



# Teaching For Success®

## Quick Answers

No. 801

### Q: What I Can I Do to Stimulate Creative Thinking?

#### A: Group Paragraph Writing Idea

by Samuel W. Whyte

**A**t first glance, it would appear that group paragraph writing would be an exercise for only English classes, but in fact it is highly adaptable to any class in which logical organization, creative, or critical thinking is a goal. It can also be used to review lectures and class assignments or to provide a sneak preview of a question that might be on an essay exam.

##### How it works

Choose the topic sentence or test question and put it on the board. For example, you might write "In my house, we couldn't get along without aspirin." Then tell your students instead of their writing a paragraph, they are going to develop it orally. You might say, "If you were writing this paragraph, what would be your next sentence?"

After you write that suggested sentence on the board, read what is written so far. Then ask for a next possible sentence from another person. Again, write it on the board and read the developing paragraph.

Continuing the process until you have a paragraph of ten or twelve sentences, make sure not to take a second sentence from a student who has already contributed.

During the process, make no comments about what is being offered. Just write. Then call for a volunteer to come up to the board, only to write what the class tells him or her to do.

##### Revision time

Handing the chalk to the volunteer, ask your class to revise and rewrite the paragraph—while you are out of the room.

The only instructions I give as I read the paragraph aloud once more is that they retain the original topic sentence.

Tell them that if you return to the room before they are finished, you will take a seat in the back of the room and listen to what is happening.

##### Evaluation

Most of the time the results will be outstanding. The revised paragraphs are far better than the first draft. Students remove intrusive sentences or phrases; they add more examples and illustrations; they correct errors in fact.

○ Additionally, they break up the monotonous subject/verb/object sentence structure that first appeared; they add transitions; and they very often have strengthened unity and coherence.

If it is a response to a test question, it is nearly always right on target since so many students are contributing information.

If you do return while the revision is still going on, you'll probably always be encouraged by the number of students participating, the spirited discussions and disagreements and the general overall atmosphere of the classroom.

### **The wrap up**

When you look at the completed paragraph, comment about as many things as possible that have contributed to the improvement. Where errors or weaknesses appear, question how those might have occurred. Finally, ask where the most difficulty came in revising the paragraph.