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COMPOSITION. THE PARAGRAPH

Structure, Unity, and Coherence in Paragraphs

A paragraph is a physical division of a composition, marking a stage in the writer's thought. It is possible for a reader to struggle through a long piece of writing not divided into paragraphs just as it is possible for a motorist to drive over unmarked roads to a destination. But like the motorist, the reader hopes to find an occasional signpost pointing the way. In a composition of several paragraphs, the indentation, or spacing, that marks the beginning of a paragraph is a signpost that signals a change in the direction of the writer's thought – a new idea; a change in place, time, or situation; a slightly different point of view.

Paragraphs differ in length, content, and organization, but it is possible to form an idea of the kind of average paragraph that is likely to appear in student writing. It is likely to be from 100 to 150 words long, to consist of a general statement supported by specific statements, and to have a single unifying idea. This chapter provides you with instructions, examples, and practice to help you master the writing of an effective paragraph. The work is important preparation for Chapters 14, 15, and 16, which deal with writing compositions of many paragraphs.

1a. THE STRUCTURE OF A PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is a series of sentences developing a single topic.

The writer of the following paragraph, Martin Luther King, Jr., wanted to establish that violence is both impractical and immoral. He begins with a general statement of this idea and then supports it by giving reasons.

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. A voice echoes through time saying to every potential Peter, "Put up your sword." History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow this command. [1; 211-214]

In this paragraph, after stating the main idea in the first sentence, the writer defends the idea by stating reasons for the impracticality and immorality of violence. The paragraph, which is taken from a longer article on nonviolent resistance, makes a forceful, unified plea against bloodshed. Most of the paragraphs you will study in this chapter are organized around a single, unifying topic.

1b. The Topic Sentence

The sentence stating the topic of a paragraph is called the topic sentence.

Most paragraphs, like the one written by Martin Luther King, Jr., have a general statement, or topic sentence, giving the main idea. (Paragraphs in stories often do not have a topic sentence, but they are a special case.) The topic sentence usually comes at the beginning of the paragraph, so that the reader can immediately tell exactly what the paragraph is about. Notice that the topic sentence comes at the beginning of the paragraph. Putting the topic sentence at the beginning can be a help to the writer, too, since a clear statement of an idea at the outset can prevent the writer from wandering from the subject.

Occasionally the topic sentence appears in the middle of the paragraph, and sometimes it comes at the end. Coming at the end, the topic sentence often serves as the climax to the series of details that led up to it. It is a conclusion based on the evidence presented in the paragraph.

Read the following paragraphs, noting the topic sentences in bold-faced type.

TOPIC SENTENCE IN THE MIDDLE

Recently, while fishing in a clear stream, I picked a rough twig out of the water. Growing out of the twig were the tightly furled petals of some strange yellow bud. In seconds this "bud" had blossomed into a pale, golden fly with a long, gracefully tapered body and upright wings like sails. As I watched, the wings dried, became taut and fit, and the insect took flight, mounting high over the stream until it disappeared. Surely there are few stranger creatures in nature than this little mayfly of the order ephemeroptera. The Greeks named it "flower of the river," and the names given to it by trout fishers are no less poetic – "golden drake" and "pale evening sun." The insect spends all but the last few days of its life on the stream bottom where as a nymph it undergoes as many as twenty metamorphoses. Then, in response to some mysterious rhythm of nature, it struggles to the surface, breaks open the nymphal case, and emerges as a winged fly. It is from this instant draining the precious stock of life stored up on the stream bottom, for its mouth has stopped working and it cannot feed again. The insect now has only one function: to mate, to drop eggs into the stream, and then to die.

TOPIC SENTENCE AT THE END

The fourteenth century opened with a series of famines brought on when population growth outstripped the techniques of food production. The precarious balance was tipped by a series of heavy rains and floods and by a chilling of the climate in what has been called the Little Ice Age. Upon a people thus weakened fell the century's central disaster, the Black Death, an eruption of bubonic plague which swept the known world in the years 1347-1349 and carried off an estimated one-third of the population in two and a half years. This makes it the most lethal episode known to history, which is of some interest to an age equipped with the tools of overkill.

[4]

1c. The Concluding, or Clincher, Sentence

Sometimes a writer may wish to reemphasize the main point of a paragraph by restating it in a concluding sentence. This kind of restatement is sometimes called a clincher sentence. It is used to very good effect by skillful writers. A paragraph concluding with a clincher sentence has two statements of its topic: one in the topic sentence and one in the clincher.

Use clincher sentences sparingly. A clincher is unnecessary in a very short paragraph. A poor clincher is one that seems to be tacked on just for its own sake to a paragraph which is complete and effective without it.

In the following paragraph both the topic sentence and the clincher sentence are printed in bold-faced type.

Then in the cool long glade of yard that stretched four hundred feet behind the house he planted trees and grape vines. And whatever he touched in that rich fortress of his will sprang into golden life. As the years passed, the fruit trees the peach, the plum, the cherry, the apple – grew great and bent beneath their clusters. His grape vines thickened into brawny ropes of brown and coiled down the high wire fences of his lot and hung in a dense fabric upon his trellises, roping his domain twice around. They climbed the porch end of the house and framed the upper windows in thick bowers. And the flowers grew in rioting glory in his yard – the velvet-leaved nasturtium, slashed with a hundred tawny dyes, the rose, the snowball, the red-cupped tulip, and the lily. The honeysuckle dropped its heavy mass upon the fence. Wherever his great hands touched the earth, it grew fruitful to him. [2]

EXERCISE 1. The topic sentence in each of the following paragraphs may be at the beginning, middle, or end. Find the topic sentence and the clincher sentence, if any; then copy these sentences.

1. This farm, which was situated two miles west of the village, immediately won our love. It was a glorious place for boys. Broad-armed white oaks stood about the yard, and to the east and north a deep forest invited to exploration. The house was of logs and for that reason was much more attractive to us than to our mother. It was, I suspect, both dark and cold. I know the

roof was poor, for one morning I awoke to find a miniature peak of snow at my bedside. It was only a rude little frontier cabin, but it was perfectly satisfactory to me. [3]

2. The number of children under fifteen years old living in poverty in the urban centers of the developing world is now estimated at 156 million, of whom 60 million are under five years old. The basic needs of these children are not being met. Meals are often irregular, accidents are frequent, arrests of older children for delinquency are commonplace. Their environment is often dangerous. Cuts go untreated and untended colds turn into pneumonia. Their mothers usually have to go out to find work to supplement the family income. Many lack the basic physical protection of shoes, a change of clothes, clean, warm blankets to sleep in, or a decent home to shelter them. [5]

3. Greek mythology is largely made up of stories about gods and goddesses, but it must not be read as a kind of Greek Bible, an account of the Greek religion. According to the most modern idea, a real myth has nothing to do with religion. It is an explanation of something in nature; how, for instance, any and everything in the universe came into existence: men, animals, this or that tree or flower, the sun, the moon, the stars, storms, eruptions, earthquakes, all that is and all that happens. Thunder and lightning are caused when Zeus hurls his thunderbolt. A volcano erupts because a terrible creature is imprisoned in the mountain and every now and then struggles to get free. The Dipper, the constellation called also the Great Bear, does not set below the horizon because a goddess once was angry at it and decreed that it should never sink into the sea. Myths are early science, the result of human beings' first trying to explain what they saw around them. [6]

4. Limiting the field to experienced pilots was the first obvious step. It would be foolish – particularly in a semicrash program – to train astronauts in the basics of flying when a sizable pool of trained pilots was available. But even this limitation left too unwieldy a group from which to winnow the final choices. And at no time was consideration given to throwing Project Mercury open to volunteers from among our considerable number of experienced pilots. Psychologists insisted, with some justification, that many of the men who would blindly volunteer to be fired into orbit would show signs of emotional instability. Thus it was determined to pre-select a rather small group from which volunteers would be sought after the program had been carefully explained to them. [7]

EXERCISE 2. Select one of the following topics and write a paragraph (100-150 words) on it. Underline the topic sentence and, if you use one, the clincher sentence as well. You may choose a topic of your own if you prefer.

1. A visit to an interesting place
2. Things that teen-agers boast about
3. A happy (or unhappy) occasion
4. The best way to solve a dispute
5. Your opinion on a local, national, or international issue

1d. DEVELOPMENT OF A PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is usually developed by means of additional, detailed information given in support of the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

It is easy to make general statements; it is harder to find the specific details, examples, or reasons that are needed to back up such statements. The details may be of many kinds – facts, examples, incidents, or logical arguments. The details, however, must be there, and they must clearly support the topic sentence.

The following paragraph does not develop its topic sentence. Instead, it merely restates its main idea several times in different words. Saying something over and over does not, of course, make it any clearer or truer than saying it once. Details are needed to make a general statement stick. In the absence of details, we are left with an emotional, and not very convincing, repetition of the same theme:

In my opinion, running daily is the best exercise you can do to become physically fit. People today talk a great deal about physical fitness, but there would not be so many people in

poor physical condition if everyone ran a mile every day. It is our responsibility to take care of our bodies. We cannot do this without exercising. No one has found a better or more efficient means of exercising than running. Therefore, everyone should practice running since it is the best exercise you can do to become physically fit.

A paragraph that consists of a series of general statements without supporting information is little better than the one that keeps making the same statement over and over. One topic sentence is enough for a paragraph; once you have stated it, it is up to you to develop it. The following paragraphs deal with the same topic, the duties of a catcher in baseball. Notice that the second one is more convincing and interesting than the first because it is more specific.

I

Baseball demands intelligence, especially behind the plate – because the catcher is the quarterback of baseball. He runs the team and is the one player who can never relax, whether his team is in the field or at bat. He has a wide variety of duties, He must keep track of the tactical situation on the field and see that the rest of the team knows it also.

II

Baseball demands intelligence, especially behind the plate – because the catcher is the quarterback of baseball. He runs the team and is the only man who sees every player on the field and every move that takes place. He calls the pitches and sometimes directs much of the defensive play. He is the one person on the team who can never for a moment relax, whether his team is in the field or at bat. He must know wind conditions in every ball park, and his duties vary from studying the opposing batteries, the mental condition of his own pitcher, and the spacing of the outfielders, watching runners on base, keeping track of the tactical situation and seeing that the rest of the team knows it also, to backing up third and first except when a runner is in a scoring position. [8]

The second paragraph is better because it gives the details that make the general statements interesting and meaningful. Always be specific and illustrate with appropriate details the points you want to make.

Planning a Paragraph

Like most human projects, a paragraph calls for planning. Before you begin to write, make a simple inventory of your ideas on the topic you have chosen. Jot down these ideas in any order they come to mind. The act of setting them down will suggest others, and these may in turn generate still others. Continue until you have a sizable list before you. Next, begin to arrange the ideas into some order, culling out every idea that does not directly pertain to the topic.

The Paragraph Outline

When you have decided on the ideas you will include in the paragraph, write a simple outline of it. The following is an outline of a paragraph:

TOPIC SENTENCE

DETAILS

People vary a great deal in the conditions they require for efficient study.

1. Some want silence and solitude.

2. Others want noise and company.

3. Some want the radio on.

4. Some want the same conditions day after day.

5. Some can study anywhere

EXERCISE 3. Make a simple inventory of ideas for a paragraph. The ideas can be written as one-word statements or as complete sentences. When you have compiled a list of ten ideas, stop. Save this list for your own use later.

EXERCISE 4. Make a paragraph outline for each of the following topic sentences. The items in the outline need not be in sentence form. Copy the sentence first; then list the details you would use in your paragraph.

1. Anyone planning a trip from New York to San Francisco finds several ways to make the journey.

2. There are many reasons people would rather attend a spectator sport than watch it on television.

3. In every home certain jobs should be delegated to the children.

4. You will find some of the same types of teachers in any high school.

1e. UNITY IN THE PARAGRAPH

A paragraph should be unified. Unity is achieved by discussing only one topic in a paragraph, the topic stated in the topic sentence.

A unified paragraph is a forceful unit because all of the sentences have a common purpose – to develop or support the general statement made by the topic sentence.

It is possible to measure the unity of a paragraph by testing the relationship of each sentence to the main idea. You should ask this question: "How is each detail related to the topic sentence?" Study the following paragraph, noting how its unity has been broken.

¹One difference between dogs and cats as pets is that dogs can be taught obedience whereas most cats cannot. ²Dogs are easily taught not to get on the furniture and not to steal food left on the kitchen table when no one is around. ³They can be taught to heel, to stay, and to do tricks. ⁴Cats, on the other hand, do just exactly what they want to do in spite of their owners' efforts to discipline them. ⁵Our neighbor has two Siamese cats. ⁶No matter how many times she punishes them for getting on the furniture or stealing food, she knows that at any time she

(1) topic sentence

(2-3) examples of dogs' obedience

(4-6) examples of cats' disobedience

may find them curled up on the easy chair, and she would never dare leave the cats alone in the house with any food lying around. ⁷Many people are fond of cats because cats are beautiful and independent. ⁸As kittens they are more entertaining than they are when full grown. ⁹I have never heard of a cat that had been taught to stay or to sit or to roll over. ¹⁰Dogs make more satisfactory pets because they can be taught to obey.

(7-8) unrelated statements
break unity

(9) an example related to
examples 4-6

(10) clincher sentence

EXERCISE 5. Examine each of the following paragraphs to test its unity. There is one sentence in each that is not closely related to the topic. Find this sentence, copy it onto your paper, and be ready to explain how it breaks the unity of the paragraph.

1

When backpacking in Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana, hikers are advised not to disturb the grizzly bears that live in the park. Because grizzlies have been known to react violently when suddenly surprised by visitors, hikers wear bells which jingle as they march, warning any bears in the vicinity that intruders are coming. The black bears found in Yellowstone Park do not have the same frightening reputation as the grizzlies. Although there are only about two hundred grizzlies in Glacier National Park (the park is larger than the state of Rhode Island) and although the chances of being attacked are about one million to one, visitors are uneasy because the grizzly has traditionally been considered America's fiercest and most dangerous animal. Even today a grizzly will occasionally attack a human being –with painful results.

2

While some parents may be skeptical about the education their children receive at Beeston College and some students may share the attitude of these parents, all have only praise for the college's beautiful campus situated on a wooded hill overlooking Spring Lake. Stand at the edge of the campus and look down at the shimmering surface of the lake. Your eye can follow the graceful curves of a road, obscured here and there by foliage, as it winds to the water's edge. In winter, the dark ribbon of road is visible all the way. Snowmobiles, which are a noisy winter distraction in this part of the country, are forbidden on campus. Now turn about for a view of the campus. All the buildings – dormitories, classroom buildings, the gymnasium, and the student center – have old-fashioned charm. The red and white of the buildings blend easily with the green of lawns and playing fields. Students who are sensitive to beauty say the campus itself is enough to make them glad to return at the beginning of each school year.

3

There are many things to learn about paddling a canoe. Since a canoe can be pushed from its course by a slight breeze, the paddlers must sit in such a way that the bow will not be forced too high out of the water where it will catch too much wind. In calm weather, the canoeists should sit in the stem, but in windy weather, they should kneel just aft of the middle, for in this position they can control their craft with less effort. They should paddle on the side opposite the direction of the wind because the wind then actually helps them to hold to a straight course. A canoe should never be loaded with stones for ballast because the stones will sink the canoe, should it be swamped. Steering is done by a twist of the paddle at the end of each stroke, the extent of the twist depending upon the force of the stroke and the strength of the wind against the bow.

4

If you have read *A Search for the Apex of South America*, you may know something about Annie Peck's career as a mountaineer. This internationally acclaimed climber first became interested in mountaineering when she saw the majesty of the Matterhorn. She climbed Mount Shasta in California and then, in 1895, ascended the Matterhorn. Because she was interested in

the terrain of the Americas, she climbed the live volcano Popocatepetl. Climbing Mount Orizaba won her recognition for achieving the highest point in the Americas reached by a woman up to that time. Peck was not satisfied with achieving something no woman had ever achieved before; she wanted to reach a height no person had ever reached before. Some people considered her climbing costume as daring as her accomplishments. She continued searching for the right mountain, and she finally climbed the north peak of Huascarán. This peak was named Huascarán Cumbre Ana Peck in her honor. Peck continued to be an active mountaineer until her death at the age of eighty-four.

5

Walking is more than an everyday necessity – it can be used for all kinds of reasons. As a recreation it serves to pass your leisure time. When you are feeling lonely and depressed, a long walk in the crisp air does heaps of good toward cheering you up. Then again, if you're filled with the glorious feeling that every thing is perfect, you enjoy a walk outdoors where everything in nature seems to be happy with you. On hikes through wild country, campers make many wonderful and surprising discoveries. Nervous business people, waiting to hear whether the stock market has gone down another point, put their hands behind them and pace impatiently up and down a room. Riding in a car everywhere you go is faster but not so good for you as walking. Next time you're bored or happy or unhappy or worried, take a walk.

1f. COHERENCE IN THE PARAGRAPH

A paragraph should have coherence; that is, its ideas should be arranged according to a definite plan and should be linked clearly to one another.

Coherent paragraphs are easy to read. The relationship between the sentences is clear, and the train of thought, moving easily and naturally from one sentence to the next, is easy to follow. The two ways to achieve this coherence are (1) to arrange the ideas in a logical Order and (2) to provide clear transitions, or links, between sentences. Logical order is explained in connection with the following discussion of paragraph types.

1g. FOUR TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

Learn to write four types of paragraphs: expository, descriptive, narrative, persuasive.

Like longer forms of writing (which you will study in later chapters) paragraphs can be classified into four types: the expository paragraph, the descriptive paragraph, the narrative paragraph, and the persuasive paragraph. The type of paragraph you write may often depend on your purpose in writing. If, for example, your purpose is to inform, then you will choose the expository paragraph, for it normally gives information or provides explanation. The following presentation of the four types of paragraphs will make familiar to you the ways in which paragraphs may differ according to their purpose.

The Expository Paragraph

As mentioned, the purpose of an expository paragraph is to give information or to explain something, or to do both. The writer of the expository paragraph, for example, wanted to give information about the fourteenth century. You may notice that her paragraph provides a series of facts all closely related to her topic.

Develop an expository paragraph with facts and specific examples.

The most common way to develop an expository paragraph is to supply facts and examples about a topic. The following paragraph, whose purpose is to give information about the English language, provides a series of facts that develop the idea in the first sentence (the topic sentence). In the paragraph below, these facts are underlined. Some of the facts are, in turn, developed by specific examples.

The English language has its peculiarities, some of which make the language difficult to learn for speakers of another language. In English, the position of a word is very important. By placing the word *only* before a different one of the seven words in the following sentence, you can change the meaning of the sentence seven times. "She told me that she loved me." English has a number of words that can be used with opposite meanings. *Seeded* rye has caraway seeds in it, but *seeded* raisins have had the seeds removed. A *fast* horse runs, but a *fast* color does not. When plants are *dusted*, chemical dust is sprayed on them, but when furniture is *dusted*, the dust is wiped off. Another source of confusion is the fact that in English the pronoun *I* has the plural form *we*, but the pronoun *you* is the same in the plural as in the singular.

EXERCISE 6. Write an expository paragraph developed by facts that supply information on one of the following topic sentences.

1. One of the greatest problems in the world is the diminishing supply of oil.
2. Many popular beliefs about wild animals are completely wrong.
3. Sports in this country are more popular than ever before.
4. There is evidence suggesting life on other planets.
5. A volcanic eruption is perhaps the most destructive force on earth.

Sometimes a topic sentence states a general idea that can best be supported by a number of specific examples. If carefully chosen, each specific example will make the topic sentence clearer for the reader. In the following paragraph, the writer gives three well-chosen examples to demonstrate the idea in the first sentence, which is the topic sentence. These examples are underlined.

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is an interesting book not only because of its unusual plot but also because of the constant suspense Golding creates. For example, there is always the question of whether or not the boys will find adult help before they destroy themselves. Then, too, there is the problem of the beast. Is the beast real or is it imaginary? If real, what kind of creature is it and how should it be dealt with? An event which adds to the suspense is the chase near the end of the book when Ralph is being hunted down by Jack and his fierce band.

EXERCISE 7. Write an expository paragraph developed by examples to illustrate or support one of the following topics.

1. Life in a big city (small town) can be frustrating at times.
2. Haste does not always make waste.
3. "Every neighbor is a teacher." [proverb]
4. Overcoming a physical handicap requires courage and perseverance.
5. Every freedom is a responsibility.

Order of Details in an Expository Paragraph

The arrangement of the sentences in an expository paragraph will determine how easily the reader can follow the writer's train of thought. Without logical organization, the information in an expository paragraph will be difficult to understand.

Arrange the details in an expository paragraph in a coherent, logical order.

There are four common ways of arranging details in an expository paragraph: by order of importance, by chronological order, by comparison, or by contrast.

(1) The facts or details in an expository paragraph may be given in the order of their importance.

Suppose that you are writing an expository paragraph and you have three pieces of information to give in support of your topic sentence. You will have to decide which idea or piece of information to give first and which to give second and third. You may decide to put the most

important first, followed by the idea second in importance and the idea that is least important. Or you may reverse this order, placing the most important last, where it will come as a kind of climax. The point is that your paragraph should follow a logical order.

The ideas in the following paragraph are arranged by order of importance, with the most important idea first, directly following the topic sentence.

Specialists in children's television viewing suggest a number of ways parents can control their children's viewing.¹ Most important, they say, is setting time limits such as one hour a day, no viewing on school nights, or two or three hours on weekends.² Another suggestion is that parents discuss with the children which television programs to select. It is important that children learn to choose their programs instead of just watching whatever happens to be on.³ It is generally agreed that parents should watch with their children occasionally. Viewing programs together leads to discussion of the programs and to rating them fairly. It may also bring the family closer together and increase understanding of different points of view.

(2) The details in an expository paragraph may be given in chronological order.

When the purpose of a paragraph is to explain (how to do or make something, or how something works), it is only natural to give the steps of the process in the order in which they must be performed. This is chronological, or time, order. The details in the following paragraph, which tells how the booster and orbiter work in making contact with a space station, are given in chronological order.

After blasting off, the booster rockets the entire double assembly up into the final reaches of the earth's atmosphere.

topic sentence

¹Having achieved proper altitude and velocity, the booster separates from the orbiter stage. ²Then the booster extends its wings and, guided by its two-man crew, returns to earth in normal airplane fashion, using auxiliary jet engines as necessary. ³The second stage, which carries the payload of personnel and supplies, takes up where the booster stage lets off. ⁴ It accelerates on into orbit and makes a rendezvous with the space station. ⁵After transferring its crew and cargo, and picking up whatever personnel or equipment is scheduled for a return to earth, the orbiter casts off for the journey home. ⁶Owing to its unique design, which includes small wings and efficient control surfaces, it is able to spiral downward and reenter the atmosphere at a safe, gentle angle, unthreatened by extreme friction heat.¹

- (1) First step
- (2) Second step
- (3) Third step
- (4) Fourth step
- (5) Fifth step
- (6) Sixth step

EXERCISE 8. Decide whether the following two paragraphs are organized by order of importance or by chronological order. Be prepared to explain your answers.

1. Leave the astronauts out of it, and the paratroop teams that free-fall for 10,000 feet or skate down by means of those flattish, maneuverable new parachutes. Leave out the six people who have survived the 220-foot fall from the Golden Gate Bridge, and the divers of Acapulco, who swan-dive 118 feet, clearing outcrops of 21 feet as they plunge past the sea cliff. Leave out even the ordinary high diver, who enters the pool rigid and pointed after a comely jackknife. Come down from such lofty characters to Henri LaMothe—who on his seventieth birthday last April dove from a 40-foot ladder into a play pool of water 12 inches deep.²

2. Sometimes a writer will contradict what he has already written, and in that case the only thing to do is to investigate what has changed his point of view. For instance, in 1608 Captain John Smith issued a description of his capture by Powhatan, and he made it clear that the Indian chief had treated him with unwavering courtesy and hospitality. In 1624 the story was repeated

in Smith's *General History of Virginia*, but the writer's circumstances had changed. Smith needed money, "having a prince's mind imprisoned in a poor man's purse," and he wanted the book to be profitable. Powhatan's daughter, the princess Pocahontas, had recently been in the news, for her visit to England had aroused a great deal of interest among the sort of people that Smith hoped would buy his book. So Smith supplied a new version of the story, in which the once-hospitable Powhatan would have permitted the hero's brains to be dashed out if Pocahontas had not saved his life. It was the second story that achieved fame, and of course it may have been true.

But it is impossible to trust it because the desire of the writer is so obviously involved; as Smith said in his prospectus, he needed money and hoped that the book would give "satisfaction." [From "Getting at the Truth" by Marchette Chute from *Saturday Review*, September, 1999. Copyright © 2003 by Saturday Review. All rights reserved.]

(3) The details in an expository paragraph may be given in order of comparison or contrast.

Paragraphs may be developed by offering a comparison or stating a contrast. A comparison shows how two things are alike; a contrast, how they are different. In both cases, facts, incidents, concrete details, or examples may be used to point out the similarities or differences. At times a writer may even wish to use both comparison and contrast to develop a single idea.

In the following paragraph details are given in order of comparison.

In one way, baby-sitting a two-year-old child is like dog-sitting a two-month-old puppy. You cannot trust either of them out of your sight. Puppies must be watched constantly because their curiosity is endless and their teeth are sharp. Nothing they can reach is safe. They can happily destroy a shoe or a pillow or a book in a few minutes. If you don't know where a puppy is, you had better worry. Silence doesn't necessarily mean sleep. Similarly, two-year-olds are never still. They run, climb, fall down, throw things, disappear suddenly. They try to put everything into their mouth. If you can't see or hear them, you had better investigate. Silence often means mischief.

Not all expository paragraphs, of course, follow these four common orders. A paragraph developed by facts or examples may not follow any particular order if the facts or examples are all of equal importance. Simple, easily understood facts should precede those that are hard to understand. Remember, too, that many writers use not one method, but a combination of methods.

EXERCISE 9. Consider the following topic sentences. Then, next to the proper number on your paper, write down your recommendation for the best method of organizing the details in an expository paragraph developing these topic sentences.

- (1) order of importance
- (2) chronological order
- (3) comparison or contrast

1. Last year the political issues were much less complicated.
2. There are three things that will affect the outcome of this year's election.
3. The process for converting solar energy into electricity is quite complicated.
4. The pollution of our rivers and streams has been easing somewhat.
5. The body needs several basic nutrients for growth.

EXERCISE 10. Select one of the following topic sentences and develop it into an expository paragraph by giving facts or examples to support it. As you plan the paragraph, bear in mind the four common orders of details. If you prefer, you may use a topic sentence of your own.

1. My family enjoys being together.
2. Inflation has affected my current spending habits in several ways.
3. Both wind power and solar power have advantages and disadvantages.

4. Machines and appliances frequently frustrate us.
5. Researching family history can have its rewards.
6. In the long run, what appears to be a tragedy today may turn out to be a blessing tomorrow.
7. Dogs of the same breed may have very different personalities.
8. Changes in our school population have created problems for this community.
9. The success (failure) of our basketball team (or any team) is the result of three causes.
10. A heron (or any other bird) is quite a remarkable creature to watch in flight.

A writer who wants to tell a reader exactly what something looks, tastes, smells, feels, or sounds like uses description, the type of writing that appeals chiefly to the senses.

A paragraph-length description usually concentrates on only one subject: a place, an object, a person, or an event.

Develop a descriptive paragraph with concrete (specific) details.

The concrete details that make a description effective are, naturally, details that appeal to the reader's senses. In the following descriptive paragraph, the writer concentrates on bus travel in rural India. As you read, note that the details appeal to the reader's senses of sight and touch, or feeling. In the last sentence, the details appeal exclusively to the sense of touch.

I have not yet traveled on a bus in India that has not been packed to the bursting-point, with people inside and luggage on top; and the buses are always so old that they shake up every bone in the human body and every screw in their own. If the buses are always the same, so is the landscape through which they travel. Once a town is left behind, there is nothing till the next one except flat land, broiling sky, distances and dust. Especially dust: the sides of the bus are open with only bars across them so that the hot winds blow in freely, bearing desert sands to choke up ears and nostrils and set one's teeth on edge with grit.¹

The following descriptive paragraph portrays a commonplace event, a picnic. As you read, note the number of concrete details and the number of different senses the details appeal to.

Beach picnics come in many shapes and sizes. I like best the evening picnics. The air cools as the lowering sun spreads a gold path across the lake. Someone has started the bonfire, and the bittersweet smoke reaches us as we run across the beach toward the fire. The sand is cold and soft to our bare feet. The small children chase one another in high-pitched, screaming excitement. Breathless from running, they return to the fire to pick up a long-handled fork or a sharply pointed stick to spear a frankfurter for roasting. Those who take up a position on the wrong side of the fire are soon crowding their way around to windward, coughing, eyes smarting from the windblown smoke. Somebody's frankfurter drops into the ashes to roars of laughter. Those too hungry to wait settle for a cold hotdog, while others absentmindedly burn their franks. I like the brittle, burnt skin of a frank that's overdone. On a fresh roll and covered with sharp-tasting mustard and sweet relish, it is irresistible. Plates of fresh green salad are passed around while paper cups of cold drinks suddenly appear. [From *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Copyright © 1999 by Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., and the British publishers John Murray Ltd.]

Soon everyone is back at the fire for seconds and thirds. Small groups sit cross-legged on the sand, their faces reflecting the fire's glow. The pungent, sweet smell of roasting marshmallows signals the last course. Talk becomes drowsy. The smaller children, stuffed and sleepy, stagger toward home with their parents. The ring of figures silhouetted around the fire becomes an island in the dark. Someone starts a song; others join in. The evening drifts away.

Order of Details in a Descriptive Paragraph

13j. Arrange the details in a descriptive paragraph in coherent order.

There are two useful ways of organizing a descriptive paragraph: by chronological or by spatial order.

(1) The details in a descriptive paragraph may be given in chronological order.

The details in the description of a beach picnic are given in chronological order. A picnic is a series of events, and so it is logical to describe the events in the order in which they happen. The description begins as the picnickers gather on the beach. Following time order, the writer then describes the children's playing while the fire is being built, their gathering around the fire to cook and to eat, the quiet time after the supper as darkness comes, and finally the singing of songs after dark.

(2) The details in a descriptive paragraph may be given in spatial order.

When a place is the subject of a description, the order may be spatial, which means that the writer is careful to give the location of each part of the place. For example, if you were to describe your school building, you might describe first the entrance, and as you enter the building, you would tell what is on your left, on your right, and straight ahead. The following brief description of Samuel Clemens' boyhood home, Hannibal, Missouri, follows spatial order. Phrases used to locate the details in the description are printed in heavy type.

One morning I stood **atop** 200-foot-high Cardiff Hill and surveyed the scene that stretched **before** me. Hannibal – an active town of 20,000 people that today is an agricultural, rail and light manufacturing center – **nestles in** a mile-and-a-half wide fan-shaped valley. It rises gradually **from the river up to residential areas in** the low hills and knolls **a mile or two off to the west**. **Above** the riverfront's cobblestone levee **below to my left** towered the white silos of the Hannibal Grain Terminal, while directly **in front of me** Main Street passed **through the center** of the grid-like downtown area **on its way toward** Lover's Leap, the high bluff that overlooks the river **to the south**. [Excerpt from "Paying a Visit to the Boyhood Home of Mark Twain in Hannibal, Missouri" by Tom Weil in New York Times Travel of May 4, 1995. © 1995 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.]

EXERCISE 11. Choose one of the following topics and write a descriptive paragraph developed by concrete details. Begin with a general statement of the idea you will develop. If you prefer, write on a topic of your own.

1. A pleasant or an unpleasant place
2. A sight you will always remember
3. The house you live in
4. The view from a vantage point familiar to you
5. A busy air terminal

The Narrative Paragraph

A writer who wants to develop a topic by relating an incident or a series of events uses narrative, the type of writing that tells *what happens*.

A paragraph-length narrative usually focuses on one action or one series of events as it tries to illustrate a single topic.

13k. Develop a narrative paragraph with a brief story.

Notice how the incident in the following paragraph illustrates the point made in the first sentence.

. . . After a spring tide there was also much high talk of treasure and no little search for it. We lived, indeed, on a coast that nurtured such fancies. Not far from us lay the very island which was rumored to hide within its sands the bulk of Captain Kidd's ill-gotten gains. Moreover, not so many years past, two boys who lived near us, following an old footpath through the woods during a storm, had rested against a small boulder beneath a pine tree. One of them, idly kicking the soft mold at the base of the rock, caught the glint of metal, tarnished yet still bright enough to be distinguished against the black earth. They dug farther, with feet and with hands, to discover at last an iron pot half filled with gold coins, coins marked by strange designs and a strange language. They proved to be French pieces of the seventeenth century, probably buried there, so the learned of our coast surmised, by escaping French

traders and settlers of the nearby town of Castine when their fort was captured by the Dutch. What wonder that we scrutinized the wrack of spring tides and dug now and again in likely coves or beneath giant boulders? [*From A Goodly Heritage* by Mary Ellen Chase. Copyright 1980, © 2001 by Mary Ellen Chase. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.]

The order of ideas in a narrative paragraph is usually chronological, the order in which events occur in time. If you have ever listened to someone tell a joke or relate a story but confuse the proper order of events, you will understand how important chronological sequence can be in a narrative paragraph. Since the narrative paragraph must tell its story briefly, it must never risk confusing the reader.

EXERCISE 12. Write a paragraph in which the main idea or topic is developed with a brief story. Be specific about time, place, and characters. One of the following topics may suggest a story.

1. The best things in life are free.
2. A soft answer often turns away anger.
3. The foolishness of some drivers is beyond belief.
4. About the only thing that makes me really angry is unfair treatment of myself or of others.
5. I usually fail a test of willpower.

The Persuasive Paragraph

Thus far you have written paragraphs in three kinds of discourse: exposition, description, and narration. A fourth kind of discourse, used usually when you are engaged in an argument, is persuasion. The purpose of persuasive writing is to state a view, an opinion, and to support it so effectively that the reader will be persuaded to accept the opinion as correct.

13I. Develop a persuasive paragraph with reasons.

The topic sentence of a persuasive paragraph states an opinion, or point of view, as clearly and succinctly as possible. For example, the writer choosing to state an opinion on the high price of gasoline might write the topic sentence, "The big oil companies are charging too much money for gasoline."

The reasons used to develop a persuasive paragraph explain why the writer holds the view stated in the topic sentence. Reasons are most convincing when they can be supported by facts.

The following persuasive paragraph states an opinion about the future and backs up this opinion with reasons. Because the writer is considering the future, he cannot offer facts to support his reasons, but they remain convincing nevertheless.

What will be left in a computerized world will be human curiosity and innovation. With the world run by machinery, human beings will be free to follow their interests freely. The leisure will not be that of today, however, when it is possible to watch television in a state of semicomatose for six hours a day out of sheer lack of anything else to do. Instead, the availability of computerized education may introduce each individual to complex interests he might otherwise never have known he could have. There will be many human beings who, as a matter of interests, will wish to engage in scientific research, in space exploration, in government, medicine, art, music, or literature – enough of them to help the computers run the world and make it a stimulating place in which to live. Others, on another level, may wish to be involved in entertainment, in sport, in stamp collecting, hiking, or playing chess. [Excerpt from "Technology and Communication," originally appeared as "Not Enough Information, Too Much Information, and the Information Democracy" in *Dialogues in Technology #7* by Gould, Inc., from the book *Time and Life* by Issac Asimov. Copyright © 2003 by Issac Asimov. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday and Company, Inc.]

Order of Details in a Persuasive Paragraph

Reasons in a persuasive paragraph may be given in the order of importance. In general, it is better to begin with the least important reason and build up to the most important ones, thus achieving a vigorous conclusion. In some situations, however, especially when the writer may

have one very important reason and several less important ones, it may be appropriate to do just the reverse – to give the most compelling fact or reason first and then support it with the less important details.

Whether the writer chooses one order or the other, the reader must be able to distinguish important from less important details in a persuasive paragraph.

EXERCISE 13. The following sentences could be used to introduce a persuasive paragraph. Select one and write a persuasive paragraph in support of it. You may use a topic sentence of your own if you wish.

1. Pollution control is obviously far from perfect.
2. Young people should have the privilege of changing, if they wish, the names their parents gave them.
3. Interscholastic athletics should be on the same scale for girls as for boys.
4. It is more important that high school graduates be able to qualify for a job than for college.
5. Solving national problems should (should not) take priority over solving international problems.

Transitional Expressions

You have already learned how to achieve coherence by arranging the ideas in the different types of paragraphs in logical order: order of importance, chronological order, and spatial order. Now turn your attention to the use of transitional expressions.

13m. Strengthen a paragraph by using linking expressions and connectives which help the reader to follow the line of thought from one idea to the next.

The most useful words for this purpose are the pronouns: *he, they, this, that, these, those, them, it*, etc. When they appear in the paragraph, they serve to remind the reader of their antecedents – that is, the words, expressions, and ideas to which they refer. As reminders, they help to bind the ideas in the paragraph more tightly together.

(1) Keep the thought of a paragraph flowing smoothly from sentence to sentence by using pronouns which refer to words and ideas in preceding sentences.

As you read the following paragraphs, notice how the words in bold-faced type refer back to an idea that comes earlier in the passage.

A hundred years ago, the average work week in the United States was about seventy hours. Today, **it** is about forty hours – and experts say that in the next decade or so **it** will be cut again, the predictions ranging from thirty-seven hours or thereabouts down to twenty or even less. **This reduction** might come as a shorter workday, or fewer workdays per week, or longer – very much longer – vacations.

What shall we do with all **that free time**? Many people are profoundly troubled about **this question**. **They** feel that, far from being a blessing, the change may prove a catastrophe. Certainly, the growth of leisure time is an extremely serious matter. **It** deserves far more attention than **it** is getting. [Excerpt from "Using Our Leisure Is No Easy Job" by Bruce Bliven. *New York Times Magazine* of April 26, 1999, © 2002 by the New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.]

(2) Keep the thought and purpose of the paragraph flowing smoothly from sentence to sentence by the use of linking expressions.

One infallible mark of a good prose style is care in the choice of linking expressions. Many expressions do approximately the same job. For instance, you can add still another idea to those already mentioned in a paragraph by introducing it with a "furthermore" or an "in addition." You can use "consequently" and "therefore" to show that one idea is the result of the preceding idea. You can use "however" or "nevertheless" to make clear that you are about to introduce a contrasting idea. Which connective you use depends on the logical relationship of the sentences. This relationship must be kept clear and distinct if you are to write well.

Read the following lists of linking expressions. Use the lists for reference when you write paragraphs and longer compositions.

Linking Expressions

To add an idea to one already stated:

moreover	likewise	besides	too
further	also	and	again
furthermore	nor	and then	in addition
equally important	in the same fashion		

To limit or contradict something already said:

but	still	although
yet	nevertheless on	otherwise
and yet	on the other hand	at the same time
however	on the contrary	

To show a time or place arrangement of your ideas:

first	meanwhile	next	here
second (etc.)	later	presently	nearby
finally	eventually	at length	opposite to
at this point	sooner or later	afterward	adjacent to

To exemplify some idea or to sum up what you have said:

for example	to sum up	in any event
for instance	in brief	in any case
in other words	on the whole	as I have said
in fact	in short	as a result

EXERCISE 14. Read the following paragraph. Select from it (1) all pronouns that you think add to the coherence of the paragraph and (2) all linking expressions. Copy them in order, placing before each the number of the sentence in which it appears.

1. Indiscriminate tampering with the balance of nature has often had unfortunate results. 2. A case in point is the Pacific Islands. 3. On the more remote of these, eons of isolation from the mainland masses had allowed an enormous variety of life forms to evolve. 4. Furthermore, the relationship between these life forms and their environment was precariously balanced. 5. One species of plant, for example, depended upon one species of insect for its pollination. 6. This insect not only served to reproduce the plant, but by feeding upon competing and more virulent growths protected the plant from being choked out. 7. In a like manner, one species of bird kept the insects in check, and on certain headlands, by its thousands of nests that blanketed the ground, provided the humus for still other varieties of plants. 8. This balance was violently upset by the first Polynesian settlers who brought with them pigs and, accidentally, rats. 9. Within a few centuries thereafter, hundreds of species of birds and plants had become extinct. 10. Later on, mongooses were imported from the East to control the rats which – without natural enemies of any kind – had decimated the bird population and threatened to overrun the islands. 11. These little heroes of Kipling's tales, however, found the ground-nesting birds much easier prey than the rats, and so the carnage goes on unimpeded to this day.

EXERCISE 15. Read the following paragraph. You can see at once that the necessary connectives have been omitted. Next to the proper number on your paper, put down your choice for the correct connective.

It is rarely wise for teen-agers to buy a car. (1) —, average teen-agers cannot pay cash (2) — they must buy "on time." (3) —, they must pay far more than merely the value of the car. (4) —, they must commit themselves to a long series of payments. Without a full-time job,

teen-agers find that none of these payments is easy to meet. When, (5) —, the monthly payment happens to come at the same time as the inevitable and unlooked-for repair bill, then the task of raising the necessary money becomes difficult. (6) —, this incessant anxiety over money can easily sour whatever pleasure comes from owning the car.

CHECKLIST FOR PARAGRAPH REVISION

Phrasing the Topic Sentence

1. Is it concise, directly to the point? Does it make your topic narrow enough?
2. Will it arouse the reader's interest or curiosity? Will it produce agreement or disagreement?

Developing the Topic

3. Does the paragraph have unity?
4. Have you used good examples, specific facts, sensory details, vivid comparisons, convincing reasons?
5. Does the paragraph have coherence? In what order are the details arranged? Are linking expressions and other connecting devices used properly?
6. Does the paragraph rise to a climax, come to a conclusion, reach a solution? Does it merit a summarizing, or clincher, sentence?
7. Is the paragraph adequately developed? By what method or combination of methods is it developed?

Proofreading Your Paragraph

8. Did you check the spelling of every doubtful word and refer to a list of your own commonly misspelled words?
9. Have you looked for unnecessary words, for trite expressions?
10. Are you confident that the grammatical usage is correct?
11. Have you checked your own error chart, or earlier compositions, to see that your special weaknesses are not being repeated?

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