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Writing Effective Paragraphs

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Outline 1

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1. What is a Paragraph?
2. What Makes a Good Paragraph?
3. The Topic Sentence
4. The Supporting Sentences
5. The Concluding Sentence
6. Unity
7. Coherence
8. Questions?

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- The following advice relates to paragraphs for academic work
- This will help you produce better essays, reports, literature reviews and short answers to questions
- Paragraphs in different genres (newspaper articles, novels, etc) may not follow the principles presented today
- Not every important writer writes well-structured paragraphs



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Easy?

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- Learning about paragraphing is easy
- Writing good paragraphs is difficult
- Paragraphs are the building blocks of almost all written genres
- You cannot write good essays, reports or literature reviews if you cannot write good paragraphs

What Makes a Good Paragraph?

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- A good paragraph contains a topic sentence
- All remaining sentences support and develop the topic sentence
- Only one main idea is developed (unity)
- The sentences flow smoothly and logically (coherence)

Paragraph Length 1

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- Paragraph word length can and should vary

But:

- Paragraphs that are too long are hard to read
- Paragraphs that are too short look 'choppy' or read like a list

Paragraph Length 2

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- A one sentence paragraph is usually too short.
- Writing an A4 page with only two paragraphs indicates paragraphs may be too long.
- A paragraph should only develop one main idea.
- This is the main factor which determines paragraph length
- When you need to say something else, start a new paragraph



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Paragraph Structure

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1. **Topic Sentence:** states the main topic of the paragraph and the controlling idea
2. **Supporting Sentences:** develop the topic sentence
3. **Concluding sentence:** signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember (not always necessary)



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Sample Paragraph 1

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Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important reasons: it is both beautiful and useful. First of all, gold has a lustrous beauty that is resistant to corrosion. For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished today as the day it was minted twenty three centuries ago. Another important characteristic of gold is its utility in industry and science. The most recent application of gold is in astronauts' suits.



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Sample Paragraph 2

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Hurricanes, which are also called cyclones, exert tremendous power. These violent storms are often a hundred kilometres in diameter, and their winds can reach velocities of one hundred and ten kilometres per hour or more. Furthermore, the strong winds and heavy rainfall that accompany them can completely destroy a small town in a couple of hours. The energy that is released by a hurricane in one day exceeds the total energy consumed by humankind throughout the world in one year.



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Sample Paragraph 3

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Albert Einstein, one of the world's geniuses, failed his university entrance examinations on his first attempt. William Faulkner, one of America's noted writers, never finished college because he could not pass his English courses. Sir Winston Churchill, who is considered one of the masters of the English language, had to have special tutoring in English during elementary school. These few examples show that failure in school does not always predict failure in life.



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Topic Sentences 1

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- The topic sentence gives the reader a clear idea of what the paragraph is about
- The topic sentence does not have to be the first sentence of the paragraph
- However, this is the clearest way to present your points



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Topic Sentences 2

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The topic sentence is neither too general nor too specific

Too General

Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult.

Too Specific

Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult for 63% of the people surveyed who cited a range of difficulties including homesickness, loneliness, difficulty making Australian friends, changes to diets, health problems, weight gain, and difficulties with money and jobs.



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Examples

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- ✓ Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult in three main respects for 63% of the people surveyed.

or

- ✓ Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult for 63% of the people surveyed due to the impact of culture shock, financial concerns and health concerns.

Topic Sentence Structure 1

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A topic sentence contains:

1. A topic

- eg. Studying overseas

The topic should not be a pronoun (he, she, his, this, it)

The topic is best placed at or near the start of the sentence

2. A controlling idea (what you say about the topic)

- ...was deemed to be very difficult...

Topic Sentence Structure 2

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The controlling idea 'controls' everything else in the paragraph

Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult...

In this case, do not talk about benefits of studying overseas, or statistics about the overseas student population etc.

If you want to do this, start a new paragraph

Topic Sentence Structure 3

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The Topic Sentence may contain language which helps link it to other paragraphs, eg.

- Firstly,
- The most important reason,
- The next step,
- In addition to...
- The result of...



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Example

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Unlike many countries in Europe, multiple voting shares do not exist in Thailand. Thai law prohibits the issuance of such shares. Therefore, when I identify who owns and controls the sample firms, I focus only on three control mechanisms, namely, direct, pyramidal, and cross-shareholdings.

The first form of control mechanism, “Direct ownership”, means a shareholder who owns shares under his own name or via a private company owned by him. “Indirect ownership” is when a company is owned via other public firms or a chain of public firms. ...



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Topic Sentence Structure 4

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The topic sentence may contain language which clearly indicates the structure of the paragraph. eg.

- ...for three main reasons.
- ...in the following respects...
- There are two methods of...
- ...has two advantage and one disadvantage

Rhetorical Questions?

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What is a rhetorical question?

- A question used to emphasise a point, not to ask something

Who uses them constantly?

- Kevin Rudd, Australia's Prime Minister

Why?

- He thinks it makes his points sound interesting and powerful

Rhetorical Questions?

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Is it a good idea to use rhetorical questions in your written work?

- No

Concluding Sentences

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Concluding sentences are optional

They can help by summarising the main point of the paragraph

You may begin a concluding sentence with such signals as:

- In short,
- In summary,
- Indeed,
- Therefore, it is clear that...



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Unity

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- Unity (noun): 'oneness'
- All paragraphs should have unity – that is, they should only discuss one idea.



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One Paragraph or Two?

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High emotional intelligence can help a manager improve workplace communication skills, employee motivation and organisational effectiveness.

If a manager has high empathy, a key component of emotional intelligence, he or she will be able to listen to the concerns of employees and will be more understanding of their needs, wants and concerns. This will most likely translate into increased motivation and satisfaction of employees and ultimately will have a positive effect on the effectiveness of the business.

It is important to note, however, that emotional intelligence is a concept that is not universally understood to have the same meaning and is not universally believed to be a key determiner of business success. Highly authoritarian, top down approaches are employed in many successful businesses today.



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A Misplaced Sentence?

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HRM policies affect certain immediate organisational outcomes and have long-term consequences. For example, policy choices made by managers affect the overall competence of employees, the commitment of employees, the degree of congruence between the goals of employees and those of the organisation, and the overall cost effectiveness of HRM practices. HRM policies have been subject to considerable change in throughout the western world in recent years. HRM policy makers may find the four Cs useful means to enhance effectiveness of human resource management in organisations.

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Cohere (verb): 'stick together'

Sentences in a paragraph should flow smoothly and logically.

How?

1. Use nouns and pronouns appropriately
2. Arrange ideas in a logical order
3. Use linking words

Use Nouns Appropriately

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- Make it easy for the reader by repeating key nouns regularly
- If pronouns are overused, the focus can be hard for the reader (What is 'it'? Who is 'he'? What are 'they'?)



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Pronoun Misuse 1

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A common mistake is singular / plural confusion.

- The company embarked on an unrelated diversification strategy. They had decided that previous strategies had been ineffective.

Another mistake is using a pronoun which could refer to more than one subject.

- A number of people support the new systems and new processes. They (?) might be considered to increase organisational effectiveness.

Pronoun Misuse 2

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These are certainly problematic and if you do it, this may confuse them and it make hard to understand them.

Unfortunately, it is something they often do no matter how often these are told to them and this can even lead to them failing it.



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How to Develop a Paragraph

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- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say -- quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons
- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyse the topic
- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)



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Kinds of Paragraphs

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- Classification
- Comparison and Contrast
- Process (Sequence)
- Definition
- Description
- Choice
- Explanation
- Evaluation
- A Combination of Methods



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Classification and Comparison

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Classification

- is a kind of ...
- can be divided into...
- is a type of...
- falls under..
- belongs to...
- is a part of...
- fits into...
- is grouped with...
- is related to...
- is associated with...

Comparison/Contrast

- is similar to...
- On the other hand...
- Both...
- However...
- But...
- While
- in contrast...
- as well ...
- differs from ...
- Unlike...



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Process and Definition

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Process

- First(ly)/second(ly) ...
- Recently...
- Previously...
- Before...
- When...
- After...
- Finally...
- subsequently ...

Definition

- Is a kind of ...
- Can be defined as...
- Is like...
- Is similar to...



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Description and Choice

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Description

- Is like ...
- Resembles ...
- Above the ...
- Below the ...
- The purpose ...
- Besides/ next to ...
- Near/ nearby ...

Choice

- In my opinion ...
- I like/dislike ...
- I believe ...
- I hope ...
- I feel ...
- I think that ...
- I consider ...
- I believe ...
- I prefer ...



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Explanation and Evaluation

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Explanation

- Because ...
- Therefore...
- Since...
- Thus...
- As a result of...
- Consequently...
- ...is due to...
- Hence
- It follows that ...
- If . . . then...

Evaluation

- I suggest
- I recommend
- I advise



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Signifying Paragraphs

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- Either at the start:

text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text

- **OR** space between:

text text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text text
text text text text text text text text text
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text text text text text text text text text
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Paragraph Checklist

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- Does the paragraph directly to the question / thesis statement?
- Does the paragraph just have one main idea?
- Is there a topic sentence which has a topic and controlling idea?
- Has the topic sentence been supported?
- Are nouns and pronouns used appropriately?
- Are sentences arranged in a logical order?
- Are linking words used?
- Is the paragraph clearly linked to the other paragraphs?
- Is the paragraph layout correct?

Need Further Help?

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Consult Academic Writing Books, particularly:

- Writing Academic English (Longman)
- The Essentials of English (Longman)

Use TLU Services, particularly:

- Workshops
- Individual Consultations
- Helpsheets
- PEP



Acknowledgement

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