

PARAGRAPH WRITING

by

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Today's talk will focus upon Paragraphs. What are Paragraphs? How they should be written, what is the use of Paragraphs and why should we write good paragraphs at all. Now, let us begin with the question of what is a paragraph. All of us are familiar with this word paragraphs, whenever we write anything specially, anything which is long, it is usually divided into paragraphs. So all of us are familiar with what a paragraph is if we are into writing. Even a letter will have paragraphs in it. It is never unbroken text. It has to be divided into paragraphs and why we divide into paragraphs is what we are going to talk about today. So a paragraph is a collection of related sentences around a single topic. And what this means is that there is main idea, a single which you want to focus upon and you develop this idea through a paragraph. So it has a set of related sentences, there are about may be 5 to 8 sentences or 10 to 12 sentences which constitute a paragraph. And all these sentences will have the main idea as they are focus. They will adequately try to deal with the main topic and develop the idea within the paragraph.

Now, why write good paragraphs? Writing good paragraphs is essential for two reasons, one - that it helps you as a writer, you know when you are writing it keeps your writing focused, it makes your writing more readable, so this is the second function comes in, that the reader is helped in his understanding of what is written before him through paragraphs, because deal with one idea or one topic, the reader is able to understand and grasp what the writer is talking about. You may have fantastic ideas, you may have very creative ideas also but if you cannot present them in an organised fashion, if you cannot present them in a logical coherent way then it is of no use. Your ideas may just go down the drain. So it important to know how to write paragraphs.

Now there is one basic rule which have already mentioned to you, that you should keep one idea to one paragraph. That is one basic rule which one all of us should follow while writing. And if there is a new idea which comes out of the idea that you are discussing in your paragraph it should be put in a separate paragraph. And there are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or on a new one. For example you may be having one idea within a paragraph like I told you before but you may be having a lot of supporting evidence along with it. For that is one way of knowing that this is part of a same paragraph and there is also you know there may be several points which is made around the main idea. So that also helps you to know that they should be part of a main one paragraph. And you should be careful to see that all the related sentences; they are connected to the main topic. They should not be unconnected or in off shoot or in wild off shoot of the main topic. In case you wish to discuss something else then you have to change your paragraph that is may make your point in a separate paragraph. And if by chance your main idea the single topic that you are discussing it is becoming too long then a good idea is to break it into smaller paragraphs, instead of having one idea in one long unbroken paragraph because this will again make your text unreadable and whole idea of having a readable text with paragraphs will be lost.

Now what are the elements that make up of paragraph, if you want your paragraph or if you want your writing to be effective if you want to achieve your goals in writing, then a paragraph should have some elements like unity, coherent, topic sentence etc. Now let us go over these points one by one. Unity - we have already talked about, it should have a single focus. It should not end with a

totally different idea or it should not wonder of in different ideas. So each paragraph should keep its focus to a single idea, around that idea, you know citing details, citing statistical evidence or giving illustrations and anything whatever you wish to say, whatever you wish to write which will there in support of your main idea. So unity is very important you cannot be hath hazard in the writing of your paragraph.

The second thing you need to be looking at Coherence. This I feel is one of most essential parts of a paragraph. If your paragraph is not coherent, if it does not read as a connected piece of writing, if it appears to be unorganised, if it appears to be incoherent then there is no meaning to your writing even if you wish to convey the best of ideas, here you may have lost your purpose because your reader will not understand what are you trying to communicate. So because this is what, this coherence is something which helps the reader to understand what you wish to state in your writing or what is the purpose or content of your writing. And how do you create coherence within your paragraph, this is by building logical bridges and vertical bridges. Now logical bridges, I think the term if you look at it, you will understand what it means. The same idea is to be carried from sentence to sentence basically it should be developed like I told you before the idea, an any idea which are discussing in a paragraph is to be developed around that idea, around your topic. So, the same idea is being carried from one sentence to another, the idea is being developed adequately and successive sentences should be constructive in a parallel manner. These are logical bridges you have to create in your writing. Then there are vertical bridges, there are some ways of doing this. For example the keywords which relate to your main idea, which explain your main idea. There are some keywords you keep on using, for example, if there is a paper on global warming or climate change, these will be the keywords in your paragraph. So, these key words should repeated again and again, so the reader understands that you are talking about the same idea, you are writing about the same idea. Then synonymous words should be used in different sentences that you are constructing in your paragraphs because you don't want to be using the same words over and over again but you should be using synonymous words.

Pronouns can refer to nouns improve your sentences. Of course we all know the use of pronouns in our writings and you know it helps to cut down the repetitions and it helps to make your writing more readable. So the use of pronouns is also useful in writing paragraphs so that the reader at once know what is being referred through that pronoun.

Then transition words are to be used to link ideas from different sentences. So you can use certain words which are talking about different points around the same idea and if you want to link them together you should use some transition words, transition means which move from one place to another that is what transition means. So they help to you move from one point to another point. These are the vertical bridges which you must create in writing so that you can provide a good coherent paragraph.

There is a vital element in a paragraph which is called a key sentence or a topic sentence. Now this sentence is what tells you, what the paragraph is about. Some paragraphs may have not a very clear cut topic sentence. But this sentence can be anywhere in the paragraph. They may occur at the beginning of the paragraph or in the middle or may be at the end of the paragraph. However, it is better to have a topical sentence in your paragraph writing because it helps the reader to understand immediately what the paragraph is about. Basically a topic sentence talks about the main idea which you are going to discuss in your paragraph. And for writers who are new, who are wish to write good paragraphs it is a good idea to put a topic sentence right at the beginning of the paragraph so the reader is made aware right from sentence one that what the paragraph is about. So in a way you can say that the topic sentence is about summarising what the paragraph is going to talk about. Then apart from this key element in paragraph you should have adequate development. So the topic or idea which you are building the paragraph should be adequately discussed and developed. In fact if paragraphs have only two-three sentences, then it is too short and it is not fully developed. So you

cannot call it a good paragraph. That is not good paragraph writing, if you want to write a good paragraph you should at least try to adequately deal with the topic in 5 to 8 sentences or may be more depending on how much you want to develop it and you have to try and construct your sentences in such a way that they give the reader a fairly good idea of what you want to say about the main topic. How you developed your argument, what you wish to state about it. What are factors or what are the points you wish to highlight about the topic, the reader should be able to understand all this only your paragraph is adequately developed.

Then how do you make your paragraph well developed. What are the methods, what are the ways in which we can make a paragraph well developed. We can make use of examples and illustrations. For example if suppose you are writing on climate change, some aspects of climate change, then we can give examples of their aspects that you are talking about. One aspect of climate change is global warming, if you are talking about global warming then you should give some examples to support your statement on global warming. The topic sentence will obviously talk about global warming and what is the point behind global warming that you are trying to say in your paragraph. Then you can also apart from using examples and illustrations, you can also cite data, data like facts, statistics, evidence, some details which will corroborate your point and idea, which will develop your idea. So in a way you are trying to support your topic sentences by doing all this, by citing data, by giving evidence from other sources or by giving examples, by giving illustrations, and this is the way to build up your paragraph to make it well developed.

Then you can also examine testimony. Testimony means what other people have said about what you are discussing you can give their quotes, you know quotes from other people, if you know what they exactly have said or you can even say that so and so has said this about particular topic that you are talking about, so that also works as a very supportive piece of sentence which gives more credence and authenticity to your writing. You can also use anecdotes, stories, some experiences of other people in your paragraph to highlight the main topic that you are discussing. You should also make it a point to define terms. If you have used certain terms which may not be easily understood by your readers because your readers may be of all kinds and not of your specific field or area, so you should define those terms so that the reader is able to understand. What exactly you mean to say. It should not be that the reader comes across certain technical terms which you have used but they have not been spelt out by you as to what they mean, so again you are defeating the purpose of your writing. If the reader is not able to understand the terms, then he will not understand what you are trying to say in support of your main topic.

Then you should use the method of compare and contrast. Compare as you know when you compare two things, you see their similarity and when you contrast you see their differences. That what could be the possible similarities between this and the other thing. What could the possible differences between the two things. These are just some pointers, some aids which will help you to write better paragraphs. They will assist you in making your writing more authentic and it will also validate what you are trying to state in your paragraph.

Then there are other ways also of developing your paragraphs. A other one is to evaluate causes and reasons if you are talking about global warming, then you can talk about the reasons behind global warming, why global warming, then you can also examine the effects of global warming, what is the outcome, what are the possible repercussions, what is the happenings to the world at large, what kind of consequences it has had, whether they are good, whether the consequences have been fatal in some cases, or whether they are for the betterment of man kind, are they better for the world at large. So all these things you can add in your paragraph. So you should be able to analyse your topic. All these aids that I have just talked about, they are aids to writing your paragraph, developing your paragraph and making your paragraph better, more readable and better defined as well. So that you are clear about the possible meaning that you wish to convey to your reader. So you should be able to analyse the topic that means you should have a critical orientation. You

should be able to critically see the topic from different angles from different perspectives and then write about it. So you have to analyse the topic, you have to describe whatever topic you have chosen in your paragraph and if there is a certain chronology, for example, I took up the example of global warming, you can also offer the chronology as to how you have come to this, how you, not you but may be scientists have come to this fact of global warming. So you can offer a chronology also, that these are the factors which took place, these are the events which took place and at different periods of times and that is how we come up with this idea, how the earth is getting warmer day by day and contributing to disastrous consequences the world over. So this was just an example of how you can write your paragraph and develop them adequately.

Now the next question which comes to our mind is that when you are writing paragraph when you should begin a new paragraph. Is there a hard and fast rule for beginning a new paragraph? May be yes or may be not. But let us examine this question, when you should begin a new paragraph. One basic rule I have already talked about that when there is a new idea to be talked about begins in a new paragraph. So then there is a new topic that you wish to write about begin in a new paragraph. One idea, the idea which you began may have many other it may be an extended idea because it may have several points around it. So one way of dealing with this that if you write it fully along with the different points surrounding your main idea your paragraph will become too long and again it will become unreadable. So what you can do is to take up each point in a separate paragraph. Write each point in a separate paragraph and develop them within that paragraph. So then there will be a kind of a logical connection between the paragraphs and in a way it is also developing your argument or the main topic. Whenever you want to begin with something new you can start with a new paragraph. Then, there are other times also when you wish to start a new paragraph, they could be when you wish to contrast information or ideas. For example we use words like - on the one hand so and so said this, on the other hand so and so said this, we may talking about different schools of thought you know they may be divert in schools of thought, so when we are talking about to different schools of thought it is best to put them in two different paragraphs. So that is a way of contrasting their ideas regarding the same topic of there is contrasting the ideas it is better to put them in separate paragraphs. So you can highlight the differences you can also say in a way that the debate is still going on about this, you know because there are two schools of thought and may be third one may also emerges you never know. So all these things you have to bring into your paragraph writing. Then you also begin a new paragraph, when your readers need a pause. If I am giving to read pages and pages of unbroken text, it will become too much for me and after a point of time I probably give it up and despair because it becomes too difficult to read so much in one go. That is the importance of paragraphs comes in and also because readers need a break they need a pause, it makes your writing more readable to have well defined paragraphs. And specially you know if your material is very complex and if the paragraph you feel is becoming too long around a certain idea then its time you broke into a different into a separate paragraph. So these are times when you start new paragraph and also even when you being an essay you have an introduction, you have a body and finally you have a conclusion. So when you begin with introduction you should begin obviously in a new paragraph. And your introduction should also end where when a new paragraph begins after that. So that is the time when you are ending your introduction there is a time to start a new paragraph. Another time when you start a new paragraph is when you are beginning your conclusion. So when you begin either or ending your introduction or you are beginning your conclusion then these are the two times when you should start a new paragraph. So that is why we need to have paragraphs. I have already told you about that how to write different paragraphs and why to write different paragraphs, what is the need behind writing paragraphs and how paragraphs should be written.

Now there are two more elements regarding paragraphs and these are called transitions and sign posts. Now sign posts as you can make out and you may have seen by traveling on the roads sign posts are usually they tell you the name of a place where you are standing or they may even tell you

the name of the place towards which the road is heading so these are all sign posts or they may give you some other information. Now in a paragraph, sign posts, they also function as aids. The sign posts on the roads are also aids to you. They help you to know the direction. They help you to know which where you should go. In the same way, you have sign posts within a paragraph which functions as internal aids and these internal aids assist readers and sign post may not be just one word it may be one sentence, it may be several sentences or it may even be a paragraph and paragraph about what, it is outlining what the article, suppose it is a part of an article so then sign posts will be a paragraph which is outlining what the article is about and where the articles is headed towards. So that paragraph will be called a sign post.

Now there is something else which are mentioned was transitions. What are transitions? Transition also may be one or several sentences that move from one idea to the next. Transitions as it told you earlier the word moving one place to another. So here it is a movement from one idea to another and usually it is used at the end of paragraph, so that you can move easily to the next paragraph. When the reader is reading one paragraph to second one he can make the connection between the two paragraphs. Because after all even the paragraph are related to each other they are not separate entities by themselves with having one idea and the next paragraph being a separate entity by itself having another totally different idea, it's not like that. All paragraphs are connected to each other, because they are all worked around a single topic. It could be single topic having ideas around it having many points and many points around each idea so that is how you will develop your writing. So transitions are which help you to move from one paragraph to another, which help you to move. The movement becomes smooth. You do not feel that there is sense of disconnection between one paragraph and another. It is like a smooth transition of one paragraph to another.

Now where paragraphing is concerned we should also be careful about the length. A paragraph cannot be several pages long. So you have to make sure that you use or rather you write about may be five, may be eight or slightly more sentences to make up your paragraph around the topic you are discussing.

There are some rules which may help you to write good paragraphs. But let me assure you that once you start writing well, your writing improves you can always dispense with these rules you meet your own needs. So don't think that these rules are fossilized or setting stone for all times to come but these are just guidelines some things which help you for specially a beginner to write well to write good paragraphs. And after you are more proficient in the art of writing paragraphs, you can move on, making your own rules about writing paragraphs.

So this is a kind of an encapsulation of all that has gone before, you have to put one idea, one main idea per paragraph, then you should have not more than 5 to 8 or may little more sentences in each paragraph and if it is a page, in a page you should have a normal size page, you can have two handwritten paragraphs. And if it is typed then have three typed paragraphs in one page. So don't make one whole page one paragraph. It becomes too long for the reader and the reader may just lose the thread of your argument. Then you should also make paragraph proportional to your paper. By this I mean that if you are writing an article on something or if it is a short research paper, a short research paper means paragraphs are doing less work there. So you should have short paragraphs for short research, not only research but any short paper or any short article. Whereas, if you are writing a longer article or if you are writing a longer paper you can have longer paragraphs. So make your paragraphs proportional to the length of your paper.

Now sometimes you find that you have written your ideas or points around the main idea in short paragraphs. So then you have to think whether these short paragraphs can be combined to make one continuous paragraph. Because it is not even feasible to have like have three-four sentences in one paragraph and again three-four sentences in another paragraph that is also not a feature of good writing. So as I told you earlier paragraph should have five to eight or a little more sentences and if you have very short paragraphs then it is best to try and see if you can put them in one paragraph.

And whether you can combine them together to make a larger paragraph or if you have smaller paragraphs and you don't them to put them in a larger paragraph then see if you can add some details to your shorter paragraphs to make them more longer. So details like as I told you earlier you can use illustrations, you can use stories, you can use details, evidence anything that you want, you can use device of comparing, contrasting and so on. All these different methods will help you to develop your paragraph. So don't have very short paragraphs also because as I told you earlier it is three sentence paragraph it means it is not adequately developed and that is not a good paragraph. So it is better to develop each short paragraph into a slightly bigger paragraph or alternatively you can combine the short paragraphs into a larger paragraph.

What is the importance of verbal bridges? As I already told to you, verbal bridges are what you need in your paragraph to make your paragraph coherent. It should make sense that is the function of verbal bridges along with the logical bridges which we have already mentioned. Now verbal bridges are the keywords which you have used in your paragraphs, they should be repeated. So this is like a bridges what, it connects two things. It connects one place to another. One person to another that is what we call a bridge. So here words are doing performing same function of a bridge. Words are being repeated, keywords are being repeated so that you can connect the idea together. You can connect the argument that is being built around the idea. That is a function of keywords which are repeated.

Then the use of synonymous words, synonymous means the words which are similar in meaning to the keywords that you have used or to some other term that you have used. If you use synonymous words then it will help the reader to again connect. So the synonymous words are also acting like a bridge which is connecting you to the main topic. These words can be used in several sentences so that you are not even running the risk of repeating yourself using the same word all the time.

Then you have the use of pronouns. Pronouns as we know in grammar they are very useful specially when we want to avoid repetition of the same word. So here you can use pronouns which can refer to nouns to previous sentences. They will not only make your writing more readable your paragraph more coherent but they will also make it full of sense, well argued, well defined and well developed as well.

Then you can also use transition words as verbal bridges. These transition words are again use to link ideas from different sentences or different points that you are building around the main topic. These transitions words will help you to link these different points that you making around the main topic. This is the function of verbal bridges, that is words are functioning as bridges, as connectors. This is why it is important to have these kinds of words in your paragraph.

Is it necessary to have a topic sentence? I would say yes, it is important that you should have a topic sentence because the whole idea behind the topic sentence is that it quickly tells you what the paragraph is about. So if you have a topic sentence right at the beginning of your paragraph the reader knows immediately what you are going to talk about in the rest of your paragraph. So a topic sentence is a very good way of writing paragraphs and as far as possible you should have a topic sentence in your paragraph. For beginners I would say, put it at the beginning but those who are better at writing they can use it either at the end of the paragraph or at the middle of the paragraph. Of course, some people do not use the topic sentence at all in a paragraph. I mean they are not clearly formulated as the topic sentences. But then they have to device other ways of making their idea or the topic discussed in the paragraphs, they have to device other ways of making it understandable to the reader.