

Developing Writing Skills – Paragraph development

Paragraphs are the building blocks of texts. It is imperative that academic texts in particular be structured in paragraphs. In order for a paragraph to be effective, it must have a number of distinct features. What do you think these features are? Discuss in pairs/groups. Then read on and check your answers.



A. The characteristics of an effective paragraph

Written texts are divided into paragraphs, so that organization is made clear and information can be easily followed by the reader. An effective paragraph should have unity, proper topic sentences, cohesion, coherence and adequate development. Let's look at these features in more detail:

Unity: Each paragraph should introduce a new element and should be connected logically with the previous paragraph as well as the following ones. A writer should begin a new paragraph when he/she changes to a new idea which is not consistent with the topic sentence of the paragraph.

Topic sentence: This is often (but not always) the first sentence of a paragraph and expresses its main idea. Sentences following the topic sentence normally expand on the topic sentence in a number of ways, for instance by giving examples, reasons, explanations and further evidence, by expressing contrast, etc. These functions are signaled through the use of linking words/phrases which contribute to the cohesion of the text. Examples of linking words include *for instance*, *on the other hand*, *in other words*, etc. (see Unit 2).

Cohesion: Apart from linking words and phrases, cohesion can be obtained in a number of other ways. These include: a) repetition of the same word, b) use of synonyms or antonyms, c) ellipsis and substitution, d) anaphoric nouns and reference words (e.g., *it*, *that*), e) indication of order (e.g., *first*, *second*), and f) words / expressions indicating writer comment (e.g., *interestingly*, *importantly*, *it should be noted that*) (see Unit 2). However, it is important to note that the use of linkers and the other cohesive devices is not always necessary, as it is possible to have cohesive text by placing statements one next to the other in such a way that the reader may be able to recognize the logical connection between them.

Coherence: A well written paragraph or text needs to be coherent as well. Coherence refers to the relevance of the content of the paragraph to the topic, and the logical organization of all the ideas presented. Therefore, it encompasses cohesion as well. One way coherence of the whole text can be achieved is by guiding the reader in the introductory paragraph as to the structure of the text, mentioning briefly the main points to be covered.

Adequate development: A paragraph is adequately developed when it explains and supports the controlling idea (its topic sentence) through evidence and details. With regard to length, paragraphs should be neither too short, as that would mean that they are not sufficiently developed, nor too long, as this would make them too difficult to process. Therefore, a long paragraph should be broken into smaller ones.

► **Activity 1:** Now look at the following paragraph and: **a) Underline the topic sentence; b) Circle all linkers and cohesive devices; c) Decide if the paragraph has unity and coherence:**

Traditional laptops are not the only portable computers appearing in elementary and secondary institutions. Some schools uncomfortable with the high cost of laptops have explored the advantages of lower-priced portables designed for

K-12 students. The AlphaSmart and DreamWriter, for example, make it possible to provide each student with a rechargeable portable that can be used for word processing or keyboarding instruction at a fraction of the cost of a traditional laptop.

