

**Writing with Scaffolds: Using Paragraph Frames**

**References**


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Jigsaw Reading

1. What is a Paragraph Frame?
After completing prewriting activities one way for teachers to move ESL students into the next stage of the writing process is through the use of a paragraph model or paragraph frame. Similar in form to a cloze fill-in exercise, paragraph frames guide students as they construct sentences to form paragraphs.

Gail Adams, in writing about the importance of supporting student writing, explains: “One of the best research-validated procedures for scaffolding and supporting emerging writers is the use of paragraph frames. “When a paragraph frame is used,” she continues, “a portion of the paragraph is provided and students complete the remainder. First, they (students) learn about the structure of a paragraph including use of a topic sentence and related details. In addition,” she continues, “they (students) gain both sentence and paragraph sense, learn how to generate ideas for a paragraph, practice writing related sentences using a paragraph structure and practice rereading and proofreading their composition.”

~Adams, G. Written Expression: Building the Foundation in Primary Grades

My Favorite Place

______________________________ is my favorite place. One reason I like it is that __________________________________________________________.

Another reason is that __________________________________________________________.

There is no place as wonderful as __________________________________________________________.

2. Use a Paragraph Frame to Strengthen Thinking Skills and Academic Language
According to Jeff Zwiers in Developing Academic Thinking Skills in Grades 6–12: A Handbook of Multiple Intelligence Activities, “…it is vital to model the types of writing that you want your students to do, and to provide plenty of good samples for them to analyze.” Zwiers explains, a paragraph frame is a writing scaffold which can be used to strengthen students’ academic language and thinking skills. (Zwiers, pp. 16-17).

Paragraph writing frames can be used to scaffold writing and guide students as they write sentences and paragraphs which: analyze, categorize and classify information, describe, compare and contrast, give supporting arguments, find commonalities, persuade, interpret, show cause and effect, provide problem solving, etc. “Frames,” Zwiers explains, “…..help students to gradually pick up academic language and eventually use it to compose their own high-quality written products without help.” (Zwiers, pp. 49, 74).

Paragraph frames:
• Explicitly teach ESL writers the academic language needed to communicate abstract and higher order thinking (Using frames is a great way to scaffold instruction and build learners’ confidence in writing, particularly in writing tasks and genres with...
which they have little prior experience.)

- Allow students to express thoughts and ideas that are more complex than their current English proficiency level
- Increase fluency by providing scaffolding support
- Serve as a means to reduce student anxiety about using correct English
- Provide temporary assistance so the student will be able to complete a similar writing task in the future

3. Paragraph Frames Provide a Direct, Guided Writing Model

According to the TEAL (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy) Center Fact Sheet on Research-Based Writing Instruction, teaching using a paragraph frame model is a good way to scaffold instruction and build learners’ confidence in their own writing. Practice with direct, guided writing models, is very effective. Because many “adult education students, are not familiar with different types of written genres, the explicit study of formats, styles, tones, vocabularies, sentence structures, etc. can provide new frames and words” for student work. TEAL Center Fact Sheet on Research-Based Writing Instruction. 2012.

“A writing frame consists of a skeleton outline given to learners to scaffold their writing. By providing a few sentence starters and some rhetorical phrases common to the task or genre, frames give learners a structure that allows them to focus on expressing their thoughts. They also help learners incorporate vocabulary they have learned in a given topic and create more sophisticated sentences and paragraphs……”

Paragraph frames:
- Provide a structure on which to hang ideas
- Provide sentence starters
- Provide support for struggling writers
- Can be differentiated to stretch more competent writers


4. Using Think-Alouds with Paragraph Writing

A “think-aloud” is when a teacher takes time during instruction to describe their thinking process to their class. Think-alouds allow students to see how the thought process of the teacher works. During a writing think-aloud, a teacher would verbalize their thinking about the writing lesson while at the same time using academic language.

Right now, I want you to watch and listen to what I do and say. Imagine I am a student and I am sitting at my desk. It is just me, the desk, and my work. I want you to see what goes on in my mind as I look at my writing. I want to turn my writing into a good paragraph.

I’m going to follow the paragraph writing frame for comparing and look at my paper and see if I have included all the elements of a good paragraph. Let’s see…..
• In the introduction, do I have two things that I am comparing? No....so I need to fill them in.
• Do I show how the two things are the same, or similar? One of the details is not clear, so I need to make it clearer.
• Do I show how the two things are different, how they differ? Yes.
• Do I need a conclusion, an ending for my paragraph?.....I don’t have a conclusion.....So, I need to write a conclusion.
• Let me go back and write my introduction.....the introductory statement.

The use of a paragraph frame should begin with a discussion of paragraph writing (and the elements of a good paragraph) and how using a paragraph frame supports the writing. This discussion would be followed by teacher and students jointly filling in a frame. Later, students would write on their own while using a frame for support. By making academic literacy explicit in this way, writing frames help learners improve their reading comprehension and begin to predict and follow the academic style of writing.


### Procedure for Implementing a Jigsaw Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher provides participants a lesson to work on in teams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The lesson is divided into sections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants form teams of 4. They number off 1-2-3-4 within teams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person 1 reads Section A of the reading, Person 2 reads Section B, Person 3 reads Section C, and Person 4 reads Section D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each participant reads/scans their section within the time allotted and either summarizes what they read, or reports answers to assigned questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team members report back to the team on their assigned tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other team members listen actively and record information on a guided activity worksheet.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Sample Jigsaw Reading Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph Frame Information (for instructors)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning Information (for instructors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic School Information (hours school is open, courses available, significant dates, holidays) (for students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Brochures from famous cities (important landmarks and monuments) (for students)</td>
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Writing: Using a Paragraph Frame for Comparing
In the following example developed by Betsy Parrish and Kimberly Johnson building on the work of Jeff Zwiers, in the prewriting stage, ESL students initially walk around the classroom and gather information from male and female classmates about what kinds of jobs they do and what activities they do at home. Each student interviewer records the information in their cluster diagram. After completing the prewriting information gathering stage of the activity, students continue by working with a partner or in a small group. They use the information gathered to evaluate the similarities and differences between the jobs and activities of men and women. After discussion in which the information is evaluated and summarized, groups or pairs fill in the “compare and contrast” paragraph frame.

Our Jobs and Activities

Paragraph Frame for Scaffolding Comparing

_________________ and ____________________ are similar in several ways.
They both______________________________________.
They also______________________________
Furthermore, each______________________________. Because
of these similarities, we (they) can help each other__________________________.

However, _________________________ and ______________________ differ in
some key areas. First, _________________
In addition, _________________ . In contrast, _________________.
These differences help us to see _________________________________.

(Parrish, B., Johnson, K. 2011; Zwiers, J. 2005)
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At intermediate and advanced ESL levels, the following paragraph frames from Jeff Zwiers in Developing Academic Thinking Skills in Grades 6—12: A Handbook of Multiple Intelligence Activities can be taught for comparing, classifying, and categorizing information, and to evaluate cause and effect.

Writing: Academic Language Paragraph Frames

1. Paragraph Frames for Scaffolding Classifying and Categorizing
   It is helpful to place the ______________________, ______________________, and ______________________ in the same group. They have important commonalities such as ______________________. Likewise, the ______________________ and ______________________ belong together because they ______________________. However, the ______________________ is distinct because it ______________________. We need to create a new category for it, such as ______________________.

2. Paragraph Frames for Scaffolding Cause and Effect
   The cause of ______________________ is not obvious as we are led to think. Even though many people think the cause was ______________________, I believe that the main cause was ______________________. First, ______________________. Second, ______________________. Therefore, if I am correct, then we must ______________________.
   The effects of ______________________ are significant because ______________________. First, we have the ______________________. Though some people simply think this is just a coincidence, I believe it is more. For example, consider ______________________. In addition, ______________________. Because of these arguments, we should at least begin to ______________________.
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Writing: Using a Paragraph Frame for Time Sequencing
Another way to teach the sequencing of a paragraph using a paragraph frame is by providing students with a set of phrases that will fit into sentences within a paragraph. In the example below, begin by teaching students the sequencing words: first, then, next, while, after, finally, etc. Then, have pairs of students work to order and sequence the phrases. Have them list the career goal first. After listing the goal, have them list the steps to getting there. After they have written the paragraph, have students compare their writing in small groups.

- Goal: Be a licensed vocational nurse.
- Complete my ESL courses and get a GED.
- Take classes to study nursing at a community college.
- Work as a volunteer at a nursing home.
- Pass the state licensing exams.
- Save some money.
- Have a successful career in the field of nursing.

My Future Plans
In five years, I plan to _____________________________. First, I plan to ____________
_______________________________________________________________________. Then, I
want to _______________________________________________. While I am in school, I plan to
_________________________________________________________.
After finishing my schoolwork, _______________________________________________________________________.
I plan to________________________________________________________________________________. I hope
to get a job in a good hospital. While I work, I plan to _______________.
I look forward to_______________________________________________.

Sequencing Information from Informational Texts
In the ___________________________(story, event, period of history), there are three
important ___________________________________________(events, steps, directions, etc.)
First,_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________.
Second,_______________________________________________________________________________.
Next,_______________________________________________________________________________.
In conclusion,_________________________________________________________________________.
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*Sample paragraph frames for high beginning ESL and above:

1. **My Favorite Dinner**

   If I could have my favorite dinner, these are the foods I would pick. First, I would pick ___ because ___________________________.

   Next, I would also select __________________________________________.

   I also like __________________ because _________________________________.

   I would be thrilled to have this dinner.

2. **My Best Friend**

   ___________ is my best friend for a number of reasons. First of all, ______ is my best friend because _____________________________.

   Also ___________ is _____________________________________________.

   In addition, _________________ is my best friend because_____________________.

   I am so lucky to have _________________ as a friend.

3. **My Favorite Place**

   _________________ is my favorite place. One reason is that _____________________________.

   Another reason is that _________________________________.

   _________________ is also my favorite place because _____________________________.

   There is no place as wonderful as _____________________________.

   (Adams, G. 2008)
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Making “I” Statements  
Teaching Students to Identify and Articulate Transferable 21st Century Skills

Not only do we need to teach students how to collaborate, communicate and work in teams in the classroom, we need to help students develop an understanding of what they are doing and provide them with the language to explain it to others.

**Explicit Teaching** Tell students what they will be/are doing in class:

*This week you will be/are practicing working in teams.*
*This week you will be/are practicing writing a paragraph.*

**Skills Brainstorm** After doing a cooperative activity, stop the class and ask, “What skills did you use in class today?” Ask leading questions such as, “Did you work in a team?” From student comments and your own rephrasing, end up with statements on the board such as:

- Work in a group/team.
- Take notes.
- Gather and summarize information.
- Write a paragraph.

**Cooperative Groups** Convene cooperative groups. Have group leaders repeat the question, “What skills did we use today?” Have students make statements such as:

- We worked in a group/team.
- We listened to each other.
- We gathered and summarized information.
- We wrote a paragraph.

**“I Statements”** Teach students phrases they can say in an academic or job interview:

- I work well in a team.
- I listen to others.
- I take notes.
- I can write a paragraph.

**“I Statements”** In groups, have students practice making “I” statements. Provide them with additional examples.

- I can work in a team and get along with my teammates.
- I can listen to others and give feedback.
- I can write a paragraph.

**Role-Play:** Have students role-play academic and job interviews, one playing the employer, the other playing the employee. The employer asks, “What can you tell me about yourself?” “What skills do you have?” The employee responds, “I work well in a team….I can listen and take notes…..I learned these skills in my ESL classes at school.

**Reflect** Repeat these reflective activities on a regular basis so students become comfortable identifying their transferable 21st Century skills. Have student groups discuss how these skills can be used on the job and named in academic and job interviews.