When to Start a New Paragraph

**Objectives**

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Learn when to start a new paragraph.
- Practice starting new paragraphs.
- Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

**Preparation**

**Materials Needed**
- Chart paper and markers
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

**1. Focus**

**Explain When to Start a New Paragraph**

Say: A paragraph is a group of sentences having to do with one topic. If you organize your ideas into cohesive paragraphs, your writing will be easier to follow and you won’t run the risk of frustrating your readers. How do you know when to start a new paragraph? When you begin to write about a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph. Also, when you use dialogue, you begin a new paragraph each time a different character speaks. Today I’m going to show you when to start a new paragraph so you can organize your ideas effectively and make your writing easy to understand.

**Model When to Start a New Paragraph**

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read the text aloud.

**Modeling Text**

Ditanu paused. “What’s wrong?”

“It needs to look more like me,” said the Wife of Hudu-libbi.

Ditanu had never heard anyone say such a thing. The gods knew whom a statue was supposed to represent.

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read the text aloud.

**Say:** This passage has three paragraphs. Can you tell where each one starts? The first paragraph begins, “Ditanu paused,” and then he speaks. The second paragraph is the dialogue of the Wife of Hudu-libbi. The last paragraph begins with a new idea—Ditanu’s reaction to the Wife of Hudu-libbi. The paragraph breaks make the text very easy for readers to follow. We know when different characters are speaking, and we know when the writer presents something new.
2. Rehearse

Practice Starting New Paragraphs

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

“I still have nightmares about it,” said the Wife of Hudu-libbi. Ditanu understood. “I sometimes have nightmares, too,” he said.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to organize the practice text into paragraphs. Pairs should write down their paragraphs and be prepared to read them to the class and explain how they decided when to start a new paragraph.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their paragraphs. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their historical fiction stories.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned when to start a new paragraph in our writing. Remember to keep one idea to one paragraph. When you want to begin a new idea, or when a different character speaks, begin a new paragraph. Learning how to write strong, consistent paragraphs is an important part of becoming a good writer. As you work on your historical fiction stories, read your paragraphs carefully to make sure they are well organized and coherent.

Encourage students to focus on writing cohesive paragraphs when they work on their stories. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share examples of paragraphs from their historical fiction stories.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While other students complete the partner practice activity, work with beginning ELs to help them understand the purpose of quotation marks. Show them examples of dialogue in a simple book and point out the punctuation. Model saying a sentence and then writing it as dialogue. Say: I like baseball. Use gestures to ensure comprehension. Then write the sentence on paper as dialogue with a speaker’s tag, while reading the revised sentence aloud. For example, write and Say: The teacher said, “I like baseball.” Point out the quotation marks. Repeat the process with other simple sentences.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: fiction/la ficción; historical/histórico(a); paragraph/el párrafo.