

# A Controlling Frame for Paragraph Development

by Walter P. Allen

Different cultures foster varying modes of thought, logic, and exposition. In a widely quoted and frequently reprinted article (see Croft, 1980, p. 410), Robert Kaplan points out that paragraph development in American English is likely to be more direct than that in some other languages. For this reason, our ESL composition students, who have all been trained in different cultures, need not only training in appropriate grammatical forms and units, but also familiarity with common forms of organization expected of students in an American university. (See also Buckingham, 1979.) Since test answers, lab reports, and business memos (among other things) are all expected to follow this direct development pattern, it is vital that the foreign students learn to use this organization in their writing.

For several years I have been developing exercises which provide models for guiding students to organize their paragraphs in a common English expository style: starting with a topic sentence and leading through supporting statements and details to a summary conclusion. My experiments have resulted in a model and a frame which lies pretty close to the end of the continuum from controlled writing to free composition. An example, developed to follow discussion of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, is reproduced in Figure 1 (see page 56).

The exercise sheet is given out to the students following class discussion of the two subjects which are given as topic sentences in the sample and in the following quiz. The handout begins with a simple statement of the organization pattern which will be used. The sample follows with each sentence labeled as one of the parts identified in the organizational pattern: topic sentence, supporting statement 1 with details a and b, supporting statement 2 with details a and b, and the conclusion. Each item in the pattern is discussed and its relationship to the whole is stressed. It is also explained

that this simple pattern is a bit raw, as some connecting expressions are needed to mold the bare sentences into a unified paragraph.

In the last ten or fifteen minutes of the period, the students write the quiz, making up their supporting statements, details, and conclusion to go with the topic sentence provided. With the model of the sample before them, the students can advance sentence by sentence to fill out the pattern for this paragraph form. The frame gives direction, but allows for free writing of the sentences. On a 100 point grading scale,

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a student can earn up to 20 points for each supporting statement and the conclusion and ten points for each detail.

Controlling frames can easily be made for any story or topic the class is studying, and different frames can be constructed for other types of paragraphs. The use of several of these exercises will help the students write in the more direct patterns expected in our American culture.

## REFERENCES

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- Kaplan, Robert B. 1966. Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning* 16: 1-20. Reprinted with new addendum in Croft, 1980, pp. 399-418.
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

*Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men*

A paragraph may be organized with a topic sentence, supporting statements illustrated by details, and a conclusion.

**Sample**

Topic Sentence	Lennie is just as important for George as George is for Lennie.
Supporting Statement	1. Lennie could not exist without George to help him.
Details	1a. George saved Lennie from the lynch mob in Weed. 1b. George gets jobs for Lennie.
Supporting Statement	2. The only thing that raises George above the other men is his concern for Lennie.
Details	2a. George's care for Lennie is praised by the God-like Slim. 2b. After Lennie's death George gets drunk, just like the other men.
Conclusion	"I got you and you got me" is as necessary for George as it is for Lennie.

**Quiz**

Write a similarly structured paragraph to develop this topic sentence.

Topic Sentence	Curley is more responsible for Lennie's death than George is.
Supporting Statement	1. _____
Details	1a. _____ 1b. _____
Supporting Statement	2. _____
Details	2a. _____ 2b. _____
Conclusion	_____

Figure 1