**WRITING EFFECTIVELY**

**WRITING EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS**

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**Writing Effectively**

Before you start writing it is important to understanding your **purpose** and **audience**—you need to consider your **purpose in the context of your audience**, this helps you to write an effective writing.

**Purpose—Defining your purpose**

Before you start the actual formal writing, it helps to think about and identify ***why you are writing something, and what you are writing***. Think about the different kinds of writing that you have experienced. Consider the newspaper that’s delivered to your door or that you read online. Its different parts do different things—they have different purposes. Its news articles and bulletin boards generally inform you about world, state, or local events; its opinion columns and advertisements try to persuade you either to a point of view or to buy something; its humor columns and comics attempt to entertain you. Since writing can have so many purposes, ***you have to decide exactly what you want your writing to do****.*

Why do people write?

People write, amongst other reasons:

* to educate
* to entertain
* to debate
* to inform
* to persuade
* to promote
* to raise awareness
* to win an argument
* to evoke certain emotions, etc.

What are you writing?

This leads us to think of the ***topic,*** *its* ***focus*** *and different* ***types*** *of writing*, i.e., the **best form for it to be written in.** They could include:

Short pieces of writing, like:

* applications
* badges
* banners
* e-mail messages
* fax messages
* letters
* lists
* memos
* minutes
* notices
* opinion pieces
* pamphlets
* posters
* presentations
* press statements
* responses
* stickers
* summaries
* web-site information

Longer pieces of writing, like:

* appraisals (a formal assessment)
* arguments
* articles
* booklets
* case studies
* evaluations
* proposals
* newsletters
* policy/ strategy documents
* reports
* reviews
* speeches/debates

A way of thinking about purpose is to think about your topic as a noun and your purpose as a verb. Let’s consider an example: your topic is ‘*the rise in the sea level of Long Beach Island due to the green house effect’ (when the planet’s atmosphere warms the planet’s surface).* This noun phrase reflects the topic for your writing, but it doesn’t tell anything about what you want to accomplish in your paper. So, to have a purpose, you have to answer the question, “what do I want to accomplish in my writing?”

If we return to our example, you’ll notice you need a verb or verb phrase to accomplish something in your writing about the rise in the sea level of Long Beach Island due to the green house effect. More than one verb phrase is possible that would relate to this topic. For example, you may want to

* *Describe* the affects of the rise in the sea level of Long Beach Island on the Long Beach Island community.
* *Persuade* the readers to prevent the rise in the sea level by raising the island.

You may have more than one purpose in your writing, but typically you will be driven by a **primary aim**. For example, you may have **to inform** readers of the dangers of the rise in sea level **to persuade** readers to raise the island, but your main aim is still persuasive because your ultimate goal is to persuade, informing your readers is just one of the techniques you are using to attain your goal.

Ask yourself to help you clarify your purpose. Before you start writing a draft, think and scribble around answering these questions:

* Why am I writing this?
* What do I want to achieve?
* Who am I writing for?
* What do I want people to think, feel, know or do after they have read it?
* What would be the best form for it to be written in? An article, pamphlet, poster, etc.?

Before you begin writing you will need to consider your primary purpose in the context of your audience.

**What is your objective? And who is your audience**?

*Your objective,* ***what your writing*** *is finally produced as, and* ***whom you are writing for****, go hand in hand*. For example, a slogan from your policy recommendations like ‘*give us back* *our land!’* could fit on a T-shirt that members of the community wear. But your slogan on a T-shirt cannot replace your detailed and considered policy recommendations from indigenous people reclaiming ancestral land. This probably needs to be produced as a policy paper or booklet aimed at government.

**Audience—Considering your audience**

Whatever your purpose, you will be writing to a specific audience. You not only must understand your audience but also keep this audience in mind at all times as you draft your writing. Many times your audience will be dictated to you by your instructor or workplace situation; other times you will get to choose an audience. In either case, you’ll have to understand and then adapt your writing to that audience.

Understanding the audience can be fairly easy or rather difficult depending on what you already know about them. The best way to see what you know and what you need to know about your audience is **to ask yourself some questions about your relationship to the audience and the audience’s relationship to your topic.**

**My Audience & I**

* Does my audience know me personally? Would they identify me as a “type” of person?
* Can I identify my audience as a “type”?
* How large is my audience?
* Can I claim any shared experiences, characteristics, attitudes, values, or prejudices with my audience? (i.e., nationality, culture, gender)
* Do my audience and I have any differences that would present barriers to communication?

**My Audience & Its Relationship to My Topic**

* What does my audience know about my topic?
* What does my audience need (or not need) to know about my topic?
* How “close” is my audience to my topic? (emotionally, geographically, culturally)
* Does my audience have any expectations concerning formality of language?
* What does my audience expect as far as the format of the final document?
* How will my audience use the final document?

Essentially, as you think about audience, ask yourself, “how will reading my paper, change or affect the way my audience thinks, feels, or understands my topic?” The answers to these questions will condition your approach to your audience.

Now that you’re beginning to understand your audience, the next step is to look at some ways you can **adapt your writing to your specific audience**. Adapting your writing to your specific audience makes your writing very ***reader-friendly***.

Again, you need to answer some questions so you can make decisions on how to best adapt your writing to your audience

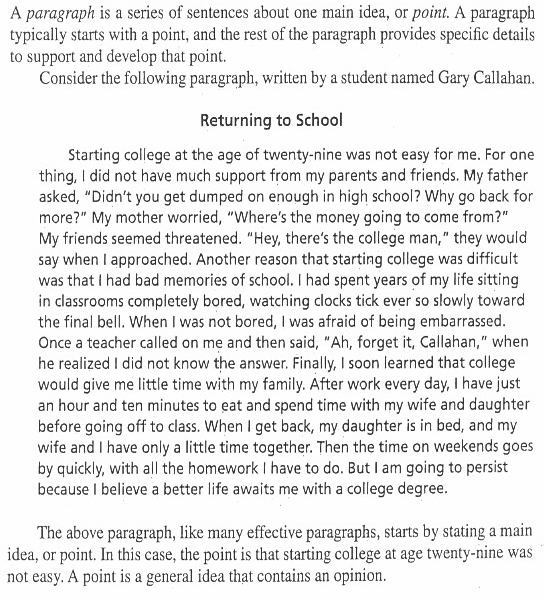
* What **organizational strategies** is my audience accustomed to? Or how can I best organize my paper for my audience? Generally, you will provide clues to the audience to guide them through your discussion. These cues help to reveal your organizational strategy. Examples of clues may include your introduction, thesis, topic sentences, and transitions.

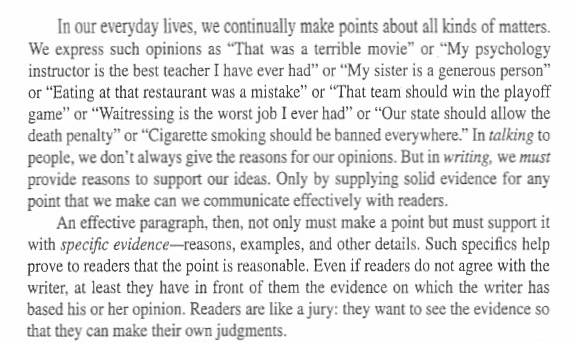
* What **content** will be most relevant to my audience? You want to provide material that is the most relevant to your audience. For example, in a paper that persuades early childhood majors to include activities for kinesthetic learners in the classroom, a history of the study of learning styles would not be relevant, but an anecdote about a student whose grades went from F’s to B’s because a teacher included kinesthetic activities might be.
* How would my **audience respond** to my argument? Generally, when readers read they “guess” at what you will say next and try to make connections with what you’ve said so far. Your goal is to structure your paper so that your audience will easily understand your points. Additionally, you may need to consider how you will handle a hostile, angry, or emotional audience. What can you say, how should you say it, and what proof can you provide to this audience to make your points understandable to it?

Understanding your purpose and audience will help you write an effective writing. These factors get you thinking about ***what your audience needs to know about your topic*** *and* ***why they need the information you’re going to present.***

**What is a Paragraph?**

A paragraph is much more than a collection of connected sentences. It is a building block of essay development, and provides the structure needed to develop the thesis of a paper. In fact, a useful way to think about a paragraph is as a “mini-essay,” or an essay within an essay, with its own mini-thesis (the topic sentence), middle or body (the supporting details) and end or conclusion (the concluding sentence).





To understand how paragraphs help to develop a thesis, think of them as landmarks on a map. With each point in a paragraph or with each paragraph in an essay, you describe where you are standing and point the direction for your readers to make sure they complete the journey to your conclusion. A vague signpost or a detour down a side trail could well have your readers lost and wondering where you are taking them. Clear signals, on the other hand, in the form of **clearly worded topic sentences, relevant support, reasonable interpretations of material, and logical conclusions** will help your readers follow the development of your ideas.

## Kinds of Sentences in a Paragraph

As you write and revise your draft think about how each sentence is functioning in your paragraph, and whether your paragraph has sufficient functional sentences to make its point.

**Transition sentences** guide your reader smoothly from the topic of the preceding paragraph into the topic of your new paragraph. Writers sometimes begin with a transition sentence before introducing the topic of the new paragraph.

The **topic sentence** serves two functions: first, it functions as the thesis of your paragraph—stating the main idea; second, it pushes the thesis of your essay forward and presents an arguable point. The topic sentence is usually the first or second sentence of a paragraph. Beginning a paragraph with a topic sentence ensures your reader recognizes early in the paragraph what larger idea the paragraph is going to demonstrate. Occasionally, you may find it interesting or necessary to place the topic sentence at the end of the paragraph, but don’t make a habit of it!

**Body sentences** develop the topic of the paragraph. These sentences work to analyze data or quotations, describe a text or event, set up a comparison, showcase evidence, and sometimes they enumerate the logical points for readers to give them a sense of a paper's bigger picture. In body sentences, you need to consider how much quoted data or evidence will demonstrate or prove your point.

**Linking sentences** relate back to the paper's main argument by showing how the idea of that paragraph matches the overall goal of the paper.

**Concluding sentences** may bring a section to its end before you move on to a new section of the paper.

Paragraphs can be of varying lengths, but they must present a coherent argument unified under a single topic. Paragraphs are hardly ever longer than one page, double-spaced and usually are much shorter. Lengthy paragraphs usually indicate a lack of structure. Identify the main ideas in the paragraph to see if they make more sense as separate topics in separate paragraphs. Shorter paragraphs usually indicate a lack of substance; you don’t have enough evidence or analysis to prove your point. Develop your idea or integrate the idea into another paragraph. The structure of a paragraph parallels the structure of an essay in order as well as content. Both contain a coherent argument, supporting evidence/analysis, and a conclusion.

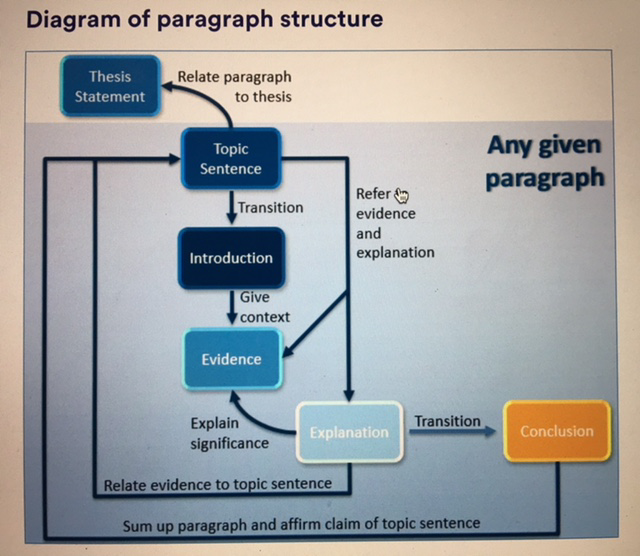
**Main Ideas and Supporting Details**

**Organization of a Paragraph**

1. Statement of the main idea.

2. Elaboration of the main idea and supporting details.

3. Restatement of the main idea-summary of main ideas or conclusions.



**Topic**

The topic is the subject that the selection is about. The main idea can usually be located if you can determine what the topic is. To find the topic of a selection, ask the simple question, “**Who or what is the selection about**?”

Example:

*Consumers concerned about the hazards or noise can reduce noise pollution in many ways. They can purchase noisy products such as garbage disposals and lawn mowers with reduced noise levels. They can also use sound-absorbing materials in their home. Carpeting can be installed instead of hard flooring, and cork and fabric can be used in rooms that tend to be noisy. Also, people can become less noisy themselves. They can learn to avoid shouting, to close doors without slamming them, and to play radios, TV sets, and stereos at moderate levels.*

Topic of this paragraph: noise pollution or noise pollution in the home.

**Main Idea**

Chief point an author is making about a topic. It sums up the author’s primary message.

**Topic Sentence** is the statement of the main idea. It is the statement under which all other material in the paragraph – examples, reasons, facts, details and other evidence – can fit.

Example: *(refer to above example) Notice that all information after the first sentence is about ways to reduce noise pollution.* The first sentence is the most **general** *– it states that there are ways to reduce noise pollution.* It **summarizes** the other statements in the paragraph.

Before writing a paragraph, it is important to think first about the **topic** and then **what you want to say about the topic**. Most often, the topic is easy, but the question then turns to what you want to say about the topic. This concept is sometimes called the **controlling idea**.

Strong paragraphs are typically about **one main idea or topic**, which is often explicitly stated in a **topic sentence**. Good topic sentences should always contain both **(1) a topic and (2) a controlling idea.**

**The topic** – The main subject matter or idea covered in the paragraph.

**The controlling idea** – This idea focuses the topic by providing direction to the composition.

Read the following topic sentences. They all contain a topic (in red) and a controlling idea (in blue). When your paragraphs contain a clearly stated topic sentence such as one of the following, your reader will know what to expect and, therefore, understand your ideas better.

Examples of topic sentences:

* People can avoid plagiarizing by taking certain precautions.
* There are several advantages to online education.
* Effective leadership requires specific qualities that anyone can develop.

An ideal topic sentence should do the following:

* **Make a single point**
* **Contain both a topic and a controlling idea**
* **Make a discussible point**
* **Not be too narrow**
* **Not be too broad**

(Practice exercises in course pack)

**Location of the Topic Sentence**

Topic sentences are usually the first sentence of the paragraph, but not always. They may also be located within the paragraph or at the end of the paragraph. They may even appear twice – at the beginning and at the end.

Example: **WITHIN A PARAGRAPH** – Preceded by one or more introductory sentence that may relate the main idea to the previous paragraph, arouse the reader’s interest or give background for the main reason.

*The physical complaints of neurotics – people who are overly anxious, pessimistic, hostile, or tense – were once largely ignored by physician. Many doctors believed that the frequent complaint of neurotic were exaggerations. However, new research shows that neurotics are more likely to have physical problems. Specifically, researchers found neurotics stand a grater chance of having five particular ailments: arthritis, asthma, ulcers, headaches, and heart disease. In addition, there is evidence that people who are pessimistic in their teens and twenties are more likely to become ill or die in their forties.*

Main idea: Third sentences. The two sentences before the topic sentence introduce the question of the physical health of neurotics. The topic sentence gives the writer’s main ideas on the topic. The last two sentences develop the main idea by giving specific details of the relevant research.

Example: **END OF THE PARAGRAPH**-Previous sentences build up to the main idea.

*A study at one prison show that owning a pet can change a hardened prison inmate into a more caring person. Another study discovered that senior citizens, both those living alone and those in nursing homes, became more interested in life when they were given pets to care for. Even emotionally disturbed children have been observed to smile and react with interest if there is a cuddly kitten or puppy to hold. Animals, then, can be a means of therapy for many kinds of individuals.*

Example: **BEGINNING AND END OF THE PARAGRAPH**

*We are on our way to becoming a cashless, checkless society, a trend that began with the credit card. Now some banks are offering “debit cards” instead of the credit cards. That costs of purchases made with these cards are deducted from the holder’s bank account instead of being added the a monthly bill. And checking accounts, which are mainly used for paying bills, are going electronic. Now some people can make computer transactions over their pushbutton phones to pay bills by transferring money from their account to the account of whomever they owe. Soon we may be able to conduct most of our business without signing a check or actually seeing the money we earn and spend.*

**Topic Sentences That Cover More Than One Paragraph**

Sometimes, you find a topic sentence that provides a main idea for more that one paragraph. This occurs when the author feels that the development of the main idea may be too lengthy for one paragraph.

Example: **Main Ideas that are inferred**

Sometimes a selection lacks a topic sentence but that does not mean that it lacks a main idea. The author simply lets the details of the selection suggest the main idea. You must figure out the implied idea by deciding the points of all the details.

*In ancient times, irrational behavior was considered the result of demons and evil spirits taking possession of a person. Later, Greeks looked upon irrational behavior as a physical problem – caused by an imbalance of body fluids called “humors” – or by displacement of an organ. In the highly superstitious Middle Ages, the theory of possession by demons was revived. It reached a high point again in the witch-hunts of eighteenth-century Europe and America. Only in the last one hundred years did true medical explanations gain wide acceptance and were categories of illnesses changed.*

No sentence is a good topic sentence that covers all other sentences. We must ask ourselves, “**What is the main point the author is trying to make up with these details?**” “**Does all or most of the material support this idea?**” In this case, the details show that **people have explained mental illness in man different ways over the years**. Although this is not stated, it is a broad enough summary to include all other material in the paragraph-it is the main idea.

**Supporting Details**

A paragraph contains facts, statements, examples-specifics that guide us to a full understanding of the main idea. They clarify, illuminate, explain, describe, expand and illustrate the main idea and are supporting details.

**Determining Supporting Details**

* Decide which details help to further the storyline.
* Decide which details help you to understand the main idea.
* Answer question raised by the main idea (who, what when, why or how).

The kinds of supporting details depend on a topic sentence. The most common types of supporting details include:

1. Examples
2. Facts
3. Testimony
4. Personal Observation
5. Reason and Logic
6. Sensory Details
7. **Examples**

* An example is a part to represent the whole. Examples are ways of illustrating your point so that it is better understood.
* To use examples, all you have to do is introduce them with a suitable phrase such as *for example, for instance, take the case of,* and then spell out example you have in mind.
* Here is an example from a student essay on the usefulness of the Internet.

There’s a lot of useful information available on the Internet. For example, I needed to find the words of the national anthem of Trinidad. I went to Yahoo, entered “national anthem” in the search box, and was directed to a site called the World National Anthem Database. There I found the entire text of the national anthem for Trinidad. Another Time, my mother wanted to find the exchange rate for Singapore dollars to send some money to a relative. Again, this information was readily found on the Internet, merely by going to a search engine and typing “foreign currency rates.” It took two minutes to find what I was looking for. Indeed, almost anything you need to know can be found on the Internet. Here’s another example: Not too long ago, I was doing a paper on old television shows and needed information on the sitcom (comedy series) “The Farmer’s Daughter.” I found an entire Web page devoted to the star, Inger Stevens. It contained all that I was looking for. Before the Internet, I would have had to go to the library and manually dig through reference books. What would have taken me a half a day to find, I found on the Internet in the matter of minutes.

1. **Facts, Statistics and Opinions**

* **Facts are statements from reliable sources about real things.**

Examples:

**Accepted Fact:** The sun rises in the east. (Universally accepted)

**Verifiable fact:** Toni Morrison wrote *The Bluest Eye.* (This fact can be verified)

* **Statistics are facts expressed in numbers**

Examples: Your topic sentence claims that the Chinese are big users of the Internet.

Statistics: A study in 2010 counted Chinese users at over 440 million, second only to English users who number about 537 million.

* **Opinion:** Toni Morrison’s best book is *The Bluest Eye.* (It can be neither universally accepted nor verifiable.)

Properly cited, facts add believability to a paragraph.

**Here is a paragraph that supports its topic sentence with facts:**

The prices of computers have come down dramatically. Just a little over a year ago I bought a 233 MHZ computer with 32 megabytes of RAM, a CD-ROM drive, and a 14-inch monitor. I paid a little over $ 1800 for it. Today in the newspaper, that same system, with the same amount of memory and same size monitor, was advertised for $ 199. To make matters worse, my system was a clone- meaning an off-brand that was assembled locally. The $199 system was known as national brand backed up by a good warranty. But when it comes to buying a computer, it’s no use waiting. Prices are always coming down.

1. **Testimony**

* Testimony is expert opinion that backs up your topic sentence. The expert may be someone who is recognized in the field or who has had personal experience with your topic.
* Here is a paragraph that has both kinds of testimony-the personal experience and expert opinion.

When it comes to swimming in an unfamiliar place, it is always wise to look before you leap. I found out that truth one day when I dove into an unfamiliar river and hit the bottom. Fortunately, I was only dazed, not seriously hurt. My friend, Brenda, who is a park ranger, says that almost every week she is called to the scene of a diving accident. She says the accidents, are usually caused by reckless diving into unfamiliar water. Only last year she pulled a young boy out of the Chattahoochee River, who had dived and hit head against a rock. He’d never swum in that stretch of the river before and was showing off to his friend. Although he broke his neck, he was lucky because he regained the use of his legs after physical therapy. “Two summers ago, another boy did the same thing in the same stretch of river and is now confined to a wheelchair, for the rest of his life,” Brenda said. “When it comes to a strange stretch of water, never dive without knowing the depth and first checking for submerged rocks and trees,” Brenda advises.

1. **Anecdotes—Personal Observations, Experiences**

Anecdote is a short amusing or interesting story about a real incident, event or person/character.

***Personal experience:*** When I was single I would frown at mothers who couldn’t control their screaming youngsters at a mall; now, I smile and nod to let them know I feel their pain.

***Observation:*** I saw a father pushing twins in a stroller who was obviously in a hurry, but he stopped in front of a store to allow a woman with her child to go in ahead of him.

* Some topics are strictly personal and must be supported mainly by your own personal observation. That old standby topic, “How you spend your summer vacation,” is a classic example of a personal topic. You must draw entirely on your own personal observations for support.
* Personal observation includes descriptive details and examples. Following is an example of it:

About a year ago I tried water skiing and hated it. Getting up on the skis was a battle to begin with, and once I got up, I found the ride frightening. I found myself stung by spray from passing boats, bumped by waves, and occasionally flattened by the wake (a trail of disturbed water) of passing boat. Falling was no joke. It hurts. Being slammed against the water when you are travelling over twenty miles an hour might look good in a television commercial, but in real-life it’s painful. I fell three times. Once I thought I’d dislocated my shoulder. The second time I got water in my ear, and it took more than a week for it to come out. The third time I was almost knocked unconscious, and that’s when I, finally, decided water skiing was not for me.

The details this writer uses are not available in any library, but come solely from memory. Similarly, paragraphs written on such topics as a favorite place, a special friend, or the first day on a new job must be supported by personal observations.

1. **Reasons**

* Some topic sentences are best supported by reasons- explanations based on common sense, good judgment, clear thinking, and logic.
* This kind of support is most commonly used when a writer is trying to persuade the reader to change an opinion. Reasons are details that tell why an opinion is valid or an event occurs.

Example II

There are three reasons why Canada is one of the best countries in the world. **First, Canada has an excellent health care system. All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. Second, Canada has a high standard of education. Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at university. Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live.** As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live.

Example I: In the following paragraph, reason is used to support the writer’s argument that a constitutional amendment against flag burning should not be passed.

A constitutional amendment outlawing flag burning is a bad idea and should not be passed. To most Americans, flag burning is a repugnant (hostile) gesture. I myself do not believe in flag burning and would never burn the American flag. Yet common sense tells us, and a 1989 Supreme Court decision agrees, that burning the flag is a form of political speech protected by the First Amendment. As a matter of fact, according to flag etiquette, the proper way to dispose of an old flag is to burn it. What we should respect and honor, above all else, are the principles of freedom enshrined in the Bill of Rights. That, in part, is what the American flag stands for\_ the right to protest, even if the protest is unpopular, as protest frequently is. It makes no sense to desecrate (to treat disrespectfully) what the flag stands for- freedom- in a misguided attempt to protect it.

1. **Sensory Details**

* Details that appeal to one or more of the five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch)

Upon entering the grocery store, I headed directly for the flower department, where I spotted yellow tulips. As I tenderly rested the tulips in my rusty shopping cart, I caught a whiff of minty dried eucalyptus, so I added the fragrant forest green bouquet of eucalyptus to my cart.

**Concluding Sentence**

* The concluding sentence of a paragraph should summarize your main idea by reinforcing your topic sentence.

Example

The prices of computers have come down dramatically. Just a little over a year ago I bought a 233 MHZ computer with 32 megabytes of RAM, a CD-ROM drive, and a 14-inch monitor. I paid a little over $ 1800 for it. Today in the newspaper, that same system, with the same amount of memory and same size monitor, was advertised for $ 199. To make matters worse, my system was a clone- meaning an off-brand that was assembled locally. The $199 system was known as national brand backed up by a good warranty. But when it comes to buying a computer, it’s no use waiting. Prices are always coming down.

**Writing Effective Paragraphs**

In general, in order for a paragraph to be effective, it must have three characteristics: unity, development and coherence.

Characteristics of effective body paragraphs:

**Unity**: Unity in a paragraph means that the entire paragraph should focus on one single idea. Every part of your essay should contribute towards the topic at hand. A unified paragraph must follow the idea mentioned in the topic sentence and must not deviate from it. Do the sentences support the main idea?

**Development**: Have you included detailed and sufficient support for the main idea of the paragraph?

**Coherence**: Coherence means establishing a relationship between the ideas presented in a paragraph. It brings about rationale in the arrangement of the ideas (which are introduced either in the chronological order or any other order). Have you progressed from one sentence to the next in the paragraph smoothly and logically?

**Unity**

The first characteristic of an effective paragraph is unity, **which means that all sentences in the paragraph explain, develop, and support a central idea** in some way. In other words, every paragraph must have a purpose within your paper, and **all the sentences** must somehow advance that purpose. This means that ALL sentences—topic sentence, supporting ones, and concluding sentence—must be related to the sub-topic. They must all advance the paragraph’s purpose as well as the thesis. **All paragraphs** should have unity, and they should only discuss one idea. If you have more than one idea, start a new paragraph.

Why should you aim for unified paragraph? Because in a dis-unified one, a writer’s purpose and the connections between the sentences can be unclear, as in this one:

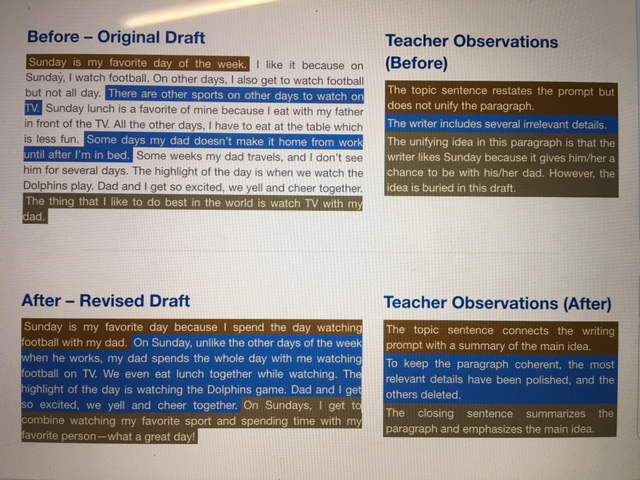
*(1) Firstly, the Olympic games provide an outlet for competition. (2) Friendly competition among many countries occurs around the world. (3) Regardless of each country’s financial situation, the competition is in the field of sports and not in politics. (4) It provides to people who have trained very hard a form or basis of comparison to others around the world, giving these competitors the opportunity to find out if they are the very best. (5) Also, along with providing an outlet for competition the Olympic games creates a sense of nationalism. (6) Nationalist pride is always a component of the Olympics, each country having its representatives. (7) The Olympics unifies a country, giving its citizens something in common—a victory—that brings them together. (8) For example, the acquisition of a gold medal or a number of gold medals can be a source of national pride. (Adapted from a student paper, used with permission.)*

Here, the topic sentence is about how the Olympic games provide an outlet for competition, and in sentences (2), (3) and (4) the writer sticks to that idea. However, in sentence (5), she shifts focus to how the Olympic games create a sense of nationalism. It’s possible that this second idea is connected to the key concept in the topic sentence, but the writer doesn’t make that connection, and as a result, the paragraph ends weakly with an example supporting the shift in topic. The writer never makes her point about how the games provide a competitive outlet.

**To achieve unity, begin with a clear topic sentence.** This doesn’t mean that it has to appear at the beginning of the paragraph, although a topic sentence usually does in academic writing. What is important however is, that the main idea or purpose, stated in the topic sentence, sets the agenda for the rest of the paragraph. **Because the topic sentence provides the unifying idea, this sentence must be clear, concise and make a point about your thesis.** Once you know what point you want to introduce in your topic sentence, you can create a unified paragraph by making sure that all the rest of the sentences are clearly related to the first one.

### Before & After Comparison: From a wandering paragraph to a wonderful paragraph!

One big mistake people tend to make is adding sentences to the paragraph that aren’t related. This can be a big problem in your writing as it makes it look confusing and the work loses focus. This example shows how one student approached the writing prompt **“What is your favorite day of the week and why?”**The original draft has some interesting ideas but overall, **the paragraph wanders**. It includes both relevant and irrelevant details and lacks the coherent focus required for a successful paragraph. One should eliminate unnecessary details and write a tightly structured paragraph.



Example II

Look at the paragraph below and notice how some of the sentences don’t seem like they belong in paragraph.

*California is a great state to live in. Not only is California very large, but there are many people who live in it. You can find different types of jobs in California. I want to be a firefighter. California has really amazing weather. The weather in New York is good too, but it snows a lot there. If you want to live in a great state, you should think about moving to California.*

The paragraph starts off with the topic about California and it being a great place to live in. The following sentences in the paragraph should then help expand on the topic and explain to the reader why California is such a great place, but instead it seems to lose focus at certain points.

For example, the statement about the weather in New York being good doesn’t really fit in this paragraph. If the paragraph were talking about the weather in different states or if it were discussing how great the weather in California is compared to other states, then it would be more appropriate.

Another comment that doesn’t belong is the one about the writer wanting to be a firefighter. Although it does sound like it would fit since the writer is talking about jobs, the idea of the writer wanting to be a firefighter doesn’t help explain why California is a great state to live in. Not only is this statement not helpful to the paragraph, but it is also very distracting.

**Coherence**

**Coherence**: Coherence means establishing a relationship between the ideas presented in a paragraph. It brings about rationale in the arrangement of the ideas (which are introduced either in the chronological order or any other order). Have you progressed from one sentence to the next in the paragraph smoothly and logically?

Sentences in a paragraph should “flow” smoothly and logically. A paragraph that is coherent flows because it is arranged according to a definite plan, and as a result, all the sentences are about the same main topic (Unity), and they also “stick together” ***leading readers smoothly from the topic sentence to the concluding one.*** A coherent paragraph conveys continuity because the sentences follow naturally and **logically** from one to the next, and in a way that **makes sense**.

There are a number of ways to achieve coherence, through use of:

1. Ordering principles—arranging ideas in a logical order

2. Nouns and pronouns appropriately

3. Transitional/linking words

4. Repetition—repeating key nouns regularly

1. **Using an ordering principle to achieve coherence**

One way to achieve the flow of coherence is to *decide on an* ***ordering principle (organizational pattern)*** *for the ideas in your paragraph*. This means that there is a pattern of development that creates a logical flow between the sentences.

For example, if you’re explaining how to bake a cake, you want to give the directions in a particular order. At other times, you may find that more than one arrangement is possible. For example, if you’re writing about solving a problem and therefore using the ***problem-to-solution*** arrangement, you might also use the technique of ordering from ***least to most important***—or its reverse.

Narrative paragraphs use a ***chronological*** ordering principle and usually relate events connected by time. You’ll usually find narrative paragraphs using transitions of time like “then,” “next,” and “finally.”

There are many other ordering principles (organizational patterns) used to create coherent paragraphs including ***comparison-contrast, cause-effect, by time, by location, from general to specific, from specific to general, from least to most important, from problem to solution*** and so on.

The important point is to **choose the method (or methods) that fits your material, and make sure you use it consistently to link the ideas** in your paragraph together.

1. **Using pronouns to achieve coherence**

Another way to help achieve coherence is to use pronouns to refer to nouns in previous sentences in the paragraph, thus “sticking” the sentences together. For example, if you refer to “people” in one sentence you can “point back” to that noun in the next sentence by using the pronoun “them”. In this case, *people* is the antecedent of the pronoun *them*.

(a antecedent is a word, phrase, clause, or sentence to which another word refers esp. a following pronoun: s/he, him, her, his, it, they; or a relative pronoun: who, whom, whose, which.)

* **Caution about using pronouns**: **make sure it is clear what noun (antecedent) the pronoun is pointing to because this could cause confusion instead of coherence.** Consider these two sentences, for example:

Turnbull chooses words that could be found in any newspaper. Like a newspaper reporter, he writes ***it*** so most readers at a grade nine level could read it.

Here, it is clear that Turnbull’s work is being compared to that of a newspaper writer, but it’s not clear what noun “it” refers to. The noun could be newspaper, but then it sounds like Turnbull is writing a newspaper article, which is probably not what the writer intended.

A simple edit creates coherence by making the antecedent of the pronoun clear:

Turnbull chooses words that could be found in any newspaper. Like a newspaper reporter, he picks them to make his work readable at a grade nine level.

In the edited version, the pronoun “them” clearly refers to the antecedent, “words” and creates a connection between the two sentences.

* Another thing to remember about using pronouns to create coherence is to **use them judiciously** (done with good judgment or sense). Just as a vague reference can create confusion, so can using too many pronouns in a paragraph. In this paragraph, notice how the numerous pronouns combine to make the writer’s meaning unclear: In addition,

Turnbull chooses words that could be found in any newspaper. Like a newspaper reporter, he writes it so most readers at a grade nine level could read it. They are of, one or two syllables. It makes this very readable and informal, and they create a nice style.

In this case, even though most of the pronouns refer to a noun in a previous sentence, the sheer number of pronouns makes the whole piece incoherent.

* Another common mistake that involves **use of pronouns is singular/plural confusion.**

**The company** embarked on an unrelated diversification strategy. **They** had decided that previous strategies had been ineffective.

The company is actually singular. The second sentence should also start with “The company” or “it”.

* Another mistake involves **using a pronoun which could refer to more that one subject.**

A number of people support the new systems and new processes. They (?) might be considered to increase organizational effectiveness.

*These are certainly problematic and if you do it, this may confuse them and it make hard to understand them. Unfortunately, it is something they often do, no matter how often these are told to them, and this can even lead to them failing it.*

*(Please don’t write sentences like these!)*

1. **Using transitional /linking words and phrases to achieve coherence**

Transitional expressions are words and phrases that emphasize the relationships between ideas, so they help readers follow your train of thought or see connections that they might otherwise miss or misunderstand. They offer cues about what follows. Transitional/linking words and phrases help to create coherence by providing bridges between sentences within the paragraph and between paragraphs.

The following paragraph shows how carefully chosen transitions (CAPITALIZED) lead the reader smoothly from the introduction to the conclusion of the paragraph.

*I don’t wish to deny that the flattened, minuscule head of the large-bodied "stegosaurus" houses little brain from our subjective, top-heavy perspective (unstable/unbalanced), BUT I do wish to assert that we should not expect more of the beast. FIRST OF ALL, large animals have relatively smaller brains than related, small animals. The correlation of brain size with body size among kindred animals (all reptiles, all mammals, FOR EXAMPLE) is remarkably regular. AS we move from small to large animals, from mice to elephants or small lizards to Komodo dragons, brain size increases, BUT not so fast as body size. IN OTHER WORDS, bodies grow faster than brains, AND large animals have low ratios of brain weight to body weight. IN FACT, brains grow only about two-thirds as fast as bodies. SINCE we have no reason to believe that large animals are consistently stupider than their smaller relatives, we must conclude that large animals require relatively less brain to do as well as smaller animals. IF we do not recognize this relationship, we are likely to underestimate the mental power of very large animals, dinosaurs in particular.*

When you use transitional words and phrases, it can be tempting to stick one or two in without thinking about the meaning, but this can result in confusion instead of flow. Thus, make sure that the link you have created between your sentences is a clear and logical one. If you write “therefore,” for example, make sure that the sentence that follows does, in fact, flow logically from the previous one; if you write “similarly,” make sure that there is, in fact, similarity between the two ideas.

[Lecture Comprehension Skills: Signal words are words that helps the reader follow the direction of a writer’s thought. They are like **signposts** on the road that guides the traveler.]

Few transitional expressions and the relationships they signal:

**Addition-** also, in addition to, too, moreover, and, besides, furthermore, equally important, then, finally, additionally—signals your readers that that the relationship between two sentences is one of addition.

**Example-** for example, for instance, thus, as an illustration, namely, specifically, more specifically, that is.

**Contrast**- but, yet, however, nevertheless, nonetheless, conversely, in contrast, still, at the same time, on the one hand, on the other hand

**Comparison**- similarly, likewise, in the same way

**Similarity-** likewise, similarly, in other words

**Result**- therefore, thus, as a result, so, accordingly, in conclusion

**Summary**- hence, in short, in brief, in summary, in conclusion, finally

EXAMPLES:

COHERENCE BY ADDITION

Woodpeckers use their beaks to find food and to chisel out nests. **In addition**, they claim their territory and signal their desire to mate by using their beaks to drum on trees.

COHERENCE BY CONTRAST

Most birds communicate by singing. Woodpeckers, **however,** communicate by the duration and rhythm of the drumming of their beaks.

COHERENCE BY RESULT

The woodpecker’s strong beak enables it to communicate by drumming on dry branches and tree trunks. **As a result**, woodpeckers can communicate across greater distances than songbirds can.

The following paragraph demonstrates how transitional expressions (shown in bold) enhance a paragraph’s COHERENCE. The TOPIC SENTENCE is the final sentence.

Before the days of television, people were entertained by exciting radio shows such as Superman, Batman, and “War of the Worlds.” **Of course**, the listener was required to pay careful attention to the story if all details were to be comprehended. **Better yet**, while listening to the stories, listeners would form their own images of the actions taking place. When the broadcaster would give brief descriptions of the Martian space ships invading Earth, **for example**, every member of the audience would imagine a different space ship. **In contrast**, television’s version of “War of the Worlds” will not stir the imagination at all, for everyone can clearly see the actions taking place. All viewers see the same space ship with the same features. Each aspect is clearly defined, and **therefore**, no one will imagine anything different from what is seen. **Thus**, television can’t be considered an effective tool for stimulating the imagination.

—Tom Paradis, “A Child’s Other World”

1. **Using repetition to achieve coherence**

Most developing writers are taught to avoid repetition, and this is good advice to a point. However, **judicious repetition of key words and phrases and synonyms throughout a paper can provide your readers with necessary signposts and strengthen the flow of the essay.**

A key word is a strong word that’s central to the main idea of the paragraph. Repetition of a key word is a useful way to achieve COHERENCE in a paragraph.

The word usually appears first in the paragraph’s TOPIC SENTENCE and then again throughout the paragraph. The idea of key-word repetition is to keep a concept in front of the reader.

For example, suppose a key concept in a thesis statement was that of “*mythical structures in literature*.” Throughout the essay, a writer might use a number of synonyms, such as “myth,” “mythical forms,” “configurations,” or “patterns” to refer to this concept. In addition, the writer might repeat these phrases and the original one, “mythical structures” throughout the paper. The key to using repetition of words and phrases effectively is to keep the concept in the readers’ mind. If you use the same word, they will be bored. If you use too many terms, your readers could easily become confused. A good rule of thumb is to use no more than two separate terms or phrases. In a short paragraph, that number is usually enough to create variety without creating confusion.

The following paragraph contains repeated words (shown in-bold) closely tied to the concept of emotions, making the paragraph more coherent.

**Emotions** are, technically speaking, chemical impulses to act. The root of the word **emotion** is movere, the Latin verb meaning “to move,” plus the prefix *e* which means “away,” suggesting a tendency to act is implicit in every **emotion**. One of the primary functions of **emotion** is to warn us of danger. Goleman refers to this warning process as an “**emotional** alarm.” When you experience an **emotional** alarm, like an unexpectedly loud noise, the **emotional** part of your brain takes over the analytical part of your brain, and you react.

—Carol Carter and Lynn Quitman Troyka,

Majoring in the Rest of Your Life

**Development**

Effective paragraphs are not only unified, they are fully developed, which means that **they don’t leave any significant questions in readers’ minds.** If you were drawing a map to show a fellow traveler how to get from a mountain pass to a source of water, you would be careful to draw a line that followed the trail down the mountain, along the valley to a spot where there was a lake. You wouldn’t stop the line halfway down the mountain, hoping that those who used your map would be able to figure out the rest of the way for themselves. Similarly, **when you are writing a paragraph, you must be sure to trace the full development of your ideas for readers so they will understand the assumptions, evidence and reasoning you used.** There are three ways to ensure that your paragraphs are fully developed: by providing the **right level of supporting detail**, choosing the **right kind of evidence** and choosing the **right pattern of development** for your purpose.

* **Developing paragraphs with the right *level* of detail**

To fully develop the sub-topic of the essay’s main idea in a paragraph, you must **provide your readers with details**. It is not enough to make assertions (a confident and forceful statement of fact or belief). Your readers must understand fully how you reached your conclusion. What leads you to the conclusion you make in the paragraph? What influenced your thinking? What reasoning do you use?

**To make sure you’ve provided the right level of detail, try using the 5Ws and 1 H** to imagine what questions an informed reader might ask. Does your paragraph give enough detail to answer important what and when questions? Does it answer who, where, and why questions? Although you will probably not have to address all of these, a fully developed paragraph provides enough supporting detail to answer questions any informed reader might ask.

* **Developing paragraphs with the right *kind* of detail (type of details)**

Not only is it important to provide enough detail for your readers, it’s important to provide the **right kind of detail**, and that will **depend on the purpose** of your essay. The kind of detail will also depend on the **demands of the assignment** and the **discipline you are writing** in. For example, if you are asked to write a personal essay, your details might be examples of personal experiences. If you are asked to write a history paper or a report, the “right” kind of details might come from your analysis of a historical text. Similarly, support in an argumentative essay might come from both analysis and reasoning.

Another way to think about choosing the right kind of detail is in terms of warm or cool proofs (Brundage, D. on Tarver, J., personal communication, March 17, 2008). **Warm proofs are those that appeal to emotions**, and they are what classical rhetoricians (master in the art of speaking or writing effectively) call that appeals to *pathos* (an emotion of sympathetic pity)*.* On the other hand, **cool proofs, like logical arguments and statistics**, appeal to reason and are more in keeping with classical ideas of *logos,* or logical thought*.* **If you think about choosing details in this way, then a history paper might use a combination of warm proofs (e.g., personal histories and letters from the historical era) in addition to the cool proofs (e.g. reasoning and logic)**. Again, the choice of detail will depend on your writing purpose, which flows from the demands of the assignment and the requirements of the discipline you are writing in.

* **Developing paragraphs with the right *pattern* of development (*format/type/genre*)**

The particular **kind of support you provide will depend largely on the pattern of development** you use for your paragraph, **which, in turn**, **depends on its purpose**. If you are trying to make a point by telling a story, then you might use narrative. If the purpose is to explain, step by step, how something is done, then a process pattern might be better. **The key is in selecting the right pattern of development**, keeping in mind that **you can use a variety of patterns in the same essay**—a paragraph that uses definition as a method of development is also likely to use elements of cause/effect and process development; a paragraph of narration will likely use elements of description.

One way to think about different types of arrangements or patterns is on a continuum (a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not notably different from each other, although the extremes are distinct), from the types most likely to be found in creative writing (relating to or involving the imagination or original ideas) to the types found in analytical writing (relating to or using analysis or logical reasoning). On such a continuum, narration would be on the most creative end and cause and effect and definition on the analytical end:

***Creative***—Narration—Description—Process—Exemplification—Comparison/Contrast—Definition—Cause and Effect—***Analytical***

In academic writing, it’s a good rule of thumb to use the more creative types of patterns sparingly, for a defined purpose and to rely more on analytical types of arrangements.

Traditionally, paragraph/essay writing has been divided into following **patterns of development:**

* *Narration*
* *Description*
* *Process*
* *Exemplification*
* *Comparison/Contrast*
* *Definition*
* *Cause and Effect*
* *Exposition*

Each pattern has its own internal logic and provides its own special strategies for imposing order on your ideas. As you practice each pattern, you should keep two points in mind:

* While each essay that you write will involve one predominant pattern, very often one or more additional patterns may be involved as well, for example an essay of narration will likely use elements of description or an essay of definition will also likely to use elements of cause/effect and process development
* No matter which pattern you use, each will probably involve some argumentation. You will advance a point and then go on to support that point. For example a writer claims that a certain experience in his life was frightening and then uses a narrative to persuade us of the truth of this statement. Another author states that a fast food restaurant can be preferable to a fancy one and then supplies comparative information about both to support his statement. Much of your writing, in short, will have the purpose of persuading your reader that the idea you have advanced is valid.

**Narration:** Because narrative paragraphs often *focus on an experience or an event*, they share features with both process and descriptive styles of development. Like process paragraphs, narrative uses transitions of time (eventually, then, as soon as) and space (e.g. here, there, to the left, up); like descriptive paragraphs, this pattern uses sensory words [gaunt (very thin), blonde, shaky] to develop ideas. Usually in narrative paragraphs the topic sentence is near or at the end of the paragraph. The unique feature of this type of development is that it tells a story.

Although we were close, Samantha managed to hide her problem throughout Grade 11. I remember her saying that she had to watch what she ate to maintain her figure, but that wasn’t unusual; almost everyone we knew was constantly on a diet, so when she’d bring only a piece of lettuce and a slice of tomato for lunch, I didn’t think anything of it. I didn’t find it unusual either that she spent a lot of time in the girl’s washroom that year. Like any good friend, I accepted her explanation that she had picked up a flu that she couldn’t shake. It wasn’t until the beginning of Grade 12 that I began to suspect that something more serious might be wrong. I noticed that she looked more gaunt each week, and she complained of feeling weak and tired all the time. Even more disturbing, though, was the way she made excuses not to walk home with Kath and me. Eventually, she even stopped meeting us for lunch at Wu’s Cafe. At first, I thought maybe she was on something, but when I stole peeks into her locker and her big saddle-bag purse, I never saw anything suspicious. Then, one day, we were in the girl’s room, repairing our lipstick and I asked her, straight out what the problem was. She leaned on the sink with both hands, and hung her head, until her blonde hair shielded her face, and in a shaky voice she told all: the uncontrollable urges to eat anything, and the vomiting that always followed. With that simple statement, the wall of secrets Samantha had built between us over last year collapsed and once again, we were friends.

Even though this paragraph does not start with a formal topic sentence, it is not difficult to find the theme—it’s in the last sentence, which is a common pattern in narration. Notice how events are organized according to time. The first sentence establishes the *time frame of the story* (during Grade 11), and *traces some of the events* during that year with use of past tense (we were close; everyone we knew, etc.) Then, the rest of the paragraph details *events in chronological order*. *Transitions of time* (eventually, then, as soon as) and *sensory words* (gaunt, blonde, shaky) help readers follow and visualize the events that form the backbone of this story.

**Description**: A descriptive pattern is characterized by vivid sensory description. It uses **sensory words** (e.g., bitter, light, bright, pungent, loud) **vivid action** **verbs**, (e.g., dive, drip, rip) and **transitions of space** (e.g. here, there, to the left, up) to give sense impressions of a scene. This pattern is useful when you want to create a dominant sensory impression. In most academic work, you should use this arrangement with caution: many academic papers call for analysis, and although description can contribute to that type of development, use it sparingly to make room for more analytical paragraphs.

Descriptive paragraphs include details that appeal to the five senses: sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing. In a descriptive paragraph/essay, the writer must convey information that appeals to all the senses, in order to give the best possible description to the reader. The key to writing the perfect descriptive paragraph/essay is to provide enough vivid detail to help the reader create a mental picture of what is being written about.

**Sample 1**. The sample below is an opening paragraph from a student essay on the development of entertainment media. In it, she describes TV-watching in her family to make a point about how central TV was as a form of entertainment in the 60’s.

*(1) As I was growing up in the 60’s, television was the only entertainment my family knew of the electronic sort. (2) The 7 o’clock nightly news was such an important part of our family that my dad knocked a wall down and built a huge cabinet in its place just to accommodate our 19-inch black and white. (3) No one was allowed to talk or make a sound when the television was on; all eyes were glued to the moving and flickering image. The box commanded absolute respect. (4) In the daytime, “the television needs its rest” my mother would say, as she patted its pseudo-wooden top and covered it with a doilie she had made herself. (5) There is no doubt that TV was as central to our lives as it was to the lives of all our friends during that period. (adapted from an essay by Angeline Chan, used with permission.)*

Notice the writer’s use of action verbs (*knocked*, *glued*) and her use of sensory words (*19- inch, black and white, huge, talk, sound, flickering)* to paint a picture of the scene in her living room. In the final sentence, she states the main point of the paragraph: that TV was central in families’ lives during the 60’s. The appearance of a topic sentence at the end of a paragraph, rather than at the beginning is common in descriptive paragraphs, and it works well for this kind of development.

**Sample 2**. This paragraph is a student’s response to an assignment to describe a place of personal importance or beauty:

(1) The trail, perching precariously 500 feet above the roaring surf and then dipping effortlessly into dark lush valleys, snakes its way along the fluted coastline. (2) From a distance, it is hard to believe there would be any way to traverse the cliffs that dip like fingers into the frothing Pacific. (3)The first half of the trail is densely overgrown, and the air is dripping with the aroma of over ripe guava. Waterfalls and streams cascade unceasingly down along the trail from Mount Waialeale, the wettest spot on earth. (4) Vegetation grows thickly on the near vertical slopes above and below the trail, lending a sense of false security to the path, which at its widest measures ten feet across. (5)The landscape on the second half of the trail, the leeward side, changes dramatically from jungle to semi-arid desert. (6)Now, the cliffs are bare rock, and a three-foot wide ledge is all that protects the wary hiker from the black shoreline below.(7) Nevertheless, the white sand beach that marks the end of the trail is more than ample reward for the dangers survived.(8) The colors of this last valley, the Kalalau Valley, are a vivid red and green against a cloudless blue sky. (9)This, however, is not the end of the trip. The only trail out is the trail in. Not for the faint of heart, the Kalalua Trail on Kauai’s north shore is eleven miles of rugged adventure. (from an essay by Noreen Edgar, used with permission)

This writer, too, makes liberal use of sense words (*roaring, dark, lush, thickly* etc.) and vivid action verbs (*snakes, traverse, cascade).* In addition, she uses a spatial arrangement that moves much in the way a hiker might, from a distant view*,* to a description of the first half of the trail, and then to the second half. The topic sentence, (sentence 9) as in the first sample, is found at the end instead of the beginning of the paragraph.

**Process:** A process arrangement is usually used to explain a process or how to do something. It uses **transitions of enumeration** (e.g., *first, second, third*), **time** (e.g., *then, next, finally*) and is the right pattern of development when your purpose is to help your readers understand the **steps in a process or procedure or to give instructions.** For full development, a process paragraph relies on clear communication of the instruction or steps to your readers.

Process paragraphs/essays explain to the audience **how to do something or how to complete a task.** This may involve **explaining how to put items or ingredients together** to make a finished product, such as in a recipe. These essays can **also explain** **how to accomplish a goal**. For example, a process essay could detail the steps that must be taken in order to graduate from a particular college. Regardless of the subject, **all process essays must clearly explain in detail how to complete or perform a task.**

***Sample of a process paragraph:***

*(1) The writing process has four distinct phases. (2) The first is invention, which is aided by any number of techniques, including free-writing, mind-mapping and outlining. (3) In this first stage, it’s important for a writer not to edit but to let ideas flow and to simply get them down on paper. (4) After invention, comes the first draft—the stage where the ideas start to take shape. (5) Many writers use a sentence outline at this stage to see where they need to cut and where they need to add material. The first draft is also where writers should develop a tentative thesis to guide the structure of their essay. (6) The next stage of the process is when both the second and third drafts are done. (7) Here, ideas and structure are refined, and the thesis is revised until it becomes the unifying idea of the paper. (8) Finally, comes the last stage, that of editing. (9) Writers should take care at this stage that all sentence structure and punctuation is correct, and they should make corrections to documentation format as needed. (10) Writers often repeat these four phases more than once, or skip a phase and go back to it, making the writing process more cyclical than linear.*

* Notice how the topic sentence (1) introduces the number of steps in the process.
* Then, the next two sentences, (3) and (4), name and comment on the first step.
* The next series of sentences—(4) to (7)—go on to enumerate and comment on the next two steps, and
* sentences (8) and (9) complete the description of the process.
* The paragraph ends with a general statement (10) about the writing process that characterizes it and sums it up.

**Exemplification:** This pattern uses examples (or one longer, extended example) to support the topic sentence and is useful when your most convincing support is a number of relevant examples. With this pattern, you provide proof of a more general statement (the topic sentence) with the weight of the specific instances (supporting details).

Exemplification means to provide **examples** about something. Writing an exemplification paragraph/essay typically involves offering many examples to support a generalization [a general statement or concept obtained by *inference* (a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning) from specific cases] about something. In this type of essay, **examples act as supporting material** to explain or clarify the generalization.

Not only do these examples illustrate and explain the topic sentence, but they also make your writing more interesting and more convincing. The following paragraph about the Woodstock festival uses a number of short examples to illustrate its main idea:

*In most respects, after all, Woodstock was a disaster. To begin with, it rained and rained for weeks before the festival, and then, of course, it rained during the festival. The promoters lost weeks of preparation time when the site had to be switched twice. They rented Yasgur’s field less than a month before the concert. The stage wasn’t finished, and the sound system was stitched together perilously (in a way that is full of danger or risk) close to the start of the show. As soon as the festival opened, the water- and food-delivery arrangements broke down, the gates and fences disintegrated, and tens of thousands of new bodies kept pouring in. One powerful lure was the rumor that the revered Bob Dylan was going to perform; he wasn’t. In response to an emergency appeal for volunteers, fifty doctors were flown in. The Air Force brought in food on Huey helicopters, and the Women’s Community Center in Monticello sent thirty thousand sandwiches. One kid was killed as he was run over by a tractor, one died of appendicitis, and another died of a drug overdose.*

                                                                    Hal Espen, “The Woodstock Wars”

The writer of this paragraph piles on many examples, one after the other, to support his main idea. Each example gives a specific illustration of how Woodstock was a disaster: it rained, the promoters had to switch sites, water and food were not delivered as planned, and so on.

If a **single example is** particularly **vivid**and **compelling**, it can sometimes be enough to support a topic sentence. The following paragraph uses **one extended example to support its main idea**—that fear can move one to action.

*Sometimes fear can be a great motivator. Once when I was in high school, I tried out for a part in the school play. I was surprised and thrilled when I was given one of the leads. Never for a moment, however, did I consider how long my part was or how hard I would have to work to memorize it. All I could think of was how much attention I was getting from my friends. I even ignored the warnings of the play’s director who told me I would be in trouble if I did not begin to memorize my lines. The reality of my situation finally sank in during our first dress rehearsal when I stumbled all over my lines, and the rest of the cast laughed at me. That night, and for the two weeks leading up to the play, I spent hours going over my lines. Miraculously, I got through the first night of the play without missing (at least obviously missing) many of my lines. As a result of that experience, I learned two things: first, that I could do almost anything if I was frightened enough and second, that I would never try out for another play.*

                                                                                              Jerry Doyle (student)

***Sample of a paragraph developed by exemplification:***

In the paragraph below, a student writer uses exemplification to develop her point about Shakespeare’s use of language in the play, Henry IV:

*(1)The subordinate image of women is suggested in this passage by the way they are treated and addressed by the male characters. (2)The language Falstaff uses in addressing the hostess of the tavern , for example, echoes the treatment of women in other parts of the play.(3) In this passage, instead of apologizing to the hostess for his rudeness towards her, Falstaff says that he “forgives” (3.3.176) her and orders her with commands.(4) In addition, the brusqueness of his manner is accentuated by short, terse phrases —“go make ready,” “love thy husband,” “look to thy servants,” “cherish thy guests” and “be gone” (3.3.176-180). (5) This disrespectful treatment of women is echoed as well in Hotspur’s behavior towards his wife, Kate, when he says to her, “I love thee not; I care not for thee, Kate” (2.3.90-91) and when he expresses his distrust of her simply because she is a woman (2.3.107-111). (6)Still another woman in the play, Lady Mortimer, experiences the same treatment when she is referred to as “a peevish self-willed harlotry” (3.1.198) by her father, Owen Glendower. (7)Overall, the men in this passage speak of and to the women in ways that suggest women must submit to disrespectful and dominating behavior by men. (Adapted from an essay by Angeline Chan, used with permission.)*

* In this paragraph, the author opens with a general statement about the author’s portrayal of women in the passage under study,
* and then, the writer provides her first example from the text.
* She goes on in sentence (3) to give a more specific example,
* and then, supports her example in sentence (4) with quotes.
* In sentences (5) and (6) , she gives two other examples, and
* finally, in sentence (7), the writer concludes and sums up the idea presented in her topic sentence.

**Comparison/Contrast**: This pattern of development is useful when you want to help readers understand a concept by **pointing out similarities and differences between** it and another concept. The comparison is usually developed either by analyzing all features of one concept and then comparing them to the features of the other (**a block comparison method**) or by analyzing each point of comparison (**a point-by-point method**). The conclusion of the paragraph should be drawn from your comparison. Your conclusion sums up the points made in your compare and contrast paragraph/essay. Your reader should know how and why the two things in your paper were the same but also different.

***Sample of a paragraph developed by comparison/contrast:***

In the paragraph below, a writer draws differences between student nurses and regular staff on a hospital unit. Notice how the writer makes a comparison between the dress and behavior of the two groups to draw a conclusion about the relative powerlessness of the nursing students.

*(1)In morning report, the nursing students were always obvious, even to the casual observer. (2)Their uniforms marked them, of course.(3) Unlike the grads in their crisp, white cotton dresses and caps, all the students were dressed in robin’s-egg blue polyester tops and skirts.(4) Their shoes, too, were a dead give-away. (5)While the old-timers wore scuffed, white duty shoes, broken down by miles of walking the hospital corridors, the students’ shoes were pristine, freshly polished before each shift in case of a snap inspection by the surgical instructor. (6)The most telling detail, however, was the way the students all perched around the edges of the room on stools, leaving the chairs around the conference table for the regular staff. (7)No one had ever explicitly told them that they couldn’t sit at the table; no one had to. (8)They just automatically took their places on the periphery, giving deference to the nurses who worked on the unit. (9)No one had to tell them either, that while the regular staff could talk during report, they could not.(10) Each morning, as the night-duty nurse read report, the regular staff laughed and joked about the patients and each other, but the students, not daring so much as a peep, leaned in, waiting to catch each crumb of information about the patients entrusted to them that day. (11) In those days, neither staff nor instructors ever left a first year student nurse with any doubt about the position she held in the hierarchy.*

* In sentence (1), the writer introduces one of the groups she will compare, then, in sentences (2) and (3), introduces the first point of comparison (uniforms) and makes the comparison (crisp white vs. blue polyester).
* In sentences (4)-(8), the writer introduces two more points of comparison, using a point-by-point structure to develop the paragraph.
* In sentences (9) and (10), the writer introduces and develops the final point of comparison, and then in sentence (11), draws a conclusion about the power differences between the two groups, based on the comparison.

**Definition**: A paragraph of definition aims to give a complete, working definition of a term, concept or idea in your paper. One of the central features of this pattern is that it tells both **what the term is and what it isn’t**, that is, it **defines the boundaries of a term** so your readers can better understand it. This pattern is useful when you are introducing new or specialized terms to your readers, or when you need to define a key concept in your thesis. For example, if you were writing a paper to explain the role that propaganda played in the Nazi takeover of Germany, you might begin by defining the key features of propaganda as they relate to the thesis of the paper.

Some rhetoricians, such as Winifred Horner (1988), suggest a classical approach to defining terms. In this approach, the term is named and the class to which it belongs is determined. Then, the differences between the term and others in its class are named. Thus, if you were defining propaganda, you might place it in the larger class of communicative acts, which would include advertisements, reports, and magazine articles and then try to determine what differentiates propaganda from these other types of communication. Through this analysis, you could come up with an “essential definition” (Horner, 1988, p.80) of the term that might look like this: propaganda is mass communication that deceives or distorts truth to further political goals.

***Sample of a paragraph developed by definition:***

In the paragraph below, the writer defines the term *paradigm*, which is a key term in her thesis. She has placed this paragraph right after her introduction, as a first body paragraph so as to give readers the information they will need to understand the analysis that comes later:

*(1)In nursing research, paradigms are essential to help to place the research into a broader context. (2) According to Polit and Hungler (1997) paradigms constitute a worldview or a general perspective on the complexities of the real world. (3)More specifically, paradigms for human inquiry are often characterized in terms of the way in which they respond to basic philosophical questions (p.11). (4)In this sense of the term, then, paradigms are more than typical examples or models. (5)Rather, they demonstrate relationships between ideas and provide a basis for a methodology or a theory, and as such, they are useful as lenses for viewing and interpreting significant, substantive issues to the discipline. (6)Thus, paradigms that are often used for nursing research, such as empiricist, interpretive and critical social paradigms, provide frames that hold the vocabulary, theories, principles, presuppositions and values related to an inquiry. (Adapted from an essay by Mary Ratsensperger, used with permission.)*

* In sentence (1), notice how the writer opens with a topic sentence that introduces the term to be defined and suggests the importance of the term to the paper.
* Then, in sentence (2), the writer gives a definition of her term from a source and then draws the boundaries of the term in sentence (3) by specifying the part of the definition that applies to her topic.
* In sentence (4), the writer differentiates her term from other words that might be in the same class, such as *examples* or *models* and goes on in sentence (5) to identify another part of the definition that applies to the thesis of her paper.
* Finally, the writer concludes by giving examples of the term that will be addressed in her paper.

**Cause and Effect**: Cause and effect paragraphs analyze the causes or the effects of something or the relationship between both. If you want to explain the “why” of something—a process, an event, a concept—then this is a useful pattern. In this pattern, **transitions of logic** (e.g., thus, therefore, consequently, as a result) and **words and phrases of cause and effect** (e.g., because, for the reason that, given that, in effect) feature prominently.

Be careful, however, when you make statements about cause and effect. If there is more than one cause to a particular effect, be sure not to restrict your analysis or explanation. On the other hand, if there is more than one effect, be sure not to assume they all arose from the same cause. To be sure there is a connection between the causes and effects you are analyzing or explaining, ask questions like “Is this the only thing that could cause this effect?” and “Is this the only possible effect this cause could have?” and “Was this cause sufficient to result in this effect?”

***Sample of a paragraph developed by cause and effect:***

This paragraph is taken from a student essay on the causes of the French Revolution:

*(1)While there were many contributing factors to the French Revolution, a primary cause was a financial crisis brought on by royal extravagance. (2) For years before the revolution finally exploded in 1789, the royal government had been borrowing heavily to cover deficit spending. (Cobb, 1988.) (3) Even though France’s high courts of appeal cautioned against such borrowing, the royal’s extravagance continued, eventually resulting in a financial crisis that required the government to institute a series of taxes. (4) As the press highlighted the government’s spending with cartoons and stories, the peasants, already burdened by high taxes, low wages and poor harvests, began to resent the demands of the royals. (5)Finally, in 1789, the Third Estate—the common people—became so enraged, they demanded a new constitution and refused to compromise with the existing government until it was written. (6) This demand set off the first sparks of revolution.*

* In the topic sentence (1), the writer introduces both the cause (a financial crisis) and the effect (the French Revolution ) she will discuss.
* In sentence (2), she then suggests the first cause, the royal government’s spending and borrowing.
* In sentence (3) the writer announces the first result, a financial crisis, which she signals with the word *resulting.*
* Then, in sentence (4) she introduces a contributing cause—that of high taxes, etc.—and suggests the effect—the peasants’ resentment.
* The writer then suggests the effects of this resentment in sentence (5) and finally states the overall effect in the concluding sentence (6) of the paragraph.

**Exposition:** When you read your textbook, the newspaper, magazine articles, or any other types of publications, you are reading expository writing. When you write answers for an essay test, you use the expository form. **In an expository paragraph, you give information.** You explain a subject, give directions, or show how something happens. In expository writing, linking words like first, second, then, and finally are usually used to help readers follow the ideas.

This paragraph, like any other, organizes itself around three parts. A topic sentence allows the reader to understand what you are writing about. The middle part of the paragraph contains supporting sentences that follow one another in a logical sequence of steps. The concluding sentence closes your subject with an emphasis on the final product or process desired by the topic.

Remember that all paragraphs should contain a topic sentence. It may be even more important in the expository paragraph because this is where the main idea of the paragraph is expressed. This topic sentence lets the reader know what the rest of the paragraph will discuss

*Example: Going to college can be expensive. First, college tuition and room and board can cost anywhere from $2,000 to more than $10,000 per semester. Other expenses make going to college even more expensive. For example, books typically cost between $100 and $500 each term. Second, materials are also very expensive. Paper, notebooks, writing utensils, and other supplies required often cost more at the college bookstore than at any local discount department store. For instance, a package of notepaper costing $2 at a discount store might cost $5 at a college bookstore. Finally, there are all kinds of special fees added onto the bill at registration time. A college student might have to pay a $50 insurance fee, a $20 activity fee, a $15 fee to the student government association and anywhere from $500 to $100 for parking. There is another fee if a student decides to add or drop classes after registration. The fees required to attend college never seem to end.*

The topic sentence in the example lets the reader know that the paragraph will talk about the expenses of going to college. Immediately following the topic sentence is the first supporting sentence (underlined) and two detail/example sentences. Each support sentence and its two detail/example sentences are shown in different colors so you can see where one ends and the next begins. Finally, the closing sentence neatly ties back to the topic sentence by rephrasing it.

Notice the use of transitional words to help the reader follow the ideas. Also, notice the use of third person point of view in this paragraph. The third person point of view (he, she, one) is most commonly used for expository writing, technical writing, and any other sort of writing that has a business-minded or persuasive intention or purpose. For our purposes in this class, you will always use third person point of view when writing expository paragraphs, unless otherwise directed. This means there should be no "I" or "you" words anywhere in the paragraph.

**Paragraph Length**

“how do I know when to start a new paragraph?” or “how long should a paragraph be?” Usually, these questions are related to how well paragraphs are developed and unified, and essentially, there is no one, right answer. In extreme cases, you might find a paragraph as short as few sentences or as long as a page if it achieves the writer’s purpose. However, most paragraphs fall somewhere between these two extremes, and while there are no hard and fast rules, there are a few principles you can use to determine proper paragraph length:

1. The paragraph should be long enough to fully develop your topic.

2. The paragraph should focus on one topic

3. The paragraph length should support the effect you are trying to create. Keep in mind that longer paragraphs slow readers down and shorter paragraphs are easier and quicker to read.

4. Paragraph length can vary greatly from discipline to discipline.

**Paragraph layout**

In order to signify where a paragraph begins and ends, you have a choice of two

methods.

1. Indent the paragraph

text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text.

text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text.

2. Leave a space between paragraphs

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

text text text text text text text text

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text text text text text text text text

## Some Sample Paragraphs

### Undergraduate literary analysis

In this paragraph from a 2012 [Lewis Prize-winning](http://english.wisc.edu/undergraduate-scholarships.htm#writing_prizes) English essay, UW–Madison undergraduate Abby Becker organizes her sentences in a savvy manner. She first transitions her reader into her topic, then introduces the source of evidence for that paragraph before analyzing that source and returning to the topic with the new critical perspective that her analysis suggests.

In order for a political or social revolution to occur, connections must be formed. More means of communication lead to more opportunities to make connections. In Dos Passos' The 42nd Parallel, J. Ward Moorehouse focuses on making business connections but never forms any relationships. He explains at a party that "he had come down in a purely unofficial way you understand to make contacts" (249). In business and politics, making contacts denotes an impersonal, removed way of dealing with people. This type of communication does not result in connections. Moorehouse's connections are for his own political personal gain. There may be a connection but no insight or true relationship. Moorehouse views people as a tool to advance his own business and political agendas demonstrating that connections with people are often made out of selfish, egotistical motives.

### Magazine profile

From a September 2006 *The Atlantic* [article](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/09/the-hive/305118/), by Marshall Poe, describing Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia, and collaborative knowledge. Notice how the first sentence introduces a philosophical issue that the body sentences define and link to both Wikipedia and Wales's own personality.

Wales was an advocate of what is generically termed "openness" online. An "open" online community is one with few restrictions on membership or posting-everyone is welcome, and anyone can say anything as long as it's generally on point and doesn't include gratuitous ad hominem attacks. Openness fit not only Wales's idea of objectivism, with its emphasis on reason and rejection of force, but also his mild personality. He doesn't like to fight. He would rather suffer fools in silence, waiting for them to talk themselves out, than confront them. This patience would serve Wales well in the years to come.

### Psychology

From [Spontaneous Gestures Influence Strategy Choices in Problem Solving](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21813800) (2011). UW-Madison Psychology Professor Martha Alibali et al. present empirical research on how children use physical gestures to acquire mathematical problem-solving knowledge. Notice the clarity of expression in the first paragraph's topic sentence: the writer provides sufficient set-up to prepare readers for the data which comes at the end of each paragraph.

We predicted that participants in the gesture-allowed condition would be less likely than participants in the gesture-prohibited condition to generate the parity strategy, because the availability of gesture would promote use of perceptual-motor strategies instead. This was indeed the case; the proportion of participants who used the parity strategy on at least one trial was .74 in the gesture-allowed condition and .91 in the gesture-prohibited condition, \_2(1, N = 85) = 4.17, p = .04 (Fig. 1). Once they generated the parity strategy, most participants (89%) used it on all subsequent trials.

### Mechanical engineering

From [Mounting methodologies to measure EUV reticle nonflatness](http://proceedings.spiedigitallibrary.org/proceeding.aspx?articleid=788459) (SPIE Proceedings7470, 2009), by the lab of UW–Madison Professor Roxanne L. Engelstad. Notice how Battula et al. signal the practical consequence of their findings and also suggest that another result would be possible depending on further research.

Unfortunately, to map the entire reticle with a single measurement, a 12 in. beam expander is needed. With such a large optical system, the expander must be held rigidly, not allowing it to tip or tilt. Since the UW-CMC mount must remain vertical to be effective, it cannot be used in this scenario. Consequently, the application of this mount is limited. Thus, a number of new designs have been proposed by industry to address the alignment issues and provide for other options, such as automated handling. Three of these designs are described and evaluated in the following sections.

### Literary studies

From [*Dorothy West's Paradise: A Biography of Class and Color*](http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/dorothy_west%27s_paradise.html) (2012), by UW–Madison Professor Sherrard-Johnson. Notice how the first two sentences give crucial background information in order to set up the topic sentence.

In Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America, Jeff Wiltse examines how U.S. swimming pools were transformed from interracial single-sex spaces in which class and gender were more important than race to "leisure resorts, where practically everyone in the community except black Americans swam together." His study then follows what he calls the second social transformation—"when black Americans gained access through legal and social protest" and "white swimmers generally abandoned them for private pools." The various iterations of West's story, which discuss the span from 1950 to 1980, fall between these two moments in social and legal history. I am particularly intrigued by how the national history of segregated bathing areas informs the local, particular event described by West. Does the exclusion of blacks from the high beach parallel the segregation of public pools? In the early twentieth century, public bathing spaces were notoriously violent. The Chicago Riot in 1919 was touched off when white bathers threw rocks at black teenagers who had drifted into a white beach on Lake Michigan. Northerners' use of pools during the Progressive era reinforced class and gender but not racial distinction. Working-class folk did not swim with the upper classes, but they were not as concerned about color. Following the Great Migration, the concerns about intimacy and sexuality that have always been latent in conversations about public space (in particular the public space of the pool) were directed at blacks. The peculiar democracy of the beach—in bathing suits it is more difficulty to determine class‐worked against black Americans. Wiltse marks this shift between the years of 1920 and 1940. The social changes that took place during this period shape West's complex politics. (26)

### Legal writing

Former UW–Madison School of Law Professor Arthur F. McEvoy wrote this model paragraph as part of a memorandum on effective writing. Notice that each of the body sentences illustrates and develops the main idea or topic sentence.

The ideal paragraph contains five sentences. The topic sentence almost always comes first and states as clearly as possible the point that the paragraph makes, just as the first sentence of this paragraph did. The three middle sentences of the paragraph follow the topic sentence in some rational order and substantiate it with examples, analysis, or other kind of development; if written clearly, middle sentences may employ conjunctions or subordinate clauses to put across complex ideas without breaking the basic form. Every well-written paragraph ends with a "clincher" sentence that in some way signals completion of the paragraph's point and places it in context, either by restating the topic sentence, relating the topic back to the thesis of the writing as a whole, or by providing a transition to the paragraph that follows. While good style may require a writer to vary this basic form occasionally, the five-sentence model captures the Platonic essence of the paragraph and most effectively accomplishes its purpose, which is to state a single idea, in sequence, discretely and comprehensively.

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