

## Language Arts Paragraphing

My Friends,

This is a mini-lesson on paragraphing. Over the course of my career, I've come across many student rough drafts for an essay or a story that is written as one single paragraph. Some of these "paragraphs" have gone on for up to two whole pages!

Why is this a problem? For starters, I'll ask you to refer to my "Little Bumps in the Road" mini-lesson. Our minds work so incredibly fast. I'm going to use a sports analogy in this one. It is said that one of the differences between the NFL and NCAA football is the speed at which the games are played. Things just happen faster at the pro level, and athletes need to handle that speed. A trained reader is basically a "pro" at reading. Because she reads at such a high speed, even little errors can really throw her off.

It may not seem like much, but every time we stop one paragraph and start a new one, we are allowing the "pro" reader to read at her highest level. Although we're talking about microseconds here, the transition between paragraphs does the following for a reader. It allows her mind to say the following:

- "OK, the writer is about to move on to another idea. Let me be clear on the idea I just read about, and let me prepare for new territory."
- "OK, let me take a quick rest here before moving on."

We don't actually notice any sort of pause as we are reading, but we must remember that we are talking about very tiny fragments of time, which, at the speed of thought, make a world of difference for our comprehension.

So I encourage you as writers to make sure you spend the time deciding where paragraphs should be ended and where they should begin. Not only will you make life a lot easier on your reader, this turns out to be a great revision exercise as well. Writing an entire piece as one paragraph masks a lack of description in some areas. If students correctly paragraph their piece, they may find that some of their main ideas are only one or two sentences long. Perhaps they become areas where more detail needs to be added.

Still not convinced that paragraphing makes a difference? Imagine how different your understanding of this mini-lesson would be if it were typed like this...

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pro level, and athletes need to handle that speed. A trained reader is basically a “pro” at reading. Because she reads at such a high speed, even little errors can really throw her off. It may not seem like much, but every time we stop one paragraph and start a new one, we are allowing the “pro” reader to read at her highest level. Although we’re talking about microseconds here, the transition between paragraphs does the following for a reader. It allows her mind to say the following: “OK, the writer is about to move on to another idea. Let me be clear on the idea I just read about, and let me prepare for new territory.” “OK, let me take a quick rest here before moving on.” We don’t actually notice any sort of pause as we are reading, but we must remember that we are talking about very tiny fragments of time, which, at the speed of thought, make a world of difference for our comprehension. So I encourage you as writers to make sure you spend the time deciding where paragraphs should be ended and where they should begin. Not only will you make life a lot easier on your reader, this turns out to be a great revision exercise as well. Writing an entire piece as one paragraph masks a lack of description in some areas. If students correctly paragraph their piece, they may find that some of their main ideas are only one or two sentences long. Perhaps they become areas where more detail needs to be added. Still not convinced that paragraphing makes a difference? Imagine how different your understanding of this mini-lesson would be if it were typed like this...

Stay Gold,  
Mr. Stiles