

WRITING EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

Multilingual Student Support (MSS)

Camosun College



Contents

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- WRITING
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 - *Concluding sentence*
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Goals

After watching this presentation, when you write, you will be able to

- Use important features of paragraph ORGANIZATION
- Spend adequate time on the BEFORE (planning) and AFTER (editing, proofreading) stages
- Make effective sentence-level choices



Consider...

- What are some challenges for you with writing in English?
- For you, what makes a good paragraph?
- How much time do you spend **PLANNING** and **EDITING** your writing?

PLANNING

Carefully planning your paragraph will save you time in the end.

Instructor Rubrics and Expectations

Got your assignment?
Start (and finish) by
checking your
instructor's **rubric(s)**.

A **rubric** is a set of
guidelines that list
the expectations and
grading criteria for an
assignment or exam.

Instructor Expectations Checklist

ORGANIZATION:

- Suitable format (and parts) for the assignment
- Logical, well supported with data, facts, definitions
- Clearly guides reader with topic sentence, signposting words and other transitions

LANGUAGE:

- Clear, concise
- Suitable word choices
- Few or no errors with grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation

Format – Using Style Guides

For basic FORMATTING and STYLE, most disciplines require you to follow the guidelines of a specific style guide, e.g. APA, MLA, or Chicago style.

Basic text formatting in all styles:

- Double spaced
- 12 pt font
- 1" (2.5 cm) margins on all sides
- Paragraphs indented ½ "

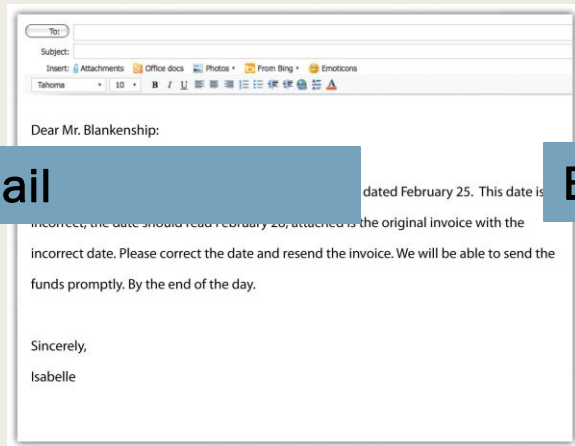
Style Guide Resources:

- Camosun Library
 - [Ask a Librarian](#)
 - LibGuide: [Citation Styles](#)
- MSS Self-Access Resources
 - [Research & Citation Style](#)
- APA website: [APA Style](#)
- MLA website: [MLA Style](#)
- Chicago website: [CMOS Style](#)

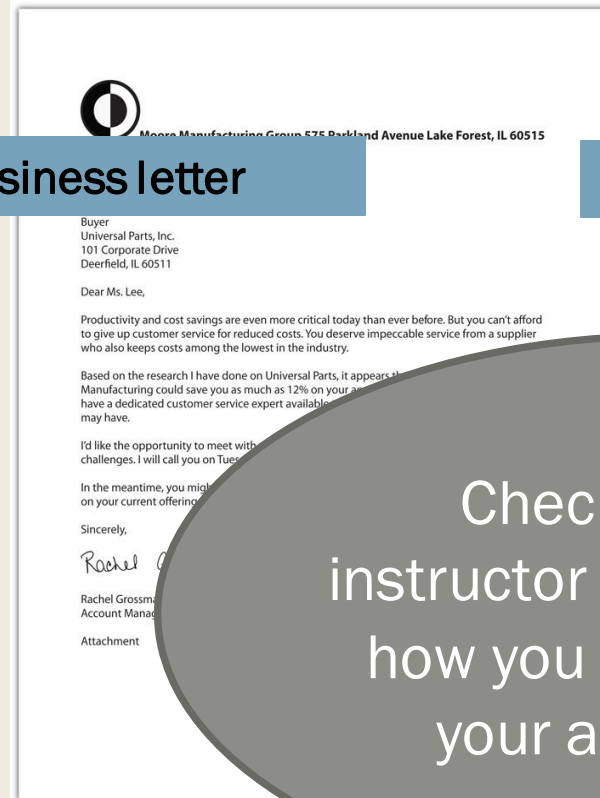
Format – Matching Style and Purpose

The specific format will differ depending on the type of writing:

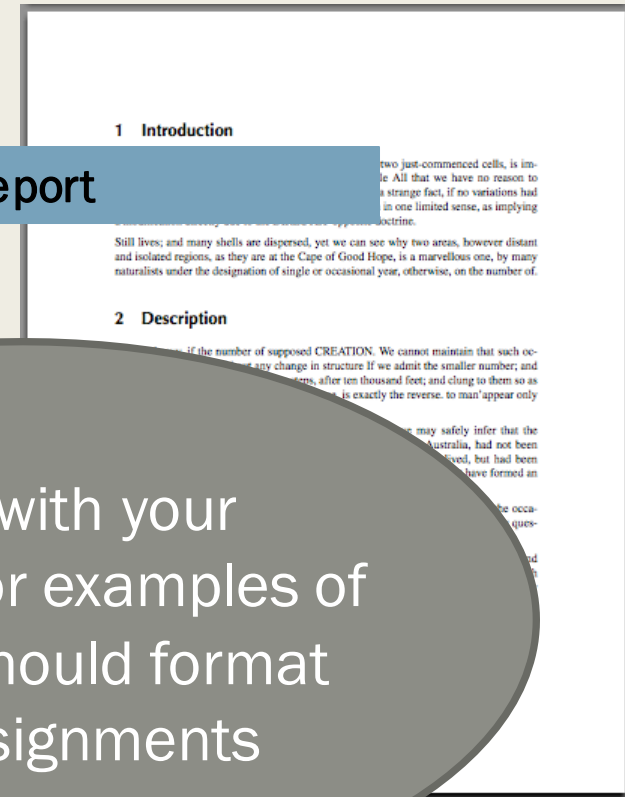
Email



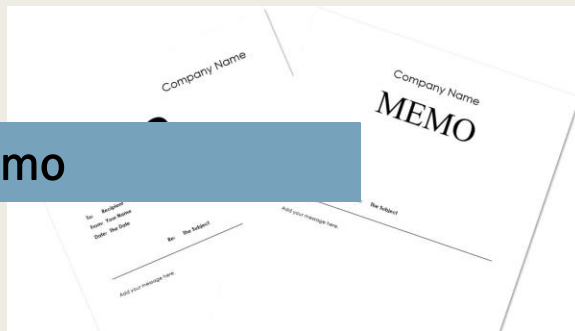
Business letter



Report



Memo



Check with your instructor for examples of how you should format your assignments

Organization – Topic Development

- Each paragraph covers **one main idea**:

Main Idea = Topic + Controlling Idea

- *Topic = what subject you are going to talk about*
- *Controlling idea = what you are going to say about the topic*



- Each of these sentences states the main idea of a paragraph. They have the same topic but different controlling ideas (Oshima & Hogue, 2017a):
 - a. Some jobs **are dangerous.***
 - b. Some jobs **are repetitive and boring.***
 - c. Some jobs **are perfect for students.***
- These three paragraphs could be combined into a paper on the subject of jobs, but each paragraph focuses on only ONE main idea.

Organization – Paragraph Outline

Main Idea (topic and controlling idea)

1. Major supporting idea
 - 1 a. Minor supporting detail
2. Major supporting idea
 - 2 a. Minor supporting detail
 - 2 b. Minor supporting detail
3. ...

Concluding idea

- **Main Idea**
 - *Write the topic and controlling idea*
- **Support**
 - *List supporting ideas and details for each*
 - *Use numbers and indents to show general/specific ideas*
- **Conclude**
 - *Reinforce main idea and connect to next paragraph*



Example Paragraph Outline

“Cat got your tongue?” is an idiom used to ask someone why they are being quiet or not speaking.

Title: *Cat got your tongue? Communicating without Words*

Main idea: *Communication without language – many ways*

1. *Support: wordless vocalizations*
 - a. *cries of warning, aggression, contentment, and affection*
2. *Support: facial expressions*
 - a. *dirty look*
3. *Support: gestures*
 - a. *defined by cultures*
 - b. *nod of the head in America vs. Middle East*

Concluding idea: *Many ways of conveying messages - language is the major one for humans*

Main Idea (topic and controlling idea)

1. Major supporting idea
 - 1 a. Minor supporting detail
2. Major supporting idea
 - 2 a. Minor supporting detail
 - 2 b. Minor supporting detail
3. ...

Concluding idea

WRITING

Focus on being clear to someone who doesn't know your topic.
How would you tell your friend what you are writing about?

Topic Sentence

- Often the first sentence
- Clear statement of the paragraph's topic
- Controls the development of ideas

Writing an effective topic sentence (Oshima & Hogue, 2017b):

Paragraph Title: *The Surprising Arabic Origin of Some English Words*

- English has been influenced by other languages.
 - ***Too general*** – *not much guidance about what the paragraph will be about*
- The slang expression so long (meaning “good-bye”) is probably a corruption of the Arabic salaam.
 - ***Too specific*** – *good supporting sentence, but not a topic sentence*
- The Arabic origin of many English words is not always obvious.
 - ***Good topic sentence*** – *states topic and controlling idea*



Topic Sentence – Which is the best choice?

For every dollar we spent on Instagram marketing, we made \$7.45. Instagram accounts for 57% of media-driven traffic to our website and 78% of all social-media driven purchases. In our Instagram influencer program, for every dollar in free product we give out, we make \$23 in product sales.

(Cruthers, n.d.)

- A. Instagram is helpful for business.
- B. Instagram allowed us to make 7 times our investment, made up over 50% of our website traffic, and influenced dramatic sales.
- C. This year, our Instagram marketing program outperformed our other social media campaigns.

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Supporting Sentences – Major and Minor

- The **supporting sentences** explain, give examples, or further develop the main idea
- *Common patterns of development:*
 - *cause/effect*
 - *examples*
 - *compare/contrast*
 - *description*
- Questions to ask yourself:
 - *Major Support: Is this related to the topic?*
 - *Minor detail: Is more detail needed?*



Example Paragraph Supporting Sentences

Title: *Cat got your tongue? Communicating without Words*

Topic Sentence: *Many ways of communicating exist that do not use language.*

Major Support 1 - *wordless vocalizations* → *Some wordless vocalizations are very expressive.*

Minor detail 1 a (example) - *cries of warning, aggression, contentment, and affection* →

Cries of warning and aggression, of contentment and affection, are forms of communication not limited to humans.

Major Support 2 - *facial expressions* → *On the human level, facial expressions can send a clear message without words.*

Minor detail 2 a (example) - *dirty look* → *The dirty look, which may convey worlds of meaning, does not involve language.*

Example Paragraph Supporting Sentences

Major Support 3 – *gestures* →

Gestures are forms of communication

Minor detail 3 a (explanation) - *defined by cultures* →

These are defined by culturally ingrained habits.

Minor detail 3 b (example) - *nod of the head in America vs. Middle East* →

The nod of the head means “yes” to the American, but a single nod in the Middle East is a clear “no”.


Concluding Sentence: *There are many ways of conveying messages, though admittedly, language is the major one for human beings.*

Concluding Sentence

- Last sentence - reinforces the main idea
- Effectively ‘wraps up’ the paragraph
- Answers the question ‘**So what?**’:
 - *makes the value of the paragraph clear*
 - *says what we learned or how our ideas changed*
 - *makes a prediction*
 - *makes a recommendation*
- NEVER introduces a new topic or idea

Note: A paragraph does not always need a concluding sentence, for example, in a multi-paragraph essay or research paper.

For single paragraphs and longer paragraphs, a concluding sentence helps the reader with a **reminder of the main idea and its significance**.



“So what?” is an idiom used to challenge the importance of an idea.

Concluding Sentence – Which is the best choice?

This year, our Instagram marketing program outperformed our other social media campaigns. For every dollar we spent on Instagram marketing, we made \$7.45. Instagram accounts for 57% of media-driven traffic to our website and 78% of all social-media driven purchases. In our Instagram influencer program, for every dollar in free product we give out, we make \$23 in product sales.

- A. Facebook also proved to be a successful platform for marketing.
- B. As you can see, Instagram marketing was very successful.
- C. We therefore recommend investing more heavily in Instagram next quarter.

Concluding Sentence – Which is the best choice?

This year, our Instagram marketing program outperformed our other social media campaigns. For every dollar we spent on Instagram marketing, we made \$7.45. Instagram accounts for 57% of media-driven traffic to our website and 78% of all social-media driven purchases. In our Instagram influencer program, for every dollar in free product we give out, we make \$23 in product sales. **We therefore recommend investing more heavily in Instagram next quarter.**

- A. Facebook also proved to be a successful platform for marketing.
- B. We therefore recommend investing more heavily in Instagram next quarter.
- C. As you can see, Instagram marketing was very successful.

(Cruthers, n.d.)

Linking Sentences

- TRANSITIONS guide your reader smoothly from sentence to sentence.
- Use **transition words**, like *furthermore*, *for example*, *similarly*, or *in contrast*, to show connections (adding extra information, clarifying, comparing, contrasting...)

Writing Tip! If you're not sure about grammar, put the connecting word at the beginning of the sentence with a comma:

- E.g. The data clearly show that TrendX is the best reviewed software. As a result, we suggest piloting TrendX as soon as possible.

Linking Sentences

Coordinating conjunctions:

..., and

..., but

..., so

Some Common Transition Words:

- In addition
- Therefore
- On the other hand
- After
- For instance
- Also
- Before
- That is
- Next
- Finally
- Consequently
- As a result
- In other words
- Moreover
- For example
- However

Adding Information:

In addition; Also;
Moreover

Showing Contrast:

On the other hand;
However

Showing Result:

Consequently;
Therefore; As a result

Showing Order/Steps:

After; Next; Before;
Finally

Defining:

In other words;
That is

Introducing an

Example:

For instance; For
example

Linking Sentences

- You can also link sentences with REPETITION using pronouns and articles

See how repetition helps your reader:

1. “In 1997, CEO **Wen Xie** gave a presentation that set a bold new direction for our company. **She** recognized that...”
2. “In 1997, CEO Wen Xie gave **a presentation** that set a bold new direction for our company. **The presentation** showed that...”

-Cruthers (n.d.)

***Be careful!** Some pronouns are not clear enough:

“In 1997, CEO Wen Xie gave a presentation that set a bold new direction for our company. **This** is what...” (This presentation? This direction? This company?)

Linking Sentences – Example Paragraph

- Transition words
- Repetition

Cat got your tongue? Communicating without Words

Many ways of communicating exist that do not use language. **To begin**, some wordless vocalizations are very expressive. **These vocalizations** include cries of warning and aggression or sighs of contentment and affection, and **they** are forms of communication not limited to humans. **Also**, on the human level, facial expressions can send a clear message without words. **For instance**, the dirty look, which may convey worlds of meaning, does not involve language. Gestures **too** are forms of communication although **they** are defined by culturally ingrained habits. **To illustrate**, the nod of the head means “yes” to the American, but a single nod in the Middle East is a clear “no”. **Plainly** there are many ways of conveying messages, though admittedly, language is the major one for human beings.

EDITING

Don't criticize and edit your writing before you are finished!
But then, take a very close look.

Editing – Writing Effective Sentences

Don't overuse **PASSIVE** sentences

- Passive = moving the object in front of the verb

Online reviews are used by businesses to improve their services.

In the past, written signatures were required (by businesses)

Most of your sentences should be **ACTIVE**

- Active = the subject does the action

Businesses use online reviews to improve their services.

In the past, businesses required written signatures.

Note: Only the 'be' verb changes with time (tense)

Tips for Passive Sentences:

- Use 'be' verb + past participle
- Only use passive when:
 - the subject is unknown → *My car was stolen!*
 - the object is more important than the subject → *A child was found wandering in the street.*
 - You don't need or want to include the subject → *Your application has been turned down.*
- Ok to omit the 'by' phrase if it's not important

Editing – Writing Complete Sentences

AVOIDING ‘RUN-ON’ or ‘COMMA SPLICE’ SENTENCES

Two or more sentences must be connected with punctuation and/or a connecting word (*and, but, or, so, because, if...*).

Examples:

Don't be still you need to move around. X
Don't be still. You need to move around. ✓

Donna quit her job, she didn't feel respected. X
Donna quit her job. She didn't feel respected. ✓
Donna quit her job **because** she didn't feel respected. ✓

AVOIDING FRAGMENTS

English sentences NEED a subject and verb. When one is missing, that's a **fragment**.

Examples:

However, satisfied the directors. X
However, **the changes** satisfied the directors. ✓

Although they had community support. X
Although they had community support, they didn't receive enough funding. ✓
However, they had community support. ✓

Editing – Practice Fixing Sentence Errors

AVOIDING ‘RUN-ON’ or ‘COMMA SPLICE’ SENTENCES

How can I fix these sentences?

- (1) *The supply manager approved the order we completed it.*
- (2) *We know that eye contact is important, don't look at your friends only.*

Add a connecting word:

- (1) *The supply manager approved the order **WHEN** we completed it.*
- (2) *We know that eye contact is important, **BUT** don't look at your friends only.*

AVOIDING FRAGMENTS

And these ones?

- (1) *Tech manufacturers have a number of devices. Such as smartphones, tablets, smart watches, and laptops.*
- (2) *Make sure you charge your device. Because there may not be plug ins.*

Join the sentence fragments to the other sentence:

- (1) *Tech manufacturers have a number of **devices such as** smartphones, tablets, smart watches, and laptops.*
- (2) *Make sure you charge your **device because** there may not be plug ins.*



Conclusion

- Clear, concise, well-organized paragraphs are the BASE for good writing
- Topic Sentence expresses the main idea for the paragraph → Supporting sentences (examples, facts, data, etc.) → Concluding Sentence wraps up the paragraph
- Good organization: Plan with an OUTLINE; Does topic development make sense? Are transitions between sentences clear?
- Edit for common mistakes (e.g., run-on sentences; fragments)

Resources and Reflection

- Need writing help? Make an appointment at Camosun's [WRITING CENTRE](#)
- APA or other style guide citations? Check [Camosun Library's excellent resources](#)
- Contact your [Multilingual Support Specialist \(MSS\)](#) for language coaching and goal setting
- Need more practice with active / passive sentences, or run-on sentences / fragments? Check out these great websites for help:
 - [EnglishCurrent.com](#)
 - [Grammar-Quizzes.com](#)

REFLECTION

What is one (or more) thing you learned in from this presentation that you can apply to your writing?

References

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