

## **Peer review activity – guess the argument**

### Abstract

In this exercise, students will review their peers' essay draft (argumentative essay). Particularly, students will be asked to write short summaries to random peers' single paragraphs extracted from the essay body, then write the conclusion and introduction based on a collection of one sentence summaries. The goal of this exercise is to review whether each paragraph in an essay contain a clear main point and whether points in different paragraphs are structured to form a coherent argument for the whole essay.

Keywords: topic sentence, writing style, logical flow.

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### Student handout

You would have received a draft of your peer's essay with each paragraph covered by blank pieces of paper. You'll notice that some of the papers are flip-able, and you are able to access your peer's writing, some are not. We'll do this exercise together. Please follow the steps below:

Let's start with the paragraph bodies (i.e., flip-able papers)

1. Pick the next accessible paragraph and focus on this paragraph. Read this paragraph carefully, and on the blank piece of paper covering it, write a one-sentence summary of this paragraph. Ignore any other paragraphs or writings.
2. Pass it to the next person, repeat step one
3. If you receive a paper for which all paragraph bodies have been summarized (all the blank flip-able papers are filled), pick a random paragraph to read and evaluate the summary your peer has written about this paragraph. Is there anything you'd like to add/revise?

Let's now work on the conclusion (i.e., focus on the last paragraph – you should notice that the piece of paper covering the conclusion is not flip-able).

4. Write a conclusion (a short couple of sentences, paragraphs, or bullet points) based on the paragraph summaries your peers have made.
  - a. Focus on the summaries. Do not read the actual paragraphs.
5. Pass the paper along to the next person

Let's now focus on the introduction (again, this paper covering should not be flip-able).

6. Write an introduction (a short couple of sentences, paragraphs, or bullet points) based on the paragraph summaries and conclusion your peers have written.
  - a. For the body paragraphs, focus on the summary and ignore the actual paragraphs.
7. Return the paper to the original writer

Now that you've received your draft spend some time reading what your peers have written for the introduction, paragraph bodies, and conclusion. This about:

- Do the summaries reflect the exact point you're trying to make in that paragraph? Why or why not?
- Do the conclusion and introduction adequately reflect your main claim and takeaway? Why or why not?

Write a short ~half a page reflection on the above questions and how are you going to revise your writeup next. Upload it on canvas

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Instructor handout

### Goal of activity

Review the clarity and organization of essays:

- At paragraph level: whether each paragraph contains a clear main point/ argument.
- At essay level: whether points are organized clearly and coherently to form a clear conclusion and structure of the essay.

This activity was done for an assignment on an argumentative essay. Thus, one of the main key questions was whether arguments in the essay are clearly expressed within individual paragraphs and whether these arguments/ counterarguments are organized in a manner that clearly conveys the writers' stance on the topic argument.

### Preparation prior to in-class activity

Print out students' essay drafts. Cover each paragraph of students' writing with a piece of blank paper, the height of the paragraph. For paragraphs other than the introduction or conclusion, ensure that the writing is still accessible (i.e., if you were to tape a piece of paper over the paragraph, paste tape only along the left-hand side of the paper). Cover the introduction and conclusion fully with a piece of blank paper such that the writing is not accessible (i.e., paste tape on both the left- and right-hand sides of the paper).

### In class activity

#### Peer review

Pass print out and prepped drafts to authors. This draft will be passed around the class, starting with the authors ensuring that students will receive their peers' drafts to review. Students will pass their essay draft to the person next to them (e.g., in the clockwise direction). For the draft that they just received, students will read the next available paragraph (i.e., if this is the first round of passing, students will read the second paragraph). They will then write a one-sentence summary of that paragraph on the blank paper cover. Students will be instructed to ignore any other paragraphs or written summaries and just focus on the one paragraph. This can be a timed activity (e.g., 3 minutes). After everyone is done writing a one-sentence summary, they'll pass the draft along to the next person and repeat the reading and summarizing activity. Once there are no accessible paragraphs left, students will then write the conclusion (in prose or bullet points) based on the one-sentence summaries that their peers have written. In the last round of passing,

students will write the introduction based on the paragraph summaries and conclusions their peers have written. At the end of this activity, the draft will be passed back to the original author.

### Reflection

Following the peer-review activity, students will be given some time to read the introduction, paragraph summaries, and conclusion their peers have written. They will then write a 0.5 – 1 page reflection on this activity.

### **Additional notes**

- To ensure that all students review an equal number of paragraphs, students may be asked to write a set number of paragraphs.
- When students receive a draft, if there are no other available paragraphs to read, they can pick a random paragraph and evaluate the summary their peers have written. They may write additional points, or they may revise the summary.

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Sample responses (students' reflection)

#### Student 1

This peer review activity made me realize what makes a paragraph easy to follow. Things like transitioning between ideas, having a logical and chronological flow of thoughts, and having a topic and ending sentence in every paragraph is what makes a good writing. The summaries that I have received from my peers have reflected the main points I want people to get from my paper. What my peer wrote in my introduction has given me an idea of what I could use as a hook sentence, and what they wrote for the body paragraphs gives me an idea of what I could write as topic sentences. I will revise my writeup by adding more details and evidence, and making my paper easier to follow by adding more transition sentences and topic sentences that connect ideas from the previous paragraph to the next. Reading through other people's papers have given me an idea of what things I can elaborate on and make a new body paragraph about.

#### Student 2

The summaries do reflect the exact points I'm trying to make most likely because I had clear examples and a clear topic and concluding sentence. Each sentence of a paragraph expanded

on this main idea, which allowed for a clear, concise paragraph. There were some aspects that did not necessarily pull through to the readers, though. Most of the readers understood that I was trying to convey the give-and-take of event segmentation and fuzzy trace theory: although they both cause false memories, they serve a greater purpose/function. However, readers didn't really seem to understand the "why" part, so I think I need to emphasize that the purpose and function of the source of these false memories is to accumulate lots of data for event construction, AND to preserve the mental state from stress and duress. I think I expanded this point mostly in the conclusion, so I think I should try to show more evidence for this point in a body paragraph. I also need to expand upon the "further more" / "significance" of all this aspect of my paper. I attempted to explain how this give-and-take aspect of event segmentation and fuzzy trace can make it seem unfit for our modern world, especially in the context of the court room.

### Student 3

I believe that the elements of a paragraph that make it particularly effective and easy to understand are its structure and having a defined topic. Structure is integral to a good paragraph, as it provides a logical flow for the reader to easily comprehend. I find compare and contrast structures to be especially engaging, since not only do they force the reader to comprehend the topic at hand, but they also apply the reader's newfound knowledge to a critical analysis. Having a defined topic is equally as important and becomes integral to flow. Ensuring that the reader is able to predict where the paragraph is going or what the paragraph is mainly discussing is a good sign that the paragraph is well written.

Personally, my peers were able to adequately capture the points I intended to make. I had created a small outline of the points I wanted to discuss in my paper, and while I wasn't able to write all my desired points for my rough draft, my peers were able to predict the flow and desired points from my introduction alone. I'm glad that my writing was able to convey a good source of information and engagement from my readers that they were able to predict the unwritten yet planned topics so well. This gives me a small boost in confidence in my own writing.