although logically connected is probably more important than both.

f. The Quadrant of Important and Interesting Ideas	
1. important and interesting	2. important but not interesting
3. not important but interesting	4. not important and not interesting

In summary:

1. Creating the main idea is easy. Any detail can be the main idea if we choose to explain and elaborate on that detail, at which point it becomes the main idea. Isolated paragraphs are relatively easy to write because any idea is capable of being the main idea. However, even in an isolated paragraph, creating important, interesting, and logical details that support or prove the main idea or main point is a challenge.

2. Creating an important main idea that relates to and supports or proves the whole-composition thesis statement or controlling idea is significantly more difficult. In fact, creating these types of main ideas require the same type of critical thinking that is necessary to create effective details and support in a paragraph.

3. Details are to main ideas as main ideas are to the thesis statement or controlling idea in a whole composition. This is why creating highly-effective main ideas for a whole composition is more difficult than creating main ideas for isolated paragraphs.

g. Teaching Isolated Paragraphs Across the Curriculum

Although I don't believe in the One Good Paragraph Theory, isolated paragraphs do have a place in teaching writing. Probably the most valid and authentic way to teach isolated paragraphs is by using the textbook comprehension questions that students already answer across the curriculum. A paragraph answers a single question (*Note:* We could also say the same thing about a sentence and a whole composition,) which makes many comprehension questions perfect for teaching paragraphs.

Most comprehension questions in textbooks address or elicit a logical pattern of thought, and most of these logical patterns of thought are also patterns of organization in writing: e.g., cause-effect, compare-contrast, definition, point-and-proof, sequence, process, classification, etc. A course in paragraph writing is a course in logical thinking. And comprehension questions are designed to elicit this kind of logical thinking.

Admittedly, it does take some teaching skill and knowledge to use these comprehension questions for teaching writing. As an example, teachers must teach students how to incorporate the question into their answer in order to create a full paragraph. After all, the question contains the topic, which is certainly a part of the topic sentence. Additionally, teachers must be selective and manage their time effectively, as it's not practical to turn every comprehension question into a paragraph writing assignment. Of course, there are other issues and struggles, but practice does make perfect.

Teachers have three ways to use textbook comprehension questions: 1) Use the questions as written, 2) Adapt the questions, and 3) Create their own questions—that is, their own assignments.

With comprehension questions, teachers must decide what their main purpose is—WAC or TWAC:

1. **Write Across the Curriculum (WAC):** Teachers can provide ***a bit*** of writing instruction and then grade the content (i.e., the answer) and the writing separately by assigning a grade for each.

2. **Teach Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC):** Teachers can provide ***lots*** of writing instruction and have students practice writing without making it high-stakes writing. It's quite easy to scaffold these single paragraphs so that the entire class can learn a new paragraph concept and finish the assignment quickly. Furthermore, it's an excellent way to reinforce the content learned.

The big question is this: Do students need to answer the comprehension question in a single isolated paragraph?

h. The Big Question: Do Students Need to Answer the Comprehension Question in a Single Isolated Paragraph?

In order not to confuse students, teachers must always strive to keep things simple and clear. And one thing is certain: Students always want to know how much they need to write. Certainly, it's valuable to have students write single isolated paragraphs (nouns). In fact, it would be very difficult to teach writing if we didn't have students write single isolated paragraphs (nouns) at least occasionally. And as I said before, many comprehension questions are uniquely appropriate for teaching isolated paragraphs (nouns).

But this does not mean we can't also teach students to paragraph (verb). Later, we will examine both the good and bad aspects of *Formulaic*, *Organized and Natural*, and *Short and Lively* paragraphing styles, but for now I will simply say that paragraphing is a style—and the style that is most effective may surprise you.

Teachers have two ways of approaching comprehension questions for teaching paragraphs and paragraphing. Naturally, the comprehension question itself is an important factor in determining which is most appropriate.

1. **The Teacher Can Require a Single Isolated Paragraph:** The answer to a single question should be able to fit into a single paragraph, which is why requiring students to fit answers into a single isolated paragraph is often an excellent, clear, and concrete choice. Unfortunately, single isolated paragraphs do make students put everything they want to say into a single paragraph regardless of how long the paragraph becomes and regardless of whether the details belong or not.

2. **The Teacher Can Require a Small Range of Paragraphs:** Two or more short paragraphs are often more effective than a single long paragraph. In fact, cause-effect, pro-con, compare-contrast, problem-solution, etc. don't fit easily or naturally into a single paragraph. Why should a student force something into one long paragraph when it would be equally effective or even better in two short paragraphs?

Getting students to write a single well-written paragraph (noun) is an important goal. But we also need to teach critical thinking, decision-making, and good judgment in paragraph writing (verb), and when we make all the decisions for students, we don't teach these things. When it comes to short answers, I can't offer a perfect solution here, as there is none. There are trade-offs.

When teachers allow for a range of paragraphs (e.g., 1-2 or 1-3 paragraphs), it forces students to make paragraphing decisions. Furthermore, this allows the more proficient writers to write a bit more, while also learning how to paragraph (verb). Teachers must be clear in their expectations, but

with writing, there is not just one correct way. Ideally, teachers form the habit of sharing with the class the answers that are correct and that are also examples of excellent writing. This way the class can quickly compare and contrast a few short pieces of paragraph writing. Students catch on.

i. A Final Note on Isolated Paragraphs and The One Good Paragraph Theory

Outside of answering a specific question, writing a single paragraph is unnatural—and even then, the requirement of a single paragraph is not natural. However, it may be this unnaturalness that makes it an effective teaching tool. It's quite challenging to create a well-written isolated paragraph. It forces students to consider every single word and idea that goes into the paragraph. Of course, this benefit is only realized if the teacher analyzes and provides feedback on the paragraph—possibly grades it. If this is not the case, students will simply stick everything they have into that one paragraph whether it belongs or not—and they will believe that this is how one writes an effective paragraph.

Have you personally tried to write a single well-written paragraph? I had to write a number of different types of isolated paragraphs, and I didn't like the experience. I found it difficult to say something important and meaningful, and the results rang false to me. In short, it didn't feel like real writing. Disobediently, I ended up dividing a few of the single paragraphs into two paragraphs, and I believe the overall writing would have been better if I had been free to paragraph as I felt best. But still, I do remember the kind of discipline it brought to my thinking and writing.

Sometimes what we have to say fits into one paragraph, but if it doesn't, we need more paragraphs. The One Good Paragraph exercise often creates paragraphs that the writer would have divided into two paragraphs if the paragraphs were in a whole composition. Now, is that good writing?

In summary: We should not teach students how to write *just* One Good Paragraph (noun)—we should also teach students and help students figure out *how to paragraph* (verb). There is an art to paragraphing, and on state writing assessments, even the high-scoring third-grade writers seem to know this.

Stage 3: Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consciousness Writing

I've heard some educators claim that all students who don't create paragraphs by indenting still have an invisible paragraph structure hidden inside of their whole compositions. These educators claim that all these students need to do is add indentations.

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay?

Put simply, it works.

I disagree. This is not the case with all student writers. I've seen plenty of writing that is a long grocery list of ideas. It's just detail after detail after detail—none of them important or interesting—and none that combine to make a real point.

The classic example of this type of writing is a student who writes about a video game, and it's as if the student is writing about the fast-paced game while also playing the game. The student writes whatever pops into his mind—and then something else (related or unrelated) pops into his mind, so the student writes that—and so on. What's going on here?

1. FEELING: These students don't know how it feels to make a real point. These students don't know how it feels to discuss one topic clearly and appropriately—and then move on to another topic, which the writer also discusses clearly and appropriately.
2. INSTRUCTION: It's possible that these students have had writing instruction that primarily focuses on grammar and isolated paragraphs. It's also likely the writing instruction consisted primarily of isolated drill skills or guided writing instruction. In other words, these students have not been trained to examine and think critically about their own independent writing. When these students find themselves in an independent writing situation where they know that a single paragraph is not enough, they write the way THEY IMAGINE a busy writer writes.
3. AGE: Many of these students are old enough to know that a single short paragraph is unacceptable. Everyone else is writing much more than a single short paragraph, so they too must write more. However, these students don't understand paragraphs, and they don't understand how to think in paragraphs. They don't grasp how to divide a topic, even superficially. In short, their writing becomes stream-of-consciousness writing. This is the kind of writing that has a teacher thinking, "I don't even know where to begin."

In the video game example, the student wants to tell the reader about the game as it exists in his mind, but unfortunately, the game does not exist in the mind in an organized way. For these student writers, to tell the reader about the game in an organized way will slow down the game to the point where it will be uninteresting and boring. For these writers, when they dissect the game it kills the game—much like dissecting a frog kills the frog. On a happy note, once these students *get it*—they look at their stream-of-consciousness writing and say, "What was I thinking? I can't even read that." Their response is never one of shame or embarrassment, but bemusement—because their writing was just so bad—and now they know it.

This stream-of-consciousness writing exists because students don't understand that they must break down their topic or they don't understand how to break down a topic in a way that will help others understand the topic. Here is one possible breakdown (Main Idea List) of the video game topic: 1) Overview and background of the game, 2) The video game world, backdrop, or genre, 3) The

characters, 4) The plot and the goal, 5) Personal high score or memorable experience, 6) Who else may like the game, 7) Comparison with similar or different games, 8) Reception – what others think, 9) Personal opinion and review, 10) The good and the bad, 11) Ways to make the game better, etc.

Note: I call this kind of list a Main Idea List (MIL). For a competent student writer, nothing in writing is easier than creating a list of possible main ideas. Of course, the ability to create highly effective main ideas that all fit together to create a whole does require a certain kind of thinking, and it does require instruction and practice to develop this kind of thinking.

These stream-of-consciousness writers may write reasonably well when it comes to writing short answers to specific questions: e.g., end of chapter check-for-understanding questions. This is because once they give "the answer" to the question, they usually stop writing, as there is nothing left to say. Remember, these types of comprehension questions have been designed to elicit a short answer, usually a paragraph or less. The problem surfaces when a writing assignment is open-ended, and the assignment provides students with a substantial amount of time. They simply don't have the proper tools and thought processes to fall back on.

Some teachers don't come across this kind of writing often because these particular students also know how to get away with writing next to nothing. These stream-of-consciousness writers often pose as non-writers. Personally, I prefer having stream-of-consciousness writers to having non-writers. These students are willing to write—they just need to see the light. These students are often just a breakthrough away from a reasonable level of writing competency. Reluctant and non-writers often need to pass through this stream-of-consciousness stage to reach writing success. However, teachers frequently discourage this kind of writing in ways that produce the outcome that students become reluctant writers or non-writers.

One solution for this stream-of-consciousness writing is to have students create a Main Idea List (MIL) every time the class finishes a section or chapter in a textbook. This helps students see how they might organize an essay even if they are not going to write one. Furthermore, creating a Main Idea List (MIL) lets a teacher check for understanding and forces students to reflect back on what they just learned. This is quick and easy writing instruction, effective time management, and just plain good teaching—accomplished across the curriculum.

Truthfully, this stream-of-consciousness writing is relatively easy to fix. Once students bring organization to their writing, many of these stream-of-consciousness problems go away. Having said that, many of these students are still shocked to discover that their readers prefer reading this organized writing over their amazing stream-of-consciousness writing. In their mind, stream-of-consciousness writing is so much more exciting to create because it seems to move as fast as their thoughts. In fact, it does!

Stage 4: Single Long Paragraph – Contains Organized Hidden Paragraphs

Some student writers can easily fill an entire page, but still can't find a place to indent. What's up with that? Personally, I know that I am biased against this kind of unparagraphed writing. I just have a physical gut reaction against it. I don't like to look at or read unparagraphed writing. However, I have learned to deal with this kind of writing, so I'm now less biased than I once was. I've learned how to analyze the writing and figure out what is going on structurally inside of a piece of writing.

To see a hidden paragraph structure, one must be able to see how each sentence (each detail) relates to the other sentences around it. When you closely examine each sentence, a pattern might emerge, and it may look something like this (T=topic): T1, T1, T1—hey, something has changed—T2, T2, T2, T2—hey, something has changed—T3, T3, T3, etc. The paragraphs in unparagraphed text are rarely built around a formal topic sentence, so one must read closely.

The truth is that sometimes what appears to be an endless string of words is actually a well thought out, organized, effective piece of writing. In other words, student writers sometimes create a piece of writing that is in paragraph form—but they kept the paragraphs hidden. Sometimes all that is lacking is proper indents.

I remember early in my career I would hear a variety of Writer's Workshop type teachers and experts talk esoterically and without concern about hidden paragraphs. I understood the concept that paragraphs can hide inside of a student's unparagraphed text, but my students' hidden paragraphs certainly did not match the paragraph theory that I was teaching. I didn't know what to think. To be honest, I didn't have enough knowledge or experience to understand or deal with this type of subjectivity. I wanted objective and concrete paragraphs.

I remember watching one teacher point out places where a student could add indents, and I was not impressed. The indents seemed random to me. Judging by the look on the student's face, the indents also seemed random to the student. However, if the student had initially placed those indents there on their own accord, I would have probably liked the paragraphs and the piece of writing much more. I suppose I was reacting against the teacher casually throwing out suggestions that no one except the teacher understood.

Unfortunately, hidden paragraphs won't follow a formula or even the rules of formal paragraph writing. Students create these hidden paragraphs without thinking about them simply by having a logical change in thought or topic. Students talk about one thing—they finish it—then they talk about something else. What could be more natural? Some of these hidden paragraphs may be fully developed paragraphs, but many of them are probably short paragraphs. Students make a quick point and provide a bit of elaboration, and then they move on. To be clear, there is not just one correct way

to paragraph this kind of text. The paragraphing is somewhat subjective. Still, finding and adding a few breaks will improve the text in two ways.

a. Two Ways Paragraphs Help the Reader and the Writer

1. **It's Easier to Read**! Put simply, readers don't like to read long blocks of unbroken text.
2. **It Creates Clarity!** This clarity is quite nice for the reader, but it's also extremely useful for the writer. While writing and after writing, most writers pause to evaluate or reflect on what they have created thus far. This analysis guides them forward both in finishing the whole composition and in revising it. In short, the indents create an outline structure that helps writers skim and scan, which helps them see the piece of writing as a whole. When you see your students doing this type of skimming and scanning while writing mid-essay, you know you are getting somewhere with them. They are becoming writers.

   Of course, we *can* skim and scan unparagraphed text, but it doesn't help much. The individual topics, main ideas, and main points don't jump off the page.

   One more thing: True revision (not editing) begins with seeing the piece of writing as a whole. It's extremely difficult to make substantial changes if you can't see the piece of writing as a whole. Personally, I keep an outline of my headings as I write, I update them as necessary, and I update them at the end. We simply must be able to see what we have created as a whole if we hope to revise.

   It certainly is an excellent habit to create an outline before we write, and then to update it as we write; however, it's essential to have an outline at the end—that is, if we wish to revise. An outline makes clear what we have written, which may not match what we thought we wrote. But even if we don't plan to revise, it is still a valuable exercise to outline our writing after the fact, even in low-stakes writing. It trains students to make clear and concrete points.

   When students divide their text (create paragraphs and outlines), it becomes clear what is going on inside of the piece of writing—the good, the bad, and the ugly. But even if students haven't created an outline—if they have paragraphs, at least they can skim and scan the paragraph structure to help them see the piece of writing as a whole. Without those paragraphs, one can't see the whole without reading the whole. Furthermore, without paragraphs or indents, it's near impossible to create an outline.

So why can't students who have the ability to write well figure out where the indents go?

Answer: These students may be focused on other things—for example, ideas, sentence structure, sentence variety, word choice, and correct grammar. Their writing probably turns out reasonably well

organized (although unparagraphed) because these students naturally think in an organized way. These students know what's important, and they know what they want to say. It's likely that these students have an intuitive sense of *the whole* before they begin writing. Furthermore, each chunk of text is probably a logical CONTINUATION of what came prior:

e.g., I just talked about a problem. Now what will I discuss? A solution to that problem.

Some teachers (often Writer's Workshop type teachers) don't find this kind unparagraphed writing to be a major concern, and we can make an argument for that belief. Actually, these teachers may see unparagraphed writing as a problem, but they are unwilling to teach concrete concepts or strategies to fix the problem. They believe students will figure out how to paragraph naturally in their own time, with a little guidance. But this is a different style of teaching writing, and many of these teachers understand both the art and science of writing and of teaching writing on an extremely high level. It's also important to note—many teachers don't get results teaching writing this way.

b. Two Approaches for Teaching Paragraphs

We have two approaches for dealing with this kind of unparagraphed text—and for teaching paragraphs. I find that one should understand, appreciate, and at least mildly use both approaches to teach writing most effectively. Each approach reveals a certain kind of truth.

- **Approach 1: Concrete Strategies:** 1) Teach paragraph theory, 2) Teach paragraph patterns, 3) Teach multi-paragraph patterns, 4) Analyze paragraphs specifically created for teaching concepts about paragraphs. Note: These paragraphs are often artificial and formulaic.

- **Approach 2: Natural Strategies:** 1) Help students find the paragraphs (natural breaks) in their writing, 2) Help students find the seeds of new paragraphs in their writing and prewriting, and help them develop those paragraphs, 3) Help students make their scrappy paragraphs better and more fully developed, 4) Analyze various paragraph styles across various genres of writing, 5) Use various forms of outlining, 6) Use paragraph exercises that have students apply paragraph concepts but don't explicitly teach a concept or pattern, 7) Analyze well-structured paragraphs in real writing. Note: In real writing, paragraphs are rarely as formulaic as typical model paragraphs.

Please note: Teachers can teach paragraph and multi-paragraph writing using Approach 1, but still have an Approach 2 attitude when evaluating and accepting student writing. If teachers teach concrete patterns and concepts, most students will use them naturally in their daily writing. With most students, concrete and formulaic teaching fades into natural and effective writing—if the teacher lets it.

Keep This in Mind: These two different approaches exist in all areas of teaching writing, not just paragraphs. In fact, we have a number of dichotomies in teaching writing that seem quite related:

product vs. process; structure vs. style; content vs. mechanics; teaching writing knowledge vs. developing writing skill—and more.

Stage 5: Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs

As discussed, teachers often try to help students break up (divide) large blocks of unparagraphed text. They want to help their students find the hidden breaks that exist within their text. These hidden breaks are created by a change in logic or topic, or a change in tone—or all of the above.

When teachers try to help students find the hidden paragraphs that exist within their text, a variety of outcomes are possible. Some students are confused by this idea of finding their hidden paragraphs, as it just seems so random. Put simply, they don't see what the teacher sees—they don't see the breaks. However, even these confused students will create paragraphs if the teacher demands paragraphs, but they may do so begrudgingly.

But most students are not resistant to paragraphs. In fact, most students will happily and enthusiastically create paragraphs for their teacher. Many beginning writers want to have paragraphs in their writing just like the paragraphs they see in the books they read. These students gleefully insert indents every so often—or quite often—and they like how it looks. Even struggling writers who are resistant to almost everything else in writing will participate in these occasional paragraph breaks. They know they are supposed to have paragraphs in their writing, and to be honest, it's a little embarrassing not to have them—so they proudly create the indents.

The only problem is that these students don't understand paragraphs, so their paragraphs are really just a series of random indents. Their writing may not be making any clear points, which means the writing doesn't even deserve to be paragraphed. Naturally, these students have a few general ideas about paragraphs, and some have learned a few rules about paragraphs, but since they don't really understand paragraphs, they just imitate what they think paragraphs should look like. Perhaps they add an indent every 3, 5, or 7 sentences. Better yet, they may imitate the look of the writing they like to read—narrative stories or internet writing. In the end, students become even more confused

about paragraphs. After all, the teacher told them to add indents, and now the teacher doesn't like the indents.

But here's the big problem: Paragraphs are supposed to train students to make points and develop points in their writing. Random paragraphing confuses the reader, but it also confuses the writer. If we are not teaching students to make points in their writing, I don't know what we are teaching them. But if we teach students how to make a point in a structured paragraph, they quickly learn how it feels to make a point. The specific paragraph pattern will fade from memory, but that feeling of how to make a point will not.

Stage 6: Multi-Paragraph – Organized but Uneven Paragraphing

Paragraph length is supposed to vary, but not because varying paragraphs is the goal. Paragraph length varies because some topics need more support and elaboration than other topics. Furthermore, formal topic sentences and concluding sentences are not always necessary when the point is made clear without them.

Although it's a good thing to create paragraphs that vary in length, student writers often create multi-paragraph writing where the paragraphs vary in unnatural and ineffective ways. In fact, this was the most obvious problem I noticed I when examined the student writing samples from a number of state writing assessments. Many (possibly most) of the samples across many grades have one or two paragraphs that are extremely large, while the others are extremely short. In most of these writing samples, if the student had fully developed one or more of the short paragraphs, the entire piece of writing would have been much better.

When I examined the student writing samples, the causes of the problem was surprisingly clear: 1) Lack of Planning, and 2) Lack of Time Management. These two aspects of the writing process work together, and a problem in one or both areas helps create an uneven paragraph structure. This uneven paragraphing style falls into three categories: 1) Front Weighted, 2) Middle Weighted, and 3) End Weighted. Let's now examine a few causes and solutions for these types of writing.

1. **Front Weighted:** These students begin writing with passion and purpose! They create a nice introduction and one nice big paragraph. But then they lose that energy or the time begins to run short. Each paragraph gets shorter and less developed and the conclusion is a single sentence.

   Solution: The solution for these writers is simple: Make students aware of the causes and then practice planning (prewriting) and time management. We want the end of our essay to be as good as the beginning of our essay.

2. **Middle Weighted:** These are usually fine, in that they accurately match the writers' ability. The paragraphing is not perfect, but neither is anything else. One gets the feeling that this was an optimal outcome for these writers. As these students improve their writing skills, their paragraphing style and development will also improve, and so will their introductions and conclusions.

3. **End Weighted:** These writers didn't really know what they were trying to say when they began writing, so they wrote a few short paragraphs—and then it hit them! They have discovered the TRUTH of the subject! Now they write a giant paragraph or two and possibly a short conclusion. They are done.

   Solution: This problem is more of a challenge. For many writers, even when they plan extensively, the plan changes once they begin writing. This type of writer feels a need to discover the truth about a topic, and they go where the truth leads them. Sometimes they don't discover what they really want to say until the end of the composition, which is why we find a large paragraph or two at the end of the composition.

   These students need to go back and develop, combine, or eliminate the paragraphs that came before in order to better match and support their large paragraphs. Unfortunately, this is difficult to do with a handwritten text. And furthermore, by this time, many students will be tiring or losing interest. They may have given all they have to give. Of course, this problem is easy to fix when writing on a computer, but not in handwriting. In reality, those first few paragraphs were prewriting—they helped the writer discover what they wanted to say. But even when these writers do prewriting, this same problem may still arise once they begin writing.

   Teachers must make these students aware of the problem, and on important writing assessments, insist that they create a plan (prewriting) and at least attempt to stick to it. Furthermore, teach students that on a writing assessment, they should remain objective and logical, and not become overly emotional or passionate. Students shouldn't try to solve the world's problems or attempt to discover the meaning of life on a writing assessment. That is not the time.

Once again, I found it extremely easy to see the writer at work when coming across *Organized but Uneven Paragraphing*. I won't say that this is one of the easiest problems to solve, but it is the easiest problem to diagnose. We can judge students writing ability by looking at their best paragraphs, which lets us know the quality of writing they are capable of creating. Furthermore, those best paragraphs can serve as models for their other paragraphs. In so many cases, if the other paragraphs even remotely resembled the student's best paragraph, the writing and the message would be monumentally better.

Stage 7: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Formulaic Paragraphs

This section (Organized and Formulaic Paragraphs) and the next section (Organized and Natural Paragraphs) are two sides of the same coin. Teachers and students can all benefit from understanding both sides of this coin.

As you may or may not be aware, a heated debate exists over formulaic writing. Here is a synopsis of the arguments for and against:

- CON: Formulaic writing prevents students from exploring and wrestling with complex topics, which is an important part of developing critical thinking skills. Formulaic writing forces students to approach complex topics in a superficial way, which creates superficial thinking. In short, formulaic writing prevents a real search for truth—and developing the skills that allow students to seek truth is the point of an education.
- PRO: Formulaic writing teaches concrete concepts, which serve as a foundation for advanced writing success. Without these concrete concepts, many students never understand anything concrete about writing and language, and their writing remains remedial at best—unintelligible at worst. In short, formulaic writing techniques are valuable teaching tools that help create effective writers.

I'm not against using formulaic writing techniques as a teaching tool. And from what I gather, the people who are against formula are primarily against a prolonged and rigid insistence on a specific formula. In that respect, I too am against formula.

a. Formulaic Writing is a Stage

Formulaic writing is not the end goal, but it is certainly preferable to unorganized, unintelligible writing. However, once students become reasonably competent writers, formulaic writing becomes a negative. Arizona's "Holistic Rubric Based On 6 Traits Of Writing" makes this point concrete. It's a 6-point holistic rubric, with 6 being the highest score. Formulaic writing helps students reach *Score Point 4*, at which point it becomes a ceiling students must break through.

- Score Point 2: Ideas are presented but are not clear or organized.
- Score Point 3: Ideas are simple; organization is inconsistent; development is uneven.
- Score Point 4: Clear ideas are organized coherently, although the paper is often formulaic.
- Score Point 6: The exceptional and sophisticated craftsmanship shows a thoughtful and exacting writer who strives to communicate clearly and creatively.

Formula will get students to a *Score Point 4*, and then if used properly as a tool, it will help teachers move students far beyond. Formulaic writing is a stage just like all the stages we have covered. It's a fine stage (Score Point 4), but it's also a stage we want to move beyond. As the rubric indicates, our end goal is to create sophisticated paragraph and multi-paragraph writers.

b. The Two Types of Formulas

As relates to paragraphs and multi-paragraph writing, we have two types of formulas:

1. Paragraph Formulas
2. Whole Composition Formulas

1. Paragraph Formulas

Alexander Bain created the topic sentence rule (including its recommended first sentence location) back in 1866. In an attempt to teach young children paragraph writing, teachers have filled in the rest of the paragraph formula, and then they moved on to creating essay formulas. Certainly, topic sentences are a good thing! However, the research indicates that professional writers don't put their topic sentences where they are *supposed* to be—and sometimes they don't use them at all.

Plain and simple—if writers follow all of the time-tested rules of paragraphs, they will be formulaic paragraph writers. In other words, a reader will be able to glance at the piece of writing and understand it without really reading it. If the information is important, the reader will read the whole composition; if the information is not important, the reader won't read it, as there is no need to read it—as they have got the gist.

To some degree, formula is in the eye of the beholder. To be clear, there is very little concrete paragraph instruction that I would not classify as formula, and I don't know where we would be without it. For example, repeatedly using a topic sentence as the first sentence in a paragraph is certainly formulaic. However, many professional style guides recommend that writers place a clear and concrete topic sentence just there, as it helps busy professionals skim and scan in order to get the gist, which helps them determine if they want to read the whole composition more carefully.

Formulaic paragraph writing can be excellent writing, as people often read just for the information. And if the writer presents important information clearly and explicitly (which describes formulaic paragraphs perfectly), the reader will take away a wealth of knowledge and be happy in the process. Furthermore, since formulaic paragraphs involve only the traits of Organization and Ideas, the writer can use the other four traits to dazzle their readers.

Paragraph patterns and formulas do teach structure, but they also teach different ways of thinking—that is, of making points and supporting or proving those points. That's a good thing!

2. Whole Composition Formulas

The most famous formula of all time is the five-paragraph essay. Some educators are vehemently against this kind of essay. Ironically, some of these educators actively promote a different formula, which coincidentally, is also five paragraphs. These educators don't seem to understand the real problem with formulas, which I discuss a bit in this section and more fully in the next section.

Basically, a formula is anything that provides the structure and the logic of a piece of writing in advance. The purpose of providing that useful information in advance is that students learn various patterns of organization and logical thinking, and in the process, create a well-structured, logical piece of writing of which they are proud. Although formulas provide scaffolding, students still need to come up with the ideas and put them into words.

Teachers often use graphic organizers and outlines to teach formulas. And once teachers get into the habit, it's easy to generate relevant formulas across the curriculum. I frequently use formulas to check for understanding and to get students writing. We read a chapter—and then I have students write a short essay using a formula that seems to fit the content we have read: cause-effect, compare-contrast, pro-con, describe two things and then use compare-and-contrast to make a recommendation—the list goes on and on.

My goal is to create effective independent writers, so I am usually flexible with how students apply the formula. Put simply, my goal is to have students internalize the feeling of creating organized and logical writing, so I look to see if students have created organized and logical writing, not if they have rigidly applied the formula. Struggling writers often need to follow the formula more strictly if they wish to produce an effective piece of writing.

Many of these types of writing assignments are low or medium stakes writing opportunities, so I frequently scaffold the assignments so that they don't take up too much class time. My purpose here is to introduce my students to new ways of thinking and new ways of organizing information, while also having my students write often. *Note:* Teachers may want to get a generic collection of graphic organizers to inspire and guide them in creating these assignments. Depending on your students' ages, with a little practice, they too will be able to help create appropriate formulas and assignments.

We could examine any number of formulas, but let's look at two that have stood the test of time. Furthermore, several educators have promoted one formula as highly superior to the other formula.

- Formula #1: The Traditional Five-Paragraph Essay
- Formula #2: Aristotle's Five-Paragraph Essay

c. Whole Composition Formula #1: The Traditional Five-Paragraph Essay

A writer can present a very strong argument and make a number of points very clear using the five-paragraph essay structure. However, the structure prevents students from seeking and communicating any substantial truth. The formula uses repetition as its deep structure.

A five-paragraph essay divides the topic into three equal parts, and each paragraph approaches the topic in the same way: e.g., three reasons, three types, three things, etc. Put simply, a writer creates a five-paragraph essay by asking the same question three times:

1. What is one reason?
2. What is another reason?
3. What is the final reason?

The reason this prevents truth seeking is that writers are not free to address the topic from different angles. As the famous Abraham Maslow saying goes, if your only tool is a hammer, you treat everything as if it were a nail. We don't want our students to approach a complicated world with only a hammer in hand.

The five-paragraph essay treats ideas as interchangeable parts. A writer can remove a body paragraph and replace it with a different paragraph without really affecting the whole. The body paragraphs don't build on or extend the other body paragraphs. In the five-paragraph essay, the body paragraphs connect to the thesis, but they don't connect to or build on each other.

Once again, the five-paragraph essay develops three points, but in the real world, a single important point that a writer successfully develops can be more powerful than three points. An old saying makes this point clear: The tragedy of one person is a story; the tragedy of a million people is a statistic. In other words, three reasons may be less persuasive than one reason, if the writer communicates powerfully and in great detail that one reason. Of course, three strong reasons are certainly better than one meandering reason, which is why the five-paragraph essay is so popular.

d. In Defence of the Five-Paragraph Essay

The five-paragraph essay exists for the same reason that Goldilocks met three bears and that three pigs built houses. **The five-paragraph essay has nice proportions**. A five-paragraphs essay is the shortest essay that creates two levels of beginning, middle, and ending. But remember, five is just a

number. Four paragraphs work better for basic cause-effect, compare-contrast, pro-con, and a few other types of essays. However, we are back to five paragraphs if students include a paragraph that makes a point about or draws a conclusion about cause-effect, compare-contrast, or pro-con.

We have no need to defend the five-paragraph essay if one uses it as a tool. The thinking that goes into creating a five-paragraph essay is an important kind of thinking—and writers can use that thinking and those paragraphs as a beginning stage or a framework for a much larger, more complex piece of writing.

The five-paragraph essay is an excellent beginning essay that teaches many important writing concepts. Take for example the ability to give and support a REASON. *Reasons* are the foundation of argument. If a writer can't give and support a single reason, the writer has no argument. However, if the writer can give and support three reasons—the writer does have an argument.

Furthermore, we can't ignore the reasons why many upper-grade teachers across various subjects like the five-paragraph essay:

1. The five-paragraph essay is a fast and effective ways for teachers to evaluate students' learning of content. It allows teachers to evaluate a structured set of ideas as quickly and effortlessly as possible. This allows teachers to assign more writing assignments and to evaluate more content knowledge.
2. The five-paragraph essay forces students to make points and provide proof of their points, which is an important life skill—and that's an understatement. How many students would prefer to ramble along for several pages instead of making points and providing proof?
3. The five-paragraph essay creates a uniform standard that allows teachers to provide fair grades based on a true understanding of content, not writing ability. We all know a few students who are not masters of the content, but whose writing ability masks this lack of knowledge and understanding. In other words, I'm sure there are a few excellent writers who don't like their guaranteed A taken away from them, which is what the five-paragraph essay does.

Five-paragraph essays are a pragmatic tool for busy teachers that allow them to evaluate students' learning and understanding quickly and easily. Of course, many of these teachers are not really teaching writing. However, they are forcing students to become clear on their understanding of the subject matter. In higher grades, not every teacher wants to be or is qualified to be a writing teacher, just as not every teacher wants to be or is qualified to be a trigonometry teacher.

e. Building on the Five-Paragraph Essay

In a moment, we will look at "Aristotle's Five-Paragraph Essay." Some people may say that Aristotle's formula does not need to be five paragraphs. Well, that's equally true with the five-paragraph essay. Don't let the number five fool you into thinking that you can't be flexible with the five-paragraph essay.

- **Alternative Definition of a Five-Paragraph Essay:** A short multi-paragraph essay where the goal is to make strong points and provide proof and support for those points.

Remember, paragraph is both a noun and a verb! If teachers don't make the number *five* a dogmatic requirement, many students will choose to paragraph naturally—and some excellent writers will use the Short and Lively style, which we will discuss later. In short, many teachers use the five-paragraph essay as a tool, while others get stuck on a dogmatic interpretation of it. But this is not the five-paragraph essay's fault.

Let's examine how teachers can use the five-paragraph essay, how they can be more flexible with it, and how they can move beyond it. First, teachers frequently use a popular paragraph formula for the body paragraphs. Young students begin with generic paragraph patterns:

- Topic Sentence, Detail, Detail, Detail, Concluding Sentence

Older students move on to paragraph patterns that are more specific:

- PPE: Point, Proof, Explanation
- PPC: Point, Proof, Comment
- PQC: Point, Quote, Comment
- PEE: Point, Evidence, Explanation

As I mentioned before, the foundation of all writing is asking and answering questions, and the five-paragraph essay asks and answers the same question three times. However, the answers to the questions do not need to be quite as formulaic as the patterns above indicate.

Teachers and students can use a five-paragraph essay outline as a basic outline—but then also search for what is IMPORTANT and INTERESTING about the topic. How do we do that? By asking and answering questions. In other words, teachers can use the five-paragraph essay to scaffold writing assignments in a way that helps students understand their topics. Furthermore, this scaffolding will help students develop a logical, thoughtful, and structured way of approaching a topic.

Here is a list of questions that focus on giving REASONS (i.e., argument). Of course, teachers and students can create additional sets of questions for other types of main ideas. With a five-paragraph essay, writers only need to create one set of questions, as the body paragraphs all approach the topic in the same way.

f. Body Paragraph 1, 2, and 3: What is one reason?

- What proof do you have that your reason is valid? How do you know your reason is valid?
- What proof do you have that your reason is an important or significant reason? Why should anyone care about this reason?
- Can you provide refutation for those who disagree with your reason? Why are you right and they wrong?
- Who supports your reason or is opposed to your reason? Can you add to what they said or provide proof that they are wrong?
- To help your reader better understand your reason—what is your reason similar to or analogous to? What is your proof or evidence similar to or analogous to? Does history show any similar situations or examples?
- What are the consequences of ignoring your reason? Who will suffer the consequences? How will they suffer the consequences?
- What are the consequences if we later find out that your reason is not valid? How much can be lost by pursuing your agenda? What is the likelihood of those consequences becoming a reality?
- How is this reason similar to or different from your other reasons? Is this reason more or less important? Why?
- And many more!

In reality, people don't criticize the five-paragraph essay, as there is nothing in it to criticize. People criticize how teachers use it and how some students come to believe that it creates better results than anything else they have learned about writing.

Now let's look at Aristotle's five-paragraph essay formula.

g. Whole Composition Formula #2: Aristotle's Five-Paragraph Essay

Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) was a prolific formula creator. In fact, he usually gets the lion's share of the blame for creating the omnipresent formulaic plague of the storytelling world: the three-act narrative structure. It's almost ironic that educators promote Aristotle's five-paragraph formula as a solution to the five-paragraph essay plague. It's also surprising that one would put forth a different formula as a solution to a current formula. It's essentially saying, "My formula is better than your formula." Why wouldn't one realize that the real problem is a rigid and dogmatic approach to formula?

Please note that I do like Aristotle's five-paragraph essay formula just as I like all formulas. Every formula is a good formula, as every formula creates a new and specific way of logical thinking. On the other hand, every formula is also a bad formula if a teacher is STUCK in or on that formula. Teachers shouldn't use any formula for too long, or be too rigid and dogmatic in using them—unless of course, they want to—and they get nice results. If that's the case, next year's teacher will have something substantial to build on. Of course, the real problem with formula comes into play when the next year's teacher also likes to use the same formula, which is often the case. Students are stuck repeating the same formula year after year, and in the process, they never learn how to move beyond formula.

Some people put forth the five-paragraph essay as an argument formula, but in reality, many teachers use its basic structure as a generic multi-paragraph formula. In contrast, Aristotle's formula is an argument formula plain and simple. Aristotle's formula uses these five topics:

1. Introduction
2. Narration/Background: What position am I arguing for? What is my point? How did I become aware of the topic? What background information is necessary to understand the topic? What led me to my position?
3. Confirmation: What proof do I have for my position, argument, or point?
4. Refutation/Concession: What are the counter arguments? Why are they wrong? What are the limits of my argument?
5. Summation

Aristotle's formula and the five-paragraph essay have a great deal in common, and this should not be a surprise since Aristotle is an influence on everything that we all learn about writing and logical thinking. In case you hadn't noticed, the first and last paragraphs are the same in both formulas. Additionally, there is no reason that each body paragraph in the traditional five-paragraph essay can't contain elements of Aristotle's paragraphs #2, #3, and #4. Furthermore, any of the body paragraphs from the five-paragraph essay would serve nicely as paragraph #3 in Aristotle's formula.

What separates Aristotle's formula from the five-paragraph essay is the fact that it approaches the essay topic from different angles. Each paragraph asks and answers a different question.

Aristotle certainly wasn't thinking about paragraphs when he created his formula. In reality, each component of his formula could be a multi-paragraph composition. Of course, we could also make this claim about the five-paragraph essay—that is, if we are willing to allow more than five paragraphs.

I doubt that all the educators who put forth Aristotle's formula as an alternative to the five-paragraph essay demand five-paragraphs; however, I have seen plenty of examples based on Aristotle's model that are five paragraphs. Certainly, many students interpret it as five paragraphs.

h. Which Five-Paragraph Essay Model is Better? Can We Combine the Formulas?

Both formulas have their strengths. I began a comparison of the pros and cons for both formulas, but it was getting quite long and in depth, and it was going to require a full exploration of the psychology behind Aristotle's formula, which contains many elements of communication and persuasion that an effective salesperson should know. However, even in Aristotle's formula, a writer must be able to make points and provide proof for those points, and the five-paragraph essay teaches this skill quite concretely. Without points and proof, Aristotle's formula doesn't work.

But another thing: To list the pros and cons of each formula is to miss a major point about teaching writing and teaching formulas. To put one formula above another is counterproductive. The point of a formula is for students to learn and understand the logic behind the formula, and then for students to use that logic as a tool and technique.

Once again, no one is required to treat either formula (or any formula) as something rigid. Both formulas are tools. So why not teach both formulas, and then teach students how to use elements from both formulas, and then see how students incorporate various components and ways of thinking into their writing?

The one concept that Aristotle's formula addresses that the five-paragraph essay does not address is *refutation*. Aristotle saves refutation for a specific paragraph towards the end, but there is no reason why we can't use refutation in body paragraphs of a five-paragraph essay. As an example, here is a topic sentence that states a position and refutes a different position at the same time:

- Some people believe that global warming is a result of a natural climate cycle, but the majority of scientific evidence indicates that human activity causes global warming. In fact…

Would you be happy if your students created a topic sentence like this? I would. This kind of writing is a product of two approaches: Approach 1: Concrete Strategies, and Approach 2: Natural Strategies. Since this topic sentence follows a pattern that is repeatable, we could teach students this topic sentence pattern, at which point this topic sentence would become formulaic.

In the upcoming "Organized and Natural Paragraphs" section, I discuss what's wrong with formulas, but that does not mean that formulas are not effective tools. But first, let's look at two examples of formulaic writing success. Formulaic writing is often a nice outcome when compared to the alternative.

i. Formulaic Success: Breakthrough Writing Success with Formulas

Organized and Formulaic writing is certainly a fine beginning stage in a student's writing career. In fact, an important breakthrough for many beginning and struggling writers occurs the day they create an essay or report that looks like uniform blocks of text—one stacked below the other. Often when we examine the writing, we find that they *are* in fact uniform blocks of text. The blocks of text add up to a list of sorts, and each block is an item on the list.

I consider this to be a high-quality problem—one that I am happy to address. The question then becomes how to move students beyond this kind of formulaic writing. The answer is simple: Just keep teaching writing and praise writing that rises above formula. Don't insist on formula, and do help students learn how to search for the truth of a topic. Teach students how to ask and answer important and interesting questions—the kinds of questions that their readers want answered.

j. Formulaic Success: Advanced Writing Success with Formulas

According to *The National Commission on Writing*, the world of academics, business, and government are all upset over a preponderance of unorganized, unintelligible writing. Put simply, no one in the real world is complaining that the writing is too formulaic.

On the state writing assessments that I examined, I saw a few high-scoring essays that were quite formulaic. They were high-scoring essays because the writing, the ideas, and the logic were all exceptional. Furthermore, one of these essays made the strongest points of all the essays I examined.

My primary goal in teaching is to help students become successful students. Truthfully, I think many students can achieve great academic success by simply being an objective, disinterested, analytic, logical, purposeful, formulaic writing machine. Furthermore, many student writers would benefit from bringing some of these qualities into their own writing process. The most important component of academic writing is the ability to make points and support points. If students can do this, they can likely direct that skill in all the directions that they need to. Of course, I'm not saying that formulaic writing is the ideal.

k. Strategies for Moving Beyond Formula

Organized and Formulaic writing is just one stage on a journey that leads to paragraph and multi-paragraph mastery. And despite what some people say, it's an extremely easy stage to pass through. For most students, time alone makes a formula fade in memory. And one can hasten the process just by teaching a new formula. What remains is a mental and kinesthetic memory of how it feels to make a point.

Here are some concrete strategies that will help teachers and their students move through this stage and move beyond formula:

1. Teach students to ask questions that they think are important, interesting, and need answering. Then teach students how to answer those questions. As I explain elsewhere, the problem with the traditional five-paragraph essay is that the writer asks and answers the same question three times, and that is what makes it formulaic.
2. Teach many different patterns of organization and patterns of logical thinking. Put simply, teach many different formulas. Then help students and encourage students to use combinations of these patterns and formulas as strategies that help them make points.
3. Assign writing assignments where the task is not conducive to formulaic writing. Be sure to download a few collections of **released state writing assessment prompts**. These prompts are constructed in a way that encourages a natural approach to the topic. Teachers can easily use these prompts to guide students away from strict formula, while also showing them how the formula can help them.
4. Temporarily ban or discourage writing that you deem to be formulaic. Spend time focusing on various types of low-stakes (journals and learning logs etc.) writing.
5. Use rubrics and checklist that don't emphasize or reward formula.

You will find many more ideas on how to move beyond formula in this next section!

Stage 8: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural Paragraphs

Once again, this section (Organized and Natural Paragraphs) is the opposite side of the coin that contains our last section (Organized and Formulaic Paragraphs). Here is one way to look at the two sides of the coin:

1. Teachers need to get results. They need their students to create effective, organized pieces of writing—so they use formulas.
2. Teachers want their students to be versatile writers and critical thinkers—so they help their students move beyond formulas.

For a variety of reasons (assessments, bulletin boards, etc.), teachers often need their students to create a single very good piece of writing. However, the strategies and formulas that helped their students create that one very good piece of writing won't be appropriate in all writing situations. In reality, students must develop an extensive repertoire of writing skills and ways of thinking—that is, if they are to become Organized and Natural Paragraph writers.

So, How Do Teachers Help Students Become Organized and Natural Paragraph Writers?

You may remember that I discussed the "Two Approaches for Teaching Paragraphs – Approach 1: Concrete Strategies, and Approach 2: Natural Strategies." If teachers want to create Organized and Natural paragraph writers, it sure helps to have a solid grasp of a large number of strategies from both categories. In short, teachers will want to know quite a bit about writing and teaching writing.

Teachers may want to:

1. Understand the common **best practices in teaching writing**. *Note:* This link takes you to another excellent free teaching-writing ebook!
2. Monitor, track, and determine which teaching-writing techniques and strategies bring about true writing success for their students.
3. Create classroom systems and routines that help them teach writing effectively.
4. Have a sound understanding of their big picture goals, along with a sound understanding of the small picture goals that will help them achieve those goals.
5. Have a sound understanding of the important teaching-writing models and then exact and use helpful strategies and techniques from each of them.
6. Have a sound understanding of grammar, writing, and writing genres.
7. Understand the pros and cons of the various teaching-writing theories and debates, and then figure out what works best for them.

Put simply: Organized and Natural Paragraphs are often the product of teachers who have taken control of teaching writing and use a framework and methodology that makes sense to them and their students. The following sections (a-m) largely focus on the following three topics, so keep these three topics in mind as you read on:

1. The Writing Process and the Search for Truth
2. Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum
3. Teaching Writing and the Reading-Writing Connection

Here is an outline of the following sections:

a. The Limits of Formula: Formula vs. Searching for Truth and Communicating Truth
b. The Natural Paragraph Writer
c. The Writing Process: The Real Writing Process is Recursive
d. The Writing Process and Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum
e. Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum *AND* Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum
f. Reaching Escape Velocity: Prewriting Across the Curriculum with Beginning Writers and Struggling Writers
g. Prewriting and Seeing the Whole – Begin Writing with the End in Mind – or Measure Twice, Cut Once
h. Teaching Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Writing Across the Curriculum – see the ebook
i. Organized and Natural Paragraph Writing on Writing Assessments
j. A Final Note on Organized and Natural Paragraphing

a. The Limits of Formula: Formula vs. Searching for Truth and Communicating Truth

How are the students of today going to solve a plethora of world problems if they can't sort through complicated topics, come to logical conclusions, and communicate those conclusions to others in a way that others can understand? Put simply, a formula is not a solution for the problems of today. Furthermore, a formula has never been a true solution for the problems of the day, as formulas don't seek truth.

How do we seek truth? We seek truth by asking and answering questions—followed by asking and answering more questions based on the answers to the previous questions. This is what Socrates (471 BC – 399 BC) put forth over two thousand years ago, and it is just as true today as it was then. It should be no surprise that asking and answering questions is the true foundation of all writing. Having said that, organizing those questions and answers into something intelligible, coherent, and meaningful is still a big challenge.

In one sense, the printing press helped create the industrial revolution, which helped create the need for paragraph rules, which helped create increasingly concrete and formulaic types of writing. Shortly after Bain created his paragraph rules in 1866, the belletristic, meandering informal essay began to lose its appeal to busy readers. Articles—or the facts, just the facts—replaced the essay more and more. In the early 1900s, Katharine Fullerton Gerould (1879-1944) responded to this loss of interest in the essay by asking readers if they wanted the news or the truth. Sadly for her, the readers responded by saying they wanted the news.

In other words, as soon as formulaic writing became popular, its shortcomings became apparent—at least, to some. Here are two quotes that span the better part of a century that explore this Formula vs. Truth debate.

> The essay, then, having persuasion for its object, states a proposition; its method is meditation; it is subjective rather than objective, critical rather than creative. It can never be a mere marshaling of facts; for it struggles, in one way or another, for truth; and truth is something one arrives at by the help of facts, not the facts themselves.
>
> Meditating on facts may bring one to truth; facts alone will not. Nor can there be an essay without a point of view and a personality. A geometrical proposition [i.e., a formula] cannot be an essay, since, though it arranges facts in a certain pattern, there is involved no personal meditative process, conditioned by the individuality of the author.
>
> *An Essay on Essays* (1935) by Katharine Fullerton Gerould (1879-1944)

> The other big difference between a real essay and the things they make you write in school is that a real essay doesn't take a position and then defend it... Defending a position may be a necessary evil in a legal dispute, but it's not the best way to get at the truth... And yet this principle is built into the very structure of the things they teach you to write in high school.
>
> *The Age of the Essay* (2004) by Paul Graham (1964—)

The modern world doesn't want a writer to explore both sides of an issue, and possibly in the process, come to no conclusion at all. The reader wants a writer to take a position, argue for that position, defend that position—and either omit or destroy the other side of the argument. This way the reader doesn't have to think at all, as the writer has told the reader exactly what to think. Unfortunately, this kind of truth is often not the full truth.

b. The Natural Paragraph Writer

Writer's Workshop and the writing process were created to teach students how professional writers who are seeking truth really write. The Six Traits model came along to provide a rubric that helps teachers evaluate this kind of writing. The goal of all of these models together and alone is to create Organized and Naturally effective writers.

At one time, these models seemed to eschew formula even as a teaching tool, but then reality set in. The modern push for results has forced many to soften on this stance. As I stated before, most

concrete paragraph and multi-paragraph writing instruction is formulaic in nature, and many students will fail to learn to write well without it.

What is ”Organized and Natural” paragraphing? Well, let’s begin by thinking about a skilled writer who understands a subject, has something to say about that subject, and can create a reasonably well paragraphed short composition off the top of his or her head. Haven’t you ever done that? I have, and I’ve seen plenty of students do it, too.

Most skilled writers know how to make a point and then indent even without prewriting. They begin a paragraph, and when they feel they have made that point clear, they begin a new paragraph. It’s just that simple. Like a branch on a tree, each new paragraph is a logical extension of all that came before. At the end of the composition, all of the paragraphs combine to create a single, clear, coherent, connected message.

Nearly all writing will be better with prewriting and rewriting. But with short compositions, a skilled writer may understand the topic in a way that allows him or her to paragraph (verb) an effective short composition without prewriting or true revision. Of course, we often don’t know what we want to say or the best way to say it before we begin writing, and this is why prewriting and rewriting are so important.

c. The Writing Process: The Real Writing Process is Recursive

Some professional writers say writing is prewriting; others say writing is rewriting; no one says writing is writing. It’s for this reason that modern writing instruction spends a great deal of time addressing the writing process. Has it worked? Are students writing better now than they were before this shift in focus to the writing process?

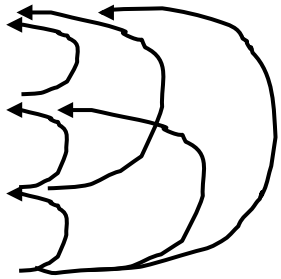
Well, I think we can certainly do better in how we teach it. Without a motivated writer who wants to create something of value, there is no *real* writing process. This is why unmotivated writers see the writing process as a diabolical list of steps designed to keep them busy—i.e., busy work. However, when we create motivated writers who care about their writing, these motivated writers will lead the charge through the steps of the writing process. The teacher will be forced to say, “Yes, we should do that next step of the writing process, but unfortunately, we don’t have the time on this piece of writing.” And when the students let out a groan, the teacher will think, “This a good place to be.”

When it comes to Organized and Natural paragraphs, the writing process is extremely important. Organized and Natural paragraphs are the result of two things:

1. A writer who wants to say something important.

2. A writer that uses the writing process to discover, organize, and refine what he or she wants to say.

The writing process is supposed to reflect the writing process of professional writers. Although the traditional models of the writing process have great value as a teaching tool, they don't accurately capture what most writers do. Professional writers do whatever it takes to avoid appearing foolish. And a writer can appear quite foolish if he or she believes that going through the traditional version of the writing process just once is enough. Thinks about it: Every edit, every revision, and every new draft may create brand new errors. Therefore, we must edit and revise our editing and revisions. That's right—it's round and round until we get it right. The writing process is recursive.

The Writing Process – Traditional Version	The Real Writing Process is Recursive
1. Prewriting 2. Drafting 3. Revising 4. Proofreading 5. Publishing	1. Prewriting 2. Writing 3. Rewriting 4. Publishing 

The Six Traits of Writing is primarily an assessment model. But at the heart of the Six Traits model is the fact that students are supposed to use their knowledge of the Six Traits to assess (informally through analysis) their own writing throughout the writing process. In fact, the most important activity to see in student writers is LOOKING BACK over their writing as they write. The writer writes a bit and then looks back over what he or she wrote, and then writes a bit more, and then looks back over the writing again. When students get serious about writing, that's what they do—just like everyone else who cares about their writing does.

We never hear about assessment as being a part of the writing process, but as Vicky Spandel of Six Traits fame says, "What you can assess you can revise." Clearly, assessment comes before revision—and then after revision. Now we are starting to understand the real writing process!

Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) statement about art certainly applies to the writing process: "Art is never finished, only abandoned." Our modern research on writing shows what we should have always known: The writing process is recursive. It's round and round until the writer gets it right. Writers abandon stages and return to stages if it will help them produce an effective piece of writing. Writers do whatever they need to do in order to create an effective piece of writing. The writing process is a result of a writer who wants to create and communicate something of value. This may explain why

some students don't use the writing process with determination and commitment. Many students just want a high grade—and often, students only need to give a correct answer to get a high grade.

Teachers must keep things simple and clear for their students, and this is why the traditional writing process models are so valuable. But that does not mean that we should not also teach students the truth about writing. The writing process is the process of a writer taking pride in his or her writing—and because of that, it's recursive. Let's look at how that looks:

AN EXAMPLE OF THE RECURSIVE WRITING PROCESS IN ACTION:

> A writer has been writing for a while and becomes tired and distracted. Out of curiosity, and to relax, the writer begins skimming and scanning what she just wrote. All of a sudden, the writer finds herself editing and revising—and perhaps doing a little more research (prewriting). Now the writer is exhausted, so she takes a walk. While the writer walks, the writer thinks (consciously or unconsciously) about what she has written (more prewriting). The writer returns from the walk and inserts a new paragraph into what already exists—and then continues writing from where she left off.

The mystery writer Agatha Christie (1890-1976) said, "The best time for planning a book [prewriting] is while you're doing the dishes." That's the real writing process. You plan your book while you wash dishes because you are interested in what you have to say.

d. The Writing Process and Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum

We won't cover the entire writing process here. In fact, I only bring up the writing process because it is a large part of what creates Organized and Natural paragraphs. It is what allows a writer to search for truth, discover truth, and to organize that truth into natural paragraphs. It is through the writing process that writers discover what is most IMPORTANT and INTERESTING about a topic, and this means that they won't need to over-rely on formula.

Since the writing process is recursive, I tend to speak of it in the simplest way possible: 1) Prewriting, 2) Writing, and 3) Rewriting. Having said that, 4) Publishing is extremely important in teaching writing because the more students publish, the more motivated they become, and the better writers they become.

I try to think of most everything we do in school as a part of the writing process. Students must understand that today's learning is prewriting for our next writing assignment. Here is how I see the writing process across the curriculum:

1. **Prewriting:** *Prewriting* is anytime a writer is getting or organizing ideas that he or she will use in writing. This includes reading, researching, note-taking, planning, brainstorming, mind mapping, and organizing. Furthermore, various types of low-stakes writing (journals, learning logs, freewriting, etc.) can be prewriting.
2. **Writing:** *Writing* is anytime a writer writes new content for the first time. This includes adding substantial new chunks of text when revising. We often move from rewriting back into writing; hence, the term recursive.
3. **Rewriting:** *Rewriting* is anytime a writer attempts to improve something he or she has already written. This includes fixing errors, editing, proofreading, reading one's writing back to oneself, receiving teacher or peer feedback, using rubrics and checklists, and of course—revision.
4. **Publishing:** *Publishing* is anytime a writer shares his or her writing with another person. This includes reading a piece of writing to another person, turning it in for a grade, pinning it to the bulletin board, sending it home to be read by and signed by a parent, placing it in a portfolio to be shared with others, and discussing it as a class.

We can't have students go through the complete writing process every time they write across the curriculum. There's not enough time in the day. However, we can teach and reinforce aspects of the writing process throughout the day. Of course, teachers must get in the habit of thinking this way, and they must develop and use effective classroom systems.

Whenever students read and write, they are involved in the writing process—that is, if the teacher chooses to see it this way. Across the curriculum, teachers need to ask one question: "Can I add a writing process exercise that will achieve one of these goals? 1) Improve students' learning of the content, 2) Improve the written content of their answers, 3) Improve their writing skills, or 4) Improve their writing process." Happily, these four improvements often go hand in hand.

e. Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum ***AND*** Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum

In the next few sections, I discuss teaching writing across the curriculum quite a bit. But it's not enough just to teach writing across the curriculum; we must hold students accountable across the curriculum for the writing skills they learn. To a large degree, when we assess, evaluate, and provide feedback for writing across the curriculum, we are teaching writing across the curriculum.

Unfortunately, assessing writing (and all of the accompanying topics) across the curriculum is too large a topic to address in depth here. I repeatedly tried to create a short version, and I repeatedly

ended up with a long version. Here's the good news: Check back for a free multi-page *Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum* ebook!

Although it is too large a topic to address here, I would be remiss if I did not address the topic in brief. Put simply, managing a classroom full of writers across the curriculum is half the battle in teaching writing. Teachers must develop systems and routines that focus on holding their students accountable for using proper writing skills across the curriculum. Later, when I discuss teaching writing across the curriculum, please consider all of the systems and routines that need to be in place to make it work.

Here are a few models and concepts to consider when thinking about teaching writing across the curriculum:

I. Grade separately for 1) Content, and 2) Mechanics.
II. Think about 1) High Stakes, 2) Medium Stakes, and 3) Low Stakes assignments.
III. Six Traits: 1) Ideas, 2) Organization, 3) Sentence Fluency, 4) Word Choice, 5) Voice, and 6) Conventions
IV. Rubrics and Checklists
V. Fill-In-The-Blank, Just Answer The Question ***vs.*** Short Answer/Constructed Response, Whole Composition

On every assignment, teachers want to be able to answer these three questions:

1. What do I expect to see on this piece of paper?
2. How will I handle this piece of paper?
3. How will I communicate my expectations for this piece of paper to my students?

f. Reaching Escape Velocity: Prewriting Across the Curriculum with Beginning Writers and Struggling Writers

I don't like to let students write whatever way they want to write, but I do want to get things moving forward and I want to keep things moving forward. In short, I don't want to teach writing at a snail's pace. I want to empower all student writers in a way that they believe they are in charge of creating their own writing success, and this frees me from the need to move at a snail's pace. I want us to reach a point where students care about their writing as much as I do. When this happens, it makes them want to slow things down and get things right, while I want to move forward to the next content-related writing assignment. I would rather have students feel the need to omit the errors of the past on their next assignment than to fix every single error on their current assignment.

Naturally, this is not accomplished with a single system. But it does begin with reading the prior paragraph and thinking, "Yeah, that sounds good!" It also begins with the belief that a great deal of writing instruction and writing improvement can be accomplished across the curriculum.

After saying all that, it should be no surprise that I am not a fan of so-called *guided writing*. However, I do like to scaffold writing assignments across the curriculum and then let students write independently. Put simply, I review the subject content taught and check for understanding while I teach writing. Everything is a tradeoff in time, and this technique keeps students learning across the curriculum and keeps students writing across the curriculum. (Of course, I use this approach strategically, with purpose, as needed, and in moderation.)

We will discuss *prewriting* quite a bit over the next few pages, as *prewriting* is the primary tool for easily scaffolding writing assignments. Some teachers lose the writing battle with struggling students before they begin. Many of these teachers don't know how to scaffold writing assignments or are philosophically against it. Unfortunately, what happens is that the best students write and learn to write, while the low students become reluctant writers or non-writers.

We all know that a classroom grows throughout the school year. When it comes to teaching writing, I find that there is a distinct break where teaching writing changes from being difficult to being easy:

> **Stage 1:** Teaching Writing is a Battle
> **Stage 2:** BREAKTHROUGH
> **Stage 3:** Teaching Interested Writers to Become Better Writers is Fun and Rewarding

In order to BREAKTHROUGH, I am extremely proactive about writing across the curriculum. Of course, we all must use our time wisely, and scaffolding writing assignments across the curriculum achieves many of the following goals all at once. That's a good use of time!

> 1) Teach the writing process, 2) Teach various writing skills, 3) Get all students writing, 4) Keep all students writing, 5) Create a classroom full of writers, 6) Review content learned, and 7) Check for understanding of the content learned.

One easy way to scaffold writing and to get things moving forward is to create prewriting as a class activity. When I scaffold, I'm always trying to scaffold something for everyone. I am trying to introduce new concepts, new patterns, and new ways of thinking. My goal is always to be moving forward, and as we move forward, to help students omit the errors of the past.

So whatever kind of prewriting we create, I don't require that students rigidly follow the prewriting we create as a class. I just want to show students a logical way of thinking or a way to group ideas for one or more paragraphs. I use the prewriting process as a tool to review the content students

learned, as a way to teach writing, and as a way to take away the excuses for having nothing to say. I get *everyone* writing!

As I discuss elsewhere, when I scaffold the prewriting, the writing assignment is low-stakes or medium-stakes writing—i.e., we are writing to learn content or writing to learn writing. In contrast, when I formally evaluate writing skills and writing progress, I use ONLY independent writing. But when teaching writing across the curriculum, I use whatever techniques work and get students writing. With beginning and struggling writers, we must get them writing, and we do that by making sure they have something to write about—that is, we scaffold.

Think about it: We have just two types of student knowledge to work with when teaching writing:

1. We can teach students to write using the knowledge that they are all experts on, which is their life, their experiences, and their opinions. Unfortunately, this kind of writing takes students out of the real school curriculum and is usually not formal academic writing.
2. We can teach students to write across the curriculum. Sadly, the best students have the most knowledge to work with, and the lowest students have little knowledge to work with. Put simply, students who don't understand the content across the curriculum have little to write about across the curriculum.

A sad fact of writing exists: The more one knows about a topic, the easier it is to write about the topic. Therefore, prewriting (learning information and organizing information) makes writing easier. As mentioned, many students struggle with writing across the curriculum because they don't have the content knowledge. Of course, on a state and district writing assessment, students don't need content knowledge—they just need to be able to write. Point being: If struggling students don't practice writing across the curriculum because they don't have enough content knowledge, they won't be able to write well on these writing assessments. We must get students writing! So why not get them writing and learning content at the same time? That's what I do.

Scaffolding prewriting is an expedient way to make sure that *all* students are writing. Of course, teachers must find a strategic balance. Everything is a tradeoff in time. For me, it's expedient and strategic to teach writing by reviewing the current learning across the curriculum and create prewriting in the process. Of course, everything in moderation.

Keep in mind that teachers can use formulas and graphic organizers to create prewriting, while at the same time, reinforce understanding of subject matter. In a sense, all formulas and graphic organizers are prewriting, as they provide a structure for a text in advance.

g. Prewriting and Seeing the Whole – Begin Writing with the End in Mind – or Measure Twice, Cut Once

"Measure twice, cut once" is an old proverb—and the message is so valuable and timeless that I imagine this proverb has always existed. It communicates common sense. But in the real world, common sense is not always so common, and many people choose to fail instead of planning for success—or as Benjamin Franklin put it, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

When we create something, whether it be a building, business, painting, or an essay, we should create it twice:

1. We create it in our mind or in a plan. (Prewriting)
2. We create it in actuality. (Writing)

Both times we create, we consider how to put together parts to create an effective whole, and this is why I so frequently use the term "whole composition." Most of the arts use the term *composition*—and in all of them, it refers to ways that parts create a whole. Worth mentioning, in neither stage (above), do we just "create the whole." It's a round-and-round process of wrestling with and fitting together parts to create a whole. It's recursive. It's also a search for and a discovery of the whole that we want to create.

Organized and Natural Paragraphs are a goal, and writers achieve that goal in part by being able to see the whole before they begin writing, and that is primarily a product of prewriting—i.e., learning content and organizing ideas.

Across the curriculum, I constantly teach students to see the whole, and I constantly remind students that we will be writing about this content soon enough, so it is not enough to just learn the facts; we want to understand how the facts fit in with a larger picture. When students know that they are going to be writing about the content they are learning, it forces them to think differently. Students become aware that the goal is to understand. Put simply, we must understand *the whole* in order to write competently and confidently.

Teachers must teach students to see the whole and to think about the whole. If teachers don't do this, their students will not think this way. This *is* something that we can teach and want to teach. This kind of thinking is valuable in everything from reading a book to making an important life decision. For this reason, it's easy to find quotes that relate to this topic in most every subject (business, sports, science, etc.) and in nearly all forms of art. I recently heard an interesting comment about whole compositions as relates to painting on *Antiques Roadshow*:

> William Merritt Chase was quite a personality as a teacher, and there were lots of little adages that he would say that would stick with his students. And one of them was, 'Take all the time you want to paint this painting—take 15 minutes.' Meaning that before you touch your brush to the canvas—in this case, panel—you should know exactly what the composition is going to be and how the painting is going to develop so that once you start painting, you paint quickly. And that is extremely evident in this painting. She's incredibly competent, secure, confident as a painter.
>
> *Appraiser: Betty Krulik – Antiques Roadshow (2016)*

Echoing this sentiment is a quote from the movie Amadeus (1984) that I have long remembered. In one scene, Schikaneder asks Mozart where the finished musical composition is. Mozart points to his head and replies, "Here. It's all right here in my noodle. The rest is just scribbling." When we think about the writing process (Prewriting, Writing, and Rewriting), we want the writing stage to be scribbling. Of course, that's an unrealistic ideal, but the more we can see the whole, and the better we are at prewriting, the more the writing stage is a process of scribbling.

h. Teaching Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Writing Across the Curriculum

Do your students write paragraphs across the curriculum? Of course, they do! And here is an important fact: Across the curriculum is when the truth and the reality of paragraph writing is brought to full light. We cannot ignore *Organized and Natural Paragraphs* across the curriculum, and this is why I have devoted an entire free ebook to ***Teaching Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Writing Across the Curriculum*** (coming very soon).

i. Organized and Natural Paragraph Writing on Writing Assessments

When it comes to writing assessments, Organized and Natural paragraphing is an important goal. Some rubrics actually penalize students for rote-formulaic writing. When students fill in the blanks, it looks like they filled in the blanks, and that may be reflected in the score. Of course, sometimes rote-formulaic writing is better than the alternative. Sometimes the alternative is a complete mess.

Although ORGANIZATION is a topic of discussion right up until test day, I don't want a FORMULA to be an important topic of discussion right before an assessment. I do want students to address the prompt in an organized way, but I don't want them to follow a formula. For one thing, when students are overly focused on formula, they often try to bend the prompt to fit their formula. Sometimes it works—sometimes it doesn't. Another problem arises when students are so focused on formula that they turn on autopilot and mechanically fill in the blanks. While these essays are often highly acceptable, they often don't represent the best writing the student is capable of producing.

Some teachers teach a formula right before a writing assessment in order to guarantee that their students' writing is acceptable on the writing assessment. In contrast to this strategy, the closer I get to a writing assessment, the less I want to be telling students exactly what I want them to do. When it's time for my students to begin writing on the assessment, I don't want them thinking, "Am I doing this correctly? Is this what my teacher told me to do?" I want my students to focus on the writing prompt and to focus on creating something of value using the writing skills they understand and are most comfortable with. Put simply: I plant (teach) concrete writing concepts and techniques in the fall and winter—and harvest writing success in the spring. For optimal writing results, teachers can't plant in the spring and harvest in the spring.

Right before a writing assessment, here is one thing I make sure I do: I have students work with authentic *released* writing-assessment prompts. Here are a few excellent collections of released writing prompts: **Released Writing Prompts for State Writing Assessments**.

I use released writing prompts in two ways:

1. We read, analyze, dissect, break down, and create prewriting using released writing prompts.
2. We use released writing prompts to go through the entire writing process. Furthermore, we analyze and discuss the writing using a rubric.

Truthfully, I'm usually not that worried about the actual *writing* on a writing assessment. For one thing, at that point in time, the writing will be what the writing will be. There is no quick writing fix so late in the game. However, I do worry about how students address the prompt—and I continue to worry about that even while they write. A great deal of time and hard work can fly out the window if students don't dissect and approach the prompt with skill.

We must prepare our students for *whatever* writing prompt they find in front of them. We want our students to be able to address the writing prompt as a whole, to be able to break that whole into parts, and to create a working plan. When it comes to analyzing and breaking down writing prompts, there is no substitute for practice.

j. A Final Note on Organized and Natural Paragraphing

It's no secret that teaching writing is teaching thinking. And it's for this reason that concrete formulas and logical patterns of thought are so useful. But when it's time to write, these formulas and patterns should function as a highly-effective backseat driver. In other words, we don't want our students to compare and contrast just for the sake of it. We want them to compare and contrast with a specific purpose or to make a specific point.

Does what you teach your students about paragraph writing in lessons apply to all of your students writing across the curriculum? Short answers? Science experiment reports? Comprehension questions? If you don't want to create confusion and frustration, you must be able to answer this question—for yourself and for your students.

I think you will find it difficult to create highly-effective writers if you don't accept that paragraphing is an art, with the goal being Organized and Natural paragraphs. It's the goal because it's the truth. If you examine twenty books and periodicals from twenty different sections of the library, you will find that Organized and Natural paragraphs is the *real* truth of paragraphing. It's reality!

If you accept that truth, another less obvious truth is this: It's not that hard to get students to write Organized and Natural paragraphs and whole compositions—that is, if you don't get STUCK. Since teachers can make writing a fundamental part of the school and homework day, we have no reason to stay stuck. Doris Lessing (1919-2013), the Nobel prize-winning author, said, "You can only learn to be a better writer by actually writing." When teachers stay stuck, their students write less.

When I think of Organized and Natural paragraphs, I certainly think about writing across the curriculum. And when I think about writing across the curriculum, I think about every single time a student picks up a pencil—that's writing across the curriculum. To a large degree, we are our habits—and our writing will be a product of our writing habits. Once again, I have an entire free ebook devoted to ***Teaching Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Writing Across the Curriculum*** (coming soon).

But my point here is this: The main goal of writing is communication. But the next goal of writing is to learn the truth about something—or put simply, to learn something. It is through the writing process that we discover that truth, while also helping others understand that truth, and that helps us to understand it even better. This means that while we learn to write by writing, we also learn by writing. That's win-win!

So across the curriculum, we ask questions, we answer questions—and we use the writing process. A sincere utilization of the entire writing process combined with an enthusiastic interest in a topic is not likely to produce uniform or formulaic paragraphs. The outcome will be Organized and Natural Paragraphs. Each paragraph will build on and be an extension of what came before. The paragraphs will be connected and interconnected and form a complete whole.

Most professional writing contains paragraphs that vary in length. But more importantly, the types of paragraphs vary, and the approaches to the topic vary. The paragraphs ask and answer different questions and different types of questions, yet, all of the paragraphs contribute appropriately, effectively, and naturally to the whole. This varied paragraph style is the result of telling all that is important and interesting about a topic, and omitting that which is neither. This writing ability comes

naturally to some students, but for the majority, they develop it through instruction and a frequent application of the writing process.

Stage 9: Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style

What's the Short and Lively style? It's exactly what it sounds like. The paragraphs are short and the paragraphs are lively. The best Short and Lively writing often uses highly-effective sentence structure and includes all those little transitional phrases that make writing flow. The best Short and Lively writers seem to have a feel for language beyond rules.

I'm not sure that students need to master this "Short and Lively" style of paragraph writing, but teachers must address it and discuss it because it is extremely common and many excellent writers use it. We tend to find this short and lively style of paragraph writing in children's books, newspapers, magazines, popular fiction, internet writing, and advertisements. Having said that, even textbooks and academic expository writing use the Short and Lively style in certain sections from time to time.

This Short and Lively style is common in many types of short compositions. If a piece of writing does not fit into a single paragraph, the next step up is the Short and Lively style. Just yesterday, I came across President Ronald Reagan's (1911-2004) final open letter to the world, in which he informed the world that he had Alzheimer's disease. Because I always pay attention to paragraphing style in REAL WRITING, I quickly noticed that President Reagan had used a Short and Lively paragraphing style. The 8-paragraph letter averaged just 2.5 sentences per paragraph (1/1/4/3/4/3/2/2 = 20/8 = 2.5 sentences).

President Reagan certainly could have included more detail and more elaboration in every single one of those paragraphs. In fact, I'm sure many well-meaning writing teachers would have told him to do so. After all, Alzheimer's disease is an important enough topic to merit more elaboration, and traditional paragraph theory dictates that the paragraphs should be longer.

Although President Reagan could have written longer paragraphs, he chose not to. Apparently, he did not feel the occasion warranted it or that his reader would want him to. He made his points clear, but he kept his letter Short and Lively. This is how the man known as "The Great Communicator" chose to compose his final message to the world.

One may think that this style of paragraphing is a product of our modern age, which some say has created a short attention span. Others may believe it is a product of a general, tragic decline in the English language. But it's not. I've found plenty of examples of this kind of writing dating back well over 100 years. In fact, I began to appreciate this short and lively style of paragraphing more fully

when I analyzed two old books written by Olive Thorne Miller: *The Children's Book Of Birds – Book 1* (1899) and *Book 2* (1901).

As the titles indicate, Ms. Miller wrote these two expository books for children. The first thing I noticed about Miller's style of paragraphing was that I liked it, and that prompted me to examine it more closely. In the writing samples I examined, *Book 1* has an average paragraph length of 2.5 sentences, and *Book 2* has an average paragraph length of 3.94 sentences. The second thing I noticed about Miller's paragraphing style was that she skillfully navigated from a very short style for younger children in *Book 1* to a somewhat longer style for older children in *Book 2*.

It's possible that I took notice of Miller's short and lively style because at the time I had been studying a number of famous copywriters who all vehemently declared that if a writer wished to keep the reader reading, the writer must keep the paragraphs short. Many professional copywriters believe that an average of 2.5 sentences per paragraph is a bit on the long side. These professionals know that people don't like to read long paragraphs. They also know that if a copywriter doesn't paragraph for the reader—it's less effective and it costs people money.

But how does all this relate to our students' academic writing? Well, as I mentioned at the beginning of this ebook, my analysis of real student writing on real student writing assessments is a major part of this ebook. When I examined the highest scoring high-school writing samples from state writing assessments, two styles emerged:

- #9 Short and Lively Style
- #10 Academic Style

Put simply, some highly-effective student writers use the Short and Lively style—and score well. Once again, I don't know that we must teach students to write this way. In fact, I don't know if it can be taught explicitly. The question is whether we should deride it and discourage it even when it is effective and appropriate.

Worth mentioning, this Short and Lively paragraph style works better with short compositions. Long compositions seem to require longer paragraphs. Looking back at Miller's two books, everything in *Book 1* is shorter in comparison with *Book 2*, and this is why the paragraphs in *Book 1* are shorter than the paragraphs in *Book 2*.

Students primarily write short whole compositions. So why have I found so much paragraph instruction that teaches elementary school students to write paragraphs as long as 10-16 sentences? If we teach students to write paragraphs that are 10-16 sentences long, what happens when it's time to write a short composition, for example, on a writing assessment or in daily writing across the curriculum? The outcome will be one of two things: 1) unparagraphed writing, or 2) poorly paragraphed writing.

This type of long-paragraph instruction is not incorrect or without value, as it does teach some things that are true about paragraphs—but if your goal is to improve your students' writing, it's not an effective use of class time. Of course, we may still want to introduce students to these types of long paragraphs and discuss them. As noted elsewhere, these long paragraphs usually contain logical breaks where a writer might choose to divide the paragraphs and create more paragraphs. So, teachers can teach some important paragraph concepts by analyzing these long paragraphs.

But when teachers make students write these long paragraphs in practice, and then require them to write a well-structured short composition for an important grade, it causes problems and confusion. We have a mismatch. Of course, if your students only write long multi-page whole compositions, this won't be such a big problem.

Stage 10: Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style: Organized, Fully Developed, Natural Paragraph Style

As I mentioned before, when I examined the highest scoring high-school writing samples from state writing assessments, two styles emerged:

- #9 Short and Lively Style
- #10 Academic Style

A few of the highest scoring high school writing samples stood out as different from all the other papers in all the other grades. The ideas presented were deep, and the writers had a strong conviction in those deep ideas. Furthermore, the writers developed each of their deep ideas using proof and explanation. Although the length of the paragraphs varied somewhat, it was clear that the writers had developed quite effectively all of the main ideas.

It was interesting to place these high-scoring Academic compositions next to the high-scoring Short and Lively compositions. Both styles were effective. But when I considered how effective the styles might be in a significantly longer essay, report, or research paper, the Academic style is the clear winner. Why? Because it handles deeper, more profound ideas more effectively and more seriously—and that's what long academic essays, reports, and research papers need.

The Short and Lively paragraph style seems to glide along the surface of a topic and makes for a highly enjoyable read. With the Short and Lively style, the writer could choose to combine a number of the paragraphs, but the ideas don't require it. In contrast, what I noticed about the academic style was that each paragraph was a short mini-essay, but not an isolated mini-essay. Each paragraph built on what came before and related to the other body paragraphs.

Section C: The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery: The Short Version

Section C: The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery: The Short Version

Teachers can use the following ***8-page short version*** of "The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery" to refresh their memory of the complete model. This Short Version is not just a copy and paste from the Long Version. While this Short Version is a quick review of the Ten Stages, I also provide commentary on the Ten Stages as relates to two types of student writing across the curriculum: 1) Short Answers, and 2) Whole Compositions.

My goal with this section is to help teachers think about their writing expectations and plans for their students in regards to paragraph and multi-paragraph writing—both with Short Answers and Whole Compositions—and across the curriculum and on state writing assessments.

But First: Relating The Ten Stages to Whole Compositions and Short Answers Across the Curriculum

I want to have a plan (at least a mental plan) for teaching writing every time my students pick up their pencils. This is how we communicate clear expectations. However, sometimes I also leave things somewhat open-ended and let students produce what they feel is quality work. The goal of being a writer is to *WOW* your reader. It's inspiring for the entire class when some students go the extra mile and *WOW* the reader and create something more valuable than anyone had expected. It let's all of us know what's possible and raises the standards for everyone.

Although we have many types of student writing, in the following section, I will be discussing two. When it comes to teaching paragraph and multi-paragraph writing (i.e., The Ten Stages), teachers need to be clear on what's possible and what's expected with these two types of writing:

1. Whole Compositions – Four Components or Requirements of a Whole Composition
2. Short Answers
   - 2.1 Short Answers and Assessments
   - 2.2 Short Answers Across the Curriculum
   - 2.3 Short Answer Patterns and Formulas

1. Whole Compositions: Whether it's a classroom writing assignment or a state writing assessment, a whole composition is always a whole composition. A whole composition is always more than just a long piece of writing, and this is why in the classroom, whole compositions should not happen by accident. Of course, I'm happy if I ask for a short answer and a student brings me a

piece of writing that meets the requirements of a whole composition. But if a long piece of writing does not meet the requirements of a whole composition, then it is a long short answer or freewriting (which is prewriting).

Here are the Four Components or Requirements of a Whole Composition:

1. **Two Levels of Beginning, Middle, and Ending:** A whole composition has a beginning, middle, and ending, and the paragraphs have or have a feeling of beginning, middle, and ending.
2. **Uses the Writing Process:** Whole compositions require the writing process. In my mind, a long piece of freewriting is prewriting. Therefore, I don't want to read any whole composition that does not have prewriting attached to it and signs of basic editing or revision.
3. **Contains an Introduction and Conclusion:** Expository and argument whole compositions require a separate introduction and conclusion. Narrative stories require a beginning.
4. **Clear Requirements:** With whole compositions, the teacher makes the minimum requirements clear and concrete. Students know how much to write, and have a clear idea of what is acceptable and unacceptable. In my class, students are always free to *WOW* the reader.

Note: I believe in have students write more whole compositions quickly, while always impressing upon students that we always have a goal of improving upon our previous attempts. Students like to learn writing this way! We are always moving forward—and we are always learning content!

2. Short Answers: In the following "Short Version of the Ten Stages," I relate or apply the Ten Stages to Short Answers. When we consider short answers across the curriculum, the topic is too large to provide universal rules. Largely, teachers decide what kind of short answers they want given the time available and the circumstances.

Short Answers are the largest lost-opportunity for teaching writing across the curriculum. (Be sure to read my free ***Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum*** ebook—coming soon.) My goal here is to get teachers thinking about developing appropriate short-answer paragraph and multi-paragraph expectations and plans for their students across the curriculum. We have three short-answer categories to consider:

2.1) Assessments: A Constructed Response short answer on a state or district assessment is objective and concrete. In fact, most states release rubrics, sample questions, and exemplars that communicate exactly what is required to score high. For this reason, teachers and students know what the target is, and plenty of strategies and formulas exist that can help teachers help their students hit that target. That's objective and concrete! Keep in mind that we have two types of

constructed response: Brief Constructed Response (e.g., 8 minutes), and Extended Constructed Response (e.g., 15 minutes).

2.2) Short Answers Across the Curriculum: Across the curriculum, short answers are more complicated than they are on assessments. For both teachers and students, every short answer across the curriculum involves a tradeoff of time, energy, and focus. Teachers must be strategic and consider their goals and their purpose for each assignment. Teachers and textbooks primarily use Short Answers to elicit and evaluate students' answers, but they also use them for student reflection and for other types of *writing to learn*.

Here are a few things teachers might consider when thinking about short answers across the curriculum. As you can see, it's quite a long list. This is why we have no universal rules for short answers across the curriculum, and teachers need to take charge of their short-answer requirements and expectations.

a) length and complexity of the assignment
b) the time required and frequency of the assignments
c) elementary vs. middle school vs. high school
d) daily writing across the curriculum vs. assessing learning
e) teaching writing vs. grading for correct answers vs. writing to learn
f) independent writing vs. writing connected to instruction vs. guided writing
g) comprehension questions vs. checking for understanding vs. constructed response in the classroom vs. writing practice
h) Teachers in different grades have different approaches, beliefs, classroom management systems, time management systems, district requirements, state requirements, etc.
i) Student populations – high achieving vs. low achieving vs. ELL vs. special education vs. GATE vs. Advanced Placement etc.

2.3) Short Answer Patterns and Formulas: Teachers have a variety of patterns, formulas, and strategies available to teach students to answer short answers. When we teach short answer writing, we are often teaching paragraph writing at the same time.

1. RACE: Restate, Answer, Cite, and Explain
2. RAP: Restate, Answer, and Prove
3. RAPS: Restate, Answer, Provide Proof/Details, and Sum It Up.
4. ACE: Answer, Cite, and Expand
5. ACES: Answer, Cite, Explain, and Sum Up

All of these patterns are quite similar to PPE (Point, Proof, and Explanation) and all of the other "Point Patterns". Keep in mind that these patterns and formulas are tools, and one size does not fit all. As an example, a Brief Constructed Response (8 minutes) will require a different type of answer than an Extended Constructed Response (15 minutes) or a large Extended Constructed Response (180 minutes). Once again, formulas and patterns are effective tools, but they do not replace the skill of thinking, analyzing, and writing.

The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery: The Short Version

Stage 1: Single Short Paragraph – Short and Problematic: It takes courage and strength to be a beginner, as we will face times when others see that we are less than perfect. But if we ever wish to get anywhere—begin we must! Thousands of years ago, Lao Tzu (604 BC - 531 BC) observed, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." And then after we begin, we must continue moving forward! Yes, we will certainly face trials and tribulations, which we must overcome. And we will overcome them if we persist—and don't give up!

Beginning writers often begin their writing career by creating Short and Problematic paragraphs. However, since they are beginners, it is to be expected. It becomes a significantly larger problem when students get stuck at this stage. We don't want beginning writers to become struggling and reluctant writers.

- **Short Answers:** Admittedly, giving correct answers is an important part of school. And students can give "correct answers" by writing a few problematic sentences—that is, they can write a short and problematic paragraph. But here is the question: Is a correct answer all we care about? If teachers and students only care about a correct answer, and not how the students write the correct answer, Short and Problematic paragraphs become a habit.
- **Whole Compositions:** On state writing assessments, students typically have 40-60 minutes to write a whole composition. With all that time, some students produce just a single Short and Problematic paragraph. Even in third grade, that's a problem—a big problem.

Stage 2: Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written: Many teachers spend a great deal of time teaching students how to write a single isolated paragraph. Teachers then expect students to use that isolated paragraph as a building block to create multi-paragraph writing. Sometimes this works, but sometimes it doesn't—and for a good reason. Real writing is more complicated than the building block theory suggests. If all it took to be an effective writer were the ability to write just one good paragraph, we would all be famous authors. This may be why modern teaching-writing theory doesn't even mention the "one good paragraph theory."

- **Short Answers:** A single well-written paragraph is often an excellent way to answer a short-answer question. Of course, the short answer must be able to fit inside of a single paragraph, which means the answer must be about just one thing. The paragraph must have unity.

  Here is what complicates the matter: Two reasons or two examples etc. can fit inside of a single paragraph, or they can fit inside of two paragraphs. Furthermore, a reason with proof and

explanation can fit inside of a single paragraph or two paragraphs, or possibly three paragraphs. I've examined high-scoring Brief Constructed Response exemplars that students wrote as a single paragraph and others that students divided with skill. Point being, students should always consider that it might be better to end the current paragraph and begin a new paragraph. Two short or medium-sized paragraphs may be more effective than a single well-written isolated paragraph.

- **Whole Compositions:** A single well-written paragraph is rarely a whole composition. Unfortunately, many students struggle to write more than a single paragraph when they only learn how to write a single paragraph. This fact becomes apparent at the most inopportune times—e.g., a state writing assessment.

  I find that students understand all paragraphs better when they understand how to write a basic multi-paragraph composition. Reason being, paragraphs are both a whole and a part of a whole. That's the truth about paragraphs.

Stage 3: Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consciousness: Stream of Consciousness writing is a series of unorganized or random thoughts that don't make specific points or concepts clear. The reader is left thinking, "What's the point?" This kind of writing may be the result of a student's ineffective or non-existent use of the writing process, which may be caused by carelessness, laziness, or lack of understanding. But a bigger problem exists when the writing is the result of an incorrect belief structure about writing and the writing process.

The good news is that these stream-of-consciousness students are willing to write—these students just need to see the light. These students often believe that ideas flow from their brain onto the page in an organized way without any focused effort. But this is not true. At the very least, a writer must think deeply about a subject and pause-and-plan as they write if they hope to create a half-decent piece of writing. Of course, our best writing always comes from a process of prewriting, writing, and rewriting.

- **Short Answers:** Sometimes students believe that the more they write, the higher the grade they will receive. When students are not sure of the correct answer, they may write down everything that is in their brain hoping that something they say will be the correct answer.

- **Whole Compositions:** With whole compositions (and in general), stream-of-consciousness writers fall into two categories:

  A. **Overwhelmed Writers:** Independent writing assignments overwhelm some students, and this causes many of the writing rules they know to fly right out the window. In short, these

students know the rules—they know better—but under pressure or in a hurry, they forget to stop and think about the rules. They just write!

B. **Overconfident Writers:** Some students are so confident in their writing skills, and they believe that their message is so important that they lose sight of the fact that they are not following any of the writing rules they know. Not only do these students write whatever pops into their head, but also they truly believe it is good writing. These students are in a state of denial and delusion, and when they snap out of it, they look at their old writing and wonder, "What was I doing? What was I thinking? I can't even read this!"

Sometimes these stream-of-consciousness writers need to learn or re-learn writing skills; but other times, nothing will change until the student drops the belief that this kind of writing is good writing. I've observed this change happen in a single moment. And after the change, the student looks like a completely different person when writing. The student's body language changes from that of a carefree and careless writer into that of a serious, cautious, and reflective writer. Now the student is truly ready to begin to improve his or her writing.

Stage 4: Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs: Sometimes all that is missing from a long passage of unparagraphed text is the indents. Students talk about one thing ➡ they finish it ➡ then they talk about something else. These students are only missing one little step: Students talk about one thing ➡ they finish it ➡ <u>they indent</u> ➡ then they talk about something else.

These students don't see or realize that they have logical breaks hidden in their text where they can indent. Worth mentioning, these types of hidden paragraphs may not be perfect paragraphs. After all, the students didn't plan or create the paragraphs with intent. Still, the paragraph breaks exist, and a paragraphed text is always easier to read than an unparagraphed text.

- **Short Answers:** Short answers can be quite effective when written as a single long paragraph. In fact, a writer should only divide a short answer if they are quite sure that it is an improvement. However, well-written long paragraphs usually have logical breaks where the writer can divide the paragraph into more paragraphs. The purpose of creating paragraphs is to help the reader understand the text, so writers must use good judgment in deciding if their short answers need a paragraph break. Will a paragraph break help make things clear for the reader? Is the writer discussing two distinct and separate topics?

- **Whole Compositions:** Whole compositions are easier to read when the writer divides the text into paragraphs. One aspect of teaching writing is helping students find the paragraph breaks in their unparagraphed text. Even if the paragraph divisions are less than perfect, it will still be easier to read than unparagraphed text. We often have more than one way to paragraph a whole composition, and different people will paragraph it differently.

Stage 5: Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs: Random Paragraphs are paragraphs that the writer did not divide using logical breaks or with a consistent paragraph style. Students see that the books they read are divided into paragraphs, so students know that they too should divide their text into paragraphs. But some students divide their text into paragraphs when they don't really understand paragraphs, and in the process, they create random paragraphs.

- **Short Answers:** Why would a student randomly paragraph a short answer? After all, short answers often fit into a single paragraph just fine. It's likely that the student has read a great deal of text written in the Short and Lively paragraph style, and the student is trying to imitate that. However, short answers are often more effective and more powerful when written as a single paragraph. Breaking up a piece of writing that works as a single paragraph may weaken it, and breaking it up randomly damages the text.

- **Whole Compositions:** If we remove the indents from a professionally written text, different people will re-paragraph it differently. The point being that there may be more than one effective way to paragraph a text. But this does not mean that the paragraphs are random. In fact, all effective paragraphs are the result of a logical division, and every effective paragraph has unity and coherence. I'm sure that many skilled and experienced writers create paragraphs based on a feeling of beginning, middle, and ending, without really thinking about the logic of their paragraph breaks. However, if the paragraphs are effective, they are not random.

Stage 6: Multi-Paragraph – Organized but Uneven Paragraphs: Paragraphs are supposed to vary, but not vary unnaturally. These Organized but Uneven paragraphs are often a result of poor planning or poor time management. Teachers and students alike can use the best paragraph in a composition as a model for comparison to set a standard of quality for the other paragraphs.

- **Short Answers:** Organized but Uneven paragraphs are not a big problem in classroom short answers. After all, we must be pragmatic across the curriculum. The goal of a short answer across the curriculum is not necessarily to create excellent paragraphs. But we don't want to create paragraphs with poor unity! Poor unity confuses the reader, which is why it may still be effective in a short answer to divide a text unevenly, even if it creates Organized but Uneven paragraphs.

  Paragraphs in a short answer can be uneven, but the writer must still divide the paragraphs using some type of logic. In a short answer, students shouldn't feel the need to write more just to make the paragraphs even. Remember, with short answers, the main focus is usually on giving a correct answer. Of course, if the short answer is part of a writing assessment, Organized but Uneven paragraphing is more of a problem.

- **Whole Compositions:** Organized and Uneven paragraphs in whole compositions are often a result of poor planning and poor time management. Organized and Uneven paragraphing falls into three categories: 1) Front Weighted, 2) Middle Weighted, and 3) End Weighted. The writer can fix this paragraphing problem in revision, which is easy on a computer, but more difficult in a hand-written text. Usually, the entire piece of writing will be significantly better if the writer improves, combines, or eliminates the weakest paragraphs. In a sense, a whole composition is only as strong as its weakest paragraph, especially if that paragraph is at the beginning or end of the whole composition.

Stage 7: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Formulaic Paragraph Style:

Patterns and formulas are an important and effective tool for teaching paragraph and multi-paragraph writing. Without them, many students never learn to master effective organization in writing. Unfortunately, teachers often approach them dogmatically and then overuse them.

An important objective in teaching writing is to help students learn how to search for, discover, and communicate important truths. To a large degree, this is also the point of an education. Of course, no universal formula exists for communicating the truth of a topic, and this is why we must use formulas as teaching tools and organizational tools and not hold them up as laws of effective writing.

- **Short Answers:** If students answer a specific question correctly, Organized and Formulaic paragraphs are not usually a problem. In fact, one or more well-structured formulaic paragraphs that answer the question correctly may be an excellent outcome. But if a writer truly focuses on giving the best answer possible, the outcome is more likely to be Organized and Natural, but not formulaic. Worth mentioning, short answers offer an excellent opportunity for teachers to teach or reinforce paragraph patterns and formulas across the curriculum, in which case, the desired outcome will be formulaic.

- **Whole Compositions:** Everything that relates to organization in paragraphs and whole compositions can be explained using patterns and formulas. In other words, we can reverse engineer a piece of writing and explain its structure using patterns and formulas. However, when we write, we don't want our writing to look formulaic on the surface. We want to fall back on patterns and formulas as a foundation for organizing our writing—but we also want to communicate what is most important and most interesting about our topic, and that probably won't match any one formula.

  Paragraph and whole-composition patterns and formulas focus primarily on two Traits: 1) Ideas, and 2) Organization. So, even if we follow a formula to a T, we can still rise above formulaic writing by using a variety of literary techniques, along with an effective use of the other four traits: 3) Sentence Fluency, 4) Voice, 5) Conventions and 6) Word Choice.

Stage 8: Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural Paragraph Style: We use patterns and formulas to help us reach this goal: An Organized and Natural Paragraph Style.

- **Short Answers:** Question #1: What is the correct answer? Question #2: How will I organize that correct answer so that others will understand it? Beyond giving the correct answer, students must still choose what belongs in that correct answer and leave out that which does not belong. And they need to organize it all.

  With short answers across the curriculum, students often figure out part of their answer as they write, which means they must pay special attention to how they construct their paragraphs and when they need to begin a new paragraph. Short answers often fit into a single paragraph, but often, the reader will understand that single paragraph better if the writer divides it into two or more paragraphs.

- **Whole Compositions:** Open up a few different newspapers, magazines, textbooks, encyclopedias, and stories and compare the paragraphs. Now find similar materials for a significantly different grade level or audience and compare the paragraphs. You will find that there is not just one way to create paragraphs. In fact, most published writing addresses a specific audience and uses Organized and Natural paragraphs to create an Organized and Natural whole composition for that audience.

  All excellent paragraphs and whole compositions have Unity and Coherence. Beyond that, there are no clear rules—just effective guidelines, patterns, and formulas that help writers organize their writing.

  The foundation of all paragraphs and whole compositions is asking and answering a single question. Each paragraph and each whole composition asks and answers a single question. And in a whole composition, all of the paragraphs add up to and answer the single question that the whole composition asks and answers.

  The first step in creating Organized and Natural paragraphs is this: Understand your subject. After that, ask this one question: What do I want to say about my subject? That one question opens up the floodgates for a mighty river of questions: What's important? What's interesting? What does my reader need to know? What's my main message? We must write down all of our questions and answers and ideas. As we progress, we must begin to organize all of these thoughts into a tentative or working plan. By the way, we call all of this kind of work *prewriting*.

  Note: A sound understanding of patterns and formulas helps writers sort through this maze of ideas and organize their writing. A great place for a writer to begin the process of organizing his or her ideas is to think about the original formula—beginning, middle, and ending.

Organized and Natural paragraphs are a product of writers who put in the time to figure out an important message that they need to communicate. Once again, this happens in three steps:

Step 1: Understand your subject.

Step 2: Figure out what you want to say (or at least what you think you want to say) about your subject. Be sure to ask questions and write down ideas.

Step 3: Continue forward using the writing process: Prewrite, Write, and Rewrite.

Stage 9: Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Paragraph Style: The Short and Lively paragraph style is the writing world's dirty little secret. No one wants to discuss it—because there are no clear rules. Created without skill or judgment, the paragraphs may look like unskilled or Random paragraphs. But used effectively and for the right audience, the Short and Lively Paragraph Style is fun to read.

- **Short Answers:** Writing is a series of choices and decisions. In the end, the readers decide if they like the choices and decisions that the writer has made. Although we have many so-called paragraph rules, technically correct paragraphs require only two things: 1) Unity, and 2) Coherence.

  If a short answer has two distinct parts, the writer must do one of two things: 1) Create a main idea or topic sentence that unifies the two distant parts, or 2) Divide the answer into two paragraphs. The outcome of this second choice may be Short and Lively paragraphs.

- **Whole Compositions:** A surprisingly large amount of professionally published text is written in a Short and Lively paragraph style. What is a Short and Lively style? A Short and Lively paragraph style tends to average around 2.5 – 3.5 sentences per paragraph. Some paragraphs are longer and some are shorter, but they always stay somewhat close to the mean, which is the average paragraph length.

  Where do we find these Short and Lively paragraphs? Well, many short compositions use this style, so they are all around us. We frequently find the Short and Lively paragraph style in newspapers, advertisements, magazines, internet writing, popular fiction, and children's books.

  Furthermore, when I examined the highest-scoring high-school writing samples from state writing assessments, two styles emerged. This Short and Lively style was one of them. How can this be? Well, on state writing assessments, students write short whole compositions. And the Short and Lively paragraph style is effective in short whole compositions.

  The Short and Lively paragraph style is a bit of an art. The divisions are all logical, and the paragraphs all have Unity and Coherence, but they don't seem to follow many of the traditional paragraph rules. An effective Short and Lively style is often the product of a skilled or natural

writer—i.e., a writer who just "gets it." The paragraphs are not random, and they do require good judgment. Worth mentioning, these Short and Lively paragraph writers may still struggle with creating effective academic paragraphs, which require substance over style.

Stage 10: Multi-Paragraph – Academic Paragraph Style: An Academic paragraph style uses paragraphs that are organized, fully developed, and natural. The key here is that the writer digs deep to discover profound academic ideas and then fully supports or proves them.

- **Short Answers:** Short answers often fit into a single paragraph, and that paragraph might be a single large paragraph. That single large paragraph, if correctly written, will likely be a fine academic paragraph. It will have unity, coherence, and emphasis, and it will prove a single important point or make one concept very clear. All of the ideas in the paragraph will connect, but when examined closely, one will find that the paragraph is composed of several CHUNKS of related ideas. A Short and Lively paragraph writer might choose to break that paragraph into two or more paragraphs on the lines of those CHUNKS, but an academic writer knows they are making a single point, so they choose not to weaken the message by dividing. The academic writer wants the reader to read and understand the paragraph and the main idea as a whole.

  Of course, the academic short-answer writer may need two or more academic paragraphs to provide a complete answer, and in the process, the writer will create a rather substantial piece of writing. To improve the flow, a skilled short-answer writer may (knowingly or unknowingly) include a single sentence at the beginning and end that serves as a merged introduction and a merged conclusion respectively.

- **Whole Compositions:** Textbooks are a great place to learn about academic paragraphing style. In reality, most textbooks use an Organized and Natural paragraph style. Many textbooks even have brief sections that use a Short and Lively paragraph style. Still, in nearly all textbooks you will find a high percentage of large paragraphs that develop important ideas.

  In textbooks, grade by grade, the average paragraph length becomes longer and longer. And grade by grade, the ideas become deeper and more complex. Deep and complex ideas require detailed and concrete proof or explanation, which is why the paragraphs become longer and longer. Surprisingly, most textbooks use a rather short average paragraph length. Even high school textbooks contain few paragraphs that are over ten sentences long, and most are much shorter.

  Academic writing is primarily argument or expository text, and much of this writing requires research. Of course, some types of narrative writing are academic in nature, and both argument and expository text can include narrative passages or even use narrative structure.

An academic paragraph style is primarily a matter of ideas and logic. Here are seven of the more important academic writing terms that relate to ideas and logic: controlling idea, claim, thesis, proof, evidence, support, and explanation. An academic writer should ask this question: Can I explain the structure of my paragraph using those seven academic terms? In academic writing, the writer must make everything clear and concrete, which means that the writer must include everything that is necessary to prove his or her case or to make the information academically clear. It's not just about good writing—it's about ideas, proof, support, and logic.

In contrast, the Short and Lively paragraph style tends to glide along the surface of a topic. It doesn't bog the reader down with too many concrete details or too much irrefutable evidence—and this is why it is so enjoyable to read. Put simply, the reader doesn't need to think quite so hard. Keep in mind that writers can choose to reuse or expand on a piece of writing that they wrote in the Short and Lively paragraph style to create a fully-developed Academic piece of writing.

We have three techniques for transforming the Short and Living paragraph style to Academic paragraph style:

1. Add in additional support, proof, elaboration, or explanation.
2. Add appropriate topic sentences and concluding sentences.
3. Combine related paragraphs.

Section D: The Ten Stages Checklists

I've included four different checklists:

1. Author Evaluation Checklist or Piece of Writing Evaluation Checklist #1
2. Author Evaluation Checklist or Piece of Writing Evaluation Checklist #2
3. Self-Evaluation Checklist
4. The Writer's Paragraphing Style Checklist/Peer-Evaluation Checklist

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay?

Put simply, it works.

The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery Checklist

Name of Author or Piece of Writing	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
1.										
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The Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery Checklist

Name of Author or Piece of Writing	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Name of Author or Piece of Writing	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Name of Author or Piece of Writing	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10

	Name:		Name:
	I Rate My Paragraphing Style		I Rate My Paragraphing Style
	1. Single Short Paragraph – Short & Problematic		1. Single Short Paragraph – Short & Problematic
	2. Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written		2. Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written
	3. Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consc.		3. Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consc.
	4. Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs		4. Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs
	5. Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs		5. Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs
	6. Multi-Paragraph – Organized but Uneven		6. Multi-Paragraph – Organized but Uneven
	7. Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Formulaic		7. Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Formulaic
	8. Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural		8. Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural
	9. Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style		9. Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style
	10. Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style		10. Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style
	Name:		Name:
	I Rate My Paragraphing Style		I Rate My Paragraphing Style
	1. Single Short Paragraph – Short & Problematic		1. Single Short Paragraph – Short & Problematic
	2. Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written		2. Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written
	3. Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consc.		3. Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consc.
	4. Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs		4. Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs
	5. Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs		5. Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs
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	8. Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural		8. Multi-Paragraph – Organized and Natural
	9. Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style		9. Multi-Paragraph – Short and Lively Style
	10. Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style		10. Multi-Paragraph – Academic Style

	Name:		Name:
	The Writer's Paragraphing Style		The Writer's Paragraphing Style
	1. Single Short Paragraph – Short & Problematic		1. Single Short Paragraph – Short & Problematic
	2. Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written		2. Single Short Paragraph – Well-Written
	3. Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consc.		3. Single Long Paragraph – Stream of Consc.
	4. Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs		4. Single Long Paragraph – Hidden Paragraphs
	5. Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs		5. Multi-Paragraph – Random Paragraphs
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Have you checked out "Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay" yet?

- ✓ **Fast!**
- ✓ **Effective!**
- ✓ **Foundation!**
- ✓ **Framework!**
- ✓ **Methodology!**
- ✓ **Beginning Writers!**
- ✓ **Struggling Writers!**
- ✓ **Remediation!**
- ✓ **Review!**

It's the missing piece of the puzzle that makes everything else you teach about writing stick! It provides the foundation and framework you need to power through the "Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Writing"! Don't stay stuck!