

## PARAGRAPH WRITING

If you look at any printed prose book, you will see that each chapter is divided up into sections, the first line of each being indented slightly to the right. These sections are called Paragraphs. Chapters, essays and other prose compositions are broken up into paragraphs, to make the reading of them easier, for the beginning of a new paragraph marks a change of topic, or a step in the development of an argument or of a story. In writing essays or other compositions, it is important to know how to divide them properly into paragraphs; for an essay not so broken up, looks uninteresting and is not easy to read.

**Definition.**— A paragraph is a number of sentences grouped together and relating to one topic; or, a group of related sentences that develop a single point.

These definitions show that the paragraphs of a composition are not mere arbitrary divisions. The division of a chapter into paragraphs must be made according to the changes of ideas introduced.

There is, therefore, no rule as to the length of paragraphs. They may be short or long according to the necessity of the case. A paragraph may consist of a single sentence, or of many sentences.

(Note.—In this respect, the paragraphs of a piece of prose differ from the stanzas or verses of a poem. The stanzas of a poem are usually of the same length and pattern; but paragraphs are long or short according to the amount of matter to be expressed under each head).

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## PRINCIPLES OF PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

1. **UNITY.**—The first and most important principle to be observed in constructing a paragraph is that of *Unity*. Just as each sentence deals with one thought, each paragraph must deal with *one topic or idea*—and *with no more than one*. In writing an essay, for example, every head, and every sub-head, should have its own paragraph to itself. And every sentence in the paragraph must be closely connected with the main topic of the paragraph. The paragraph and every part of it must be the expression of one theme or topic.

(Note.—A good practice is to read a chapter in a book, and give a short heading or title to each paragraph, which will express in a word or brief phrase the subject of the paragraph).

The topic, theme or subject of a paragraph is very often expressed in one sentence of the paragraph—generally the first. This sentence is called the *topical sentence* (because it states the topic), or the *key-sentence* (because it unlocks or opens the subject to be dealt with in the paragraph).

2. *ORDER*.—The second principle of paragraph construction is *Order*—that is, *logical sequence of thought* or development of the subject. Events must be related in the order of their occurrence, and all ideas should be connected with the leading idea and arranged according to their importance or order.

(*Note*.—The two most important sentences in the paragraph are the first and the last. The first, which should as a rule be the topical sentence, should arouse the interest of the reader; and the last should satisfy it. The first, or topical, sentence states the topic—a fact, a statement, or a proposition; the last should bring the whole paragraph on this topic to a conclusion, or summing up).

3. *VARIETY*.—A third principle of paragraph construction is *Variety*; by which is meant that, to avoid monotony, the paragraph of a composition should be of different lengths, and not always of the same sentence construction.

To sum up :—the essentials of good paragraph construction are—  
(1) Unity. (2) A good topical sentence. (3) Logical sequence of thought.  
(4) Variety. (5) A full and rounded final sentence in conclusion.

In all these paragraphs, the principles of unity are observed, and also the general rules about the place of the topical sentences and the rounding off the whole with a good conclusion.

## THE WRITING OF SINGLE PARAGRAPHS

So far we have been treating of paragraphs which are sections of a more or less lengthy composition, like an essay or the chapter of a book. But students are often asked in examinations to write short separate paragraphs, instead of essays, on subjects of ordinary interest. Such single paragraphs are really miniature essays ; but the same principles as we have discussed above (except the principle of variety), must be followed in their construction. Each paragraph must be a unity, treating of one definite subject, and must follow a logical order of thought. In most cases, too, the rules about the topical sentences and the conclusion should be borne in mind.

A few examples should make this clear. Suppose, for example, you are asked to write a paragraph on "The Cat." It is obvious that you cannot treat this subject fully, as you might in a long essay. And yet you must, according to the principle of unity, confine your paragraph to one definite topic. You must, therefore, choose one thing to say about a cat, and stick to it throughout. You might, for example, write of one characteristic of the cat, say, its love of comfort and attachment to its home. In that case, you might write a paragraph something like this:—

### *The Cat*

There is some truth in the common saying that while dogs become attached to persons, cats are generally attached to places. A dog will follow his master anywhere, but a cat keeps to the house it is used to ; and even when the house changes hand, the cat will remain there, so long as it is kindly treated by the new owners. A cat does not seem to be capable of the personal devotion often shown by a dog. It thinks most of its own comfort, and its love is only cupboard love.

Notice the construction of this paragraph. It begins with the topical sentence, which clearly states the subject. The following sentence explains the statement by expanding it; and the last sentence, by giving a reason for the attachment of a cat to a particular house forms a fitting conclusion. The paragraph is therefore a Unity, treating of one characteristic of cat character: and it follows an orderly plan.

The paragraph on the cat is descriptive. Now take an example of a narrative paragraph, in which you are required to tell a story. Suppose the subject is to be a motor-car accident; you might treat it in this way:—

### *A Motor-Car Accident*

It is the mad craze for speed that is responsible for many motor accidents. Only