

Chapter 4 Second Lecture

Paragraph Unity and Coherence

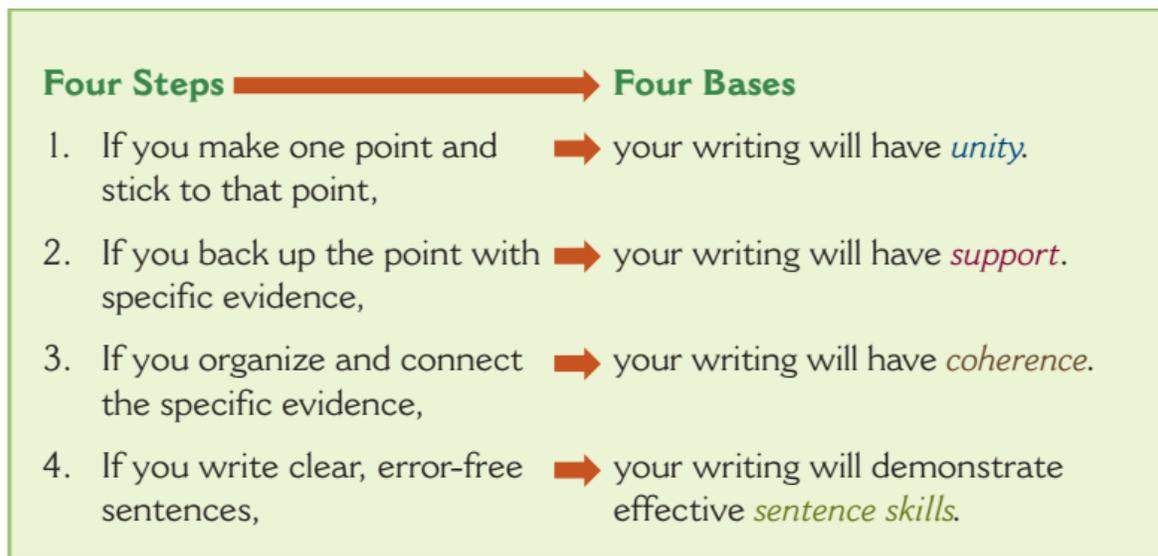
We learned that a writer to form a good written text , he needs good organization:

- topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence

He also needs to be sure that his written text contains three characteristics:

- unity
- coherence
- cohesion

There are four main bases of a good writing:



Base 1: Unity

The first characteristic of an effective paragraph is unity, which means that unity in writing is the connection of all ideas to a single topic. In a written text , all ideas should relate to the thesis statement or topic sentence , and the supporting ideas should relate to the topic sentence. To achieve unity is to have all the details in your paper related to the single point expressed in the topic sentence, the first sentence.

Each time you think of something to put in, ask yourself whether it relates (it has a connection) to your main point. If it does not, leave it out. For example, if you were writing about a certain job as the worst job you ever had and then spent a couple of sentences talking about the interesting people you met there, you would be missing the first and most essential base of good writing

The following paragraph contains two sentences that are off target— sentences that do not support the opening point—and so the paragraph is not unified. In the

interest of paragraph unity, such sentences must be **omitted**. Cross out the off-target sentences and write the numbers of those sentences in the spaces provided.

Example:

Paragraph Lacking Unity

(1)There were several reasons for the destruction of the English religious houses. (2)Moral, political and financial considerations forced Henry to evict the monks. (3)When he did that, the people rebelled and organized pilgrims' groups to save the monasteries. (4)Their efforts failed, and many religious houses were sold or dismantled. (5)Beautiful churches were destroyed. (6)Many great medieval manuscripts were lost forever.

Comment In the above paragraph, sentences (1) and (2) suggest that the writer is going to tell the readers the reasons for destroying the English monasteries. Instead of discussing the reasons why the English monasteries were destroyed, the writer jumps into a description of the people's reaction to Henry's action (sentence 3) and the consequences of that reaction (sentence 4, 5 and 6). These sentences don't contain ideas relevant to the topic sentence at all. If the writer had concentrated on the central idea in the opening sentence and had kept focus on that idea, the paragraph could be expanded as follows, and it would become a unified paragraph.

(1)There are several reasons for the destruction of the English religious houses. (2)The official reason given by king Henry was morality: the monks, he claimed, were acting immorally by accumulating wealth at the expense of the poor. (3)However, there were political reasons as well.(4)Thomas Cromwell, the new vicar-general, was opposed to pilgrimages, and the worship of relics, and Henry didn't wish to see his new government split into factions. (5)But the chief reason for the action was financial. (6)The resources of the crown were no longer sufficient to meet the cost of government and the expenses of Henry's overseas campaigns.

The above paragraph is unified because all major supporting sentences 2, 3 and 5 are relevant and related to the topic sentence (the first sentence). Sentences 4 and 6 are minor supporting sentences which give additional details to sentences 3 and 5 respectively.

Checking for Unity

To check a paragraph for unity, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is there a clear, single point in the first sentence of the paragraph?
2. Does all the evidence support the opening point?

Base 2: Support

Understanding Support

The following paragraphs were written on the topic “A Quality of Some Person You Know.” Both are unified, but one communicates more clearly and effectively. Which one, and why?

Paragraph A: My Quick-Tempered Father

My father is easily angered by normal everyday mistakes. For example, one day my father told me to wash the car and cut the grass. I did not hear exactly what he said, and so I asked him to repeat it. Then he became hysterical and shouted, “Can’t you hear?” Another time he asked my mother to go to the store and buy groceries with a fifty-dollar bill, and he told her to spend no more than twenty dollars. She spent twenty-two dollars. As soon as he found out, he immediately took the change from her and told her not to go anywhere else for him; he did not speak to her the rest of the day. My father even gives my older brothers a hard time with his irritable moods. One day he told them to be home from their dates by midnight; they came home at 12:15. He informed them that they were grounded for three weeks. To my father, making a simple mistake is like committing a crime.

Paragraph B: My Generous Grandfather

My grandfather is the most generous person I know. He gave up a life of his own in order to give his children everything they wanted. Not only did he give up many years of his life to raise his children properly, but he is now sacrificing many more years to his grandchildren. His generosity is also evident in his relationship with his neighbors, his friends, and the members of his church. He has been responsible for many good deeds and has always been there to help all the people around him in times of trouble. Everyone knows that he will gladly lend a helping

hand. He is so generous that you almost have to feel sorry for him. If one day he suddenly became selfish, it would be earthshaking. That's my grandfather.

EXPLANATION: Paragraph A is more effective, because it offers specific examples that show us the father in action. We see for ourselves why the writer describes the father as quick-tempered. Paragraph B, on the other hand, gives us no specific evidence. The writer of paragraph B tells us repeatedly that the grandfather is generous but never shows us examples of that generosity. Just how, for instance, did the grandfather sacrifice his life for his children and grandchildren? Did he hold two jobs so that his son could go to college, or so that his daughter could have her own car? Does he give up time with his wife and friends to travel every day to his daughter's house to babysit, go to the store, and help with the dishes? Does he wear threadbare suits and coats and eat frozen dinners and other inexpensive meals (with no desserts) so that he can give money to his children and toys to his grandchildren? We want to see and judge for ourselves whether the writer is making a valid point about the grandfather, but without specific details we cannot do so. In fact, we have almost no picture of him at all.

Checking for Support

To check a paragraph for support, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is there *specific* evidence to support the opening point?
2. Is there *enough* specific evidence?

Exercise: Being on TV

1 People act a little strangely when a television camera comes their way. 2 Some people behave as if a crazy puppeteer were pulling their strings. 3 Their arms jerk wildly about, and they begin jumping up and down for no apparent reason. 4 Often they accompany their body movements with loud screams, squeals, and yelps. 5 Another group of people engage in an activity known as the cover-up. 6 They will be calmly watching a sports game or other televised event when they realize the camera is focused on them. 7 The camera operator can't resist zooming in for a close-up of these people. 8 Then there are those who practice their funny faces on the unsuspecting public. 9 They take advantage of the television time to show off their talents, hoping to get that big break that will carry them to stardom. 10 Finally, there are those who pretend they are above reacting for the camera. 11 They wipe an

expression from their faces and appear to be interested in something else. ¹²Yet if the camera stays on them long enough, they will slyly check to see if they are still being watched. ¹³Everybody's behavior seems to be slightly strange in front of a TV camera.

Question: The first spot where supporting details are needed occurs after sentence number ----- . The second spot occurs after sentence number ----- .

Base 3: Coherence

Understanding Coherence

Another element of a good paragraph is coherence. The Latin verb *cohere* means "hold together." For coherence in writing, the sentences must hold together; that is, the movement from one sentence to the next must be logical and smooth. There must be no sudden jumps. Each sentence should flow smoothly into the next one. The key techniques for trying material together are choosing a clear method of organization (such as time order or emphatic order) and using transitions and other connecting words as signposts.

The following two paragraphs were written on the topic "The Best or Worst Job You Ever Had." Both are unified and both are supported. However, one communicates more clearly and effectively. Which one, and why?

Paragraph A : Pantry Helper

My worst job was as a pantry helper in one of San Diego's well-known restaurants. I had an assistant from three to six in the afternoon who did little but stand around and eat the whole time she was there. She would listen for the sound of the back door opening, which was a sure sign the boss was coming in. The boss would testily say to me, "You've got a lot of things to do here, Alice. Try to get a move on." I would come in at two o'clock to relieve the woman on the morning shift. If her day was busy, that meant I would have to prepare salads, slice meat and cheese, and so on. Orders for sandwiches and cold platters would come in and have to be prepared. The worst thing about the job was that the heat storeroom to get some supplies, and one of the waitresses would tell me she wanted a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich on white toast. I would put the toast in and head for the supply room, and a waitress would holler out that her customer was in a hurry. Green flies would come in through the torn screen in the kitchen window and sting me. I was getting paid only \$5.05 an hour. At five o'clock, when the dinner rush began, I would

be dead tired. Roaches scurried in all directions whenever I moved a box or picked up a head of lettuce to cut.

Paragraph B:

My Worst Job

The worst job I ever had was as a waiter at the Westside Inn. First of all, many of the people I waited on were rude. When a baked potato was hard inside or a salad was flat or their steak wasn't just the way they wanted it, they blamed me, rather than the kitchen. Or they would ask me to light their cigarettes, or chase flies from their tables, or even take their children to the bathroom. Also, I had to contend not only with the customers but with the kitchen staff as well. The cooks and bus-boys were often undependable and surly. If I didn't treat them just right, I would wind up having to apologize to customers because their meals came late or their water glasses weren't filled. Another reason I didn't like the job was that I was always moving. Because of the constant line at the door, as soon as one group left, another would take its place. I usually had only a twenty-minute lunch break and another ten-minute break in almost nine hours of work. I think I could have put up with the job if I had been able to pause and rest more often. The last and most important reason I hated the job was my boss. She played favorites, giving some of the waiters and waitresses the best-tipping repeat customers and preferences on holidays. She would hover around during my break to make sure I didn't take a second more than the allotted time. And even when I helped out by working through a break, she never had an appreciative word but would just tell me not to be late for work the next day.

EXPLANATION:

Paragraph B is more effective because the material is organized clearly and logically. Using emphatic order, the writer gives us a list of four reasons why the job was so bad: rude customers, an unreliable kitchen staff, constant motion, and—most of all—an unfair boss. Further, the writer includes transitional words that act as signposts, making movement from one idea to the next easy to follow. The major transitions are (*First of all, Also, Another reason, and The last and most important reason*).

While paragraph A is unified and supported, the writer does not have any clear and consistent way of organizing the material. Partly, emphatic order is used, but this is not made clear by transitions or by saving the most important reason for last.

Partly, time order is used, but it moves inconsistently from two to seven to five o'clock.

In a coherent paragraph, each sentence relates clearly to the topic sentence or controlling idea, but there is more to coherence than this. If a paragraph is coherent, each sentence flows smoothly into the next without obvious shifts or jumps. A coherent paragraph also highlights the ties between old and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments clear to the reader. Along with the smooth flow of sentences, a paragraph's coherence may also be related to its length. If you have written a very long paragraph, one that fills a double spaced typed page, for example, you should check it carefully to see if it contains more than one controlling idea. If it does, you should start a new paragraph where the original paragraph wanders from its controlling idea. On the other hand, if a paragraph is very short (only one or two sentences, perhaps), you may need to develop its controlling idea more thoroughly, or combine it with another paragraph. A number of other techniques that you can use to establish coherence in paragraphs are described below.

1-Repeat key words or phrases.

Particularly in paragraphs in which you define or identify an important idea or theory, be consistent in how you refer to it. This consistency and repetition will bind the paragraph together and help the reader understand your definition or description

2-Create parallel structures.

Parallel structures are created by constructing two or more phrases or sentences that have the same grammatical structure and use the same parts of speech. By creating parallel structures, you make your sentences clearer and easier to read. In addition, repeating a pattern in a series of consecutive sentences helps your reader see the connections between ideas. In the paragraph above about the worst job several sentences in the body of the paragraph have been constructed in a parallel way. The parallel structures help the reader see that the paragraph is organized as a set of examples of a general statement.

3-Be consistent in point of view, verb tense, and number.

Consistency in point of view, verb tense, and number are subtle but important aspects of coherence. If you shift from the more personal *you* to the impersonal *one*, from past to present tense, or from *a man* to *they*, for example, you make your

paragraph less coherent. Such inconsistencies can also confuse your reader and make your argument more difficult to follow.

4-Use transition words or phrases between sentences and between paragraphs.

Transitional expressions emphasize the relationships between ideas, so they help readers follow your train of thought or see connections that they might otherwise miss or misunderstand.

Checking for Coherence

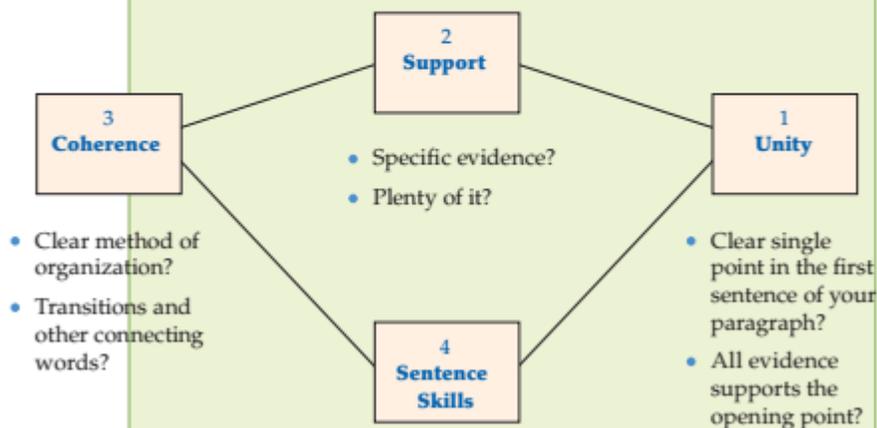
To check a paragraph for coherence, ask yourself these questions:

1. Does the paragraph have a clear method of organization?
2. Are transitions and other connecting words used to tie the material together?

Checking for Sentence Skills

Sentence skills and the other bases of effective writing are summarized in the following chart and on the inside back cover of the book.

A Summary of the Four Bases of Effective Writing



- Correct verb forms?
- Subject and verb agreement?
- Faulty parallelism and faulty modifiers eliminated?

- Capital letters used correctly?
- Punctuation marks where needed?
- Correct paper format?
- Effective word choices?
- Possible spelling errors checked?



Exercise:

1 My hometown is famous for several amazing natural features. 2 First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. 3 On either side of this river, which is 175 feet wide, are many shady willow trees which have long branches that can move gracefully in the wind. 4 In autumn the leaves of these trees fall and cover the riverbanks like golden snow. 5 Second, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep. 6 Even though it is steep, climbing this hill is not dangerous, because there are some firm rocks along the sides that can be used as stairs. 7 There are no trees around this hill, so it stands clearly against the sky and can be seen from many miles away. 8 If you visit Wheaton Hill you should try the nice restaurant at Wheaton Hill hotel. 9 The third amazing feature is the Big Old Tree. 10 This tree stands two hundred feet tall and

is probably about six hundred years old. **11** These three landmarks are truly amazing and make my hometown a famous place.

Paragraph Analysis

- The topic sentence is:
- Irrelevant sentence:
- The paragraph also shows coherence by the use of
 - Parallel constructions:
 - Pronouns:
 - Synonyms: natural features =
 - Paraphrasing of phrase/sentence:
 - Repetition of key words:
 - Transitional words:
- Methods of development/sentence organization used:(more than one method can be found in the paragraph)
 - Examples/illustrations: -
 - Comparison and contrast:
 - Causes and reasons: **F S S**
 - Descriptions or details of each landmark
 - Logical divisions:

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