

WRITING DEVELOPMENT

In her book, *The Writing Revolution* Judith Hochman tells us that students' problems with reading comprehension, as well with writing essays, occur because they have not been taught systematically to write ... to which her book gives a step-by-step guide.

The Writing Development exercises here are adapted from her programme.

Conflict with the Indigenous Nations – Overview

18. Paragraphs – turning notes into a paragraph

Let's say I have been asked to write about how conflict broke out between the Indigenous tribes and the *wašiču*, and I am writing my first paragraph on the period 1831-51. I remember my notes:

- **PRESSURES:** *Oregon Trail (1840). California Trail (to the goldfields 1849). Mormon Trail (1846)*

I turn this fairly easily into a basic paragraph of three sentences:

“Gold miners went west for gold. Pioneers went to Oregon and California. The Mormons went to the Great Salt Lake.”

and it scores ... 1 mark. It is inadequate.

SO... how might I improve this paragraph? I will use the following ideas:

- Start with a topic sentence introducing the idea of the paragraph
- Expand sentences by adding factual information
- Vary vocabulary
- Use subordinating conjunctions and an appositive
- Explain how all this led to conflict, including proving information
- End with a concluding sentence

Doing all this, I might end up with a paragraph which reads:

“Conflict first broke out in the 1840s, as the first groups of white Americans began to go onto the Great Plains. Gold miners went west – notably to California in 1849 – seeking their fortune. Pioneers travelled to Oregon and California seeking good farmland. Meanwhile the Mormons, a persecuted religious sect, settled by the Great Salt Lake. In doing so, these *wašiču* crossed and settled sacred tribal lands, and killed thousands of buffalo; this did not just displace and damage the Indigenous tribes' way of life, it was deeply offensive to their religion and values. The inevitable result was the first skirmishes between settlers and Indigenous warriors on the Plains.”

- Look at my revised paragraph. Identify in it the parts where I have implemented ideas a-f.
- My second paragraph deals with the period 1851-67. My notes read:

- **PRESSURES:** *1851-1867: Regular stage to California. Gold discovered in Colorado (1859). First farmers onto Plains (1862). Goodnight-Loving trail (1866).*

Improve the following basic paragraph using ideas a-f above:

“There was a regular stagecoach to California. Gold was discovered in Colorado. Farmers went onto the Plains. The Goodnight-Loving Trail was opened.”

- My third paragraph deals with the period 1851-67. My notes read:

- **PRESSURES:** *1867-1885: Railways. Cow towns. Gold discovered in Black Hills (1870). Supplies to the reservations are inadequate. Many Americans wanted to exterminate the Indigenous Peoples. Slaughter of buffalo.*

Write my third paragraph for me:

- Start with six basic sentences.
- Improve the paragraph using ideas a-f.

TOP TIP: before you put a paragraph 'to bed', read it (or better still, ask someone else to read it) out loud. You will immediately catch any grammatical errors, and also realise whether its meaning is clear enough.]