

Advanced Level

Six-Way paragraphs

Walter pauk

Revised and Expanded

100 Passages for Developing the Six
Essential Categories of Comprehension



Jamestown Publishers

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Walter Pauk, Ph.D.

Director, Reading Research Center
Cornell University



Jamestown Publishers
Providence, Rhode Island

Six-Way Paragraphs
Advanced Level

Catalog No. 731

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Readability

Passages 1-20: Level H

Passages 21-40: Level I

Passages 41-60: Level J

Passages 61-80: Level K

Passages 81-100: Level L

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Preface

Learning by Doing

“Please let me do this one by myself.” These words echo the age-old principle of learning by doing. And this basic “hands-on” principle works because it makes students *concentrate* and it makes them *think*.

Concentrate. First, to make students concentrate, we compiled stories about what I believe are among the world’s most fascinating factual episodes and facts of nature. The stories in this revised and expanded edition of *Six-Way Paragraphs* are all new.

Think. Second, to make students think, we devised six types of questions, which are the only ones that can be legitimately asked about factual prose.

Practice. By answering these six types of questions over and over again, each time in a different context, students learn what to look for when reading factual prose. And once these skills are learned it is easy and natural to carry them over to the reading of textbooks.

In brief, by making students concentrate on factual stories and questions, this book provides a systematic and certain way for teachers to teach and learners to learn.

Acknowledgments

Although I assume complete responsibility for the faults of this book, I am happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to students and colleagues for many of its strong points. The students in all my classes have been helpful in their suggestions and enthusiasm. Graduate students, colleagues and teachers too numerous to mention individually provided criticism when I needed it most. I wish, however, to single out Walter Brownsword, former chairman of the English Department of Community College of Rhode Island, for especial thanks for refining the six-way questions in the first edition. The staff of Jamestown Publishers has been unstintingly

helpful in supporting these efforts, through genuine encouragement, and design and editorial assistance in both editions. To all, I am deeply grateful.

Walter Pauk

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The Paragraph

The paragraph! That's the working-unit of both writer and reader. The writer works hard to put meaning into the paragraph; the reader works hard to take meaning out of it. Though they work at opposite tasks, the work of each is closely related. Actually, to understand better the job of the reader, one must first understand better the job of the writer. So, let us look briefly at the writer's job.

One Main Idea. To make their meaning clear, writers know that they must follow certain basic principles. First, they know that they must develop only one main idea per paragraph. This principle is so important that they know it backward, too. They know that they must not try to develop two main ideas in the same paragraph.

The Topic Sentence. The next important principle they know is that the topic of each main idea must be stated in a topic sentence, and that such a sentence best serves its function by coming at or near the beginning of its paragraph. They know too, that the more clearly they can state the topic of a paragraph in an opening sentence, the more effective they will be in developing a meaningful, well-organized paragraph.

One word of warning to the reader: there is no guarantee that the topic sentence will always be the first sentence of a paragraph. Occasionally, a writer will start off with an introductory or a transitional sentence. Then, it is up to the reader to spot such a sentence, and recognize it for what it is.

The topic sentence may be placed in several other positions in a paragraph. It may be placed in the middle, or even at the very end. If it appears at the end, though it may still be a topic sentence in form, in terms of function, it is more rightfully a *restatement*. Whenever the end position is chosen, it is chosen to give the restatement especial emphasis.

Finally, a paragraph may not have a topic sentence in it at all. Some writers purposely leave out such sentences. But, in such cases, inferring a topic sentence may not be as difficult as it may at first appear. Here's why. Inside information has it that many such professional writers actually do write topic sentences, but on separate scraps of paper. They then place one

of the scraps at the head of a sheet and use the topic sentence to guide their thoughts in the construction of the paragraph. With the paragraph written and the topic sentence having served its purpose, the scrap is discarded. The end result is a paragraph without a visible topic sentence, but the paragraph, nonetheless, has embedded in it all the clues that an alert reader needs for making an accurate inference.

Finding Meaning. Actually, there is nothing especially important in recognizing or inferring a topic sentence for its own sake. The important thing is that the reader use the topic sentence as a quick means of establishing a focal point around which to cluster the meanings of the subsequent words and sentences that he or she reads. Here's the double-edged sword again: just as writers use topic sentences to provide focus and structure for presenting their meaning, so the perceptive reader can use the topic sentence for focus and structure to gain meaning.

Up to this point, the reader, having looked secretly over the writer's shoulder, should have learned two exceedingly valuable secrets: first, to always look for only *one* main idea in each paragraph; and secondly, to use the topic sentence to discover the topic of each paragraph.

Supporting the Main Idea. Now, there is more to a writer's job than writing paragraphs that consist of only bare topic sentences and main ideas. The balance of the job deals with *developing* each main idea through the use of supporting material which amplifies and clarifies the main idea and, many times, makes it more vivid and memorable.

To support their main ideas, writers may use a variety of forms. One of the most common is the *example*. Examples help to illustrate the main idea. Other supporting materials are anecdotes, incidents, jokes, allusions, comparisons, contrasts, analogies, definitions, exceptions, logic and so forth.

To summarize, the reader should have learned from the writer that a textbook-type paragraph usually contains these three elements: a topic sentence, a main idea, and supporting material. Knowing this, the reader should use the topic sentence to find the main idea. Everything other than the main idea is supporting material used to illustrate, amplify, and qualify the main idea. So, the reader must be able to separate the main idea from the supporting material, yet see the relationship between them.

To the Instructor

The Reading Passages. Each of the 100 passages included in the book had to meet the following three criteria: *high interest level*, *appropriate readability level*, and *factual content*.

The high interest level was assured by choosing passages of mature content that would appeal to a wide range of readers.

The readability level of each passage was computed by applying Dr. Edward B. Fry's *Formula for Estimating Readability*, thus enabling the arrangement of passages according to grade levels within the book. *Six-Way Paragraphs, Middle Level* contains passages that range from grade 4 to grade 8 reading level, with twenty passages on each grade level. The passages in *Six-Way Paragraphs, Advanced Level* range from grade 8 to grade 12 readability, with twenty passages on each reading level.

The factual content was a definite requirement because by reading factual passages students build not only their reading skills, but, of equal importance, their informational backgrounds.

The Six Questions. This book is organized around six essential questions. And the bright jewel in this array is the exciting main idea question, which is actually a set of three statements. Students must first choose and label the statement that expresses the *main idea* of the passage, then they must label each of the other statements as being either *too narrow* or *too broad* to be the main idea.

In addition to the main idea question, there are five other questions. These questions are within the framework of the following five categories: subject matter, supporting details, conclusions, clarifying devices, and vocabulary in context.

By repeated practice with the questions within these six categories, students will develop an active, searching attitude that will carry over to the reading of other expository prose. These six types of questions will help them become aware of what they are reading at the time they are

actually seeing the words and phrases on a page. This type of thinking-while-reading sets the stage for higher comprehension and better retention.

The Diagnostic Chart. This Diagnostic Chart provides the most dignified form of guidance yet devised. With this Chart, no one has to point out a student's weaknesses. The Chart does that automatically, yielding the information directly and personally to the student, making self-teaching possible. The organization of the questions and the format for marking answers on the Chart are what make it work so well.

The six questions for each passage are always in the same order. For example, the question designed to teach the skill of drawing conclusions is always the fourth question, and the main idea question is always first. This innovation of keeping the questions in a set order sets the stage for the smooth working of the Chart.

The Chart works automatically when the students write the letter of their answer choices for each passage in the spaces provided. Even after completing only one passage, the Chart will reveal the type or types of questions answered correctly, as well as the types answered incorrectly. As the answers for more passages are recorded, the Chart will show the types of questions that are missed consistently. A pattern can be seen after three or more passages have been completed. For example, if a student answers question number four (drawing conclusions) incorrectly for three out of four passages, the student's weakness in this area shows up automatically.

Once a weakness is revealed, have your students take the following steps: First, turn to the instructional pages in the beginning of the book, and study the section in which the topic is discussed. Second, go back and reread the questions that were missed in that particular category. Then, with the correct answer to a question in mind, read the entire passage again, trying to see how the author developed the answer to the question. Do this for each question that was missed. Third, when reading future passages, make an extra effort to correctly answer the questions in that particular category. Fourth, if the difficulty continues, arrange to see the teacher.

To the Student

The Six Types of Questions

In this book, the basic skills necessary for reading factual material are taught through the use of the following six types of questions: *subject matter*, *main idea*, *supporting details*, *conclusion*, *clarifying devices*, and *vocabulary in context*. Let us take a closer look at each of these types of questions.

Subject Matter. This question looks easy and is easy. But don't let that fool you into thinking it isn't important. It can teach you the most important skill of all reading and learning: concentration. With it, you comprehend and learn. Without it, you fail.

Here's the secret for gaining concentration: After reading the first few lines of something, ask yourself, "What is the subject matter of this passage?" Instantly, you will be thinking about the passage. You will be concentrating.

If you don't ask this question, your eyes will move across the lines of print, yet your mind will be thinking of other things.

By asking this question as you read each passage in this book, you will master the skill so well that it will carry over to everything you read.

Let's see how this method works. Here is a short passage:

Do you want to be a good speaker? If so, then think *before* you speak, and think *while* you speak. Take care to pronounce words well. Do not speak your words too hastily. Use words your audience can understand. Do not speak in the same tone all the time. Cut out all mannerisms such as making the same gesture over and over again. Do not point or jab your finger at the audience. And don't forget to use your voice to express your feelings.

On finishing the first sentence, I hope you said to yourself, "Ah! a passage on speaking. Maybe I can pick up a few good tips." If you use