Most of Chapter 7 is devoted to the four characteristics shared by well-written topical paragraphs: unity, completeness, order, and coherence. Students can use these characteristics as guidelines in critiquing the paragraphs in their own papers and in those of their peers. The chapter also examines special paragraphs—introductions, conclusions, and transitions—and the exercises offer in- or out-of-class practice in paragraph manipulation.

The readings and writing assignments contain many flexible suggestions for how students can work holistically on their own essays while at the same time focusing on the particular concerns of paragraphing. As you discuss paragraph development and structure, you may want to reproduce examples of paragraphs taken from student papers because students need many opportunities to discuss their own writing. You may want to steer students away from expectations of sure-fire formulas for structuring paragraphs. Although it may be possible to discern particular patterns for certain types of paragraphs, it is always the audience, purpose, and subject that should govern decisions about how to develop a paragraph. There are times, for example, when a one-sentence paragraph is exactly right for a particular point in a particular essay. The “trick” is knowing when such a decision contributes to the strength of the essay as a whole, and that knowledge comes only with practice in reading and writing. Help students avoid such prescriptions as “Every paragraph should contain at least five sentences.”

Bill Barich’s comments will be helpful in establishing a method for working on paragraphs: Barich first instinctively groups general ideas into “thought units” guided by the subject, audience, and purpose of the assignment, and then he checks for “things like sequence and fullness of statement.” The structure is “organic,” growing out of its own need.

Analogies can be used to introduce students to the importance of careful paragraph construction and revision: changing a paragraph in an essay is like
changing a color or shape in a painting; such a change affects every other part of the painting. If your students are familiar with economics, analogies to economic forecasting might help: any change in the equation changes the outcome of the entire forecast, just as any paragraph revision changes the outcome of the entire essay. Perhaps you could ask students to come up with their own analogies.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF TOPICAL PARAGRAPHS

Exercise (p. 168)

The first two sentences claim that Oregon is “an ideal place to live” because of its natural beauty—“its seaside beaches, snowcapped mountains, and extensive forests.” The reader therefore expects the rest of the paragraph to describe this beauty in greater detail. Instead, the writer shifts in sentence 3, which introduces statistics on the National Park Service and the lumber industry. In sentence 4, the writer offers information about the process of “harvesting” trees and then in sentence 5 shifts to the decline in the lumber business. Although the reader can follow these shifts, the paragraph is annoyingly disjointed and violates the reader’s expectations.

In revising this paragraph, the writer can either stick with the original focus—Oregon’s natural beauty makes it an ideal place to live—or shift to a focus on Oregon’s lumber business. The decision, of course, depends on the writer’s overall subject, audience, and purpose. If the writer chooses to retain the original focus, the paragraph might be revised like this:

(1) Seaside beaches, snowcapped mountains, and extensive forests make Oregon an ideal place to live. (2) There is literally something for everyone in terms of natural beauty and recreation. (3) Beachcombers and fishermen can retreat to Oregon’s unspoiled beaches. (4) Mountain climbers and skiers can enjoy the exhilarating challenges of Mount Hood. (5) Campers and hikers can explore 17 million acres of magnificent national forest, such as Crater Lake National Forest with its stunningly blue lake, stately evergreens, and snowcapped mountains in the distance. (6) Whether Oregonians seek the solace of natural beauty or the invigoration of outdoor activity, they need not go far to find it.

Exercises (pp. 172–173)

1. The first paragraph could be developed like this:
You cannot and should not try to remove all anger from your life. If you react mildly to everything, you will often be suppressing your true feelings. But you must learn to recognize situations in which expressing your anger may be counterproductive. Sometimes your anger is only partly, or not at all, connected with the person you are confronting, and expressing it complicates a difficult situation further. For example, no one benefits when a lawyer, nauseated by an oncoming flu and nervous about an upcoming case, shouts at a secretary who has made a typographical error. But even when your anger is perfectly justifiable, your self-interest may demand that you be cautious in expressing it. If the secretary takes this opportunity to make a few caustic comments on the boss’s work habits, that secretary may join the ranks of the witty unemployed. The moral is obvious: Learn to count to ten.

2. Here is a possible revision for the second paragraph:

Most families have a private set of signs that enable them to communicate with one another without having to say a word. Family members use these signs in public to communicate private messages to other family members. For example, when my teen-aged daughter and I are visiting friends, she uses an eye signal to tell me she is bored and wants to leave. Catching my eye, she will flash her eyes toward the door in a motion resembling the hitchhiker’s flip of the thumb. If I ignore her signal, it is repeated in rapid sequence for emphasis, warning me that this private message may soon become public if I do not begin soon to take leave.

Order

On page 173, order is defined as “direction of movement.” In some student paragraphs, the movement is haphazard, abruptly changing direction without warning. Sometimes, private associations direct the paragraph’s movement and leave the reader confused, as in the paragraph about Oregon. At other times, paragraphs stagnate and go nowhere. The writer may begin, for example, by asserting that extracurricular activities teach students to get along with others. In sentence 2 the writer declares that students learn to cooperate with one another, and in sentence 3 the writer states that students learn fair play. Such a paragraph has no direction of movement; the paragraph starts but then just sits there idling, taking the reader nowhere. It does not move up to greater generality or down to greater specificity or from the parts to the whole or from effect to cause. Although the four orders listed in Chapter 7 do not exhaust all possibilities—you will certainly find some excellent paragraphs that do not fall neatly into one class or another—every good paragraph moves in some direction.
Coherence

Because incoherence is to be expected, especially in early drafts, the student needs to learn how to detect and eliminate it. The two versions of the paragraph on Ellis Island (pp. 176–177) give students an example of the problem and a clear model of the needed revisions. Following this example is a list of specific techniques students can use to achieve coherence: pronoun reference, repetitive structure, contrasted elements, and transitional markers.

Exercise (pp. 180–181)

Barich characterizes his paragraphing process as disorderly. He relies heavily on instinct and describes a felt sense about when to establish a new paragraph unit, which he dubs a “thought unit” or an “energy unit.” He states a preference for an “organic” structure. In the context of Barich’s comments, urge your students to discuss the various possibilities for establishing “energy units” for Barich’s passage. Resisting the notion of a “topic sentence,” Barich suggests that there may be more than one “right answer” to the question of structuring a paragraph. What’s important is that your students know why they have made the decisions they have made for paragraphing. One way to break up Barich’s text is as follows:

1. Begin: “The landmark work. . . .” The first thought unit centers on Thrasher’s methods of working and his contribution to the field of sociology.
2. Begin: “Over the years. . . .” The second thought unit stresses Thrasher’s continuing influence.
3. Begin: “In Los Angeles County. . . .” The final thought unit concentrates on listing examples of individual ethnic groups and gangs.

Other possibilities for paragraphing are possible. You might ask a student to locate Barich’s article from The New Yorker and see how the excerpt included here looks in the context of the entire article.

SPECIAL PARAGRAPHS

You might suggest that students start with the body of the essay or write a temporary introduction just to get started because many students experience writer’s block when they begin to write, especially if they are trying to come up with a “grabber” or catchy phrase to pull the reader in. Since drafting involves discovery, it
is only natural that an idea for the beginning often emerges later in the composing process, after students have a clearer idea of what they are trying to say.

To help students develop a sense of options about introductions and conclusions, you might ask them to write several introductory and several concluding paragraphs for the essays they are writing. Each paragraph should display a different strategy. Because many of the examples of special paragraphs in this chapter are drawn from case study essays in earlier chapters, students have the opportunity to examine familiar passages from yet another angle.

REVISING TOPICAL AND SPECIAL PARAGRAPHS

Exercises (pp. 188–189)

1. Although the paragraph details the development and decline of the front porch, moving roughly from its inception to its replacement by the backyard patio, the paragraph lacks unity and coherence. In revision, the writer needs to add a lead sentence, rearrange other sentences, delete the sentences that digress, and add cohesive ties.

   Now an artifact from the past, the front porch began as a way to move the family out-of-doors and into the community. Door sills served as the first front porches, expanding later to become square platforms that could hold two chairs. Expansion continued, and porches became long and narrow, just wide enough for a row of chairs. At the height of their popularity, front porches had lengthened to wrap around the house and widened to accommodate larger gatherings of people. Front porches were a social gathering place for the family, the neighborhood, and the town in general. People-watching, courting, gossiping, and politicking all took place on the front porch in the early part of this century, but with the advent of the car, things began to change. The dust and fumes from the automobile sent old folks indoors, and the privacy of the car drew courting couples away from the front-door swing. Now the movement of the family out-of-doors is in a different direction and for a contrary purpose. The backdoor sill has extended to become a backyard patio secluding the immediate family from the neighbors and the rest of the community.

2. This paragraph confusingly conflates two topics—the geographic dispersion of the American family and Americans’ search for ethnic roots. To revise this paragraph, the writer must choose a single focus and shape the paragraph around that focus.

   Today it is unusual for one family to live in the same community for more than two generations. In fact, the average American family moves every five years. This mobility has produced a sense of homelessness and family discontinuity. No longer do
children settle in the region in which they grew up. Brothers and sisters scatter all over the country to raise their children, and their offspring often grow up having little contact with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Parents and grandparents who once provided a home base for dispersed adult children, a place to congregate at Christmas, now spend Christmas in trailer parks in Florida.

3. Although the whole paragraph deals with the famous Gateway Arch in St. Louis, the information is disorganized and incoherent. The paragraph makes two points about the arch: its size is impressive, and its purpose is to mark a historically important place.

The Gateway Arch in St. Louis is both an impressive physical structure and a reminder of St. Louis’s role as the gateway to the West. A visually stunning sight, the stainless-steel structure stands 630 feet in height. Inside the steel structure is a contraption like a Ferris wheel that travels to the apex of the arch. The small windows at the top provide a thirty-mile view in any direction. This panoramic vista of the Mississippi River and the land to the west gives the viewer a clear sense of why this place was the opening to the West. The arch marks the most prominent point of embarkation for those who traveled into the new territories. A further reminder of the significance of this place is the Museum of Westward Expansion. Located near the arch, it commemorates the frontier experience, a fascinating chapter in American history.

4. This paragraph involves an unacknowledged opposition—between the contributions of Chinese Americans and the discrimination they have suffered. Both a lead and cohesive devices are needed to clarify the relationship of these two parts of the paragraph.

Although scorned and subjected to discrimination, Chinese Americans made one of the most widely acclaimed contributions to American history. More than thirteen thousand Chinese built the western half of the transcontinental railroad. Digging tunnels through mountains and track beds across deserts, they laid ten miles of track a day. Yet rather than receiving praise and gratitude for their work, the Chinese were resented for their strength and skill. Anti-Chinese feeling was so strong that Congress passed a series of Exclusion Acts that prohibited further Chinese immigration. On May 10, 1869, when a golden spike was driven at Promontory Point, Utah, those who in large part were responsible for the achievement, the Chinese, were nowhere in sight.

**COMPOSING PARAGRAPHS ON YOUR COMPUTER**
If your classroom or Writing Center offers computers for your use, you might introduce students to various types of computer programs available for word processing. Some programs provide automatic outlining capability, or assistance in crafting paragraphs. While some of these programs are useful, try to avoid the types of programs that teach students to count the number of sentences per paragraph, since the determination for paragraph length is dependent on the writer’s purpose and the demands of the subject. Warn students that writing is done by writers, not programs, and that some programs may in fact hinder them. The technology allows students to take more risks in ordering paragraphs and in constructing them, but it will not produce the paragraphs themselves. Prescriptive software programs do more harm than good for students learning to write, which requires critical thinking skills.

Depending on the degree of computer experience your students have had, the following additional suggestions for classroom exercises on the computer might be useful:

- Ask students to make a backup of their original drafts (and remind them to back up all the work they do on the computer). Then ask them to rearrange the paragraphs by using block moves. Each student may then exchange seats with a peer, read the peer’s draft, and comment on the organization of the paragraphs. In some cases, the peer reviewer might suggest the original ordering; in other cases, the writer might discover that a different ordering of topical paragraphs makes better sense. Perhaps additional information or more attention to transitional devices is needed to indicate the relationship among body paragraphs. Students with less computer experience can use this exercise to become more familiar with how to compose on the computer; those with more experience with computers can concentrate on exploring the possibilities of reshaping their paragraphs.

- For a sense of the possibilities for paragraph revision, ask students to make three copies of one of their topical paragraphs. One version will remain the same. For the other two, the writer will use various commands (“add,” “delete,” “move”) to reshape the paragraph. Suggestions for reshaping the paragraph include place the topic sentence at the end of the paragraph; vary the structure of individual sentences; reorder the sentences; add or delete sentences. When the tinkering is completed, the writer should have three significantly different versions to print out and submit to peers or to you for review and comment. Here the writer gets practice in manipulating internal paragraph structures as well as in using word processing commands.
• If students have been maintaining a process diary or a research log on the computer, they might practice merging portions of the diary into their draft in progress. This shows students that journal entries can potentially become part of their final paper and that computer technology allows student writers more flexibility in experimenting with their drafts.

• Introduce students to the use of “hypertext,” which offers reading experiences that emphasize the connections between texts. This is probably best illustrated by using software programs to teach specific subjects (a lesson on Charles Dickens, for example). Students can browse around through the various files, keeping their own notes in a special file (or “electronic notepad”) on their computer. The traditional notion of a linear text is challenged by the use of hypertext, which can open up new possibilities for putting ideas together, encouraging a circular, recursive way of reading, writing, and understanding. Each student can pace herself or himself through such a program.

**READINGS**

“Family: The One Social Glue,” Ellen Goodman

This short essay, which focuses on the changing face of the American family, could stir some spirited discussion about the meaning of “family.” You might ask students to consider their own families, which may be as fragmented as those mentioned by Goodman and difficult for some students to talk about. What is the function of a family? What constitutes “family,” particularly if family members live many miles apart and are unable to offer the kind of emotional or financial support to one another they once did? What implications for changes in social policy does the changing family suggest?

**Discussion questions (p. 190).** How do you account for the difference in length between Goodman’s and Barich’s paragraphs? How do the size and sequence of Goodman’s paragraphs contribute to her purpose?

One explanation for the difference in paragraph length between Goodman’s and Barich’s works is that they appear in publications with differing editorial styles. Newspaper columns are conventionally short, which dictates Goodman’s short paragraphs, whereas The New Yorker publishes essays with longer paragraphs. You might want to bring in samples of both types of publications, or ask students to bring them in, and discuss such factors as page layout and design in addition to the
content of the texts. What visual clues contribute to how we “read” an article or essay?

Paragraphs are groups or “families” of sentences that are related through ideas. Goodman writes about the structure of the American family in this essay, and it is clear that her short paragraphs (families of sentences) reflect the point she is making about American families: they are increasingly smaller, often fragmented through divorce, and dispersed, coming together briefly at Thanksgiving for “reunion. It’s no longer a celebration of food (which is plentiful in America) but of family (which is scarce).” The paragraphs are visually predictable—much like the rituals of Thanksgiving, with the traditional turkey and stuffing, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, pumpkin pie. This sameness also reflects the condition of the American family: decreasing in size, categorized by generation gaps and peer groups, “individuals, all wrapped in separate cellophane packages like lamb chops in the meat department.” The young live with the young in dormitories or singles clubs; the elderly move into retirement villages.

Despite the changing shape of the American family, however, Goodman maintains an optimistic perspective. Thanksgiving remains for her a symbol of hope, a time to “come together, not to fight for their piece of the pie this day, but to share it.” Her short paragraphs, like the American family, all show room for growth and development.

The longest paragraph of her essay is third from the end, and its length echoes her idea of the family as “the one social glue.” This paragraph is the pivotal point of her essay, the one that lets us know that despite the increasing fragmentation of the family and the alienation of its members, we are still able to gather around that symbol of warmth and nurturing: the extended dining-room table.

Goodman’s paragraphs move from general (the family) to specific (age groups), although she does not include a personal account of her own family. Family, in her essay, remains generic, although her use of the pronoun we shows inclusiveness and suggests that all Americans are part of a national family, particularly at such times as Thanksgiving.

“Five Myths About Immigration,” David Cole

Cole’s essay can provoke much discussion about how cultural myths are generated and perpetuated. Encourage your students to tell their own immigration stories, as Cole does in his essay. As Cole shows, many of the myths about immigrants are based on fears: of losing jobs, or prestige, or position to new immigrants.
**Discussion questions (p. 191).** Why do you think Cole uses the term *myths* (rather than *errors, or mistakes*)? What kind of strategies does he use in his first paragraph to attract his readers’ attention? How does he use his last paragraph to bring his analysis to an appropriate conclusion?

Myths are traditional stories that are used to explain cultural origins (the word generally conjures images of Greek myths). However, myths are also fictions, which may tell a half-truth or a story that has no basis in reality. Most importantly, the word *myth* lacks the negative judgment conferred on the terms *error* and *mistake*. Errors are unintentional deviations from the truth (but deviations nonetheless); mistakes are the result of defective judgment. Cole is careful not to alienate his audience. By choosing the word *myth*, Cole helps to create a positive reaction from his audience toward his topic. He also suggests how deeply rooted such thinking is.

Cole suggests his intentions to discuss attitudes toward immigration in his opening paragraph by setting up a parallel between the present and the past as he cites facts about nineteenth-century “Know-Nothings.”

His final paragraph creates cohesion by referring to his personal history, as he does early in his essay. He appeals to the moral judgment of his readers, creating a bond between himself and his readers with the use of the plural pronoun.

**“La Frontera,” Bill Barich**

You might want to ask students to research personal stories of border crossings or life in Mexico and Central America and to compare the rhetorical strategies in the different pieces of writing. (For example, Betty LaDuke, ed., *Companeras: Women, Art and Social Change in Latin America*, is a collection of personal stories.) After doing research, some students might construct a narrative from the point of view of a border guard or a series of letters to the INS from a Mexican worker seeking legal entry to the United States.

**Discussion question (p. 194).** How do the size and sequence of Barich’s paragraphs contribute to his purpose?

Barich tells us that for him, “paragraphs tend to arrange themselves during the writing. The process is instinctive and often surprising.” He begins with a general plan, but the piece unfolds as a “thought unit.” He concentrates first on “finding the rhythm that will carry the information” and then checks elements “like sequence and fullness of statement.” These comments, of course, are those of an experienced professional writer, and some of your students may not believe him. This could lead to a discussion of how students develop their own paragraphs. You might ask them...
to choose a particular statement from Barich and then freewrite a response to it in their journals. How do they experience the process of paragraphing?

Another way to use the discussion question is to have students examine the unity, completeness, order, and coherence of their own paragraphs. Such terms may not be helpful for some students, who need more direct questioning about their paragraphs, which they can get by going to the Writing Center.

Nevertheless, students will easily recognize the “organic” nature of Barich’s paragraphs in “La Frontera.” The first paragraph describes the border strip between Mexico and California through the use of physical details and information about what happens there. The description of the fence, in particular, leads to a description of the litter, which leads to a discussion of the people who leave it on both sides of the fence. The details here are logically connected and provide an overview of the border town.

The next paragraph deals with statistics: “About forty-three million people pass through its [San Ysidro’s] legal port of entry every year, in vehicles, on bicycles, and on foot, but nobody knows for certain how many undocumented migrants slip illegally over la frontera.” The progression of this sentence, from numbers to categories of transportation to the people themselves, reflects the pattern of the development within the paragraph. Each sentence in the paragraph sheds more light on the people who pass through the border yearly and thereby creates unity in the paragraph.

Next, Barich introduces the town of San Ysidro, whose atmosphere is conducive to paranoia.” He describes the setting further, explaining that San Ysidro is not the typical suburb it appears to be: The town blood bank buys blood from poor Mexicans who then go on shopping sprees, the skies are “often full of ravens and buzzards,” and angry home owners resent illegal aliens who “dash through their back yards.” These images are unpleasant, showing paranoia by giving just enough information to make the paragraph complete without overwhelming the reader with irrelevant detail.

The next two paragraphs discuss the Border Control—“the uniformed arm of the Immigration and Naturalization Service”—which is “supposed to control the flow of uninvited foreigners into the States.” The paragraphs then detail more specific information about the difficulties faced by those charged with controlling the border between San Ysidro and Tijuana. The order here is from general to particular.

Barich describes what illegal aliens do once they get by the Border Control. The paragraph employs a number of cohesive devices that make it easy to read. Pronouns are repeated (“they” referring to the aliens) in a parallel subject-verb
structure throughout the paragraph. Each sentence picks up something from the previous sentence; nothing is out of place.

Barich’s paragraphs in this essay are long, and, like Goodman’s paragraphs, they reflect the content and purpose of his essay. It is a long and arduous path for many Mexicans who want to get across the U.S.-Mexican border. The long paragraphs suggest the length of the journey, and the many details that develop the paragraph suggest the numerous stories to be told.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The writing assignments for Chapter 7 provide many ways for your students to explore their own ethnic heritages and cultural backgrounds. All the assignments can be used collaboratively. You might want to group students according to interests. For example, students who are most interested in exploring their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds might work together. Those who are more interested in looking at government policies or interpreting social customs might constitute other groups.

1. **Narrate:** Students should first focus on telling the story. Next they may want to briefly outline what they have actually written. As they do so, a natural paragraph division will reveal itself. Students will most likely discover that they have touched on many details, some of which need to be further developed. As they flesh out the ideas, they will begin to see that some paragraphs need to be reorganized. You might ask students to look again at how Barich tells his story, which addresses a significant social issue that the author wants to bring to the attention of thoughtful citizens. What is the significant social issue in students’ own stories? They may have difficulty recognizing their own relationship to the larger society.

2. **Observe:** This assignment works nicely with assignment 1. Students might research a photo of the person about whom they have written the narrative and then continue to develop the narrative. They might even find a series of photographs of the relative at different stages of life and write descriptions of the various photographs. How do the photographs show change? How do they reflect a central recognizable core that becomes the hallmark of that relative? Students might want to work on this assignment first and develop the descriptions into the narrative assignment. As they do so, the letter they write to the relative and the photographs become important primary research. Obviously, students may discover disturbing or delightful facts about their
families. How do students locate themselves in the continuum of family development? Do they recognize family traits or patterns of behavior? Is there a family time line that could evolve from this personal research? For an additional perspective, students might want to “become” the relative they describe and craft a second letter in the relative’s voice in response to the first.

3. Investigate: This is a potentially powerful assignment, particularly for students who have not experienced much cultural and ethnic diversity or who have not explored their own unique backgrounds. The assignment blends personal research with information found in books, periodicals, and interviews. This might begin as a private journal entry and later be revised and developed into a major research project. Personal accounts—diaries, letters, autobiographies—can help students understand how others experience the dominant culture. Mike Rose’s book *Lives on the Boundary* might be used as a supplementary text, or students might research other autobiographic accounts (such as Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*) that interest them. Some students might want to explore gender and learning and conduct case studies to examine the assumptions that underlie the educational system. How do these assumptions reward one group over another? This will give students practice in identifying an issue, formulating a hypothesis, arguing, supplying evidence (including the telling of stories), drawing conclusions, and offering strategies for change. A starting point for all students is their own attitudes toward ethnic minorities and women. Do they feel threatened, as the myths discussed in Cole’s essay suggest? What do they think they might gain or lose by accommodating “otherness”? Does it necessarily mean a loss of self?

4. Collaborate: This assignment could be used early in the term as an icebreaker or as a way to involve students in new writing groups if you decide that students need to be in new groups at this point. One of the contradictions students exhibit is their willingness to talk about themselves and their inability to believe that their stories are interesting enough to write about. This assignment gives students the opportunity to get to know other students. You might ask students to brainstorm a list of questions on the topic of ethnicity. Make it clear that they should ask questions about material that really interests them: What special rituals or cultural celebrations do they observe in their families? Are there traits or practices from other cultures that they do not like? Are they sometimes prejudiced? Have they been embarrassed by their own family practices, such as speaking other languages or observing religious holidays that are not honored in the dominant culture? How have these
experiences contributed to their own views of what it means to be an American?

5. Read: Students might enjoy writing a narrative in which they use as characters themselves and someone from the ethnic group they have chosen to read about. They might choose a particular social issue—immigration policies regarding Central America, for example—and write the conversation they would have with a Central American Indian on the issue of entry to the United States. They might also include voices that represent the U.S. government, humanitarian groups such as the American Friends Service Committee, small fruit growers in the Southwest who employ immigrants to harvest their fruit, and managers of large corporations that have business interests in Central America. This kind of assignment teaches students to see from the other person’s perspective and to construct accommodation arguments. As they experiment with each paragraph by placing topic sentences in different positions, they might also freewrite alternative sentences to use in place of the lead sentence.

6. Respond: Students might want to base their paper on an actual event recently reported in the news or on a specific campus controversy having to do with a special group. They might link this to the larger issues of immigration discussed in Cole’s essay. They might begin the assignment by considering the Biblical origins of scapegoat (Aaron confessed all the sins of the children of Israel over the head of a live goat and then sent the goat into the wilderness bearing all the sins.) In what ways has the term been secularized? How has this changed the connotation of the word? Students might also respond by placing themselves first in the group doing the scapegoating, then rewriting their opinion column from the point of the view of the “enemy” created by the act of scapegoating.

7. Analyze: This assignment introduces students to the idea of form as meaning. Not only what a writer says but also the structure in which it is written contributes to meaning. Such elements as emphasis and pacing can be established through the size of a paragraph. This is a good opportunity to help students rid themselves of old misconceptions and prescriptions about the proper length of paragraphs. The subject, audience, and purpose are always the dictators of form. As Barich notes, paragraphs grow organically from the content. Students might want to take their essays and present several different
versions of them, using different paragraph sizing and organization, to see what new meanings emerge.

8. Evaluate: Many sites on the Web are dedicated to genealogy. Students should examine them to see which are most accessible. If they are lucky, they may find not only information on family histories but also news about contemporary events such as family reunions. Some families, or individual family members, make such research a full-time enterprise; others have little sense of, or interest in, their own family history. Some of this difference has to do with the stability of the family as a social unit. Thus, this electronic research project can lead to other cultural/historical insights about the changing character of the American family.

9. Argue: Students’ own ethnicity and family histories may contribute to their views on immigration policies. You might want to ask them first to examine their own situation: Are they members of the dominant cultural and economic group? Or are they members of ethnic minorities? Did any member of their family experience Ellis Island? You might challenge students to question the assumptions they bring with them to the issue of immigration. Are they concerned primarily with the economic issues surrounding immigration? If so, they might want to approach the issue by researching U.S. government documents, U.N. publications, and other statistical records to find out ratios of immigrants and profiles of a “typical” immigrant to the United States. Next, they might want to conduct some interviews.

   Students might want to look at the correlation between the political climate and policies that restrict certain nationals from entering U.S. borders. For example, students might want to compare policies governing immigration of Eastern Europeans with policies for Haitians. What are the reasons—economic, social, ethical—that may have contributed to such policies? Some students might use this assignment as a major research project that could include personal family history.

   Still another way to approach this assignment is to examine the immigration policies and practices of other countries. How do other countries handle border crossings? Work permits for Americans?

10. Argue: This assignment could translate into campus action. You might ask students to list the courses they have taken in their major or the courses they anticipate taking. Have they considered alternative courses? What courses would they like to see listed? What assumptions does the current curriculum
indicate through inclusion or exclusion of certain courses? The assignment allows students to draw on the reading and writing they have been doing so far in Writing with a Purpose and asks them to categorize and construct arguments in favor of their point of view.

USING THE WRITING CENTER

Tutors can help students think about the arrangement and development of their paragraphs. Some students may not make the transference of classroom discussions about paragraphing to their own writing. Remind students that Writing Center tutors can talk to them about their writing and help them understand concepts they might find confusing. Often, tutors do not need to use terms such as coherence and unity when talking to students about their paragraphs. As Muriel Harris points out in Teaching One-to-One, “Students who sense something missing might describe the paper as ‘choppy’ or say that it doesn’t ‘flow’” (113). Tutors can help students by going through the paper or a particular section of the paper and asking such questions as “How is this sentence connected to the previous one?” and “How can you help your reader understand this?” Other prompts are “What’s your first paragraph about? . . . What’s your second paragraph about? . . . What else is in that paragraph?” (111). The point is not to teach students a special vocabulary about paragraphs, but to give them the opportunity to decide what should be in certain paragraphs. By bringing a reader’s perspective to the essay, tutors can help students see how each paragraph contributes (or does not contribute) to the whole.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM

- To introduce paragraphs, bring copies of a short, unparagraphed essay. Ask students to read it and discuss what’s missing. Students will probably complain that the essay is “hard” to read without paragraphs. Next, ask them to insert the paragraph symbol where they think the paragraph divisions should go. Then discuss the reasons for these decisions and how different paragraphing affects the reading of the essay.

  This can lead to a discussion of the sometimes arbitrary nature of paragraphing: newspaper articles have much shorter paragraphs than books because of the narrow columns, and we therefore read newspapers with different expectations. Paragraphs are primarily aids to the reader. Next, ask students to describe their own process of deciding how they will break up the
writing into a new paragraph. Is the decision a deliberate one made before drafting, or does it happen during drafting in the way Bill Barich describes— "paragraphs tend to arrange themselves during the writing"? Let students see that although there is a logic behind paragraphing, there may be several alternatives to paragraph breaks depending on the piece they are writing, the place of publication, and the reader.

• To demonstrate the role of introductory and topical paragraphs while at the same time giving students feedback on their drafts, you might try this small-group exercise: Divide the class into groups of four or five, or ask students to work in their regular writing groups. Tell your students to take turns reading their drafts, pausing after each paragraph for their peers to write predictions about what they expect to hear next. After the student has read the entire draft, group members read aloud their predictions, reading all the predictions that followed the introductory paragraph first, all those that followed the second paragraph second, and so on. The degree of consistency among the predictions indicates something about the overall coherence in the essay and points out problem paragraphs. A variation of this exercise is to ask the whole class to work together, each student reading the introductory paragraph only and each class member making predictions based only on that paragraph.

• Ask students to work on the exercises on pages 188–189 collaboratively. You might want to divide the class into four groups and ask each group to work on one of the four paragraphs.

• To reinforce the explanation of cohesive techniques, divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the model paragraphs that appear on pages 169–171 (Richard Rodriguez, Ralph Ellison, E. B. White, and Lou Ann Walker). Ask the group to identify and list the types of cohesive techniques the writer uses. The group might then report its findings to the class and hand in lists to you.

• To give students an overview of the collaborative nature of the writer-editor relationship, ask a team of students to interview the campus news staff. If possible, they might obtain early drafts of stories to see how paragraphs changed from draft to published piece. This team can report its findings back to the class and then lead a discussion about how the paragraphs changed and how decisions were made.
SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

For a summary of various theoretical views of paragraph structure, see David Foster’s *A Primer for Writing Teachers* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton, 1983): 68–79.

In “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer’s Block,” *College Composition and Communication* 31 (1980): 389 – 401, Mike Rose examines the way in which prescriptions like “Always begin with a catchy introduction” contribute to writer’s block.


Margaret L. Shaw discusses how to respond to silence and lack of development at key points in student writing in “What Students Don’t Say: An Approach to the Student Text,” *College Composition and Communication* 42 (1991): 45 – 54.


Further commentary on the development of writing software is offered in Paul LeBlanc’s *Writing Teachers, Writing Software: Creating Our Place in the Electronic Age* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1993).