

Paragraph Unity

Sentences that have nothing to do with the topic hinder the unity within a paragraph. You want to try to connect each sentence in a paragraph to your thesis and the main idea of the paragraph. Many times students will add additional information to make word length or because they cannot think of what to add to the paragraph's main idea. Try not to add useless information but detailed information that connects to your main point or thesis.

Developing Your Main Point

Each of your paragraphs needs to revolve around your thesis. In addition, all of your sentences need to revolve around the main point or topic sentence of each paragraph.

- A main point or topic sentence indicates to readers where they are in your essay. It is “a one-sentence summary of the paragraph’s main point...” it also “acts as a signpost pointing in two directions: backward toward the thesis of the essay and forward toward the body of the paragraph” (Hacker, 62).

Organization

You may often use different patterns of organization for your paragraphs depending on your subject and purpose. (These typically come after the main point) Some types of patterns include:

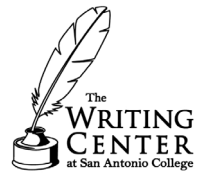
- Example and Illustrations
- Narration
- Descriptions
- Compare and Contrast
- Definition
- Cause and Effect

Coherent Paragraphs

Linking ideas clearly helps readers to follow the main idea of your essay. Essentially, “readers expect to learn a paragraph’s main point in a topic sentence early in the paragraph, they expect to encounter specific details, facts, or examples that support the topic sentence” (Hacker, 75). In the following example, the writer was consistent with the use of ‘I’ and details pertaining to the main point.

Example from page 78 of *The Bedford Handbook*

I went about trapping in this manner. To acquire a “trapping” state of mind, I read a library of books and talked at length with an experienced trapper, my father. Then I purchased the traps and outfitted myself by collecting a pair of rubber gloves, waterproof boots, and the



grubbiest clothes capable of withstanding human use. Finally, *I decided* just what kinds of animals to seek, what sort of bait to use, and where to place my traps. [Italics added]
-John Clyde Thatcher, student

When writing your sentences, try not to make them short or they may feel like your paragraphs are short and choppy. Readers want to understand and see how your ideas connect throughout your entire paper, even at sentence level.

What do I do when I have more than one point in my paragraph?

- Ask yourself what is the main idea of my paragraph
- Does each of your sentences support your topic sentence/main point?
- Do you think you have sentences that might be better placed elsewhere?
- Main point/topic sentences serve as signposts for your readers; you should make sure you have a clear and defined topic sentence and evidence (organization) to support it.

What if I don't have enough evidence to support my topic sentence?

- You may want to brainstorm different main points that will support more evidence.
- Develop better organization by adding definitions, compare and contrast, illustrations, or examples.
- You might want to consider combining your paragraphs that have closely related ideas.
- Ask a friend to look at your paragraph and suggest what they think you are missing. Having another person read your paper always brings a new and fresh perspective to your essay.

Notes

This handout was created using sources from:
Hacker, Diana. *Bedford Handbook. Updated 8th Edition*. Bedford St Martins, 2010. Print