PURDUE UNIVERSITY GLOBAL

Academic Success Center
WRITING CENTER

READINGS FOR CM220: COLLEGE COMPOSITION TWO

UNIT 7

PART 1. THE TOPIC SENTENCE AND PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION

PART 2. PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT WITH PIE PODCAST

PART 3. HOW TO WRITE A STRONG PARAGRAPH

PART 4. PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

THE TOPIC SENTENCE AND PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

When you read directions, your texts, and the articles you research, when you read your own writing in order to revise and edit, you will increase your comprehension of the content and write more cohesively when you understand paragraph organization. **Paragraph organization** refers to the way sentences are ordered and structured to create a unified and cohesive body of text.

The principal features to consider in paragraph organization are the topic sentence and controlling idea, supporting details, organizational patterns, and signal words. Together, these features progress a topic and idea from one point to the next, logically and fluidly. This resource explains these features and provide numerous sample paragraphs with analyses of the topic sentences and organization.

THE TOPIC SENTENCE AND CONTROLLING IDEA

The Topic Sentence is the most general sentence in a paragraph, and it has two parts: 1) a topic: the subject or issue being discussed, and 2) a controlling idea: a point, opinion, or feeling about the topic.

Example: Snow skiing is a challenging sport with important requirements.

In this example, the subject of the sentence, snow skiing is **the topic**, and the predicate of the sentence expresses the **point or opinion** about the topic: that it is challenging and has important requirements (Figure 2). As the controlling idea, the rest of the paragraph will serve to develop this point with supporting details. **The topic sentence is typically the first sentence in a paragraph.**

Example:

> *Snow skiing is a challenging sport with important requirements.* Bending your knees and putting your weight on the downhill ski during turns will help you control your speed as you ski. If you do not adhere to these requirements, you may ski too fast and even fall.

The topic sentence can come later in a paragraph too.

Example:

> Bending your knees and putting your weight on the downhill ski during turns will help you control your speed as you ski. *Snow skiing is a challenging sport with important requirements.* If you do not adhere to these requirements, you may ski too fast and even fall.

The Topic Sentence *On Your Own*

Identify the topic sentence in the sample paragraph along with the specific topic and controlling idea. After identifying the topic and controlling idea on your own, proceed to the Analysis.

Sample Paragraph

> Toddlers have strong opinions about certain food. Broccoli ("trees") and alphabet soup can bring shrieks of delight. Happy eaters are not always skillful or neat eaters, however. Toddlers still have much to learn about using a fork and spoon.

Analysis: In the sample paragraph, the topic sentence is "Toddlers have strong opinions about certain food." According to this topic sentence, the paragraph is largely about toddlers, but the controlling idea concerns their opinions about food or their eating preferences.

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SUPPORTING DETAILS

In a paragraph, the topic and controlling idea are developed with supporting details. Listed here are some types of supporting details found in paragraphs along with an example of each in a sentence.

- **Facts: statistics or evidence from research that can be verified**

  The office sold seven million dollars of real estate during the boom years (Stoff, 2017).

- **Opinions: statements, quotes, or paraphrases from subject matter experts (which may be you!)**

  According to expert tea maker, Stoff (2017), there are three easy steps to making tea.

- **Definitions: explanations of what a term or concept means**

  A "crossover" is a family vehicle with the features of a sedan, mini-van, and an SUV.

- **Examples: illustrations that show how something is or how it is done**

  Mario was a shy, introverted young man. For example, he had few friends and mostly kept to himself.

- **Anecdotes: narrative accounts of one time or recurring events**

  When I visited the Washington Monument, I enjoyed the 180 degree view the most.

- **Descriptions: a visual or sensory depiction of a person, place, event, activity, or idea**

  Frostbit leaves crunched beneath our winter boots on the path through the snow frosted trees.

Supporting Details *On Your Own*

Identify the supporting details in the sample paragraph then proceed to the Analysis. Hint: A paragraph may not have every type of detail in it, but it might have more than one type as they develop the topic and main idea with more information and depth.

Sample Paragraph

> Hiking can be especially exhilarating during snowy, winter months. When my friend and I visited North Carolina last January, we hiked in the Blue Ridge Mountains near the highest peak, Mount Mitchell, which is 6,684 feet above sea level. We first crossed a footbridge over a rapidly moving, ice-cold river and then followed a wooded trail up to a waterfall. Frostbit leaves crunched beneath our winter boots on the path through the snow frosted trees. We also saw deer and rabbits as we trekked up the path. I assure you that nothing feels better than inhaling crisp, fresh mountain air, but the neatest part of hiking in winter, besides the

beauty of the mountain, is exhaling and seeing your breath turn to frost when it hits the cold air!

Analysis: The topic sentence and the concluding sentence are opinions about the topic. The middle of the paragraph is an anecdote—a story about visiting and hiking to a waterfall. There is also a fact about Mount Mitchell and descriptions of the area.

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PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION

Along with having topic sentences and supporting details, paragraphs are also organized to achieve a certain purpose. However, just as a paragraph can contain different types of supporting details, a paragraph may also include more than one organizational pattern. Listed here are some common patterns for organizing a paragraph.

- **Cause and Effect:** for showing how one thing leads to another
- **Chronological Order:** for narrating events that occurred over time
- **Classification:** for grouping things together according to their features
- **Compare and Contrast:** for showing how things are similar or different
- **Definition and example:** for defining a term or idea then expanding it with examples
- **Description:** for listing details
- **Episode:** for presenting details or information about a specific event or anecdote
- **General/Specific order:** for presenting a general idea followed by specific examples
- **Generalization/Principal:** for making a general statement or applying a broad principal to explain the supporting details
- **Listing:** for presenting ideas from the least to most important
- **Order of Importance:** for building up to or leading away from the most important point.
- **Problem and Solution:** for presenting an issue and ways to address it
- **Process/Cause:** for explaining what or how something happens and then why
- **Spatial Order:** for ordering details directionally

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SIGNAL WORDS

Signal words indicate a type of organizational pattern and reinforce or further the meaning of the content (the information given in the body of the text) by way of that organization. Commonly, we find signal words at the beginning of a paragraph or sentence or as part of a signal *phrase* that leads into a quote or paraphrase.

Example:

In the paraphrase, *Stoff (2011) argued that green tea is healthier than jasmine tea*, the verb "argued" in the signal phrase, "Stoff (2011) argued," informs us that the ideas that follow are Stoff's and that she "argued" them. The signal word "argued" creates a firmer tone than if she had merely "said" green tea was healthier. It also establishes more context for Stoff's meaning, signaling that she is making a claim or basing her opinion on some principal.

Signal words are also part of the vocabulary that makes up the content of the paragraph. The word "type" in a sentence, for example, *signals* that the ideas involve classification, which is an organizational pattern. Signal words are therefore **context clues**; they hint at what the paragraph is about and how it is organized.

Listed here are signal words associated with different types of paragraph organization.

- **Cause and Effect:** because, consequently, for this reason, hence made, on account of
- **Chronological Order:** after, at last, at (time), as long as, at the same time, as soon as, before, during, eventually, finally, in (month or year), later, meanwhile, next, on (day or date), since, second, subsequently, then, until, and whenever
- **Classification:** categories, classes, classifications, elements, features, groups, kinds, methods, types, varieties, and ways
- **Compare and Contrast:** another, both, however, likewise, one difference, on the other hand, on the contrary, similarity, similarly, unlike, and while
- **Definition and Example:** concept, defined as, described as, e.g., for example, for instance, i.e., illustrates, is, is called, is stated, known as, means, refers to, specifically, such as, term, and that is to say
- **Description:** above, across, along, appears to be, as in, behind, below, beside, between, down, in back of, in front of, looks like, near, onto, on top of, outside, over, such as, to the right/left, and under
- **Episode:** a few days/weeks later, around the same time, as a result of, as it is often called, because of, began when, consequently, for this reason, just, lasted for, led to, shortly thereafter, since then, subsequently, this led to, and when
- **General/Specific order:** for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, in other words, like, namely, such as, and that is
- **Generalization/Principal:** Additionally, always, because of, clearly, conclusively, first, for instance, for example, furthermore, generally, however, if...then, in fact, it could be argued that, moreover, most convincing, never, not only...but also, often, second, therefore, third, truly, and typically
- **Listing:** additionally, also, and, as well as, besides, furthermore, in addition, in fact, moreover, or, plus, and too

- **Order of Importance:** central, chief, ending with, finishing with, key, lastly, least, main, major, finally, primary, principal, and significant
- **Problem and Solution:** answer, challenge, difficulty, dilemma, enigma, indicate, improve, issue, need, plan, problem, propose, resolve, respond, solve, and suggest
- **Process/Cause:** accordingly, as a result of, because, begins with, consequently, effects of, finally, first, for this reason, how to, how, if...then, in order to, is caused by, leads/led to, may be due to, next, so that, steps involved, therefore, thus, and when...then
- **Spatial Order:** above, below, behind, beside, down, east, feels, highest, looks, lowest, next to, north, smells, sounds, south, tastes, under, and west

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SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS AND ANALYSES OF THE ORGANIZATION

The sample paragraphs in this section illustrate topic sentences, supporting details, organizational patterns, and signal words in context. Read each paragraph to identify the type of paragraph organization on your own then proceed to the analysis to check your comprehension.

Sample Paragraph 1

Fifteen years ago, Lawrence started his real estate business, and it has since become a huge success. In 1995, Lawrence Real Estate opened its door in Oviedo, Florida and sold seven million dollars of real estate during the first few "boom years" (Stoff, 2017). By 2000, Lawrence decided to open two branch offices: one in Tampa in 2003 and one in Miami in 2004. By 2007, the home office and both the branch offices had survived the economic slowdown, so Lawrence and his associates are expanding their business to the Carolinas and plan to open a branch office in Charlotte in 2017. It can be safely said that in the last fifteen years, Lawrence Real Estate has become a model for success despite the economic struggle and real estate devaluation.

- **Analysis of Paragraph 1:** According to the topic sentence, which contains two coordinating clauses and therefore two subjects and two topics, this paragraph is about Lawrence and his real estate business, and the controlling idea is that they have been successful.

  Let's now look at how the supporting details are organized to present the information about this topic and idea. To do this, we look at the way the sentences begin and at any other signal words that lead readers along a certain line of thinking. Here we see "Fifteen years," "in 1995," "By 2000," "By 2007," and "in the last 15 years." Do you see a pattern? The dates make a pattern. They go back 15 years, but then in a chronological order, they move forward to when the success of the business happened.

  This paragraph uses ***chronological order***. Notice too that the last sentence returns to the beginning idea of 15 years ago. In this sentence, a final comment about the time period overall is given with respect to the new information

Sample Paragraph 2

Making a great cup of tea (Figure 6) is easy if you follow these three steps. First, heat a cup of water to a boiling point. Then put the tea bag in the hot water, and let it seep into the hot water for at least three minutes. Finally, add creamer and sugar to taste. There is nothing tastier than a strong cup of tea early in the morning.

- **Analysis of Paragraph 2:** According to the topic sentence, which is the first sentence of the paragraph, making cup of tea is the topic, and the controlling idea is that it's easy to do if you follow three steps. Then, by looking at the sentence openings, we find the signal words: "first," "then," and "finally," which indicate a sequence of steps, not times or dates as in a narrative story, but steps that happen in a specific order as in the process of doing something or informing others how to do something.

  This paragraph uses ***process order*** *(or process/cause).* In the last sentence of this paragraph, too, the process is completed with a return to the original topic—a cup of tea—and a new comment about it—that a strong cup is tasty in the morning, making those three steps not only easy but also worthwhile.

Sample Paragraph 3

The Washington Monument is divided into three main areas. The lowest section of the building houses the entrance, a gift shop, and a restaurant. The middle section consists of elevators and stairways to the top. The top section of the monument includes an observation deck with a spectacular view of the Washington DC area. When I visited the Washington Monument, I toured every section but enjoyed the spectacular 180 degree view the most.

- **Analysis of Paragraph 3:** Based on the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, the topic is the Washington Monument and the controlling idea is that it is divided into three main areas. The paragraph presents information about the lowest section first, then the middle section, the top section, and the last sentence makes a remark about the most enjoyable of all the sections. This is an example of **spatial organization**. The information is given in the order you might see it if you were there.

Sample Paragraph 4

There are three types of family vehicles made in the United States. The first type is the minivan. All American car manufactures make a version of the minivan. Some say that the comfort and amenities of the minivan compare to none. The second type of family vehicle is the SUV. Some SUVs offer four-wheel-drive to navigate tough terrains, and they also offer seating for a large crowd. A third type of family vehicles is called the "crossover." These vehicles supposedly have the best features of the sedan, mini-van, and SUV. They are easy to maneuver, look much like a regular sedan, and sit up to six people. All of these vehicles are family friendly; they offer safety, roomy comfort, and many extra features to accommodate the special needs of families.

Analysis of Paragraph 4: This paragraph shows us another way to organize the details of a topic. The topic sentence of this paragraph is structured differently than the other ones we've looked at. Typically the topic of a sentence is also the grammatical subject. Here however,

the subject is "there," a pronoun, so the topic is in the predicate of the sentence. The topic, what the paragraph is about, is "family vehicles." The controlling idea is that there are three types made in the US.

The paragraph is organized according to those three types: The first type, the second type, and the third type, and to conclude, there is a comment about "all of these vehicles" or all of these types of vehicles. When we organize information by types or something's features, we are classifying it. We thus call this type of organization, ***classification.***

Sample Paragraph 5

Although the twin brothers shared many physical characteristics, they handled themselves differently in social situations. Mario was a shy introverted young man. He had few friends and mostly kept to himself. On the other hand, Gino was outgoing and the life of the party. Unlike Mario, Gino had many friends and felt totally at ease among big crowds. The best way to tell these identical twins apart is to invite both to a party and observe how differently they interact with the other guests.

- **Analysis of Paragraph 5:** When the topic sentence is complex (having more than one clause) as in this paragraph, there may be two subjects and therefore two topics; however, here, the subject of the first clause is "the twin brothers" and the subject for the second clause is "they," so they refer to the same topic: the twin brothers. The controlling idea is that they share many physical characteristics but handle themselves differently socially. The paragraph then progresses with descriptions of these similarities and differences and signal words that create contrast such as "although," "on the other hand," and "unlike." Vocabulary such as "apart" and "differently" also indicate that the organizational pattern of this paragraph is ***Compare and Contrast.***

Sample Paragraph 6

There are many reasons why I enjoy walking tours when visiting new cities. For starters, walking through a city allows the visitor to see the details of an area without having to hurry. This often results in meeting locals and experiencing their lives and traditions first hand. Furthermore, walking tours are flexible and inexpensive because there are no strict schedules or transportation expenses. Travelers taking walking tours are rewarded with firsthand experiences of the places they visit and the opportunity to personally interact with the people who live there.

Analysis of Paragraph 6: The first sentence begins with "there are," so we must read beyond the subject and verb to find the topic. Additionally, this is a complex sentence with an independent and dependent clause connected by "why," so there may be two topics. Looking at the objects of both clauses, we find "many reasons" and "walking tours"; these two topics are linked together by the controlling idea: why walking tours are enjoyable when visiting new cities.

The signal words build on this idea of "why" or causes with terms such as "results" and "*because.*" The last sentence then sums up the ultimate effect of walking tours: Travelers *are rewarded.* This is an example of ***cause and effect*** organization.

Sample Paragraph 7

Hiking can be especially exhilarating during snowy, winter months. When my friend and I visited North Carolina last January, we hiked in the Blue Ridge Mountains near the highest peak, Mount Mitchell, which is 6,684 feet above sea level. We first crossed a footbridge over a rapidly moving, ice-cold river and then followed a wooded trail up to a waterfall. Frostbit leaves crunched beneath our winter boots on the path through the snow frosted trees. We also saw deer and rabbits as we trekked up the path. I assure you that nothing feels better than inhaling crisp, fresh mountain air, but the neatest part of hiking in winter, besides the beauty of the mountain, is exhaling and seeing your breath turn to frost when it hits the cold air!

- **Analysis of Paragraph 7:** In the first sentence we find that the topic of the paragraph is "hiking," and the comment or main idea is that it "can be especially exhilarating during snowy winter months." Based on this, we can expect supporting details to illustrate this exhilaration, but we don't know how it is organized until we look at the signal words that help progress the topic from one idea to the next.

  Taking inventory of the signal words, we find several time markers: "when," "last January," "first," "then," and "in winter." "When" and "last January" set the narrative in the past while "first" and "then" develop a **chronological order** of events along with a final, summarizing idea about hiking "in winter" based on the experience last January. Within this chronology, we also find signal words associated with **spatial organization**: "over," "up," "beneath," "through," "crunched" (sounded), "saw," "feels," and "seeing." Narratives do typically include descriptive elements about the setting. Additionally, the concluding thought **contrasts** inhaling to exhaling. We can thus conclude that this paragraph has **multiple patterns of organization** intricately connected.

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PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT WITH PIE PODCAST (TRANSCRIPT)

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Greetings everyone. This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to talk about developing body paragraphs with a technique called PIE.

In my experience, writers often have one of two problem areas related to paragraph development: not enough development or not enough of the right kind of development. What I mean by the latter is the idea that just because a paragraph contains a lot of content does not necessarily mean that content is doing the best job developing the idea of the paragraph.

One good way to go about developing paragraphs is to use the PIE method, which is an approach that has been around in some form or another I imagine since the time of Aristotle. So for a long time. PIE is an acronym that stands for develop a limited point (that's the P) in a paragraph; illustrate (that's the I") the point with supporting information; the E stands for explain how the evidence supports the point of the paragraph and relates to the thesis of the essay.

Restated:

P = Point

I = Illustrate

E = Explain

Paragraphs need to make clear and focused points. I mean, that's the point of a paragraph right? To make a point. Whether or not you use a topic sentence at the start of the paragraph does not matter, for the paragraph still needs to make a point.

In order to make a point, you have to illustrate the point by using evidence—details, facts, statistics, testimony, examples, and the like. Supporting information helps readers understand the point you are trying to make in a paragraph.

Evidence alone will not help you develop the point. What every paragraph needs is elaboration where you explain the relevance of the information presented as it relates to the point of the paragraph as well as the essay as a whole. As the writer, you need to offer thoughtful commentary of the supporting details you use to illustrate the point. This last part is critical to the success of a paragraph, for its this kind of commentary where the writer offers analysis and interpretation of the content as it relates to their point. It's also how the writer connects the point of the paragraph to the larger point of the essay.

I am going to read a sample paragraph and as I do, listen for the elements of PIE that may be missing: The United States Postal Service has a proud history. Benjamin Franklin was named Postmaster General in 1775 even before The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776

(USPS, 2007). Through the evolution of the service, the mission of the USPS has remained the same: "provide universal service to all Americans. From the bottom of the Grand Canyon to the furthermost point in Alaska, mail gets through" (USPS, 2010,para. 4). The United States Postal Service provides 596,000 jobs and has donated over$70 million to breast cancer research (USPS, 2010).

What did you hear? Or, should I ask, what did you not hear? The paragraph starts out with a clear focus—the proud history of the postal service—and that point is illustrated with some good examples. But what's it all add up to? Is there any explanation that discusses how the information relates to the point of the paragraph and to the larger point of the essay? Do you have any sense of what this paragraph as a whole is trying to support? Do you sense a connectedness to a thesis? I don't think so. I see this paragraph as just floating in the sea.

This is how PIE can help you. If you think about your paragraphs as needing those three parts—Point, Illustration, and Explanation—then you are more likely to notice that what is lacking in the paragraph I read is explanation, language that helps readers understand the relevance of the information as it relates to the point of the paragraph and to the larger point, the thesis, of the essay. Listen to the revised version of the paragraph:

The United States Postal Service has a proud history. Benjamin Franklin was named Postmaster General in 1775 even before The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 (USPS, 2007). Through the evolution of the service, the mission of the USPS has remained the same: "provide universal service to all Americans. From the bottom of the Grand Canyon to the furthermost point in Alaska, mail gets through" (USPS, 2010,para. 4). In addition to those accomplishments, the USPS also provides nearly 600,000 jobs and has donated over $70 million to breast cancer research through its breast cancer awareness stamps (USPS, 2010). The United States Postal Service has been an important institution and provided valuable services for over two hundred and thirty years—all at no cost to U.S. taxpayers. While the post office needs to redefine how it conducts business in the electronic age, eliminating the service is not the answer. In fact, there is no reason the postal service cannot, once again, change with the times and continue to add to its rich history and accomplishments.

What do you think? Better? Did it seem as if the paragraph was trying to develop a point and that point was connected to a bigger idea? Was there enough explanation—that is, was there enough commentary on the information presented so that you understand better the point of the paragraph as well as how the paragraph relates to the thesis? When you offer explanation, you are, in a sense, taking a step back and examining-analyzing—the information presented and making sure readers understand how the information relates to the point of the paragraph and to the larger point of the essay. The revision offers language such as the "in addition to those accomplishments" and "also" in the sentence "In addition to those accomplishments, the USPS also provides nearly 600,000 jobs and has donated over 70 million dollars to breast cancer research" thereby creating the sense that the USPS already has many accomplishments and on top of those, the postal service also has other accomplishments. The language connects the new piece of information to other pieces of information which are all connected to the idea of proud accomplishments.

The revision also includes three full sentences of explanation after the last piece of information—all of which work to connect that information to the point of the paragraph and to what the essay as a whole is trying to communicate. Listen:

The first version of the paragraph stops after the sentence "The United States Postal Service provides nearly 600.000 jobs and has donated over $70 million to breast cancer research." That's it—a paragraph floating in an ocean, insignificant and hardly noticed. But listen to what happens when the writer explains the importance of the information:

In addition to those accomplishments, the United States Postal Service also provides nearly 600,000 jobs and has donated over $70 million to breast cancer research through its breast cancer awareness stamps (USPS, 2010). The United States Postal Service has been an important institution and provided valuable services for over two hundred and thirty years—all at no cost to U.S. taxpayers. While the post office needs to redefine how it conducts business in the electronic age, eliminating the service is not the answer. In fact, there is no reason the postal service cannot, once again, change with the times and continue to add to its rich history and accomplishments.

Do hear the difference? Do you understand the importance not just making a point and illustrating a point but also—perhaps most importantly—explaining the importance of that information through commentary and analysis? The revised paragraph, which is only three sentences and maybe five words longer than the original is better by leaps and bounds.

When you are working on an essay and developing body paragraphs, keep PIE in mind—the idea that body paragraphs need to make a point, information presented needs to illustrate that point, and commentary and analysis is essential to explain the significance of the point. Indeed, PIE is an effective method for developing healthy paragraphs.

Thanks for listening, everyone. Happy writing.

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HOW TO WRITE A STRONG PARAGRAPH

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PARAGRAPH LENGTH

Because the definition of a paragraph is a group of sentences on one topic, in theory, paragraphs can be any length, from one sentence to one hundred. Paragraph length is dictated first by content and purpose. A new paragraph signals a pause in thought and a change in topic, directing readers to anticipate what is to follow or allowing them a moment to digest the material in the preceding paragraph. Reasons to begin a new paragraph include

- beginning a new idea,
- emphasizing a particular point,
- changing speakers in dialogue,
- allowing readers to pause, and
- breaking up lengthy text, usually moving to a subtopic.

Once you are satisfied with the content of your paragraphs, consider your readers.

Paragraphs of more than one typewritten page scare readers away: The paragraphs appear too dense and too long to be inviting. Short paragraphs make it appear as if ideas are not fully developed. Think of your reader and how your paragraphs appear on the page. Paragraph lengths should invite readers in, neither seeming too daunting to read through nor appearing incomplete.

Of course, if you have a complex concept that demands a lot of explanation, longer paragraphs are necessary. In a persuasive paper, for example, a complex, logical argument with supporting evidence might require a longer paragraph. Shorter paragraphs may be useful, for example, when relating the story of an exciting event. Dialogue could appear in separate, brief paragraphs or perhaps a series of short paragraphs could be used to create suspense as readers rush on to the next paragraph to see what happens next.

Extremely short paragraphs of one sentence are sometimes, though rarely, effective. Look at the following example:

> My grandmother was a wonderful woman. I never went to visit her without getting the traditional plate of cookies and glass of milk. When I needed something for a Homecoming dance that my babysitting money couldn't accommodate, grandma would rummage in the

attic and find gloves, a shawl, a brooch. When a date ended badly or a speech flopped or a friend betrayed me, grandma's wise counsel and ample lap soothed more effectively than even my mother's hug. Grandma taught me about friendship, honesty, comfort, and love.

She died suddenly right in front of my eyes.

That last sentence, because it is set apart visually from the other paragraph, dramatizes the narrator's emotions more effectively.

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SENTENCE VARIETY

We have all probably experienced a lecture or presentation given by someone who talks in a monotone, never varying the tone of voice. It probably puts you to sleep, right? The equivalent of such monotony in writing occurs when sentences have the same structure and the same length. Once the content of your writing is solid, revise, paying attention to sentence variety.

Sentence Structure

Remember the different types of sentence structure you learned years ago?

1. **Simple Sentence** = one independent clause with no subordinate clause

   Without music, life would be a mistake.

2. **Compound Sentence** = two or more independent clauses with no subordinate clauses

   One arrow is easily broken, but a bundle of ten can't be broken.

   independent clause independent clause

3. **Complex Sentence** = one independent clause with one or more subordinate clauses

   If you scatter thorns, don't go barefoot.

   subordinate clause independent clause

4. **Compound-Complex Sentence** = at least two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause

   Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.

   independent clause independent clause subordinate clause

One of the methods you can use to gain sentence variety is to be sure you are using all of the above sentence structures in your paper. It is not necessary for you to identify the different clauses and name the sentences, but if you can scan your paragraphs and have a general sense that you are using them all, you are on the right track.

Sentence Type

Here is another method for identifying sentence structure that should look familiar to you:

1. **Declarative** = make a statement

The echo always has the last word.

2. **Imperative** = make a demand

   Love your neighbor.

3. **Interrogative** = ask a question

   Are second thoughts always wisest?

4. **Exclamatory**= make an exclamation

   I want to wash the flag, not burn it!

Declarative sentences will naturally be used the most in academic writing. But as you revise, look for places where imperative and interrogative sentences could be used effectively, both to make the content stronger and also to add sentence variety. Exclamatory sentences are used rarely in academic writing and professional writing, but can occasionally be effective, depending on context, audience, and purpose.

Sentence Openings

Another easy way to add sentence variety is to look at sentence openings. Many writers fall into a pattern of starting sentences the same way, generally with the subject of the sentence. Here is a sample of what can be done with the very simple sentence *"John broke the window."* Note all of the different openings that not only add sentence variety, but also create more interesting content.

- **Subject**
  - John broke the window.
- **Conjunction**
  - But John broke the window.
- **Adverb** (answers how, when, why)
  - Afterwards, John broke the window.
- **Adverb Clause**
  - While hitting a fly ball in the vacant field, John broke the window.
- **Expletive** (there, it)
  - There is the window John broke.
- **Correlative Conjunction**
  - Either John broke the window with the fly ball or he did not.
- **Prepositional Phrase**
  - During the game, John broke the window.
- **Infinitive Phrase**

- To complete the destructiveness of the baseball game, John broke the window.

- **Passive Voice**
  - The window was broken by John.
- **Participle Phrase**
  - Testing his father's patience, John broke the window.
- **Subordinate Clause**
  - Although John hit a home run, the price was a broken window.
- **Inverted Word Order**
  - The window John broke.

Inverted word order, as in the last example, should not be overused. But occasional use at an important point where you want to really gain your readers' attention can add surprise and drama to your writing, as in the following example:

- **Normal Word Order**
  - The Christmas treats, the bright, beribboned presents, and the charitable love of the season are all gone.
- **Inverted Word Order**
  - Gone are the Christmas treats, the bright, beribboned presents, and the charitable love of the season.

Varied Length

Finally, another easy method for adding sentence variety to your writing is to pay attention to length. Strive to write sentences that are short, medium, and long in length. The easiest way to check for sentence length is to begin each sentence of a paragraph on a separate line so that you can scan the sentences. Here is an example:

1. Kirilov's home is described as dark, in part because of his son's sickness and death, which occurred barely five minutes before Aboguin rings the doctor's doorbell.
2. The entry is dark and the lamp in his drawing room is unlighted, allowing the twilight and the dark September evening to fill the room, relieved only by a light in the adjoining study that lights his books and a big lamp in the dead boy's bedroom.
3. The darkness extends to Kirilov himself.
4. Chekhov describes him as having a prematurely gray beard and skin with a pale gray hue.
5. His hands are stained black with carbolic acid, marking him as a laborer.
6. His dark home and gray appearance exemplify the grayness and monotony of life that characterize his recent loss and years of poverty.

It is easy to see at a glance that this paragraph has sentences of varying length.

Combining and Dividing Clauses

If you decide your paper's sentence length needs to be more varied, there is much that can be done. **Clauses can be converted to phrases**; for example, sentence one in the paragraph above could be changed to

> Kirilov's home is described as dark, in part because of his son's sickness and death, occurring barely five minutes before.

Sentences can be combined. Sentences three and four above could become

> The darkness extends to Kirilov himself as Chekhov describes him as having a prematurely gray beard and skin with a pale gray hue.

Long sentences can be divided. Sentence two above could become

> The entry is dark and the lamp in his drawing room is unlighted, allowing the twilight and the dark September evening to fill the room. The darkness is relieved only by a light in the adjoining study that lights his books and a big lamp in the dead boy's bedroom.

Phrases can become one or two words. Sentence four above could become

> *Chekhov describes him as prematurely gray.*

These changes do not necessarily make the sentence better, but they serve as good examples of what can be done to change sentence length and add sentence variety.

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SENTENCE CLARITY

Sentence clarity simply means that sentences are clearly written and grammatically correct. Most of the time, they are. As speakers of English, we naturally speak and write correct sentences. But sometimes hasty, careless writing and revising can result in garbled sentences.

Mixed Construction

A mixed construction occurs when a sentence begins with one grammatical pattern and concludes with a different grammatical pattern, as if the writer started writing a sentence, was interrupted, and then finished it without referring back to the beginning.

- The fact that our room was hot we opened the window between our beds.
- By not prosecuting marijuana possession as vigorously as crack possession encourages marijuana users to think they can ignore the law.
- Because of the European discovery of America became a profitable colony for Britain.

It is perfectly fine to begin sentences with the expression "the fact that," with adverb clauses like "because," and with prepositional phrases, but pay attention to these openings because it is especially easy to write mixed constructions. Usually, if these sentences are pointed out, writers can quickly see

they are a problem. An easy way to find them is to read a paper backwards, one sentence at a time so that each sentence is isolated.

Faulty Predication

Faulty predication occurs when the predicate of a sentence does not logically complete its subject. Most often faulty predication involves the verb *to be*. We know that *to be* verbs act like equal signs between the subject and predicate:

- The piano player is skilled.

But if the predicate is logically inconsistent with the subject, the sentence will confuse readers.

- The power of a skilled piano player is keenly aware of being able to raise strong emotions in listeners. [Can the power of a piano player be keenly aware?]
- Listeners are keenly aware of the power a skilled piano player has to raise strong emotions in listeners. [Now it is the listeners who are keenly aware.]

Inconsistent or Incomplete Comparisons

When making comparisons, be sure they are consistent and complete.

Inconsistent: *Brownlee's business proposal is better than Summers.* [Brownlee's business proposal is being compared to Summers, a person.]

Consistent: *Brownlee's business proposal is better than the one by Summers.*

Incomplete: *I was ashamed because my background was so different.* [Different from what?]

Complete: *I was ashamed because my background was so different from that of my new co-workers.*

Inconsistent and incomplete comparisons are common in speech. Context, facial expression, and body language supply the missing information. But in more formal writing, care must be taken to be completely clear.

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TRANSITIONS

Transitions are connectors or bridges between thoughts. For example, if you read the word *however*, you know that the next thought will be in contrast to the previous one. The word acts as a bridge explaining the relationship between the two thoughts. If you read the word *meanwhile*, you know that the next event is happening at the same time as the event discussed previously. The word explains the simultaneous relationship between the two events.

Transitions are one of the methods used to make paragraphs flow smoothly. When the reader knows the relationship between concepts or sentences, the thoughts flow smoothly and the paragraph is easier to read. The transitions used most often are the ones already described, words like *however* and *meanwhile*. Lists of transitional expressions can be easily found in most writing handbooks. Following is just a small sample:

TO INDICATE TIME ORDER	TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE	TO INDICATE RESULTS
in the past	for example	as a result
before	for instance	consequently
earlier	to illustrate	because of
preceding	specifically	for this reason
recently	in particular	since
presently	namely	therefore
currently	in other words	thus
now		accordingly
until		
during		
following that		
after a short time		

TO CONCEDE	TO COMPARE	TO CONTRAST	TO EMPHASIZE
although	in comparison	and yet	above all
even though	in like manner	but	undoubtedly
admittedly	in much the same way	despite	most importantly
granted	likewise	nevertheless	moreover
while it is true		nonetheless	furthermore
of course		notwithstanding	without question
			however
			contrary to
			on the other hand

Transitional expressions like these work well between sentences, *within* paragraphs, but should not be used too often. Use them only when a relationship between sentences is not already evident.

Transitional expressions can also be used *between* paragraphs when the paragraphs are already arranged so that the content of one paragraph leads logically into the next paragraph. In these cases, the transition simply highlights the relationship that is already clear.

Echo Transition

For more sophisticated transitions between paragraphs, use whole sentences. One effective sentence transition is an *echo transition.* An echo transition echoes a word, phrase, or idea from the last sentence of one paragraph in the first sentence of the next paragraph. Here is an example:

- . . . Throughout the story, the husband's word is considered law, and the wife barely dares to question it.
- *This unequal marriage* fits perfectly into the historical period of the setting….

The italicized phrase echoes the idea in the previous paragraph, providing a bridge to the next paragraph.

Key Word Transition

Another sentence transition repeats *key words* from one paragraph to the next.

- …Shirley Jackson shows the uselessness of the lottery and the *selfishness of human nature* through Mr. Warner's ignorance.
- This *selfishness of human nature* is shown very clearly through Tessie in the story….

The repetition of key words demonstrates the relationship between the ideas in the two paragraphs.

Look Back and Forward

A third type of sentence transition *looks back and forward*. In one or two sentences, look back at the ideas of the preceding paragraph and then look forward to the ideas in the next paragraph.

- …These first two stanzas set up the theme of triumph in life.
- *In contrast to this victory, stanza three moves to the issue of dying….*

In the italicized sentence, the first phrase (*in contrast to this victory*) looks back at the ideas of the preceding paragraph. The second clause (*stanza three moves to the issue of dying*) looks forward to the ideas in the next paragraph.

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PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

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Writers use words to compose sentences that develop ideas. A group of related sentences that develops a particular idea is organized in a unit called a paragraph. Understanding the basic concept of "paragraph" is easy enough, but applying your understanding – that is, writing strong, focused paragraphs – can pose challenges for writers of all levels of accomplishment. The discussion that follows will help you understand effective paragraphing and reinforce good writing habits. Please keep in mind that writing is a process, and to produce good writing, paragraph by paragraph, takes time. Learning to write effective paragraphs will help you communicate your ideas clearly to an audience and help you achieve the purpose of the writing.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE PARAGRAPH

A strong paragraph will have a clear focus, usually at the start and in the form of a topic sentence. A topic sentence is a direct and limited statement that announces exactly what the paragraph will discuss. Using a topic sentence helps readers understand the point of a paragraph and helps writers stay focused too. While not every paragraph needs an explicit topic sentence, every paragraph needs a clear focus, and for many writers using a topic sentence is the best approach.

With the exception of introductory and concluding paragraphs, paragraphs found in the body of an essay, or body paragraphs, work to develop individual points within their respective paragraphs, and they also work to support the larger point of the essay as communicated in the thesis. Body paragraphs will have content that supports the point of the paragraph as well as language that connects the paragraph to other ideas in the essay, particularly the dominant idea of the thesis, so the content of the essay is unified around a central idea.

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THE QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPH

An effective paragraph will have unity, coherence, and development. Unity means that all of the content in the paragraph belongs; each sentence provides information that relates to the established focus of the paragraph. Coherence refers to content that is organized in a way that is easy to understand. One sentence logically leads to the next sentence, and the writer has provided transitions and guidewords to make the movement fluid for the reader and the different ideas come together cohesively. Lastly, development speaks to the idea of sustaining the writing and providing enough

supporting details, so the point of the paragraph is clearly communicated to an audience. While paragraph length can vary, effective paragraphs contain enough substantive content that readers do not have lingering questions.

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EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH

Read the sample paragraph carefully and ask the following questions about how it's constructed:

- Is the topic sentence clear and limited in focus?
- Does the content of the paragraph support the idea expressed in the topic sentence?
- Does the paragraph make a point?
- Does the paragraph have language that connects it to a larger idea or previous paragraphs?
- Is the content unified and easy to follow? Is the idea developed sufficiently for an audience?

Sample

> While abstinence may be the only sure-fire contraceptive, the effectiveness of this birth control method is questionable. The teen pregnancy rate in the United States had been steadily declining from the late 1940's up until 2004 when there was a dramatic increase (Belanger, 2007). In fact, the United States now has the highest teen pregnancy rate of any industrialized country in the world (Marquis, 2009). Beginning in 2001, school systems only taught the federally funded "Abstinence-only" curriculum, but experts now agree and recommend that parents talk to their teens early and often not only about sex, but about all kinds of risky behavior. Behavioral psychologists report that teens have always experimented with risky behavior and will continue to do so (Belanger, 2007), which raises questions about the effectiveness of abstinence. Indeed, teens need science and fact-based education about safe sex practices in order to take the appropriate precautions when engaging in risky behavior. Abstinence works, but only if teens avoid risky behavior, which the evidence suggests is unlikely.

The topic sentence begins the paragraph and asserts that the effectiveness of abstinence as a birth control method is questionable. Notice how the content that follows all works to support the controlling idea of the topic sentence, providing evidence and commentary that create doubt about the effectiveness of abstinence? The writing is sustained and connects teenage sexual activity with the idea of risky behavior and whether or not abstinence or information will best protect teens. The content of the paragraph is substantive and relates to the idea expressed in the topic sentence and thus the paragraph has a sense of completeness.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPH

Limit the Focus to One Distinct Idea

A paragraph is a group of sentences that work together to develop a single idea. To maintain a tight focus, it is important that you compose an effective topic sentence. An effective topic sentence establishes a subject, asserts a controlling idea, and suggests a limited scope of development. In the

example, *"This class is full of aspiring writers,"* what is the subject? Clearly, the subject is **class**. So what statement does the sentence make about its subject? The sentence asserts that the class is *full of aspiring writers.* This part of the topic sentence is your controlling idea – it is what gets developed in the paragraph. Is the scope of the controlling idea limited enough for a single paragraph? Yes, since the controlling idea is limited to a particular class and a specific characteristic of that class, it seems reasonable to develop that idea in a single paragraph.

Develop Paragraphs With Your Audience and Point in Mind

A paragraph has no set length requirement. A paragraph can range from one sentence (even one word!) to half a page or more. What you need to be concerned with is developing your ideas thoroughly and specifically so that your audience fully understands what you are trying to say. When the point is sufficiently developed, end the paragraph. In this way, some paragraphs may require less development and other paragraphs more depending on the point and the purpose of the writing (to persuade, for example, may require more development than a paper that informs). As a way to understand the idea of developing your thoughts fully, think about this:

Imagine it is late July in New Orleans. If I were to state that it is snowing outside, would you believe me? Probably not. After all, it is July in New Orleans, and the likelihood of snow is nil. But even beyond this fact, a statement with no proof, no development, is just an assertion. And an assertion is incomplete in the sense that it lacks sustained development. But what if after I said it's snowing out (remember, it's July in New Orleans!), I said, "I can see my next door neighbor, Mr. Hibble, a slight man in his 70s, out in his driveway right now, shoveling. He's wearing a light yellow hat and tan gloves. And here comes the snow plow – will you listen to that clatter!" if I said all of that, you would be convinced, right? How could you not be?

The key to the success of this content is that the writer has established his credibility as an authority on the subject by using concrete information that supports the claim that it is snowing in New Orleans in July. Readers see an elderly man wearing a yellow hat and tan gloves, shoveling snow in his driveway as the plow truck clangs along the street. Without such specific information, the writer's credibility would be in question and readers would be less convinced by the claim.

While the above example is an exaggeration, the point should be clear: You need to take your time and develop your points so that they make sense to someone else, an audience. You need to sustain the writing and *expand upon the controlling idea expressed in the topic sentence*; depending on your purpose, you will need to use examples, details, facts, quotes, statistics, and testimony to give meaning to your ideas.

Another Example

Let's examine a paragraph from a persuasive research-based paper. A paper with this purpose will have a primary audience that does not share the view the paper espouses, so the writer will need to tailor the message to this particular group of readers. As you read the paragraph, think about the limited scope of the paragraph and the ways in which the writer presents information with the audience and purpose in mind.

> Some parents are losing sight of why their children play sports—and that, to the children, is what they are doing: "playing." Many parents come to their child's practice or

> game with their own agenda of win, win, win at all costs. The team winning, the points scored, who is the big scorer: these issues have replaced fun and sportsmanship for these parents. According to Sachs (2000), "These parents expect perfection from their children, the coaches and the referees" (p. 62). Playing sports is no longer for the kids. Maybe Mom or Dad were promising athletes in their youth and for one reason or another were robbed of their hopes and are pinning all of their own wants, needs, wishes, and "what ifs" on their child or children (Kehe, 2000). The major problem seems to be that these parents are not considering what the children want. According to a "Kidthink" survey conducted by Jerry Kirshenbaum (1993) for Sports Illustrated, the kids want things like "unlimited free throws until they miss in basketball, everyone having a turn to play, less violence in hockey, using their hands in soccer, and to have fun" (p. 12). Perhaps the parents should listen to the children on this issue.

What you should notice initially is the limited focus of the paragraph (see above) established with the first sentence. The topic sentence states the paragraph will develop the idea that *parents have lost sight of why their children play sports*. Since the writer's purpose is to persuade readers, evidence will need to be used to support the writer's contention. To this end, the writer has used a variety of content: a direct quote, a paraphrase, and another direct quote. In addition, the writer includes personal thoughts on the issue in between the evidence presented. What the writer is trying to accomplish in the paragraph is clear as the language and evidence reflect a persuasive purpose. Lastly, the writer sustains the writing and offers enough compelling development to get readers thinking and to take what the writer has to say seriously.

Use Various Rhetorical Modes for Developing and Organizing Paragraphs

Rhetorical modes refer to the patterns of development available to the writer. In other words, modes are the particular manner in which we develop our thoughts, and quite typically the mode comes to us naturally depending on what we are trying to accomplish. If you are talking to an auto mechanic about a problem with your car, you are describing. If you are telling a story about your seven-year-old daughter, you are narrating. If you are talking about the types of books you like to read, you use examples. Whatever it is you are trying to convey, you will do so with one or more patterns of development, or rhetorical modes.

Types of modes include **description, narration, compare and contrast, example, definition, cause and effect, analogy, and analysis**. Usually the focus of the paragraph lends itself to the use of one primary mode, but even so, most paragraphs utilize more than one pattern of development. For example, if you are taking a United States history course, you may be asked to compare and contrast the South before and after the Civil War. While the predominant rhetorical mode used in paragraphs will be compare and contrast, you will also probably use examples, include description, and offer analysis as you compare the old South to the new South.

Rhetorical modes help writers think about their topic and organize their ideas. These rhetorical modes also show writers the options available to them when composing paragraphs.

When to Begin a New Paragraph

Paragraph length is dictated first by content and purpose. A new paragraph signals a pause in thought and a change in topic, directing readers to anticipate what is to follow or allowing them a moment to digest the material in the preceding paragraph. Reasons to begin a new paragraph include

- beginning a new idea,
- emphasizing a particular point,
- changing speakers in dialogue,
- allowing readers to pause, and
- breaking up lengthy text, usually moving to a subtopic.

Use Transitions and Signal Words

A paragraph needs to be developed in a logical manner, and readers need to be guided through that development. As a writer, you need to help your readers by using transitional expressions and other appropriate words to guide them through the development of the paragraph. Transitional expressions function like glue: They hold a piece of writing together and give it order. Without such expressions, a paragraph would be a jumbled mess.

Paragraph Length

Paragraphs as long as a page or more and often lack a well-defined focus, and more often, they do not allow readers an opportunity to assimilate one point before another point is made. Long paragraphs can either be divided at a natural break or reorganized into two or more separate but more focused paragraphs.

By contrast, short paragraphs make it appear as if ideas are not fully developed and often leave the reader craving more information. Think carefully of the needs of your audience and the purpose for the writing, and develop each point accordingly For example, a paper with a persuasive purpose written for an audience that does not share the writer's view, may need more development in each paragraph in order to present a convincing case. Depending on your audience and purpose, you may need to include more or less information. Ideally, paragraph lengths should invite readers in, neither seeming too daunting to read through nor appearing incomplete.

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PIE METHOD OF PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

One good way to go about developing paragraphs is to use the PIE method: Make a strong **point** as expressed in the topic sentence or claim statement; **illustrate** the point with supporting details and evidence; then **explain** how the evidence supports the point of the paragraph and relates to the thesis. Take a look at the example below and use this color code to understand the organization:

P - Point
I - Illustrate
E – Explain

> Despite preservation efforts, more and more barns are in jeopardy, a reflection not only of economics but also of the fading family farm. To make matters worse, razing an old barn is often easier than trying to save it. Many people who own property with an unused barn are reluctant to spend money to keep the building standing, and if the barn is already in rough shape, it is usually neglected until it either falls down or is taken down permanently. Preservationists, however, say that in the majority of cases, most ailing barns simply need to

be stabilized by replacing the sills around the perimeter of the structure. But even this is too costly for something that barn owners consider functionally obsolete. Despite the many practical uses of the space such as using them as big garages, barns tend to be taken down rather than repaired, and even when a barn owner looks into the cost of repairs, most carpenters who make a livelihood in construction would not have the skills nor the tools and equipment to complete barn preservation work.

Take-Aways for Writing an Effective Paragraph

- Limit the focus to one distinct idea
- Develop paragraphs with your audience and point in mind
- Consider various rhetorical modes for developing and organizing paragraphs
- Use transitions and guidewords
- Use the PIE method of paragraph development

When Revising Paragraphs, Consider the Following Questions

- What is the point?
- What should readers understand after reading the paragraph?
- Is the topic sentence clear and limited?
- Do all of the supporting details belong?
- Will readers understand the relationship of the supporting details to the point of the paragraph and the larger point of the essay?
- Is the content organized in a logical, easy-to-understand manner?
- Is the development sufficient for the audience and purpose?
- Does anything need to be added or deleted?

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