

Effective Paragraph Structure

Paragraphs help you organize your ideas, and they help your readers stay on track. The most effective paragraph style is one that saves time for the reader—one where the topic of the paragraph is introduced in the first sentence so the reader can skim the remainder of the paragraph or move on to the next one. When this format isn't used, the reader has to plow through a lot of information to find out what you're talking about. This can be frustrating and time-consuming.

Here are some more tips for writing paragraphs:

- Use paragraphs to develop ideas and to show major units of thought. **Give each idea its own paragraph.** In other words, one thought per sentence, one idea per paragraph.
- Don't allow paragraphs to become too long. The break between paragraphs provides mental and visual relief for the reader. Try to keep paragraphs to a maximum of ten sentences. At the most, single-spaced paragraphs should not exceed one third of a page; double-spaced should not exceed half a page.
- Vary the length of your paragraphs. Some paragraphs will be long (8-10 sentences), but others should be short (1-3 sentences). Varying the length of paragraphs makes your writing more interesting. And single-sentence paragraphs, when used sparingly, add emphasis to an idea.
- Well-written paragraphs begin with a topic (thesis) sentence, contain material to support the topic, are held together with connecting ideas or connecting words, and conclude with a summary of the paragraph's main ideas.
 - A topic sentence states the central idea of the paragraph and usually comes first. When the rest of the sentences in the paragraph directly relate to the topic sentence, the paragraph is clear and consistent.
 - Support material consists of evidence, facts, details, opinions, specific information, and examples that develop or explain the idea introduced in the topic sentence.
 - Connecting ideas or words are like sentence bridges. Such words are either repetitions of an idea in an earlier sentence or transitional words that connect sentences, such as *and*, *but*, *while*, *although*, *since*, *nevertheless*, *second*, *after*, *therefore*. I call them bridges because they help your readers cross from one part of your sentence to another, follow your thought

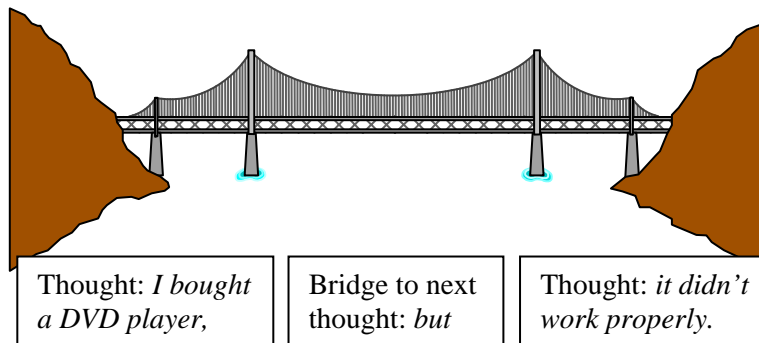
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process, and understand the relationship of the points you're expressing. You need to always show the reader exactly how ideas are tied together in your mind by using obvious connectives. Some bridges are informal and best used in informal writing; others are more formal and best saved for academic and formal writing.

I've been broadcasting sports for a long time. Much of what I do is ad lib, but one of the most important aspects of my job is being able to write. Good writing is essential for almost any career, and with today's advanced technology, the need to write well has never been more important.

—Bob Costas
Sportscaster

Word Bridges



Your problem is to bridge the gap which exists between where you are now and the goal you intend to reach.

—Earl Nightingale, 1921-1989

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