Paragraph Detectives: How Each Sentence Grows the Idea

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 8
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Paragraph structure
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United States

Students learn how each sentence in a paragraph has a job. They label sentences and track how a key concept gets refined.

Curriculum links

- Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text [2]
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole [2]

Learning objectives

- Students will analyze a paragraph sentence by sentence to name each role.
- Students will explain how sentences develop and refine a key concept.
- Students will identify topic, evidence, analysis, and wrap-up sentences.

Success criteria

- I can label each sentence by the job it does.
- I can explain how a sentence refines the key concept.
- I can name topic, evidence, analysis, and wrap-up parts.

What students already know

Ask: What does the first line of a paragraph usually do? Listen for: tells what the paragraph is about.

Key words

topic sentence	first line that tells what the whole chunk is about [4]
evidence	facts, quotes, or numbers that show a point is true [7]
analysis	thinking that says what proof means and why it matters [3]
concluding sentence	last line that wraps up the point and points ahead [7]
refine	make a thought clearer and sharper by adding limits or details [2]

Materials

- Slides 1-5, 7, 10-12
- Worksheet page 2 with Passage Why Focus Matters Paragraph 2
- Highlighters
- Blank paper for three-step chain

Before the lesson

- Print worksheet page 2 for each pair with sentences in Paragraph 2 numbered 1 to 4
- Load slides 1-5, 7, 10-12 and check projector
- Set out highlighters and blank paper for chain
- Write guiding questions for sentences 2 and 3 on board

Lesson outline

0–7 min **Starter** 7 min · Whole class

Hook interest and recall that each sentence has a job in building one idea.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 1 Paragraph Detectives and read title question.
2. Say the hook and hold up Paragraph 2 with sentences covered except first and last.
3. Show Slide 3 fact that no rule says a paragraph must be five sentences.
4. Show Slide 2 objectives and read I can label each sentence aloud.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen and predict how first and last sentences might differ.
2. Read objectives with teacher.
3. Give thumbs up if they can remember one sentence job.

Say: Does the last sentence mean exactly the same as the first? Let's find out where the meaning changed. Today we are paragraph detectives tracking how one idea grows clearer sentence by sentence.

Ask: What does a strong paragraph focus on? (One clear idea per paragraph [5].) · Does the last line just repeat the first? (No, it refines and ties ideas together and transitions forward [7].)

Check understanding: Thumbs up or down for one idea per paragraph. Reteach with tower image if mixed.

Support: Show first and last sentences side by side so comparison is easy to see. **Stretch:** Ask students to predict which middle sentence will change the meaning most.

Use: Slides 1-3

7–19 min **Teaching** 12 min · Whole class

Model how to label sentence roles and spot development of a key concept.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 4 key words and define topic sentence, evidence, and analysis.
2. Show Slide 5 tower question and explain each block holds up one idea like each sentence.
3. Model labeling Paragraph 2 sentence 1 as opener using think-aloud.
4. Show Slide 7 Evidence vs Explanation contrast and model sentence 2 vs sentence 3.

STUDENTS DO

1. Follow with highlighters and repeat labels with teacher.
2. Choral read sentence 3 and vote evidence or explanation.
3. Point to tower blocks for start, middle, and end.

Say: Every sentence has a job: start it, prove it, grow it, close it. A paragraph is a group of sentences held together by a controlling idea [4]. Evidence never speaks for itself without analysis of how it supports the claim [3].

Worked example: Paragraph 2 Sentence 1: Focused practice builds stronger memory because it forces the brain to repeat one clear signal. Step 1: Ask what chunk is about - focused practice and memory. Step 2: Label topic sentence that introduces what the paragraph is about [4]. Step 3: Note key concept starts as broad claim about repeat one clear signal. Sentence 2: For example, a student who rereads math notes for twenty minutes without checking a phone remembers more the next day. Step 1: Spot For example plus facts. Step 2: Label supporting sentence that adds evidence [7]. Step 3: Note it narrows vague signal to twenty minutes without checking a phone.

Ask: How do you know sentence 2 is evidence? (Shows facts: who, what, when and comes from example data.) · What does sentence 3 do that sentence 2 does not? (Shows thinking how and why, explains what evidence means.) · What must each middle sentence do for unity? (Stay on one idea and link back to the opening line [5].)

Check understanding: Hold up E for evidence or X for explanation for sentence 3. Reteach Slide 7 if split.

Support: Provide word bank clues: states main idea, gives fact or quote, explains what it means, wraps up and connects. **Stretch:** Ask students to underline exact words where sentence 3 refines sentence 2.

Use: Slides 4-5, 7

19–44 min **Main Activity** 25 min · Pairs

Analyze in detail how each sentence develops and refines focused practice.

YOU DO

1. Hand out numbered Paragraph 2 and highlighters and read paragraph aloud while pairs whisper read together [1].
2. Direct pairs to highlight where focused practice is introduced, developed, and refined.
3. Guide sentences 2 and 3 with: What new detail does this add? How does it make trying hard more specific?
4. Have pairs build three-step chain: starts as, becomes clearer when, refined to mean.

STUDENTS DO

1. Whisper read Paragraph 2 together to support fluency and comprehension [1].
2. Annotate sentences 1 to 4 as focus statement, evidence, explanation, refining wrap-up.
3. Make three-step chain on paper: starts as -> becomes clearer when -> refined to mean.

Say: You and your partner track one key concept, focused practice, from start to finish. Number the sentences 1 to 4. Highlight where it gets clearer and decide what each sentence does for the idea.

Worked example: Chain for Paragraph 2. Starts as: focused practice builds memory by repeating one clear signal in sentence 1. Becomes clearer when: we see that a student rereads math notes for twenty minutes without checking a phone in sentence 2, adding proof. Refined to mean: each repeat without interruption tells the brain information matters in sentence 3, then focus signals value into removing distractions in sentence 4. Sentence 4 is brief wrap-up that tells how information supports main point [21].

Ask: Which sentence most refines the key concept? Why? (Sentence 4, it changes trying hard into specific habit of removing distractions.) · What would be lost if sentence 3 was removed? (We would have proof but no thinking that explains why repeats matter.)

Check understanding: Collect chains and check for specific refining words. Pull small group to reread sentence 3 aloud if vague.

Support: Number the sentences and give guiding questions for sentences 2 and 3, such as What new detail does this add? **Stretch:** Partners argue which single sentence does the most refining work and why.

Use: Worksheet page 2 Passage Why Focus Matters Paragraph 2

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44–55 min **Practice** 11 min · Whole class

Explain reasoning and agree which sentence refines the idea most.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 10 big idea and read Every sentence has a job: start it, prove it, grow it, close it.
2. Show Slide 11 question Which sentence in our paragraph most refines the key concept? Why?
3. Have pairs share one-line reason like Sentence 3 gives thinking for the main idea.
4. Summarize that analysis refines meaning over the course of the text [2].

STUDENTS DO

1. Think, then pair and share choice with reason.
2. Listen to two pairs and agree or disagree with evidence.
3. Revise chain with stronger refining words if needed.

Say: Turn to your partner and pick one sentence that does the most refining work. Say it in one clear line and point to the words that make the idea sharper.

Worked example: Sentence 3: This happens because each repeat without interruption tells the brain the information matters. Reason: It does not add new facts, it adds why. The words without interruption refine twenty minutes into a rule, and tell the brain the information matters, which refines remembers more into a brain signal.

Ask: How does sentence 4 refine, not just repeat? (Adds concluding observation that leads forward, not just summary [6].) · Why must analysis be the biggest part? (Evidence needs thinking to show how and why it proves the point.)

Check understanding: Cold-call pairs for Sentence 4 refines the idea by... Correct to specific habit language if general.

Support: Provide sentence starters: This sentence gives evidence that... This refines the idea because...
Stretch: Ask students to write a so what line why the refinement matters to the whole text.

Use: Slides 10-11

55–60 min **Plenary** 5 min · Whole class

Check understanding of sentence roles and unity before exit.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 12 true or false statements and read first two aloud.
2. Take class vote true or false with reasons.
3. Address that evidence speaks for itself is false and fix with analysis point.
4. Restate objectives and preview homework.

STUDENTS DO

1. Vote true or false and explain in one sentence.
2. Correct false statement to need analysis.
3. Self-rate I can label each sentence.

Say: Show me true or false. Every paragraph should focus on one main idea. Unity keeps writing clear and convincing. We will use your vote to see what stuck today.

Ask: True or false: Evidence speaks for itself without analysis? (False, it needs explanation of what it means [1].) · True or false: Every paragraph should focus on one main idea? (True, unity on one topic keeps writing clear [5].)

Check understanding: Show of hands for all three votes. Reteach wrap-up job if last vote is weak.

Support: Show checklist: restates main idea, adds refining thought, points ahead. **Stretch:** Ask students to defend why unity helps the reader follow refinement.

Use: Slide 12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Calling evidence the explanation	Labels sentence with example or numbers as explains meaning	Ask does it show who or what, or does it tell how and why it matters [3].
Thinking closing sentence only repeats	Says last line means same as first	Point to new words that add limit and link forward, not just summary [6].
Putting two ideas in one paragraph chart	Chain drifts to new topic like sleep or phones alone	Return to controlling idea and check each sentence links back for unity [5].

Support

- Number the sentences and give guiding questions for sentences 2 and 3, such as What new detail does this add?
- Provide sentence starters: This sentence gives evidence that... This refines the idea because...

Stretch

- Partners argue which single sentence does the most refining work and why.
- Students add a so what line explaining why the refinement matters to the whole text.

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with pairs needing reading support during whisper reading. Prompt with guiding questions and word bank for evidence vs explanation.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer

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Which sentence is the topic sentence in Paragraph 2 and what does it do?	Sentence 1, opens with main idea of focused practice.
How does sentence 3 refine the key concept?	Explains repeats tell the brain information matters, adds why.
Why does Paragraph 2 need analysis, not just evidence?	Evidence needs thinking to show how it proves the point [3].

Homework

Complete Worksheet Task E: explain Paragraph 2 structure and sentence roles in a short letter.

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