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# **Focus on Language**

This book also focuses on sharpening your language skills, along with making you a good writer. Special attention has been paid to:

## **Improving Style**

Informal, Neutral and Formal Language, Hedging.

Inversion with Adverbs of Place, Using Concise Language/Avoiding Wordiness.

Avoiding Vague Language, Nominalization.

Using Gender-Neutral Language, Avoiding Cliches, Avoiding Illogical Shifts in Subject.

Person and Number, Avoiding Illogical Shifts in Tense, Discourse and Voice.

## **Improving Sentence Skills**

Writing Simple, Achieving Sentence Variety, Parallel Structures.

Adverb Clauses of Comparison and Contrast, Clauses of Reason and Result.

Correcting Run-ons, Comma Splices and Sentence Fragments, Correcting Misplaced/Dangling Modifiers.

Adjective Clauses, Noun Clauses, Cleft Sentences.

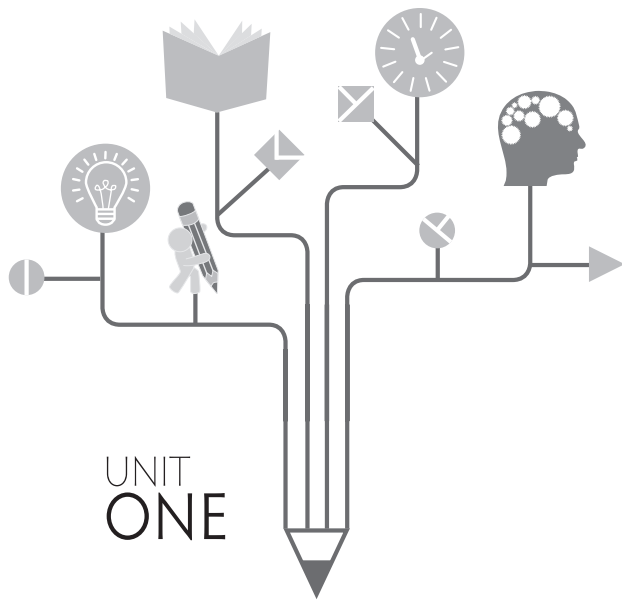
## **Punctuation**

Punctuating Compound and Complex Sentences, Sentences with Introductory Phrases.

Punctuating Parallel Structures, Time Clauses, Adverb Clauses of Comparison and Contrast.

Clauses of Reason and Result, Punctuating Sentences with Coordinating and Subordinating Conjunctions.

Punctuating Present and Past Participle Modifiers, Adjective Clauses, Noun Clauses and Punctuating Titles.



## PART ONE

# From Paragraph to Essay

## UNIT ONE

# The Paragraph



## Paragraph Focus

### *What Is a Paragraph?*

A paragraph is a group of sentences that develop one main idea. The *length* of a paragraph ranges from 7 to 15 sentences. The *length* of a standard paragraph in an exam essay is 5–8 sentences.

### *How to Organize a Paragraph?*

The paragraph consists of a topic sentence, supporting ideas and a concluding sentence. The main requirements for a paragraph are the following:

- unity
- support
- coherence (a clear principle of organization such as time order, spatial order, emphatic order and linking of ideas by using transitional words and expressions)
- language skills (correct sentence structure and appropriate style)

Elements of paragraph structure are illustrated in the next page.

## KEY POINTS

### PARAGRAPH FOCUS

- ★ defining a paragraph
- ★ developing and organizing ideas
- ★ topic sentence
- ★ support
- ★ unity
- ★ coherence
- ★ paragraph analysis and writing practice

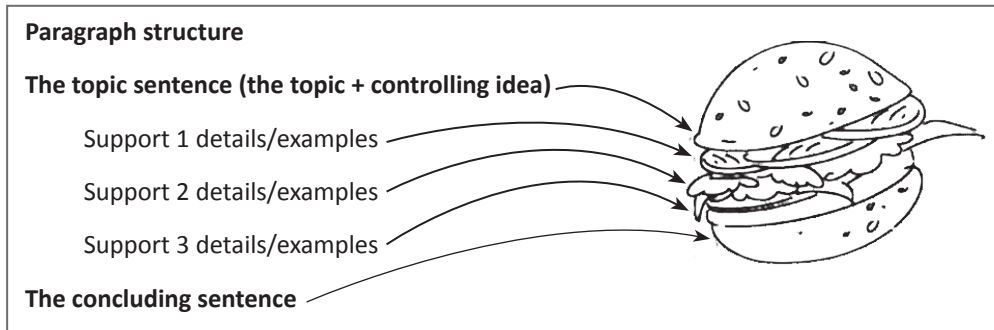
### LANGUAGE FOCUS

- ★ improving style: informal, neutral and formal language
- ★ improving sentence skills: writing simple, compound and complex sentences
- ★ punctuating compound and complex sentences

### EVALUATION FOCUS

- ★ paragraph evaluation
- ★ self-evaluation on the Unit

TABLE 1.1 Paragraph Structure



## The Topic Sentence

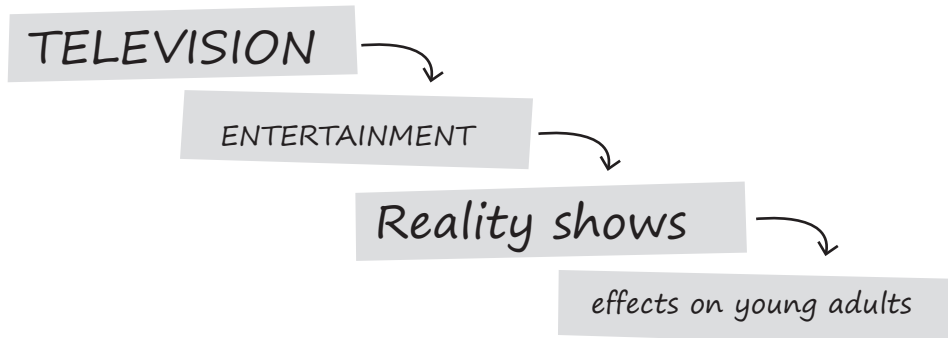
- As illustrated in the visual representation, a paragraph consists of the following components:
  - the introductory/topic sentence (the top layer)
  - supporting ideas and specific details/examples (the middle layer, the filling)
  - the concluding sentence (the bottom layer).
- The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph. The topic sentence consists of two parts: the **topic** and (2) the **controlling idea**. The controlling idea expresses the focus of a paragraph and the writer's idea or attitude about the topic. All sentences in a paragraph should relate to and develop the controlling idea. The relationship between the topic and the controlling idea is provided in the examples below:

TOPIC	CONTROLLING IDEA
<u>Studying in a foreign country</u>	can be a <i>challenging experience</i> .

CONTROLLING IDEA	TOPIC
<i>There are several reasons why I like</i>	<u>my native town</u> .

- There are several stages in writing the topic sentence:
  - brainstorming
  - narrowing the topic (choosing the focus/attitude to the topic)
  - formulating the topic sentence

An example of narrowing down the topic is provided below.





1. Identify the topic and the controlling idea in the following sentences.

- a. Travelling is my favourite pastime.
- b. The kitchen space has varied meanings in different cultures.
- c. Working as a private tutor was the worst job I have ever had.
- d. Television commercials can have negative effects on children.
- e. Life in a small town has several advantages for me.

2. Narrow down the following topics. Choose the controlling idea and write the topic sentence for each of the topics.

a. .... Exams .....

.....  
 .....

Topic sentence (topic+controlling idea):

.....

b. .... The Internet .....

.....  
 .....

Topic sentence (topic+controlling idea):

.....

c. .... Friends .....

.....  
 .....

Topic sentence (topic+controlling idea):

.....



## Support

Supporting sentences develop the topic by directly relating to the controlling idea. Support includes (1) **supporting ideas** and (2) **specific details** such as facts/arguments, statistics, data, examples, illustrations, reasons and quotations. The organization of supporting ideas and specific details is illustrated in the following example.

### Topic: An Ideal Holiday Place

**Supporting idea 1** : Perfect geographical location

Specific detail : green scenery

Specific detail : pleasant weather

**Supporting idea 2** : Comfortable hotel

Specific detail : centrally located

Specific detail : access to free wi-fi and free breakfast

**Supporting idea 3** : Places of interest

Specific detail : museums and art galleries

Specific detail : historical monuments

### *Making Support Specific*

To make writing effective, support has to be specific as in the examples below.

**Table 1.2** Writing Specific Support Sentences

How to make support specific	Examples
Use exact names/terms	He is reading <u>a book</u> . (general) He is reading <u>a history textbook</u> . (specific)
Use descriptive words (modifiers before nouns)	She met a <u>strange</u> man. (general) She met a man <u>wearing a purple jacket, shiny green shoes and a turban</u> . (specific)
Use of words that relate to sense perceptions (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch)	In our culture, it is more appropriate to do <u>a proper namaskar</u> . (general) In our culture, it is more appropriate to <u>bow slightly with the namaskar</u> as a sign of humility rather than doing a <u>namaskar</u> with the head held high. (specific)
Use of lively verbs	The children <u>misbehaved</u> during a sightseeing tour. (general) The children were <u>shouting, pushing and kicking each other</u> during a sightseeing tour. (specific)

## The Concluding Sentence

The concluding sentence is the last sentence in a paragraph. Its function is to remind the reader of the focus of the paragraph. This can be done in two ways:

- by providing a hindsight summary of the main ideas developed in the paragraph
- by rephrasing the topic sentence.



3. Analyse the following paragraph and identify the supporting ideas and specific details. Complete the provided outline.

### **Memories of my Grandmother**

There are several things that I remember about my grandmother. The first thing that I remember is her ability to knit. On winter evenings, she would sit at the wooden armchair and knit wonderful sweaters with vivid colours and complex designs which she would later exhibit in handloom fairs. The time when she started teaching me how to knit after I turned seven lingers in my memory. When I learned to knit intricate patterns myself, I would spend at least five hours a day knitting because it was only at grandmother's living room that I could practice the art. Another thing that I remember about my grandmother is her love for flowers. She had at least six or seven small pots of flowers that were scattered all over her well-kept terrace garden. She would ask my sister and me to decorate the flower pots and remove the old ones, to water them and sometimes to decorate them with small rocks and sea-shells. My most precious memories are about a small garden in the apartment-block where my grandmother helped my sister and me to plant and grow green peas, our favourite vegetable. It was great fun to take care of the green peas, to weed the pea beds, to water them and to pick the mature pea pods. After we picked the peas, our grandmother would make dozens of peas *kachoris*, and we would eat them with freshly made potato curry. At present, the things that my grandmother taught me have become a dear part of my life.

**Topic sentence**

**Supporting idea 1** .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Supporting idea 2** .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Supporting idea 3** .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Concluding sentence** .....

4. Identify the type of the concluding sentence in the paragraph above and write an alternative type of the concluding sentence.

Your version of the concluding sentence: .....

.....



## Unity

A paragraph is **unified** when all sentences relate to the main idea expressed in the **topic sentence** (consisting of the topic + controlling idea). To achieve unity:

- write an effective outline/plan (written in short noun phrases)
- omit off-topic or irrelevant sentences.



### 5. Evaluate the following outline for unity and write the concluding sentence.

**Topic Sentence:** In contemporary society, young people's book reading habits have changed in several ways.

**Support 1:** decreasing interest in reading print books

**Support 2:** increasing popularity of e-books

**Support 3:** reading book summaries instead of full books

**Support 4:** influence of television

**Concluding sentence:** .....

### 6. Use the following template to make an outline of a paragraph on one of the following topics:

- a. Reasons for studying the night before a test
- b. The main outcomes of globalization
- c. Should distance learning replace the classroom?

**Topic sentence:** .....

**Supporting idea 1** .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Supporting idea 2**.....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Supporting idea 3**.....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Concluding sentence** .....

## Coherence

Coherence is arrangement of ideas into a logical order. To achieve coherence:

- arrange ideas in logical order going from general to specific



- use transitions
- use verbal bridges
- use clear method of organization

### Logical ordering of ideas

The text is logically ordered when the movement from one sentence to the next is logical and smooth. There should be no unexpected illogical leaps, and each sentence should flow smoothly into the next one.

### Use of transitions

Transition signals ‘are like traffic signs.’ They tell the reader about the movement and direction of the argument. The reader is informed whether a **similar idea** follows (e.g. *similarly, and, in addition*), an **opposite idea** is introduced (e.g. *on the other hand, but, in contrast*), an **example** is provided (e.g. *for example, to illustrate*), **results/effects** are discussed (e.g. *therefore, as a result, thus*) or **conclusion** is drawn (e.g. *in conclusion, to sum up*). Transitional words and expressions are used to link ideas **within** a paragraph and **between** paragraphs in a longer piece of writing. Transitions are classified by their **function**. Some **types** of transitions include the following:

**Table 1.3** Making Transitions in Paragraphs

<b>To introduce and add information</b>	also, and, besides, first, in addition, finally, furthermore, moreover, next, second, etc.
<b>To give examples/support/emphasis</b>	in other words, to put it differently, as an illustration, in this case, for this reason, another key point, on the positive/negative side, truly, certainly, in particular, for instance, to enumerate, in fact
<b>To conclude/summarize/restate</b>	all things considered, as shown above, in the long run, given these points, as has been noted, in summary, in conclusion, to sum up, on the whole, in either case, all in all, obviously, ultimately, definitely



**NB:** More types of transitions will be provided in the subsequent chapters on different essay types.



7. Search the Internet to find other types of transitional words and expressions (e.g. for contrast- comparison, cause-effect or chronological order). Write down four types other than those in the table above and five examples for each of the types in the provided worksheet.

Type .....	Type .....
Examples:	Examples:
1 .....	1 .....
2 .....	2 .....

3 .....  
4 .....  
5 .....

Type .....

Examples:

1 .....  
2 .....  
3 .....  
4 .....  
5 .....

3 .....  
5 .....  
5 .....

Type .....

Examples:

1 .....  
2 .....  
3 .....  
5 .....  
5 .....

8. Read the following paragraph. As you read, underline transitional words and expressions. Identify their type.

### **Value of Social Connections in the Age of Globalization**

Nowadays, when people live in the world that is strongly affected by globalization, they look for something that could help them to stay more coherent and closer to each other. One of the things that help to achieve this aim is belonging to various groups. Usually such groups not only provide people with a feeling of social connectedness but also help to save the cultural heritage of a country. For example, almost every college has dance and song or performing art societies. These groups unite young people who share similar ideas and visions about the future of their country and its culture. Another way to stay related to others is participation in various festivals. Such festivals bring together people who have the same taste in music or other forms of entertainment. To illustrate, more than 1,000 people attended a jazz festival in my small Himalayan town—Darjeeling—where global and local tendencies in music and their influence on national culture and fans could be observed. To sum up, there are many ways for people to stay close. They just need to find what suits them best.

#### *Use of verbal bridges*

Besides transitions, other means that help to connect ideas in the text are the following:

- repetition of key words
- use of synonyms
- use of pronouns.

#### *Clear method of organization*

To achieve coherence, supporting ideas have to be organized using one the following principles:

- emphatic order (from the least important to the most important idea or vice versa)
- time order (chronological presentation of events)
- spatial order (organizing information in order of space or location).

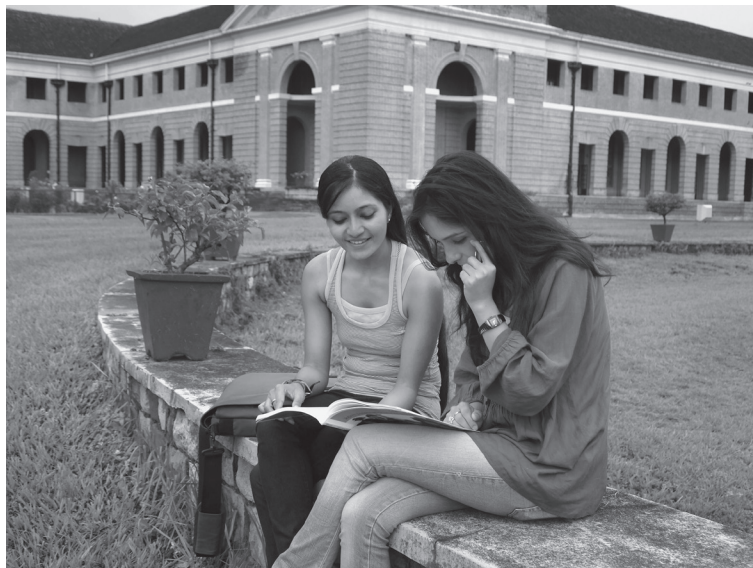


9. Identify verbal bridges and the method of organization in the paragraphs in Activities 3 and 8.

10. Read the following paragraph. Analyse the paragraph in terms of unity and coherence. Delete the off-topic sentences and rewrite the paragraph adding transitional words and expressions to achieve unity and coherence. The sentences are numbered for convenience.

### Life in a University

(1) There are several reasons why I like studying at my university. (2) It is the best university in the area. (3) Many students from other states choose to study there, and many visiting professors come to lecture at my university. (4) The university offers a flexible credit-based programme which allows students to have a part-time job. (5) I work as a language teacher to pay for my studies. (6) As I receive additional income, I can afford both to study and travel. (7) My best friend likes travelling very much. (8) She has visited the Andaman, Kerala, Odisha and Arunachal Pradesh. (9) She is very fond of regional cuisines. (10) My best friend studies at the same university, and we often study for exams together. (11) She lives in the same hostel, and she has a dance class twice a week. (12) After she graduates, my friend wants to work in the social sector for a year. (13) My friend and I are members of the Student Board and attend student meetings together. (14) The university is centrally located, and it is easy to get there by public transport or bicycle. (15) The city bus goes there every ten minutes, and the university metro station has a large bicycle parking lot. (16) By encouraging students to use bicycles, the university is environment-friendly. (17) Last week a student's bicycle was stolen from the bicycle parking lot. (18) My university is the best place to study for someone who values high quality studies, likes to spend time with friends and is eco-friendly.





## HELPFUL TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR PARAGRAPH

- Make sure your paragraph has a clear topic sentence indicating the topic and the controlling idea.
- Note that the controlling idea determines what the paragraph is about. For example, the topic 'studying for exams' can have different controlling ideas such as 'frustrating experience' or 'rewarding experience'. You would need different support for a paragraph on the 'frustrating experience' if compared to a paragraph on the 'rewarding experience' to provide evidence why the experience is frustrating or rewarding.
- Make sure your paragraphs contain no off topic sentences that break the unity of the paragraph.
- Make certain that the paragraph uses adequate cohesive devices and a clear method of organization.
- Check whether the concluding sentence retains the focus of the paragraph.
- Proofread the paragraph by reading it aloud. Proofread to improve the following possible errors:
  - poor organization
  - weak development
  - unrelated specific details
  - incorrect order of specific details
  - poor coherence
  - overuse/lack of transitional words and expressions
  - errors in grammar
  - punctuation errors
  - spelling mistakes

## Paragraph Analysis and Practice



11. Analyze the paragraphs in Activities 3 and 8 for structure, support, unity and coherence.
12. Choose a topic from the options given in Activity 2. Write an outline using the provided template.

**Topic sentence:** .....

**Support 1:** .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

**Support 2:** .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

Support 3: .....

Specific detail .....

Specific detail .....

Concluding sentence .....

13. Write a paragraph using the outline provided in Activity 12.

14. Evaluate the paragraph in view of the following criteria. Tick (✓)the appropriate box (☐)

PARAGRAPH EVALUATION CHECKLIST	
1. The topic sentence states the topic and the controlling idea.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The paragraph includes 2–3 supporting ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The supporting ideas are developed by providing specific details.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. There are no off topic ideas that break the unity of the paragraph.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Transitional words and phrases link ideas in the paragraph.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. The paragraph uses a clear method of organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The concluding sentence follows logically from the points made in the paragraph.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. There is no informal/colloquial language in the paragraph.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The paragraph is revised for grammar.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The paragraph is revised for spelling.	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The paragraph is revised for punctuation.	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Revise your paragraph and write the final draft. Edit and proofread it.

## Language Focus

### Improving Style: Informal, Neutral and Formal Language

The tone and style of writing, or language **register**, is related to the use of vocabulary, structure and grammar. The three most common language styles in writing are **formal**, **neutral** and **informal**.

- **Informal language.** The features of informal language are the following:
  - simple and grammatically incomplete sentences
  - active voice
  - emotional language and exclamations
  - personal opinion
  - humour, slang and clichés
  - phrasal verbs.

- **Neutral language.** The features of neutral language are the following:
  - active rather than passive voice
  - factual rather than emotional language
  - more complex language than in informal style.
- **Formal language.** The features of formal language are the following:
  - compound, complex and grammatically complete sentences
  - full forms instead of contractions
  - the use of the passive voice if the agent is not important
  - use of one-word verb instead of phrasal verb.

In essay writing, keep to neutral and formal style. Following are examples of informal language and suggestions how to avoid it in academic writing:

**Table 1.4** Formal and Informal Language in Essay Writing

Avoiding informal language in academic writing	Informal language	Formal language
Avoid contracted forms.	<i>can't, don't</i>	cannot, do not
Avoid phrasal verbs.	<i>turn up, hand in</i>	appear, submit
Avoid colloquial words and expressions.	<i>moms, kids, a lot of</i>	mothers, children, many
Avoid run-on words.	<i>so on, so on and so forth, etc.</i> To prepare for an English exam, students are advised to read in English, to watch English programmes on television, do writing activities and <i>so on</i> .	To prepare for an English exam, students are advised to read in English, to watch English programmes on television and do writing activities.
Avoid the display of emotions and the use of exclamation marks.	This method <i>works wonderfully!</i>	This method is <i>highly effective</i> .
Avoid using personal pronouns <i>I, me, my, mine, we, our, ours</i> . Use <i>I</i> when relating personal experience or when expressing your personal opinion (e.g. in a descriptive, in a narrative or in an opinion essay).	<i>I consider</i> that...	<i>It is considered</i> that...

Avoiding informal language in academic writing	Informal language	Formal language
Avoid using <i>you</i> (1) in addressing the audience or (2) in the generic sense.	(1) <i>You can find</i> this information in the school library. (2) When <i>you</i> are angry, <i>you</i> cannot think clearly.	(1) <i>This information can be found</i> in the school library. (2) When <i>one</i> is angry, <i>one</i> cannot think clearly.
Avoid generalizations. Use specific language.	(1) <i>Teenagers</i> are irresponsible. (2) <i>Some important people</i> attended the homecoming party.	(1) <i>Troubled teenagers sometimes</i> behave irresponsibly. (2) <i>The town mayor and the head master of the school</i> attended the homecoming party.
Avoid gender-specific language. Use gender-neutral language.	<i>fireman, stewardess, chairman</i>	<i>fire-fighter, flight attendant, chairperson</i>
Avoid negative forms.	The weather is so cold. It isn't going to change.	The weather seems to stay cold.
Avoid clichés.	After the second semester ended and all examinations were passed, Ruth felt <i>as free as a bird</i> .	Ruth experienced complete <i>freedom</i> after the spring semester ended and all examinations were passed.
Avoid dashes.	My new mountain bike – I bought yesterday – is wonderful!	I am very happy because yesterday I bought a new mountain bike.
Use more nouns than verbs (use nominalization)	<i>The percentage of dropouts is increasing</i> , and the teaching staff and school administration are becoming concerned.	<i>The increase in the percentage of dropouts</i> is conditioning concern among the teaching staff and school administration.
Use passive structures if agents are not important.	Many people <i>use</i> public transport daily.	Public transport is used on a daily basis.
Use hedging, i.e. cautious language.	Honesty is <i>the most important</i> character trait.	Honesty is <i>one of the most important</i> character traits.

In addition to the language features mentioned above, effective academic writing is achieved by employing other aspects of writing such as conciseness, accuracy, correct punctuation, logical structuring of ideas and coherence.