



Writing a Paragraph

It's not so bad...

What is a Paragraph?

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic.

Learning to write good paragraphs will help you stay on track during your drafting and revision stages.

Good paragraph structure also greatly assists your readers in following a piece of writing.

You can have fantastic ideas, but if those ideas aren't presented in an organized fashion, you will lose your readers (and fail to achieve your writing goals).

The Basic Rules

Keep one idea to one paragraph...

1

If you begin to transition into a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph.

2

There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one.

3

You can have one idea and several pieces of supporting evidence within a single paragraph.

4

You can also have several points in a single paragraph as long as they relate to the overall topic of the paragraph.

What is wrong with this paragraph?

The topic sentence implies this paragraph is about why Chicago style pizza is better than New York style. Unfortunately, the rest of the paragraph has nothing to do with this subject. Look at all of the underlined phrases – none of them are related to the topic sentence. Not even a little bit...

Chicago style pizza is way better than New York style pizza. I do like New York better as a city though. Cheeseburgers are good too, but it doesn't really matter what city you are in, a cheeseburger is a cheeseburger. I do not like Mexican food. I think it is gross and I'm lactose intolerant. Being lactose intolerant also makes it hard to eat pizza, but at least I am not gluten intolerant. My brother hates pizza.

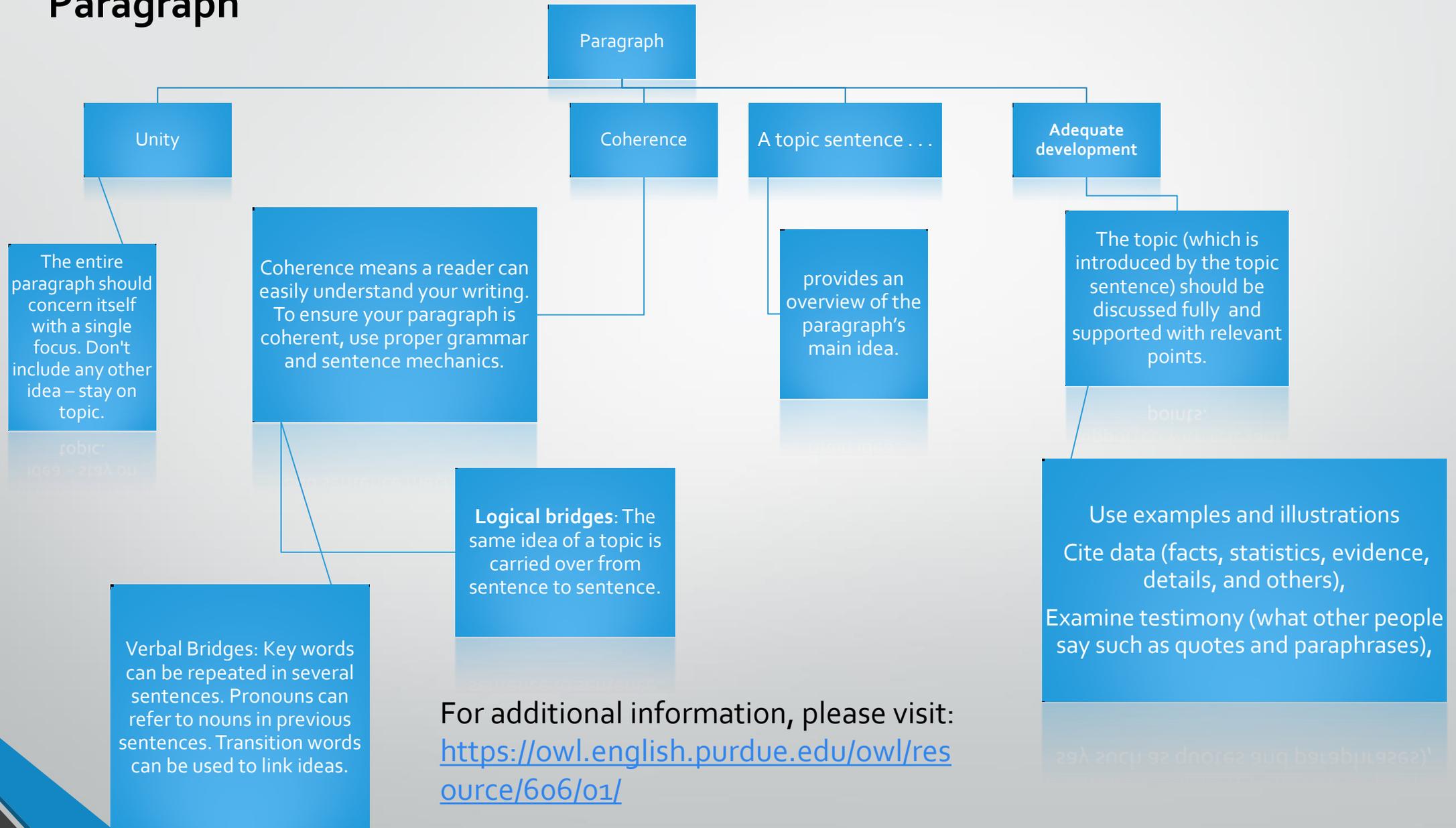
Exercise 1

How would you rewrite that paragraph to follow the basic rules of writing a paragraph?

Go back and review the basic rules slide. Then, on your Writing a Paragraph Exercise Sheet, rewrite the paragraph about Chicago style pizza so it stays on topic and has appropriate supporting points.



Elements of a Paragraph



- To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following:
 - **Unity, Coherence, A Topic Sentence, and Adequate Development.**
- Carefully go over the chart on the previous slide which shows how each of these elements are related
- As you will see, all of these traits overlap
- Using and adapting them to your individual purposes will help you construct effective paragraphs



A Topic Sentence

- A topic sentence indicates, in a general way, what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with.
- An easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph.
- The reader should be able to easily summarize what the paragraph is about.



Adequate Development

The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully with supporting points and evidence. The length of a paragraph will vary depending on the author's purpose, but writers should be wary of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences. It is a pretty good bet that the paragraph is not fully developed if it is that short.

Some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed:

- Use examples and illustrations;
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others);
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases);
- Define terms in the paragraph;
- Compare and contrast;
- Evaluate causes and reasons;
- Examine effects and consequences;
- Analyze the topic;
- Describe the topic; and
- Offer a chronology of an event (timeline).

How Do I Know When to Start a New Paragraph?

When you begin a new idea or point. New ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.

To contrast information or ideas. Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides or points in a debate or argument.

When your readers need a pause. Breaks between paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding these in ensure a reader can easily understand your writing.

When you are ending your introduction or starting your conclusion. Your introductory and concluding material should always be in a new paragraph. Many introductions and conclusions have multiple paragraphs depending on their content, length, and the writer's purpose.

Exercise 2

On the Writing a Paragraph Exercise Sheet, compose an original paragraph about your favorite movie. Make sure you refer back to the “elements of a paragraph” chart on this PowerPoint to ensure you use all of the elements of a paragraph. I will grade this paragraph based on its unity, coherence, topic sentence and if it is adequately developed. You will not be able to start the essay writing part of boot camp until you have shown you can write a paragraph according to the standards outlined in this presentation.

Sources

- Information on writing a paragraph from:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/>