

Communicative English Language Skills II

Lecture 3

Writing: Paragraph Development

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Writing: Paragraph Development

Welcome back, dear students, Lecture 3!

In our last session, we focused on speaking skills:

- ❖ How to express your opinions clearly;
- ❖ Support them with reasons, and
- ❖ Respond respectfully to others during discussions.
- ❖ You also practiced organizing your ideas quickly when speaking.

Today: Writing: Paragraph Development

Presenter: Dr. Biniam Atnafe Beyene

Outline

The following concepts will be introduced in the lecture.

- ❖ Paragraph structure
- ❖ Unity
- ❖ Cohesive devices
- ❖ Types of paragraphs
- ❖ Techniques of paragraph development
- ❖ Steps of Paragraph Development
- ❖ Editing checklist

Presenter: Dr. Biniam Atnafe Beyene

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Identify the structural parts of a well-formed paragraph;
- Write clear, focused topic sentences that guide your reader;
- Select and organise supporting details effectively;
- Craft effective concluding sentences that bring a paragraph to a satisfying close;
- And perhaps most importantly-revise your paragraphs for unity and coherence.

A Paragraph

What exactly is a paragraph, and why does it matter?

- A paragraph is a group of related sentences that develop a single main idea. It begins with a topic sentence that introduces the idea, includes supporting sentences that explain, illustrate, or provide evidence, and often ends with a concluding sentence that reinforces or transitions (Eggenschwiler & Biggs, 2001).
- A paragraph is the basic unit of writing, combining unity, coherence, and adequate development to communicate one clear thought effectively.

Paragraph as a unit...cont'd

In other words, a paragraph is a unit of thought which begins with a main idea, develops with supporting sentences, and may close with a conclusion. Imagine a paragraph about “Exercise improves memory.” The topic sentence states the idea, supporting sentences give evidence, and the conclusion reinforces the claim.

- In short, one main idea + supporting sentences + conclusion.

Why paragraphs matter?

- ❖ Paragraphs organize ideas: group related thoughts into one clear, focused unit
- ❖ Guide readers: signal where one idea ends and the next begins, and
- ❖ Show logical development: build arguments step by step toward a conclusion.

Paragraphs are not just clusters of sentences. They organize ideas so the reader can follow the argument. For example, in a report about health, a paragraph might explain causes of obesity, while another discusses solutions. Without clear paragraphs, ideas blur together.

Structure of a paragraph

In a well-structured paragraph, those parts are collectively called the paragraph structure or components of a paragraph (Eggenschwiler & Biggs, 2001).

More specifically:

- Topic Sentence
- Supporting Details
- Conclusion (or Closing Sentence)

So, when we put them together, we usually refer to them as the elements of a paragraph or the basic paragraph structure (Eggenschwiler & Biggs, 2001).

Topic sentence

States the main idea (often first sentence, sometimes implied or last).

- The task of topic sentence is: to announce the point, sets expectations (tells the reader what to expect); guides supporting details (the guidepost).
- For example: “Regular reading strengthens vocabulary.” That sentence sets the stage.

Characteristics of a topic sentence

- Clear: readers immediately understand the paragraph's focus
- Specific: narrow enough to be fully developed in one paragraph
- Arguable when needed: makes a claim worth supporting-not just a fact
- Linked to thesis: ties back to the essays overall argument or question

Characteristics...cnt'd

A strong topic sentence avoids vagueness. Compare: “Sports are good” versus “Team sports build cooperation among students.”

Which one is specific and arguable?

Good topic sentences connect back to the essay’s thesis, keeping the writing focused (Eggenschwiler & Biggs, 2001).

Position of Topic Sentences

- The position of topic may vary according to the writer's choice.
- Traditional Placement: topic sentence opens the paragraph. Clear and direct for academic writing
- Implied Placement: topic sentence appears mid-paragraph. Builds context before stating the main idea
- Climactic Placement: topic sentence concludes the paragraph. Creates suspense and emphasizes the point

Topic sentence placement...cont'd

Placement changes effect. Beginning placement is straightforward: “Technology reshapes education.” End placement builds suspense: “Online tools, adaptive exercises, and digital libraries: all these show that technology reshapes education.”

- Choose placement based on your rhetorical purpose and audience expectations.

Activity: Please try to experiment with different placements in your next paragraph

Supporting sentences

Supporting sentences build credibility with varied evidence. They could be:

- Examples: concrete instances that clarify
- Facts or data: statistics and research findings
- Reasons: logical explanations and causes
- Explanations: detailed breakdowns of concepts
- Comparisons: Similarities and contrasts

Supporting sentences... cont'd

- Anecdotes: brief, relevant stories
- Quotations: expert voices and authorities

Supporting sentences give life to the topic. If the topic is “Reading improves focus,” support could be a fact from a study, an example of a student’s experience, or a quotation from an expert. Each type of support strengthens credibility.

Match your support type to your audience and purpose.

Order of supporting Sentences

Logical Ordering Strategies such as:

- Chronological: events in time sequence
- Emphatic: weakest to strongest argument
- Spatial: physical location or arrangement
- Importance: most to least critical

Choose the pattern that best serves your purpose

Order of supporting...cont'd

The order matters. In a process paragraph, steps follow chronology: “First boil water, then add flour. Finally,.....” In persuasive writing, save the strongest reason for last. In descriptive writing, spatial order works: “At the entrance stands a tall tree; behind it lies a small pond.” (Adapted from Eggenschwiler & Biggs, 2001).

Concluding sentence

- Restates main idea or summarizes, provides closure, or transitions.

A concluding sentence ties the paragraph together. For example: “Thus, teamwork in sports fosters lifelong collaboration skills.” It restates the idea and signals closure. Sometimes it also transitions: “This cooperation extends beyond sports into academic projects.”

❖ *The two key functions of concluding sentence include: Reinforces the paragraph's central point and Signals completion or links to next idea.*

It is parably like a gate door

Practice -Identify the Parts

Read the paragraph below and label each part: Topic Sentence; Supporting Detail; Example; Concluding Sentence

“School gardens give students a powerful way to connect classroom learning to the real world. When students plant seeds and observe growth, they engage directly with concepts from science and nutrition. For example, a student tracking a tomato plant's growth gains firsthand knowledge of photosynthesis and soil health. These hands-on experiences make abstract lessons memorable and meaningful.”(Taken from the Course Module, p. 34)

Now try it yourself: swap with a partner and discuss your labels

Qualities of Effective Paragraph

- Unity = oneness of idea; coherence = flow of idea logically and clearly.

In other words, unity means every sentence belongs to the same idea. Coherence means the sentences connect smoothly. If a paragraph about “healthy eating” suddenly discusses “climate change,” unity is broken. Coherence is achieved with transitions such as “in addition” or “however.” Think of unity as staying on topic, and coherence as connecting your thoughts smoothly.

In sum, unity, coherence, adequate development are termed as three essential qualities of a paragraph.

Weak paragraphs

Note that it is easy to spot weak paragraphs.

- Lack of unity: Multiple unrelated ideas crammed together.
- Poor coherence: Sentences jump without transitions.
- Insufficient support: Claims made without evidence.
- Abrupt ending: No closure, leaving the reader confused.

Example: “Sports are fun. Students eat lunch. Reading is important.” This lacks unity and coherence.

Maintaining Coherence

We can maintain coherence: using cohesive devices/connectors

- Additive: also, and, furthermore, moreover, in addition
- Contrast: however, although, but, nevertheless, on the other hand
- Cause/effect: because, therefore, consequently, as a result,..
- Sequencing: first, next, then, finally, meanwhile, etc.

Cohesive devices are the glue. For example: “Exercise improves health. Moreover, it reduces stress.” The word “moreover” links the ideas. Overusing connectors, however, can make writing mechanical. Balance is key.

Cohesive devices...cont'd

Using pronoun reference and Lexical Cohesion

- Use pronouns {it, they) and synonyms to link sentences; avoid ambiguity
- Pronouns prevent repetition. Synonyms add variety. For instance: “The city built a new library. It has become a cultural hub.” Here “it” refers back to “library.” Ambiguity must be avoided — unclear pronouns confuse readers.
- 'The teacher gave the student her book.' Whose book? The teacher's or student's?

Transition words (example)...cont'd

- Transitions act like bridges. For instance: “For example, the data shows improvement. Consequently, students benefit.”

Notice how “for example” introduces evidence, while “consequently” signals a result. Without these connectors, the sentences feel disconnected.

Types of Paragraphs

- According to Azar (2003), paragraphs serve different purposes depending on the writer's goal. Knowing the main types helps students choose the right structure for their ideas.

Descriptive paragraphs

Purpose: creates a vivid picture of a person, place, or thing. A descriptive paragraph paints a picture using sensory details: what you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch.

Features: Uses sensory details (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) and strong adjectives.

- Activity: “Describe your favorite holiday destination.”

Descriptive paragraph...cont'd

- Specific language over vague generalities
- Sensory details that bring scenes to life

Overall impression as the concluding point.

"The garden was beautiful. "The garden burst with orange marigolds and the sharp scent of fresh earth after rain.

Doen't tell → Show

Descriptive paragraph...cont'd

In descriptive paragraph:

- Topic sentence: Identifies what is being described
- Supporting Sentences: Sensory details, precise language, vivid specifics
- Concluding Sentence: Overall impression or function

Narrative Paragraph

A narrative paragraph tells a story or sequence of events -moving the reader through time using clear order and linking language. Thus, the purpose is to tell a story or recount an event.

- Features: Chronological order:

Narrative...cont'd

- Events are arranged in the order they happened -from first to last. Transitional Phrases
Linking words guide the reader through time: First... Then... After that... Finally...

Activity: “Write about a memorable day in your life.”

- Action Verbs: Strong, vivid verbs keep the sequence moving and the reader engaged

First, she gathered her notes. Then, she drafted a topic sentence. Finally, she revised the whole paragraph.

Process Paragraph

Explains steps clearly and in order.

- Topic Sentence: States what process is being explained
- Ordered Steps: sequencing words: first, then, next, finally
- Imperative or Passive: Choose form based on audience and tone
- Concluding Sentence: State the outcome or add a cautionary note
- Imperative: Add the solution carefully and stir for two minutes.
- Passive: The solution is added carefully and stirred for two minutes.

Opinion/Persuasive Paragraph

Purpose: Expresses the writer's viewpoint on a topic.

- Features: Clear topic sentence, reasons and evidence, persuasive tone.
- Example: “Should homework be banned in schools?”

The Argument Formula

- Claim: State your position clearly
- Reasons: Why you believe this
- Evidence: Facts, examples, data
- Conclusion: Reinforce your point

Expository (Informative) Paragraph

- Purpose: Explains, informs, or defines a concept.

Presents facts, examples, and logical explanation without personal opinion.

Techniques of Paragraph Development

- Writers use different techniques to develop paragraphs depending on their purpose.
- Each technique provides a distinct way to explain, clarify, or persuade.
- Each type has a distinct role: describing, narrating, explaining, analyzing, comparing, or persuading.
- Choosing the right type strengthens clarity and effectiveness in writing.

Techniques...cnt'd

- Illustration: Use examples to clarify or support an idea.
- Example: “Reading improves focus. For instance, students who read daily show better concentration.”
- Explain the meaning of a term or concept.

Example: “Teamwork means working together toward a common goal.”

Techniques...cnt'd

- Cause and Effect: Show reasons and results. Example: “Because students practice regularly, their fluency improves.”
- Classification: Group ideas into categories. Example: “Study skills include time management, notetaking, and test preparation.”
- Exemplification: Provide multiple examples to support a general statement.
- Example: “Healthy habits include exercising, eating balanced meals, and sleeping well.”

Techniques...cnt'd

- Comparison and contrast
- Comparison show similarities between two subjects.
- Example: “Both cats and dogs make loyal companions.”
- Contrast highlight differences between two subjects.
- Example: “Unlike buses, trains are faster and more reliable.”

Techniques...cont'd

- Two Ways to Organize Your Paragraph: whole by whole or bit-by-bit
- Useful language: whereas, similarly, on the other hand, in contrast, both, however. Choosing the right technique depends on the writer's purpose and the audience's needs.

Paragraph Length

Typically 4–8 sentences; depends on purpose.

- Length is flexible. A short paragraph may suffice for a simple idea, while a complex argument needs more. Quality of support matters more than quantity.
- Match length to your purpose
- Stop when the idea is fully supported
- Ask yourself,, Have I explained, supported, and shown -or just repeated?

Common errors

- Mixed topics: Two unrelated ideas sharing one paragraph
- missing topic sentence: Reader has no anchor for the paragraph's point
- abrupt ending: Paragraph stops without closure or transition
- Weak transitions: Ideas feel jumpy and hard to follow
- Errors weaken clarity. For instance, a paragraph that begins with “Healthy eating” but shifts to “wildlife conservation” lacks unity. A missing topic sentence leaves readers guessing. Abrupt endings confuse always provide closure.

Steps in Paragraph Writing

Writing a strong paragraph requires following a series of steps.

- These steps ensure clarity, logical flow, and effective communication.

❖ Choose a Topic

- Select a clear subject or idea to write about.
- Keep it narrow enough to cover in one paragraph.

❖ Write a Topic Sentence

- Introduce the main idea of the paragraph.
- Acts as a guide for the rest of the sentences.

Steps...cnt'd

❖ Develop Supporting Sentences

- Add details, examples, facts, or explanations.
- Ensure each sentence relates directly to the topic sentence.

❖ Organize Ideas Logically

- Arrange supporting details in a clear order (chronological, general → specific, cause → effect).
- Use transitions to connect sentences smoothly.

Steps...cont'd

❖ Conclude the Paragraph

- End with a closing sentence that reinforces the main idea.
- May summarize, emphasize importance, or provide a transition to the next paragraph.

❖ Revise and Edit

- Check for Unity (all sentences support one idea).
- Ensure Coherence (smooth flow) and Adequate Development (enough detail).
- Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Steps...cont'd

Following these steps: topic, topic sentence, supporting details, organization, conclusion, revision helps writers produce clear, effective, and well-developed paragraphs.

Editing for clarity: Checklist

Apply this checklist to your paragraphs during revision

- Is there one main idea?; are supports relevant?; Is order logical?; Are transitions clear?; Any vague words?
- Peer Review Guidelines: Apply the golden formula for constructive feedback
- Step 1: Start with something you genuinely liked
- *I liked how you...*

Editing for clarity: Checklist

- Step 2: Offer two specific suggestions for improvement
- *You could improve this by...*
- Step 3: Ask one clarifying question to spark reflection
- *Could you explain...?*
- Praise → Suggest → Question

Summary and closing

- To conclude: paragraphs are the foundation of effective writing. Each should focus on one idea, begin with a clear topic sentence, develop with relevant support, and maintain coherence. Revision ensures clarity.

Practice these techniques, and your writing will become sharper, persuasive, and professional.

Closing

- This concludes Session 3. In our next session (lecture 4), we will move to Grammar Focus: the Passive Voice
- For any question, please reach out to me:
- Email: biniwaatnafe@gmail.com
- Office Hours: Mon, Wed, Fri mornings

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