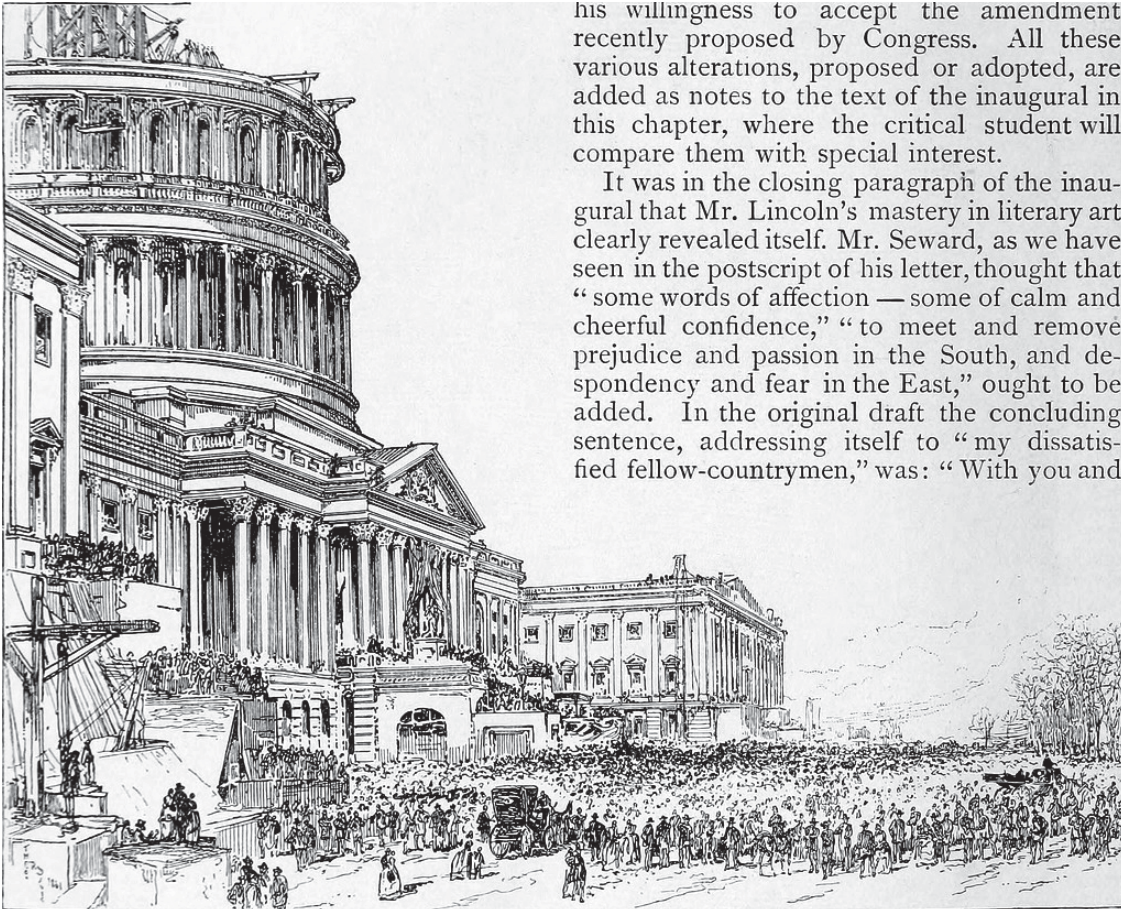


Chapter 6: Effective Paragraphs and Their Elements



his willingness to accept the amendment recently proposed by Congress. All these various alterations, proposed or adopted, are added as notes to the text of the inaugural in this chapter, where the critical student will compare them with special interest.

It was in the closing paragraph of the inaugural that Mr. Lincoln's mastery in literary art clearly revealed itself. Mr. Seward, as we have seen in the postscript of his letter, thought that "some words of affection — some of calm and cheerful confidence," "to meet and remove prejudice and passion in the South, and depondency and fear in the East," ought to be added. In the original draft the concluding sentence, addressing itself to "my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen," was: "With you and

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What Is a Paragraph?

Simply, a paragraph is a collection of sentences made up of words. Words, sentences, and paragraphs are the building blocks of good writing. The keys to a "good" or effective paragraph are **unity**, **coherence**, and **adequate development** through a variety of organized details that create a full exploration or analysis of the paragraph's focus. In effective paragraphs, the sentences are related and the details flow in a natural or logical sequence.

What Makes a Good Paragraph?

Unity is achieved by focusing each paragraph on a single idea, often called the **controlling idea**. This controlling idea is usually established in the **topic sentence**. The topic sentence works like a mini-thesis for the paragraph and guides the content of the paragraph. Beginning writers should consider making the first sentence of each paragraph the topic sentence; more advanced writers can manipulate the placement of the topic sentence to the middle or end of the paragraph, or simply imply the topic through a unified focus and **coherence**.

Coherence makes the paragraph flow and is created by bridges. Think about what bridges do: they join cities and islands; they connect places to one another. These bridges also connect sentences and ideas, helping the writer avoid "sentence stacking." Sentence stacking happens when bridges are lacking and sentence structure is not varied.

Two types of bridges can be employed:

- Logical bridges carry the same idea over from sentence to sentence.
- Verbal bridges link ideas using repeated key words, synonyms, pronouns, and transitions.

Here is an example of a paragraph of stacked sentences that lacks logical and verbal bridges:

My dogs are named Cooper and Calli. Cooper is a Golden retriever and Akita mix. He is a male. Calli is a shepherd, Husky and wolf mix. She is a female. Calli was rescued from the pound. Cooper was purchased from a breeder. They are close in age. They play together all the time.

Revised to incorporate bridges and varied sentence structure, the paragraph would read as follows:

My dogs, Cooper and Calli, are best friends. Cooper, a male retriever and Akita mix, came from a breeder. On the other hand, Calli, a shepherd, husky and wolf mix, was rescued from the pound. Because they are close in age, they play together all the time.

Still, the paragraph lacks **adequate development**. Adequate development is achieved through details, including facts, description, examples, quotes, analysis, explanation, and evaluation. A more developed paragraph would read like this:

My dogs, Cooper and Calli, are best friends. Cooper, a male Golden retriever and Akita mix, came from a breeder. On the other hand, Calli, a shepherd, Husky and wolf mix, was rescued from the pound. Because they are close in age, they play together all the time. For example, the two dogs hunt for mice that are attracted by the seed in the chicken coop in the back yard. They also play in the kiddie pool I fill with water every morning. Being a Golden retriever mix, Cooper should be more attracted to the water, but Calli is the one who is always wet from laying in the pool.

The paragraph, however, has no closure. It just “stops.” A final sentence is still needed:

Cooper keeps Calli active and fit with their constant play. They are truly bonded.

Use Transition Words

Transition words are like bridges between parts of your paper. Transitions establish logical connections between sentences, paragraphs and sections in written work. These verbal bridges signal your intentions and establish the progression of ideas to your readers.

The many types of transition words lead readers to make certain connections. Some imply the building of ideas while others help readers compare or draw conclusions from the preceding thoughts.

Relationship	Useful Words
Similarity	Also, in the same way, just as, likewise, similarly
Contrast	But, however, in spite of, on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, in contrast, still, yet
Time	Afterward, after, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, later, now, simultaneously, recently, then, subsequently
Place	Above, below, beyond, here, there, in front, in back

Order	First, second, third, next, finally
Emphasis	Even, indeed, of course, in fact
Example	For example, for instance, to illustrate, such as
Cause and effect	Accordingly, consequently, therefore, thus
Addition	Additionally, also, again, as well, equally important, furthermore, further, in addition, moreover
Conclusion	Finally, in a word, in brief, briefly, in conclusion, to conclude, on the whole, in the final analysis, to summarize, in summary

Types of Paragraphs

The basic paragraph contains the elements of unity, coherence, adequate development and usually a topic sentence. But not all paragraphs are the same. Paragraphs have special functions; the purpose determines the type of paragraph you write. Students often learn that paragraphs must have six, or 10, or 14 sentences. The truth is that paragraphs contain the right number of sentences to make good writing, and good writing considers the purpose of the paragraph to determine its style, content, and length.

Introductions

Whether it is one paragraph or an entire chapter, the purpose of the introduction is to grab your readers' attention and coax them to continue reading. The introduction also sets the tone, whether it be light-hearted or serious. Make sure you draw your readers in with a set of strategies appropriate to your topic. If readers are not intrigued from the very beginning of the piece, they will quickly become distracted and avoid reading any further.

What is the difference between a good and a bad introduction? A bad introduction is misleading, rambling, incoherent, boring, or so hopelessly vague that you know less about the topic than you did before you read it. On the other hand, a good introduction gives the reader a reason to keep on reading, and sets the stage for a really exciting performance. An introduction is like a first impression; it is crucial to your image and, once presented, you never get a second opportunity. Your essay's introduction is your reader's first impression of your ability as a writer. Even if you are brilliant and have great ideas, a muddy or boring introduction will turn away many of your readers. One caution: Do not use tedious openers such as "in today's society" or openers that merely relay what the assignment is; change the opening. Additionally, do not directly state your intentions by saying, "In this essay I will..." Also, avoid clichés; you want your writing to be fresh and original. And finally, be careful not to write a wordy or overly dense introduction; your introduction should merely set the stage for the rest of the paper. Your introduction should provide a hook and relate to the issue at hand.

In developing your introduction, a mix of strategies can be used:

- An anecdote, a brief story, that hints at the topic of the essay;
- A definition, though one of your own making. Do not quote the dictionary because these definitions are too simplistic and trite;
- A set of facts or statistics that you will develop further in your essay;
- Quotations from subject matter experts regarding your topic. Any quotes should be specific to your issue and the discussions that surround it, not something pulled from "famous quotations" Internet sites. Do not, however, let another's words open your essay. The quote should be in the body of the introduction, not the first sentence;

- Background that sets the stage for the discussion of your topic;
- Examples that demonstrate your topic.

Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph, or set of paragraphs in a longer essay, should focus on a single topic and develop it thoroughly with a mix of details or evidence. Types of evidence include facts, data, examples, and expert testimony.

Conclusions

After all the work you have exerted on your paper, you want to end with a **good conclusion**. For many writers, this is the hardest part of the essay to write. A beginning writer often learns that one should restate the thesis and sum up the main points. A more sophisticated conclusion uses a variety of strategies available, leaving a lasting impression on the reader.

To begin a solid conclusion, incorporate the following key elements.

- Reference any elements offered in the introduction.
- Do not simply restate your thesis; instead, emphasize the significance of your thesis.
- Sum up your main points.
- Reflect on the information presented.

To expand your conclusion and drive home your main point, you can also incorporate creative elements. Some suggestions are as follows:

- Ask a thought-provoking question;
- Present a “call to action,” telling your readers what you want them to do with the information you have presented;
- Provide a quotation that captures and confirms the assertion you made in your thesis. The quote should be from an authority on the subject; however, don’t just go to quotes.com and choose a random quote.

Often, this choice will be determined by the genre, audience, or purpose of your paper. Nevertheless, your conclusion should accurately reflect the paper’s subject and provide the reader with closure.

One final point: Be sure not to end a paper with new ideas or a thesis you have not already supported or explained in the paper. Remember, a conclusion is meant to reiterate the paper’s main argument and then return the thesis to the larger issue the paper is addressing and should not present any new arguments or topics in the process.

Transitional Paragraphs

Short paragraphs between longer paragraphs are sometimes needed to link sets of information or transition from one idea or set of ideas to the next. The transitional paragraph can sum up previous points or draw conclusions then lead into the ideas to follow. An example of a transitional paragraph occurs in previous section of this chapter in the description of conclusions:

“Often, this choice will be determined by the genre, audience, or purpose of your paper. Nevertheless, your conclusion should accurately reflect the paper's subject and provide the reader with closure.”

While not all essays need transitional paragraphs, do not be afraid to use them in more complex writing.

Chapter 7: Analyzing Assignments



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Snowflakes, Fingerprints, and Assignments

Writing assignments in college differ as much as instructors. There is no one guidebook, approach, or set of rules that college teachers will consult when putting together their coursework. Since each assignment will always be unique, it is important to devote time to thoroughly understanding what is being asked of you before beginning. Don't wait until the night before the work is due to begin asking questions and delving in. The sooner you understand and approach the assignment's requirements, the less time you will spend second-guessing (and needlessly revising) your writing.

Analyzing an Assignment

You will likely encounter many different kinds of writing assignments in college, and it would be nearly impossible to list all of them. However, regardless of genre, there are some basic strategies one can use to approach these assignments constructively.

- **Read the assignment sheet early and thoroughly.** An assignment sheet may be lengthy, but resist the temptation to skim it. Observe and interpret every detail of the text. Moreover, it is essential to focus on the key words of the subject matter being discussed. It would be unfortunate to hand in an incomplete or misguided assignment because you did not properly read and understand the guidelines. Since you can easily overlook details on the first reading, read the assignment sheet a second time. As you are reading, highlight areas where you have questions, and also mark words you feel are particularly important. Ask yourself why your professor has given this assignment. How does it relate to what you are studying in class? Pay