

Composition: models and exercises

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made aware of the techniques used by good writers — techniques which he can incorporate in his own writing.

This book also carries with it the advice that you learn to write by writing. As everyone knows, a knowledge of theory and an ability to recognize techniques do not alone make good writers. Learning to write requires practice and more practice. In *Composition: Models and Exercises II* the student is given specific assignments calling for practice in each of the techniques demonstrated in the book. As he moves through the book, he is also given comprehensive assignments requiring use of all the techniques at his disposal.

A single book cannot, of course, teach students everything there is to know about writing. Nor can it create writers. It is hoped, however, that this book, with its demonstration of techniques in professional models, its inductive analyses of models, and its many composition assignments, will help students in their efforts to become better writers.

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SECTION ONE

The Paragraph

LESSON

1

Unity in Paragraphs

All good paragraphs are unified. A paragraph is said to be unified if every sentence in it contributes to a common goal. In this lesson you will see how unity is achieved in three types of paragraphs: descriptive, narrative, and expository. You will notice that despite differences in length and purpose, each paragraph has its own kind of unity.

UNITY IN A DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH The first paragraph in this lesson is from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. It describes a deserted house and, in doing so, conveys a vivid impression of the house.

1 Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse*

The house was left; the house was deserted. It was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it. The long night seemed to have set in; the trifling airs, nibbling, the clammy breaths, fumbling, seemed to have triumphed. The saucypan had rusted and the mat decayed. Toads had nosed their way in. Idly, aimlessly, the swaying shawl swung to and fro. A thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder. The swallows nested in the drawing room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid bare; rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots. Tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and pattered their life out

on the windowpane. Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; the lawn waved with long grass; giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages; while the gentle tapping of a weed at the window had become, on winters' nights, a drumming from sturdy trees and thorned briars which made the whole room green in summer.

The Writer's Craft

1. In this paragraph Virginia Woolf is describing an abandoned house. The desolation of the abandoned dwelling is the *unifying idea* of the paragraph. Does every sentence help the reader to visualize the house and to feel its atmosphere?

2. In writing description the writer should avoid irrelevant details, extraneous bits of information that have no apparent connection with the unifying idea of the paragraph. Suppose we add a sentence to Miss Woolf's paragraph:

The swallows nested in the drawing room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid bare; rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots. *One of the things the rats carried off was a shoe.* Tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and pattered their life out on the windowpane.

Does the italicized sentence have anything to do with the appearance or condition of the house? How does it affect the unity of the paragraph?

Now You Try It

Choose one of the following assignments:

1. Write a paragraph describing one of the places or objects listed below. Be sure that all your sentences help to create a vivid impression of the place or object.

- A carefully restored antique car
- A fashionable new dress
- A school cafeteria at the height of the lunch hour
- A lake in the wilderness
- A house that is said to be haunted

The Paragraph

2. Use one of the following sentences as the introductory statement in a paragraph of description. Make sure that every detail you mention supports the introductory statement, the unifying idea.

- He was nearly forty, but he looked very much like a teddy bear.
- Everything about her face seemed to shout one word: Anger!
- Although she pretended to be harsh and stern, all her features spoke of gentleness and kindness.
- It was obvious that the little boy had been playing in the mud.

UNITY IN A NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH The following paragraph tells about the opening of the Indian Territory to settlement. It demonstrates one of the ways unity is achieved in a narrative paragraph.

2 Ray Allen Billington in *Westward Expansion*

Slowly the minutes ticked away toward the zero hour. Officers, their watches synchronized, waited with guns in air, ready to fire the shots that signaled the opening. At last the revolvers barked, and along the line pandemonium broke loose. Men whipped up their horses, wagons careened wildly forward, horses freed from overturned vehicles galloped madly about—all was hurrah and excitement. The Sante Fe trains, steaming slowly forward at a regulated pace which would not give their passengers an undue advantage, disgorged riders along the route as men leaped from roofs or platforms and rushed about in search of a claim. Noise and confusion reigned as the shouts of successful "Boomers," the crash of hammers on stakes, the clatter of wagons, the crash of overturned vehicles, and the curses of disappointed homeseekers mingled to create a bedlam unique in the annals of the nation.

The Writer's Craft

1. The event depicted in this paragraph is the opening of lands in the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) to settlement. Are all of the sentences in the paragraph related to this event? Is it this single event, then, that unifies the paragraph?

2. Suppose the writer had added these sentences to the conclusion of his paragraph:

A few days later axes flew and trees fell as the foundations for houses were laid. Neighbor helped neighbor as the homesteaders prepared for life in the new land. The trip west had been exhausting, but they found new zeal for their tasks.

How would these sentences affect the unity of the paragraph?

Now You Try It

Choose a simple incident — one with a definite beginning, middle, and end — and tell about it in a single paragraph. Be sure that all the sentences in your paragraph relate directly to this incident. Use one of the ideas suggested below, or choose one of your own.

- a. A boy finds ten dollars at school, hesitates, then decides to turn it in.
- b. The star end drops a key pass in the big football game.
- c. A girl opens a letter from a college and learns that she has been accepted.
- d. A girl sits at home alone in her room on the night of the big prom.

UNITY IN AN EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPH. The next paragraph is expository. Identify the unifying idea and notice whether each sentence helps to support this idea.

3 Henry Steele Commager in "The Ambiguous American"

The American is, on the whole, openhanded, generous, and hospitable. No other people pours so much money into churches, schools, hospitals, and other charities; no other has given so freely to help less fortunate people around the globe. While it is true that a system of tax exemptions makes it easy for Americans to be generous, it is suggestive that American tax laws are, designed to encourage giving. The great philanthropic foundation is a distinctly American institution, almost an American invention. For two centuries visitors from the Old World have paid tribute to American hospitality; the American — as Denis Brogan has observed —

was the first to make the term "stranger" a word of welcome. Along with material generosity went magnanimity. It is not without significance that America has achieved nationalism without recourse to national enmities; Americans did not nurse enmity toward Britain in the 19th century, nor have they harbored enmity toward Germany or Japan in the 20th.

The Writer's Craft

1. The unifying idea of Commager's paragraph is that Americans are generous and hospitable. Do all of the sentences in the paragraph support this idea?

2. If the italicized sentence below were added to the paragraph, what effect would it have on the unity of the paragraph?

While it is true that a system of tax exemptions makes it easy for Americans to be generous, it is suggestive that American tax laws are designed to encourage giving. *My personal feeling, however, is that excise taxes are completely unnecessary.* The great philanthropic foundation is a distinctly American institution, almost an American invention.

Now You Try It

Write an expository paragraph, using one of the following sentences as the first sentence of the paragraph. Develop or support the idea expressed in your opening sentence with relevant facts and examples.

- a. The American is, on the whole, _____ (You supply the adjective or adjectives.)
- b. The best teen-age books are those not specifically written for teen-agers.
- c. The United States has regained (or lost) its worldwide supremacy in sports.
- d. The _____ is the best sports car in the world.
- e. The climate of a place often has a profound effect on the people who live there.

The Topic Sentence

A paragraph is unified if it develops a single clear idea. How does the writer state his unifying idea? Does he repeat it in every sentence of the paragraph? Does he merely hint at the idea, hoping the reader will guess what it is? A close look at a typical expository paragraph may suggest the answer to you.

4 John A. Crow in *Mexico Today*

The tremendous growth of urban life in Mexico during the past three decades has created many new problems. The country folk have poured into the cities in an ever-increasing stream. They are in search of a better income, better living conditions, better schools, and all the other accoutrements of urban civilization. At first, they did not seem to "belong" in their new environment. They had not learned the necessary techniques of city life. They were not accustomed to the impersonality of urban society. They felt uprooted, alienated, lost; and the cities in which they lived gave the same impression. They were cities composed of wandering and apparently rootless men in a restless search for their destiny.

The Writer's Craft

1. This paragraph includes many factual details: the movement of Mexicans from the countryside to the cities, their search for a higher standard of living, their lack of adjustment to urban life, their impact

on the cities to which they have moved. Does this mean that the paragraph lacks unity? Or is there one unifying idea that ties together all of the separate details?

2. John A. Crow expresses the unifying idea of the paragraph in one sentence, called the *topic sentence*. Which sentence is it?

5 Richard H. Rovere in "Wallace"

A topic sentence expresses the unifying idea of the paragraph and makes this idea clear to the reader. Very often the topic sentence comes first, as in the paragraph by Crow and also in the paragraph below. Notice, however, that in the following paragraph the topic sentence is two-pronged.

The two most expressive things about him were his mouth and the pockets of his jacket. By looking at his mouth, one could tell whether he was plotting evil or had recently accomplished it. If he was bent upon malevolence, his lips were all puckered up, like those of a billiard player about to make a difficult shot. After the deed was done, the pucker was replaced by a delicate, unearthly smile. How a teacher who knew anything about boys could miss the fact that both expressions were masks of Satan I'm sure I don't know. Wallace's pockets were less interesting than his mouth, perhaps, but more spectacular in a way. The side pockets of his jacket bulged out over his pudgy haunches like burro hampers. They were filled with tools—screwdrivers, pliers, files, wrenches, wire cutters, nail sets, and I don't know what else. In addition to all this, one pocket always contained a rolled-up copy of *Popular Mechanics*, while from the top of the other protruded *Scientific American* or some such other magazine. His breast pocket contained, besides a large collection of fountain pens and mechanical pencils, a picket fence of drill bits, gimlets, kitchen knives, and other pointed instruments. When he walked, he clinked and jangled and pealed.

The Writer's Craft

1. Rovere's paragraph discusses the "two most expressive things" about Wallace, his mouth and his pockets. Does the fact that they are

both discussed in one paragraph mean that the paragraph lacks unity? Why or why not?

2. How does the first sentence, the topic sentence, help to unify Rovere's paragraph? Would the topic sentence be effective as the last sentence of the paragraph?

Now You Try It

Select one of the topics listed below. Then write a topic sentence which makes a specific statement and develop this topic sentence into a complete paragraph.

- The first step in applying to college
- The chief advantage of extracurricular activities
- The main ingredient in teen-age popularity
- Our town's major attraction
- The quality I most admire in a teacher
- One way in which I have changed during the past year
- One problem with parents

THE TOPIC SENTENCE AT THE END OF A PARAGRAPH Although the topic sentence is commonly found at the beginning of a paragraph, it can sometimes be placed effectively at the end.

6 Edgar Allan Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher"

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around. The eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortable, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

The Writer's Craft

1. If Poe had wanted to put the topic sentence first, he might have begun his paragraph like this:

An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over the room in which I found myself. The room was very large and lofty. The windows were long . . .

Does placing the topic sentence at the beginning make the paragraph less effective than the original? Why?

2. A paragraph like Poe's may be said to move inductively. Evidence is presented piece by piece; then the unifying idea of the paragraph is stated in the last sentence. What are the possible advantages of placing a topic sentence at the end of a paragraph?

Now You Try It

Write a paragraph using one of the following sentences as the concluding topic sentence.

- As such movies show, Hollywood can ruin a good book.
- Each morning brings a new crisis that our family somehow seems to survive.
- All these factors are important to a college admissions officer.
- The popularity of teen-age idols is short-lived.
- For these reasons, it is unwise to sell a used car to a friend.

THE CLINCHER SENTENCE Occasionally a writer will state his main idea in the first sentence of the paragraph and then restate it—in slightly different words—in the last sentence of the paragraph. The following paragraph will show how such a summarizing sentence, called the *clinch*er sentence, is especially useful in long, complex paragraphs.

7 Brooks Atkinson in "An Introduction to Thoreau's Writings"

As a writer Thoreau embraced so many subjects that it is still difficult to catalogue him. He was "poet-naturalist," as Channing described him; but he was also philosopher, historian, economist, rebel, revolutionary, reporter. Apart from its poetic record of an idyllic adventure, *Walden* is

the practical philosophy of rebellion against the world's cowardly habits of living. Most formless of his books and yet most winning and highhearted, *The Week* is a compend of thought, scholarship, speculation, and narrative. *The Maine Woods* is the most pungent and profound study of woods and camping that has ever been written. *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* is an eloquent declaration of the principles that make revolution inevitable in times of political dishonor. The John Brown papers are political pamphleteering. Large portions of the journals are character studies of the people in Concord whom Thoreau most admired. Although he rarely left Concord and seldom read the newspapers, he was well informed about the life of his times and had fiery opinions about slavery and justice. His achievements in those fields have somewhat overshadowed the range of his scholarship and the brilliance of his detached portraits of people. Almost nothing escaped the keen eyes and mind of this tireless writer; there is a bewildering variety in his work.

The Writer's Craft

1. What is the unifying idea in Atkinson's paragraph? Which sentence is the topic sentence? Which is the clincher sentence? Why do you think the author used a clincher sentence?
2. The clincher sentence is not a word-for-word repetition of the topic sentence. Why is some variety in wording desirable?
3. Sometimes the clincher sentence is much more emphatically stated than the topic sentence. Why do you think this is so?

Now You Try It

Select one of the sentences below as a topic sentence. Put this topic sentence first, develop a paragraph based on it, and end the paragraph with an effective clincher sentence.

- a. There seems to be a trend away from economy cars.
- b. Women's shoes are instruments of torture.
- c. Slang has a vividness that formal usage lacks.
- d. The best mystery stories have believable characters as well as excellent plots.
- e. Proverbs do not always contain sound advice.

Paragraph Development

A topic sentence serves as the unifying statement in a paragraph, but it cannot be the entire substance of the paragraph. Inexperienced writers, forgetting this, sometimes repeat over and over in different words the statement made in the topic sentence. The resulting paragraph is inevitably poor, for satisfactory development requires the use of specific details. This lesson shows four kinds of details with which paragraphs can be developed: facts, examples, incidents, and reasons. Although many paragraphs use a combination of these devices, each kind will be examined separately in this lesson.

DEVELOPMENT WITH FACTS The following paragraph shows how facts can be used to support the statement made in the topic sentence.

8 Bruce Bliven in "Using Our Leisure Is No Easy Job"

Not only has recreation expanded enormously but it has been upgraded culturally. In 1900 there were ten symphony orchestras in the country; today there are about 1,200. We have more than 1,500 local theater groups, most of them amateur. People spend five hundred million dollars annually on concert tickets. In 1934, five hundred records of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* were bought, and in 1954, 75,000. We expend 2.5 billion dollars annually for musical instru-

ments, radios, and television sets. Twenty million of us play the piano, four million the guitar, three million the violin. There are two million "Sunday painters."

The Writer's Craft

1. By itself the topic sentence in this paragraph is a rather vague generalization. Suppose we were to omit most of the facts and substitute only repetitious generalizations. Notice how weak the paragraph would be.

Not only has recreation expanded enormously but it has been upgraded culturally. We have more interest in cultural activities, and we spend more money on them. We are more conscious of the value of cultural pursuits than we used to be. Indeed, we are in the midst of a cultural revolution.

Contrast this paragraph with the one Bliven actually wrote, and you will see the difference between *developing* a paragraph and merely *re-stating* the unifying idea. Bliven chose to use statistics to support his topic sentence. These helped him to produce a substantial paragraph that is clear, interesting, and convincing.

2. Does a paragraph like Bliven's need a clincher sentence? Could you logically put the author's topic sentence at the end of the paragraph? If so, what changes would you make in the wording of the sentence?

Here is another paragraph in which the topic sentence is developed with facts.

9 John F. Kennedy in "On History"

A knowledge of history is more than a means of judgment; it is also a means of sympathy — a means of relating our own experience with the experience of other peoples and hands struggling for national fulfillment. We may sometimes forget, for example, that the United States began as an underdeveloped nation which seized its independence by carrying off a successful revolution against a colonial empire. We may forget that, in the first few years of the new republic, George Washington laid down the principle of

no "permanent alliances" and enjoined the United States to a course of neutralism in the face of the great-power conflicts then dividing the civilized world. We may forget that, in the first stages of our economic development, our national growth was stimulated to a considerable degree by "foreign aid" — that is, investment from abroad — and by public investment and direction on the part of our state and local as well as our national government. We may forget that our own process of economic change was often accompanied by the issue of wildcat paper money, by the repudiation of bonds, by disorder, fraud, and violence. If we recall the facts of our own past, we may better understand the problems and predicaments of contemporary "new nations" laboring for national development in circumstances far less favorable than our own — and we will, in consequence, become less liable to the national self-righteousness which is both unworthy of our own traditions and a bane of international relations.

The Writer's Craft

1. Kennedy gives four facts that illustrate how a knowledge of our history can help to make us sympathetic to policies of new nations. Would fewer facts have been just as effective? Should more have been used? How does a writer decide how many facts to use?

2. Each fact is introduced with the phrase "We may forget that . . ." Why do you think Kennedy repeats this phrase?

Now You Try It

Develop one of the following topic sentences by using specific facts to support it.

- Styles in women's clothes change every year.
- Among economy cars the _____ gives the best gas mileage.
- The average life expectancy in the United States is steadily increasing.
- Our school has a varied curriculum.
- College football has become a big business.
- Television has had a profound effect on professional sports.

DEVELOPMENT WITH EXAMPLES Rather than giving facts, a writer may develop a paragraph with examples that illustrate or support the point he is making. The following paragraph by H. L. Mencken is developed with examples.

10 H. L. Mencken in *The American Language*

The settlement of the continent, once the Eastern coast ranges were crossed, proceeded with unparalleled speed, and so the naming of the new rivers, lakes, peaks and valleys, and of the new towns and districts, strained the inventiveness of the pioneers. The result is the vast duplication of names that shows itself in the Postal Guide. No less than eighteen imitative *Bostons* and *New Bostons* still appear, and there are nineteen *Bristols*, twenty-eight *Newports*, and twenty-two *Londons* and *New Londons*. Argonauts starting out from an older settlement on the coast would take its name with them, and so we find *Philadelphias* in Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee; *Richmonds* in Iowa, Kansas, and nine other Western States; and *Princetons* in fifteen. Even when a new name was hit upon, it seems to have been hit upon simultaneously by scores of scattered bands of settlers; thus we find the whole land bespattered with *Washingtons*, *Lafayettes*, *Jeffersons*, and various natural objects, e.g., *Bear Creek*, *Bald Knob*, and *Buffalo*. The Geographic Board, in its fourth report, made a belated protest against this excessive duplication. "The names *Elk*, *Beaver*, *Cottonwood*, and *Bald*," it said, "are altogether too numerous." Of post offices alone there are fully a hundred embodying *Elk*; counting in rivers, lakes, creeks, mountains, and valleys, the map of the United States probably shows at least twice as many such names.

The Writer's Craft

1. The examples that Mencken gives are the substance of his paragraph; yet a statement of the topic is still essential. Where does Mencken state his topic? How many sentences does he use to make this statement?

2. Do you think Mencken could have supported his statement about "the vast duplication of names" without giving examples? Does his use of the word *east* control, to some extent, the number of examples he must give? Do you think Mencken gives more examples than are necessary to prove his point?

The following paragraph is also developed with examples.

11 Alan Moorehead in *The Russian Revolution*

For six hours every day the Soviet Council of People's Commissars met under Lenin's chairmanship, and a fantastic stream of decrees began to pour out of Smolny. Nothing like it had been seen in the world before; it was a program that uprooted every institution and tradition in Russian life. The abolition of private ownership in land was followed by the nationalization of the banks, of the merchant marine, and of all industrial enterprises. The stock market was swept away, and so were the rights of inheritance. All state debts were annulled, and gold was declared a government monopoly. Wages of the People's Commissars were pegged at 500 rubles a month for single people with additional payments for families. The old criminal courts were supplemented or replaced by "revolutionary tribunals" made up of a president and six peasants, workers and soldiers, and any citizen could appear as a lawyer. Men and women were declared equal in law, and the strict Czarist code governing marriage and divorce was abolished; a civil marriage now took the place of the church ceremony, and divorce could be obtained by either party of the marriage merely asking for it. All titles were submerged into the universal "Citizen" or "Comrade." The church was permitted to continue but in a drastically truncated form; its lands — and they were enormous — were confiscated and religious teaching was forbidden in the schools. The state religion was now Leninism. The Western calendar, which was now thirteen days ahead of the old Russian calendar, was declared law, and even the alphabet was pruned of various letters and signs. Later on, strikes were declared to be treason.

The Writer's Craft

1. What is the unifying idea of this paragraph? Is it stated in a single topic sentence? If not, in how many sentences is it stated?
2. The author says that the Soviet program "uprooted every institution and tradition in Russian life." Why does such a statement require illustration? Does the author provide enough examples?
3. Compare Moorehead's paragraph with the preceding one (Model 10). What differences do you notice in the kinds of examples used in these two models?

Now You Try It

Select one of the following topics and develop it by giving examples:

- a. Many English words are derived from the names of places or persons. (Look up, for example, *mautlin*, *sandwich*, *hector*, *mentor*, *macadam*, *bedlam*, *mecca*.)
- b. A knowledge of history makes us realize that our times and our problems are not really unique.
- c. Modern fiction frequently portrays the unheroic hero.
- d. Many American cars are adorned with useless gadgets.
- e. The high school curriculum has been enriched by the addition of many new courses.

DEVELOPMENT WITH AN INCIDENT Another way for a writer to develop a paragraph is to relate an incident which illustrates the idea expressed in the topic sentence. In the following paragraph John Gunther uses an incident to show what he considers to be a Russian national trait.

12 John Gunther in *Inside Russia Today*

Russians have an appealing aptitude for adding two and two and getting three or five. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, was astounded some years ago when a Russian acquaintance told him quietly that the distinguished quarterly he edits,

Foreign Affairs, was subsidized by the House of Morgan.* Mr. Armstrong, the most unsubsidized author imaginable, could not believe his ears. Blandly, triumphantly, the Russian pointed out that Russell C. Leffingwell, who is indeed a Morgan partner, was a member of the editorial board of the magazine, and had his name *printed* — ah! — on the masthead. It was impossible to convince the Russian that this did not prove, beyond peradventure of a doubt, that the Morgans ran Mr. Armstrong's magazine.

* House of Morgan: one of the world's most powerful banking houses; its home office is in New York City.

The Writer's Craft

1. Gunther begins with a rather sweeping statement about Russians. He says, in effect, that they have an aptitude for reaching false conclusions. Then he tells of an incident in which a Russian did reach a false conclusion. Does this incident illustrate and support Gunther's topic sentence effectively? Why or why not?
2. When an incident is used in the development of a paragraph, it should be concise and to the point so that the reader does not lose sight of the main idea of the paragraph. Is Gunther's incident to the point or does it include extraneous details?

Here is another paragraph in which the writer uses an incident to develop his topic sentence.

13 Bruce Catton in *This Hallowed Ground*

In the Shenandoah Valley, Union soldiers were learning that southern civilians could be exactly like the folks at home and that there could be a touch of friendship now and then between the invaders and the invaded. The 13th Massachusetts was appealed to by a valley farmer for protection against foragers, and the colonel detailed four men to guard the place. The farmer insisted that they stay in the house and make themselves comfortable; he would go about his duties and would call them if any prowlers appeared. His wife would not let them bunk down in the yard when

night came, but put them in bedrooms with soft mattresses and clean white sheets, told them to sleep until they were called in the morning, served breakfast at eight-thirty -- hominy and bacon, potatoes and fried chicken, hot biscuits and coffee, all they could eat. When the regiment finally had to move on and the detail was called away, the farmer went to the colonel to testify what fine young men these soldiers were, and his wife sent a huge basket of biscuits and cakes for them to take with them. All the rest of the war the 13th Massachusetts nursed this memory.

The Writer's Craft

1. An incident has a kind of built-in appeal, since everyone likes a story. Incidents vary, of course, in their interest. Do you find the incident Catton relates interesting? What idea does it illustrate? Why do you think an author like Bruce Catton, whose writings about history are intended for the average reader, makes frequent use of incidents in developing his paragraphs?
2. In developing paragraphs with incidents, where would you place your topic sentence? Is one position more desirable than another? Explain.

Now You Try It

Select one of the topic sentences below, or make up one of your own, and develop it with a brief incident.

- a. Many city dwellers are indifferent to their neighbors.
- b. Not every touchdown in football is scored on a play called by the quarterback.
- c. Girls have an infuriating habit of losing things at the wrong time.
- d. Practical jokes are not always funny.
- e. An election is sometimes won or lost because of a single event.
- f. When I delivered newspapers, I had a few hair-raising experiences.
- g. I have become convinced that mental telepathy works.
- h. Mental telepathy is really nothing more than coincidence.
- i. President Kennedy had a delightful sense of humor.

DEVELOPMENT WITH REASONS Paragraphs in which the topic sentence states an opinion are developed with reasons. The reasons may be facts, examples, incidents, or specific supporting opinions. In the following paragraph, the writer first states an opinion and then supports it by giving reasons.

14 Edgar Johnson in *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*

Of all Dickens' novels, *David Copperfield* is the most enchanting. Few novelists have ever captured more poignantly the feeling of childhood, the brightness and magic and terror of the world as seen through the eyes of a child and colored by his dawning emotions. Dickens renders all the vividness and flavor of those early days when the grass is unbelievably green and fruit "riper and richer than fruit has ever been since." He mirrors the tenderness of reposing safely in the assurance of maternal love, the heart-quaking mystery of a sudden harshness or frightening anger in grown-ups, the disjointed strangeness of a universe discovered to contain such wonders as geese and crocodiles and graveyards and cathedrals. *David* has, too, the savagery and brutality of boyhood, its boyish hero worship, and its luminous blur of shining aspiration. And, following on these, come the widening through stiff confused horizons of adolescence and its endeavors to grasp the world, the problems of embarking upon a career, the tremulous silliness and ecstasy of youthful love.

The Writer's Craft

1. What is the topic sentence in this paragraph? What opinion does the sentence express? Do the author's reasons adequately support the broad generalization of the topic sentence? Are his reasons factual or are they statements of specific opinions which support his overall opinion?
2. Would a clincher sentence heighten the effectiveness of the paragraph? Why or why not?

Here is another paragraph developed with reasons. Notice how the reasons help to answer the unstated question "Why?" raised by the topic sentence.

15 Margaret Mead in "What Women Want"

Women in our society complain of the lack of stimulation, of the loneliness, of the dullness of staying at home. Little babies are poor conversationalists, husbands come home tired and sit reading the paper, and women who used to pride themselves on their ability to talk find on the rare evening they can go out that their words clot on their tongues. As the children go to school, the mother is left to the companionship of the Frigidaire and the washing machine. Yet she can't go out because the delivery man might come, or a child might be sent home sick from school. The boredom of long hours of solitary one-sided communication with things, no matter how shining and streamlined and new, descends upon her. Moreover, the conditions of modern life, apartment living, and especially the enormous amount of moving about, all serve to rob women of neighborhood ties. The better her electric equipment, the better she organizes her ordering, the less reason she has to run out for a bit of gossipy shopping at the corner store. The department stores and the moving-picture houses cater to women — alone — on their few hours out. Meanwhile efficient mending services and cheap ready-made clothes have taken most sensible busy work out of women's hands and left women — still at home — listening to the radio, watching television.

The Writer's Craft

1. What are some of the reasons Miss Mead gives to explain why women are bored with their home life? Do her reasons support the topic sentence? Do you think Miss Mead has an opinion on the desirability of staying at home? If so, what is it? Do you think her reasons support the opinion?
2. Does Miss Mead's topic sentence lend itself to development with an incident or incidents? What specific incidents would you use in the development of such a paragraph?

Now You Try It

Develop one of the following topic sentences by giving reasons. Be sure that the reasons are made clear and are fully explained.

- a. High schools should give more emphasis to intramural sports.
- b. Every high school student should learn how to type.
- c. The capital of the art world has shifted from Paris to New York.
- d. The Electoral College should (or should not) be abolished.
- e. Basketball will always be a popular spectator sport.
- f. High school students should be allowed to do independent research in subjects that interest them.
- g. Congress should (or should not) subsidize a national theater.

Arrangement of Details

There are several ways to arrange details in a paragraph. Four of the most common ways are discussed in this lesson. The method that you choose for a particular paragraph will depend upon your purpose, the nature of your subject, and the kinds of details you wish to use.

ORDER OF LOCATION The details in descriptive paragraphs are presented according to their location in space and their relationship to one another. In the following paragraph you will notice this kind of organization.

16 Winston Churchill in "The Battle of Britain"

The Group Operations Room was like a small theatre, about sixty feet across, and with two storeys. We took our seats in the Dress Circle. * Below us was the large-scale map table, around which perhaps twenty highly trained young men and women, with their telephone assistants, were assembled. Opposite to us, covering the entire wall, where the theatre curtain would be, was a gigantic blackboard divided into six columns with electric bulbs for the six fighter stations, each of their squadrons having a sub-column of its own, and also divided by lateral lines. Thus the lowest row of bulbs showed as they were lighted the squadrons which were "Standing By" at two minutes' notice, the next row

* Dress Circle: a theater balcony.

those at "Readiness," five minutes, then at "Available," 20 minutes, then those which had taken off, the next row those which had reported having seen the enemy, the next — with red lights — those which were in action, and the top row those which were returning home. On the left-hand side, in a kind of glass stage box, were the four or five officers whose duty it was to weigh and measure the information received from our Observer Corps, which at this time numbered upwards of 50,000 men, women, and youths. Radar was still in its infancy, but it gave warning of raids approaching our coast, and the observers, with field glasses and portable telephones, were our main source of information about raiders flying overland. Several roomfuls of experienced people in other parts of the underground headquarters sifted them with great rapidity, and transmitted the results from minute to minute directly to the plotters seated around the table on the floor and to the officers supervising from the glass stage box.

The Writer's Craft

1. Churchill is describing a very complex scene — the Group Operations Room which he visited at the height of the Battle of Britain. Being personally involved in the scene, he describes it from his point of view: "Below us," "Opposite to us," and so on. He explains in considerable detail the blackboard signaling system. How does he make this system clear to the reader?
2. Running through the entire description is an implied comparison. To what is the Group Operations Room being compared? What words and phrases indicate this comparison? Why do you think Churchill makes the comparison?

New You Try It

Choose one of the following topic sentences and write a descriptive paragraph based on it. Present your details in an order determined by their location.

- a. The seemingly simple daisy is quite a complicated flower.
- b. About the entire room there was an air of disarray.
- c. From the top of the hill, I could see the whole town spread out beneath me.

- d. When the seniors finished decorating for the prom, it was hard to recognize the gym.
- e. As I looked down the main street, I could see that the town was not prosperous.
- f. After the game, the field was a scene of bedlam.
- g. There was an awesome quietness about the church as I entered late one Sunday evening.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER IN A NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH Most narrative paragraphs are arranged in chronological order, with the events presented in the sequence in which they occurred. The following paragraph is from John Gunther's account of his teenage son's tragic battle against the ravages of a brain tumor.

17 John Gunther in *Death Be Not Proud*

The day before graduation was strenuous, with a lunch for the parents at noon and then a baseball game which Johnny watched with serious interest for about four innings. The dress-up banquet that night, to celebrate Mr. Boyden's forty-fifth year as headmaster, lasted three hours. Johnny did not miss a minute of it. He tramped across the lawn afterward, with his classmate Henry Eisner holding his hand, for the off-the-record talk Mr. Boyden gives each graduating class. Then the class, standing under the trees in a night grown chilly, serenaded the Boydens on the front porch. Johnny, on the outskirts of the massed pack of boys, looked suddenly exhausted, and I slipped away from the adults to join him inconspicuously, standing just behind him. He did not mind, though as a rule he loathed having us anywhere near him at school. I was afraid he might fall. Then I heard his light, silvery tenor chime in with the other voices. The song floated across the lawn and echoed back. We hiked to the infirmary and Johnny ran into a classmate who had won an award. "Congratulations!" he snapped briskly.

The Writer's Craft

The events in this paragraph are presented in the order in which they happened, from lunch to the incident on the way to the infirmary.

Occasionally an author will present one event out of chronological order to highlight it. If Gunther had done so, the result might have been something like this:

The day before graduation was strenuous; it was highlighted for me by the class serenading the Boydens late in the chilly night. There had been a lunch for the parents at noon and then a baseball game . . .

Why do you think Gunther used strict chronological order?

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER IN AN EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPH A paragraph that explains how to do something, or how something is done, is often organized chronologically. In the following paragraph, notice that the writer presents a step-by-step explanation of how a fresco is painted.

18 Joshua Taylor in *Learning to Look*

Preliminary to painting a fresco, the wall, which must be sound and free from dampness, is given one or more coats of plaster made from lime and sand. Often the artist then transfers his cartoon to the wall to judge the effect of his design before proceeding. When the artist is ready to paint, a very fine layer of smooth plaster is applied over that portion of the surface that the artist intends to finish in one working period. This smooth coating, called the intonaco, is made from very fine sand, lime, and sometimes marble dust. Onto this surface the artist transfers his final design and proceeds to paint with his water-ground pigments while the plaster is still damp. If a portion of the final intonaco coat remains unpainted at the end of the working period, it is scraped away before it dries, since true fresco must be painted on fresh plaster. A large fresco is completed, then, in small sections at a time, often carefully predetermined so that their joinings correspond with contours in the painting and are thus less conspicuous.

The Writer's Craft

1. In this paragraph the steps in fresco painting are presented in the exact order in which they occur. What words and phrases help to make this sequence clear to the reader?

2. Is this paragraph intended for someone who wants to paint a fresco or simply for the person who wants to know how a fresco is painted? How can you tell?

3. This paragraph has no topic sentence, though it does, of course, have a unifying idea. We can say that the topic sentence is *implied*. What is there about the development of the paragraph that makes a stated topic sentence unnecessary? Could you put a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph? If so, how would you word the topic sentence?

Now You Try It

Select one of the following as the topic sentence for a narrative or an expository paragraph. Develop the paragraph by giving details in chronological order.

- You can make a good impression in a job interview if you follow certain steps.
- Calling up a girl to ask for the first date is a ritual with clearly established procedures.
- The events of that tragic morning are still a nightmare to me.
- For me, getting up in the morning is a long and involved process.
- A girl putting on makeup follows a definite procedure.
- It is easy to make a cake if you follow the directions on the side of a cake-mix box.
- Repainting an old car is no simple matter.
- I still remember clearly every mistake I made in the game.

ORDER OF IMPORTANCE In an expository paragraph, a writer will often arrange supporting details in the order of their importance. Often the most effective order is from least important to most important because the paragraph thus builds toward a climax. Occasionally, however, a writer will reverse this order and put the most important details first. Notice the order in which Eisenhower presents his details in the following paragraph about the possible results of postponing D day.

19 Dwight D. Eisenhower in *Crusade in Europe*

If none of these three days should prove satisfactory from the standpoint of weather, consequences would ensue that were almost terrifying to contemplate. Secrecy would be

lost. Assault troops would be unloaded and crowded back into assembly areas enclosed in barbed wire, where their original places would already have been taken by those to follow in subsequent waves. Complicated movement tables would be scrapped. Morale would drop. A wait of at least fourteen days, possibly twenty-eight, would be necessary—a sort of suspended animation involving more than 2,000,000 men! The good weather period available for major campaigning would become still shorter and the enemy's defenses would become still stronger! The whole of the United Kingdom would become quickly aware that something had gone wrong and national discouragement there and in America could lead to unforeseen results. Finally, always lurking in the background was the knowledge that the enemy was developing new, and presumably effective, secret weapons on the French coast. What the effect of these would be on our crowded harbors, especially at Plymouth and Portsmouth, we could not even guess.

The Writer's Craft

- What is the topic sentence in this paragraph? Does every other sentence in the paragraph help to support it?
- Which consequences of the postponement of D day do you think Eisenhower regarded as most important, in the sense of being potentially the most serious or dangerous? Which consequences did he probably consider as being of lesser importance? In what general order, then, are the supporting details arranged: from least to most important or from most to least important? Why is this an effective arrangement for the paragraph?

Now You Try It

Choose one of the following topic sentences and develop it in a paragraph. Organize the details according to order of importance.

- Our school is known chiefly for three things.
- There are many reasons why a student should have a part-time job.
- The president of the class has many responsibilities.
- Educational television has still not reached its fullest potential.
- The Korean War resulted in changes in American attitudes.

- f. Overemphasizing interscholastic sports can cause several problems for a school.
- g. There are three main steps to take in preparing for an important test.

ORDER OF COMPARISON OR CONTRAST An expository paragraph can sometimes be developed effectively through the use of *comparisons* (to show similarities) and *contrasts* (to show differences). Such paragraphs demand a special kind of organization. One way to organize them is illustrated in the following model.

20 Peter F. Drucker in "How to Be an Employee"

There are basic differences between the large and the small enterprise. In the small enterprise you operate primarily through personal contacts. In the large enterprise you have established "policies," "channels" of organization, and fairly rigid procedures. In the small enterprise you have, moreover, immediate effectiveness in a very small area. You can see the effect of your work and of your decisions right away; once you are a little bit above the ground floor. In the large enterprise even the man at the top is only a cog in a big machine. To be sure, his actions affect a much greater area than the actions and decisions of the man in the small organization, but his effectiveness is remote, indirect, and elusive. In a small and even in a middle-sized business, you are normally exposed to all kinds of experiences and expected to do a great many things without too much help or guidance. In the large organization you are normally taught one thing thoroughly. In the small one the danger is of becoming a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. In the large it is of becoming the man who knows more and more about less and less.

The Writer's Craft

1. Drucker's objective in this paragraph is to contrast some aspects of a small enterprise with those of a large enterprise. He chose to organize the paragraph by setting off one aspect of the small company against a contrasting aspect of the large company. In outline form the

first part of his paragraph would look something like the outline below. Examine this beginning and then complete the outline. There should be a total of four Roman numerals.

Differences Between Large and Small Enterprises

- I. Methods of operation
 - Small: through personal contacts
 - Large: through established policies, channels, and procedures
- II. Areas of influence
 - Small: immediate effectiveness in a small area
 - Large: effectiveness remote, indirect, and elusive

2. There is a second way in which Drucker might have organized his paragraph. He would first have discussed aspects of the small enterprise and then have discussed parallel aspects of the large enterprise. Do you think this method would have made the contrasts as sharp as they are in Drucker's paragraph? Why or why not?
3. A paragraph showing similarities can be developed in the same way as one showing contrasts. Why are the two techniques similar?

Now You Try It

Select one of the topic sentences below, or make up one of your own, and develop it in a paragraph organized according to the pattern used by Drucker.

- a. Basketball has more spectator appeal than baseball.
- b. The one-act play and the three-act play are different in many respects.
- c. "Pop" art and realism are worlds apart.
- d. Although they sprang from the same soil, jazz and the blues took different forms.
- e. In the minds of most Americans, Thoreau and Emerson are closely linked; actually they were quite different in many ways.
- f. There are sharp differences between urban and suburban living conditions in the United States.

LESSON
5

Coherence in Paragraphs

A coherent paragraph is one in which the sentences are carefully linked so that the reader can easily follow the sequence of ideas from sentence to sentence. In this lesson you will examine some of the ways in which writers link their sentences and make clear the relationships between them.

COHERENCE THROUGH TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS There are certain words which are useful in showing the relationships between sentences in a paragraph. *Afterward, moreover, finally, therefore, however*—these and similar words and phrases, called *transitional expressions*, help to make paragraphs coherent by indicating the relationship between ideas in the sentences. Notice the transitional expressions in the two following paragraphs.

21 Albert H. Marcwardt in *American English*

In considering the history and development of American English we must remember that the courageous bands who ventured westward into the unknown with Captain John Smith or on board the *Mayflower*, as well as those who followed them later in the seventeenth century, were speaking and writing the English language as it was currently employed in England. Consequently, whatever linguistic proc-

esses operated to produce the differences between American and British English which exist today must either have taken place in American English after the colonists settled on this continent or have occurred in British English after the emigrants left their homeland. Or, as a third possibility, there may have been changes in both divisions of the language after the period of settlement. We cannot, however, escape the conclusion of original identity and subsequent change.

22 J. B. Priestley in "Other People's Weaknesses"

What delight we give other people by confessing to absurd weaknesses! For example, I cannot endure being tossed about in small boats, where I sweat with terror. Again, the sight and sound of a bat or a bird fluttering and banging about in a room fill me with disgust that can leap to fear and panic. When I have admitted this, I have seen people light up for the first time in their converse with me. At last I have succeeded in pleasing them. Until then, apparently, I have been insufferable. And I behave in the same fashion. I delight in J's terror of public speaking, in M's horror of spiders, in A's fear of being left alone in any old house, in H's rejection of all flying, in W's shuddering withdrawal from any cat. We like to feel that there is an equitable rationing system for this nonsense, and that we are all at times still children huddling together in the dark. A man or woman whose personality had not a speck of such weakness would be intolerable, not one of us at all, a sneering visitor from some other planet. Now and again they turn up, and we are delighted to see them go.

The Writer's Craft

1. What relationship between ideas is indicated by each of the underscored expressions in Models 21 and 22? Reread Model 21, omitting the words *consequently, or, and however*. Does the paragraph seem less clear without these transitional expressions? Why? Does the paragraph read less smoothly without them?
2. Notice that the words *or* (Model 21) and *and* (Model 22) are used as transitional expressions at the beginning of sentences. While

some authorities consider it a stylistic fault to begin a sentence with a conjunction, most modern writers occasionally use *and*, *but*, *or*, and *so* as transitional sentence starters. Why do you think Marckwardt used *or* to begin a new sentence instead of attaching the *or* sentence to the preceding one with a comma or a semicolon? Why do you think Priestley began his seventh sentence with *and* instead of joining the sentence to the preceding one?

COHERENCE THROUGH THE USE OF LINKING EXPRESSIONS

Another way to link together the thoughts in a paragraph is to use pronouns to refer to elements in preceding sentences or within the same sentence. Words like *he*, *it*, *they*, *this*, and *those* remind the reader of relationships within and between sentences. Notice how pronouns help to give the following paragraph coherence.

23 R. L. Bruckberger in *Image of America*

Americans are a slow people, but they seldom retrace their steps. I do not mean to imply that all Americans are slow. There are some who are only too hasty, but these are exceptions; moreover, they do not go far and are often obliged to repent of their haste. Americans are slow because they are profoundly aware that life is a continuous movement, advancing only through contradictions and becoming fuller and richer only as it succeeds in reconciling as far as possible these contradictions, never when it ignores or silences them. Americans strive heroically and with rare obstinacy to keep extreme opposites on speaking terms and to find a way to reconcile them, even if the reconciliation is merely superficial. They do not give up an extreme position until it becomes more than obvious that it cannot possibly be reconciled with its opposite and merged with the continuous movement. But once they do give it up, they look upon it as an obstacle to be removed forthwith. Americans are a slow people because of two seemingly contradictory elements in their nature: a desire for compromise at almost, though not quite, any price, and an undeniable rigidity wherever their honor and their interest are concerned. But

once they have reached a decision — either to compromise or, if compromise proves impossible, to refuse to compromise — they are then as swift and direct in carrying out their decision as they were slow and indirect in coming to it. Observers, however, see only the action itself, the carrying out of the decision. It is this manner of taking action, together with the remarkable tempo of American production, that gives America its reputation for breathtaking speed. Innately America has the slowest pulse in the world. If Americans seem obsessed by the need for haste, it is because they are always slow to start.

The Writer's Craft

1. In addition to the words *moreover* and *however*, which are used as transitional expressions in this paragraph, there are thirty pronouns that refer to elements in the same or preceding sentences. These pronouns function as nouns and as adjectives. Find the element to which each of the underscored pronouns refers.
2. Would the paragraph be as coherent if each pronoun were replaced by the noun to which it refers? Would the paragraph read as smoothly as it does?
3. Notice that the word *Americans* is used six times in the paragraph. Why do you think Bruckberger repeats this noun instead of using pronouns throughout?

Now You Try It

Choose one of the following topic sentences and write a paragraph in which you use both transitional expressions and linking expressions. Underline all of the transitional and linking expressions you use.

- a. Some early American Presidents are practically forgotten today.
- b. Swimming is one of the best forms of exercise.
- c. Women's fashions change more rapidly than men's.
- d. The poetry of Emily Dickinson is quite different from that of Walt Whitman.
- e. The seashore is wild and lonely.
- f. Changing an automobile tire is not difficult.
- g. A camper needs more equipment than just a tent.

COHERENCE THROUGH REPETITION Repeating certain key terms throughout a paragraph contributes to the coherence of the paragraph. As the reader encounters the same word again and again, he is reminded of the previous sentences in which the word appeared. Notice how effectively the repetition of *New York* and *the city* ties together the paragraph that follows.

24 E. B. White in *Here Is New York*

There are roughly three New Yorks. There is, first, the New York of the man or woman who was born here, who takes the city for granted and accepts its size and its turbulence as natural and inevitable. Second, there is the New York of the commuter — the city that is devoured by locusts each day and spat out each night. Third, there is the New York of the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something. Of these three trembling cities the greatest is the last — the city of final destination, the city that is a goal. It is this third city that accounts for New York's high-strung disposition, its poetical deportment, its dedication to the arts, and its incomparable achievements. Commuters give the city its tidal restlessness; natives give it solidity and continuity; but the settlers give it passion. And whether it is a farmer arriving from Italy to set up a small grocery store in a slum, or a young girl arriving from a small town in Mississippi to escape the indignity of being observed by her neighbors, or a boy arriving from the Corn Belt with a manuscript and a pain in his heart, it makes no difference: each embraces New York with the intense excitement of first love, each absorbs New York with the fresh eyes of an adventurer, each generates heat and light to dwarf the Consolidated Edison Company.

The Writer's Craft

1. There are two key terms here: *New York* and *the city*. Are there any sentences in which one or the other of these terms does not appear?
2. How many times do the terms *New York* and *the city* appear in the paragraph? Do you think there is too much repetition? Would White's paragraph have been more effective if he had occasionally

substituted for *New York* and *the city* such expressions as *this metropolis*, *Manhattan*, *this largest city*, *this urban giant*? Why or why not?

3. What transitional expressions do you find in White's paragraph? Do the transitional expressions plus the repetition of key terms make the writing in the paragraph seem labored? Explain.

Now You Try It

Write a descriptive paragraph in which you use repetition to achieve coherence. Underline each repetition of a key word.