

Format for the Idea Exchange and Example

Purpose/focus of activity: To teach paragraph focus, organization for students whose paragraphs tend to wander and/or whose ideas in any given paragraph lack development and/or bounce around from topic to topic.

Grade level: 7-12, depending on students' abilities, needs in paragraph structure

Materials: Each student needs a paragraph of his/her own expository writing. This exercise works best if the writing is not personal narrative but written to inform or persuade. Best if the writing has been typed and double-spaced. Each student should have a pair of scissors, some tape, and blank paper.

Procedures: Have each student cut out each sentence in the paragraph. Ask them to

- 1) Sort the sentences into piles based on their topic or focus. (If the paragraph is well focused, a student will have only one pile.)
- 2) Find the sentence that best describes the subject or focus of the paragraph and put it at the top of a page. Beneath it, place all sentences that have the same focus, in an order that seems to work. Leave space between sentences.
- 3) If you have another group with a similar focus, repeat step two with that focus, placing the main sentence at the top of a blank page and the related sentences beneath it.
- 4) If you have several sentences with different focuses, place them side-by-side.
- 5) Once students have their sentences sorted by focus, explain: "A paragraph should have one focus and each sentence should develop that focus or idea. If your sentences are all about different topics can you create a sentence that would unify all the others? Provide focus for the rest? If you have some sentences that don't fit but others that do: eliminate the ones that don't fit and add more that do. Create a new paragraph using the sentence that doesn't fit as your main focus. (What you explain will depend on what the students come up with.)"

Source: Candy Gillis' imagination. [Give a full citation of the source of the activity if it comes from a book, article, Web site, person.]

Comments: The separating of sentences physically enables students to examine focus/topic more clearly, and to determine whether the paragraph actually builds on and develops one topic. A good activity for visual learners.]