



Writing Good Paragraphs

The Basic Unit of Academic Writing

3 Qualities of a Good Paragraph

- Relevance
- Coherence / Cohesion
- Conciseness



Relevance: The Paragraph as a “Thought Unit”

- Topic Sentence / Claim
 - Overall topic
 - Specific aspect – “limiting idea”
- Body
 - Evidence
 - Examples
 - Reasoning
- Conclusion/Transition


Good paragraphs represent a unified thought, not a random set of sentences. Each sentence should directly relate to and contribute to the thought expressed in the topic sentence. They can do this in a variety of ways including elaborating on ideas, giving examples, or clarifying concepts. Once the thought has been fully articulated, the writer can begin their next paragraph.



Practice 3.1: Recognizing Irrelevant Sentences

Which of these sentences is/are irrelevant?

The Japanese automobile industry uses robots in many stages of its production process. In fact, one large Japanese auto manufacturer uses robots in all stages of production. The company claims it has saved millions of dollars by this practice. Some Japanese universities are developing medical robots to detect certain kinds of cancer. While their current overall success rate is lower than a highly trained medical professional, they have proven capable of quickly detecting several of the most common types of cancer. Another automobile factory in Japan uses them to paint cars as they come off the assembly line. Since robots are spraying the paint, there is less concern for human health and safety. Furthermore, most Japanese factories use robots to weld the parts of the finished car together. It is likely that even more companies will find further uses for robots on their production lines in the future.



Coherence/Cohesion: Making it Flow

Coherence

- Logical flow of ideas
- Connecting ideas at an idea level
- Supporting ideas with details
- Requires planning
- Macro-level

≈Argumentation

Cohesion

- Seamless transitions between sentences
- Connecting ideas at a sentence & paragraph level
- Using linguistic cues to link ideas
- Occurs as you are writing/rewriting
- Micro-level

≈Readability

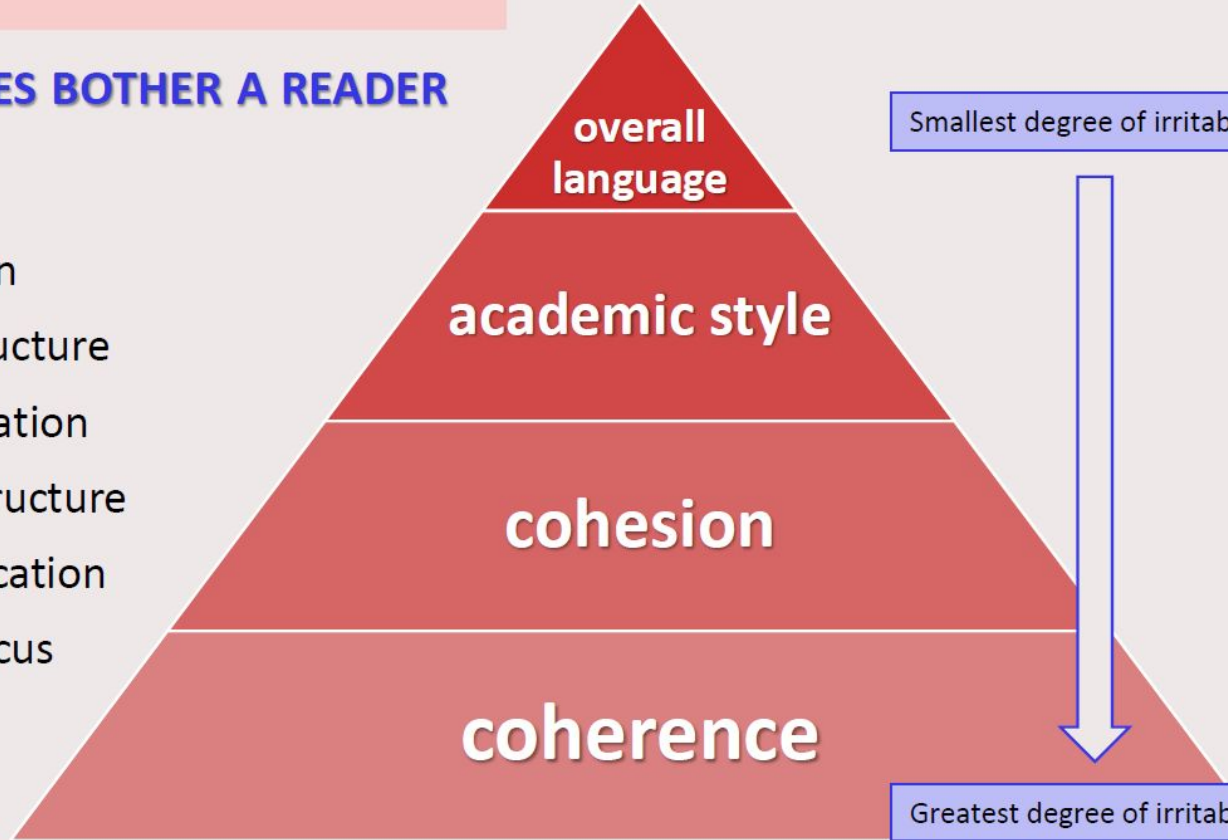
READABILITY

DEGREE TO WHICH ISSUES BOTHER A READER



Word choice
Word location
Sentence structure
Sentence location
Paragraph structure
Paragraph location
Paragraph focus
Overall logic

Greatest degree of irritability



overall
language

academic style

cohesion

coherence

Smallest degree of irritability

Greatest degree of irritability

Cohesion Techniques

- Old-before-new pattern
- Parallel structures / repeated words
- Consistency in POV/tense/number
- Linking language (more fully covered in later lessons)



Which of these
two sentences
sounds better
to you?

1. Your writing lacks cohesion, but it is not bad.
2. Your writing is not bad, but it lacks cohesion.


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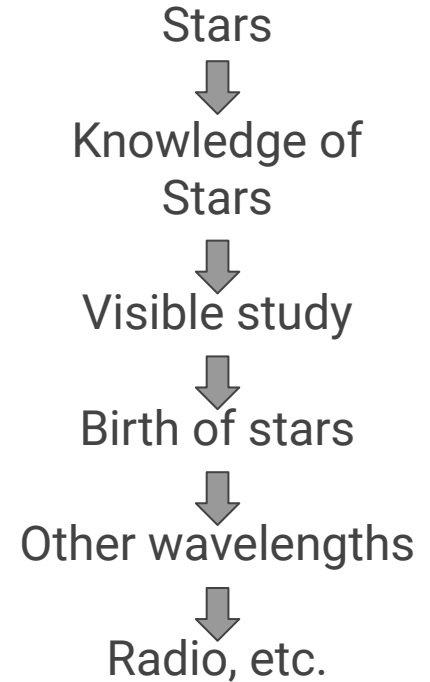
The old-new pattern in writing smoothly *connects each sentence to the next*. This smooth connection allows a reader to focus on your message instead of your *language*. Remember, language is a tool for expressing *your ideas*.

Practice 3.2: Old-New Pattern

- A. The birth of stars, however, cannot be followed by an optical telescope, since it takes place in regions of space from which light cannot escape.
 - B. To study this process, therefore, astronomers have to make use of telescopes operating at other wavelengths.
 - C. Developments in radio, millimetre-wave and infra-red astronomy have turned the study of star-formation into one of the most exciting areas of astronomy.
 - D. The majority of stars, including the Earth's sun, are clouds of gas which are maintained at a high temperature by the energy liberated by thermonuclear reactions in their centres.
 - E. Most of our knowledge of stars and how they evolve comes from the study of the visible light they emit.
 - F. It is currently thought that most of the matter of the universe is in the form of stars.
- 

Practice 3.2: Old-New Pattern

- A. The birth of stars, however, cannot be followed by an optical telescope, since it takes place in regions of space from which light cannot escape. - 4th
- B. To study this process, therefore, astronomers have to make use of telescopes operating at other wavelengths. - 5th
- C. Developments in radio, millimetre-wave and infrared astronomy have turned the study of star-formation into one of the most exciting areas of astronomy. - 6th
- D. The majority of stars, including the Earth's sun, are clouds of gas which are maintained at a high temperature by the energy liberated by thermonuclear reactions in their centres. - 2nd
- E. Most of our knowledge of stars and how they evolve comes from the study of the visible light they emit. - 3rd
- F. It is currently thought that most of the matter of the universe is in the form of stars. - 1st




Practice 3.3: Rewrite Using Old-New Pattern

The biological clock is a master clock that dictates the day-night cycle of activity known as circadian rhythm. The suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) was identified as the location of the clock in the brains of humans and animals. Specialized clock genes are activated and deactivated mainly by a pair of proteins, one of which turns on a group of genes and the other of which turns off a key gene in a feedback loop that has a 24-hour rhythm (specifically a 24-hour and 18-minute rhythm). The biological clock functions regardless of the normal 24-hour cycle of light and darkness. Light is involved in resetting and regulating the clock.



A Possible Answer for Practice 3.3

The biological clock is the master clock that dictates the day-night cycle of activity known as circadian rhythm. The clock was identified in a part of the brain called the superchiasmatic nucleus (SCN). Within individual SCN cells, specialized clock genes are activated and deactivated mainly by a pair of proteins, one of which turns on a group of genes and the other of which turns off a key gene in a feedback loop that has a 24-hour rhythm (more precisely, a 24-hour and 18-minute rhythm). Although the biological clock functions regardless of the normal 24-hour cycle of light and darkness, light is still involved in resetting and regulating the clock.



Parallelism & Repetition

Keeping things the same


- This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.
 - A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.
 - We can neither wait for something to happen nor can we take evasive action.
 - The old house sits vacant. The ancient dwelling has been empty for 30 years, and both neighboring residences have been demolished.
-

That's better...

- This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering ~~workers'~~ its wages.
 - ~~Going for~~ a brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.
 - We can neither wait for something to happen nor ~~can~~ ~~we~~ take evasive action.
 - The old house sits vacant. ~~The ancient dwelling~~ ~~It~~ has been empty for 30 years, and both neighboring ~~residences~~ ~~houses~~ have been demolished.
-

Practice 3.4: Consistency in POV/Tense/Number

When Zane brought his two year old to the swimming pool for a first lesson last week, he is surprised by the chaos of pre-lesson preparations. With goggles gripped tightly in her fist, another parent's friendly Labrador retriever distracted Emily with her wet kisses. Sprawled across the wet cement floor with her arms wide open to the friendly dog, Zane tried to redirect Emily toward the swimming pool. At the athletic club, we always did a nice job of hiring welcoming, knowledgeable swimming instructors. Once Zane introduced Emily to her teacher, he tries to retreat back to the parents' seating area. A small crowd were gathered, and Zane found a seat among them. Once seated, Emily realized that he had left her and began to cry. Waving with a wide smile on her face, Zane saw that the teacher was looking directly at him and beckoning him to come back. Rising to his feet, Emily reached for her dad as he made his way back to the poolside. For the remainder of the lesson, Zane crouches near the water's edge, encouraging Emily as she laughs and splashes in the water.



Linking Words: Sentence Connectors & Conjunctions

Sentence Connectors

- Moreover
- Also
- However
- Nevertheless
- As a result
- For this reason
- Otherwise
- Next
- Then
- And many, many others...

Conjunctions

- and
- but
- not only
- but also
- yet
- because
- before
- after
- although
- And many, many others...

Practice 3.5: Cohesiveness

It is well known that many students come to the university to visit lectures because it provides the opportunity to meet peers and to have discussions also about less academic topics. The meeting place at the university is partly replaced by a virtual meeting place. Students report about their daily activities, opinions, problems using social media. At this moment social media plays a limited role in the academic process of teaching and learning. But social media could offer great opportunities.

Rewrite the provided paragraph considering the cohesion techniques we discussed: old-before-new, parallelism, consistency, and linking words.



Practice 3.5: One Possible Solution

Many university students attend on-campus lectures partially because it provides the opportunity to meet peers and to have discussions about less academic topics. However, the meeting place of the university is being partly replaced by a virtual meeting place: social media. Students use social media to report about their activities, opinions, and problems. While social media currently plays a limited role in the academic process of teaching and learning, it could offer great opportunities.



Conciseness

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

– William Strunk, Jr., American writer

Conciseness: 8 Tips - Tips 1 & 2

Tip #1: Eliminate extra words that do not carry any additional meaning.

- **Wordy:** Chapter 3 gives an overview of the results **that were obtained**.
- **Concise:** Chapter 3 gives an overview of the results.

Tip #2: Write in active voice if possible.

- **Wordy:** **In** this report, **it is** shown that errors **were due to** faulty programming.
- **Concise:** This report shows that faulty programming caused errors.

Conciseness: 8 Tips - Tips 3 & 4

Tip #3: Identify and reduce the use of prepositional phrases

- **Wordy:** The reason for the success of the experiment by Rogers and Newton was that they checked the levels of the fluid at every stage throughout the procedure.
- **Concise:** Rogers and Newton's experiment succeeded because they checked the fluid levels consistently throughout the procedure.

*Tip #4: Combine sentences when information can logically be inserted into another sentence.**

- **Wordy:** The supposed crash of a UFO in Roswell, New Mexico aroused interest in extraterrestrial life. This crash is rumored to have occurred in 1947.
- **Concise:** The supposed 1947 crash of a UFO in Roswell, New Mexico aroused interest in extraterrestrial life.

Conciseness: 8 Tips - Tips 5 & 6

*Tip #5: Avoid starting sentences with “there is/are” or “it is”.**

- **Wordy:** There are 6 steps that are necessary to complete the process.
- **Concise:** Six steps are necessary to complete the process.

Tip #6: Replace a phrase with a single word whenever possible.

- **Wordy:** Given the fact that not enough research exists to prove this theory, it is necessary that further studies be conducted.
- **Concise:** Since little research exists to prove this theory, further studies should be conducted.

Conciseness: 8 Tips - Tips 7 & 8

Tip #7: Replace vague wording with more powerful and precise words.

- **Wordy:** Some of the subjects believed but could not be certain that a person's economic situation could play a role in how happy that person might be.
- **Concise:** One-third of the subjects assumed that economic status was linked to personal happiness

Tip #8: Omit unnecessary qualifiers.

- **Wordy:** Since a great many of the words in this sentence are basically unnecessary, it would really be a very good idea to edit somewhat for conciseness.
- **Concise:** Since many of the words in this sentence are unnecessary, it should be edited.

Practice 3.6: Rewrite for Conciseness

It has been argued by Stargill that there is no topic in education on which there is greater agreement and consensus among educators than on the need for parental involvement in classrooms (Stargill, 2009). Parental involvement is quite critical. It is important because it encourages and fosters the development of the child in regards to education (Summers, 1997). There are many obstacles, barriers, and impediments to increasing parental involvement, however. Some of these are parental availability, parental interest, and parental awareness (Jones, 2015). Any strategy which only focuses on or addresses one of these three criteria is less likely to be successful than one which can tackle all three at the same time.

