Unit 5: Writing Paragraphs 1

Units 5 and 6 deal with aspects of structure at paragraph and text level, and explain how these help the readability of a text. They consider ways in which the writer may achieve a sense of logical flow through the text. This enables the audience to read the text more easily.

Paragraphs are used to separate ideas. Paragraphs are signals to the reader; they are a way that the writer breaks up a text into manageable chunks for the reader. Academic text usually contains complex ideas, theories, discussion etc. In order that such text is comprehensible to its audience it needs to be well-structured; paragraphs help create clarity.

A good writer will help the reader by making use of:

- headings, sub-headings and numbering
- paragraph breaks
- coherent paragraphs
- cohesive paragraphs.

1. Structuring a paragraph

There are certain conventions related to good paragraph writing in an academic context.

- A paragraph deals with **one** topic and has a **topic sentence** which introduces the main idea of the whole paragraph. This is usually the first or second sentence of the paragraph. However, be aware when you read that experienced writers may place the topic sentence at any point within a paragraph, or may even omit it and imply rather than state the main idea.
- The topic sentence is followed by supporting sentences which develop the main idea, by, for example, explaining, giving examples, giving evidence or providing contrasting information.
- Each sentence should be linked to the previous sentence in some way. The reader should not have to wonder what the relationship is between the two sentences.
- A new main topic usually requires a new paragraph.
- Paragraphs should not be too short or too long. (If the paragraph is very short, it is likely that the topic has not been sufficiently developed. If it is long, it may be that more than one main topic has been introduced). Most paragraphs in academic text tend to be between four and ten sentences, and 80 to 200 words.

The following are examples of well-structured paragraphs with clearly linked ideas. The shaded text shows the topic and the **bold** words show how the information is connected.

Example:

*==Large IT companies are choosing Bangalore for one main reason,== which is the availability of well-educated computer-science professionals. The concentration of **such** companies in the city is unparalleled almost anywhere in the world. A recent survey shows that Bangalore has more than 150,000 software engineers. **This** is slightly fewer than can be found in Silicon Valley.*

Example:

*==Students have access to the computer room only when supervised==; that is, students may enter only if a teacher or other person responsible for the facility is present. **This** policy has a number of advantages. **For one**, the enhanced security allows special equipment, **such as** webcams and video equipment, to be left in place. **A further advantage** is that the computer room can be set up for a specific purpose in advance of a particular scheduled period. The students and teachers, **therefore,** can depend on finding the facility in a ready-to-use condition at the start of each period. **Another benefit** of supervised access is that the computers do not need the highest levels of security, **and hence** can be used more flexibly.*

Example:

*==It is worth noting that a number of scholars have questioned the validity of Cuba's health outcomes.== Eberstadt (1988) and Mesa Lago (1969), **for example**, have drawn attention to statistical inconsistencies **in the country's official outcomes** and have suggested the Cuban government may deliberately misrepresent statistics as a means to promote a favourable image of the country's socialist project. **Other researchers**, **including** Feinsilver (1993), Santana (1988) and Waitzkin et al (1997), have affirmed the accuracy and reliability of **the outcomes**. **Others**, **such as** McGuire and Frankel (2005), agree that **the country's** statistics are complete and reliable but have been critical of the commonly held belief that the major improvements in Cuba's health statistics occurred after 1959.*

2. Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence*: The property of unity in a written text that stems from the relationship between its underlying ideas, and from the logical organisation and development of these ideas.*

A paragraph has good coherence when ideas are arranged in a logical order.

Cohesion*: the property of flow and connection in a written text that stems from the linguistic links among its surface elements.*

A paragraph has good cohesion when each sentence is clearly linked to the next through language.

Coherence and Cohesion mean that all of the parts are connected logically and linguistically to form a whole.

(a) Coherent Order:
Paragraphs may be organised according to a sequence of time (chronological order), space (describing something from top to bottom or foreground to background) or arranging information in order of importance. Another common way of ordering information in a paragraph is to present the most general information first and then move on to focus on the more detailed, specific information.

(b) Cohesive devices:
Individual sentences can have connections within them. A word that connects parts of a sentence is called a conjunction. The common coordinating conjunctions are: 'and', 'but', 'or', 'yet', 'nor'. There are also subordinating conjunctions. These establish the relationship between a dependent clause and the rest of the sentence. A few common examples are: 'as', 'because', 'whereas', 'in order that', 'since', 'although'.

Sentences within a paragraph may also be linked together. There are various ways of linking one sentence to another:
- repetition of important words,
- substitution of pronouns e.g. 'this', 'it', 'these',
- substitution by synonyms (words with nearly the same meaning),
- using linking words or phrases which show the relationship between ideas, e.g. 'however' indicates a contrast, 'in addition' gives more information,
- using grammatical words, especially articles, e.g. 'the' may refer back to a specific noun previously mentioned.

The linking words such as 'however', 'moreover', 'nevertheless', 'consequently', 'as a result' are used to express complex relationships between ideas

Here is a table of the more common linking words organised into broad categories of meaning. Also, some of these words appear in more than one category, and not all words in the same category are interchangeable.

cause and effect	therefore, thus, consequently, hence, as a result of
addition	also, and, and then, equally important, finally, first, further, furthermore, in addition, in fact, in the first place, last, moreover, next, second
comparison	also, in the same way, likewise, similarly
contrast and concession	and yet, at the same time, even so, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of this, instead, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet
emphasis	certainly, indeed, in fact
example or illustration	for example, in conclusion, in other words, namely, specifically, that is, to illustrate, thus
summary	in brief, in other words, in particular, in summary, in short, on the whole, that is, therefore
time sequence	eventually, finally, in the first place, in the past, last, next, second, simultaneously, so far, subsequently, then, thereafter, until now

For a detailed list see:
http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/transitions.htm

Below, we have two paragraphs which deal with dating advertisements. The first paragraph is about the present popularity of such advertisements, and the second is about why they may be a useful area for sociological research.

The bold words show the connections between and within sentences, and between the two paragraphs.

Example:
__In spite of__ the recent increase in divorce and the dramatic rise in single person households, contemporary society still privileges couples and espouses the virtues of 'family values'. The plight of single adults who are without partners, __however__, remains largely ignored. Those in paid work spend long hours either furthering a career or merely hanging on to an existing job, __whilst__ those without work are frequently debarred from normal participation in social life through lack of money and sufficient opportunities for sociability. __Hence__ the notion that 'boy meets girl' with relative ease is, perhaps, an enduring aspect of social mythology. __Nevertheless__, so many people now resort to advertising in newspapers, magazines, and a range of

*electronic media for the purpose of meeting a partner, that **such methods** have become a well-established and socially acceptable procedure.*

***Although dating advertisements** are currently very popular, they remain an under-researched area, especially within sociology. Little is known, **therefore**, about those using **such means** to establish new relationships nor what they say when producing descriptions of themselves for selective consumption by others in the dating market place. **Yet** dating advertisements can be a revealing site for examining the social construction of identities, and they can provide clear insights into advertisers' idealisations of themselves, **for example**, in terms of physical attributes, age, personalities and interests.*

Here is another, longer example of a well-structured text. Again, the bold words show the connections between sentences and between the paragraphs.

Example:
*We need to ask, though, how important this relationship is for explaining patterns of poverty in the United States and for guiding policy. Should we **conclude**, as development economists **conclude** when they look at poverty and economic development across countries, that **per capita income differences among states** or other political entities are essentially the whole story of poverty? Should we **conclude**, as **they** do, that attention to development will solve poverty problems? There are **three ways** of approaching the problem that suggest that **this conclusion** would not be correct.*

***A first approach** is to look at the relationship between **the number of poor in a state** and its **per capita income**. **The largest number of poor** in **any state** is found in California, which ranks 14/51 in per capita income. **Half the poor** in the US are found in eight **states**: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio and Georgia. With the exception of Texas, which ranks 33 in per capita income, **all these states** are in the top half of the per capita income distribution; indeed six of the eight are in the top quarter of the per capita income distribution. **This finding** reflects both a high level of inequality and thus relatively high poverty rates in rich states like New York and California. **It also** reflects the fact that many of the richer states are quite large, so that even with average or below poverty rates—as in Illinois and Michigan—they are home to **large numbers of poor**.*

***Another way** of looking at **these relationships** is to ask what proportion of the poor live in poor states **as defined by per capita income**. For **this calculation** we ranked the states by per capita income, and then examined the group of low income states whose cumulative population numbers came to about a quarter of the country. In the US **this procedure** identified twenty states, ranging from Mississippi with a per capita income of $15,853 to Iowa with a per capita income of $19,674.7 (The US average in 2000 was $21,587.) The group includes states in the deep south, Maine, and some mountain, plains and mid-western states, **for example**, the Dakotas and New Mexico. **These** twenty US states included 24 percent of the population and 29 percent of the poor. **In other words**, the percentage of the poor living in poor states is not much higher than the overall percentage of the population (or of the non-poor) living in*

*those states. **It is also worth noting** that while 29 percent of the US poor live in these poor states, 71 percent do not.*

*A **third approach** is to examine two important historical divisions in income and poverty and ask what has happened to them over time: between rural and urban areas, and between the south and the rest of the country. In 1959 ...*