

Journalism Style

New Speaker, New Paragraph

Journalistic paragraphs in print and online are short, sometimes just one sentence, rarely more than three. Paragraph breaks generally signal a new entry point into the story. A new paragraph signals a new speaker.

The new high school is being built to house modern school activities. “I hear we’ll have a dance studio with a suspended floor. No more shin splints!” sophomore Gabriela Lim said.

“We’ve been asked to help design the media production classrooms. It’ll be exciting to have print, online, broadcast and yearbook all in one building,” freshman Jared Bullock said.

But some fear the new facility will be sterile compared to the rich heritage of Mimosa. “We’ll be leaving behind 75 years of history at Mimosa High.

“No victory bell in the center of the quad. No trophies in the lobby. No state records on the gym wall. No memorial to alumni who have died in service to their country.

“It will be like going to school in a clean refrigerator,” sophomore Nephi Cahua said.

“Transferring stinks,” freshman Leticia Broom said.

If you have a quotation from one source that extends for more than a paragraph—a running quotation, such as Nephi’s above—do not put a close quotation mark at the end of the first paragraph, but do begin the second paragraph with an opening quotation mark.

For some, Habitat for Humanity is a family affair. Jocelyn White has worked with her grandparents on three Habitat

houses. “I thought Grandma and Grandpa were just going there to tell the workers what to do, but that first day they got shovels and started digging trenches as soon as they got out of their car.

“I’m proud to say I keep up with them, but by the end of the day, I’m really, really tired. They can work me into the ground!”

If you quote only a snippet in the first paragraph and complete sentences in the following paragraph, use opening and closing quotation marks around the snippet:

Jocelyn White’s grandparents are Habitat volunteers. Though Jocelyn is in great shape, her grandparents “work me into the ground.”

“They start hammering or hauling or shoveling as soon as they get out of the car and don’t quit until the last person leaves. They love the work.”

What If You Are Quoting Someone Quoting Someone?

If your quotation includes material that should go in quotation marks, use the usual double quotation marks around the sentence you are reporting and use single quotes around the material inside your source is quoting.

Jorge said, “Reading ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ was the best part of English that year.”

Principal Lotta Smiley said, “I like it when some of the students ‘geek out’ about the science competition. Focus and concentration are great things!”

Ivo Slacker's C++ code won third place, but he said, "It's no big deal, and I really dislike all this talk about 'focus and concentration.'"

You do not need quotation marks around interviews formatted as Q and A, questions and answers. In this example, the publication is the Bugle On Line and Margaret Slater is being interviewed.

Bugle: When did you first learn to yodel?

Slater: I think I tried yodeling when I was little, but I wasn't really successful until I found the place where my voice breaks into falsetto.

Bugle: When was that?

Slater: I was ten or eleven, I think.

Try It!

Rewrite these notes to make a journalistic story. Use quotation marks and paragraph breaks. Sheila Nickerson volunteered for Habitat for Humanity after the Moore, Oklahoma, tornado.

I felt so helpless when I saw photos of all the damage. I even felt guilty because my house and all my family's houses were completely untouched.

But when I started volunteering for Habitat, just packing supplies into trucks that first day, I felt like I was making a difference. I felt much better.

Ben Jolley is a sophomore. (Use just a snippet, a few words, from the first sentence.)

At first I thought it was going to be kinda boring. But I carried bales of shingles onto the roof and put in the pipes for the shower and the laundry. I could really see what I accomplished that day. I'd work on another house if I had a chance.

Amelia and Ekatarina Lubchenko are sisters. Amelia, a sophomore, said:

I was sore when the day was over, but all the volunteers were really friendly and nice. We walked in not knowing anyone, but Roger Harvey tossed us a pair of gloves and a couple of name tags and said, "Hey, glad you are here!"

Ekatarina is a junior.

It's cool to drive by the house and see the flowers the family planted in their front yard. And to know I helped build their home!