

Unit 2 : Unity in a Paragraph

Contents:

1. Definition of unity in a paragraph
2. Ways to achieve unity in a paragraph
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Objectives:

After studying this Unit, a student

- knows what unity in a paragraph is.
- writes a unified paragraph.
- can do the exercises effectively.

1. Definition of unity in a paragraph

Unity in a paragraph means that a paragraph is of one piece, a distinct unit that has one specific purpose: that is, a paragraph must have a single, clear controlling idea or main idea. This controlling idea is usually expressed in a single sentence which is called the topic sentence as explained in the previous Unit. This topic sentence will be explained, expanded or proved by details or information in the form of support sentences. Every support sentence in a paragraph must be related to the controlling idea in the topic sentence to form a unified paragraph.

2. Ways to achieve unity in a paragraph

To achieve unity in a paragraph, you should

1. state the main idea in a single sentence.
2. relate every sentence in the paragraph (support sentences) to that main idea in a clear, logical way.

You should keep in mind that a unified paragraph is one that has a single, clear central idea and one in which all sentences (support sentences) are related to the central idea and are connected to each other in a logical manner. The following excerpt is an example of a unified paragraph.

¹ Generally, language has three functions according to its purpose: informative, expressive and directive. ² Speaking with the purpose of communicating factual information is called the informative function. ³ Speaking in order to express feelings or to stir the feelings and attitudes of the listener is called the expressive or emotive function. ⁴ And finally, speaking in order to make other people act is called the directive function. (1)

Here the writer states the main idea in the first sentence (topic sentence). Sentences 2, 3 and 4 are major support sentences, explaining or giving more information about sentence 1. No sentence in this paragraph is not related to the topic of the main idea ("three functions of language") of the paragraph. So this paragraph as a whole has a unified and logical structure that follows a clear pattern of paragraph development.

Unity is achieved by being sure that all the support sentences are arranged in a logical way so that all support sentences are related to the central idea stated in the topic sentence. Beginning writers should remember to stick to only one idea: sometimes they do not achieve unity in a paragraph because

(1) Adapted from Legget, Glenn, et al., Handbook for Writers, 7th ed., Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1978, pp. 121-122.

they jump from subject to subject. In other words, they seem to try to include too many ideas or subjects, as in the following paragraph.

¹ My father is very strict with his children, especially me. ² He will not let me out of the house unless I have done my homework. ³ Frankly speaking, I do not care whether I go to school or not. ⁴ School is such a waste of time. ⁵ My mother does not agree with my father ⁶ They quarrel a lot. ⁷ Sometimes I wish they would get a divorce, but then whom would I live with? (1)

The paragraph above lacks unity because it jumps from idea to idea. In the first sentence, the writer tells the reader about his father's strictness. This sentence is supported by sentence 2. Sentence 3 concerns the writer: **he does not care whether he goes to school or not**, which is supported by sentence 4. Another idea is stated in sentence 5 and supported by sentences 6 and 7.

The following paragraph is also an example of a paragraph which lacks unity because the writer tries to put too many subjects in it.

(1) Adapted from Sullivan, op.cit., pp. 7-8

¹ There were several reasons for the destruction of the English religious houses. ² Moral, political and financial considerations forced Henry to evict the monks. ³ When he did, the people rebelled and organized pilgrims' groups to save the monasteries. ⁴ Their efforts failed, and many religious houses were sold or dismantled. ⁵ Beautiful churches were destroyed. ⁶ Many great medieval manuscripts were lost forever. (1)

In the above paragraph, sentences 1 and 2 suggest that the writer is going to tell the readers the reasons for destroying the English monasteries. Instead of discussing the reasons why the English monasteries were destroyed, the writer jumps into a description of the people's reaction to Henry's action (sentence 3) and the consequences of that reaction (sentence 4, 5 and 6). These sentences do not contain ideas relevant to the topic sentence at all. If the writer had concentrated on the central idea in the opening sentence and had kept focus on that idea, the paragraph could be expanded as follows, and it would become a unified paragraph.

(1) Lefcowitz, Allan B, The Writer's Handbook, Prentice - Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1976, p.76

¹ There are several reasons for the destruction of the English religious houses. ² The official reason given by King Henry was morality: the monks, he claimed, were acting immorally by accumulating wealth at the expense of the poor. ³ However, there were political reasons as well. ⁴ Thomas Cromwell, the new vicar-general, was opposed to pilgrimages, and the worship of relics, and Henry did not wish to see his new government split into factions. ⁵ But the chief reason for the action was financial. ⁶ The resources of the Crown were no longer sufficient to meet the cost of government and the expenses of Henry's overseas campaigns. (1)

The above paragraph is unified because all major support sentences--sentences 2, 3 and 5--are relevant and related to the topic sentence--the first sentence. Sentences 4 and 6 are minor support sentences which give additional details to sentences 3 and 5 respectively.

(1) Lefcowitz, *ibid*, pp. 76-77.

To sum up

To test whether a paragraph is unified or not, you should ask yourself two questions :

1. What is the main idea?
2. Does every major support sentence clearly relate to that main idea ?

3. Exercises about unity in a paragraph

Exercise 1.

Directions: The following are topic sentences, each accompanied by a set of support sentences. Some of the support sentences are relevant to the topic sentence; some are not. Eliminate the irrelevant ones and organize the rest into a paragraph in the spaces provided.

Exercise 1.1.

Topic sentence: Being an air force officer is more interesting than any other military occupation.

1. My cousin has been in the Navy for two years.
2. The wages in certain branches of the Air Force are higher than in other branches.

3. The Navy gives one travel opportunities, too.
4. There are many opportunities to travel in the Air Force.
5. Opportunities for advancement are greater in the Air Force.(1)

Exercise 1.2.

Topic sentence: My friend is an excellent doctor.

1. He studied hard while he was in medical school.
2. His mother died during his final year of medical school.
3. He received many scholastic honors.
4. After he was graduated, he studied abroad for many years.
5. My roommate's father has many good characteristics.
6. He was diligent in his studies.
7. In addition, my roommate is very kind and sympathetic to all his patients.
8. When he came back to Thailand, he worked in the most famous hospital in Bangkok.

(1) Adapted from Legget, op.cit., p. 198.

Exercise 1.3.

Topic sentence: My favorite class this semester is the EN 305 class.

1. Moreover, the topics he introduces into the class are also especially interesting and worth thinking and writing about.
2. He gives students a chance to exchange ideas about the topic with each other.
3. I like this class mostly because the instructor is competent in his field.
4. Some students do not like this class.
5. He always inspires his students to think deeply about the topic before writing about it.

4. Other people attend university because they want some general knowledge.
5. Still other people go to university because they do not have anything else to do.
6. They hope that this education will help them have a better life.
7. They want only the honor of a university degree.
8. A university offers people all fields of knowledge. (1)

(1) Adapted from Reid, op.cit., p.56.

Exercise 2.

Directions: The following paragraphs are not unified because the unity has been weakened by the inclusion of some ideas not closely related to the topic sentence, which is the first sentence. Point out which sentences in each paragraph should be omitted because they are not related to the topic sentence. Then rearrange the rest into a unified paragraph in the spaces provided.

Exercise 2.1.

¹ *Everyone in our country can help save energy effectively by changing two habits.* ² *Firstly everyone should always remember that when they go out, every light in the house or in the office must be turned off and that all electricity must be used in the most useful ways.* ³ *The cost of electricity in Thailand is very expensive.* ⁴ *Another habit people should get rid of is that of driving absolutely everywhere regardless of wastefulness.* ⁵ *For example, driving two blocks from the house to buy little things wastes fuel.* ⁶ *Fuel in our country is very expensive, too.* ⁷ *Some people are silly in thinking that going from one place to another requires a car.* ⁸ *This habit, too, must be broken.*

Organize the unified paragraph here.

Exercise 2.2.

¹ People who live in a small town in the countryside have at least three major advantages. ² The first is the ease with which they can get around. ³ Driving always presents a problem. ⁴ The roads are never crowded with cars at any time because people need not drive. ⁵ People can walk from place to place easily. ⁶ The second advantage is the low cost of living. ⁷ People in a small town earn a low income. ⁸ The prices of groceries are low, especially if people take advantage of farmers' markets. ⁹ The greatest benefit of living in a small town is the friendliness. ¹⁰ Every-

*one in a small town knows each other. ¹¹ They always
have a kind word for each other. ¹² I am treated well
when I shop because everyone knows me. (1)*

Organize the unified paragraph here.

(1) Adapted from Lorch, Sue, Basic Writing, A Practical Approach,
Winthrop Publishers, Inc. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981, p.88.

Exercise 2.3.

¹ Many college and university students in the United States find it necessary to work while attending school in order to support themselves and pay tuition. ² Some students qualify for "work-study" grants. ³ These are paid positions offered by the college or university to students who demonstrate financial need. ⁴ Work-study grants are often for positions in the school cafeteria or library. ⁵ A variety of grants and scholarships are available to qualified applicants from families that could not otherwise afford to provide a college education for their children. ⁶ Other students whose family incomes may be too high to qualify for work-study grants have to find part-time jobs on their own in the community. ⁷ Although part-time work puts extra pressure on college students, many report that the experience actually helps them deal with academic demands. (1)

(1) Blass, Laurie, et al., Mosaic I, A Content-Based Writing Book, 2nd ed., McGraw - Hill Publishing Inc., 1990, p.43.

Organize the unified paragraph here.

Exercise 2.4.

¹ College education not only is a stepping stone toward any competitive profession, it also provides for a well-rounded life. ² College provides all the general skills that can be applied to any profession. ³ In addition to preparing students for their future careers, studying at college helps students develop skills and interests they will find useful and important in the future. ⁴ Regardless of one's major,

Exercise 3.

Directions: None of the following paragraphs contains an appropriate topic sentence. Choose and check (/) the best sentence to be the appropriate topic sentence for each paragraph.

Exercise 3.1.

_____ . For example, North Americans like to stand about 18 to 20 inches apart from each other when they talk. People from Saudi Arabia like to stand 12 to 14 inches apart when they talk. As a result, when a North American talks to someone from Saudi Arabia, everyone is uncomfortable. The North American feels that the Saudi Arabian is trying to be too close, too intimate, and so the American moves away as they talk. The Saudi Arabian, on the other hand, feels that the North American is too unfriendly, too distant. (1)

(1) Reid, op.cit., p.57.

Possible topic sentences for the above paragraph.

- a. [] People from different cultures have different ideas about many things.
- b. [] Distances between conversing people differ from culture to culture.
- c. [] Some people like to be close while others like to be farther apart.

Exercise 3.2.

_____ . For many Americans, blue is a color that means sadness or coldness; an idiom says "She's feeling blue" when someone is sad. Most Americans think that yellow is a bright, cheerful color, so yellow is often used to decorate kitchens in houses. Red represents anger for some people; an American idiom states that people "see red" when they are furious. However, red is also the symbolic color of Christmas celebrations. Green is another color that can have two meanings. Some people think it is a calming color, and so many schools and hospitals paint their walls light green. But for other people, green represents jealousy: "She is green with envy" is a common idiom. (1)

(1) Reid, *ibid.*, p.57.

Possible topic sentences for the above paragraph

- a. [] Colors are often used in English idioms.
- b. [] Colors are interesting.
- c. [] Some colors have special meanings in American culture.

Exercise 3.3.

_____ . *The winter weather in Milwaukee is cold. It snows and rains nearly every week. However, during the spring, the weather is quite mild, and when the trees and flowers begin to bud, the scenery is beautiful. The summers in Milwaukee are quite hot, and many people use airconditioning to be comfortable. Probably the best season in Milwaukee is autumn; this season is usually lengthy, pleasant in temperature, and quite dry. The people who live in Milwaukee have a saying about their weather: "If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes: it will change!" (1)*

(1) Reid, *ibid*, p.57.

Possible topic sentences for the above paragraph

- a. [] The weather in Milwaukee is a good example of mid-western weather in the United States.
- b. [] In the United States, mid-western weather is changeable.
- c. [] Many people dislike the weather in Milwaukee.

Exercise 3.4.

..... The first reason is that I have trouble in my listening class, and I want to improve my listening. Second, I often can't understand the conversation when American people talk, so I have difficulty talking with American friends. Watching American people and listening to them talk on television not only helps me hear the sounds of English better, but it also helps me hear the patterns in English more clearly. This practice helps me understand what my American friends are talking about. Third, I want to learn English as quickly as possible. If I listen to English as many hours a day as I can, I know that my abilities in English will improve. Finally, some of the programs on television are interesting or funny, and because of that I enjoy listening to them. (1)

(1) Reid, *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

Possible topic sentences for the above paragraph

- a. [1 I like to watch television after I finish all my work.
- b. [1 Watching television is important for everyone.
- c. [1 Watching television provides important help in developing the listening skill.