

Introduction

Paragraph writing for speakers of English as an additional language can be challenging. This is because several features of paragraph writing are different from other types of writing. For instance, in a paragraph, each sentence should support the main idea of the paragraph. In addition, paragraphs should be cohesive, with each sentence flowing smoothly into the next. Finally, paragraphs should be well-organized, with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. English writing style usually differs in some and/or all segments relative to other languages, and that is why it may be challenging for many students to learn it, and for many teachers to teach it. However, with adequate approach, and practice, paragraph writing can become easier. By paying attention to these features of paragraph writing, speakers of English as an additional language can learn to write successful paragraphs.

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Introducing the challenge of paragraph writing for EFL/ESL students

For many EFL/ESL students studying English as a foreign or second language constructing a coherent paragraph can be a difficult task. There are several challenges that they may face, including organizing their thoughts, using appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and linking their ideas together in a logical way. While some students may be able to overcome these challenges with time and practice, others may need additional support from their teachers.

One of the first and biggest obstacles is the act of writing. Writing is difficult even in the first language. We all find ourselves struggling with words, context, etc. even in our first language. Now, in addition to that, we need to take into consideration EFL/ESL students' lack of grammar, style, spelling, synonyms, etc.



Why is writing difficult?

When we speak, we can usually self-correct, and we move on. However, with writing, the written record stays, and usually cannot be amended (i.e. email). Because once it's written and sent, we cannot undo it, and we are afraid of a perpetual judgment on our writing. Another reason why writing is difficult is the style. English language style differs from many writing styles of other languages. For example, when writing a paragraph in English following the English writing style, we start with a topic sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence. However, Eastern language writing styles such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, may differ from English writing styles, in ways where it starts the same but it goes into too much detail that may not be fully supporting the topic sentence. One of the ways to see this in real life is to see how stories are told through movies. If you compare Hollywood movies with Chinese, Korean, and Japanese movies from 30 or so years ago, you may see such instances of storytelling.

Breaking the task into smaller steps

To help EFL/ESL students overcome the challenges of paragraph writing, it is important to break the task down into smaller, more manageable steps. For instance, rather than asking students to write a full paragraph on a given topic, teachers can provide them with a framework that they can follow. This could include a list of key points that the paragraph should cover or a set of questions that the student should answer in their writing. By breaking the task down into smaller steps, students will be able to better focus on each aspect of paragraph writing and will be less likely to feel overwhelmed by the task.

Offering a solution to the challenge by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable tasks

**Note: See Writing Academic English / Edition 4 by Alice Oshima, Ann Hogue

One of the first things to do is to introduce students to style differences between English writing style and their first language writing style. English style is a simple 3 step process: Topic sentence, supporting sentences (usually 2-4 supporting sentences), and one concluding sentence. Sentences

should not be repeated and each sentence should be about the same topic.

This is important because students need to understand not to translate paragraphs written in their first language, and paste them into their document. Students need to be aware of the style differences, as it is the first and essential step in paragraph writing. Once students know the style differences, they will have an easier time organizing their sentences according to the style.

Topics and main ideas

The next thing is to introduce/review topics and main ideas. Students need to understand that the topic is what the paragraph is about, and the main idea is what the writer thinks about the topic (i.e. Dogs are the best pets. “Dogs” is the topic. “Dogs are the best pets” is the main idea). Usually, topic sentences should be simpler, especially for lower-level classes. The simpler the topic sentence the more likely students will write a better paragraph. Students need to understand that the main idea is their opinion on a topic, and to write a paragraph they need to support their opinion with 2-4 supporting sentences (i.e. give reasons to justify their opinion on the topic). This may be a speaking task at first, to allow students to think about a topic on which they have a strong opinion, and the opportunity to talk about it with their partner/group before writing about it.

Supporting sentences

Supporting sentences and supporting details support the topic sentence throughout the paragraph. In our example, Dogs are the best pets, a supporting sentence is “Dogs are the best pets because they are loyal. Most dogs will die protecting their owners.” Students need to understand that all sentences must support the topic sentence, if even one sentence does not support the topic sentence, then there is no paragraph.

Providing examples

Providing examples of well-written paragraphs is one way to help [EFL](#) / [ESL](#) students understand what makes a paragraph effective. Most textbooks provide examples of stand-alone paragraphs, but at times those examples are too technical, demanding, and complicated. For these reasons some students may think that that is a type of paragraph, they should be producing. Hence, sometimes, teachers need to write their own stand-alone paragraph examples to simplify it enough so that students can see that students can set their expectations based on the teacher’s explanation and examples.

Providing examples of each task with accompanying explanations

When introducing paragraph writing, it is essential to provide examples of each task that students will be expected to do. This includes a well-written topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. For each example, it is important to include an explanation of what makes the paragraph effective. For instance, when providing an example of a well-written topic sentence, the teacher might explain that a good topic sentence introduces the reader to the main idea of the paragraph and captures their attention. Additionally, the teacher could provide an example of a supporting sentence and explain that a good supporting sentence provides evidence or reasoning to

back up the main idea of the paragraph.

Different types of paragraphs

There are four basic types of paragraphs, and EFL / [ESL students](#) should be aware of them all. A paragraph is a fundamental writing unit. The expository paragraph serves to explain or inform. The second is the narrative paragraph, which tells a story. The persuasive paragraph persuades the reader of a specific point of view. The fourth provides a detailed description of a person, location, or thing. Whether teaching a persuasive, expository, narrative, or descriptive paragraph, the teacher must adapt their techniques following the specific requirements that each style of paragraph presents. A well-written paragraph will have all of these elements: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. Providing examples of each, with accompanying explanations, will help students understand what makes a paragraph effective.

5. Encourage students to give paragraph writing a try.

Encourage ESL/EFL students to give paragraph writing a try, because paragraph writing requires accuracy in thinking, grammar, and word use, which later translates into accuracy in [speaking skills](#). When students first start learning English, they often focus on mastering individual words and simple sentences. However, if they never move beyond this stage, their speaking skills will always be at a beginner level. Paragraphs are a key component of formal writing, and they can also be very useful in everyday conversation. By learning how to construct well-organized paragraphs, ESL / [EFL students](#) can take their speaking skills to the next level. The main benefit of paragraph writing is that it forces students to pay attention to both grammar and vocabulary. To write a good paragraph, they need to use a variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary items. As a result, they get plenty of practice using these language elements in context. In addition, paragraph writing helps students develop their ability to express ideas clearly and concisely. This is an important skill for both written and spoken English. Paragraphs are also relatively short, so they are less daunting than other types of writing such as essays.

Conclusion

Overall, paragraph writing can be extremely beneficial for [EFL/ESL learners](#). It helps with thinking, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills. However, it can also be challenging for students to write good paragraphs. By providing examples and explanations, teachers can help their students understand what makes a paragraph effective. Encouraging students to give paragraph writing a try is also important because it can help them develop their English [language skills](#). For foreign language speakers, [language acquisition](#) can be very difficult, particularly writing skills for professional development. Usually, most English language learners do not have good writing skills, (as most language learners), as writing skills are most difficult to teach and learn. There is an old saying that every good writer is even a better reader, as reading and writing go hand in hand. In addition to teaching paragraph writing (and essay writing too), we may ask learners to do some extensive reading for homework to prime them for paragraph writing. [English language teaching](#), in particular, writing skills can at times be challenging for EFL/ ESL teachers, but with adequate strategies learning writing skills may boost learners' English [language proficiency](#), and make

[language teaching](#) and learning more efficient and enjoyable for both teachers and English language learners.

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