

Workshop 5: Flow



We acknowledge and respect the *ləkʷəŋən* peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and *WSÁNE/* peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.



Why Flow Matters

Good flow means the reader always knows **why this sentence or paragraph is here**. They are motivated to keep reading.

- Flow lives at two levels:
 - **Paragraphs:** one main idea that is clearly stated at the start.
 - **Sentences:** ideas progress from old → new, simple → complex.
- Your task is to make the reader's task **as easy as possible..**
- To do this, you need **clear structure** for the reader to follow.
- **The guidelines here are not hard-fast rules, and breaking them *intentionally* and sparingly can create the some of the best writing.** However, ignoring these guidelines is not a good recipe...

Key idea: If a reader only skimmed your first sentences in each paragraph, they should still follow the story.



Paragraphs: Argument First, Details Second

A paragraph is a **unit of argument**, not just a block of text. The **first sentence** should state the main point.

Role of the first sentence

- States the **main idea** of the paragraph.

What follows

- Evidence and examples.
- Logical reasoning.
- Limitations, caveats, and discussion.
- Sometimes a mini-wrap-up that links back to the bigger story or helps bridge to the next paragraph or section.



A Simple Paragraph Template

Role	Example fragment
Topic / claim sentence	"Last Interglacial global sea-level estimates remain uncertain because different sites tell conflicting stories."
Support	"Coral ages and elevations from Hawaii, the Bahamas, and the Seychelles often show wide scatter, even when measured with similar techniques."
Support	"These scattered datasets produce spatial gradients that are hard to reconcile with existing geophysical models."
Wrap / link	"Together, these discrepancies motivate a new approach."



Linking Paragraphs for Flow

A good diagnostic

1. Read all the topic sentences in your peers work, ignoring everything else.
2. Ask yourself: do they tell a clear, logical story?

If not, your paragraphs may be internally fine but globally out of order. Alternatively, your paragraphs many need to be internally reworked, divided, or combined.



Sentence structure: given → new

Within a sentence, put **given / familiar information first** and **new / important information second**.

- **Given / old:** what the reader already knows from previous sentences or common context.
- **New:** the fresh result, technical term, or key twist.
- This pattern:
 - Creates logical continuity.
 - Puts emphasis on the **end** of the sentence.

Example:

Given (old / familiar) → New (new / important / technical)

“These observed sea-level differences are hard to explain, and to account for them, we need a fully 3-D viscoelastic Earth model with laterally varying viscosity.”



Sentence order in practice

Example — Awkward order

“A complex, fully 3-D viscoelastic Earth model with laterally varying viscosity is required to explain the observed sea-level differences among interglacial reef sites.”

Problem: heavy, technical phrase appears before we've reminded the reader what problem we're solving.

Example — A solution

After: “To explain the observed sea-level differences, we need a **complex, fully 3-D viscoelastic Earth model with laterally varying viscosity**.”

Same content, but the familiar concept (“observed sea-level differences”) comes earlier, and the heavy technical phrase moves to the end position for emphasis and better flow.



Workshop activities:

A good diagnostic

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Working on sentences

1. Identify a paragraph that either you or the author are struggling with.
2. Work through the sentences one by one and identify where new information and old information is presented.
3. Discuss whether or not re-ordering sentences can improve flow.

