

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.

Western Front, 1917

10. Paragraphs - turning points into a paragraph

Let's say I have been asked to write an account of how British generals introduced new tactics in 1917. I reach the events of the [battle of Cambrai](#), and I turn to [my notes](#):

- *Surprise attack w. 476 tanks smuggled in (labelled 'WATER TANKS').*
- *Used latest 'COMBINED ARMS' tactics (all combat branches co-ordinated)..*

a. I summarise these into a 'basic paragraph' of three simple sentences:

"Cambrai was a surprise attack. Tanks were smuggled in. The attack used the tactic of 'combined arms'."

That is not going to score me many marks! SO... how might I improve this paragraph?

b. To improve the paragraph, I will use Judith Hochman's ideas:

- Start with a topic sentence introducing the idea of the paragraph
- Expand sentences by adding factual information
- Vary vocabulary
- Use conjunctions
- Explain how this information addresses the question, including proving information
- End with a concluding sentence which directly answers the question

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

"Finally, the generals used new tactics at the Battle of Cambrai. The idea of a surprise attack was not new (although it shows that the generals were at least trying to be inventive) but the 'surprise' element was indeed VERY new. 476 tanks had been smuggled in, labelled 'Water Tanks' so that they would not be recognised (this, by the way, is why they were called 'tanks'). Moreover, mounting the attack, the generals also introduced the new battle-strategy of 'combined arms', integrating infantry, artillery, air force, tanks, engineers - and even the 2nd & 5th cavalry divisions - into a single plan. Even though technical inadequacies of the tanks caused the attack to fail, its initial remarkable success was due to the British generals introducing new ideas.

Note that all of this information comes from the webpage, apart from the details of the combined arms, which comes from the webpage on [Improvements](#); what makes it effective is the way the information has been put together to answer the question.

1. So look at my revised paragraph. Identify in it the parts where I have implemented ideas *i-vi*.

This is a **really good way** to write an essay:

- Choose the topic for a paragraph.
- Write a 'basic paragraph' of three simple sentences/ideas.
- Improve the paragraph using ideas *i-vi*.

2. Using this approach, write the rest of the essay:

'Write an account of how British generals introduced new tactics in 1917.'

... adding paragraphs on Vimy Ridge and Messines, using the notes on the webpage and your wider research.

[Question: are you going to include a paragraph on Passchendaele?]

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.]