

Part I. Background Information

- A. Lesson title: Introductions and Conclusions
- B. Discipline : English Composition
- C. English B 6172
- D. Names of authors and the semester the project was conducted: Matt Cheung and John Weitting; Fall 2007.
- E. Rationale for this study (Why this class or this lesson?)

English B focuses on writing at the paragraph level. Near the end of the course, the writing assignments expand to include multiple paragraphs and full length essays. Teaching introductions and conclusions comes near the end of the course and fits in perfectly with the timing of the Susan Johnston seminars. Introductions and conclusions are also relatively self-contained and would provide a good testing ground for the lesson study.

- F. An abstract (200 words or less) containing information on the course, the actual lesson taught, and the results of the lesson

The lesson took place in an English B class. The goal was to have students able to construct an introduction and conclusion paragraph based on the methods described in class. The lesson was successful in that the use of an essential question helped focus the class, and the quick thinks/ quick activities gave the students opportunities to test their new knowledge and a chance for me to evaluate them. I underestimated how much time I would need, so the class was not able to complete all of the assessments I had planned. I was able to go through most of the material, but we were not able to practice writing a conclusion.

Part II. The Lesson

- A. Learning goals

Given an explanation and demonstration of introductory and conclusion methods for an essay, students will be able to choose one method and construct an introductory paragraph (and a conclusion if time permits).

B. Lesson outline (detailed description in outline format of the lesson)

Topic: Introductions and Conclusions

Content: Procedure

Essential Questions: What would a good writer put into an introduction? What is necessary to put into an introduction paragraph and why?

What would kinds of things do good writers include in their conclusions?

Learning Outcome: Given an explanation and demonstration of introduction and conclusion methods for an essay, students will be able to choose one method and construct an introductory paragraph.

Phase 1: Explain that the class will now be writing full essays. Heretofore, we have been focusing on body paragraphs. Now we need introductions, conclusions, and thesis statements but, first, introductions.

Ask the class: Is getting started the hardest part of writing an essay?

What does a good introduction need?

What kind of things would you put in it?

How would you start off your essay?

Phase 2:

Point 1

_A) Introductions should progress from a general statement to a specific statement. Use the funnel method. Don't give away your position but build up to it. Most introductions find a way to explain a topic's significance or background.

Introductions end with a thesis. A thesis is like the topic sentence for the entire essay. It's placed at the end of the intro.

Strategies to show background or significance

- 1) Begin with a question or a series of a question. When using this method, be sure that the thesis answers those questions.
 - 2) Begin with a definition of an idea that will be discussed in the paper.
Don't write, "According to the dictionary . . ."
 - 3) Use a quotation to introduce an idea. Maya Angelou said,
"Nobody but nobody can make it alone."
- _B) Show examples from the handouts and the textbook. Note the strategies in each.
- _C) As a quick think, ask the students to identify the topic and thesis of the model paragraphs from the textbook and the worksheets. Can they spot the organizational pattern or method? Would there be anything they might change in the sample paragraphs? These questions will be asked as we go through the examples to engage the students and test their comprehension of the methods.

Point 2

- _A) What do we put in a conclusion? Take answers from the class.
Conclusions do the opposite from an introduction. They go from specific to general. They show the broader picture and how the essay applies to the world.
Show options you have for conclusions:
- _B) Summary: restate the thesis and the paper's main points.
Questions: Pose a question at the end or the beginning of the conclusion.
Action: Tell the reader/audience what should be done next.
Consequence/Prediction: What happens next?
- _C) Show examples from the worksheet. Identify the method of each example and discuss pros/cons of each.

Phase 3:

- 1) Students will arrange an introduction from a paragraph with its sentences cut apart.
- 2) Students will be given a sample prompt and have to construct their own introduction.
- 3) Students will write a sample conclusion.

Phase 4:

Gather the students' attention and direct it to the board. Answer the essential question as a class.

Part III. Results of the Lesson

A. Description of the results of the piloting of the lesson

The lesson went relatively well. The class was attentive from the beginning. Introducing the essential question helped keep the class engaged. If they weren't interested in the material, they were at least curious about the novelty of this new approach. I emphasized the question and made them write it down in their notes. This seemed to work; the class knew the question was important and that we would be working toward answering it. One of my students even moved from the back of the class to the front in order to pay more attention.

As the lesson progressed, it became obvious that I planned to do too much. We were able to cover both introductions and conclusions but did not have much time for independent practice. I had to skip the activity where students assembled an introduction from strips of paper and instead of writing both a sample introduction and conclusion, students wrote only a sample introduction which was similar to what was necessary for their next essay.

After the students wrote their sample introduction, we sat in a circle and read the introductions aloud. For those of who were shy, I collected their samples and read them

anonymously. I allowed those who did not mind sharing to keep what they wrote and personally read it to the class. Sharing and reading their introductions was helpful. We all discussed the merits of each introduction and it was a good way to catch and correct initial mistakes.

B. Recommendations and suggestions based on the results (i.e., What can we do in the future to help students reach the lesson goals?)

One thing I'd like to change or add for the next time is to give students an opportunity to correct or alter their introductions after we discussed them. Incorporating short activities which test comprehension of the immediate material are effective in making students stay engaged with the lecture. These short assessments show what students understand and what they do not. I also want to make sure students get a chance to correct their mistakes as well after we review them. This is especially important in writing classes where students often glance at their grades and discard their papers without paying much attention to feedback. In the future, it would be helpful if the activities planned also included time for students to examine their own work and correct their mistakes.

Part IV. Appendix

A. Handouts used in the lesson (e.g., worksheets, comprehension checks, quizzes, etc.)

Introduction Exercises

Pick one of the scenarios below and write an introduction using the methods discussed in class. If you have enough time, write a concluding paragraph using the methods discussed in class too.

Imagine that a group of foreign exchange students will be visiting your college for a month. You have the job to help them adjust to what life is like in America. Write an introductory paragraph ending in a thesis in which you give them advice on how to proceed in America. Write a thesis using correct parallelism which lists three items the foreign students should know.

The city wants to allow Wal-Mart to build a supercenter in your neighborhood. Local businesses worry they will not be able to compete, but city officials want the increased tax revenues and hope that the Wal-Mart will reinvigorate the downtown area. Wal-Mart promises at least 200 new jobs. The thesis must include “should/should not” and use correct parallelism to list three reasons why Wal-Mart should come or not.

Introductions

Give background, importance of topic.

Tell a story or incident.

Funnel: Progress from general to specific thesis.

Parents should not outlive their children. Sadly, many parents experience this fact of life because their children die in car accidents. Most of these deadly incidents occur because teens do not drive responsibly. California recently enacted tougher training laws that have reduced accidents. Behind the wheel training solves only part of the problem. Heightened reflexes will not help teenagers who do not take driving seriously and treat their cars like 2 ton toys. Teens must also be taught how to behave behind the wheel and not just how to react.

In the late 1990s President Clinton began an initiative to reduce tobacco use by children. The public was invited to comment, public officials made grand speeches, the press covered the proceedings extensively, and the result was a few Food and Drug Administration efforts to reduce access and limit the appeal of tobacco products for children. Basically, all this amounted to were some billboards and public service announcements on television. The effects have been minimal, and the public health crisis is worsening as children start smoking at younger ages. Clearly, the federal government must devote considerably more money and resources to educating children about tobacco.

Conclusions

Summary

Online shopping at home, then, has several advantages. Such shopping is convenient, saves money, and saves time. It is not surprising that growing numbers of consumers are searching the Internet for everything from turnip seeds to televisions.

Questions

What, then, will happen in the twenty-first century when most of the population will be over sixty years old? Retirement policies could change dramatically, with the age-sixty-five testimonial dinner and gold watch postponed for five or ten years. Even television would change as advertisers try to capture the 45-60 demographic. Glamorous gray-haired models would sell everything from toilet paper to televisions. New soap operas and sitcoms would reveal the secrets of the sunset years. It will be a different world when the young find themselves outnumbered.

Questions

If the speed limit is raised, truckers would save money, as would those who ship their goods on trucks. And while studies do not support the contention that the higher speed limit will mean more accidents, they suggest that the accidents that do occur would involve more fatalities. Do we really want to save money but lose lives?

Action

The reasons for our declining enrollment are complex, but the solution to the problem is clear. First, we should hire a recruitment specialist and charge that person with aggressively seeking new students. At the same time, we should begin a marketing campaign, complete with local television and radio spots, to attract area people so they attend school here rather than out of state. Finally, we should hire a marketing firm to discover what potential students are seeking and try to meet those desires. Yes, these measures are expensive, but the money will be well spent if we can return enrollment figures to their previous high levels.

Consequence

If we do not have a drug education program in the earliest grades, we miss the opportunity to influence our children when they are the most impressionable. If we miss

this opportunity to influence them when they are young and responsive to adult pressure, we run the risk of losing our children to powerful peer pressure to experiment with drugs.

Prediction

If people stopped to think before acquiring pets, there would be fewer instances of cruelty to animals. Many times, it is the people who adopt pets without considering the expense and responsibility involved who mistreat and neglect their animals. Pets are living creatures. They do not deserve to be acquired as carelessly as a stuffed toy.