

# **Paragraphs for High School**

A Sentence-Composing Approach

**A Student Worktext**

**Don and Jenny Killgallon**

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*A writer is not someone who expresses thoughts, passion or imagination  
in sentences but someone who thinks sentences.*

*A Sentence-Thinker.*

—Roland Barthes, *writer*

## THE SENTENCE-COMPOSING APPROACH

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*Nothing is more satisfying than to write a good sentence.*

—Barbara Tuchman, *historian*

### THE SENTENCE-PARAGRAPH LINK 1

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Sentences unfold one part at a time. Paragraphs unfold one sentence at a time. In this section, authors become your invisible teachers in an apprenticeship in the sentence-composing approach to building better sentences for better paragraphs. Here you'll start becoming a Sentence-Thinker.

## BUILDING BETTER SENTENCES

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*When you have made a new sentence, or even an image that works well,  
it is a palace where language itself has lit a new lamp.*

—Pat Conroy, *My Reading Life*

### BEST SENTENCES 4

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A sentence must have a subject (topic) and a predicate (comment about the subject). Best sentences always have something more: sentence parts that are tools to build better sentences like those written by authors.

## **SHOW ME HOW: SENTENCES 17**

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Imitating how authors build their sentences focuses on how they write and helps you write in similar ways.

## **SENTENCE-COMPOSING TOOLS FOR BETTER PARAGRAPHS 32**

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Writing is carpentry with sentences and paragraphs. Like any craft, it is only as good as the plans, materials, and tools. Here you will learn, practice, and use in paragraphs tools that foster elaboration. All of them are used frequently by your mentor-authors, who will guide you in learning how to use them in your own writing.

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### **THE ELABORATOR 50**

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### **THE DESCRIBER 67**

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### **MORE TOOLS 104**

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### **GOOD MARKS 112**

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In punctuating sentences, effective writers go beyond periods and commas. Learning other punctuation marks expands the ways you can express your ideas in sentences in your paragraphs.

#### **Dash to Interrupt a Sentence 112**

#### **Semicolon to Link Two Sentences 116**

#### **Colon to Introduce a List 123**

## BUILDING BETTER PARAGRAPHS

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*The practice of professional writers gives no support to the classroom notion that the paragraph should end with a clincher.*

—Francis Christensen, “A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph”

### **BEST PARAGRAPHS 137**

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A paragraph contains two or more sentences linked because they are about a common topic. Best paragraphs always have something else: sentence-composing tools like the ones used by authors.

### **SHOW ME HOW: PARAGRAPHS 141**

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Imitating how authors build their paragraphs focuses on how they write and helps you write in similar ways.

### **IMITATING PARAGRAPHS 151**

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Activities here help you learn how to compose better paragraphs by imitating the experts. Paragraphs by authors give you a blueprint for composing well-built paragraphs.

### **UNSCRAMBLING PARAGRAPHS 173**

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Good paragraphs arrange content in ways that make sense to your readers. Unscrambling paragraphs to produce a meaningful arrangement is good practice for composing coherent paragraphs.

### **BUILDING PARAGRAPHS 184**

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Here you'll practice how to assemble the raw material for a paragraph into a well-built paragraph. Activities provide practice in how to compose paragraphs through more elaboration and stronger expression of content.

## **PARTNERING WITH A PRO 204**

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Throughout, you will have imitated the sentences and paragraphs of pros as your mentors. Now you'll go beyond imitating to create paragraphs with pros as your partners, using the tools for sentences and paragraphs you learned from those pros earlier.

## **YOUR INVISIBLE TEACHERS 224**

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Approximately 300 titles from literature are the basis for the activities in *Paragraphs for High School: A Sentence-Composing Approach*. Included are model sentences and paragraphs from hundreds of authors—your silent mentors, your invisible teachers. Here they all are, all of whom work hard at their craft to make reading easy for their readers.

## THE SENTENCE-PARAGRAPH LINK

The foundation of this worktext is a profound observation about good writing: it is the “add-ons” that differentiate the writing of authors from the writing of students. In other words, good writing is a process of addition. Good writers say more. State-mandated and other writing tests confirm this characteristic of good writing: the biggest reason students perform poorly on such tests is failure to elaborate. Contrast these two paragraphs to see the dramatic difference the underlined add-ons make:

### BASIC PARAGRAPH

A twelve-year-old boy sat up in bed. There was a sound coming from outside. It was a huge, heavy rush. It was coming from directly above the house. The boy swung his legs off the bed. The yard was otherworldly. The boy stood on the lawn.

### ELABORATE PARAGRAPH

In the predawn darkness, in the back bedroom of a small house in Torrance, California, a twelve-year-old boy sat up in bed, listening. There was a sound coming from outside, growing ever louder. It was a huge, heavy rush, suggesting immensity, a great parting of air. It was coming from directly above the house. The boy swung his legs off the bed, raced down the stairs, slapped open the back door, and loped onto the grass. The yard was otherworldly, smothered in unnatural darkness, shivering with sound. The boy stood on the lawn, head thrown back, spellbound.

Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken*

The underlined parts are the result of the author’s use of sentence-composing tools that add elaboration. Here’s good news: you can own the same tools authors use to build sentences to add elaboration for their paragraphs.

The goal of *Paragraphs for High School: A Sentence-Composing Approach* is to learn those sentence-composing tools and then use those tools through activities including imitating paragraphs, unscrambling paragraphs, building paragraphs, expanding paragraphs, creating paragraphs.

In the past, paragraphs were taught mainly as specimens for dissection, not as models for imitation. Instruction rarely went beyond “topic sentence” and “clincher sentence” and types of content (comparison, contrast, definition, narration, process, and so forth). Far too often, results were anemic paragraphs unlike paragraphs of good writers.

*Paragraphs for High School: A Sentence-Composing Approach* teaches, instead, imitation of real paragraphs, worthy models by authors. With this approach, and only a single paragraph as a manageable model, and with frequent imitation through varied activities, you can succeed, often astonishingly, in writing paragraphs like those of authors.

Words are the raw materials of writing. All sentences are made up of words. All paragraphs are made up of sentences. What makes the writing of good writers different from the writing of poor writers? The answer is how those words, sentences, and paragraphs are shaped and styled.

In this worktext, *Paragraphs for High School: A Sentence-Composing Approach*, you’ll see how more than 300 authors shaped and styled their sentences and paragraphs, and, through the many activities sprung from those sentences and paragraphs, how you can similarly shape and style your own sentences and paragraphs. Those authors are your invisible teachers.

Through their sentences and their paragraphs, those hundreds of authors are ready to teach you the essential link between good sentences and good paragraphs.

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*If there is more important work than teaching,  
I hope to learn about it before I die.*

—Pat Conroy, *My Reading Life*

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Learn everything you can from your teachers, visible and invisible,  
as they go about the important work of teaching you how to build better  
sentences and paragraphs.

## UNSCRAMBLING PARAGRAPHS

A reader cannot understand a scrambled sentence because the parts are out of order. A reader cannot understand a scrambled paragraph because the sentences are out of order. In the scrambled paragraph below, readers, confused, only know that the paragraph says something about a snake.

***Scrambled Paragraph*** (sentence parts and sentences are out of order)

Were erect, which were truly like hypodermic needles, its two fangs. Was wide open the snake's huge mouth. Flicked in every direction its forked black tongue, bursting from a hissing sound from its throat. At the air bit it, and from the fangs of yellowish venom spurted great gout.

***Unscrambled Paragraph*** (sentence parts and sentences are in order)

The snake's huge mouth was wide open. Its two fangs, which were truly like hypodermic needles, were erect. It bit at the air, and great gout of yellowish venom spurted from the fangs. Its forked black tongue flicked in every direction, a hissing sound bursting from its throat.

Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full*

The two versions have exactly the same words, but the scrambled version is almost meaningless, a jumble of words, while the unscrambled version is meaningful, a collection of the snake's actions that readers can easily understand.

In good sentences, like those in the unscrambled version, sentence parts have a clear relationship to each other. In good paragraphs, sentences also have a clear relationship to each other. These activities focus on those clear relationships of sentence parts within sentences, and the sentences within paragraphs.

Zoom in now on how to achieve clear relationships within and among a paragraph's sentences.

## ACTIVITY 1

**Narrative Paragraph:** A narrative tells either a true or a fictional story. Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in a narrative paragraph from Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*.

In Crichton's fictional paragraph, during a thunderstorm a tyrannosaur attacks a Land Cruiser (car) containing two children, a brother and sister.

Unscramble and punctuate the lists to produce five sentences. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized.

*Important:* Type or write out the list of five unscrambled sentences from the activity below. In the next activity, you need that list to arrange the sentences into a paragraph that makes sense.

- 1a. with a muddy splash
- 1b. The rear of the car
- 1c. and then it thumped down
- 1d. into the air for a moment
- 1e. lifted up
  
- 2a. of the car
- 2b. The dinosaur moved
- 2c. around the side
  
- 3a. that blended with the thunder
- 3b. At the back
- 3c. a deep rumbling growl
- 3d. the animal snorted

- 4a. out of all the side windows
- 4b. The big raised tail
- 4c. blocked their view
- 5a. mounted on the back of the Land Cruiser
- 5b. and,
- 5c. It sank its jaws into the spare tire
- 5d. tore it away
- 5e. in a single head shake,

The five unscrambled sentences are not in a logical order that matches the original paragraph, so arrange them in a way that makes the most sense. Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

### ASSIGNMENT FOR NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH

From an electronic or a print source, find an image showing action. Pretend that the action is part of a story you are writing, and narrate that action in a paragraph, zooming in so details are easy to see.

## ACTIVITY 2

**Informative Paragraph:** An informative paragraph educates the reader on a particular topic. Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in a paragraph developed by examples from Richard Lederer's "English Is a Crazy Language."

In Lederer's paragraph, the contents prove that the English language is widely used and highly influential throughout the world.

Unscramble and punctuate the lists to produce the five sentences in the paragraph. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized.

*Important:* Type or write out the list of five unscrambled sentences from the activity below. In the next activity, you need that list to arrange the sentences into a paragraph that makes sense.

- 1a. are made in English
- 1b. and the majority of international telephone calls
- 1c. are written in English
- 1d. Half of the world's books
  
- 2a. that English is a crazy language
- 2b. to face the fact
- 2c. Nonetheless, it is now time
  
- 3a. in the annals of the human race
- 3b. perhaps as many as two million words
- 3c. and has generated one of the noblest bodies of literature
- 3d. English has acquired the largest vocabulary of all the world's languages
  
- 4a. in the history of our planet
- 4b. English is the most widely spoken language
- 4c. around the globe
- 4d. used in some way by at least one out of every seven human beings
  
- 5a. is stored in English
- 5b. is written and addressed in English
- 5c. More than seventy percent of international mail
- 5d. and eighty percent of all computer text

The five unscrambled sentences are not in a logical order that matches the original paragraph, so arrange them in a way that makes the most sense. Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

### ASSIGNMENT FOR INFORMATIVE PARAGRAPH

Write an informative paragraph about something strange that became popular: for example, a weird electronic device, a ridiculous game, a no-talent celebrity, a way-out book, a disgusting food, or something else. You may want to research your topic online before drafting your paragraph to learn more about why—against all odds—your topic is so popular. In your paragraph’s last sentence, explain why the popularity of your topic is puzzling.

### ACTIVITY 3

**Process Paragraph:** A process paragraph describes how something occurs or functions. Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in a process paragraph from Siddhartha Mukherjee’s nonfiction book *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*.

In Mukherjee’s paragraph, the contents show that the process of cell division, when abnormally distorted, leads to cancerous cell growth.

Unscramble and punctuate the lists to produce the six sentences in the paragraph. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized.

*Important:* Type or write out the list of five unscrambled sentences from the activity below. In the next activity, you need that list to arrange the sentences into a paragraph that makes sense.

1a. more perfect versions

1b. of ourselves

1c. They are

- 2a. to live
- 2b. as organisms
- 2c. to grow, to adapt, to recover, to repair
- 2d. Cell division allows us
  
- 3a. to live at the cost of our living
- 3b. Distorted and unleashed, it allows cell cancers
- 3c. to grow, to flourish, to adapt, to recover, and to repair
  
- 4a. adapt better
- 4b. Cancer cells grow faster
  
- 5a. cell growth without barriers
- 5b. That this seemingly simple mechanism
- 5c. a testament to the unfathomable power of cell growth
- 5d. can cause the grotesque and multifaceted illness of cancer is

The five unscrambled sentences are not in a logical order that matches the original paragraph, so arrange them in a way that makes the most sense. Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

### **ASSIGNMENT FOR PROCESS PARAGRAPH**

After selecting and researching a process online, write a paragraph describing how something occurs or functions. End your paragraph with a sentence that emphasizes the importance of the process you've described.

## ACTIVITY 4

**Memory Paragraph:** A memory paragraph lists scenes from the past recalled by the writer. Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in a memory paragraph from Pat Conroy's *South of Broad*.

In Conroy's paragraph, the narrator is recalling fondly a football game against an obviously superior team during which his own team bonded strongly.

Unscramble and punctuate the lists to produce the six sentences in the paragraph. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized.

*Important:* Type or write out the list of six unscrambled sentences from the activity below. In the next activity, you need that list to arrange the sentences into a paragraph that makes sense.

- 1a. for the rest of my life
- 1b. that I thought would last
- 1c. A bond formed between us and our teammates
  
- 2a. the whole night
- 2b. he and I defeated their running game
- 2c. Because we had worked out so hard during the summer
  
- 3a. one that happens all too infrequently
- 3b. It was a joyful and rapturous night
- 3c. in the brief transit of human life
  
- 4a. and, by the end of that game, loving each other
- 4b. slapping each other's helmets, pounding each other's shoulder pads,  
trusting each other
- 4c. We would jump up



- 5a. every play that either team ran
- 5b. I can remember everything about that night
- 5c. every block I missed or made, every tackle I was in on
  
- 6a. I fell in love
- 6b. as we fought against
- 6c. the strength of an infinitely superior team
- 6d. with the heart of my team

The six unscrambled sentences are not in a logical order that matches the original paragraph, so arrange them in a way that makes the most sense. Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

### ASSIGNMENT FOR MEMORY PARAGRAPH

Write a memory paragraph about a special day or night in your life. Recall all of the actions and feelings that made it memorable. End your paragraph with a sentence that explains why that day or night will never fade from your memory.

## ACTIVITY 5

**Explanatory Paragraph:** An explanatory paragraph explains an idea or fact, often through illustrations. Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in an explanatory paragraph from Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

In Larsson's paragraph, the sentences illustrate why a particular policeman is considered toughened by the crimes he's observed during his career.

Unscramble and punctuate the lists to produce the nine sentences in the paragraph. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized.

*Important:* Type or write out the list of nine unscrambled sentences from the activity below. In the next activity, you need that list to arrange the sentences into a paragraph that makes sense.

- 1a. and took two years
- 1b. the assistance of the National Criminal Police
- 1c. Another required
  
- 2a. a hardened veteran
- 2b. was
- 2c. The policeman
  
- 3a. Two others
- 3b. within a few days
- 3c. were solved
  
- 4a. confessed to having killed his wife or brother or some other relative
- 4b. and, full of remorse,
- 4c. In five of these the murderer had called the police himself
  
- 5a. in which he had had to take into custody
- 5b. He would never forget his first case
- 5c. at an electrical substation
- 5d. before he caused others harm
- 5e. a violent and appallingly drunk worker

- 6a. he could look back
- 6b. upon an impressive career
- 6c. All in all
  
- 7a. he had brought in
- 7b. During his career
- 7c. poachers, wife beaters, con men, car thieves, drunk drivers, burglars, drug dealers, rapists, and one deranged bomber
  
- 8a. to the police's satisfaction
- 8b. The ninth case
- 8c. was solved
  
- 9a. in nine murders
- 9b. He had been involved
- 9c. or manslaughter cases

The nine unscrambled sentences are not in a logical order that matches the original paragraph, so arrange them in a way that makes the most sense. Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

### **ASSIGNMENT FOR EXPLANATORY PARAGRAPH**

Write an explanatory paragraph about the accomplishments of a great person, someone you know personally—a friend, relative, colleague, and so forth—or someone in history, entertainment, sports, science, politics, religion, or another field. Describe the person's accomplishments throughout your paragraph, saving the most impressive accomplishment for

last. Finish the paragraph with a sentence summarizing the greatness of that person's accomplishments.

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*Proper words in proper places make  
the true definition of style.*

—Jonathan Swift, *writer*

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**DEDICATED TO TEACHERS**

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resource.

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