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ALLISON MARCHETTI • REBEKAH O'DELL

A Teacher's Guide to

# Mentor Texts

GRADES 6–12

Series Editor **Katie Wood Ray**

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PORTSMOUTH, NH

## Heinemann

145 Maplewood Avenue, Suite 300  
Portsmouth, NH 03801  
[www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com)

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Marchetti, Allison, author. | O'Dell, Rebekah, author.

Title: A teacher's guide to mentor texts / Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell.

Description: Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann Publishing, 2021. | Series: Classroom essentials | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020047096 | ISBN 9780325120034

Subjects: LCSH: English language—Composition and exercises—Study and teaching (Secondary) | Mentor texts (Language arts).

Classification: LCC LB1631 .M385477 2021 | DDC 428.0071/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020047096>

**Editors:** Katie Wood Ray and Holly Kim Price

**Production:** Sean Moreau

**Videography:** Sherry Day, Joanne Smith, and Paul Tomasyan

**Cover and interior designs, typesetting:** Vita Lane

**Manufacturing:** Val Cooper

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

1 2 3 4 5 CGB 25 24 23 22 21

April 2021 Printing

For more information about this Heinemann resource,  
visit <https://www.heinemann.com/products/e12003.aspx>.

**For KWR,  
our true guide.**

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# About the Online Resources in This Book

The Online Resources for *A Teacher's Guide to Mentor Texts* include a variety of helpful forms and documents for you to utilize with your students as they work with mentor texts.

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 2-1**

Five supports for reading like writers

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 3-1**

Blank chart for craft study across the week

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 3-2**

All the mentor text examples from the book, plus more, organized and ready for you to use in your own classroom

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 3-3**

A blank notebook chart for craft study

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 3-4**

Student directions for making craft lookbooks

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 4-1**

A complete text annotated for structure

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 4-2**

A blank teacher's craftbook for you to collect and organize your own mentor text examples

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 6-1A-C**

All you need for a genre study of op-ed writing in your classroom: three complete texts, with and without craft annotations, and a blank chart for recording musts and mights

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 6-2**

A helpful template for planning a whole unit with mentor texts

## **ONLINE RESOURCE 6-3**

A helpful template for planning an instruction lesson with mentor texts

- VIDEO 1-1** Welcome, Reader.
- VIDEO 2-1** Reading Like a Writer: A Poem
- VIDEO 2-2** Introducing Students to a Different Way of Reading
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- VIDEO 6-4** Teaching Through Modeling
- VIDEO 6-5** Teaching Through Inquiry



Look for this arrow throughout the book for Online Resources that can be downloaded. See page xi for instructions on how to access the Online Resources.



Additionally, you will find seventeen video clips of Allison and Rebekah teaching with mentor texts.



# How to Access the Online Resources and Videos

To access the Online Resources for *A Teacher's Guide to Mentor Texts*:

1. Go to **<http://hein.pub/MentorTexts-login>**.
2. Log in with your username and password. If you do not already have an account with Heinemann, you will need to create an account.
3. On the Welcome page, choose **“Click here to register an Online Resource.”**
4. Register your product by entering the code **XXXXXX** (be sure to read and check the acknowledgment box under the keycode).
5. Once you have registered your product, it will appear alphabetically in your account list of **My Online Resources**.


**Note:** When returning to Heinemann.com to access your previously registered products, simply log into your Heinemann account and click on **“View my registered Online Resources.”**



 chapter one

WHY  
Mentor  
Texts?

sets up a  
question-  
and-answer  
structure





**VIDEO 1-1**

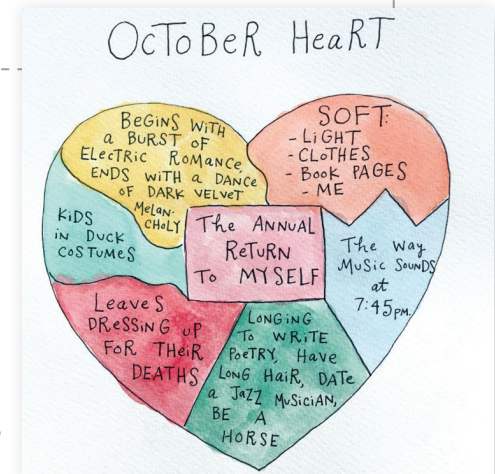
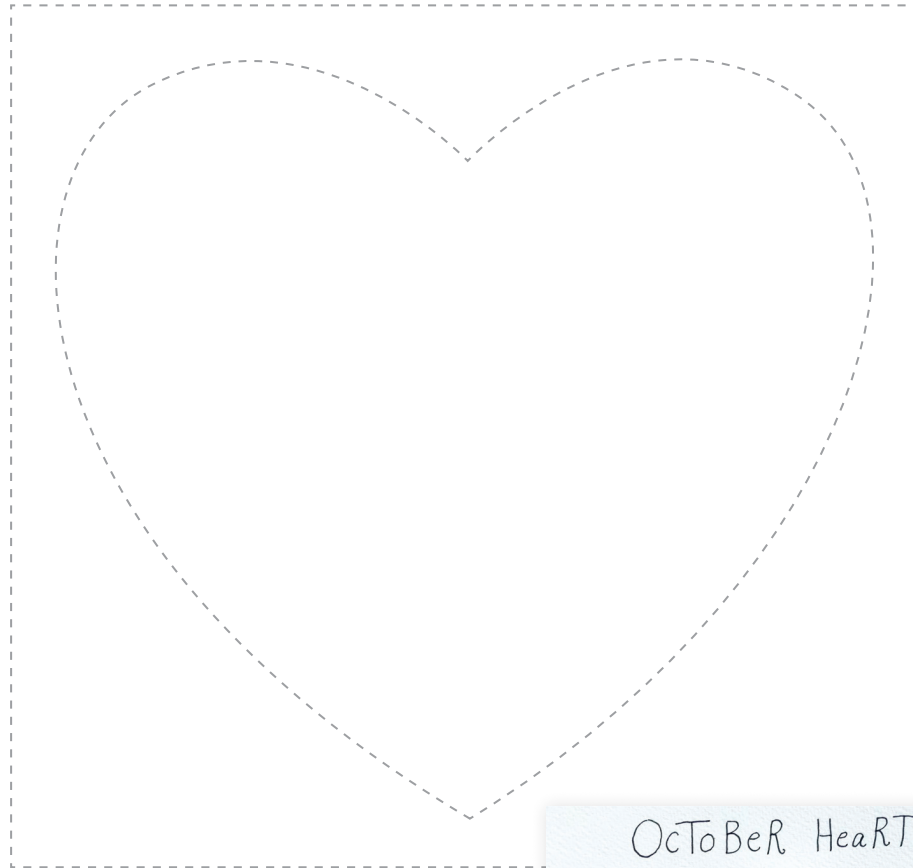
Welcome, Reader.

Welcome, writing teacher friend! We're guessing you're here because you want to help your students become stronger writers, and here's the guarantee we can confidently make: studying mentor texts will elevate your students' writing. In these pages, we're going to show you how, but before we get going, let's try a little mentor-text study ourselves with Mari Andrew's "October Heart."

In this text, Andrew is exploring what is in her heart one October. Look closely. What do you notice? What strikes you about the visual elements—color, shape, texture? What about word choice—do you notice any patterns?

Using her heart as a guide, think about what's in your heart for your student writers *right now*. What comes to mind when you think of them? What do you wonder about? What are your dreamiest dreams for them?

Now, try making a writing-teacher heart. Combine what you noticed about Andrew's "October Heart" with the hopes for your student writers. There's no right or wrong way to do this—just grab some inspiration and try it!



"October Heart"  
by Mari Andrew

That's it! You just engaged in the whole process of mentor-text study. Very simply, a mentor text is a text created by a professional that helps us make texts of our own. And all those wishes for your student writers? Well, no matter how you teach writing, the right mentor texts can help make those wishes a reality. We can't teach genius, but we can teach students to study mentor texts and use them to produce excellent writing of their own.

Mentor texts teach writers how to

- discover, expand, and develop ideas,
- structure a piece of writing,
- organize their thoughts, and
- craft their texts to match their intentions.

## SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WORK

*After studying this article . . .*

### **10 Times Aretha Franklin Improved on Other People's Songs**

by Milo Davidson, *Vulture* (August 16, 2018)

*. . . with writing in it like this . . .*

What does joy sound like? This. Just don't listen to the lyrics of this questionably intentioned Stephen Stills song, "And if you can't be with the one you love, honey / Love the one you're with." Singing a song about settling, Aretha Franklin manages to exude pure happiness and love of the world—transforming what is at best a "huh?" moment into an ode to contentment and finding triumph within yourself.

... ninth grader August G. wrote “The Odyssey Playlists,”  
with writing in it like this:

Uses the structure of a listicle,  
analyzing one song at a time.

### “Homecoming” by Kanye West

Kanye West creates a scene in this song as if someone is proudly marching back into their home. This is another song with a piano, but the notes are lower and faster, causing the listener to feel more confident. Chris Martin sings the chorus in this song, and the

Begins with what the song sounds like.

lyrics remind me of what Odysseus would say; he’s wondering if Penelope is thinking about him, and he wants to restart his life with her. I can see how Odysseus would want to restart his life when the book says, “The suitors shouted, and Athena stood beside Odysseus, and prompted him to go among the suitors, begging scraps. . . . He went around and begged from left to right, holding his hand out, like a practical beggar” (398). This shows how long Odysseus has been gone because he has to beg in his own house.

Starts with the what (a description or synopsis of the song) and then explains the why (why this song is included in the list).

Writes about songs and texts in emotional terms.

# Qualities of Mentor Texts

You will see mentor-text possibilities everywhere, but good mentor texts—the kind that will help your student writers grow—aren’t just *any* pieces of professional writing.

## Mentor Texts Are Engaging and Relevant

To impact student writing, the ideas in mentor texts need to engage the writers sitting in our classrooms *right now*. And that changes. Some years we have students who are into basketball; other years it’s anime or K-pop. Sometimes, particularly in the case of op-eds or pop culture analysis, this means that mentor texts are hot off the press. In more timeless genres like poetry or fiction, mentor texts still need to be relevant by addressing the interests of the writers we are aiming to guide.

## Mentor Texts Are Professionally Crafted

Mentor texts are crafted by professionals and aspirational by design, so they need to have the kind of writing that makes you want to grab a highlighter, read it out loud to no one in particular, and text your English-teacher best friend. If a text doesn’t make you excited as a reader, it’s probably not the right text to inspire your student writers. And while very few students will actually produce writing on par with the pros, we want every student in the room to believe that level of writing is achievable.

## Mentor Texts Inspire and Guide

Reading the work of a mentor exposes student writers to new genres, new ideas, and new ways of using language. You’ll know you’re looking at a potential mentor text if ideas for your students’ own writing come to mind: “Oh, I bet Carter could use this format to write something about Minecraft.” Mentor texts also teach students *how* to write—from showing them how to structure a piece of writing to demonstrating how to use an em dash to add detail—so they should seem chock-full of possibility.

“We read with the very real understanding that a great mentor text may be waiting just a page-turn away. We read with a sense of possibility because everything we teach is grounded in the writing we love.”

—Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O’Dell,  
*Writing with Mentors* (2015, 14)

## Mentor Texts Take Many Forms

A mentor text can be *any* text by a professional that inspires and guides student writing, from a single sentence to a whole article or an entire book. A mentor text can be a designed text that combines words and images (like the one you just studied) or a podcast episode or video.

## Mentor Texts Are Accessible

While the writing in a mentor text should be beautiful and inspiring, your students need to be able to read and understand it if they are to see the writer's craft at work. And sometimes the writing isn't too difficult, but the piece is just too long, and you know your students will struggle to make it to the end. If you've fallen for a text that is just a bit too challenging for your readers or just too long, consider excerpting it and giving them a smaller chunk to better support students' comprehension and stamina.

“Good writing makes writers want to write.”

—Penny Kittle, *Write Beside Them* (2008, 74)

## SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WORK

After studying this article . . .

### **“Tomorrow Is Too Far,” from *The Thing Around Your Neck***

by Chimamanda Ngoze Adichie (New York, Anchor, 2010, 187–97)

. . . with writing in it like this . . .

It was the summer you spent in Nigeria, the summer before your parents’ divorce, before your mother swore you would never again set foot in Nigeria to see your father’s family, especially Grandmama. You remember the heat of that summer clearly, even now, eighteen years later—the way Grandmama’s yard felt moistly warm, a yard with so many trees that the telephone wire was tangled in leaves and different branches touched one another and sometimes mangoes appeared on cashew trees and guavas on mango trees. The thick mat of decaying leaves was soggy under your bare feet. In the afternoons, yellow-bellied bees buzzed around your head and your brother Nonso’s and cousin Dozie’s heads, and in the evening Grandmama let only your brother Nonso climb the trees to shake a loaded branch, although you

were a better climber than he was. Fruit would rain down, avocados and cashews and guavas, and you and your cousin Dozie would fill old buckets with them.

It was the summer Grandmama taught Nonso how to pluck the coconuts. The coconut trees were hard to climb, so limb-free and tall, and Grandmama gave Nonso a long stick and showed him how to nudge the padded pods down. . . .

It was the summer you asked Grandmama why Nonso sipped first even though Dozie was thirteen, a year older than Nonso, and Grandmama said Nonso was her son’s only son, the one who would carry on the Nnabuisi name, while Dozie was only a *nwadiana*, her daughter’s son. (188–89)



**. . . twelfth grader McCall P. wrote a short story,  
with writing in it like this:**

Chooses a second-person stance.

That was the summer you enthusiastically agreed to travel to South Carolina for a week to watch your five cousins; coincidentally, that was the week the foster baby, Morgan, learned how to climb out of her crib. And the rest of the children learned how to turn off the movie quickly and fake sleep until after you returned Morgan's flailing and screaming body to the crib. That was the week Madison decided she wouldn't eat meat, or anything else that you cooked for dinner, and Manning swore he was allergic to carrots since they left a bad taste in his mouth. That was the week Barnett thought it would be *just kinda silly* if he pushed Johnny off the backyard zipline and Barnett swore *Johnny started it* when he threw fresh eggs from the chicken coop at him.

Writes about family relationships.

Italicizes words that demonstrate a character's voice.

Uses structural repetition.

That was the summer Robert visited you from Connecticut and swore he would never come back. It was the summer you gave him and Emelia permission to play football with the neighbors and

continued on next page

he returned home with swollen ears, puffy eyes, and hives that he itched until his raw skin peeked out from beneath the bumps. It was then that Aunt Beth and Mom rushed him to the hospital, waited there for hours, and eventually found out he had experienced an allergic reaction to yellow jackets.

Long sentences throughout capture the feeling of remembering.

## Mentor Texts Help Writing Teachers . . .

### Diversify the Teaching Voices in the Classroom

With mentor texts at the center of our writing instruction, we don't have to be everything to every student writer. The writers behind the mentor texts—representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives—are also teachers. Students are more likely to take their writing to the next level when they can learn from writers who look like them, have similar life experiences, and articulate viewpoints like their own.

### Teach Writing Authentically

When we gather professional examples of the kind of writing we want our students to create and we study it for structure and craft, the skills that are important to teach come clearly

“I show up [as a writer] to say, “I am you. You are me. I’ve been where you are. And hopefully, you’re going to succeed far beyond me.”

—Jason Reynolds,  
*The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (2018)

into focus. If the mentor writers layer evidence through hyperlinks, we need to teach our writers to layer evidence through hyperlinks. If the mentor writers conclude by zooming out to the global importance of the issue, we need to teach our writers to do the same. Our instruction is rooted not in curriculum guides and pacing charts, but in the expectations of real-world writing and the needs of our students.

## Multiply Instructional Power

With a little experience, students learn that they can find the answers to their writing problems in mentor texts. They learn to turn to these other “teachers” for guidance and often find solutions to their writing problems without even needing our support. With mentor texts, every desk has multiple teachers by its side.

## Strengthen the Reading Curriculum

When students study a mentor text to discover ideas, and then return to it to help them organize their thoughts, and then search it again for guidance on crafting stronger sentences, and examine it as they polish their writing, they are digging deep and reading with an engagement that is uncommon in most reading curricula.

## Streamline Planning and Reduce Instructional Decision Fatigue

Instead of spending hours reinventing the wheel with each unit (or spending money to buy units from others), we can rely on the planning routine we use with mentor texts to work for every kind of writing we need to teach—both genres we know by heart and genres we’ve never taught before. It works for first-grade writers and college writers. It’s the safe, simple place we return to each time we need to plan a writing unit.

If you ask one simple question of everything you read—“What could this piece help my students do in their writing?”—you will find mentor texts literally everywhere:

- in the literature you already teach
- in your own pleasure reading
- in the articles you stumble across online
- in go-to spots that consistently yield great mentor texts
- in conversations and exchanges with other teachers who also use mentor texts.

## SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WORK

*After studying this opinion piece . . .*

### **New York Has a Great Subway, if You're Not in a Wheelchair**

by Sasha Blair-Goldensohn, *The New York Times* (March 29, 2017)

*. . . with writing in it like this . . .*

Nearly eight years ago, on a bright summer morning in Manhattan, I was walking through Central Park when an enormous rotted tree branch snapped and fell on my head.

What came next was a remarkable turn of events that saved my life. First, a doctor out for a morning jog saw me lying unconscious, and used a pair of jeans he dug out of my backpack to slow the bleeding until an ambulance came.

... tenth grader **Gabrielle S.** wrote an op-ed  
with writing in it like this:

This is my life . . .

Bedroom

5:45 AM

It is dark outside.

Features a short, arresting  
beginning with longer  
paragraphs to follow.

The frigid floor bites the soles of my feet as I struggle to get out of bed.

I have hit the snooze twice, but my body aches with exhaustion. I have been asleep for only six hours because of the ridiculous history essay I had to write. Who cares about that stupid queen that had a giant palace during the French Revolution? My life would be filled with eternal sunshine and rainbows if I could just sleep for another hour. School needs to start later.

Starts with  
a microstory  
as a way  
into opinion  
writing.

Here are the facts, not the myths that have been created about teenagers and sleeping habits. You have all heard these lies a multitude of times, such as, that teenagers are lazy and irresponsible for not going to bed early? These are lies, so the next time someone tells you that you are lazy or careless because of your sleeping patterns, you can look them in the face and prove them wrong with cold, hard facts.

Introduces idea  
of dispelling  
common myths.

# Mentor Texts Help Student Writers . . .

## Practice Authentic Patterns of Learning

Studying mentor texts isn't a school skill; it's a life skill. If we want to learn to do anything better, we study the work of experts—whether it's Ina Garten baking a tart on TV or Steph Curry making a three-pointer. We watch those we admire in action, take note, and then try it ourselves. Learning to write is a similarly intuited “craft apprenticeship” (Ray 1999, 10).

## Build Writing Identity

When we study mentor texts with our students, we invite them to pull up a seat at the same table as the pros, and we send the message, “Yep, you can do that, too, because you're a writer.” When students see themselves this way, they are able to play, take risks, and add their voice to a larger community of working writers.

## Make Authentic Writing

Professional writers in the wild compose poems and op-eds and short stories and reviews and essays and listicles and feature articles. They don't write “five-paragraph essays” or “research papers”—school writing. We can prepare our students for academic writing tasks when we invite them to make the kind of writing real writers make.

“Students who see how other writers shoot their free throws will be more likely to succeed when it becomes time for them to shoot their own.”

—Kelly Gallagher,  
*Teaching Adolescent Writers* (2006, 76)

## Face Future Writing Challenges

We can't prepare students for every kind of academic, personal, and professional writing they will need to do in their lives. But we can teach them the transferable skill of reading like writers and finding the craft and structure they need for the writing task at hand. With ample practice, students will know how to find and use mentor texts whenever they *need* them—to write a paper for a professor or a memo for a boss, for example.

“If a student is writing an essay but isn't sure how to begin, she can read how other writers have started their writing and try one of their techniques.”

—Georgia Heard,  
*The Revision Toolbox* (2014, 29)

# Gallery OF Structure Moves

To really understand an excerpt as part of the *structure* of a text, you need to see how it works with the whole text. Luckily, most of the examples in this gallery are just an easy online search away so you can access the whole text.

Some conventions of structure are genre specific—a persuasive open letter is structured differently than a persuasive political speech. But other elements of structure apply to every genre. Every piece of writing has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Every piece of writing has to transition between ideas. And sometimes the way a novelist ends a story is the same way a journalist ends an essay.

Studying structure across genres builds the writer's toolbox, and here we've collected a few structure moves and examples to get you started—either teaching your whole class or supporting students in writing conferences. And remember, you can find all these examples and more in the Online Resources, and the teacher's craftbook provides room to add your own.

## Beginnings

To keep the reader reading, so much depends on a good beginning—the lead should propel the reader forward and leave them wanting more. And the beginning, of course, is the first building block of structure.

### Drop into a Scene

Opening with a descriptive scene engages the reader's senses and brings them right into the heart of the writing.

*The Bachelor* is a show designed for happy endings. In the finale of each season, the show's star receives a boulder-sized engagement ring that he hands to one of the beautiful women who has followed him to one of the most beautiful places on earth. They pop champagne and smile and sit down for an interview with Chris Harrison where they smile and look beautiful together.

—Rodger Sherman, “‘The Bachelor’ Finale Recap: The Wrath of Barb,” *The Ringer* (March 11, 2020)

At 6 o'clock in the morning, shortly after the sun spills over the horizon, the city of Kikwit doesn't so much wake up as ignite. Loud music blares from car radios. Shops fly open along the main street. Dust-sprayed jeeps and motorcycles zoom eastward toward the town's bustling markets or westward toward Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's capital city. The air starts to heat up, its molecules vibrating with absorbed energy. So, too, the city.

—Ed Yong, “The Next Plague Is Coming. Is America Ready?” *The Atlantic* (July/August 2018)

### Start with the Facts

Opening with facts gives readers needed context for what lies ahead.



## Endings

So the question is: What should we, as good people, do about it?

As a male writer, I now make it a point to seek women if, say, I'm looking for experts to interview or I'm listing civil-rights heroes. Maybe that seems awkward and stilted to you, and maybe it is. But here's what I've learned . . . I am a creature of implicit biases.

—Leonard Pitts Jr., “Diversity Matters, Stephen King, but It Doesn’t Just Happen out of Good Intentions,” *Miami Herald* (January 15, 2020)

### The Breakaway Scene

This is the conclusion cousin of the drop-into-a-scene beginning. End by painting a picture that is separate (but related) to the writing that comes before it—leaving a strong, resonant image in the reader’s mind.

In terms of structure, the ending is the other piece (with the beginning) that holds the text together. And since endings linger in the reader’s thinking, writers must carefully consider their exits.

### Zoom Out

Conclude by zooming out—like a camera panning up, out, and away from the center of action in a movie—to show how the topic matters in a broader context.

Deer legs are very useful. Their toe bones can be whistles and buckles and fishhooks. The leg bones become knives and flutes. Tendons become glue. I popped the black toes off into boiling water. Slicing with obsidian, I peeled the fur off and then the muscle and tendons. I sawed the ends off the bone. I used a twig to oust the marrow. The carnivore ate it. This would be my flute.

—Nellie Bowles, “How to Prepare for the Complete End of the World,” *The New York Times* (March 5, 2020)

## Have the Last Word

Create an audible finish. The voice behind a powerful, significant quote echoes in the reader's mind.

He would be able to make clothes that ranged in size from extra-extra-small to extra-extra-large, that people in the Midwest would be able to buy. He would show that ubiquity did not have to mean monotony. It could also be noticeable. "I'm American," he said. "There's no reason this can't work."

—Emily Witt, "Telfar Clemons's Mass Appeal,"  
*The New Yorker* (March 9, 2020)



## Paragraphs

The handshake is our national standard for signaling friendship and good intentions to a person you don't know well enough to trust totally. And they're an essential part of a reporter's tool box. . . .

. . . I trade gossip and jokes with beat writers and traveling media, but only after a handshake brings an end to a long winter's separation. Close friends might get a handshake that evolves into a one-armed bro hug.

At this point, shaking hands is as natural as blinking or drawing breath, and in the context of a working journalist's life, it's nearly as common and as useful. That's why it's so hard to stop, even if doing so could save lives.

—Michael Baumann, “The End of the Little Things We Always Take for Granted,” *The Ringer* (March 14, 2020)

In prose, structure is built from paragraphs, but studying even a single mentor text will quickly reveal: there's no one way to write a paragraph, there is no required number of sentences, and ideas sometimes extend through several paragraph breaks. Mentor texts dispel the misinformation many students have learned about *the paragraph* and show them the power of *paragraphing* as a tool for rich, complex meaning making.

### One Idea in Two or More Paragraphs

Some ideas just can't be contained in a single paragraph, so writers often build a single idea across multiple paragraphs, allowing for more examples, more detail, more nuance.

## Single-Sentence Paragraph

Writers love the punch of a supershort, one-sentence paragraph to grab the reader's attention.

Then we caught sight of a nightmare whipped up by the storm: a rain-wrapped wedge tornado half a mile to our right. The chaotic conditions made it difficult for us to keep the monster in sight. Its shape flickered in and out of the rain. We lost our cell phone reception—and all the data we were desperately dependent on for radar apps and communication. We couldn't see beyond 20 feet, and the hail was so loud we had to shout to communicate. Our road was on an intersecting path with the tornado.

—Keith Ladzinski, "Into the Storm," *National Geographic* (February 20, 2020, 26–27)

Endings are sad, but without them, nothing matters.

That was only one of the lessons of the thoughtful, emotional finale of NBC's *The Good Place*, which itself ended after four seasons and only 52 episodes. But, as the show itself stressed in its last couple of installments, heaven is not continuing forever: It's leaving at the right time, when you've done your work. When you're ready.

—Linda Holmes, "A Goodbye to 'The Good Place,'" *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, NPR (January 31, 2020)

## Microstory Paragraph

Sometimes one sentence, or a small handful of them, can tell a whole story. Packed with action, microstories speed the pace of the writing.