MERIT
S O F T W A R E

Paragraph Punch
Skill levels 6 - 10

Complete program: 5 units
REASONS (Unit 1), DETAILS (Unit 2), EXAMPLE (Unit 3),
CAUSE AND EFFECTS (Unit 4), SEQUENCE (Unit 5)

For details about each unit, see the Content section on page 4
For Teaching Suggestions, see page 6

Evaluation version: REASONS (Unit 1)
Tracks work for two students.
PUNCH (TM) A process of teaching writing.

Windows 9x/NT/2000/XP
5 MB RAM, 40 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 reasons, details, sequence, example, and cause and effects. The program contains 15 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 six and up to write effective paragraphs. It teaches five different ways to develop a paragraph: through reasons, details, example, cause and effects, and sequence. A step-by-step approach emphasizes content and organization.

To use 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 which 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.

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
Students progress through the program by typing in input boxes and by clicking on buttons or typing keyboard shortcuts to select actions. At several points during the program students are shown their work wrap style. This is for viewing only. The students edit their work by selecting from the notepads.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION: Introduces a specific type of paragraph - one that presents reasons, details, example, cause and effects, or sequence 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 topic the student has chosen to write about. These prompts encourage the student to brainstorm. He/she responds by typing words or phrases into separate input boxes. Then the computer puts the student's ideas into a list. Tips are available if the student gets stuck.

WRITING - TOPIC SENTENCE: The computer provides a sample topic sentence, plus an incomplete topic sentence for students to finish as an exercise. Students then write an original topic sentence to introduce their paragraph. Next, they look at their topic sentence together with their pre-writing items and review the items for relevance to the topic 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 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.

ORGANIZING: In the first step of this section, the Writing Notepad with the students' sentences appears 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. Complete sentences now appear in wrap style. 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 - CONCLUSION: The computer provides a sample concluding sentence, plus an incomplete concluding sentence for students to finish as an exercise. Students then write an original concluding 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.

REVISING: Optional subsections of Revising - STYLE and SENTENCE STRUCTURE - are designed to help students improve their writing. There are specific suggestions for improving style, and correcting sentence structure. (The record-keeping program notifies the teacher if the student has, or had not, looked at the Style and Sentence Structure subsections.)

Students may go back to the start of the Revising - Overview section by selecting the Review button.

GRAMMAR: Common grammatical errors are called to the student's attention.

PROOFREADING: This is the students' chance to review the spelling and punctuation. 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 the students' writing is completed, they can save it (as a text file), print it, or move it to a word processor.

The Publishing Menu options are:

Review: Review the revising and editing sections again.

Spell checking: This is a final opportunity to review spelling.

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

Save: It creates a file in a word processor format with the default name of the file with students' names and class code. We suggest that additional characters be added so that existing paragraphs are not overwritten. If you wish students to save their paragraphs to a floppy disk, they should insert the drive letter followed by a colon before the file name. Sample: A:DORIS (class 6B)2.doc.

Word Processor: Moves the paragraph to the word processor that was selected in the Teacher Program Manager (TPM). (The default word processor is Wordpad. To change this setting, press Control G when you are in the TPM program and type the complete path of your word processor program.)

New Topic: This button is enabled after the current paragraph is saved.

HOME VERSION
A Home version of the program provides additional flexibility. It is appropriate for:
    Teachers who wish to assign independent work for students
    Teachers who teach distance learning programs
    Self-motivated people interested in improving their skills
    Home school settings

The Home version has the same scope, sequence, and printing features as the School versions. It tracks and bookmarks the work of two students, but it does not permit user entry into the teacher record management system.

To facilitate distance learning, each time a student completes a round, a progress report is automatically saved as a file that may be e-mailed to an instructor. This progress-to-date file has an MPR extension and contains the same information a student gets when he prints from the summary screen. Student access to this file is through the Progress Reports folder in the Start menu of the Home version.

Students may purchase Home versions of the software directly from Merit.

HOME VERSION PROGRESS REPORT VIEWER
The School versions do not generate MPR files but they contain a Viewer program. When you double-click the Home version MPR progress-to-date file on a system that has a School version of the program installed, the file will open in a password-protected Viewer program. Type the password in the password box and press OK. You will be alerted if the file has been altered. If it is unaltered, you may view or print it out from the Viewer program.

The progress-to-date file can also be opened with the Windows system Notepad or Wordpad programs, but these programs will not notify you if the file has been altered.

EVALUATION VERSION NOTE
The Evaluation version of the software includes the Viewer program and, for convenience, automatically saves the MPR progress-to-date file at the end of each round. MPR files can be accessed through the Progress Reports folder in the Start menu.

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 with the TPM Set Up Student Names functions.

- Student controlled – for home users and for mature students. Names added at the Logon Screen.

For more information about class management and adding student names to the database, see the Teacher Program Manager manual. It can be printed out from a Merit Software CD or from this link on the Internet: http://meritsoftware.com/Teacher_Program_Manager.pdf

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.

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

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.

CONTENT OF PARAGRAPH PUNCH

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

Unit 1: Reasons

Topic: A relative has generously left you money in her will. You want to give some of it to charity. Which charity do you choose and why?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about a charity and its contribution to society.

Topic: You have won a free trip to Hawaii. You may take one person with you. Whom do you choose and why?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about a close friend or relative, and why he or she would be fun to have with you in Hawaii.

Topic: The editor of your local newspaper has asked you to write about the best athlete on a team in your school or community. Whom do you choose and why?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about your favorite local player.

Unit 2: Details

Topic: A friend from far away is coming to visit you for the first time. What place in particular do you want your friend to see during the visit?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about your favorite spot.

Topic: One place stands out in your memory. It may be indoors or outdoors, close to home or far away. Tell about it.
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about a place you remember well.

Topic: A special machine lets you travel back in time. Describe what you witness firsthand some time in the past.
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell about a period of time or an event in the past that especially interests you.

Unit 3: Example

Topic: Most of us have 'heroes,' people we greatly admire. Your heroes are people who help others.
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about a person you admire.

Topic: Machines and gadgets have made life today easier and more fun. Some you absolutely could not live without.
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about the machine or gadget you enjoy or depend on most.

Topic: You think cats, dogs, and goldfish are commonplace pets. There are other, more unusual pets available.
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about an unusual pet.

Unit 4: Cause and Effects

Topic: You are moving on to another place or a new experience. How does this move affect you?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell how your life has changed.

Topic: Something that you depend on breaks down. It takes a week to get it fixed. What does this do to your life?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe what it is like for you to live without an object that is important to you.

Topic: A natural disaster has struck your community. What are the results?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe how a force of nature affected your community.

Unit 5: Sequence

Topic: You enjoy playing a particular game. Your friend wants to learn how to play it too. Describe how you teach your friend to play the game.
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell how to play a certain game.

Topic: There is a traditional holiday in three weeks. You want to have a party in your home. How do you organize it?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe how to plan a party.

Topic: You plan to surprise your mother by preparing a meal for her on Mother's Day. What do you do?
Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe the steps involved in preparing a meal.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS PROGRAM

Ask students what kinds of writing they do for social studies, science, and language arts classes. Do they feel like writing? Why or why not? When is writing easy? When is it difficult? What kinds of writing do they most like to read? Least like to read?

Ask students what kinds of writing they do outside school. Do they keep a journal? Write letters or email? Create stories or comic strips?

Have students use the program, going through *Pre-Writing* and inputing sentences for *Writing-Body*. Ask them to break into pairs in order to share sentences with each other.

Have students continue with their Merit writing program till they reach *Editing*. Ask them to work in pairs, helping each other as they edit.

Help students transfer their completed writing to their own disks, or to a word-processing, email, or HTML program. Have them "publish" their work by printing it.

Follow up by asking students to break into small groups and share their printed writing. What do they like about each other's writing? Do group members have any suggestions for each other?

Follow up each session by asking students what they found easiest when using their Merit writing program. What was already familiar to them? What new things did they learn about writing?

Review any problem areas for writing in the classroom. Ask students what they found most difficult about starting, writing, or editing their writing.

If students are using *Starter Paragraph Punch* or *Paragraph Punch*, give them a short text based on material they are reading. Prompt students to observe that this short text is missing punctuation, such as sentence breaks, capitals, and commas. Have them edit by inserting punctuation.

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Ask students to try doing pre-writing for their language arts or social studies classes.

Have students work in pairs to come up with a list of adjectives to describe people, places, and things. Ask the pairs to come up with a list of verbs to describe action, then a list of adverbs for describing actions.

Request that students try editing their writing for language arts, social studies, and science classes.

Put together a class publication of work done with this program.

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