

Paragraphs



Paragraph basics

- A paragraph introduces and treats a single idea (more or less)
- Marked by indentation and/or blank line between
- A good paragraph is:
 - unified (around a single idea)
 - coherent (all sentences work together to develop the idea)
 - distinct (differs in topic from sentences preceding and following)

Paragraphs are unified

- All sentences in a paragraph contribute to building one idea
- That idea is announced by the *topic sentence(s)*
- Power positions: first (topic) and last (often key point or summary)

¶⁽¹⁾Two main forces are at work as protostars accrete matter from clouds of dust and gas: gravity and radiation pressure. ⁽²⁾The force of gravity drives accretion, and increases as more material is accreted. ⁽³⁾Radiation pressure opposes accretion, and increases as gravitational collapse increases the protostar's temperature. ⁽⁴⁾As accretion progresses, radiation pressure strengthens relative to gravity, and accretion should cease when the two forces balance. ⁽⁵⁾Electromagnetic forces drive stellar winds. ⁽⁶⁾The simplest models suggest that gravity-radiation equilibrium should occur before the protostar reaches about 10 solar masses. ⁽⁷⁾The existence of larger stars, therefore, suggests that these models are incomplete. ⁽⁸⁾Very massive stars are the source of elements heavier than iron in our universe.

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Paragraphs are coherent

- Sentences work together to develop the paragraph's idea
- Coherence depends on *paragraph organization* and on *relational devices*
- **Organization:** signaled by topic sentence **or** standard/logical scheme
 - spatial or temporal
 - general to specific; or specific to general
 - least to most important
 - familiar to unfamiliar
 - simple to complex (e.g., rules then exceptions)
 - certain to uncertain

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- **Relational devices:** show how sentences fit together
 - parallelism in construction or word choice (“First...” “Second...” “Third...”)

¶ We measured enzyme activity in presence of inhibitor with an in vitro assay. We first purified the enzyme in a sucrose gradient. We then added 0.1 µmol of purified enzyme to each well of a 96-well plate, and added 0.1 µmol of inhibitor to half the wells. We incubated the plates at 37° for 30 min, and then added 0.1 or 1 µmol of substrate to each well. Finally, we assayed enzyme activity spectrophotometrically.

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 - repetition (*how much is too much?*)
 - transitional expressions: *also, although, because, for example, hence, next, on the other hand, similarly...*

No transitional expressions: “Lava from the 1998 eruption was richer in metals than that from the 1983 or 1977 ones. The 1998 lava was denser and less CO₂-rich. ejecta volumes were very similar. we cannot reject the hypothesis that eruptions are driven by periodic filling of a single magma chamber.”

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With transitional expressions: “Lava from the 1998 eruption was richer in metals than that from the 1983 or 1977 ones. The 1998 lava was, **furthermore**, denser and less CO₂-rich. **Despite these differences**, ejecta volumes were very similar. **As a result**, we cannot reject the hypothesis that eruptions are driven by periodic filling of a single magma chamber.”

Paragraphs are distinct

- Each paragraph develops its own idea
- This makes paragraphs distinct *but not independent*
- Paragraphs work together in a section just like sentences in a paragraph
 - Same techniques: organization, relational devices
- Linkages between paragraphs often end up too strong. Common problems:
 - Superfluous paragraph breaks (no shift in topic)
 - Overstrong dependency (e.g, start with “Despite this...”)
 - Redundant paragraphs (two paragraphs, same topic)

Today's workshop

Paragraph markup

- Each group will be given a paragraph (or a few) to mark up.
- Identify the following elements:
 - (1) topic sentence(s)
 - (2) end-paragraph power position
 - (3) incidences of parallelism and repetition
 - (4) transitional expressions *within* the paragraph
 - (5) transitional expressions *connect* paragraphs
 - (6) if any, sentences or phrases that don't fit the declared topic
 - (7) if any, phrasing that creates overstrong dependency on material outside the paragraph.
- Identify the within-paragraph organizational scheme: temporal, spatial, general to specific, etc.
- Is the paragraph unified? Coherent? Distinct? Suggest a revision to improve one or more of these characteristics.