

WRITING DEVELOPMENT

In her book, *The Writing Revolution* Judith Hochman tells us that students' problems with reading comprehension, as well with writing essays, occur because they have not been taught systematically to write ... to which her book gives a step-by-step guide.

The Writing Development exercises here are adapted from her programme.

Stalin's Dictatorship

18. Paragraphs I - turning notes into a paragraph

Let's say I have been asked to write the essay: 'In what ways were the lives of people in the Soviet Union affected by Stalin's dictatorship?' I decide to make: 1. The Secret Police my first paragraph, and I turn to my notes:

- *§58 of Criminal Code: Arrests for 'counter-revolutionary' acts (eg. failing to report damage to public property).*
- *After 1930, NKVD used 'TROIKAS' (3 officers) to convict without trials or lawyers / used torture.*
- *Mass operations (eg against Poles – killed 111,000).*
- *Assassination (aka 'wet business') of Stalin's opponents of (eg Trotsky, 1940).*
- *Secret agents watched out for 'enemies of the people'.*

a. I summarise these into a 'basic paragraph' of three simple sentences:

"They arrested, tortured and convicted people. They did assassinations and mass executions. Secret agents watched out for 'enemies of the people'."

It is not going to score me many marks! SO... how might I improve this paragraph?

b. To improve the paragraph, I will use Judith Hochman's ideas:

- Start with a topic sentence introducing the idea of the paragraph
- Expand sentences by adding factual information
- Vary vocabulary
- Use conjunctions
- Explain how this information addresses the question, including proving information
- End with a concluding sentence which directly answers the question

c. Doing all this, I might end up with a paragraph which reads:

"The Secret Police (OGPU, later NKVD) threw a blanket of terror over the whole population. They would arrest people for 'counter-revolutionary' acts under §58 of Criminal Code, after which they could torture and convict them using 'troikas' – tribunals of three NKVD officers – without a lawyer or even the accused present. They conducted assassinations (for example, Trotsky was killed in 1940 when he was in exile in Mexico) and mass executions of whole groups (including, most horrifyingly, 111,000 Poles in 1937-38). Meanwhile, secret agents watched out for 'enemies of the people' who might be troublemakers, or sloppy workers ... or who just stopped clapping too soon when a round of applause for Stalin was called for. People were afraid to talk to, or even to meet, each other."

1. Look at my revised paragraph. Identify in it the parts where I have implemented ideas *i-vi*.

This is a **really good way** to write an essay:

- Choose the topic for a paragraph.
- Write a 'basic paragraph' of three simple sentences.
- Improve the paragraph using ideas *i-vi*.

2. Using this approach, write the rest of the essay:

'In what ways were the lives of people in the Soviet Union affected by Stalin's dictatorship?'

writing paragraphs on: The Purges; The GULAG; The Church; Russification; and Cult of Stalin, using the notes on the webpage:

TOP TIP: before you put a paragraph 'to bed', read it (or better still, ask someone else to read it) out loud. You will immediately catch any grammatical errors, and also realise whether its meaning is clear enough.]