
Follow the Footsteps: A Step-by-Step Process for Successful Descriptive Paragraph Formation

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Introduction:

This lesson was developed to help students formulate a step-by-step process for descriptive paragraph writing. A descriptive paragraph is one which creates an image in the reader's mind. Many of my students have a difficult time getting started with their paragraph writing or do not know how to continue after they have written their topic sentence. Additionally, when writing descriptive paragraphs, they often rely upon repetitive descriptors instead of expanding their use of adjectives and adverbs. This lesson provides students with a pattern to follow in writing their paragraphs as well as aids them in creating better descriptive paragraphs.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy:

I created this lesson to help my students develop and internalize a step-by-step thinking strategy for writing descriptive paragraphs. Because we do a lot of descriptive writing, my students are often called upon to use a variety words and phrases to depict, in detail, the subject about which they are writing. I was finding that many of my students had trouble creating paragraphs that were descriptive and detailed, without being repetitive. Many of them were struggling over how to start their paragraphs. They had trouble continuing on after they had developed a topic sentence. They were unable to elaborate upon their point.

This strategy allows them to reach each stage in the paragraph

writing process step-by-step by showing them how and when each decision in the process is made. Using the thinksheets as a guide, my students are able to successfully complete the process. They then have all the information they need to write an informative, well-organized, descriptive paragraph.

Step 2: Modeling the Strategy:

Using an overhead projector, I introduce the students to a copy of the thinksheet they will be using for this lesson. I explain to them that I will be sharing with them a strategy for descriptive paragraph writing which, if used correctly, will enable them to write descriptive paragraphs smoothly and easily.

I introduce a topic for discussion to use as an example. We are currently studying mammals so I choose, as my example, the "lynx." I tell my students that I have decided to write a descriptive paragraph about what a lynx looks like. Their job is to help me complete each step in the process. See attached thinksheet for example.

Footstep #1: This is where we write the topic of my paragraph.

Footstep #2: I ask myself "What am I going to discuss in my paragraph?" As a group, we come up with 2-3 sentences that may or may not work as topic sentences in my final paragraph. I write those choices down in the space provided. I tell my students that they may or may not use these choices.

Footstep #3: This step asks me to create a list of adjectives or phrases I may want to use in describing the lynx. We think about the animal for a minute. At this point, the class can brainstorm ideas. I then write down suggestions of words or phrases which could be used in describing this animal. I may or may not use them in my final paragraph. (This is perhaps the most helpful section of the "footsteps" process because it allows the creation of a list of words instead of demanding full sentences. The student can think more precisely.)

Footstep #4: Here I am asked to write 3-4 sentences using the words and phrases I listed above. Now that I have those words and phrases down

on paper, creating sentences with them becomes a much easier task. The class helps me write my sentences.

Footstep #5: I am now asked to organize those sentences in the order they would most make sense in my paragraph. I allow the class to offer suggestions. If there are more than one possible arrangement, we vote on the best one.

Footstep #6: I am now required to choose the topic sentence I believe will best suit the paragraph. I can refer to my list of possibilities in "Footstep # 2" to determine the best topic sentence for my paragraph. If I need to, I can create a new topic sentence now that I have the rest of the paragraph written.

Footstep #7: I finish my paragraph with a concluding sentence. This sentence should sum up what I have written about the lynx. As a class, we brainstorm possibilities. The concluding sentence should be kept simple but pull together the information I have stated in my paragraph.

Footstep #8: This is the last step in the process. I rewrite the paragraph in it's full form. I then ask the class, "Does this paragraph describe a lynx?" If it does, we have successfully completed the task. If it does not, we will need to read back through the steps to determine where we got off course.

Step 3 - Scaffolding the Strategy:

After I go through the process on the overhead, (leaving my example on the overhead for them to see) I pass out a copy of the thinksheet to each student. Their task is to follow the same process we followed together to write their own paragraph about a mammal of their choice. I circulate as they write to make sure they are following the steps of the process. We then share our paragraphs with each other.

Step 4 - Providing Additional Practice:

The descriptive paragraph thinksheets are available for use in my room at all times. Some of my students still rely upon the thinksheets to

take them through the step-by-step process while others are able to follow the steps without outside help. As time goes on, I'm confident that most of my students will cease to require the help of the sheets. Additionally, I have the steps listed on a poster which hangs in the "Write Right" section of my room with other helpful suggestions for writing. If I see a student struggling while he/she is writing, I often refer to the "footsteps" to help them back on track.



Thinksheet
Writing Descriptive Paragraphs

Follow the Footsteps



1 Choose your topic.
What do you want your paragraph to be about?



2 Write 2-3 topic sentences about your choice.
DO NOT choose one to use yet.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



3 Brainstorm a list of words or phrases you could use to describe and discuss the topic you chose for your paragraph.



4 Create 3-4 sentences using some of the words/phrases you came up with.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



5

Put those sentences in **order** to form a paragraph that makes sense to you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



6

Choose the best topic sentence from the choices in Footstep #2 for the sentences you have written.



7

Write a closing sentence to your paragraph.



8

Rewrite the final product. Does your paragraph state what you wanted to say?