

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Analyzing Paragraph Structure

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

For this innovative teaching activity, student groups analyze paragraph structure. Sometimes the instructor assigns groups, while other times students self-select into groups; group selection can depend on student academic strengths and weaknesses. Students receive a completion grade for the assignment.

For the activity, the instructor uses paragraphs from the course textbook or creates one. The instructor places the sentences from each paragraph on strips of paper, mixes up the strips, and distributes them to each group. The instructor asks the group to arrange the sentences in an appropriate and logical order. The group records the sentence order on a separate sheet of paper and submits it to the instructor for review.

In addition to correctly arranging the sentence order, groups also identify the topic sentence. The instructor intentionally chooses/creates paragraphs in which the topic sentence is not always at the beginning of the paragraph to demonstrate that paragraphs can be organized in many ways. If students do not correctly arrange the sentences and/or identify the topic sentence, the instructor asks them to redo the activity until they are correct. For particularly difficult or complex paragraphs, the instructor provides students with a sheet that asks guiding questions, such as “What transition words did you notice?” or “Did you notice that X is more specific than Y?”