

Aims of the Unit

This unit is designed as a companion piece to *How to Write an Essay* and *How to Write a Composition*. Its aim is to help students write various kinds of paragraphs from grades five through the first years of secondary school. It will be helpful for students at higher levels of education who have had difficulty with writing in earlier years. The unit contains many work sheets which can be used individually by students or in groups. Many of these work sheets are most useful if completed by pairs of students. It is also advisable for students to discuss the ideas generated by the work sheets in larger groups. Much of this unit is written from a student perspective, so that teachers may give students the pages which they need or so that students can purchase the unit to use as they write their compositions at home.

1. WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is a group of sentences which all talk about one topic or subject or idea. Sometimes a paragraph can stand alone. In this case, all the sentences will talk about only one thing. If a paragraph contains sentences which all discuss one idea, the paragraph is said to possess **UNITY**. Unity means that there is only one idea in the paragraph. The sentences in the paragraph do not talk about any other ideas, only the main idea.

The main idea of the paragraph is stated in the **TOPIC SENTENCE**. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in the paragraph, but it does not have to be. Sometimes the topic sentence may be in the second, third, fourth or even the last sentence in a paragraph. A writer who pays attention to the topic sentence and writes a good one will ensure that the paragraph possesses unity. The **CONCLUDING SENTENCE** is not only the last sentence in the paragraph, but it has another job: It sums up the main idea of the paragraph.

But the sentences in the paragraph also have to be arranged in an order that makes some sense. This arrangement of sentences is called **COHERENCE**. If a paragraph possesses coherence, then one sentence will lead logically to another. The writer will not skip around or jump from one idea to another. There are many different ways to create coherence in a paragraph and some of these are discussed in the next few pages.

A good paragraph is one which contains unity and coherence. The ideas are presented in the topic sentence and summed up in the concluding sentence.

Usually, a paragraph does not stand alone. It is part of a longer piece of writing which consists of several (or sometimes many) paragraphs. The connected paragraph is discussed in a later section of this unit.

2. EXERCISES IN UNITY

A) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below, followed by a number of details. Decide which details should be included in a paragraph which uses the topic sentence. Cross out details which should not be included. Give a reason why you have chosen to discard each detail.

TOPIC SENTENCE: Sam is one of the best players on the baseball team.

DETAILS:

1. Sam is a good athlete.
2. Sam is very tall for his age.
3. Sam likes to eat pizza, but he does not like spaghetti.
4. Sam hit two home runs in the last game.
5. Baseball is one of the best games played professionally in North America.
6. When the pitcher throws the ball, Sam has a good eye and can determine where the ball will go in relation to the plate.
7. Sam can run to first base faster than anyone on the team.
8. Sam is a member of the safety patrol at school.
9. Baseball was invented by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, New York.
10. Sam can pitch, hit and catch very well.
11. Sam is a very good player at first base or short stop.
12. Michelle is almost as good a player as Sam.
13. Sam likes the new glove his father bought him for his birthday.
14. Sam can read the pitcher very well and knows when he should attempt to steal a base.
15. One day when our team was losing, Sam hit a grand-slam home run, which allowed us to win the game.
16. Sam prefers baseball to hockey.

2. EXERCISES IN UNITY

D) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below, followed by a number of details. Decide which details should be included in a paragraph which uses the topic sentence. Cross out details which should not be included. Give a reason why you have chosen to discard each detail.

TOPIC SENTENCE: On the bus next to me sat the strangest looking person I have ever seen.

DETAILS:

1. She carried a large shopping bag loaded with fireworks and another one with groceries.
2. She had long, red hair which stood up all over her head.
3. Her nails were painted purple and green.
4. She looked like she was over a hundred years old.
5. She had a wart on her chin and the wart was covered with hairs.
6. She stared straight ahead and did not say a word.
7. Her orange and green floor-length dress had long sleeves, but it was ripped and tattered.
8. On her cheek, she had a tattoo of a rose and an airplane.
9. She got on the bus at Maple Street and got off at Simcoe Hall.
10. She kept on scratching her neck, as if she had fleas.
11. In her purse was a large clock which chimed the hour just after she sat down.
12. As she breathed in and out, she gasped for air.
13. She looked like she was enjoying the ride on the bus.
14. She wore new white tennis shoes.
15. On her left hand were six or seven rings, but she wore no rings on her right hand.
16. Her cheeks were sunken and pale.
17. She wore purple eye shadow.

3. EXERCISES IN TOPIC SENTENCE

A) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below. In the space provided, add five specific details which would create an interesting paragraph. Make sure that each detail is included in the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

TOPIC SENTENCE: Margaret possesses all the qualities of a good friend.

DETAILS:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

3. EXERCISES IN TOPIC SENTENCE

D) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below. In the space provided, add five specific details which would create an interesting paragraph. Make sure that each detail is included in the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

TOPIC SENTENCE: Travel broadens a person's mind by presenting new experiences and new ways to think about the world.

DETAILS:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

3. EXERCISES IN TOPIC SENTENCE

F) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below. In the space provided, add five specific details which would create an interesting paragraph. Make sure that each detail is included in the idea expressed in the topic sentence.

TOPIC SENTENCE: My favourite television show/movie/music (choose one) makes me dream about new experiences which life can offer me.

DETAILS:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

3. EXERCISES IN TOPIC SENTENCE

G) A topic sentence must be **general** enough to include all the ideas in the paragraph, but **limiting** enough to allow the writer to focus on specifics. That sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? That is why writing is not an easy task; the writer must decide what is too general or what is too limiting. If the topic sentence is too general, it might be more useful for a longer piece of writing. On the other hand, a topic sentence which is too narrow may lead to a very short paragraph. For each pair of possible topic sentences given below, choose which would be more useful in writing a paragraph.

1. a) There are many interesting shows on television.
b) Television emphasizes too much violence.
2. a) Collecting stamps is a good activity for people of all ages.
b) Stamps for a collection can be found in the most unlikely places.
3. a) Quebec City can be a fun place to visit.
b) There are many things to do in Quebec City during its annual Winter Carnival.
4. a) Basketball is a good sport.
b) Basketball is good exercise.
5. a) A dog is a pet which every family should own.
b) A dog can be trained to do many tricks.
6. a) *Jurassic Park: The Lost World* is an excellent movie.
b) *Jurassic Park: The Lost World* is both exciting and fun to watch.

3. EXERCISES IN TOPIC SENTENCE

H) Write a topic sentence which covers all the details which follow. Remember that your topic sentence must be **general** enough to include all the ideas, but **limiting** enough to allow the writer to focus on specifics.

Topic Sentence: _____

Details:

1. My hands shook a little as I opened the door of the large, imposing building.
2. I peered inside, not knowing what to expect.
3. As my eyes became more accustomed to the dim light, I saw a room covered in dust and cobwebs.
4. Cobwebs clung to the huge chandelier which hung over the staircase.
5. I closed the door behind me and inched my way to the foot of the stairs.
6. The stairs began to creak as I slowly ascended them, wondering who the last person was to ascend the stairs and whether I would ever come down them again.
7. Then I heard a blood-curdling scream and ran as quickly as I could out of the building.
8. That was the last time I would ever enter that house alone.

3. EXERCISES IN TOPIC SENTENCE

L) Write a topic sentence which covers all the details which follow. Remember than your topic sentence must be **general** enough to include all the ideas, but **limiting** enough to allow the writer to focus on specifics.

Topic Sentence: _____

Details:

1. The Duckling was forced to swim about in the water, to prevent the surface from freezing entirely.
2. But every night the hole in which it swam about became smaller and smaller.
3. It froze so hard that the icy covering crackled again
4. The Duckling was obliged to use its legs continually to prevent the hole from freezing up.
5. At last it became exhausted, and lay quite still, and thus froze fast into the ice.

(from "The Ugly Duckling" by Hans Christian Andersen)

4. COHERENCE

Coherence is a smooth movement from one idea to the next in a paragraph. In order to achieve coherence a writer must pay attention to two things:

1. **arrangement** of the ideas
2. **logical connection** between the ideas.

Arrangement of Ideas:

When you build a house, you cannot put the roof on before the walls are built. Similarly, in a paragraph, you cannot skip around from one idea to the next without any sort of arrangement of these ideas; otherwise the reader may become lost or confused.

There are several ways to arrange ideas in a paragraph:

1. **chronological order**: This means that the ideas are presented in the same order that they occurred in time. We have all heard people tell stories when they omit an important event and then go back to put it in later; this can be very confusing. The writer has the advantage that he or she can revise the writing, make any changes before the copy is finished and ready for the reader. So the writer can put in any information which he or she has forgotten.
2. **physical order**: This means that the ideas, particularly in a description, are placed in some kind of order of space, such as left to right, top to bottom, or outside to inside.
3. **order of importance**: The writer can begin with the most important idea and lead to the least important idea. Or the writer can begin with the least important idea and lead to the most important idea. Order of importance can be very helpful when the writer is trying to convince the reader of a particular point of view.
4. **order of climax**: The writer can build suspense leading to a climax. This type of order is similar to the order of importance in that the climax (the most important idea) is put last.

Whatever order the writer chooses, it is important that the sentences in the paragraph be arranged in a logical sequence, so that one idea follows another.

4. COHERENCE

Logical Connection between Ideas:

A train may have all the right cars which are put in the best order for pulling them. However, if the cars are not connected to each other, the train will not be able to move them.

There are words which we use in English called **transition** words. Transition words provide the connection between the sentences, just as the coupling on a train provides the connection between its cars.

The most obvious transition words list ideas in the order in which they appear. These are "number" words, such as:

- first
- secondly
- thirdly, etc.

These words are very obvious transitions and would be avoided by more experienced writers.

Transition words can express the order or arrangement chosen by the writer. Therefore, there can be transition words which mean each of the following:

- time
- physical order
- order of importance
- similar ideas
- different ideas
- conclusion.

The chart on page 23 provides examples of transition words which can express each of these types of arrangement.

4. COHERENCE

Chart: Examples of Transition Words

Type of Arrangement	Examples
Time	then next later before during afterwards now meanwhile presently eventually
Physical Order	to the right to the left above below under beside in the distance straight ahead
Order of Importance	more importantly to some degree to a lesser extent
Similar Ideas	in addition similarly also likewise and moreover in the same way
Different Ideas	on the other hand on the contrary however but nevertheless otherwise yet still
Conclusion	therefore thus so hence for this reason

These are only some of the many transition or connecting words available in English.

5. EXERCISES IN COHERENCE

A) In small groups decide what kind of order (chronological order, physical order, order of importance, order of climax) would work best for a paragraph on each of the following topics. Provide two good reasons for choosing each kind of order.

1. a story about a visit to a haunted house:

kind of order: _____

reasons: 1. _____

2. _____

2. a description of the haunted house:

kind of order: _____

reasons: 1. _____

2. _____

3. a paragraph persuading your parents to let you stay up later:

kind of order: _____

reasons: 1. _____

2. _____

4. a paragraph about the causes of the American Revolution:

kind of order: _____

reasons: 1. _____

2. _____

5. EXERCISES IN COHERENCE

C) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below, followed by a number of details. Decide the order in which the details should appear in the paragraph. Then write the paragraph providing any necessary transition words.

TOPIC SENTENCE: On the bus next to me sat the strangest looking person I have ever seen.

DETAILS:

1. She carried a large shopping bag loaded with fireworks and another one with groceries.
2. She had long, red hair which stood up all over her head.
3. Her nails were painted purple and green.
4. She looked like she was over a hundred years old.
5. She had a wart on her chin and the wart was covered with hairs.
6. She stared straight ahead and did not say a word.
7. Her orange and green floor-length dress had long sleeves, but it was ripped and tattered.
8. On her cheek, she had a tatoos of a rose and an airplane.
9. She kept on scratching her neck, as if she had fleas.
10. In her purse was a large clock which chimed the hour just after she sat down.
11. As she breathed in and out, she gasped for air.
12. She wore new white tennis shoes.
13. On her left hand were six or seven rings, but she wore no rings on her right hand.
14. Her cheeks were sunken and pale.
15. She wore purple eye shadow.

ORDER: Write the sentence number in sequence: _____

Write the paragraph on another sheet of paper.

5. EXERCISES IN COHERENCE

D) The topic sentence for a paragraph is given below, followed by a number of details. Decide the order in which the details should appear in the paragraph. Then write the paragraph providing any necessary transition words.

TOPIC SENTENCE: Sam is one of the best players on the baseball team.

DETAILS:

1. Sam is a good athlete.
2. Sam is very tall for his age.
3. Sam hit two home runs in the last game..
4. When the pitcher throws the ball, Sam has a good eye and can determine where the ball will go in relation to the plate.
5. Sam can run to first base faster than anyone on the team.
6. Sam can pitch, hit and catch very well.
7. Sam is a very good player at first base or short stop.
8. Sam can read the pitcher very well and knows when he should attempt to steal a base.
9. One day when our team was losing, Sam hit a grand-slam home run, which allowed us to win the game.

ORDER: Write the sentence number in sequence: _____

Write the paragraph on another sheet of paper.

6. EXERCISES IN CONCLUDING SENTENCE

A) A concluding sentence should sum up the main idea of the paragraph, but it should not merely restate the words of the topic sentence. A good writer will try to clinch the idea in a strong statement.

Write a good concluding sentence for the following paragraph. Then share your ideas with your classmates. Decide on the most effective concluding sentence written by your class.

Taking the train can be an exhilarating experience. I love to look out the window at the countryside as the train chugs along. Sometimes I imagine that I live in one of those wayward farms, small villages or large cities. I wonder how my life would be changed in any of those places. Yes, I can see the same things from a car window, but I never really have time to sit and think, time to imagine what life might be like in some other place. Would it be a better life or one which only leads to more troubles? I also like to be able to get up and wander around. I may have difficulty keeping my balance as the train moves from side to side, but that is all part of the fun. Similarly, I appreciate going into the dining car and sitting down to have a meal or just a glass of coke. You can't do that in a car; you have to stop at some restaurant along the way and sometimes battle the crowds. Finally, I like the people I meet on the train--a strange assortment from all walks of life.

Concluding sentence: _____

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

Three major types of paragraphs are dealt with in this unit:

- **exposition**
- **narration**
- **description.**

Each of these three types of writing has a different purpose, and therefore each one is planned and constructed differently.

TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

TYPE OF PARAGRAPH	DEFINITION	PURPOSE
EXPOSITION	a detailed explanation which involves facts or opinions	to explain or inform to convince or persuade
NARRATION	a story with a plot, setting and characters	to entertain to inform or teach a lesson
DESCRIPTION	a detailed picture of the characteristics of an object, person or place	to inform to entertain

The writer of a paragraph must decide what type of paragraph he or she is writing. This will depend on the topic chosen and the purpose of the assignment. Students should note that many pieces of writing involve characteristics of all three types: A short story, for example, may include explanation (that is, exposition) and description. Similarly, an exposition may develop part of its explanation by telling a story or may use description. However, for most assignments in school, students will not go wrong if they decide to use one of these types of paragraphs.

Before beginning to write, students should ask themselves:

- What is the purpose of the writing assignment?
- What type of paragraph will best achieve this purpose?

Often the question or assignment will make this decision for the student. The assignment may be, for example, to write a short story or to write an explanation.

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

EXERCISE 2 ON TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

In the chart which follows, you are given a topic for a paragraph. You are to decide what type of paragraph--exposition, narration or description--you would write for each topic. Then jot down ideas you could use to write a paragraph on the particular topic. The type of paragraph you choose will determine the ideas you use; therefore, for some of these topics, you could write any of the three types of paragraph.

TOPIC	TYPE OF PARAGRAPH	IDEAS
1. The Best Story I Have Ever Read		
2. My Hero		
3. The War Zone		

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

EXERCISE 3 ON TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

In the chart which follows, you are given a topic for a paragraph. You are to decide what ideas you could use to write each type of paragraph on this topic--exposition, narration or description. Write down ideas you could use in the space provided in the chart. You may limit the topic if you wish.

TOPIC: The Zoo (or The Circus or The Amusement Park)

Exposition	Narration	Description

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

AN EXAMPLE OF AN EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPH

Remember that an exposition tries to explain things. Sometimes this explanation can be persuasive, as the author has attempted to do in the following paragraph:

Michelangelo

Although Michelangelo is very famous as a painter whose masterpiece is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, perhaps his greatest works are his sculptures. Artists in the time period before Michelangelo's birth in 1475 painted or created statues of religious scenes; but their paintings and statues were more like stick figures than real human beings. Michelangelo's statues show people with muscles and veins, real bodies on real people. *Moses*, a statue which today is displayed in the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains in Rome, shows a strong man who survived many years living in the desert. Moses is very muscular and looks healthy enough to live through the hardships of his life. Even Mary, one of the two figures in the *Pieta* found in the Vatican, is a strong and muscular woman as she needed to be to live almost thirty years after the death of her son. But perhaps Michelangelo's greatest work of art is *David*, a statue which we can see today in the Academia in Florence, Italy. In *The Bible*, David was a young boy who killed the giant, Goliath, with a stone. A statue of David by Donatello shows a thin, weak little boy with a grin on his face. But Michelangelo's *David* shows a strong and muscular young man with a look of determination on his face; his David could kill a giant with a stone. Because his statues depict the strong human beings that would have existed, Michelangelo shows his genius in his sculptures.

Notice that this expository paragraph presents an argument about Michelangelo and then **explains** reasons why the argument is a valid one. The argument is expressed in the first sentence, which is also the topic sentence, and is restated in the concluding sentence.

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

EXERCISE ON THE EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPH

Read the paragraph *Michelangelo* on page 38 and then answer the following questions:

- 1. Begin by understanding the vocabulary. What is the meaning of each of the following words:
 - masterpiece
 - stick figures
 - determination
 - depict
 - existed.
- 2. What is the argument which the writer is expressing in this paragraph?
- 3. Where in this paragraph is the argument stated directly?
- 4. What is the topic sentence of this paragraph?
- 5. To make an effective argument, a writer uses examples. What are the three examples used in this paragraph?
- 6. What idea is common to all three examples?
- 7. Provide examples of three transition words used in this paragraph. Explain how each transition word links two ideas together.
- 8. Choose three words from this paragraph and explain why each one is a good choice to express the idea.

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

AN EXAMPLE OF A DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

Remember that a description tries to present a detailed picture. The following paragraph is taken from *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery.

Anne's First View of Green Gables

She opened her eyes and looked about her. They were on a crest of a hill. The sun had set some time since, but the landscape was still clear in the mellow afterlight. To the west a dark church spire rose up against a marigold sky. Below was a little valley and beyond a long, gently rising slope with snug farmsteads scattered along it. From one to another the child's eyes darted, eager and wistful. At last they lingered on one away to the left, far back from the road, dimly white with blossoming trees in the twilight of the surrounding woods. Over it, in the stainless southwest sky, a great crystal-white star was shining like a lamp of guidance and promise.

Notice that this descriptive paragraph lists various details to provide to the reader a vivid picture of what Anne sees. Look at the specific nouns which are used and the adjectives which describe them.

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

EXERCISE ON THE DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

Read the paragraph *Anne's First View of Green Gables* on page 40 and then answer the following questions:

- 1. Begin by understanding the vocabulary. What is the meaning of each of the following words:
 - crest
 - mellow
 - afterlight
 - spire
 - marigold
 - snug
 - wistful
 - lingered
 - twilight
 - stainless
 - crystal.
- 2. List the details of the view in the order that Lucy Maud Montgomery described them in the paragraph.
- 3. Make a list of all the nouns used in the paragraph. Which ones are particularly easy for the reader to picture? Which ones are specific rather than general?
- 4. Make a list of all the adjectives used in the paragraph. Which ones help to provide a vivid picture in the reader's mind?
- 5. Why is *marigold* a better word to use than *orange*?
- 6. Why is *stainless* more effective than *clear*?
- 7. There are also some good verbs used here. Why are the following good examples: *scattered, darted, lingered*?

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

AN EXAMPLE OF A NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH

Remember that a narrative tells a story. A single paragraph story should be very simple; a longer story would require more than one paragraph. Notice that the following story does not begin with *Once upon a time*.

The Bees

I sat motionless in the field surrounded by bees. I had come there with my family for a quiet picnic. But now I was in danger--or so I thought. There must have been fifteen bees buzzing around me. I couldn't turn my head to count them all. I remembered that someone once told me that bees won't sting a person unless they feel that they will be harmed, so I continued to sit as still as possible. "All right, bees," I thought, "you've had your fun in scaring me. Now go and find some flowers to make your honey." Suddenly a bee landed on my nose. I screwed my eyes to look at it, but otherwise I didn't move a muscle. Then another one buzzed slowly by my eyes. I still didn't move. "Please, bees, please leave me alone," I said to myself. Then came the greatest terror of all. Something was moving up my leg between my socks and my shorts. It was slimy and cold, but I couldn't move to look at it. "I hate snakes," Indiana Jones once said in a movie--and I agree with him. Suddenly, without any apparent reason, the bee flew from my nose and into the distance, followed by his fellow hive-keepers. I jumped up and the snake fell to the ground. It was a harmless garter snake. What a relief! I ran back to join my family. I will always remember that family picnic which was supposed to be so quiet and relaxed.

Notice that this narrative paragraph tells a story which builds to a climax. Because the story is written in only one paragraph, it tells of only one brief incident, gives little description of setting or character, but does conclude. To arouse the reader's interest it starts in the middle of the action.

7. TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS

EXERCISE ON THE NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH

Read the paragraph *The Bees* on page 42 and then answer the following questions:

- 1. Begin by understanding the vocabulary. What is the meaning of each of the following words:
 - motionless
 - terror
 - slimy
 - apparent
 - garter snake.
- 2. Why is it a good idea to begin the story the way this author has, rather than saying, *One day my family went on a picnic?*
- 3. How many incidents are narrated in this story? Why are there not more incidents related?
- 4. List in order the events which the author of the paragraph has chosen to include.
- 5. What sentence is the climax or high point of interest and tension in this paragraph?
- 6. Is the concluding sentence a good one? Explain why you think it is a good one or why you think it is a poor choice.
- 7. Choose three words from this paragraph and explain why each one is a good choice to express the idea.
- 8. Are there any words in this paragraph which are not very good choices? Which words would be better choices?