

Syntax and Paragraph Construction

Curriculum: ADVANCED

Created by: Dar Bagby

NOTE: Prior to proceeding with this lesson, a review of syntax is recommended. (see Ice Breaker below.)

Definitions: **Syntax** is another word for sentence structure. A **paragraph** consists of several sentences grouped together, all of which discuss one topic.

Goals: 1) Be able to identify the types of sentences in a paragraph.
2) Be able to name the elements of a paragraph.
3) Be able to write a good paragraph using a prompt.

Tools: 1) HANDOUTS (#1, #2, and #3) for each of the enthusiasts
2) dry erase board (or flip chart) and appropriate marker

Ice Breaker: Distribute HANDOUT #1 and review the major points of syntax.

Lesson

Distribute HANDOUT #2 to the enthusiasts and ask them to follow along as you discuss the following. Encourage them to take notes in the margins.

I. Sentence types in a paragraph

A. Topic sentence

1. the most general sentence in the paragraph
2. introduces an overall idea
3. should suggest a question(s) in the reader's mind
4. points the reader in the direction the writer is going
5. does not provide any detailed information about the idea
6. it is usually the first sentence in the paragraph
7. should be indented
8. can also make a reference to the preceding paragraph (see **transitions** below)

B. Supporting sentences

1. should answer the question(s) suggested in the topic sentence

2. provide explanations
 - a. facts
 - b. details
 - c. examples
 3. support or explain the main idea expressed in the topic sentence
 4. can be as many sentences as necessary to accomplish the explanation
- C. Concluding sentence
1. summarizes the information presented within the paragraph
 2. similar to, but not exactly the same as, the topic sentence

II. Elements of a paragraph

A. Unity

1. maintain one controlling idea (a single focus)
2. the main idea is expressed in the topic sentence and detailed in the supporting sentences

B. Order

1. cause & effect: a situation either causes or results from another
2. chronological: order of events in time
3. comparison/contrast: similarities and differences between (among) things
4. emphatic: details arranged in order of importance or for emphasis
5. spatial: discovering how things are arranged in a space

C. Coherence

1. the element that makes a paragraph understandable
2. uses logical bridges
 - a. the same idea is carried from one sentence to the next
 - b. successive sentences constructed in parallel form
3. verbal bridges
 - a. pronouns refer to nouns in previous sentences
 - b. key words repeated in several sentences
 - c. synonymous words repeated in several sentences
 - d. transition words link ideas from different sentences (see **transitions** below)
 - e. consistent verb tense
 - f. point of view maintained throughout

D. Completeness of each paragraph

1. a single idea
2. consists of a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence

III. Transitions and signposts

A. Transitions

1. a topic sentence can refer back to the previous paragraph
2. use transition words (“next,” “but,” etc.)

B. Signposts

1. well maintained order (i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.)
2. show special relationships (e.g., above, beside, below, etc.)
3. show logic (e.g., “in addition,” “furthermore,” “in fact” etc.)

IV. Coordination and subordination

A. Coordination

1. each supporting sentence is of equal importance
2. each supporting sentence contains the same amount of detail
3. simulates a list

B. Subordination

1. each sentence further develops idea from previous sentences
2. becomes more specific as the paragraph progresses

C. Coordination and subordination can be combined

1. the first sentence lists pieces of information
2. the separate pieces of information are described in subsequent sentences (coordination)
3. one or two following sentences develop the information in greater detail (subordination)

V. Satisfactory development of a paragraph

A. Two or three sentences usually indicate that a paragraph is not fully developed.

B. Methods for developing a paragraph (see also **II. Elements of a paragraph, B. Order** above)

1. describe the topic
2. cite data (e.g., evidence, statistics, facts, details, etc.)
3. analyze the topic
4. use examples
5. use illustrations (textual and/or visual)
6. use quotes and paraphrases from other people
7. use an anecdote
8. define terms

VI. When to start a new paragraph

- A. When beginning a new idea
- B. To contrast ideas or information
- C. When your reader needs a pause
- D. When ending your introduction or starting your conclusion

Activity 1: Distribute HANDOUT #3 to the enthusiasts and have them answer the multiple choice questions. Then go over the quiz with them and discuss any questions they might have.

Answer key:

- 1) Which of the following is NOT one of the elements of a paragraph?
- A. Coherence
 - B. Unity
 - C. Subordination
 - D. Order
- 2) Which is true?
- A. The topic sentence and the concluding sentence are always the same, word for word.
 - B. The supporting sentences in a paragraph provide details explaining the main idea of the paragraph.
 - C. A single paragraph can contain as many as 6 or 7 ideas.
 - D. Transition words are only used to connect one idea to another within a paragraph.
- 3) Coherence is the element that makes a paragraph _____.
- A. understandable.
 - B. long and boring.
 - C. refer back to another paragraph.
 - D. anecdotal.
- 4) The 3 parts of a paragraph are _____, _____, and _____.
- A. the topic sentence, the order, and completeness.
 - B. the supporting sentences, the transitions, and the signposts.
 - C. the topic sentence, the supporting sentences, and the concluding sentence.
 - D. the unity, the verbal bridges, and the concluding sentence.
- 5) Syntax is another term for _____.
- A. completeness.
 - B. sentence structure.
 - C. a single idea.
 - D. the first sentence in a paragraph.
- 6) When should you start a new paragraph?
- A. when you begin a new idea
 - B. when your reader needs a pause
 - C. when it's time to contrast information
 - D. all of the above.

Activity 2: Write the following prompts on the board (or chart):

pancakes—cook the fruit in them, or only have fresh fruit on top

the proper way to decorate a Christmas tree

the importance of wearing a life vest when water skiing or boating

preparing to bathe your cat

recycling plastic versus disposing of it in a landfill

Ask each enthusiast to write a paragraph on the back of HANDOUT #3 using one of the prompts; allow 5-8 minutes. Have each enthusiast read his/her paragraph, after which the class should discuss each one. Emphasize that any criticism is to be treated as CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM to help everyone learn to write better paragraphs.

- Discussion:**
- 1) Do you think it's necessary to examine every paragraph as you write when doing a rough draft? Why or why not?
 - 2) Would it help to practice writing good paragraphs so you can be on "autopilot" when writing paragraphs instead of having to think about paragraph construction as you write?
 - 3) Why do you suppose editors are concerned with good paragraph construction when editing your stories?

Syntax and Paragraph Construction

Handout #1: ADVANCED - REVIEW

Created by: Dar Bagby

Definition: **Syntax** is the structure of sentences. A **sentence** is a group of words arranged in a certain order which, when tied together, conveys an idea, a description, or an event.

Lesson

I. All sentences are composed of a subject and a predicate and may or may not include objects.

A. Subject

1. A person, place, object, or abstract concept
2. Answers who or what the sentence is about
 - a. a **simple subject** is a word or group of words that act as a subject
(e.g., The **dog** barked.)
 - b. a **complete subject** is the simple subject and its modifiers
(e.g., The **big white dog** barked.)
 - c. a **compound subject** is made up of two or more nouns or pronouns linked by either *and* or *or*
(e.g., The **dog and its mate** barked.)
 - d. a **complete compound subject** is made up of a compound subject and its modifiers.
(e.g., The **big white dog and its long-haired mate** barked.)

B. Predicate

1. Verb
 - a. describes the action the subject performs
 - b. contains objects that are affected by the subject's actions
2. Answers what happens and/or what is described
 - a. a **simple predicate** is made up of a verb only
(e.g., The dog **barked**.)
 - b. a **complete predicate** is made up of the verb and its modifiers
(e.g., The dog **barked viciously**.)
 - c. a **compound predicate** contains two or more verbs with or without objects, or a verb with one or more objects linked by *and* or *or*
(e.g., The dog **barked and snarled at the strangers**.)
 - c. a **complete compound predicate** is made up of a compound predicate and its modifiers
(e.g., The dog **barked and snarled viciously at the dark-clothed strangers wearing hoods**.)

C. Independent and dependent clauses

1. Independent clause contains a subject and a verb
 - a. expresses a complete thought
 - b. is a complete sentence
 - c. independent marker words are connectors used at the beginning of an independent clause and can begin a sentence that can stand alone
(e.g., also, consequently, furthermore, however, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, therefore)

- d. coordinating conjunctions can be used as connectors at the beginning of an independent clause (e.g., and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet)
- 2. Dependent clause contains a subject and a verb
 - a. does not express a complete thought
 - b. cannot be a sentence
 - c. dependent marker words are added to the beginning of an independent clause, making it a dependent clause (e.g., after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, while)

D. Objects

- 1. A direct object receives the action and always answers what or whom
- 2. An indirect object answers to whom or what the action was done (e.g., The quarterback threw **the football** [direct object] to **the wide receiver** [indirect object]).

II. Typical word order in a sentence

- A. Simple: Subject – Verb – Direct Object – Indirect Object
- B. Expanded: Subject – Verb – Object – Manner – Place – Time (all six parts are not required, but if you use all six, this is the recommended order)

III. Modifiers and appositives

- A. Modifiers are words that describe other words. (e.g., The **fuzzy little** rabbit hopped up onto the **big** pile of **orange** carrots and **leafy** lettuce.)
 - 1. Can appear in either the subject or the predicate
 - 2. May be single words, phrases, or complete clauses
- B. Appositives rename the noun or pronoun preceding them
 - 1. Use a comma to separate it from the rest of the sentence if the appositive is not essential
 - 2. Example: Adrian talked to his **family** physician, **Dr. Cromwell**, about his **embarrassing** condition. (family and embarrassing are modifiers; Dr. Cromwell is an appositive, which is not necessary for the sentence to make sense, so it is set off by commas)

IV. Basic sentence structures

- A. A **simple sentence** is an independent clause.
- B. A **compound sentence** contains two or more simple sentences.
- C. A **complex sentence** is a combination of an independent clause and a dependent Clause.
- D. A **compound-complex sentence** contains a combination of a compound and a complex sentence.

V. The four types of sentences

- A. Declarative (e.g., The wind blew my hat off my head.)
 - 1. Makes a statement
 - a. relays information
 - b. AND/OR relays an idea

2. Ends with a period
 3. Essays and reports use declarative sentences almost exclusively
- B. Imperative (e.g., Go chase my hat.)
1. Conveys a command or request
 2. OR can express a wish or desire
 3. Ends with a period or an exclamation point depending on the strength of emotion expressed
 4. Can be as short as one word when the subject is implied (e.g., Hurry!)
- C. Exclamatory (e.g., My hat is getting away!)
1. Expresses strong emotion
 2. Always ends with an exclamation point
- D. Interrogatory (e.g., Will you please retrieve my hat?)
1. Always asks a question
 2. Always ends with a question mark

VI. Run-on sentences and sentence fragments

- A. Run-on sentences occur when two or more independent clauses are unseparated by any form of punctuation. (e.g., Addison gave a treat to the dog she gave a toy to the cat.)
- B. Sentence fragments occur when an incomplete thought or a dependent clause is treated like a complete sentence. (e.g., Because the dog and cat had been especially good that day.)

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Handout #3: ADVANCED

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Circle the correct answer:

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