

Comparing the SIM Paragraph Writing Programs:

How Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing Builds on a Proven Legacy

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For more than 40 years. The instructional program for the *Paragraph Writing Strategy* has helped secondary students learn to write effective paragraphs. Now, the new *Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing* program brings SIM paragraph-writing instruction to elementary learners in grades 2-6. While both programs share the same commitment to explicit, strategic instruction, the new program includes several features designed specifically for younger students and today's classrooms. The original program, *The Paragraph Writing Strategy*, was published in 1985 and contains two printed books: an instructor's manual and a student materials volume. The "new" program, *Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing*, was published in 2026 and contains one printed book (the instructor's manual) and online supplementary instructional materials. More details about the differences are listed below.

#1: The Streamlined Lesson Format

Unlike the original instructor's manual for the *Paragraph Writing Strategy* which organizes the instruction around the eight stages of SIM instruction, the instructor's manual for the Fundamentals program is organized into eight easy-to-follow lessons. Each lesson focuses on a different concept, such as verb tense, point of view, or Topic Sentences. This format allows teachers to introduce foundational writing skills in a manageable sequence. Lesson 1 is the pretest, and the remaining lessons each cover one major concept, such as verb tense or Topic Sentences. Each of the eight lessons covers the Describe, Model, and Practice Stages of instruction. This streamlined lesson format makes locating instructional content and implementing lessons with large classes of elementary students easier. (The whole text is 85 pages long.)

In addition, the *Fundamentals* program allows instructors to choose whether to teach the Verb Tense, Point of View, and Transition lessons by supplying detailed instructions on how to do so. Lessons 2, 3, and 4 teach these concepts using learning sheets. If these concepts are taught initially to students in grades 2nd through 6th, they will be able to apply the concepts and skills to the various sentence types and parts of the paragraph they are learning.

#2: Digital Resources for Today's Classrooms

One of the most significant enhancements in the Fundamentals program is the accompanying website. Through it, teachers can gain access to over 250 instructional

resources, including PowerPoint presentations, Cue Cards, Learning Sheets, Student Note-Sheets, handouts, and coaching resources. Teachers can model filling out the Notes Sheets, and students can fill them out and store them for later reference. Permission is granted to the instructor to copy any of the digital materials for use during instruction.

#3: Learning Sheets Grouped by Grade Level

The learning sheets associated with both programs are organized in a similar pattern. That is, there are several learning sheets associated with each skill (e.g., A, B, C, D), and the groups of learning sheets become increasingly difficult as the student progresses. Additionally, E sheets are provided with the *Fundamentals* program so that the teacher can tailor a given type of sheet for certain students or a whole class. Also, the learning sheets for the *Fundamentals* program are designed for two student groups: lower elementary (LE) and upper elementary (UE). Lower elementary sheets are designed for grades 2 – 3; Upper elementary sheets are designed for grades 4-6. This means that the readability level for each group of sheets is tailored to the readability level of students in those grades. The sentences are shorter, and the words are simpler for the lower elementary (LE) level.

All the learning sheets have been reviewed by elementary teachers at the different grade levels. The teachers provided feedback about the sheets' appropriateness for their grade levels, and adjustments were made as needed. For the *Fundamentals* program, the learning sheets are available online in a digital format on the program website in two groups: LE and UE Learning Sheets.

#4: New Memory Aids and Strategies

Both programs can be used to teach students one or more strategies to help them remember what to do when writing paragraphs; however, the strategies differ. In the *Paragraph Writing Strategy* program, a train analogy and a picture of a train help students remember the parts of a paragraph and how they are linked. A FIRST-letter mnemonic device, "WRITER," also helps students remember the steps to follow when writing and checking a paragraph. In the *Fundamentals* program, a paragraph analogy is paired with a picture of a hamburger to help students remember the parts of a paragraph. Students are told that the name of the hamburger (e.g., "Big Mac") represents the title; the top of the bun represents the Topic Sentence; the meat, lettuce, and tomato represent the Detail Sentences; the bottom of the bun represents the Clincher Sentence; and the sauces (e.g., mayonnaise, dressings) represent the transitions that hold the parts of the hamburger together. Teachers can make the analogy come alive by building a hamburger as a

demonstration in front of the class. Also, the FIRST-Letter mnemonic device, “LISTS,” helps students to remember the five types of transitions.

#5: Enhanced Student Supports (Cue Cards and Notes Sheets)

The *Paragraph Writing Strategy* program includes 78 Cue Cards that teachers can display for students. In contrast, the *Fundamentals* program includes 13 Cue Cards. Additionally, the *Fundamentals* program includes fillable Notes Sheets that teachers can prompt students to complete during the “Describe” instruction for each lesson. The PowerPoint slideshow provided for each lesson can be used to show students how to fill in the Notes Sheets. Students can keep the Notes Sheets for further reference throughout the paragraph writing instruction.

#6: Expanded Planning Tools (Diagrams)

Students are taught to use a graphic organizer to plan their paragraphs in both programs. In the original *Paragraph Writing Strategy* program, students use a simple diagram to plan three or four details in their paragraph, along with the other major components of a paragraph. In the *Fundamentals* program, they use a diagram similar to a TOWER Diagram (for the Theme Writing Strategy) or the FRAME (in the Framing Routine) to plan all the elements of their paragraphs, including their Lead-off and Follow-up Detail Sentences. In other words, students plan how they will follow up on each of their lead-off details. The diagram may seem more complex for elementary students than for secondary students. However, the new planning diagram provides additional structure and support, enabling students to plan both main ideas and two levels of supporting details before writing. This scaffolding helps young writers organize their thinking and reduce the cognitive demands associated with drafting a paragraph.

For a visual representation of the comparison, please refer to Figure 1.0 below

Figure 1. Comparison Table PW to FPW

	Paragraph Writing	Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing	
	Secondary	Lower Elementary Grades 2 nd – 3 rd	Upper Elementary Grades 4 th - 6 th
Pre-requisites	Proficiency of Sentence Writing	Fundamentals in the Sentence Writing Strategy	Fundamentals in the Sentence Writing Strategy
Analogy	Train	Hamburger	Hamburger
FIRST-Letter Device	SCRIBE	LISTS (transitions only)	LISTS (transitions only)
Passage Readability	No defined grade levels Variety of 4 sentence types with more complicated sentence types	No defined grade levels Reviewed by 2 nd -6 th grade teachers to determine appropriateness Majority of simple sentences with passages that include: 1 topic sentence 6 detail sentences 1 clincher sentence Shorter sentences Fewer multisyllabic words	No defined grade levels Reviewed by 2 nd -6 th grade teachers to determine appropriateness Majority of simple sentences with passages that include: 1 topic sentence 6 detail sentences 1 clincher sentence Longer sentences More multisyllabic words
Cue Cards vs Notes Sheets	78 Cue Cards	13 Cue Cards and Notes Sheets	13 Cue Cards and Notes Sheets
Types of Paragraphs	All types are included in the Instructor's Manual	Included in the Instructor's Manual: 3 Types (Descriptive, Narrative, & Reasons). Students utilize the FRAME to draft a paragraph and then turn it into a well-written paragraph.	Included in the Instructor's Manual: 3 Types (Descriptive, Narrative, & Reasons). Students utilize the FRAME to draft a paragraph and then turn it into a well-written paragraph.

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Adapted from Rosanne Arvin, SIM Professional Developer, Comparisons of Paragraph Writing and Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing

Figure 1. Comparison Table PW to FPW (cont)

	Paragraph Writing	Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing	
	Secondary	Lower Elementary Grades 2 nd – 3 rd	Upper Elementary Grades 4 th - 6 th
Paragraph Diagram	Name: _____ Date: _____ <u>PARAGRAPH DIAGRAM</u> 1. TOPIC: 2. DETAILS: 4. ORDER: 3. SEQUENCE 6. P.O.V. 7. TENSE 5. TRANSITIONS:	CLINCHER SENTENCES Learning Sheet 4A (LE) Title My Room Sequence: Pt. of View: Tense: Topic Sentence (General, Clueing, or Specific): Lead-Off Info Detail Trans: Follow-Up Info Follow-Up Info Follow-Up Info Clincher Sentence (General, Clueing, or Specific): Trans:	
Ready-to-Use Digital Lessons	Not provided	Provided on a Website in PowerPoint format.	
Learning Sheets	Printed Volume and Flash Drive	Provided on a Website in digital format.	

Designed for Today's Elementary Writers

From grade-level learning sheets and digital resources to interactive note-taking tools and enhanced planning supports, *Fundamentals of Paragraph Writing* builds on the strong foundation of the original SIM *Paragraph Writing Strategy* while meeting the unique needs of elementary students. The result is a flexible, engaging program that helps young writers develop essential paragraph-writing skills with confidence.