

- c. It helps when a person is feeling lonely .
 - d. It gives pleasure, especially after meals and while drinking.
3. Its disadvantages :
- a. Waste of money .
 - b. Bad for health :
 - i. Coughing .
 - ii. Difficulty in breathing.
 - iii. Loss of appetite .
 - iv. Bad breath .
 - v. It discolours teeth .
 - vi. Cancer of the throat and/or lungs.
 - vii. Blood pressure.

Paragraph :

Smoking is one of the very bad habits which everybody should avoid. Unfortunately, many men and women are slaves to this habit. These people believe that it helps them concentrate when they are thinking, and gives them relief when they are under pressure. They also say that smoking helps a great deal when a person is feeling lonely, and it gives pleasure, especially after meals and while drinking. But doctors confirm that this habit entails grave disadvantages. It is really senseless to waste money on something harmful. Smoking is very bad for health. It causes coughing and makes breathing difficult. It also causes loss of appetite and makes the breath smell. Moreover, it ruins the teeth by discolouring them. And most dangerous of all, it may cause cancer of the throat and/or lungs. It also aggravates blood pressure. I am very lucky that I have not smoked in my life, and will never smoke.

me as I am an English language student. Moreover, most foreign films are very well produced, and very wide in scope. I can say that every film tackles a new problem in a new way. Finally, watching foreign films helps us to compare them with Arabic ones in every way: in theme, acting, and production. For these reasons, we find that English and American films are very popular everywhere. Let us hope that Arabic films will enjoy this privilege in the future.

2. Topic : The Annual Flood in Mosul

Plan :

- a. Opening sentence.
- b. When it usually happens.
- c. Its causes.
- d. The dangers it entails.
- e. Precautions taken .

Paragraph :

The annual flood is always feared here. It takes place in early spring. To be more precise, it usually happens sometime in April. Rain and snow are the causes of the flood. Their amount determines the dangers of the flood that is coming. It also depends on the nature of the cold season that has passed. Last year, for example, we had a very mild winter with the minimum rain and snow. That is why the flood caused no trouble. But this year, we are expecting a very dangerous flood. We have had a very cold winter with a lot of rain and snow. Damage to fields, livestock, houses, and buildings is imminent. The authorities are keeping a close watch on the situation. They are doing all they can to minimise the danger. Sand dams are being built in the threatened areas. Sacks of sand are placed where flooding is expected. Let us hope that this flood will pass without causing any destruction .

3. Topic : Smoking

Plan :

1. Opening sentence.
2. Its advantages :
 - a. It helps to concentrate.
 - b. It gives some relief.

soon after he arrives. At the same time she has to keep an eye on her two sons to see that they do their homework. At 6:15 it is time for the baby to be fed, bathed, and then put to bed. The two boys have to start getting ready for bed at about 7:15 and if Mrs. Smith does not watch them carefully, they do not wash very well. Finally, she has to wash up the dirty dishes and tidy the living room and the kitchen. Only very rarely does she finish this before 7:45. ”

3. Write a paragraph about breaking up at the end of term. Use the following questions as a guide, if you wish.
 - a. How are the last few days of the term different from the rest of the term ?
 - b. What do you have to do before you begin the holidays?
 - c. How do you feel as the term comes to an end ?
 - d. What preparations do you and your family make for the holidays ?
 - e. How do you begin the holidays ?

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS DONE ON THE BLACKBOARD

1. Topic : My Favourite Television Programme

Plan :

- a. What is it ?
- b. How often is it shown ?
- c. Do you always watch it ?
- d. Why do you like it ?
- e. Any suggestions about it ?

Paragraph :

The programme I like best is foreign films, namely English and American ones. This programme is normally shown twice a week, and I am glad to say that I never miss it. Of course, there are reasons why I feel like this about this programme. In my opinion, the most important of these reasons are four. First, English and American films demonstrate how English is spoken by native speakers. Secondly, they show different aspects of the English or American way of life. These two reasons are most essential to

We have found that this technique is most useful and profitable with our first-year students. Strange as it may seem, we still have a great deal to do along these lines before we can embark on free composition with them.(24) This is due to their present standards in English, which must be taken into careful consideration .

APPENDIX I THE TEST PAPER

1. Use the following paragraph as a guide, and write another describing the way you spent a typical day during a holiday you've had .

“Whenever he stayed on his grandfather’s farm during his holidays, George always had plenty to do. Early in the morning, he used to feed the chickens and other farm animals. After he had finished this, he played with his cousins in the fields until lunchtime. They would pick blackberries, chase rabbits, look for birds’ nests, and play a hundred-and-one games. After dinner it was usually too hot to work or play, so George used to take a nap or read a book. Later in the afternoon, he and his cousins would often go swimming. In the evening, the animals had to be fed again, the cows milked, and the chickens’ eggs collected. Then it was time for George to go to bed. ”

2. Study the following paragraph. See if it has a definite controlling idea. If it does, underline it and decide if it is completely developed. Finally, say if there is any irrelevant information in it .

“It is easy to understand why Mrs. Smith is always so busy between 5:45 and 7:45 in the evening . Her two young boys go to school at 7:45 in the morning , and Mr. Smith goes to work at 8:00. The boys eat lunch at school and Mr. Smith takes sandwiches to work for his lunch. Therefore, Mrs. Smith is not usually very busy at lunchtime. Mrs. Smith’s youngest child is only eleven months old, so she spends most of the afternoon sleeping. At about 5:45 Mrs. Smith has to start cooking because Mr. Smith gets home at 6:30 and wants his dinner

24. The techniques of teaching free composition to our students require further investigation which does not fall within the scope of this paper.

and an incentive to increase and improve their efforts. (20) Corrections to these efforts can be made by the students themselves with the teacher's guidance; and if they cannot, the teacher himself does the job.

Admittedly, this technique is slow and it usually results in untidy black-board work, but it pays in the long run, simply because it is practical. (21) It actually shows the students, step by step, how sentences are constructed and paragraphs built; and that is what our students need. That is why we devote three periods a week to composition in the first year : two double periods and another single one. During the double periods, we always manage to finish a fresh paragraph on the board, which the students copy in their composition books. And in the single period, a couple of days later, we give the students a chance to go through and analyse a paragraph written by professional writers, as a follow-up . (22) Also as a follow-up to what has been done in the double periods, we sometimes give the students a topic, or a copy of a picture with a story behind it(23),and ask them to supply a plan for it and then write a paragraph about it at home. And during the following double periods, the same topic, or story, is tackled on the board, in the manner presented above, with us acting as a guide. Remedial work regarding prominent mistakes, linguistic or otherwise, is done during the single period. Language mistakes are dealt with in contexts of situation. In other words, the correct versions of the students' errors are used in little paragraphs, and not in separate sentences out of context, to show the students how they occur in everyday situations. Other mistakes concerning the organisation of the paragraph, its pattern and sequence, are dealt with practically, by going through a sample paragraph stressing these points.

20. Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

21. We have noticed a considerable degree of improvement in the students' expression of English since we started using this method.

22. Paragraphs from the following sources have been studied in class. Jupp, T. C. and Milne, J., *Guided Course in English Composition*, Heinemann, 1968. Bright, J.A., *English Composition Course for Overseas Students*, Longmans, 1962. Campbell, R.R., *English Composition for Foreign Students*, Longmans, 1962. Ohlsen, W. and Hammond, F. L., *From Paragraph to Essay*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1963. And Close R. A., *The English We Use*, Longmans, 1962.

23. We have used pictures from Hill, L. A., *Picture Composition Book*, Longmans, 1962. See Hill, L. A., *Picture Composition Book-Teachers' Guide*, Longmans, 1961. See also Fleming, G. and Fougasse, *Guided Composition for Students of English*, University of London Press, 1963.

Then the teacher calls for their suggestions in connection with the main ideas, or points, that the topic could cover within the limits of a paragraph of reasonable length. These main points will form the plan for the paragraph. The plan is then written on the board, and the students are encouraged to stick to it to the best of their ability. (13) Part of this plan should be the opening sentence, or the topic sentence. (14) This also has to be supplied by the students themselves, but care should be taken to ensure that the topic sentence chosen should be capable of being developed. (15) The plan is then followed point by point, and sentence after sentence, with the students supplying the information, until the paragraph takes a neat shape. The teacher's role is most important here. Through his promptings and questions, he should guide and stimulate the students "without rigidly conditioning their responses. He must help them to develop an ordered sequence of ideas which is basically their own; prompted by him to a considerable extent perhaps, but not imposed." (16) The use of short sentences should be encouraged at this stage to help the students see clearly the structure, or "skeleton", of the sentence. (17) Then, having shown capability of using the short sentence, the students can attempt linking some of the short sentences to make them longer, (18) and thus introduce variety to their writing. The use of simple language should also be encouraged to produce natural and straightforward sentences, and not forced or artificial ones. (19) We advocate here that the students write their own contributions to the paragraph, including the title, on the board. This would certainly give them a more active role in class,

13. See Hill, *op. cit.*; and Hill, L.A., *Outline Composition Book*, OUP, 1966.

14. See Chaplen, *op. cit.*, pp. 8 - 9.

15. See Radford, W. L., "The Blackboard Composition," *ELT*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, 1969, p. 50.

16. *Ibid*, p. 54.

17. The sample paragraphs in Appendix 2 demonstrate this concern very clearly. These paragraphs were actually written on the board by the students themselves and during their composition periods, but we must not disguise here the fact that the final forms of the sentences in these paragraphs owe a great deal to us.

18. Radford, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

19. In their writing and speech, the students often try to imitate the language of the literature they are reading regardless of its suitability for the context or situation. They sometimes look for difficult words and expressions to include in their writing thinking, wrongly of course, that this kind of "forced" writing creates a better impact on the reader than the simple and natural language does.

not structure. In other words, the students displayed no original effort in this item in so far as both language and content are concerned.

There was commotion when we gave the students their test papers back after the holidays. They were shocked at their grades. But when they calmed down, they wanted to know why they all, except two, got D. We asked them a few questions, examples of which are these: What is a sentence? What is a topic sentence? What is a major support sentence and a minor support one? And what is a paragraph? (9) We discovered that they really knew all the theory; they even had some theoretical knowledge, parrot fashion, of structure, but when they were asked in the test to write, to actually use the language to express their thoughts and feelings in connection with suggested topics, they were hopeless. They could not utilise their theory to produce good and coherent paragraphs. The students were, therefore, told that what they really needed was practice and not theory, practice in using the language itself and not in memorising theory about it, practice in sentence - construction and paragraph-building rather than in the theory of what a sentence or paragraph is. (10) They were also told that it was not really enough to go through and comment on paragraphs written by other people, professional writers or otherwise. (11)

The crux of the problem is that our students have to be shown step by step how to write a good, coherent paragraph. They have to be taught how to walk, so to speak, by taking them carefully by the hand and helping them with their first steps until they acquire enough strength and confidence to walk on their own with ease and assurance. This kind of help, we believe, is best given on the blackboard. The students are invited to suggest a topic, and the one they like best is written on the board. (12)

9. See Chaplen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-21.

10. Before we gave them the test, the students were using Chaplen, *op. cit.*, as a textbook, but with another teacher. That is why the first two items of the test were deliberately chosen from this source. The third one was chosen from Hill, *op. cit.*, for reasons to be disclosed later.

11. See Pincas, A., "Writing in Paragraphs", *English Language Teaching (ELT)*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, OUP, 1970, p. 184.

12. The teacher here interferes to help the students choose a subject which can be treated reasonably well within their range of vocabulary and structure as well as their experience.

and decide if it was completely developed. Then they had to find out if there was any irrelevant information in it. The third item (7) in the test required the students to write a paragraph about a chosen topic, and included suggestive questions for them to use as a guide, if they wished. Four grades were used in assessing every item - A, B, C, and D - that is, the standards of performance were judged according to the alphabetical order of these grades. (8) Two hours were allowed for the test.

The results of the test were simply shocking. Of the eighty-one students who sat the test none managed to get A or B. Only two of them got what we term "the lowest pass grade", C; and all the rest got the lowest grade, D. Their effort was merely sentences in a jumbled order; and there was no pattern, sequence, or coherence in the ir "paragraphs". Furthermore, the qnsjectmatter of their "paragraphs" was just as confused and confuisng as their language, with gaps here and there in the same "paragraph." In most cases, the subject-matter was really difficult to follow; and it took us literally days to go through and assess what they had written .

It is significant to find that the test item least difficult for the students was the second . Most of them managed to underline the sentence that expressed the controlling idea, and single out the irrelevant sentences in the given paragraph. But they were unable to decide if the paragraph was completely developed and how. This really was the most important part of the second test item, because it required a careful examination of the paragraph and actually saying in some detail whether or not it was completely developed . In other words, it called for the student's own judgement of the paragraph and his own evidence of this judgement.

The most difficult item for the students was the last one as the test results clearly show . They had to create a paragraph with the help of the few directive questions supplied. They obviously found that this was not an easy job. But the first item of the test was less difficult for them, because they had a model paragraph before them. Actually, 79 per cent of them just copied the model with very few changes concerning vocabuulary and

7. See Hill, L.A., **Free Composition Book**, OUP, 1966, p.4, from which this item was borrowed. It was again chosen on purpose, because the test was given at the end of the first term, after which the students had a holiday of two weeks.

8. The writer feels that in assessing composition grades are more accurate than marks.

A BLACKBOARD COMPOSITION TECHNIQUE FOR IRAQI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

H. B. M. Al-Sawaf, Ph. D.

It is surprising to discover that first-year university students whose field of study is English have not as yet mastered the basic structures of the language and are generally weak in fundamental language-work. (1) This deficiency is apparent in the students' oral and written expression of the language. When they speak or write English in their composition periods, they cannot use the basic structures effectively, and they still make a considerable number of mistakes, especially in their written work. They do not even understand what a paragraph is and how to write a coherent one in correct English. (2)

To provide evidence of this claim, we gave our first-year students a test in written composition. (3) This test was really easy to compose. (4) It included only three items. The first one (5) gave the students a paragraph as a guide, then asked them to write another on more or less the same lines. In the second item, (6) the students were given a paragraph and asked to see if it had a definite controlling idea. If it did, the students had to single it out

-
1. The writer is focusing on first-year students of the Department of European Languages in the University of Mosul College of Arts. Prior to joining this Department, these students have been learning English for eight years. Actually, they start learning this language at the age of eleven when they are in their fifth year at the primary school, which is a six-year course. Then they go on learning it at their intermediate and secondary schools, which are a three-year course each.
 2. An investigation into the reasons why the standards are so poor does not concern this study.
 3. We could not give the students a really reliable test in oral composition owing to the fact that we have no audio facilities available to do the job. This could be a subject for another piece of research when equipment is within reach.
 4. A copy of this test is provided in Appendix 1.
 5. This item was taken from Chaplen, F., *Paragraph Writing*, Oxford University Press (OUP), 1970, p. 56. It was chosen deliberately, because the students were having a two-weeks' holiday after the test.
 6. This item was taken from the same source above, pp. 5-6.