WRITING CENTER

Paragraph Development

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THE PARAGRAPH

A paragraph is a group of closely related sentences that develops one idea. All writing of any length is divided into paragraphs.

Note: The first line of a new paragraph is either indented, or indicated by double-spacing between paragraphs.

STRUCTURE

Detailed development is just as important in a paragraph as in the whole composition.

- **The Topic Sentence**
  The topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is about. The topic sentence is usually—but not always—the first sentence of the paragraph.

- **Unity**
  The golden rule of paragraphing is: one idea, one paragraph. Following paragraphs should convey a different idea about the same subject.

- **Coherence**
  A coherent paragraph has all the sentences so well arranged that not one could be interchanged with another. All elements flow logically in a coherent paragraph.

- **Emphasis**
  A paragraph should be sure to emphasize the main points intended by the author.

MODES AND METHODS OF DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

MODES FOR DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

1. **Description:** The descriptive mode takes the whole (relationship, place, process, etc.), divides it into parts, and then treats each separately. The objective is to depict people, places, and things with sense impressions (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) that have been experienced or observed by the writer.

2. **Narrative:** Narrative writing is the recreation of a sequence of events. The elements of a good narrative may include characters, a natural time sequence, plot, dialogue, and/or a point worth considering.

3. **Evaluation:** The basis of an evaluative paragraph is to put a value on something (literature, drama, objects, food, wine, movies, etc.) To begin an evaluation the writer must first set the criteria on which the object is being judged.

4. **Classification:** The classification paragraph is usually expository and is a process of grouping related terms or ideas that in some way.

METHODS FOR DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS

There are seven main methods to develop paragraphs:

1. **Cause and Effect**
   Usually an analysis or descriptive mode, this process breaks the topic into its parts to establish a cause-and-effect relationship among the parts, and carefully scrutinizes them. One thing follows another, so this method may be in chronological order mode.

2. **Problem and Solution**
   In a problem-and-solution paragraph the writer begins by explaining the problem, and then presents a solution or several solutions. If the writer is trying to convince the reader of a best solution, the aim is persuasive.

3. **Definition**
   Usually combined with other methods of development, definition answers the question "What is it?" Usually expository or informational, the definition itself may consist of one or more sentences. As it is intended to clarify meaning, it should identify the essential qualities of the term and limit its meaning.

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4. **Analysis or Process Analysis**

   This method of paragraph development separates an object or concept into its parts, and then explains how they are related to the whole. The process analysis is usually a sequence of actions by which something is done or made. Generally, it is descriptive in mode with a spatial order of development.

5. **Example or Illustration**

   Examples and illustrations are used in almost all types of writing to help support points that the writer is making. The **example paragraph** reaches a conclusion (the topic sentence) by citing examples and then forms a generalization, i.e. a specific detail to make an abstract idea concrete or a general idea specific.

   The **illustration paragraph** is similar to the example paragraph. The main difference is that the illustration paragraph is a story (true or untrue) that supports or develops the main point (the topic sentence). When using an illustration to support a conclusion, make sure that the illustration is concise and to the point, so that the reader does not lose sight of the main idea of the paragraph.

6. **Comparison or Contrast**

   Comparison shows similarities; contrast shows differences. This method is useful to explain an unfamiliar object or idea by comparing or contrasting it to a familiar object or idea. The writer may develop the paragraph by first discussing all of one subject and then fully presenting the second subject, or the writer might discuss one like or different trait with each subject and then move to other characteristics, discussing both subjects together. A third method might be to present all of the ways that the subjects are alike and then discuss all of the ways that the subjects are different.

7. **Facts, Figures, Statistics, and Quotations**

   These forms of detail will help develop many topics, but only if they are properly used. All facts, figures, statistics, and quotations must be accurate and properly cited.

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PATTERNS OF PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION

There are five main patterns of paragraph organization:

1. **Time or Chronological Order**

   Narrates events from introduction to conclusion. Time order is useful in many ways: to sequence a chain of events, to show how a process works, to explain how to perform a process, or to trace causes and effects to their ultimate end.

   Example:
   While I jacked the fore end of the car up, and cleared away the snow from under it, Dan secured the car. The wheel correction was surprisingly easy; we were ready to leave again in a few minutes. Then we discovered that it would be more difficult to get out of the lane than it had been to get in. Because of the density of the timber there was no way of turning around without serious risk of getting stuck. Dan therefore very carefully directed my backing; yet in spite of this I bumped several small pines, which retaliated by dumping their burden of snow on top of the car. The Plymouth was little more than a snowdrift on wheels by the time we reached the highway.

2. **Space or Spatial Order**

   Places things or people in relation to each other. Spatial order is vital in describing a scene, explaining the operation of a team or group who work together, or describing a technical layout of any kind.

   Example:
   I seated myself in the barber chair, which was only a rickety, straight-backed affair made of bamboo placed on a wooden box in the center of the room. Directly in front of this throne hung a dingy, blurred mirror, suspended by ropes from the roof. To my right stood a square table, upon which rested the barber's only tools—a pair of clippers, a dirty-looking comb, and a razor. As I cast my eyes downward, I was somewhat surprised to find that the floor was still in its natural state—dirt. It also showed evidence that hair had been cut here before. I noticed now for the first time an opening at the rear, over which a piece of gray material was draped. Evidently this archway led into the living quarters of the barber.

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3. **Breakdown Order**

Analyzes a topic, breaking it down into its logical segments. This is the basis for essays that analyze a body of data or classify a set of related items into categories.

> **Example:** *Beauty is the quality which makes to endure. In a house that I know, I have noticed a block of spermaceti lying about closets and mantelpieces, for twenty years together, simply because the tallow-man gave it the form of a rabbit; and, I suppose, it may continue to be lugged about unchanged for a century. Let an artist scrawl a few lines or figures on the back of a letter, and that scrap of paper is rescued from danger, is put in portfolio, is framed and glazed, and, in proportion to the beauty of the lines drawn, will be kept for centuries. Burns writes a copy of verses, and sends them to a newspaper, and the human race take charge of them that they shall not perish.*
> --Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, Volume VIII Beauty

4. **Particular to General**

A succession of particular statements to a conclusion to which the particulars lead. This is common in expository paragraphs; a paragraph so organized will have the topic sentence at or near the end.

> **Example:** *If you enjoy working out the strategy of games, tit-tac-toe or poker or chess; if you are interested in the frog who jumped up three feet and fell back two in getting out of a well, or in the fly buzzing between the noses of two approaching cyclists, or the farmer who left land to his three sons; if you have been captivated by codes and ciphers or are interested in cross-word puzzles; if you like to fool around with numbers; if music appeals to you by the sense of form which it expresses--then you will enjoy logic. You ought to be warned, perhaps. Those who take up logic get glassy-eyed and absent-minded. They join a fanatical cult. But they have a good time. Theirs is one of the most durable, absorbing and inexpensive of pleasures. Logic is fun.*

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5. **Relationship Order**
   Shows how one thing is related to another. This underlies comparison and contrast, analogies, and literary devices such as metaphor and simile.

   Example: *And when is water boiling? It can be said, with few people to argue the point, that water boils when it has been heated to two hundred and twelve degrees Fahrenheit. Myself, I would say that when it bubbles with large energetic bubbles, and looks ready to hop from the kettle, and makes a rocky rather than a murmuring noise, and sends off a great deal of steam, it is boiling.*
   --M. F. K. Fisher, *The Art of Eating*

MAINTAIN UNITY BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS WITH TRANSITIONS

Transitions help the reader to pass from one place in your writing to the next. Transitions may be just a few words, a sentence or two, or even whole paragraphs in length (function paragraphs). Regardless of form, a transition indicates that you are moving from one point or one time to another. With practice, you will be able to judge which form will do the best job for any given situation.

TRANSITIONAL PRONOUNS AND ADJECTIVES THAT POINT BACK TO A NOUN

- this
- that
- many
- some
- who/whom
- he/she
- these
- several
- it
- all of them
- most
- few
- they
- those

TRANSITIONAL WORDS FOR DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

Additional or supplementary:

- in addition
- also
- or, nor
- again
- besides
- and
- furthermore
- moreover
- in fact
- indeed
- as if that were not enough
- then, too
- first, second, etc.

Similar:

- likewise
- once again
- in like manner
- once more
- similarly
- in much the same way

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Contradiction, antithesis, or contrast:

- yet
- for all that
- even so
- surely
- not at all

- although
- though
- still
- whereas

- and yet
- nonetheless
- in spite of this
- however

- on the contrary
- on the other hand
- nevertheless, but
- notwithstanding

Result:

- as a result
- and so
- finally
- all in all

- wherefore
- so
- thus
- this is why

- consequently
- hence
- therefore
- on the whole

- as a consequence
- for this reason
- in as much as

Reason:

- because
- since
- for

Concession:

- to be sure
- certainly

- of course
- doubtless

- granted (that)

- no doubt

Qualification:

- specifically
- usually

- frequently
- in particular

- especially
- in general

- occasionally

Illustration or example:

- for example
- likewise

- for instance
- similarly

- to illustrate
- in other words

- for one thing

Restriction:

- if provided
- lest

- unless
- in case

- provided

- when

Repetition or intensification:

- to repeat
- in other words
- as noted earlier

- in fact
- indeed

- in any case
- as we have seen

- to put it another way
- as has been said

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Expected, natural, or obviously true:

- naturally
- to be sure
- of course
- for that matter
- as a matter of fact
- surely
- it follows (then, that)

Time relationship (often used in narration)**:**

- beforehand
- the next day
- at length
- by that time
- at last
- within an hour
- presently
- soon
- thereafter
- meanwhile
- afterwards
- later
- following this
- when I returned
- from then on
- thereupon
- earlier
- shortly before
- with that said
- at that very moment
- in the meantime
- soon afterward
- immediately

Spatial relationship (often used in description)**:**

- at that altitude
- between
- beyond this…
- about a foot
- across the way
- a little farther
- to the left
- in the next…
- at the center of…
- on the edge of…

Summary:

- to summarize
- in brief
- in summary
- therefore
- in short
- all in all
- in a word
- what this adds up to
- what we have, then

CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT LANGUAGE

When developing paragraphs, consider using a combination of abstract and concrete words.

- **Abstract words** name the ideas and qualities of things. These cannot be perceived through the five senses.

  Examples: courage beauty goodness honor education

- **Concrete words** are sensory. These can be perceived through the five senses.

  Examples: garbage animal tree car parent building

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Depending on the intended meaning in the paragraph, use abstract or concrete language as appropriate.

Examples: ABSTRACT: Everything looked inviting.

CONCRETE: The homemade potato salad and the fresh apple pie looked inviting.

ABSTRACT: He wore unusual clothes

CONCRETE: He wore a red gypsy shirt with blue denim overalls, topped by a paisley turban.

ABSTRACT: Some people are good athletes.

CONCRETE: Some people are good athletes because they are tall, physically strong, or quick; or they simply possess natural talent.

ABSTRACT: She stole the show with her fine dancing.

CONCRETE: She stole the show with her fine dancing, a combination of well-executed pirouettes, bows, leaps, and half-twists.

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC LANGUAGE

Context makes a word more or less specific in relation to another word. The fewer things a word refers to, the more specific it tends to be.

- **General** words name a class or group and stand for broad characteristics or things.

- **Specific** words name a member of a group and stand for more definite things or characteristics.

General or specific language can be adjusted to ensure that the intended meaning is accurately captured.

Very General	Less General	More Specific	Very Specific
Athlete	Baseball player	Yankee outfielder	Mickey Mantle.
College student	Freshman	Boy in Comp class	Bill Jones, the smart guy.
Vegetation	Tree	Apple tree	The old apple tree in back.
Criminal	Thief	Pickpocket	The rotten person who stole my wallet.

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Use general or specific language depending on the intended meaning in the paragraph.

Examples: GENERAL: He is an accomplished athlete.

SPECIFIC: He is a skilled golfer with a three handicap.

GENERAL: He drives an old car.

SPECIFIC: He drives a rusty, noisy, smoky 1950 Buick.

GENERAL: The boy has a serious disease.

SPECIFIC: The boy has Stage 4 Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

GENERAL: I have been reading a Shakespearean play.

SPECIFIC: I have been reading an annotated edition of *Hamlet*.

General to Specific

Writing often begins with a general statement, which may in itself correctly capture the intent of the author. However, if the paragraph calls for it, general statements can be made more specific. Sharpen the idea to be expressed, then choose words specific enough to express it exactly.

Examples: It was such a nice thing to do. It made me feel grand.

REVISED: It was such a nice gesture that I felt immediately at home.

REVISED: It was flattery, of course, but I swelled with pride.

It was a strange sensation to see the odd look on his face.

REVISED: It was pathetic to watch the hurt in his eyes.

REVISED: The vindictiveness of his look terrified me.

SENSORY WORDS

A number of words refer to the senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. These sensory words are particularly effective to help enliven descriptive paragraphs. Sensory words help the reader feel the experience that the writer is recalling.

TASTE

acidic	creamy	nutty	savory	sweet
appetizing	delicate	peppery	sharp	stale
bitter	delicious	pickled	smoked	tangy

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TOUCH

sharp	melted	greasy	lukewarm	breezy
silky	moist	grimy	lumpy	bumpy
sizzling	rough	gritty	scorching	chilly

SMELL

aromatic	floral	nutty	smoky	pungent
balmy	fragrant	perfumed	spicy	putrid
bitter	fresh	pungent	stale	redolent

SIGHT

beefy	flickering	lofty	slender	ominous
billowy	forked	misty	spacious	pallid
lustrous	fragile	blazing	sparkling	petite

HEARING

banging	earsplitting	roaring	wailing	murmured
blaring	barking	shrieking	whispered	muttered
faint	purring	shrill	whistling	popping