

Writing effective paragraphs

By Georgina Barton

1. Know your topic

Good paragraphs deal with only one topic. If more than one topic features in a paragraph the reader can get confused very quickly.

Once you decide on your topic consider any key terms or repetition you can use throughout the paragraph.

e.g. if the paragraph is about the use of image in picture books you could use other terms such as photograph, illustration, drawing, visual etc.

Think about what you already know about the topic. What else you think you need to know about it, and what does this topic mean to me.

2. Write the topic sentence (your first sentence)

Even though this sounds easy most people find it difficult as they tend to go to the next step without really introducing what the paragraph is about. The topic sentence involves not only the topic but a controlling idea, that is, what you want to discuss about the topic.

For example, if you are writing about images in picture books the **topic is images** and the *controlling idea could be about the use of colour*. Then the next paragraph could deal with texture and so forth.

The controlling idea provides direction to the writing around the topic.

e.g. The *use of colour* in **images** in picture books can tell us a lot about the author's intended meaning.

3. Show and back up your argument

The point of paragraphs is to make a point. Therefore reading about your topic is critical as you need to know what you are talking about. After your topic sentence you need to provide some more information about the topic so that the reader becomes informed. You can do this in the following ways:

- Provide some facts and examples that show more information
- Refer to other people's work by citing their own research (appropriately through direct quotes or paraphrasing and acknowledging not plagiarising their work)
- Include some statistics or other forms of data
- Use personal examples from your own experiences
- Using text and lexical connectives assist with the flow e.g. firstly, secondly, for example, for instance etc.

e.g. The *use of colour* in **images** in picture books can tell us a lot about the author's intended meaning. Colours can be used to make people feel calm, angry, excited and even fearful. According to Callow (2011) colours can evoke particular moods and emotion and contribute to different symbolism within texts. He believes that colour invites the reader to react and relate to the meaning within the text. Many author/illustrators agree that the use of blues and greens can induce calm feelings while reds, oranges and yellows are hot and often angry (Barton, 2016; Gilbert et al., 2016; McDonald, 2012). Of course, darker colours, even blue can make us feel uneasy and scared, and lighter colours, such as bright yellow can create the feeling of happiness.

4. Make your paragraph meaningful

All writing needs to have a clear purpose and be meaningful for you as a writer as well as the reader. After you have provided some further evidence about your topic you need to include why this is important to know. Often this includes you showing your own opinion or explaining why others should know about this topic. This part of the paragraph talks about the significance of the topic.

Knowing how colours can influence readers is important as an author/illustrator as it can strongly assist in creating meaning and particular emotions through the images in the text. Imagine drawing a haunted house in pastel pinks and purples – it would hardly be scary. It is noted however, that illustrators can play around with the use of colour to create different effects. Indeed, creating an enticing pink and purple house on the outside may invite a character in, only to find horror within the houses confines.

5. Conclude your topic

Concluding sentences need to summarise the paragraph overall but also link to the next paragraph. The conclusion will therefore most likely include repeated words from the above information and use linking words or word groups such as *therefore, in conclusion, as a result* etc.

e.g. Therefore, author/illustrators will use colour to create meaning within their text through emotive responses. They will have carefully selected a colour palette that indicates the mood they desire to portray. Using earthy colours for example, may make the reader feel grounded and warm while cooler colours such as blue and green will enlighten the mood. Colours can be powerful indicators of emotion in picture books. Additionally, authors may use texture to work with colour to depict certain feelings.

NEXT PARAGRAPH – the use of texture in picture books.

6. Proof read and edit your paragraph

This step is usually left out but it is perhaps the most important one of all. Read your paragraph out aloud. Does it make sense? Does it flow? If not, think about text cohesion and which devices you can use to make it better. Is it interesting for the reader? Edit accordingly by using the following techniques:

- *Adding* information that may be missing
- *Rearranging* information so the paragraph flows better

- *Removing* information – do not be precious about your writing – you may be able to use what you remove elsewhere
- *Replacing* information so the paragraph is more interesting for the reader.
- *Overall editing* – use programs such as *Grammarly*, spellcheck and an online thesaurus – these are all great resources for effective writing.

FULL DRAFT PARAGRAPH

The *use of colour* in **images** in picture books can tell us a lot about the author's intended meaning. Colours can be used to make people feel calm, angry, excited and even fearful. According to Callow (2011) colours can evoke particular moods and emotion and contribute to different symbolism within texts. He believes that colour invites the reader to react and relate to the meaning within the text. Many author/illustrators agree that the use of blues and greens can induce calm feelings while reds, oranges and yellows are hot and often angry (Barton, 2016; Gilbert et al., 2016; McDonald, 2012). Of course, darker colours, even blue can make us feel uneasy and scared, and lighter colours, such as bright yellow can create the feeling of happiness. Knowing how colours can influence readers is important as an author/illustrator as it can strongly assist in creating meaning and particular emotions through the images in the text. Imagine drawing a haunted house in pastel pinks and purples – it would hardly be scary. It is noted however, that illustrators can play around with the use of colour to create different effects. Indeed, creating an enticing pink and purple house on the outside may invite a character in, only to find horror within the house's confines. Therefore, author/illustrators will use colour to create meaning within their text through emotive responses. They will have carefully selected a colour palette that indicates the mood they desire to portray. Using earthy colours for example, may make the reader feel grounded and warm while cooler colours such as blue and green will enlighten the mood. Colours can be powerful indicators of emotion in picture books. Additionally, authors may use texture to work with colour to depict certain feelings.