Brooke Hespeler: Okay so my name is Brooke Hespeler, I am a mentor writing tutor here at the Student Learning Center. And we're here to talk about paragraph development, and the Breaking Bad theme is totally arbitrary. It doesn't actually have to do with the paragraph development, I just thought it was cool. So going off, what do we mean when we say paragraph development?
So for starters,
Paragraph development is kind of a catchall term, um, usually just what it means, when we’re talking about it. Is that the paragraphs have basically four things going on; they're unified, they clearly relate to the thesis, they are coherent, and their well-developed. So when we’re talking about unit, unity, when it comes to paper, we're saying that every sentence in a paragraph is centered around one idea, which is usually the topic sentence, and on a broader scale. If we're talking about an - uh, total - an essay over all, um, when we talk about the unity, it means that everything has to relate to the thesis statement. Um - everything it kind of just gets smaller and smaller, it's all - like the structure of an essay. If you go with it ,like the whole paper is structured around the idea that you basically have a thesis statement.
In an introduction, you have your body paragraphs, which kind of expand upon the thesis statement, and then a conclusion, and if you go smaller within that each paragraph should basically be doing the same thing. Be functioning as a mini essay in itself that all them come off of this idea of a thesis statement, um, so everything within the paragraph should clearly relate to the overall thesis statement, um, meaning everything contained in the paragraph can be connected back to the thesis. If you took one individual line, just any line out of your, um, paper we should be able to have a general idea, of what your thesis - the thesis statement for that paper would be. That this - just going off of the sentence, we should be able to say 'oh, you know that paper is talking generally about, yada yada'. When we say that a paragraph is coherent, it means the sentences are arranged in a logical manner, and follow a definite plan for development. Meaning they make sense where they are - uh, in that paragraph. Um, you aren't jumping around, you aren't repeating yourself, you're not kinda explaining something, going onto another topic, then going back and doing the full explanation for concept. Um, and we'll have an example of that in a second, and then we talk about the idea of being well-developed. Which just goes to say every idea discussed in the paragraph, should be adequately explained, and supported through evidence and details, that work together to explain the paragraphs controlling idea. Basically, um - sorry, basically everything's in there for a reason. It makes sense, um - you don't just throw things in there randomly, students have a bad habit, when you're trying to hit word counts. Um, you have a habit, there's a tendency to repeat yourself, to throw in random facts of information, like "look I know what I'm talking about" - um, things like that. Those lead to very poorly developed paragraphs, and I'll show you what I mean by that.
The consequences of poorly developed paragraphs, you get something along these lines,
and this is a very extreme example; but just to show you a little bit of what I'm talking about. So that's not super readable, so I'll read it out loud, "crystal meth is a synthetic stimulant that many people use recreationally to get high, my cousin Gary had to go to rehab for meth addiction. Some of its street names include Ice, Speed, Tina, and Go Fast, it is made from pseudoephedrine, cold medicine, mixed with toxic household chemicals like lye and drain cleaner. It's one of the most addictive drugs known to man, Gary lost his job at IBM in two thousand twel-ten. Um, so if we go back to the ideas we discussed, this paragraph basically breaks all of those rules. It's not unified, it's not coherent. If you took any sentence out of this, could you tell me what my thesis statement for the paper is? Probably not. Um, also n-none of the sentences, or when we have an idea for a topic sentence, it's generally the first sentence or two. So if my topic sentence is "crystal meth is a synthetic stimulant that many people use recreationally to get high", my reader is probably going to be expecting something really close within that vein. That I'm going to be talking about either, you know its effect on people, or the fact that this, and what a synthetic stimulant is. Expanding upon that, but then I go straight into "my cousin Gary had to go to rehab for meth addiction", comes out of nowhere. My readers totally off-kilter, they have no idea what's happening in this paragraph, in this paper, what I'm trying to prove. It's all about clarity for the reader, are they going to be able to take this without knowing; who you are, how you talk, how you reason things out. Um and be able to understand the information you're trying to present, in pretty much the easiest way possible. So a better example it's not perfect, um - I kind of wrote it last-minute, but a better example of this, of unified well-developed paragraph would be this one.
So “Crystal meth is made from pseudoephedrine, cold medicine mixed with toxic household chemicals, like lye and drain cleaner. The process to distill these chemicals into meth is relatively easy, and can be done in the average kitchen; because of this, law enforcement officials have a hard time cracking down on individuals who cook and deal crystal meth”.

Does that feel a little better to you guys, do you kind of understand the comparison between the two? Um, when I start with a clear topics sentence like, "crystal meth is made from pseudoephedrine" um, the next sentence goes directly off of this. These chemicals relate right back into the topic sentence, and you know what chemicals I'm talking about, you know the direction of this paragraph is going. You're like "oh, okay", these are chemicals that can be found anywhere, it's easy to make. Why is that important, because "law-enforcement officials have a hard time cracking down on" it. You can understand my reasoning, you can understand my train of thought, you understand what I'm trying to tell you. On a very basic level, so getting started with paragraph - with an essay - uh, working on your paragraph development comes at the very - I mean, the very - sorry getting tripped up.
Um - just like my thing tells me not to. A lot of people get tripped up, writing an introduction, and this leads to terrible paragraph development. And your whole essay will suffer from it. Big way to solve this, is to actually not start by writing an introduction. How many of you have sat there staring at that stupid blinking cursor on your computer, for the blank were documented like an hour, and not know where to go. Probably everybody, right. Maybe not an hour, but um - some of you might not have that attention span; but - um, it really, if you think about it. it doesn't make sense the way we were taught to write essays. Starting with an introduction, you're introducing something that does not exist yet. How does - if you were asked at work to introduce a guest speaker, and you didn't know who the guest speaker was. Would you go up there, and just start talking about them. You know, make up an identity for them, no, you do research, you decide "oh, okay" this what I want to say about this person. And then you go ahead, and write it. So I think the easiest way to figure out what you're gonna say. Figure out your paragraph development, is to go ahead, don't start with the introduction. Jump right in to writing your body paragraphs, and - um, one of the easier ways to do this is, people get really caught up writing a thesis statement.
They're like "okay this is the overarching thing that my paper is gonna say, you know it's has to be perfectly structured like this", basically do that last, once you've got everything down. You can look at, and say "okay this is what I've said, this what this over - the paper is saying. Right now, here's a concise way to say it". When you go ahead and start actually start writing your paper. Don't start with thesis statement, start with a thesis idea, so if my prompt is; "in class we've discussed drug culture in the United States at length. Pick one aspect of 21st century drug culture to focus on, and write a 3 to 5 page paper on it". That's really broad, and you're gonna have a really hard time starting, just jumping in and saying "oh, yes this is my thesis statement, this is everything I'm going to talk about, even though I haven't really done the research". If you go ahead, and start with nothing very simple like "well you know in class, we talked a lot about meth use among young adults. I'm gonna kinda dip my toes in there, see if I can write a full paper about that; because that's another problem people have. They get halfway through a paper, they realize they really have absolutely nothing more to say on the subject, and then you end up with these terrible paragraphs, that go nowhere and are repeating themselves. Just because you're trying to hit that word count, or the page limit. So if you go ahead and start by saying, “That we talked about meth use among young adults a lot and there were a couple different aspects to that". You can kind of see how your paper is to take shape, already. If you know - you say "you know what, I've got six pages on this aspect of it, that's gonna be a paragraph". Um, and you can kind of go ahead, and start to outline how your paragraphs are gonna go and that is so important to creating well-developed paragraphs. Is knowing what you're going to say ahead of time, and not just jumping right into it. Um, so if I start with a thesis idea, rather than a statement "meth use among young adults", I can go into - and I come up with my outline, of bullet points of things work.
Where it's like "okay, I have enough to talk about this for one paragraph, and this, and maybe this. You only need maybe three ideas to go into actually writing your essay, and seeing where you want to go with it. Does anyone have any questions real quick before I get into this. At the Student Learning Center we have what we call the AEC method, which is; Argument, Evidence, and Commentary, and that's how basically every paragraph you will ever write should be structured. And it's the easiest, easiest way if break down every paragraph you write or read. Like this can be used as a studying tool too, you look at a paragraph, and say "what is the argument, what is the evidence, and what is the commentary". Argument, topic sentence, what is this paragraph trying to tell me? And that's usually derived from your thesis statement, or thesis idea when you're in the beginning stages of writing. Argument, what is it telling me. Evidence, expanding on what it's telling me. Um, this is where you use statistics, this is where you use quotes, this is where you basically expand upon, "well don't just take my word for it" - um and you give basically all the solid information facts you have. Then you go into the commentary, the lot - and this can I - it depends on the kind of paper you're writing. Usually I'd say with the argument, don't make it more than two sentences - um, if you have more than two sentences of argument. You should probably consider breaking it up into two paragraphs - um, or more. Evidence, again totally depends on how long the paper is, how much information you have to dispel. Um, your commentary is shorter than your evidence, the evidence should be the longest part of your paragraph generally. Commentary, why is this important? Why are you telling me this? Why does this relate back to the thesis statement, which is supposed to be this really important idea that I'm trying to show to you? And if you follow this method, when you're planning out your papers, it makes life so much easier - and yeah, I said life, not just paper writing, life.
So, any questions because we're gonna do a little bit of an activity, let's try putting the AEC method and practice.
So here's a paragraph, this is what we would consider a well the - well-developed paragraph. So it - I'll go ahead and read it out loud, "Crystal meth affects young adults more than any other demographic, a recent study done by the national Department of Health and human sciences, show that 2.8% of young adults, ages 18 to 25 admitted to regular use of crystal meth, which is significantly higher than any other age group surveyed. (2007) Even more troubling is the apparent availability of the drug – 45% of the young adults surveyed said they knew where they could easily obtain the drug while 30% said that they had personally been offered the drug before. Since the influence of peers plays the largest role in adolescent and young adult social and emotional development (AACAP), this means that meth use is a vicious cycle. Every time a young adult begins to use meth their peers become exposed to it, which increases their likelihood of using. As meth use grows meth exposure grows, which in turn increases meth use. Therefore, this is the most dangerous demographic for us to be seeing growth in, because it means that the problem is only going to become worse.

So in comparison to paragraph written about my cousin Gary with meth addiction, who - he doesn't actually exist by the way. I'm not actually making fun of a cousin who's got a serious addiction problem. In comparison, how does this feel? Okay, um - well if we break it down, can anybody tell me what the argument of this paragraph is, and I will call on people. So volunteers. Yeah.

**Audience Member:** The first sentence

**Brooke Hespeler:** First sentence, alright. So, “Crystal meth affects young adults more than any other demographic”, do we agree that that's argument paragraph?
Does everything that comes after this, relate back to this, and if my thesis idea at this point. Um - or statement, it's really person - depends on how you write papers, if my thesis idea is going off of crystal meth use. You can get that, if I pulled one of these sentences out, could you think those papers probably comes from paper about meth use in young adults. Yeah, so where would my evidence be? Anybody? Hmm, what would my evidence be? Oh, I thought you were raising your hand. Well your, yeah - go for it now.

**Audience Member:** [inaudible] like examples [inaudible] of where it comes from.
Brooke Hespeler: So, yeah, very good. Um - when I start talking about recent studies, this is all my evidence right here. So going off of that, um - my evidence is backing that up, "crystal meth affects young adults more than any other demographic", right away I say there was a study.

**Brooke Hespeler:** I'm not just totally making this up, there was a study done by, you know, a well respected organization. That showed this statistic going off of that, I have this statistic, and this statistic. So I know what I'm talking about. You establish yourself - when you use this method, you establish yourself as a credible source of information. Your reader is going to be - say "you know what, this person knows what they're talking about, and I'm going to keep reading, because I trust them as a source of information". When you use poorly developed paragraphs, you come off as an unreliable source of information, so people aren't going to believe you. They aren't going to finish reading the paper, and that's bad. So, uh - yeah do I have any questions about the AEC method? No, cause - also if you want another way to remember it, I had - sorry, going back. I had Argument, Evidence, Commentary, another way you can say that if - cause some people have trouble with the word argument.
They're like "but it's not an argumentative paper", you can go ahead and say Assertion, Examples, Conclusion. Um - and if you - whichever, you know, you can use those interchangeably, um. And this - like I said, it doesn't have to be just for argumentative papers this can be used in absolutely anything. If you're writing emails, or anything like that. It can be used put into play, so body paragraphs out of the way.
We can go ahead and jump into the introduction - um, when you're writing the introduction, to properly develop it. Generally the rules you want to follow, it's going to look a bit like a funnel, so you're gonna have a broad statement about your main idea. Something about crystal meth, a more specific statement that's a little bit closer to the main idea of your paper. This is generally - you see people get really fancy with it, and like they'll put - and it's fine if your paper - your professor doesn't call you out on it. It's like generally, like a statement about life itself or something ridiculous like that. You can go a little crazy, um - something that catches your reader - don't get too caught up on. A lot of people get way too caught up on, trying to create a hook, or something that really drags people in, like "I know the secret to life the universe and everything", and so your reader is like "really", and you're like "not really, but I'm gonna tell you about this". Don't get caught up with that generally the papers you're going to be writing, they're for a professor who's gonna read your paper anyway. You aren't really trying to sell them on anything, you want it to be well-developed, but you don't have to try; and actually sell them anything you aren't trying to, yeah, you're not trying to sell them anything, um - the broad statement about your main idea doesn't have to be totally philosophical and life-changing. Um, it just kind of gives a brief preview, think of it like a movie trailer - um, where at the you know at the beginning they'll usually show you like picture of a farm. Or like an explosion or something, and you're like "wow, okay you have my attention". I'm listening like it has something to do with the movie, it's taken out of the movie's context, but you aren't entirely sure what it's telling you, and then it says you know you'll see a main character appear. This getting closer to your main idea, um - my first sentence is about - or my first sentence is about drug culture. My second one would be about meth use, you're getting closer, you're getting smaller. Um, so you know if we're doing a movie trailer idea, the second one you introduce a character. It doesn't have to be a main character, but it's a person on the screen, the third one and again I used just bullet points.
These can be any length, it really just depends on your paper like the first broad statement could be to three sentences if you're writing like doctoral thesis, or something like that. Um - a main - the third one is a main specific statement, that's even closer to your main idea. So this is like, just the cusp. You might start to get - you know, here we're like moving pictures that get your attention, this is you know we've introduced a little vague idea you might've seen Brad Pitt on the screen. Like "yes, this is a movie with Brad Pitt in it", this one getting closer to the main idea on, this is where Brad Pitt says you know something menacing. So you know it's an action movie, he's says you know, "You took my daughter", no that's Liam Neeson. Actually if we're doing a Liam Neeson movie, it's like this is where he does the phone call monologue. Where he's like "you took my daughter and I'm going to kill you", and you're like "yeah, okay" that's - that's - I know where we're going with this. This is and then you get right into your thesis statement, that's where you say "Taken", in theaters July 2013 follow Taken movie on Twitter. That's where you get the meat and potatoes of your argument. Thesis statement is the main event on, you basically keep them hanging on until this very end. And then this handy structure leads you right into your first paragraph, so your first paragraph should be go - start your first topic sentence. Should start right after your thesis statement, um - so it's a direct connection, and then you can get a little more as your topic sentence. You go, on you write paragraphs your topic sentences can get a little farther from the thesis statement, than this first one. This first one should be very directly, like I am - I mean there should just generally be a transition; but um - it should be very - your strongest argument. What made you pick this topic overall, and then as you get further you can, you know. My first one is just the basic statistics.
It's that paragraph, I showed you before, where I said that, “Meth use is common among young adults". My second paragraph could be "how to make meth", which is the even earlier paragraph, if you can remember that far back. Where it's like "it's very common" - um, "common and easy to make and law enforcement has trouble with that". My next paragraph could be going off of that, words like crackdowns or fines or anything like that. So you can see, your - uh, reader should be able to track your progression. Where even if you're starting to get into these little tiny minute details, um - of what's going on in your overall subject. They should be able - it should be like a trail of breadcrumbs, I'm totally mixing metaphors and I apologize. But they should be able to track your progression, so even if were getting into these highly specific areas, you should - they should be able to see where you're going. It should be just a very tight, linear progression of ideas. Where it's like, maybe I can't identify if I take one sentence out that's towards the end. Maybe I can't completely connect it to your main thesis, but if I can connect to the idea before that, and that idea before that. I should be able to basically figure out exactly what your thesis is pretty quickly. So any question on the instruction? And this should probably - some people are totally uncomfortable with this idea, and that's fine; because a lot of us have been taught to write the five - you know, the standard five paragraph essay since day one. Where they're like "write the introduction, write three body paragraphs, ready conclusion". Some people are not comfortable breaking out of that, but that's totally fine, whatever works for you. I'm not here to tell you, you're doing everything wrong, and you should be ashamed of yourselves. This is just kind of through experience, we've found that this helps people a lot more. Um, it helps them kind - one of the most important parts of writing an essay is just starting.
And when you're - your reader can generally tell if your ha - you had trouble starting. If it was like pulling teeth the entire time, when you can jump right into "you know what this is what I want to talk about with this paper". It really just it sparks that creativity really easily - um, and you can figure out what you want to say, usually pretty quickly. Once you've actually already started saying it, or once you started thinking about what you say. Um, and what's really cool about the introduction is, a lot of time when you start off writing the introduction first, and then going into it. A lot of the time you'll realize "well that's not what I - you know, I couldn't find - or I couldn't actually expand upon that all that well. You know, something that was included in your thesis statement, and you have to go back and revise. Much easier to go ahead write the body paragraphs then write the introduction, because you can do a catchall. Whereas before if you are li - uh, if you said something along the lines of - um, it sorry - if you were going. If you were going off of your thesis statement, you're like "yeah, I didn't actually touch on that at all". You have to go back, revise your thesis statement from something like this, this way you look when you're writing your thesis statement. You just look at what you already have, and you go "okay, that's what I was trying to say", and you can go through and tweak it. Um, we like to say that if you're writing a formal, longer essay you should probably go through about three drafts. Three like and I'm not say, like in elementary school they made you like handwrite a draft, and then type of draft, and then type another draft. There should just be three main phases to your writing, so when you're going ahead, and writing - just going AEC writing your body paragraphs. That's part of one draft, you can include an outline, some people don't like to do outlines. And I understand that I'm one of those people, although a lot of time you'll realize, you've been mentally making an outline. Um, so anyway this is just an easy way to kind of - go ahead and get some of that out of the way.
And so finally we have the idea of developing a conclusion, and another thing I've seen most students do this - I did this for years. It wasn't until I started working here, and I actually learned a lot more about writing. That I realized the conclusion is not a summary of what you've just said, and it's so easy to do that, because you're so burnt out at the end of writing an essay. You are like "yes, I am done this is over - this chapter of my life is over. I am moving on", and so it's really easy to just be like "yes, I have said all these things and there I have said it. I will say them again and goodnight". Um, the conclusion though, is much more important than that. That's your "so what" paragraph. It's the last thing your reader, reads. I should rephrase that, that's a weird way to - anyway, it's your "so what" paragraph. Last thing your reader, reads, this is where you sell them that you didn't just waste their time.
If you just summarize something, why did you do that, um. If you go ahead and just summarize something, there gonna get the feeling like they just wasted their time, if you - your conclusion provides new information and I hesitate to say that. I'm not saying bring up new statistics, because statistics always need to be expanded upon, if you bring up a new idea or trying to relate this to something in the reader's own life. They're gonna feel validated in having read it, it's something that they can take away from your paper. That's the main idea basically of your conclusion, should be what your reader is going to take away from your paper. Why you want them to remember this paper five years down the line. Um, and I mean - like I said, it doesn't have to be anything philosophical. Anything super life-changing, um - but just something for them to think about, and maybe they totally - disag - oh yes.

**Audience Member:** [inaudible]

**Brooke Hespeler:** No go ahead

**Audience Member:** [inaudible] personal experience.

**Brooke Hespeler:** It can be or um - if it - sometimes personal experience like if I were talking about my cousin Gary. That would probably require its own paragraph, um - you could definitely incorporate that though. If you said "you know this is a subject that's very near and dear to my heart, if you know - my paper was about trying to prevent. Like ways you can prevent meth use in students, you could say something along lines of "you know this an issue that's very near and dear to my heart because of someone had intervened with Gary, things might've been entirely different.
So whatever you think is gonna make the most impact, in your argument. Does that kinda answer your question, a little bit. Um, or something that's more uni - more universal, if I bring it back to my cousin Gary. Maybe somebody knows somebody with a problem, something along those lines. So this is where you kind of become more human, and not just a, "I am reciting facts that we learned in class to show this professor that I thought that I learned some - that I memorized the facts, the way they told me to". This is saying I actually got something out of learning those facts, and I'm taking these, and applying them to my life a little bit. Um, I know - that a lot of times you have to write a paper, and you're like "I don't care about any of this, at all" - uh, you don't exactly want to say that. There's got to be something that you take away from, uh - writing a paper, or learning about a new subject. Find that. and you're probably gonna be able to find the best way to connect to your audience. So any more questions? How does the AEC method feel, you guys feel like you could probably incorporate that? And like I said, you can even use that as a study tool, on - if you're trying to. If you've got, you know - 75 pages of reading that you have to have figured out. If you go through and look at like the main paragraphs of your reading, and say "alright, what's the argument of this paragraph", what's the uh - expla - sorry I'm getting tripped up. Explanation or evidence for this paragraph, and "what's the commentary". You can go ahead - I mean you know, maybe some of them you're like "well that's not gonna be on the test" whatever, but if you pull those out. You're probably going to be able to find what's - you should probably be studying. Um - and basically if somebody were to be - if you incorporate into your writing. If somebody is studying your paper, for another paper they have to write - they've - there's the overlap. That was a weird example, I apologize. So yeah, if you guys on your questions. Um, I am gonna go ahead and do a little spiel for the Writing Center. As I said I'm a mentor - a mentor writing tutor, uh - here at the Student Learning Center, um - and we have and a lot of people don't know this.
We have an entire team of writing tutors, that we can help you on every aspect of the writing process. From prewriting to, you know - if you just - we have students who come in and they're like "I got this prompt, and I don't know what to do with it". We can help you there, if have been writing your doctoral thesis, and you've been over it 1000 times; but you want to go over 1001 times. We're here to sit there and listen, and let you know what's up. If it'll connect ever. Um, if you go to the CSU - if this ever loads - you go to the CSU Chico website backslash SLC, you find SLC, the Writing Center has its own link on there.
Um, we offer drop in appointments, which are a half hour, you're guaranteed a half hour. If you come in drop in, we go ten to five every day. I'm gonna write this up on the board actually. We go ten to five every day, for drop ins we have appointments from nine to six. Um, there was an eraser right next to me, nobody pointed that out you guys are cruel. So yeah, our drop in hours are ten to five every day, and then appointments from nine to six every day. And they can be made on the phone, or online, an appointment hour - cool thing about that. Is um - it's a guaranteed hour between you and a tutor, um - where they can hammer everything out. Drop in, you maybe if nobody else's here um - the tutor isn't working on anything else. They can maybe give you up to an hour, but the odds of that are pretty much unlikely. Anyway guaranteed half hour, um - don't feel like you have to if you know come in with a half hour problem or hour-long problem. If you just have a question about formatting or something like that, that's exactly what drop in is for. We also have offered two online services, we have a writing forum. which is on our main page, which I really wish I could show you guys right now. We have a writing forum, where you can ask those little questions, and we've had people – they ask really good questions. Where - um, that's where you go ahead, and go ahead and ask like we had one just recently, where it was like. Do I write out if I'm writing a paper that includes one numbers? Do I write out the numbers, like the actual word or do I just go ahead and put the numbers? If you've got a question like that, go ahead and put it in the form. We should be - have an answer back to you in about an hour or so. We also offer online writing services or online essay services, where you can submit to us through TurnItIn. And within three business days, we can have - I think we have three tutors look it over, go through it completely, and leave you comments and feedback. Um - you can ask for specific feedback, where it's like "hey did I come explain this well", "did I do formatting right".
We can address either specific issues, or just kind of overall let you know what we think. We'll have three tutors look it over, we'll have it back to you within three business days. Um, so if you - I highly recommend in person, um - appointments or drop ins with us. Um, because lot more can be done in that time; but if you can get in. That's a service that we offer. Alright any questions about that? No, I feel bad I'm gonna be letting you go a little bit early; but I don't think anybody's gonna complain. Um, so alright you guys were great, my name is Brooke - um, just two things. If you came in late, there was a sign-up sheets I should find. Sign-up sheet in the back, you can come up and sign in. Uh, with me um - if you have any more questions, that you don't ask in front of the group. I'm right here, I'll be here for a little while. So um - thank you guys so much. You were really great.