

Writing Center Modules
Paragraphing
2011-2012 Academic Year
Fall Semester 2011

Sean Meyer
September 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Instruction.....	3
II. Exercises.....	8
III. Answer Key.....	11
IV. References.....	14

Paragraphing

GETTING STARTED

Paragraphs can be defined as clusters of information supporting the main point of the essay.

In other words, they advance the action of your story.

In terms of a thoughtfully constructed paragraph, one should:

- **Clearly focus on your main point.** What is the message you are trying to get across to your readers?
- **Develop the main point.** This is done with specific and concise examples and evidence.
- **Choose a suitable pattern of organization** in order to present the evidence validating your thesis to the audience of the essay.
- **Formulate coherent paragraphs.** By ensuring that the information you are presenting to your audience builds from one point to another, the reader comes away with a better understanding of the central message of the essay.
- **Balance your opinion and evidence.** A good essay begins with a clear opinion on the subject at hand – **your thesis**. In constructing your essay and gathering your research, one should always take into consideration how well your evidence can support your opinion. However, choose your evidence carefully. Too much evidence can be considered detrimental to the development of the essay, and can leave the reader with a feeling of redundancy. Similarly, too much opinion will not be valued highly unless it is balanced with and validated by strong, supporting evidence. In an academic essay, although your opinion may have been influenced by the research conducted, one should refrain from making assertions without presenting clear evidence to fortify it.

There are generally two ways to develop the structure of the paragraphs in one's essay. Keeping in mind that the focal point of your essay is your thesis, you should always build your supporting evidence to relate your paragraphs to your thesis. One must tie **the points back to the thesis; help prove the assertions presented in your thesis; or use your body points to further explore and expand on the ideas stated in your thesis.**

BUILDING YOUR PARAGRAPH

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

The topic sentence of your paragraph will introduce the main point and focus of the individual paragraph. This is in contrast to your thesis, which introduces the main point and focus of your entire essay.

It should always come first as well as tie to earlier information presented in your essay. To do this, you should use a transitional phrase or sentence.

There are some situations and special cases in which the topic sentence may not be needed, such as:

1. Expanding upon a concept introduced previously in the essay.
2. The main point can be determined by the reader based on the context of the paragraph and how the supporting evidence is presented within the body.
3. The entire essay is presented as one narrative.

In any case, be careful to avoid making generalizations within the body of the paragraph. We must always be sure that the main point is clearly evident to the reader.

THE BODY

There are different methods to go about organizing your essay. It is important to note the peculiarities of each type so as to determine which one best fits the needs of your essay.

THREE GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What is my thesis?

In other words, what is my message? What am I trying to prove? At the end of the essay, what do I want my reader to come away with?

2. How would you define your research?

Research can come in many forms:

- Statistical data
- Hypothetical situations
- Personal narrative
- Historical data
- Current events
- Descriptive data
- Postulations for the future

Whatever the case may be, the contents of our research can give us an effective framework for the body of our essay. Often, the success of our essay will be dependent on how well we deliver the information to support our main argument, and if we present it in such a way that it is concise, clear and easy to understand.

3. How best can you deliver your message?

The following is a list of general methods of organization for preparing the body of your essay:

1. Examples/illustrations - These are extended examples presented in the format of a story. This is the most widely used organizational tool. With examples and illustrations, the writer uses evidence of situations to help validate the ideas presented in your thesis. It is important to note the context in which one has to write. For example, if you are using a novel as source material, take specific examples from the novel; if you are writing on a more global, real world phenomenon, you would draw from current events.
2. Narration – A paragraph of narration, or personal narrative, should be used if an entire story comprises your essay. Two primary ways to construct your narrative include presenting it as it happened in chronological order or through flashbacks. Whatever the method, you want to take the reader on a journey, and make them feel as though they are witnessing the action themselves by including sensory details such as the sights and sounds of the time. Including more personal touches such as the thoughts you gleaned from the experience will help keep the reader engaged and leave them feeling rewarded.
3. Description – Descriptive paragraphs are used to illustrate the finer details of a person, place or thing. To effectively convey your description, you must use concrete examples and also make use of the five senses – sight, sound, taste, and touch. The most effective way to organize your description can be either to present both tangible (physical) and intangible (mental, emotional, and spiritual) character traits in the body paragraphs; or to present the traits in the introduction and use the body to present situations where these character traits can be gleaned.
4. Process – Process paragraphs are used to illustrate how to develop, construct or build something; to describe the method by which something comes to fruition; how to obtain something. Because it generally deals with an idea illustrated from start to finish, the information should be presented in time, or chronological, order.
5. Cause and effect - This organization is presented as the quintessential “If this happens, then the following will occur.” It can be presented in a historical context or as a warning of a future occurrence, or a “chain reaction,” so to speak. The overarching effect is usually presented as the topic of the essay, with the causes comprising the body. However, the cause can also function as the topic, provided there are multiple effects that took place as a result of the action.
6. Classification and division – Classification refers to a grouping of items into categories according to one consistent principle. It can be considered the bottom up approach as opposed to division, which divides one item into many parts in illustrating its subtleties. Consider this the top down approach.
7. Compare and contrast – With this type of paragraph, we are looking at two different objects with characteristics that are somewhat similar but altogether different. Here, you are to draw attention to their subtleties and also consider in which ways they are not alike. The similarities and/or differences are generally presented one at a time, point by point.
8. Definition – Definition-type paragraphs are much like classification or division paragraphs. Here, we will clearly state how a word or concept is part of a general group or set of interrelated terms. Then, the body paragraphs serve to provide enough evidence so as to differentiate the concept from others in the same class.

9. Analogy – Analogies are comparisons between items with little in common. To best use an analogy, you should choose a topic that is vaguely unfamiliar, misrepresented or considered abstract to your readership. The key is to explain the significance of the unfamiliar object in terms of something that is considered known, familiar or an idea that is widely accepted by the general public. By looking at the abstract through the lens of something that is understood, we seek to present the reader with a fresh, new viewpoint on the subject, ultimately gaining a different perspective.

STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZING

There are generally two ways for organizing your paragraphs in an essay; however, it is important to understand the context in which you are writing.

1. Section headings – This is a more formal way of organizing one's ideas, and is the generally accepted format for those writing business and research proposals. Here, the reader gets a clear understanding of the topic at hand. The writer breaks the essay down into parts, focusing on only one aspect at a time. However, the writer must be mindful of the fact that each succeeding portion of the paper should build on the previous part, either by way of transition or helping the reader to understand how the parts are interrelated.
2. Transitions between blocks of text – The most generally used approach to paragraph construction. Here, the author uses transitional phrases and words to tie the new information back to the previous information. The transitions help with paragraph cohesion and flow.

STRUCTURING A PARAGRAPH

Ideally, paragraphs are between 100 to 200 words. Shorter paragraphs could be considered too choppy, and do not help to maintain a clear semblance of ideas. In contrast, longer paragraphs can be hampered by verbose language and too many similar ideas and concepts used to explain the main point. Writers also are at risk for coming off as repetitive, and can ultimately lose the reader's attention. Longer paragraphs will challenge one's attention span. It is always a good idea to group your paragraphs by point.

SAMPLE OUTLINE

1. Introduction
 - a. Thesis
 - b. Introduce main points
2. Body - Main points
 - a. Examples, evidences
 - b. Statistics
 - c. Quotations
 - d. Tie to thesis/analysis
 - e. Transitional sentence
3. Conclusion

- a. Summarize main points
- b. Rephrase thesis
- c. Final thoughts
- d. Concluding statement

BREAKING PARAGRAPHS

Here are several solutions for breaking up paragraphs that might otherwise be hampered by too much detail or an incoherent flow of ideas:

- 1. Clearly identify your introduction and conclusion.
- 2. Clearly signal the beginning and end of a new idea.
- 3. Signal a change in speakers, especially in terms of who is providing the evidence.
- 4. Indicate that a shift in time and space has occurred, especially in terms of a process or narrative essay.
- 5. Differentiate comparisons from contrasting information.
- 6. Provide a much-needed pause by breaking up a long paragraph into several short ones. This can also be done in the midst of single paragraphs by inserting a comma, period, or other punctuation mark. Keep sentences short and to the point, avoiding run-ons and unnecessarily complex language.

EXERCISES – TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

Analysis by Division and Classification. Complete the following paragraphs by breaking down the stated main idea to their essential functions OR components.

A. Unit: Teacher

- a. Guiding Question: What are the essential qualities, function and purpose of a teacher?
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.

B. Unit: Fruit

- a. Guiding Question: What are some different kinds of fruits?
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.
 - iv.
 - v.

C. Unit: Car

- a. Guiding Question: What are some different parts to a car?
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.
 - iv.

Cause and Effect. Based on the topic and information given, determine which is a cause and which is an effect.

- 1. Alcoholism
 - a. My father's family has a history of drug usage.
 - b. My father verbally abuses my sister and my brother.
 - c. My father lost his driver's license.
 - d. My father was demoted after 10 years in his position.
 - e. Our family is not in a good position financially.
- 2. People are not voting as much anymore.
 - a. People are losing trust in government.
 - b. Teenagers are apathetic toward politics.
 - c. People are not properly educated in political rights.
 - d. Candidates are turning to non-traditional methods such as social media to connect to constituents.
 - e. City council members are spreading political propaganda at town hall and city council meetings.

Process. Read the following paragraph about the founding of Google.

For the first few years of its existence, Google employed a bottom-up culture that encouraged employee creativity and innovation. The benefits of this move to empower employees were enormous. Within two years of its birth in the technology industry, Google created Gmail, a web-based email system that focused on greater interconnectivity between individuals⁸. As time passed, innovations such as Google Maps and Google Earth, concepts that used mapping technology to provide a bird's eye view of the world, as well as Google Talk, which allowed for instant video communication over the internet, came to light. Such inventions are prototypical of another trend of the 21st century – the move to a flatter society. Indeed, Google has partnered with educational and knowledge-based institutions overseas as part of its Google Books Library Project, including The University Complutense of Madrid, who became the first Spanish-language-based member in September 2006.

Google's personal ambitions to increase the hold on the search engine market overseas, however, have been met with severe antitrust allegations both home and abroad. The company currently holds 95 percent of the search market in Europe. With a more level competitive field, analysts believe more search engines can take advantage of a recent push toward internet commerce in European markets.

But the initiative that most likely is closest to founder Larry Page's heart is its Google Energy subsidiary. Founded in January 2010, the entity has the power to buy and sell electricity on federally-regulated wholesale markets, the first step in his desire to position Google as a green friendly company and transition the technology pioneer into an era of carbon neutrality. In the wake of increasing federal scrutiny over their desire to expand the reach of their search engine, it may provide them the goodwill needed for corporate survival in an increasingly global market.

1. How has Google expanded its services since its introduction to search engine technology?
2. What was Larry Page's reasoning behind the creation of the Google Energy subsidiary?
3. What kind of culture does Google employ that has provided them with such product diversity and a wealth of profit?
4. Looking back on our definition of process paragraphs, what aspect of the process paragraph format does the Google commentary illustrate?

Description. Read the following paragraph and use the questions to guide your commentary on how the author presents his evidence.

As Lawrence concocts different scenarios for the party, we uncover more side effects of his issues with self-assurance and insecurity. He hopes to be accompanied to the party by his agent, Mark Plebe, and eagerly awaits confirmation of his friend's presence there by the light of his computer monitor. But Mark, it turns out, is out of town for a shoot by another client, and his refusal to either confirm or deny his own invitation to the is met with great disappointment from Lawrence: "He'd hoped to hear that Plebe was going to the party so that they could go together. Or if they didn't go together, at least he would know someone there".

He later thinks to message his producer in hopes of provoking his own acknowledgement of an invitation, but realizes the foolish nature behind such an action: "... he didn't want to give Gleekman the impression that he was feeling insecure about his place at Kate's party". While he seems to be show awareness of his shortcomings, his need to feel surrounded and protected by familiar faces in attending the party shows us his inability to function on his own. He shows no self-confidence in light of what he has achieved thus far and must insulate himself with encouraging and comforting voices as he approaches new territory. In social settings, when one joins or aligns themselves with that of a group, the burden to share one's ideas becomes less threatening, as there are others around to carry the conversation. This is not unlike membership to a political party, where one has the opportunity to champion a certain set of collective ideals and values but in doing so sacrifices the chance to showcase his own individual views about political issues. Kate will never truly hear his personal aspirations for the show if she feels he may be constantly influenced by other voices.

1. What does the author identify as character traits of Lawrence?
2. In pulling direct material from the text to support his assertions, the author uses_____.
3. In his analysis of Lawrence's behavior, the author compares his situation to an individual trying to gain membership to a particular political party. What type of organizational technique for paragraphing does the author employ in doing so?

4. How does Lawrence cope with his “perceived” shortcomings?

ANSWERS

Analysis by Division and Classification

- I. Unit: Teacher
 - a. Guiding Question: What are the essential qualities, function and purpose of a teacher?
 - i. Leadership
 - ii. Knowledge of given subject
 - iii. Ability to relate to students
- II. Unit: Fruit
 - a. Guiding Question: What are the different types of fruits?
 - i. Oranges
 - ii. Pears
 - iii. Grapes
 - iv. Apples
 - v. Watermelon
- III. Unit: Car
 - a. Guiding Question: What are the different parts to a car?
 - i. Steering wheel
 - ii. Hood
 - iii. Engine
 - iv. Window

Cause and Effect

- 1. Alcoholism
 - a. Cause
 - b. Effect
 - c. Effect
 - d. Effect
 - e. Effect
- 2. People are not voting as much anymore.
 - a. Cause
 - b. Cause
 - c. Cause
 - d. Effect
 - e. Cause

Process.

1. How has Google expanded its services since its introduction to search engine technology?

It has created Google Mail, Google Earth, Google Talk, and Google Maps. It has also partnered with educational institutions overseas to promote literacy with the Google Books Library Project.

2. What was Larry Page's reasoning behind the creation of the Google Energy subsidiary?

The founder would like to position Google as a "Green" company and strengthen its efforts to go carbon neutral.

3. What kind of culture does Google employ that has provided them with such product diversity and a wealth of profit?

It is a "bottom up" culture that encourages creativity and innovation. Employees are encouraged to use Google resources to pursue their own ideas and make the company better by strengthening its product line.

4. Looking back on our definition of process paragraphs, what aspect of the process paragraph format does the Google commentary illustrate?

The Google commentary illustrates the methods and avenues Page has used to build the company. Touching on its birth and humble beginnings as a technology giant, the paragraph describes how company policies have led to contributions in the field of communication, transportation, education, and green technology.

Description.

1. What does the author identify as character traits of Lawrence?

He is insecure and shy. He is not very self-assured and lacks confidence in his ability to succeed at his profession. His lack of self-assurance causes him to seek others' approval of his work and to align himself with a group of leaders in his profession.

2. In pulling direct material from the text to support his assertions, the author uses quotations.
3. In his analysis of Lawrence's behavior, the author compares his situation to an individual trying to gain membership to a particular political party. What type of organizational technique for paragraphing does the author employ in doing so?

The author uses the analogy technique.

4. How does Lawrence cope with his "perceived" shortcomings?

He tries to invite both his agent and producer to the party to avoid the prospect of going alone.

References

Brandon, Lee, and Kelly Brandon. Ed. *Sentences, Paragraphs and Beyond: Associated Readings*.

5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008. pp. 378, 420-21. Print.

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference with 2009 MLA and 2010 APA Updates*. 6th ed. Bedford/St.

Martin's, 2010. Print.