

## **Writing Paragraphs that Work**

Effective paragraphing is essential. A well-written paragraph helps you express your ideas clearly, and helps readers move through your document smoothly. Weak paragraphing distorts your message and torpedoed your chances of influencing the reader.

A well-written paragraph is built around a single, main idea. The main idea acts as a unifying force, linking together each sentence of the paragraph. A new paragraph tells readers that either a new idea is going to be discussed, or that the present idea will be discussed in further detail.

This module focuses on how to construct well-written, unified paragraphs. It also illustrates several paragraphing strategies that give your writing more impact and clarity.

# 1. The Well Written Paragraph

What are the characteristics of a well-written paragraph?

## A. Unity

A paragraph is unified when all of its parts work together to support the main idea. To insure unity, ask yourself the following questions about each paragraph in your document:

- What is its purpose?
- What is the main point?
- Does each sentence support and develop the main point?
- Does the paragraph accomplish its purpose?

## B. Coherence

A paragraph is coherent when each sentence flows naturally from one to another, forming a logical chain of thought. Sentences should be sequenced to convey your message to readers clearly. Create coherence by using transitions and logical connectors, effective organizational schemes, varied sentence patterns and lengths, and pronouns.

## C. Length

Effective paragraphs come in a variety of sizes. The length of a paragraph depends on how complex your main idea is. If the main idea is simple, then including unnecessary data will distract the reader. More complex ideas may require several sentences or even several separate paragraphs.

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Effective paragraphs are unified and coherent. The length of a paragraph depends on the complexity of the main idea.

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## **2. Exceptional Paragraphs**

Some paragraphs break the rules. They do not adhere to the guidelines of unity, coherence, and length because they perform special functions in a document.

### **A. Introductions**

Introductory paragraphs are often a single sentence in length. A memo may begin with a greeting that includes a reference to the subject. Reports often open with special paragraphs outlining the contents. Such paragraphs do not require transitional phrases and logical connectors.

### **B. Transitions**

A paragraph may also function as a transition between different parts of a report. Transitional paragraphs should prepare readers for a change in direction.

### **C. Emphatic Paragraphs**

When you want to draw the reader's attention to a particular point, you can set it off in a one or two-sentence paragraph. Emphatic paragraphs are very dramatic, and serve to emphasize critical points in your documents.

### **D. Conclusions**

Like introductions, closing paragraphs vary in length. A report may need a long concluding paragraph recommending specific actions, summarizing key points, or echoing the introduction. In memos, a one-sentence paragraph thanking the reader may be appropriate.

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Certain paragraphs have special functions within a document and do not follow the general guidelines for well-written paragraphs.

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### **3. Checklist for Paragraphs**

When editing your documents, you can ask the following questions to determine if your paragraphs are well-written and effective.

#### **A. Individual Paragraphs**

What is the subject of the paragraph?  
Is the subject stated clearly?  
Does the subject need explanation or supporting evidence?  
Is all of the information in the paragraph related to the main idea?  
Is a variety of sentence patterns and lengths used?  
Are sentences sequenced properly?  
Are sentences linked together with transitions and logical connectors?  
Does the paragraph try to accomplish too much?  
Is the paragraph developed?  
Is the paragraph complete?

#### **B. Paragraphing**

Is there a variety of long and short paragraphs?  
Do the short paragraphs have enough detail and supporting evidence?  
Can long paragraphs be divided into separate, shorter paragraphs?  
Are there too many emphatic paragraphs?  
Are the opening and closing paragraphs effective?  
Does each paragraph move the reader along from point to point?  
Are any transitional paragraphs needed?  
Are any paragraphs repetitive?  
Can any paragraph be omitted without taking away from the message?