



Punch®
Software for teaching
writing and reading.

Starter Paragraph Punch®

Skill levels 3 - 5

Complete program: 4 units
DETAILS (Unit 1), REASONS (Unit 2),
SEQUENCE (Unit 3), EXAMPLE (Unit 4)

For details about each unit, see the Content section on page 4.
For Teaching Suggestions, see page 6.
Writing Assessment and Independent Writing Worksheet, attached.

Evaluation version: REASONS (Unit 2)
Tracks work for two students.

Windows 98/Me/NT/2000/2003/XP
5 MB RAM, 65 MB hard disk space
This program requires a minimum screen resolution of 800 by 600 pixels.

The program helps students learn different ways to write a paragraph: through details, reasons, sequence, and example. The program contains 16 writing topics and 1,548 help prompts to guide students through each step in the writing process.

This writing program helps students with reading levels of three and up to write effective paragraphs. It teaches four different ways to develop a paragraph: through details, reasons, sequence, and example. A step-by-step approach emphasizes content and organization.

To use Starter Paragraph Punch, students need to be able to write basic sentences on a word processor. The program guides students through each step in writing a complete paragraph. Help messages are provided throughout. Students are encouraged by the program's graphic rewards, as well as by seeing their work develop and progress. Students may transfer their finished paragraphs to a commercial word processing program. Teachers may write a comment to the student that will be saved until the student sees it.

Saving, Printing, and Exiting Before Completing Paragraph

When students exit, the program saves their work and allows them to return to it at another time. The program will quickly scroll students' work and stop at the place they left off. After the students have completed Pre-Writing they will be able to print out their work in progress at frequent intervals. Students who return to Publishing can go back to the Editing sections.

Versions are available for stand-alone, network, or home use. The evaluation version of the program permits entry of only two student names. When a third name is entered, the first one will be deleted. The stand-alone version for one station contains record keeping for 42 students. Other School versions permit entry of as many names as disk space allows. When disk space is filled, the name that was entered first will be deleted.

Operating Overview

The student progresses through the program by typing in input boxes and by clicking on buttons or typing keyboard shortcuts to select actions. Next, their entries are placed and edited in notepads.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION: Introduces a specific type of paragraph - one that presents details, reasons, sequence and example to support the topic of the paragraph.

TOPIC: Students are given several themes and are asked to choose one as the focus of their paragraph. The computer then prompts them to enter the name of their own specific subject, which will be the topic of their paragraph.

PRE-WRITING: A Pre-Writing Notepad appears on the screen. The computer provides a series of writing prompts that are customized to match the topics the students have chosen to write about. These prompts encourage the students to brainstorm. They respond by typing words or phrases into separate input boxes. Then the computer puts the students' ideas into a list. Tips are available if the students get stuck.

WRITING - OPENING SENTENCE: The computer provides two sample opening sentences. Students then write an original opening sentence to introduce their paragraph. Next, they look at their opening sentence together with their pre-writing items and review the items for relevance to the opening sentence.

WRITING - BODY: The Pre-Writing Notepad reappears. Students begin the body of the paragraph by choosing an item from the Pre-Writing notepad and moving it to the Writing Notepad. They then use this item in a sentence that begin the body of the paragraph. They continue to choose several items and write several sentences to complete the body of the paragraph. Students are encouraged to write complete sentences. The sentence must begin with a capital letter, have appropriate end punctuation, and include at least two words.

ORGANIZING: In the first step of this section, the Writing Notepad with the students' sentences appear on the left half of the screen. A Paragraph Notepad with the students' topic sentences are on the right half of the screen. Students transfer sentences from the Writing Notepad and arrange them in the Paragraph Notepad, deciding which sentences to use and in which order. All the sentences do not have to be used, but a minimum number, determined by the topic, must be chosen for the computer to proceed.

In the second step of the Organizing section, students see their work for the first time in paragraph form in the Paragraph Draft box. Next, students are encouraged to add transitional words to help the sentences flow smoothly from one thought to the next.

From this point on, students may print their work. (The printout will show the section of the program from which the work was printed.)

WRITING - CLOSING: The computer provides two sample closing sentences. Students then write an original closing sentence to end their writing.

REVISING - OVERVIEW: In Revising - Overview, the Paragraph Draft appears for review with the paragraph as a whole unit for the first time. The computer asks the students to check their work and guides them in the use of the Add, Change text, Remove, or Move buttons.

OPTIONS MENU: The Options Menu contains four subsections: STYLE, SENTENCE STRUCTURE, GRAMMAR AND PROOFREADING. Each subsection contains lessons designed to help students improve their writing. (The record-keeping program notifies the teacher which subsections the student has looked at.)

--**STYLE:** Students are encouraged to review their choice of nouns, adjectives and verbs. Examples show how changes can make paragraphs more interesting to read.

--**SENTENCE STRUCTURE:** The program reminds students about the common sentence structure problem of incomplete sentences. Examples show how to correct run-on sentences.

--**GRAMMAR:** Students are encouraged to improve their use of commas. Examples show some of the many ways to use commas in a paragraph.

--**PROOFREADING:** The program reminds students about the proper use of capital letters. Examples show students how to use capital letters correctly. Students then revisit their paragraph for spelling errors. Spell checking is available here as review tool. Students are reminded to reread their work after doing a spell check to make sure it makes sense.

PUBLISHING: When students arrive at the Publishing section they are given three choices:

--Review: This allows students to continue revising their paragraphs with help of the Revising section prompts.

--Spell checking: This is an opportunity to review spelling.

--Save: This creates a document with the name of the student, program unit, and a unique code so the file will not overwrite existing documents.

After students' paragraphs are saved, students are presented with these options:

--Print: Name and date appear at the beginning of the printout.

--Word Processor: Moves students' paragraphs to the word processor that was selected in the Teacher Program Manager (TPM).

--New Topic: Allows students to start new topic without exiting the program.

TEACHER PROGRAM MANAGER

All Merit Software applications utilize a centralized student record keeping/management system utility program called Teacher Program Manager (TPM). To learn about these advanced functions, see the Teacher Program Manager manual. It can be printed out from the Software Documentation section of the Merit Software Installation CD or from this link on the Internet:

http://meritsoftware.com/Teacher_Program_Manager.pdf.

LOGGING ON AND CLASS MANAGEMENT

There are two options for adding student names to the record database.

- Teacher controlled – appropriate for most schools. Names added by using the Teacher Program Manager, Set-Up Student Names functions.
- Student controlled – for home users and for mature students. Names added at the Logon Screen.

The evaluation version of the program permits entry of only two student names. When a third name is entered, the first one will be deleted. The stand-alone version for one station contains record keeping for 42 students. Other School versions permit entry of as many names as disk space allows. When disk space is filled, the name that was entered first will be deleted.

For more information about class management and adding student names to the database, see the Teacher Program Manager manual.

The program opens to a Log on screen with all previously entered class codes and student names. Students must select their class code in order to see the list of students in their class. They then click on their name to begin the program. If the program is in student controlled mode and students are logging on

for the first time, they select their class code, click the New Student icon, and fill in their name on the form that appears on the screen.

TRACKING STUDENTS' WORK

In addition to student printouts of their work in progress, teachers may view students' work in the Teacher Program Manager (TPM).

CONTENT OF STARTER PARAGRAPH PUNCH

Each unit concentrates on a specific type of paragraph - based on details, reasons, sequence, and example. Here are the topics within each type:

Unit 1: Details

Topic: An imaginary creature - Our imagination can take us to far-away places. Humans often wonder about life in outer space. Imagine that you have discovered a new planet. Write about the creatures that live on this planet.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe the beings who live on the new planet.

Topic: The weather - Everybody has an opinion about the weather they prefer. Write a paragraph about the weather you enjoy most.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about weather that you enjoy.

Topic: A favorite food - You and your family have just entered a fantastic restaurant. There is no menu there because they can make anything you want, and everything they cook is delicious. Describe what you would order.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to imagine a tasty food made just for you.

Topic: A new superhero - You have seen superheroes on television, in movies and in comic books. They have powers and abilities that are amazing. Think about your idea of a superhero and create your own.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell about a new superhero that you create.

Unit 2: Reasons

Topic: A memorable character - Write about a character you remember well from a book you have read. It could be from a biography (the life of a real person) or from fiction (a made-up story).

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe someone, either real or made up from a book.

Topic: A favorite place - There are many places where you spend your time. Think about a favorite place where you feel comfortable. Write about why you enjoy being there so much.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe your favorite place.

Topic: Someone you like - In your life you have many people whom you know well and with whom you enjoy spending time. Think about someone who is important to you and write about that person.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe someone you like.

Topic: A favorite animal - What animal do you like to visit most at the zoo? Tell why you chose it.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about your favorite animal at the zoo.

Unit 3: Sequence

Topic: Planning a party - Planning a party can be fun, but it requires a lot of hard work. You have been asked to plan a party for your class at your school. You have six weeks to prepare for it. Tell how you would organize it.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe how you will organize a party at school.

Topic: A birthday present - You want to buy a birthday present for a friend. Describe how you will go about doing this.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell about buying a birthday gift for a friend.

Topic: Making a dessert - Bake sales raise money for good causes. Your school is having a bake sale and you are going to make a special dessert. Describe the steps you take to prepare this treat.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell how you will bake something.

Topic: Lost and found something - Everyone has lost something and then found it. Write about something you lost and then found.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe how you lost something and then found it.

Unit 4: Example

Topic: An enjoyable story - In a book there are many different parts to the story. When you read, you meet people, see different places, perhaps travel to a different time period. Choose a book that you enjoyed reading and write about it.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell about a story that you enjoyed.

Topic: A memorable trip - When you travel you can learn many things. Write about a trip that you took to a nearby place or to a far-away place. Tell what you learned on this trip.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell about a trip you remember well.

Topic: An imaginary invention - Many of us have ideas for inventions that could make our lives easier. Maybe you have thought about such an invention. Use your imagination to describe something that you would like to invent.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe something unusual that you want to make.

Topic: A great day - There are great days that we remember. It is fun to look back on these days and think about what made a certain day so wonderful. Write about a great day that you had.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell what you did on a day that you thought was wonderful.

CLASSROOM PRINTOUTS FOR USE WITH STARTER PARAGRAPH PUNCH (Attached)

1. Writing Assessment

Merit Software supplies a possible rubric for assessing students' writing. The rubric resembles the scoring guidelines found on many tests and formal writing assessments. In general, a rubric is valuable for teachers in determining each students' overall writing quality and also the specific strengths and weaknesses of a student's writing. A rubric can be equally important for students. They need to know what components differentiate excellent writing from poor writing. This rubric will help students understand what they need to do to produce good writing. The teacher should actively review the rubric with students and adapt it to the students' language level.

2. Independent Writing Worksheet

One goal of Starter Paragraph Punch is to develop students' ability to write independently. The Independent Writing worksheet assists students in making this transition. The Independent Writing worksheet is a guide for paragraph writing that follows the process presented in Starter Paragraph Punch. It helps students recall the writing steps followed in the program. Using the Independent Writing worksheet, students can work as active learners.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR USING STARTER PARAGRAPH PUNCH

Make personal connections with your students. Ask what kinds of writing they have done for school. When is writing easy? When is it difficult? Do they like or dislike writing? What kinds of writing do students most like to read? Least like to read? Do they write outside of school? Do they keep a diary? Write notes, letters, poems, stories, or songs?

Help your students learn to like language. Give them a setting, such as a supermarket, classroom, movie theatre, beach, park, or museum. Have them work in small groups to come up with a list of people, places, and things found there. Ask groups to provide a list of adjectives that describe these nouns, and a list of verbs to describe actions that their nouns might be doing.

Review the computer keyboard with your class. Remind students how to make capital letters; how to remove Caps Lock; how to insert a space between words; how to delete text; how to insert text. Point out punctuation keys. Point out the difference between left-clicking and right-clicking.

Help your students get to know Starter Paragraph Punch. Have them brainstorm by going through Pre-Writing, and then begin to construct their paragraphs by inputting sentences for Writing-Body. As students reach Organizing, ask them to pause. Now, have them break into pairs, then share their new sentences with their partner.

Have your students share their writing ideas. Ask those who have completed Writing-Body and reached Organizing, to discuss their writing. What is their topic? What are they saying about their topic? What is their opening sentence? Can they make any predictions about how they will conclude their paragraph?

Give your students editing experience. Have students continue with their Merit writing program till they reach Revising. Discuss the Revising prompts—Add, Change text, Remove, Move—with students; these prompts offer information that students can use to improve their paragraph. Ask students to work in pairs, helping each other as they revise.

Boost your students' knowledge of style, sentence structure, grammar, and proofreading. When the student pairs reach the Revising Options Menu, ask them to pause. Have them paraphrase Options Menu prompts before changing their work. Options Menu prompts provide additional information that students can use to improve their paragraph. Ask student pairs to continue helping each other as they revise.

Turn your students into careful writers. Ask pairs to stop working together, and to resume individual work. Ask students to try the prompts on the Revising-Overview section. They will be asked to reexamine their writing. Have students use the prompts to make at least two further changes that will improve their work.

Don't let your students get spellbound. When students reach Publishing menu, make sure that they understand Spell check suggestions; some students tend to replace whole words by clicking too quickly! Next, ask students to quietly read their paragraph aloud to themselves. Do all their changes make sense?

Get your students published. Encourage them to ask for help, rather than exiting from Starter Paragraph Punch before their work is printed. Help them transfer their completed writing onto a floppy disk or other storage device. Encourage students to keep a writing portfolio.

Praise your students for sharing their work. Hold a class reading, and prompt students to encourage each other. What do they like best about another student's writing? Is it helpful to see how others handled a Starter Paragraph Punch topic?

Boost your students' confidence. Follow up each session by asking what students found easiest when using their Merit process-writing program. What was familiar? What new things did they learn about writing?

Troubleshoot the paragraph-writing process. Review any problem areas from a software session in the classroom. Ask students what they found most difficult about writing or revising.

Connect paragraph writing to class content. Give your students a writing topic. Ask them to write a paragraph, using steps from the Independent Writing Worksheet to guide them through the paragraph-writing process.

Practice sentence structure with your students. Give them a short text that contains run-on sentences. Have students mark sentences that should be split into two; then rewrite these sentences to make them shorter.

Practice grammar with your students. Give them a short text that is missing commas or other punctuation. Have students mark places where punctuation is missing, then correct the text.

Practice proofreading with your students. Give them a short text that is missing capital letter. Have students circle words in which letters should either be capitalized or made lower case, then fix this text.

Practice organization with your students. Give them a paragraph-length text that has sentences in the wrong order. Have students fix text by marking the correct order.

Give your students time to practice writing. If possible, allow them to use a word-processing program. Offer a choice of personalized prompts involving the specific types of paragraphs they encountered when using Starter Paragraph Punch: details, reasons, sequence, and example. For example, a details prompt could be "how my family celebrates Thanksgiving: a reasons prompt could be "someone I love," a sequence prompt could be "the best day of my life;" an example prompt could be "a new law that I would make."

Talk about time with your students. Remind them that when writing paragraphs on their own, they need to budget their time between brainstorming, writing a draft, and revising. They also need to time to review their work.

Follow your students' progress. As students complete additional sessions of Starter Paragraph Punch, use the Teacher Program Manager (TPM) to monitor students' individual software session time and what topics they have completed. Re-read their printed writings; then discuss progress with individual students. Praise students for advancing as writers.

Follow class progress. As students complete further sessions of Starter Paragraph Punch, use the Merit Writing Assessment to assess students' individual mastery of paragraph-writing skills. Does student-skill mastery correlate to regular software sessions? What portion or quartile of the class has improved?

Put together a class publication. Towards the end of the school quarter, review students' writing portfolios. Ask students what their favorite writings are. Choose work done with Starter Paragraph Punch, and work done with personalized writing prompts. Publish at least one piece from each student in the class. Ask students to design the cover of the publication and contribute artwork. If possible, include a class picture. Hand out publications at a class party.

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Merit Writing Assessment

Scores from 5 to 1 reflect the range of skills demonstrated in response to each writing assignment.

SCORE OF 5

A 5 writing assignment is **EXCELLENT**. It demonstrates proficiency in response to the assignment. It contains only a few minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 5:

- is very well organized and developed
- very clearly explains a key idea
- displays syntactic variety, including use of sentence structure
- displays facility in the use of language, including use of vocabulary
- is nearly free of errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

SCORE OF 4

A 4 writing assignment is **GOOD**. It demonstrates proficiency in response to the assignment. It may contain a number of minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 4:

- is well organized and developed
- clearly explains a key idea
- displays some syntactic variety, including use of sentence structure
- displays some facility in the use of language and vocabulary
- is generally free of errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

SCORE OF 3

A 3 writing assignment is **COMPETENT**. While it demonstrates some proficiency in response to the assignment, it also needs some improvement. It contains a number of minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 3:

- is adequately organized and developed
- explains a key idea
- does not display much syntactic variety
- displays adequate facility in the use of language
- displays a number of minor errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

SCORE OF 2

A 2 writing assignment is **LIMITED**. It demonstrates limited proficiency in response to the assignment. It clearly needs improvement. It contains both major and minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 2:

- is weakly organized and developed
- does not adequately explain a key idea
- does not display syntactic variety
- displays limited understanding of sentence structure
- displays limited or inappropriate use of language, including limited use of vocabulary
- displays major and minor errors in mechanics and usage

SCORE OF 1

A 1 writing assignment is **PROBLEMATIC**. It demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in response to the assignment. It demonstrates that the student is struggling to write. It contains major errors that need to be dealt with before the minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 1:

- is not organized and developed
- does not explain a key idea, or goes off-topic
- displays little or no relevant detail
- displays little understanding of sentence structure
- displays inappropriate use of language
- displays many major and minor errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

Independent Writing Worksheet Starter Paragraph Punch

Circle One: Details Reasons Sequence Example

Use this checklist to guide you through the paragraph writing process. As you begin each writing step, think about what you did in the Starter Paragraph Punch program. You should do your pre-writing and paragraph writing on a word processor or in your writer's notebook.

WRITING TOPIC \ QUESTION (fill in):

Check the box after you have finished each step

PRE-WRITING

Brainstorm by writing ideas related to your topic. Write only words or phrases.

WRITING--OPENING SENTENCE

Write your opening sentence to introduce the main idea of your paragraph.

WRITING--BODY

Use your pre-writing ideas to write complete sentences.

ORGANIZING

Arrange your sentences into a paragraph. Use connecting words (first, also, finally) to help your sentences flow from one to the next.

WRITING--CLOSING SENTENCE

Write your closing sentence to summarize the main idea of your paragraph.

REVISING

STYLE

Check your word choice. Make sure you use specific nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Check that you use complete sentences. Make sure to avoid run-on sentences.

GRAMMAR

Check that you use commas correctly. Check your punctuation.

PROOFREADING

Listen to the flow of your paragraph as you read it out loud. Is there something that doesn't sound right?

Correct capitalization and spelling errors.

PUBLISHING