



How do the demands of middle school writing differ from elementary school?

- In English, students are taught primarily to read and appreciate literature; we rarely ask students to just tell what happens in the story or novel.
- Students develop a deeper understanding of the text through more sophisticated analysis.
- Students are expected to not only recognize literary devices, but they are expected to use them in their writing as well.
- Student writing is expected to be less formulaic, but with a clear method of development and a broader vocabulary.

A well-developed paragraph is not the same as a Brief Constructed Response (BCR) in elementary school. BCRs are not graded for writing; they are graded primarily for reading comprehension. *A well-developed paragraph* is graded on comprehension and the 6 trait writing rubric.

What makes a good paragraph?

All good paragraphs have:

1. ***Unity***: all sentences are related to the main idea or purpose of the paragraph.
2. ***Coherence***: all the sentences in the paragraph follow each other in logical order and are clearly connected.
3. ***A topic sentence***: a topic sentence states the main idea or purpose of the paragraph. It tells the readers what to expect from the rest of the paragraph.
4. ***Elaboration***: details that support the main idea or help to accomplish the purpose of the paragraph and may include facts, statistics, sensory details, incidents, examples, quotations.

Guidelines for Creating Paragraphs

1. ***Look for related details.*** Group them together as a paragraph.
2. ***Look for changes in content.*** Start a new paragraph with each new idea.
3. ***Recognize changes in setting or speaker.*** Whenever the setting or speaker changes, begin a new paragraph.
4. ***Look for paragraphs overloaded with ideas.*** Break these down into smaller paragraphs with each one focusing on one main idea.
5. ***Make sure the main idea of each paragraph comes across clearly.*** Add topic sentences where necessary.
6. ***Identify unrelated details.*** Delete or move such details.
7. ***Check paragraphs for coherence.*** Make sure details appear in a logical order and are connected by appropriate transitions.

When writing a well- developed paragraph, remember to...

1. Provide both of your names, the date and the period on everything you turn in.
2. Always write in ***third person*** when discussing literature.
3. Do ***not use first (I) or second*** (you) person. Do not say, "I know this because...; you know this because, etc."
4. Write in ***present tense*** when writing about a book or story you have read even if the text is written in past tense.
5. Provide ***the author and title*** of the book you are writing about.
6. ***Underline*** book titles. Short stories, poems, essays and article are punctuated with quotations marks.
7. Always write a ***topic sentence*** that refers to the entire topic not just part of it.
8. Provide ***text support with explanation*** of how the text evidence supports your claim.
9. ***Text evidence can be any words or phrases the author uses. Text support does not mean an exact quote of what a character says.*** Select words and phrases that the author uses that are particularly vivid. It is not necessary to use quotes that are something one of the characters' says in the story.
10. Always ***write a concluding sentence*** that refers to the entire topic and your statements about the topic.
11. ***Avoid*** concluding by saying any of the following:
 - In conclusion...This shows why... This is why...
 - That is why... This shows that...These are the reasons why...
12. Use "for example..." only once in a paragraph. ***Do not use "also" at all.***
13. ***Punctuate run on sentences*** with a semi-colon or a coordinating conjunction with a comma before it.
14. ***Use capital letters*** for proper names, the beginning of a sentence, and book titles. Capitalize your own name.
15. ***Write out numbers*** between one and ten. Numbers above ten can be written as numerals.

What is the purpose of a rubric?

1. Rubrics provide standards and guidelines.
2. They let students know the criteria on which they are being evaluated.
3. They let the parents know what their children can do.
4. At each level descriptive words and phrases identify levels of competency.
5. Teachers match student work to the closest descriptors.
6. Students can evaluate their own work, and they can see their scores improve as they gain competence.

What rubrics are not: Checklists or criteria for success

Criteria for success are more quantitative. For example, ***that*** a paragraph needs two pieces of evidence from the text to support a claim is *quantitative*. In the rubric under **Ideas and Development**, these examples must be *relevant and effectively support the claim*.

6 Traits of Writing

Short Definitions

Ideas: make up the content of the piece of writing; it is the heart of the message.

Organization: is the internal structure of the piece, the thread of meaning, the logical pattern of ideas.

Voice: is the soul of the piece. It is what makes the writer's style singular, as his or her feelings and convictions come out through the words.

Word Choice: is at its best when it includes the use of rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.

Sentence Fluency: is the flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way the writing plays to the ear, not just the eye.

Conventions: represent the piece's level of correctness – the extent to which the writer uses grammar and mechanics with precision.

Student Scoring Rubric for a Well-developed Paragraph

Score of 5

The student has mastered the skill of writing a well-developed paragraph, and the reader can easily identify the purpose of the paragraph.

- The student is able to effectively identify and support a topic using specific and *accurate* details from the text.
- The student has chosen an order that works well in presenting the topic and details and allows the reader to predict what's coming in the paragraph.
- The student's vocabulary includes active verbs, vivid adjectives and adverbs, and each word seems just right.
- The sentences are natural sounding, and the way they are put together varies; they clearly show how ideas connect.
- There are very few, if any, errors in grammar or usage: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar are used correctly.

Score of 4

The student has adequate mastery of writing a well-developed paragraph with an occasional error in one or more of the following traits:

- The student is able to effectively identify and support a topic with details from the text.
- The order in which information in the paragraph is presented generally works well.
- The student's vocabulary gets the ideas across with some active verbs, vivid adjectives, and adverbs.
- Sentences for the most part are clear, but lack variety; sentence beginnings are more the same than different.
- There may be more than one or two errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or grammar.

Score of 3

The student is almost able to compose a well-developed paragraph; some parts are very good, but some are not so well written.

- The student's writing is sometimes quite clear, but at other times details are not strong enough or do not support the topic clearly enough.
- The order of presentation of details and information is smooth in most parts, but sometimes it is not clear how the details connect to the main idea.
- The vocabulary gets the ideas across to the reader but needs more imagination to create a picture for the reader.
- Most of the sentences are clear, but some may be awkward, too long, too short, or may not connect to the overall topic of the paragraph.
- There are enough errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or grammar to make the reader stop to think about what the writer is trying to say.

Score of 2

The student shows some mastery in selecting a topic to write about but has weaknesses in one or more of the following traits:

- The student's topic is not as clear as it could be to the reader and needs more detail and explanation to make it understandable.
- The organization is confusing, and it is not easy for the reader to follow the writer's train of thought.
- Vocabulary used is okay, but is missing any excitement and lacks specific words that describe exactly what the student is trying to say; may have overused phrases or words.
- Sentences are overly simple, lack variety, are incomplete, or all three; errors make it hard to understand some sentences.
- There are too many errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or grammar that make the reader stop to think about what the writer is trying to say.

Score of 1

The student cannot write a paragraph that a reader can understand.

- The student is having difficulty telling what his/her topic is, and the details are not clear or accurate.
- The ideas seem to be put together randomly; sentences do not seem to fit together in a way that makes sense.
- The paragraph is missing an introductory sentence, elaboration, a concluding sentence, or all three.
- Confusing, misused words and phrases are everywhere; sometimes the same words are used over and over.
- It is difficult to read the sentences because of so many errors; words may be left out; sentences may be incomplete; subjects and/or verbs are missing, or the sentences just don't make sense.
- The paragraph contains many or all of the following: spelling errors in common words, poor punctuation, and serious errors in grammar making the paragraph very difficult to understand.

Directions: Write a personal narrative that reveals something about you and the person you are. For example in **A Mango Shaped Space**, Mia explains to the reader how she learns to live with synesthesia. You may select any experience, but your topic must tell the reader something about yourself, be interesting to the reader and have a clear idea that you are trying to get the reader to understand.

<p style="text-align: center;">IDEAS & DEVELOPMENT</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The paper is clear, focused, and insightful. Relevant examples and details effectively support the main idea. 2. <i>The paper generally maintains focus on the topic. Details appropriately support the main idea.</i> 3. The paper has a recognizable topic, although development and support for the main idea maybe uneven or inconsistent. 4. <i>The paper lacks a clear topic. Support for the main idea is inadequate.</i> 5. The paper lacks ideas, details, and purpose. 	<p style="text-align: center;">ORGANIZATION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization enhances the main idea. The order, structure, and presentation of information effectively move the reader through the text. 2. <i>The organizational structure supports the main idea and moves the reader through the text.</i> 3. The paper has an organizational structure that helps move the reader through the text, although the structure may be uneven or inconsistent. 4. <i>The paper lacks clear organizational structure. Ideas, details, or events are loosely strung together.</i> 5. The paper has no discernible organization.
<p style="text-align: center;">WORD CHOICE** (Diction)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Words effectively convey the intended meaning in a specific and engaging way. 2. <i>Words convey the intended meaning in a clear and appropriate way.</i> 3. Words generally convey the intended meaning, but may lack energy and specificity. 4. <i>Word choice is limited and may not convey the intended meaning.</i> 5. Word choice does not convey the intended meaning. 	<p style="text-align: center;">SENTENCE FLUENCY (Syntax)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The writing has an effective rhythm. Sentences are well developed, with structural variety* that supports the purpose. 2. <i>The writing has appropriate sentence variety and structural clarity.</i> 3. The writing is generally clear, but sentences may be mechanical or lack variety. 4. <i>The writing demonstrates limited understanding of sentence structure.</i> 5. The writing lacks appropriate sentence structure.
<p style="text-align: center;">VOICE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The writer's voice is individual and engaging, demonstrating awareness of and respect for the audience and the purpose. 2. <i>The writer's voice is appropriate to the purpose and engages the audience.</i> 3. The writer's voice is generally clear but may not be fully engaged with the audience or purpose. 4. <i>The writer's voice is indifferent and unengaged with the audience and purpose.</i> 5. The writer's voice is not evident. 	<p style="text-align: center;">CONVENTIONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The writer uses conventions effectively to support meaning. 2. <i>The writer uses conventions with few or no errors that distract or interfere with meaning.</i> 3. The writer generally uses conventions appropriately, although at times errors are distracting and may interfere with meaning. 4. <i>The writer consistently makes errors in conventions that distract the reader and interfere with meaning.</i> 5. The writer lacks control of conventions.

* structural variety means simple, complex and compound sentences

** word choice means figurative language, vivid adjectives and active verbs

Comments:

A 12 Step program for helping your child with writing at home...

- 1) Be sure the student has the handout with the writing prompt on it and refers to it through the writing process.
- 2) Be sure the student has a rubric for the assignment in front of him/her.
- 3) Be sure the student has any handouts from the teacher that provide information on writing a paragraph, essay, or other written assignment.
- 4) Be sure the student has both a rough draft and a final draft.
- 5) Revision is the most important step in writing well.
- 6) Students should complete a handwritten rough draft before typing the final copy.
- 7) Students must follow standard English conventions: the first word of a sentence is capitalized; proper names, including their own, must be capitalized; sentences end with some type of punctuation mark, etc.
- 8) Students should read their papers out loud to their parents before parents offer suggestions.
- 9) Students should do their own editing for convention errors before parent reads the rough draft.
- 10) Provide feedback in the form of suggestions, for example:
 - a. *This paragraph needs a topic sentence*
 - b. *Your conclusion does not reflect your essay*
 - c. *This sentence does not make sense.*
 - d. *This sentence needs punctuation.*
- 11) Do not correct errors for the student or suggest a theme, a synonym, a better sentence, a better conclusion.
- 12) Do not write the essay for the student.

Student: _____ PD _____ Score _____

Rubric for “New Thoughts...” Essay

Assignment: Write a short essay (3-5 paragraphs, 1.5-2 pages) on the topic “New Thoughts on __ (your choice) _____.” You may fill in the blank with any topic you choose, as long as it is something about which you can offer *a new perspective*. Your goal is to consider what your audience already knows or believes about your topic and to offer a new perspective, to add to your readers’ understanding of the topic.

Ideas and Development 1 2 3 4 5

(MYP Criterion A, Strand iii: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

- The writer describes the common knowledge the audience possesses about his/her topic.
- The writer effectively uses relevant, accurate statements to support the New Thoughts... about which s/he is writing.
- The writer provides enough evidence for the reader to clearly understand the old and the new ideas.

Organization 1 2 3 4 5

(MYP Criterion B, Strand i, ii: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

- There is a clear topic sentence for each paragraph.
- The writer develops the paper logically with an introduction, body and a conclusion.
- Some attempt was made to create an introduction that engages or hooks the reader.
- The paper is constructed so that the reader is led logically from one point of support to the next.

Voice 1 2 3 4 5

(MYP Criterion C, Strand ii, iii: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

- The writer’s voice is confident and indicates a clear understanding of the issues on the topic
- The author’s argument is well reasoned and based on accurate information.

Word Choice 1 2 3 4 5

(MYP Criterion D: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

- The language clearly communicates the issues using specific and accurate vocabulary.
- The author uses vivid adjectives, active verbs and other literary devices to enhance his/her writing.

Sentence Fluency 1 2 3 4 5

(MYP Criterion D: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

- Sentences are complete; no run-ons or sentence fragments.
- Each sentence has a subject and a verb, and the subject and verb agree.
- There is sentence variety: complex, compound sentences and sentences using phrases.

Conventions 1 2 3 4 5

(MYP Criterion D: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

- The writer uses standard grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- If typed, paper is double-spaced in 12 point, Ariel or Times New Roman font.
- If handwritten, the student skips a line and writes in blue or black ink.

Directions: After reading the two articles arguing against more gun control laws and completing a graphic organizer for each, compose a multi-paragraph argument of your own explaining which article has the stronger, more convincing argument and why. Consult the hands on the three types of writing and the difference between persuasion and argument while you are planning your essay.

<p style="text-align: center;">IDEAS & DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>5 The paper is clear, focused, and insightful. Relevant examples and details effectively support the thesis statement</p> <p>4 The paper generally maintains focus on the thesis statement. Details appropriately support the main idea.</p> <p>3 The paper has a recognizable topic, although development and support for the main idea may be uneven or inconsistent.</p> <p>2 The paper lacks a clear topic. Support for the main idea is inadequate.</p> <p>1 The paper lacks ideas, details, and purpose.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ORGANIZATION (compare & contrast)</p> <p>5 The organization enhances the thesis. The order, structure, and presentation of information effectively move the reader through the text.</p> <p>4 The organizational structure supports the thesis and moves the reader through the text.</p> <p>3 The paper has an organizational structure that helps move the reader through the text, although the structure may be uneven or inconsistent.</p> <p>2 The paper lacks clear organizational structure. Ideas, details, or events are loosely strung together.</p> <p>1 The paper has no discernible organization.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">WORD CHOICE** (Diction)</p> <p>5 Words effectively convey the intended meaning in a specific and engaging way.</p> <p>4 Words convey the intended meaning in a clear and appropriate way.</p> <p>3 Words generally convey the intended meaning, but may lack energy and specificity</p> <p>2 Word choice is limited and may not convey the intended meaning.</p> <p>1 Word choice does not convey the intended meaning.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">SENTENCE FLUENCY (Syntax)</p> <p>5 The writing has an effective rhythm. Sentences are well developed, with structural variety* that supports the purpose.</p> <p>4 The writing has appropriate sentence variety and structural clarity.</p> <p>3 The writing is generally clear, but sentences may be mechanical or lack variety.</p> <p>2 The writing demonstrates limited understanding of sentence structure.</p> <p>1 The writing lacks appropriate sentence structure.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">VOICE</p> <p>5 The writer's voice is individual and engaging, demonstrating awareness of and respect for the audience and the purpose.</p> <p>4 The writer's voice is appropriate to the purpose and engages the audience.</p> <p>3 The writer's voice is generally clear but may not be fully engaged with the audience or purpose.</p> <p>2 The writer's voice is indifferent and unengaged with the audience and purpose.</p> <p>1 The writer's voice is not evident.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CONVENTIONS</p> <p>5 The writer uses conventions effectively to support meaning.</p> <p>4 The writer uses conventions with few or no errors that distract or interfere with meaning.</p> <p>3 The writer generally uses conventions appropriately, although at times errors are distracting and may interfere with meaning.</p> <p>2 The writer consistently makes errors in conventions that distract the reader and interfere with meaning.</p> <p>1 The writer lacks control of conventions.</p>

Comments:

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MYP-IB Criteria for Language and Literature

Criterion A: Analysing Maximum: 8

At the end of year 3, students should be able to:

- i. identify and explain the content, context, language, structure, technique and style of text(s) and explain the relationships among texts
- ii. identify and explain the effects of the creator's choices on an audience
- iii. justify opinions and ideas, using examples, explanations and terminology
interpret similarities and differences in features within and between genres and texts.

Criterion B: Organizing Maximum: 8

At the end of year 3, students should be able to:

- i. employ organizational structures that serve the context and intention
- ii. organize opinions and ideas in a coherent and logical manner
- iii. use referencing and formatting tools to create a presentation style suitable to the context and intention.

Criterion C: Producing text Maximum: 8

At the end of year 3, students should be able to:

- i. produce texts that demonstrate thought, imagination and sensitivity, while exploring and considering new perspectives and ideas arising from personal engagement with the creative process
- ii. make stylistic choices in terms of linguistic, literary and visual devices, demonstrating awareness of impact on an audience
- iii. select relevant details and examples to develop ideas.

Criterion D: Using language Maximum: 8

At the end of year 3, students should be able to:

- i. use appropriate and varied vocabulary, sentence structures and forms of expression
- ii. write and speak in an appropriate register and style
- iii. use correct grammar, syntax and punctuation
- iv. spell (alphabetic languages), write (character languages) and pronounce with accuracy
- v. use appropriate non-verbal communication techniques.

6th grade: Second quarter

In, “on the Sidewalk Bleeding”, the author Evan Hunter’s choice of words establishes a gloomy, ominous, and hopeless mood. The story takes place in a dark “deserted” alleyway in New York on a rainy night. The rain is a “fierce...drilling...” rain. In the beginning of the story, the main character, Andy, a member of the Royals, is “violently stabbed” by someone from the Guardians, a gang that is enemies with the Royals. The only people who come down the alley are a young couple who “don’t want to get mixed up...” with Andy and the Guardians, a drunk man who has “the sickening odor of alcohol” all around him, and a homeless woman who doesn’t even notice Andy. None of these people help Andy, and instead leave him in a desperate and hopeless situation. The way the author describes Andy’s suffering helps show the ominous mood using active verbs and vivid adjectives. Andy felt “excruciating pain” as his “life ran redly, steadily” out of him through his “bubbling blood.” In this story the author’s choice of words creates a very ominous, hopeless, and gloomy mood.

7th grade/end of first quarter

TOM SAWYER ESSAY

In the Adventures of Tom Sawyer, by Mark Twain, Twain satirizes human nature multiple times. Satire is a kind of writing whose purpose is to expose through ridicule the evils and weaknesses of human nature and society that frequently uses exaggeration. In Chapter two the main character, Tom Sawyer, is whitewashing a fence. Tom, like every other boy in the town, despises work and “all gladness [leaves] him” when he gets to the fence. Because he does not want to work, he uses his ability to persuade others to trick all the other kids into thinking that they cannot whitewash the fence. Tom tells the kids that they are not capable of whitewashing, and that only “one boy in [1000] maybe [2000] that can do it the way it’s got to be done.” Tom’s explanation that not many people can whitewash motivates the kids to want to whitewash, and they end up doing his job for him. In this chapter, Mark Twain satirizes how telling a kid they cannot do something will motivate them to do it. Throughout the chapter Mark Twain continuously satirizes many of the flaws that kids have.

Student Sample 8th grade

Informative v. Argument

The teacher drones on as the student stares blankly at the wall. It is only 7:30 AM, and high school students all over the country are listening and trying to learn. Feeling very drowsy, the student puts his head down and is asleep in moments. This is the fate of many high school students. Schools begin before eight in the morning, and this causes sleep deprivation, which research shows negatively impacts teens' health and well-being. Teens need eight to nine hours of sleep a night, to be focused the next day. They are not receiving this essential sleep because 40 percent of schools begin before eight o'clock. The National Sleep Foundation says lack of sleep can, "limit teens ability to learn, listen, and solve problems," which in turn leads to less productivity in school. The early school times are disrupting teens' natural sleep schedule, which would keep them up until eleven, but allow them to sleep in until nine or ten in the morning. Instead students are going to bed at eleven, but being forced to get up for school as early as five. Waking up this early causes teenage sleep deprivation and affects school performances.

High schools should begin after eight o'clock, to allow for adequate sleep which would improve focus in school, and positively impact teens' general well-being. Many teens are waking up at 5:30 to make it to a 6:30 bus stop. This is not healthy, and is preventing teens from getting their needed eight to nine hours of sleep, which is necessary to perform well at school. The National Sleep Foundation points out that, "the research is clear that adolescents who get enough sleep... have better grades, [and] higher standardized test scores." Another consequence of the early start times is the effect on teens' well-being. Studies have shown that teenagers who get the appropriate amount of sleep "have a reduced risk of being overweight...and are less likely to be involved in car accidents." In addition, they are less likely to have depression, aggression and display inappropriate behavior. The benefits of changing school start times highly outweigh the disadvantages, small things like bus problems and cost of a change. Moving start times to a later hour will benefit students as it will allow for more sleep and it would improve focus and the general quality of teenage life.