

PARAGRAPHING

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The functions of a Paragraph

- A paragraph is a group of sentences which express and develops one central idea.
- A paragraph is a series of sentences that are organized and coherent, and are related to a single topic.
- **Effective Paragraphs**
 - ✓ Helps writers organise their writing
 - ✓ Helps readers see and understand the organisation of the writing
 - ✓ Helps writers stay in control of their writing
 - ✓ Helps readers absorb information in manageable bits



Paragraph Patterns

- Most paragraphs have a three-part structure— introduction, body, and conclusion. It begins with a topic sentence, contains material to support the topic, is held together with connecting ideas or connecting words, and concludes with a summary of the paragraph’s main idea.
- Introduction: the first section should include the topic sentence and any other sentences at the beginning of the paragraph that give background information or provide transition.
- Body: follows the introduction; discusses the controlling idea, facts, arguments, analysis, examples, and any other information.
- Conclusion: the final section summarizes the connections between the information discussed in the body of the paragraph and the paragraph’s controlling idea



Paragraph Patterns

- Every paragraph needs a focus—there must be a point being made
- Every paragraph also needs a shape—a way of moving the sentences to make a shape.
- There are two paragraph patterns—the hour glass paragraph and the V-shape paragraph



Paragraph Patterns

- **Hour glass paragraph**

- ✓ Begins with a general statement about the topic. This may take one or more sentences.
- ✓ The Paragraph then narrows to the specific points in support of the general statement
- ✓ The Paragraph concludes with a more general sentence or two about the topic

The V-shaped paragraph

- ✓ This is the most common type in legal writing
- ✓ Begins with a general discussion of the topic then it narrows to specific points in support of the topic

Unity and Coherence in Paragraphs

- Unity and coherence are the quintessence of well-written paragraphs. You achieve unity when all your sentences speak to the paragraph topic, and you achieve coherence when your sentences follow one another logically.
- Your paragraphs will have unity without coherence when you randomly throw together sentences on a single subject. To ensure that your paragraph has coherence, use standard paragraph patterns and techniques such as transitions



Unity and Coherence in Paragraphs

- A paragraph should be unified, coherent and well developed. Paragraphs are unified around a main point, and all sentences in the paragraph should clearly relate to that point in some way. The paragraph's main idea should be supported with specific information that develops or discusses the main idea in greater detail.
- In a coherent paragraph, each sentence relates clearly to the topic sentence or controlling idea. If a paragraph is coherent, each sentence flows smoothly into the text without obvious shifts or jumps. A coherent paragraph also highlights the ties between old information and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments clear to the reader.



Unity and Coherence in Paragraphs


Techniques that you can use to establish coherence in paragraphs include:

- Repeat key words or phrases: particularly in paragraphs in which you define or identify an important idea or theory, be consistent in how you refer to it. This consistency and repetition will bind the paragraph together and help your reader understand your definition or description.
- Be consistent in point of view, verb tense, and number: consistency in point of view, verb tense, and number is a subtle but important aspect of coherence. If you shift from more personal “you” to the impersonal “one” or from past to present tense, you make your paragraph less coherent. Such inconsistencies can also confuse your reader and make your argument more difficult to follow.



Unity and Coherence in Paragraphs

- Use transition words or phrases between sentences and between paragraphs: transitional expressions emphasize the relationships between ideas, so they help readers follow your train of thought or see connections that they might otherwise miss or misunderstand. Common transitional words include although, because, similarly, then, and therefore, among many others.



It is also important to have clear transitions between your paragraphs. Although each paragraph discusses a separate idea, these ideas are related and should flow in a logical, coherent order. Transitions may be as brief as a word or two at the beginning of a new paragraph – e.g., “However,” or “On the other hand” – or may be in the form of a complete introductory sentence before the thesis sentence of the paragraph. You may wish to check for transitions after you’ve written the first draft of your analysis.



Paragraph length

- Paragraphs vary from a mere sentence to several sentences. Try to keep paragraphs to a maximum of ten sentences. The break between paragraphs provides mental and visual relief to the reader. Furthermore, avoid long paragraphs because they tend to switch-off readers, especially if the content is complicated. Paragraphs of between three and five sentences work well
- Vary the length of your paragraphs. Some paragraphs will be long (8-10 sentences), but others will should be short (1-3 sentences). Varying the length of your paragraphs makes your writing interesting. Single –sentence paragraphs, when used sparingly, add emphasis to an idea.



Topic and Concluding Sentences

- A topic sentence expresses the main point in a paragraph and usually comes first. A topic sentence has several important functions:
 - ✓ It substantiates or supports a writing's thesis statement/theme;
 - ✓ It unifies the content of a paragraph and directs the order of the sentences; and
 - ✓ It advises the reader of the subject to be discussed and how the paragraph will discuss it.



Topic Sentences

- Good writers think of the paragraph—not the sentence—as the basic unit of thought. The topic sentence ensures that each paragraph has its own cohesive content. A good topic sentence centres the paragraph. It announces what the paragraph is about, while the other sentences play supporting roles.
- Compare: The court dealt with cultural and religious rights because counsel for the school contended that wearing a nose ring was an optional cultural practice and counsel for the learner submitted that the nose ring embodied religious and cultural rights.
- With: The court distinguished between cultural and religious rights. Counsel for the school contended that wearing a nose ring was an optional cultural practice whereas counsel for the learner submitted that the nose ring embodied religious and cultural rights.
- The first topic sentence is long and bombards the reader with information, the second topic sentence is short, informative and eases the reader into the debate.

Topic Sentences

- Furthermore, topic sentences usually identify the rule or principle that emerges from the case or cases you use to tell your readers where you are going. In contrast, starting a paragraph by citing a case or by narrating the facts of a case, may confuse readers.
- For example: In the case of **Linda v Kenya School of Law**, the Court held that for a group to constitute an 'ethnic group' it must at least have a long shared history and a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners..
- Starting the paragraph with the following topic sentence guides the reader into the arguments in the cited cases:

Example

- In the case of *Johnson v. Cass & Emerson*, 99 A. 633 (Vt. 1917), the Vermont Supreme Court reversed the decision of a lower court that had held that the plaintiff was “doing business” in a name other than its own without making the appropriate filing. In that case the plaintiff, W. L. Johnson, used stationery in his dealings with the defendant which contained the words “Johnson’s Employment Office, W. L. Johnson, Prop’r.”. The court observed that the stationery “on its face showed Johnson as the owner of the business . . . [and that] no person could be reasonably misled by it.”. The court further implied, however, that if the plaintiff had engaged in misleading acts in addition to the aforementioned stationery, such as the concurrent running of regular advertisements bearing only the name. “Johnson’s Employment Agency,” it would have affirmed the decision of the court below. Thus, in *Johnson*, the pivotal issue was whether the plaintiff was “doing business” under an unregistered assumed name during his relationship with the defendant, rather than if he had actually held himself out as someone else to the defendant.

Example

- The Supreme Court of Vermont has held that the pivotal issue is whether a plaintiff “does business” under an unregistered assumed name while dealing with someone the plaintiff later tries to sue. In *Johnson v. Cass & Emerson*, W. L. Johnson, the plaintiff, transacted business with the defendant on stationery with the printed words, “Johnson’s Employment Office, W. L. Johnson, Prop’r.” According to the court, the stationery showed that Johnson “was the owner of the business and was doing business under his own name,” concluding that “no person could be reasonably misled by it.” Apart from the stationery, there were no acts suggesting that “Johnson’s Employment Agency” was a registered name. If there had been, the court implied, the result might have been different. The court held that Johnson could sue in a Vermont court because he did not do business there under an unregistered name.
- Notice how, in this revision, the case name doesn’t come up until the second sentence. Delaying the citation typically enables you to write a stronger topic sentence.



Paragraph Blocks

- A paragraph block is a series of paragraphs put together to form a complete whole. Each paragraph deals with an item but the ideas are flowing so that a seamless flow is established from the issue, rule, application and conclusion.
- A block represents a paragraph.
- Blocks are separated from one another by one or more blank lines.