**ET.PM3 – COACHING FOR REPORT WRITING (SW 6/7)**

**1 Paragraphs**

Paragraphs are the basic building blocks of academic writing. Well-structured paragraphs help the reader to understand the topic more easily by dividing up the argument into convenient sections. This unit looks at:

* the components of paragraphs
* the way the components are linked together

Discuss the following questions with a partner.

*What is a paragraph?*

*What is the normal length of a paragraph?*

*Is there a standard structure for paragraphs?*

*How is a paragraph linked together?*

**2 Example paragraph**

Study the paragraph below. It is from the introduction to an essay titled ‘*Should home ownership be encouraged?*’

The rate of home ownership varies widely across the developed world. Germany, for instance, has one of the lowest rates, at 42%, while in Spain it is twice as high, 85%. Both the USA and Britain have similar rates of about 69%. The reasons for this variation appear to be more cultural and historic than economic, since high rates are found in both rich and poorer countries. There appears to be no conclusive link between national prosperity and the number of home owners.

The paragraph can be analysed:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1 Topic sentence** | The rate of home ownership varies widely across the developed world. |
| **2 Example 1** | Germany, **for instance**, has one of the lowest rates, at 42%,  **while** in Spain it is twice as high, 85%. |
| **3 Example 2** | Both the USA and Britain have similar rates of about 69%. |
| **4 Reason** | **The reasons for** this variation appear to be more cultural and historic than economic, **since** high rates are found in both rich and poorer countries. |
| **5 Summary** | **There appears to be** no conclusive link between national prosperity and the number of home owners. |

This example shows that:

1. A paragraph is a group of sentences that deal with a single topic.
2. The length of paragraphs varies significantly according to text type, but should generally be no less than four or five sentences.
3. Normally (but not always), the first sentence introduces the topic. Other sentences may give definitions, examples, information, reasons, restatements and summaries.
4. The parts of the paragraph are linked together by the phrases and conjunctions shown in bold in the table. They guide the reader through the argument presented.

**3 Exercise**

The sentences below form the third paragraph of the same essay, but they have been mixed up. Use the table below to put them in the correct order.

1. When this burst, millions of people lost their homes, which for many had contained their savings.
2. These had been developed to allow higher-risk poorer families to buy their own homes, but contributed to a property price bubble.
3. Many economists now argue that there is a maximum level of home ownership which should not be exceeded.
4. All these claims were challenged by the economic crash of 2008, which was in large part caused by defaults on American sub-prime mortgages.
5. Even households which had positive equity still felt poorer and reduced their spending.
6. Others were trapped in their houses by negative equity, in other words their houses were worth less than they had paid for them.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic sentence | (iv) All **these claims** were challenged by the economic crash of 2008, which was in large part caused by defaults on American **sub-prime mortgages.** |
| Definition | (ii) **These** had been developed to allow higher-risk poorer families to buy their own homes, but contributed to a property **price bubble.** |
| Result 1 | (i) When **this** burst, millions of people lost their homes, which for many had contained their savings. |
| Result 2 | (v) Even households which had positive equity still felt poorer and reduced their spending. |
| Result 3 | (vi) Others were trapped in their houses by negative equity, in other words their houses were worth less than they had paid for them. |
| Conclusion | (iii) Many economists now argue that there is a maximum level of home ownership which should not be exceeded. |

**4 Student examples**

Analyse the following student examples and highlight positive/negative aspects relating to paragraph structure. [Please note that these are uncorrected student versions]

***Example 1:***

*The Schematic was made, but it did not work on the simulation. For this reason, The schematic on the simulation was changed, so the schematic was adapted.*

*The PCB Layout was made, and the components were soldered.*

*🡪 paragraph is extremely short and focus is not clear (suggestion: create one paragraph for each sentence providing more detailed information)*

*🡪 provide reasons, figures, statistics to support and explain your design choices*

*🡪 use linking words to connect sentences (instead of starting several sentences with “The”)*

*🡪 avoid using very simple vocabulary (“did not work”, “was made”)*

*🡪 avoid using too many verbs by replacing them with some nouns (e.g. “The design of the PCB layout….”)*

*🡪 create a separate paragraph for PCB layout*

***Example 2:***

*For the general circuit design two variants were considered:*

* *One amplifier preceded by AC decoupling and a band pass filter.*
* *One amplifier for active decoupling, amplification and a high pass filter, followed by a second amplifier with a low pass filter.*

*The first variant is less complex and therefore less expensive, easier to assemble and less prone to errors in production. In theory, both designs can deliver similar results, but the second variant is more flexible for later adjustments in the filtering behaviour and tuning of the amplification factor. To better account for tolerances in the parts and to improve future flexibility the second variant was chosen.*

*🡪 key words (“circuit design”/”variants”) are in the first sentence (=TOPIC SENTENCE)*

*🡪 focus of paragraph is very clear (circuit design/variants/decision)*

*🡪 step-by-step description of process and final decision*

*🡪 decisions are supported by reasons/arguments (“second variant is more flexible”)*

*🡪 effective use of linking words*

*🡪 use of bullet points is effective for lists*