

## Paragraphs (i)

The meaning of ideas is explained and developed, not in individual sentences but in *Paragraphs*.

To ensure that the meaning of your ideas is made clear to the reader, the four key features of paragraphs are: *Unity, Coherence, Adequate Development* and *Topic Sentences*

**Unity** means that every piece of information in the paragraph (and every sentence) must relate to that single idea (the one presented in the topic sentence). If you have two ideas, you have two paragraphs.

If the idea is very complicated, break it down into its constituent parts or elements. (Sometimes, 'the idea' is how an idea we introduced in a previous paragraph applies to a particular situation. This is a separate idea.)

**Coherence** means that the paragraph (the way you explain the idea) must make the meaning of the idea clear. Remember, you won't be there beside the reader to say *What I mean here is...* so you must ensure that you explain clearly and exactly what you mean.

**Adequate development** means that you must fulfil the 'promise' made in the topic sentence. By the end of the paragraph, the reader must understand the idea defined in the topic sentence.

## Paragraphs (ii)

Before you begin to write each paragraph, be sure that you understand what specific idea is to be explained in each paragraph, and then summarise this main point or idea clearly in a **Topic Sentence**.

For example:

By stating the central topic clearly:

The cognitive process of the Left and Right hemispheres of the brain do not find meaning in the same way – or look for it in the same place.

...then the reader will be better able to understand and anticipate the kind of information that will follow.

or:

If the paragraph explains a complex process, begin with a simple overview:

Processing black & white film is done in four consecutive stages: a) development, b) stop bath, c) fixing, and d) final wash or rinse.

...and then describe each step in detail.

## Paragraphs (iii)

The paragraph must provide all of the information necessary for the reader to understand the idea in the topic sentence. Consider what 'kind' of information is needed to do this? (*A definition? A historical overview? An example? A description of the process? An explanation of the idea's causes or its effects or its implications?*)

Points to remember:

- Keep paragraphs to a length of 75 to 125 words and five or six sentences
- Long paragraphs can be intimidating, and readers may lose their concentration or worse, lose the thread
- Repeat key words rather than using pronouns 'it' or 'they' (Consider the problem resulting from the use of 'it' in the following explanation: "*I'll hold the nail and you take the hammer. When I nod my head, hit it with the hammer...*")
- Use phrases such as "*This policy of providing financial assistance to...*" or "*This change in pricing structure...*" that point backwards to information given previously
- Establish a logical order for the order in which to provide information. Depending on the idea to be explained, this might be: from cause to effect, from the general to the particular or from the historical to the contemporary
- **Never** combine two ideas in one paragraph; instead, present complex ideas in two consecutive paragraphs (each with its own topic sentence) with a short paragraph between them to link the two together
- Spell-check **and** proof-read