Edit Your Memoir for Paragraph Indentation

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn to identify the meaning and purpose of paragraph and indentation.
- Edit practice paragraphs and share their edits with the class.
- Discuss how they can apply this skill to their own independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Memoirs Checklist
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text (without indentations) and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Editing for Paragraph Indentations

Say: As we get closer to publishing our work, we need to focus on how well our writing reflects the rules of style. We want people to focus on the message—not the mistakes that we didn’t find. That is what editing is about. One thing we can edit for is to make sure we have developed our paragraphs correctly. Remember, a paragraph is a group of related sentences that have something in common. We recognize paragraphs when the writer has indented, or started a section of text by spacing in from the left.

Model Editing for Paragraph Indentation

Display the modeling text (without indentations) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen as you read the passage aloud and think about where new paragraphs might begin.

Modeling Text

After first sentence. Say: Since this is the first sentence of a paragraph, I know I need to indent. I’ll go ahead and put a symbol to show that we are going to indent here. (Use the traditional ¶ symbol or other designated symbol.) Now I will continue reading. I know from this first sentence that the author is describing the boat trip. I’ll look for when something new happens. This will probably be where we begin a new paragraph.

After third sentence. Say: It sounds like this is when the boat trip ended. Then the author begins talking about walking off the boat. I bet more things happen off the boat, so I am going to begin a new paragraph with this sentence. I’ll use the same paragraph symbol here.

After last sentence. Say: Every time there is a change in speakers, I know I need to create a new paragraph. Since this sentence begins with dialogue, I’m going to indent it and begin a new paragraph.
2. Rehearse

Practice Editing for Paragraph Indentation

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

The next thing I knew, we were riding this noisy train that flew through the air between more tall buildings than I had ever seen. We were in an elevated subway train racing uptown. The speed, shaking, and noise scared me. “Are you scared?” I asked Nicky. Nicky was grinning a grin so big I thought his face would break. So I forced myself to smile, too.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with a partner to identify the paragraphs in the practice text. Partners should write their edited text and be prepared to show where they indented paragraphs.

Share Practice Edits

Invite partners to read aloud their paragraphs and explain how their edits improved their writing. Make the changes to the text on chart paper or the interactive whiteboard to model how to use proofreading symbols during the editing process. Discuss and support students’ use of proofreading symbols.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned how to edit our memoirs for proper paragraph indentation. Each new paragraph begins with an indent, and each time a character speaks, a new paragraph must start. Remember, during the editing process, good writers find and correct errors before publishing their work. When you leave errors in your writing, readers focus on those errors instead of on the memoir.

Review the Memoirs Checklist (page 59) and encourage students who are at the editing stage of their independent writing to focus on editing for paragraph indentation and other conventions of good writing. During conferences, use the prompts on your conferring flip chart to support students’ independent or peer editing.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to discuss errors they found and were able to correct in their memoirs.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Support beginning ELs’ understanding of the terms paragraph and indent. Show students a paragraph in a book. Say: This is a paragraph. How do we know where the paragraph starts? Good! We can tell the paragraph begins because of the indent. (Point to indented text.) This is an indent. Have students point to the paragraph. Then have them point to the indented text and say the word indent. Repeat, if needed, with the word paragraph.

Intermediate and Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Provide the following sentence frames to support oral language:

I indent a paragraph when ______.
Indenting is important because ______.