

Lee Brandon

At a Glance:



Paragraphs

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Preface

At a Glance: Paragraphs is the second-level book in the new *At a Glance* series of concise writing handbooks. Along with *At a Glance: Sentences* and *At a Glance: Essays*, it meets the current need for succinct, comprehensive, and up-to-date textbooks that students can afford. All three books provide basic instruction, exercises, and writing assignments at the designated level, as well as support material for instructors. *At a Glance: Sentences* and *At a Glance: Paragraphs* include a transition to the next level of writing while *At a Glance: Paragraphs* and *At a Glance: Essays* end with a Handbook, to which students can refer for help with sentence-level issues or for problems with mechanics. Each book in the *At a Glance* series can be used alone, as part of a two- or three-level sequence, or as a supplement to another type of textbook used in the course.

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE

Focusing on paragraph writing, *At a Glance: Paragraphs* begins with instruction in prewriting techniques, first-draft writing, revising, and editing—each phase illustrated with student examples. The book then presents ten patterns of paragraph writing, with a chapter devoted to each: narration, description, exemplification, analysis by division, process analysis, cause and effect, classification, comparison and contrast, definition, and argument.

The final chapter, "From Paragraph to Essay," provides a bridge to the writing of essays and includes examples and strategies for expanding paragraphs into short essays. *At a Glance: Paragraphs* concludes with a handbook that covers sentence-level issues (subjects and predicates, fragments, coordination and subordination, and so on); specific verb, pronoun, and modifier problems; punctuation; and capitalization.

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

The instruction in *At a Glance: Paragraphs* is concise and direct, using thought-provoking example paragraphs, hands-on exercises,

and writing practice for each rhetorical mode. Chapters 3 through 12 each present writing strategies for a particular paragraph pattern, followed by an annotated student example, a professional example with questions for students to answer, an exercise that gives students practice in organizing the pattern, topics (reading-related, career-related, and general) for writing such paragraphs, and a summary of guidelines specific to the pattern.

SUPPORT MATERIAL FOR INSTRUCTORS

- *Instructor's Guide*. Provides answers to exercises, a diagnostic test, a final test, and three quizzes for each major unit. Quizzes may be photocopied and distributed to students as additional classroom exercises.
- *English Microlab* for PC and Macintosh. Teaches and reinforces the basics of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. An accompanying data disk allows instructors to manage and record group results.
- *Expressways*, Second Edition, for PC, Macintosh, and Windows. Interactive software that guides students as they write and revise paragraphs and essays.

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For their cheerful, inspiring presence, I am especially grateful to my wife, my children and their spouses, and my grandchildren: Sharon, Kelly, Erin, Jeanne, Michael, Shane, Lauren, and Jarrett.

Lee Brandon

Student Overview

This book is designed to help you write better paragraphs. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the writing process itself. You'll discover prewriting techniques to help you get started, and you'll learn ways to develop, revise, and edit your drafts until you produce a polished paragraph. Every stage is illustrated by the work of one student, whom we follow through the entire process.

Chapters 3 through 12 each describe a different pattern for developing an effective paragraph. Chapter 3, for example, is about narration; Chapter 4 is about description; Chapter 5 is about exemplification—that is, the use of examples. All chapters include a sample paragraph written by a student and one written by a professional writer. Throughout, questions and exercises help you put into practice what you have learned.

Chapter 13 discusses the essay in relationship to the paragraph and can help you expand some of your paragraphs into essays. After Chapter 13, you will find a Handbook, to which you can refer when you need assistance in grammar, usage, punctuation, and capitalization.

Following are some strategies you can follow to make the best use of this book and to jump-start the improvement in your writing skills.

- 1. Be active and systematic in learning.** Take advantage of your instructor's expertise by being an active class member—one who takes notes, asks questions, and contributes to discussion. Become dedicated to systematic learning: determine your needs, decide what to do, and do it. Make learning a part of your everyday thinking and behavior.
- 2. Read widely.** Samuel Johnson, a great English scholar, once said he didn't want to read anything by people who had written more than they had read. William Faulkner, a Nobel Prize winner in literature, said, "Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how writers do it." Read to learn technique, to acquire ideas, to be stimulated to write. Especially read to satisfy your curiosity and to receive pleasure. If reading is a main component of your course, approach it as systematically as you do writing.

3. Keep a journal. Keeping a journal may not be required in your particular class, but whether required or not, jotting down your observations in a notebook is a good practice. Here are some topics for daily, or almost daily, journal writing:

- Summarize, evaluate, or react to reading assignments.
- Summarize, evaluate, or react to what you see on television and in movies, and to what you read in newspapers and in magazines.
- Describe and narrate situations or events you experience.
- Write about career-related matters you encounter in other courses or on the job.

Your journal entries may read like an intellectual diary, a record of what you are thinking about at certain times. Keeping a journal will help you to understand reading material better, to develop more language skills, and to think more clearly—as well as to become more confident and to write more easily so that writing becomes a comfortable, everyday activity. Your entries may also provide subject material for longer, more carefully crafted pieces. The most important thing is to get into the habit of writing something each day.

4. Evaluate your writing skills. Use the Self-Evaluation Chart inside the front cover of this book to list areas you need to work on. You can add to your lists throughout the entire term. Drawing on your instructor's comments, make notes on matters such as spelling, word choice, paragraph development, grammar, sentences, punctuation, and capitalization. As you master each problem area, you can check it off or cross it out.

Here is a partially filled out Self-Evaluation Chart, followed by some guidelines for filling out your own.

Self-Evaluation Chart

Spelling/ Word Choice	Paragraph Development	Grammar/ Sentences	Punctuation/ Capitalization
Separate A lot Studying Boundary Avoid slang	Topic sentence 1 Use specific examples 49 Support 1	Fragment 127 Run-on 128 Parallel structure 130 Subject-verb agreement 136	Comma after long introductory modifier 140 Periods and commas inside quotation marks 142

Spelling/Word Choice: List words marked as incorrectly spelled on your assignments. Master the words on your list and add new words as you accumulate assignments. Also include new, useful words with their brief definitions and comments on word choice, such as avoiding slang, clichés, and vague or general words.

Paragraph Development: List suggestions your instructor made about writing strong topic sentences and attending to matters such as coherence, language, unity, emphasis, and support.

Grammar/Sentences: List problems such as subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, comma splices, and run-ons. If you tend to begin sentences in the same way or to choose the same patterns, use your chart to remind yourself to vary your sentence patterns and beginnings.

Punctuation/Capitalization: List any problems you encounter with punctuation and capitalization. Because the items in this column may be covered in the Handbook at the end of this book, you can often use both rule numbers and page numbers for the references here.

5. **Be positive.** Most of the elements you record in your Self-Evaluation Chart probably are covered in *Paragraphs at a Glance*. The table of contents, the index, and the correction chart at the end of the book will direct you to the additional instruction you decide you need.

To improve your English skills, write with freedom, but revise and edit with rigor. Work with your instructor to set attainable goals, and proceed at a reasonable pace. Soon, seeing what you have mastered and checked off your list will give you a sense of accomplishment.

Finally, don't compare yourself with others. Compare yourself with yourself, and as you make progress, consider yourself what you are—a student on the path toward effective writing, a student on the path toward success.

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1

The Paragraph and Prewriting

THE PARAGRAPH DEFINED

Paragraphs on a printed page are easy to spot because they are indented: each one starts with skipped spaces at the beginning of the first line. The kind of paragraph we will consider in this book contains three parts: the subject, the topic sentence, and the support.

The **subject** is what you will write about. That subject is likely to be broad and must be focused for more specific treatment. The **topic sentence** includes both the subject and the specific treatment of that subject. The treatment tells what you plan to *do* with the subject.

The topic sentence contains the central, or main, idea of the paragraph. Everything else in the paragraph supports the topic sentence: that is, all the other sentences explain or say more about the central idea. The **support** is the evidence or reasoning that explains the topic sentence. That support can be developed according to several basic patterns. Each pattern is the subject of one chapter of this book. A consideration of the questions below can help you choose the most appropriate pattern for your paragraph.

Narration: Can you illustrate your point by telling a story?

Description: How does something look, sound, feel, taste, or smell?

Exemplification: Can you support your main idea with examples of what you mean?

Analysis by division: What are the parts of a unit, and how do they work together?

Process analysis: How do you do something? How is (was) something done?

Cause and effect: What are the reasons for and/or results of an event, trend, or circumstance?

Classification: How can the ideas, persons, or things be grouped?

Comparison and contrast: How are two or more subjects similar and different?

Definition: What does a term mean?

Argument: What evidence and reasoning will convince someone that you are right?

The patterns above are often combined in writing. Whatever pattern or combination you use, however, the structure of the paragraph remains the same. A paragraph is a group of sentences, each with the function of supporting a single main idea, which is contained in the topic sentence. Here is a good example:

- 1 A cat's tail is a good barometer of its intentions. An excited or aggressively aroused cat will whip its entire tail back and forth. When I talk to Sam, he holds up his end of the conversation by occasionally flicking the tip of his tail. Mother cats move their tails back and forth to invite their kittens to play. A kitten raises its tail perpendicularly to beg for attention; older cats may do so to beg for food. When your cat holds its tail aloft while crisscrossing in front of you, it is trying to say, "Follow me"—usually to the kitchen, or more precisely, to the refrigerator. Unfortunately, many cats have lost their tails in refrigerator doors as a consequence.

—Michael W. Fox, "What Is Your Pet Trying to Tell You?"

The paragraph begins with the topic sentence: "A cat's tail is a good barometer of its intentions." The other sentences provide support for the topic sentence; they give examples to show that the topic sentence is true. The final sentence adds humor to the writing and gives a sense of ending or closure.

Although the topic sentence is often the first sentence of the paragraph, it does not have to be. Furthermore, the topic sentence is sometimes restated or echoed at the end of the paragraph, although again it does not have to be. However, a well-phrased concluding sentence can emphasize the central idea of the paragraph as well as provide a nice balance and ending.