



Handout week 8 and 9: Paragraph structure

## PART 1 – PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

### A. Supporting Details

#### Exercise

1. What is the main idea of this paragraph? Underline the part of the topic sentence that expresses the main idea.
2. What examples does the writer use to support this idea? Put brackets around them.
3. What words and phrases introduce the example? Circle them.

Although we all possess the same physical organs for sensing the world – eyes for seeing, ears for hearing, noses for smelling, skin for feeling, and mouths for tasting – our perception of the world depends to a great extent on the language we speak, according to a famous hypothesis proposed by linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. They hypothesized that language is like a pair of eyeglasses through which we ‘see’ the world in a particular way. A classic example of the relationship between language and perception is the word *snow*. Eskimo languages have as many as 32 different words for snow. For instance, the Eskimos have different words for falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed as hard as ice, slushy snow, wind-driven snow, and what we might call ‘cornmeal snow’. The Aztec languages of Mexico, in contrast, used only one word to mean snow, snow, cold, and ice. Thus, if the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is correct and we can perceive only things that we have words for, the Aztecs perceived snow, cold and ice as one and the same phenomenon.

## **B. Concluding sentence**

### **Exercise 1.**

Step 1. Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph

Step 2. Add a good concluding sentence to each paragraph. You may either paraphrase the topic sentence or summarize the main points.

Step 3. Practice using end-of-paragraph signals by starting each concluding sentence with one.

#### Paragraph 1.

You can be a good conversationalist by being a good listener. When you are conversing with someone, pay close attention to the speaker's words while looking at his or her face. Show your interest by smiling and nodding. Furthermore, do not interrupt while someone is speaking; it is impolite to do so. If you have a good story, wait until the speaker is finished. Also, watch your body language; it can affect your communication whether you are the speaker or the listener. For instance, do not sit slumped in a chair or make nervous hand and foot movements. Be relaxed and bend your body slightly forward to show interest in the person and the conversation.

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#### Paragraph 2.

Modern communication technology is driving workers in the corporate world crazy. They feel buried under the large number of messages they receive daily. In addition to telephone calls, office workers receive dozens of e-mail and voice mail messages a day. Because they do not have enough time to respond to these messages during office hours, it is common for them to do so in the evenings or on weekends at home.

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## Review – Writing the paragraph

- Choose one of these topics (or which ever topic that might interest you personally): movies, your home town, advertising, cell phones
- Write a paragraph 8 – 10 sentences in length

Step 1. Begin with a topic sentence. Write several supporting sentences. Include at least one specific example. End with a concluding sentence

Step 2. After you have completed the first draft of your paragraph, use the self-editing worksheet. Answer the questions on it and write a second draft if necessary.

Step 3. Exchange papers with a classmate and check each other's paragraph using the Peer-editing worksheet.

Step 4. Write a final copy of your paragraph, making any improvements you discussed with your peer-editor.

Step 5. Hand in your first draft, your second draft and the page containing your two editing worksheets.

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## Self-editing worksheet

1. My paragraph begins with a topic sentence that has both a topic and a controlling idea: YES/NO
2. My paragraph contains supporting sentences that explain or prove my topic sentences: YES/NO
3. How many supporting sentences does the paragraph have?
4. My paragraph ends with an appropriate concluding sentence: YES/NO

## Peer-editing worksheet

Ask a **classmate** to read through what you have written, check off the box next to each question, and write a brief comment that will help improve your work. Underlining and changes are permitted if done in **pencil**.

**Peer Editor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Author:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Work Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

	Yes	No	Comment
1. Is there evidence of <b>prewriting</b> activity (brainstorm, plan)			
2. Are the <b>title</b> main words <b>capitalized</b> ?			
3. Does the <b>title</b> fit the piece?			
4. Are <b>paragraphs</b> used to organize information?			
5. Is the <b>introduction</b> effective?			
6. Is the <b>main idea</b> clear, with a <b>sense of purpose</b> ?			
7. Is information placed in <b>logical order</b> ?			
8. Is there enough <b>supporting evidence</b> ?			
9. Does the writer stay <b>on topic</b> ?			
10. Is the writing <b>interesting</b> ?			
11. Is the <b>word choice</b> appropriate?			
12. Does each <b>sentence</b> begin with a <b>capital letter</b> ?			
13. Does each <b>sentence</b> end with a proper <b>punctuation</b> ?			
14. Is each <b>sentence</b> a <b>complete thought</b> ?			
15. Are there any <b>spelling errors</b> ( <i>underline please</i> )?			
16. Are there other words that should be <b>capitalized</b> ?			
17. Are <b>plurals</b> and <b>possessives</b> correct?			
18. Are <b>quotation marks</b> used correctly?			
19. Is the <b>conclusion</b> effective and relevant?			
20. Is <b>written text</b> well <b>organized</b> on paper?			
Other comments:			

## PART 2 – UNITY and COHERENCE

### 1. UNITY

**Exercise 1.** The three paragraphs that follow all discuss the same topic. Only one of them shows unity. First read the paragraphs. Then answer these questions:

1. Which paragraph has unity?
2. Which paragraph does not have unity because it discusses two different topics?
3. Which paragraph does not have unity because it has sentences that are not related to the main topic?

#### Paragraph 1

##### Effects of Color

Colors create biological reactions in our bodies. These reactions, in turn, can change our behavior. In one study, prisoners were put in a pink room, and they underwent a drastic and measurable decrease in muscle strength and hostility within 2.7 seconds. In another study, athletes needing short bursts of energy were exposed to red light. Their muscle strength increased by 13.5 percent, and electrical activity in their arm muscles increased by 5.8 percent. Athletes needing more endurance for longer performances responded best when exposed to blue light. Other studies have shown that the color green is calming. Green was a sacred color to the Egyptians, representing the hope and joy of spring. It is also a sacred color to Moslems. Many mosques and religious temples throughout the world use green (the color of renewal and growth) and blue (the color of heaven) to balance heavenly peace with spiritual growth. To sum up, color influences us in many ways (Daniels 10).<sup>1</sup>

#### Paragraph 2

##### Effects of Color

Colors create biological reactions in our bodies. These reactions, in turn, can change our behavior. In one study, prisoners were put in a pink room, and they underwent a drastic and measurable decrease in muscle strength and hostility within 2.7 seconds. In another study, athletes needing short bursts of energy were exposed to red light. Their muscle strength increased by 13.5 percent, and electrical activity in their arm muscles increased by 5.8 percent. Athletes needing more endurance for longer performances responded best when exposed to blue light. Other studies have shown that the color green is calming. After London's Blackfriars Bridge was painted green, the number of suicides decreased by 34 percent. These and other studies clearly demonstrate that color affects not only our moods but our behavior as well (Daniels 10).

### Paragraph 3

#### Effects of Color

Colors create biological reactions in our bodies. These reactions, in turn, can change our behavior. In one study, athletes needing short bursts of energy were exposed to red light. Their muscle strength increased by 13.5 percent, and electrical activity in their arm muscles increased by 5.8 percent. Athletes needing more endurance for longer performances responded best when exposed to blue light. Blue is not a good color for dinnerware, however. Food looks less appetizing when it is served on blue plates, perhaps because very few foods in nature are of that color. Other studies have shown that the color green is calming. After London's Blackfriars Bridge was painted green, the number of suicides from it decreased by 34 percent. It is clear that color affects not just our moods, but our behavior as well (Daniels 10).

Exercise 2. Both of the following paragraphs break the rule of unity because they contain one or more sentences that are off the topic.

Step 1. Locate and underline the topic sentence of each paragraph.

Step 2. Cross out the sentence or sentences that are off topic.

### Paragraph 1

Adventure travel is the hot trend in the tourism industry. Ordinary people are no longer content to spend their two weeks away from the office resting on a sunny beach in Florida. More and more often, they are choosing to spend their vacations rafting down wild rivers, hiking through steamy rain forests, climbing the world's highest mountains, or crossing slippery glaciers.<sup>1</sup> People of all ages are choosing educational study tours for their vacations.

### Paragraph 2

Daredevil<sup>2</sup> sports are also becoming popular. Young people especially are increasingly willing to risk life and limb<sup>3</sup> while mountain biking, backcountry snowboarding, or high-speed skateboarding. Soccer is also popular in the United States now, although football is still more popular. One of the riskiest new sports is skysurfing, in which people jump out of airplanes with boards attached to their feet. Skysurfing rivals<sup>4</sup> skydiving and bungee jumping for the amount of thrills—and risk.

Exercise 3. Both of the following paragraphs not only have sentences that are off the topic but also discuss two or more topics.

Step 1. Decide where each paragraph should be divided into two paragraphs. Underline the topic sentence of each.

Step 2. Find sentences that are off the topic and cross them out.

#### **Paragraph 1**

Because the Internet makes the world a smaller place, the value of having a common language is greatly increased. The question is—which language? Because the Internet grew up in the United States, the largest percentage of its content is now in English. Bill Gates, Microsoft's president, believes that English will remain valuable for a long time as a common language for international communication. His company spends \$200 million a year translating software into other languages. He says, "Unless you read English passably well, you miss out on some of the Internet experience." Someday, software may be available to instantly translate both written and spoken language so well that the need for any common language could decline. That day is decades away, however, because flawless machine translation is a very tough problem. Computer spelling checkers also exist for various languages. Software that does crude<sup>5</sup> translations already exists. It is useful if all you are trying to do is understand the general idea of something you see on your computer screen. However, if you are trying to negotiate a contract or discuss a scientific subject where details are important, machine translation is totally useless (Gates).<sup>6</sup>

#### **Paragraph 2**

Even when you try to be polite, it is easy to do the wrong thing inadvertently<sup>7</sup> in a new culture. For example, when someone offers you food or a beverage in the United States, accept it the first time it is offered. If you say, "No, thank you" because it is polite to decline the first one or two offers in your culture, you could become very hungry and thirsty in the United States. There, a host thinks that "no" means "no" and will usually not offer again. Meals in the United States are usually more informal than meals in other countries, and the times of meals may be different. Although North Americans are usually very direct in social matters, there are a few occasions when they are not. If a North American says, "Please drop by sometime," he may or may not want you to visit him in his home. Your clue that this may not be a real invitation is the word "sometime." In some areas of the United States, people do not expect you to visit them unless you have an invitation for a specific day and time. In other areas of the United States, however, "dropping by" is a friendly, neighborly gesture. Idioms are often difficult for newcomers to understand.

## Part 2. Coherence

Exercise 1. The easiest way to achieve coherence is to repeat key nouns frequently in your paragraph. Read the model paragraph about gold to see how it uses this technique to smooth the flow of sentences. The key noun in this paragraph is gold. Circle all pronouns that refer to it.

(1) 'Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. (2) First of all, gold has a **lustrous** beauty that is resistant to **corrosion**. (3) Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. (4) Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. (5) For example, a Macedonian coin remains as **untarnished** today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago. (6) Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. (7) For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications, such as photography and dentistry. (8) The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. (9) Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection when they go outside spaceships in space. (10) In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

Exercise 2. In the following paragraph, the key noun is never repeated. Replace the pronoun it with the key noun English wherever you think doing so would make the paragraph more coherent.

### English

English has almost become an international language. Except for Chinese, more people speak it than any other language. Spanish is the official language of more countries in the world, but more countries have it as their official or unofficial second language. More than 70 percent of the world's mail is written in it. It is the primary language on the Internet. In international business, it is used more than any other language, and it is the language of airline pilots and air traffic controllers all over the world. Moreover, although French used to be the language of diplomacy, it has displaced it throughout the world. Therefore, unless you plan to spend your life along on a desert island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, it is a useful language to know.