Review the following characteristics of an effective paragraph. You have already learned how to give your paragraph direction with an effective topic sentence and how to support that topic sentence with details and examples. This chapter looks at the two remaining characteristics of an effective paragraph, unity and coherence.
1. **Direction** means that the paragraph has a strong topic sentence that states the main idea and sets the course that the paragraph will follow.

2. **Unity** means that the paragraph makes one main point and sticks to that point.

3. **Coherence** means that the ideas in the paragraph are logically connected and easy to follow.

4. **Support** means that the paragraph contains specific and detailed discussion of the idea stated in the topic sentence.

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**Focus on Unity and Coherence: Pulling It All Together**

The judges on *American Idol* often give the contestants seemingly conflicting advice: One week they may tell an aspiring Idol, “All we hear from you are ballads—give us an up-tempo song!” The next week, they may tell the same contestant, “This song is a poor choice for you. We want to hear songs that reflect who you are as an artist.”

The Idol judges are asking for the qualities of unity and coherence, which apply to music as well as to writing. From the Rolling Stones to Rihanna, artists who have made it share one thing: an unmistakable style, a unifying thread within their body of work. And whether the song is sweet and tender or a little raunchy, Mick Jagger’s throaty wail or Rihanna’s smooth, snappy style will unmistakably come through. Within an album, different tracks will relate to one another musically or thematically.

But music is not the only career in which unity and coherence are important. A business meeting or presentation will be unified—that is, it will have a single aim—and it will be coherent, moving smoothly from one part of the meeting or presentation to the next.

Unity and coherence are important to any career because they show how each part fits together (unity) and relates to each other part (coherence). In your writing, too, unity and coherence help you make your case to your reader.

**Reflect on It**

Think about the career you plan to pursue. How are unity and coherence crucial to that future job?
Unity: Sticking to the Point

Every topic sentence offers a promise of **unity** to the reader, a promise that you will discuss the point advanced in that sentence and no other. If your topic sentence is “My friend Ellen is the messiest person I have ever known,” then you will discuss the specific ways in which she is messy. You will not mention the few times you have known her to be neat; you will not discuss the other qualities that make her so good to have as a friend. You will discuss only the piles of clothes stacked on every piece of furniture in her bedroom; the assortment of books, bills, and banana peels on her desk; and the mounds of fast-food wrappers in the back seat of her car. Your paragraph will have unity because it sticks to its topic and to the specific point you make about that topic.

**EXERCISE 1** FINDING PROBLEMS IN UNITY

A list of possible supporting points follows each of the topic sentences in the exercise. In each group, circle the letter of the point that interferes with the unity of the paragraph.

1. Topic sentence: Some restaurant customers make trivial complaints in the hope of getting a free meal.
   a. Some customers gripe when service is a bit slow.
   b. Many complain if they have to make a trip to the emergency room because of food poisoning.
   c. Other customers grumble if the coffee is not piping hot or the iced tea is not cold enough.

2. Topic sentence: Fear of serious injury makes many parents hesitate to encourage their children to play football.
   a. Many parents fear that the child may break a bone in a football game.
   b. They fear their child might sustain head injuries during a game.
   c. Some parents fear their child will start to do poorly in academics.

3. Topic sentence: One way that I try to keep in shape is through a proper diet.
   a. I get plenty of exercise.
   b. I eat very few sweets or sugary treats.
   c. I stay away from too many fats.

4. Topic sentence: If I had to give up one modern convenience, I would get rid of my telephone.
   a. Getting rid of my phone would eliminate interruptions from salespeople.
b. My telephone is a vital link to emergency services.
c. Without a phone, I would waste less time chatting.

5. Topic sentence: My neighbor’s yard is an eyesore.
   a. In his front yard, he has an old Chevrolet up on blocks.
   b. At the side of his house is a beautiful old oak tree.
   c. Because he never mows his lawn, tall grass and weeds surround his house.

EXERCISE 2 FINDING PROBLEMS IN UNITY

A list of possible supporting points follows each of the topic sentences below. In each group, circle the letter of the point that interferes with the unity of the paragraph.

1. Topic sentence: Some crimes go unreported because crime victims believe they are not worth reporting.
   a. petty theft
   b. kidnapping
   c. graffiti

2. Topic sentence: Fear that they will do poorly in the classroom makes many adults hesitant to return to school.
   a. anxiety about taking tests
   b. fear of not understanding the ideas presented
   c. fear that their families will not accept their decision to return to school

3. Topic sentence: One way that I try to keep in shape is through exercise.
   a. lift weights
   b. eat nutritious foods
   c. attend aerobics classes

4. Topic sentence: Doing my writing on a computer has helped me improve my papers.
   a. modern computer lab
   b. ease of revising
   c. spelling check

5. Topic sentence: My neighbor’s dog is an annoyance.
   a. “Heinz 57” mutt
   b. barks at night
   c. jumps fence and digs up my flowers
Reinforcing Unity: The Summary Sentence
One way to reinforce paragraph unity is to end the paragraph with a summary sentence that echoes the topic sentence. The summary sentence does not repeat the topic sentence; rather, it reinforces it. If the function of a topic sentence is to tell the reader where the paragraph is going, the function of a summary sentence is to tell where the paragraph has been, thus reinforcing the unity of the paragraph. A summary sentence also signals the end of the paragraph and provides a sense of closure.

Example of Unified Topic and Summary Sentences

Topic Sentence
✔ The most valuable lesson I have learned from my parents is to be independent.

Summary Sentence
✔ I will always be grateful that my parents taught me to rely on myself and not on others.

Example of Unified Topic and Summary Sentences

Topic Sentence
✔ A few minor changes could make our campus more welcoming to students with disabilities.

Summary Sentence
✔ These easy and inexpensive changes would ensure that all students feel safe and welcome on our campus.

Exercise 3 Analyzing Paragraph Unity
In each of the following paragraphs, underline the topic and double-underline the specific point that is made about that topic. Then find and cross through the two sentences that interfere with the unity of the paragraph. If you have trouble, go back and look at the topic sentence to see the specific point that is made about the topic. Then read again to see which sentences do not support that specific point. Finally, underline the summary sentence of each paragraph.

Paragraph 1
1 I enjoy spring because it is a season when nature comes alive. 2 Each tree sports a halo of tiny, delicate leaf buds of the palest green. 3 Soon the leaves mature and unfurl, trumpeting
a brilliant green message to the world. Flowers nudge their way through a new growth of grass, pushing up to find the sun. Then they open into a rainbow of springtime colors. Each evening, a symphony of sound serenades the listener from shallow ponds where frogs call solemn invitations to prospective mates. Toward morning, as the frogs subside, birds begin their racket, their chatter reverberating from tree to tree. In the ballparks, the crack of the bat and the umpire’s cry of “Yer out!” echo again as baseball season opens. Lights blaze, the stands fill, and the aromas of hotdogs, popcorn, and beer blend on the evening breeze. It is spring, and nature awakens the world to new possibilities.

Numbers of the sentences that interfere with the unity of the paragraph:

Paragraph 2

The graduation ceremony at our college is dignified but dull. In a large hall filled with well-dressed parents, relatives, and friends of the graduates, faculty and students file in, dressed in hot, heavy academic robes. The ceremony follows a prescribed routine. First, prospective graduates sing the alma mater, desperately searching their programs for the unfamiliar words. The dean of the college, clad in a flowing robe, welcomes the assembled crowd with appropriate decorum. The graduation speaker, usually a state legislator or a distinguished graduate, delivers a lengthy discourse as members of the audience yawn, read their programs, or pretend to listen. Then, the anticipated moment arrives and the graduates begin to stir excitedly, waving at parents, who quickly ready cameras and video equipment. In spite of the dean’s plea to hold the applause until all diplomas have been distributed, whoops and cheers ring out from the audience as eager graduates file across the stage. Finally, the majestic notes of “Pomp and Circumstance” rise in the air, and the graduates march out, heads held high with the dignity of their newly conferred degrees. The ceremony, with its air of dull formality, is over for another year.

Numbers of the sentences that interfere with the unity of the paragraph:
## Coherence: Holding the Paragraph Together

If your writing does not have coherence, then the sentences in your paragraph are like a pile of loose bricks: There is little connection between them. Coherence is the mortar you use to make your paragraph a brick wall, with solid and strong connections between ideas. To achieve coherence, first make sure your ideas are logically related and well thought out. Then use coherence tools to cement the connections between those ideas in the most effective way possible. Two common and easy-to-use coherence tools are transitional expressions and repetition.

### Transitional Expressions

As a writer, you must not only express an idea clearly, you must keep your reader oriented in time and space and aware of relationships between ideas. Transitional expressions help you juggle these multiple tasks without detracting from the ideas you express. Ideally, these words and phrases do their job in the background, as guideposts that show the path of your logic and the movement of your ideas through time and space. Following is a list of transitional words and expressions, organized by their function within the sentence.

#### Some Common Transitional Words and Expressions

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<th>Transitions of Time</th>
<th>after</th>
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<th>later</th>
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<th>Transitions of Addition</th>
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<th>finally</th>
<th>furthermore</th>
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<td>another</td>
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</table>
Transitions of Importance

as important essential major primary
equally important just as important most important significant

Transitions of Contrast

although even though in contrast instead on the other hand
but however in spite of nevertheless yet

Transitions of Cause and Effect

a consequence of because for so thus
as a result consequently since therefore

Transitions of Illustration or Example

for example for instance including such as

Exercise 5 Using Transitional Expressions

In the following paragraph, provide the indicated type of transition in each blank.

1. Nothing had gone right lately, so ______ (time signal) the doorbell rang, Sam had a feeling it was not the Prize Patrol with a million-dollar check. 2. ______ (contrast signal), he did not expect quite as much trouble as he got. 3. Two police officers were standing ______ (space signal) his porch. 4. “Mr. Williams, we have information that your dog may have bitten a child who lives ______ (space signal) the street,” said the tall officer. “It couldn’t have been Killer,” said Sam. 5. ______ (cause-effect signal) he never goes outside except on a leash. 6. “Please bring the dog out ______ (time signal),” said the officer. “I’m afraid we’ll have to take him to the pound.” Sam knew that his dog had not bitten anyone, 7. ______ (contrast signal) he saw no alternative but to hand over his dog. Would he ever see Killer again? 8. ______ (time signal) he brought Killer out on a leash, the officers had their hands near their guns, as if fearful...
of being attacked. 9 ______ (contrast signal), when they saw Killer, the officers began to laugh. “That’s not the dog we’re looking for,” said the tall officer, bending to pet the tiny, trembling Chihuahua on the head. “We are looking for a large, fierce dog.” 10 ______ (time signal), to Sam’s relief, the two officers apologized for bothering him and left.

1. ______ 5. ______ 8. ______
2. ______ 6. ______ 9. ______
3. ______ 7. ______ 10. ______
4. ______

EXERCISE 6 USING TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS

In the following paragraph, provide the indicated type of transition in each blank.

1 ______ (time) the Fresh-Food Supermart was robbed, Shawna had the bad luck to be the only cashier on duty. The robber came in about 7:00 A.M., 2 ______ (time) the store opened. She noticed him right away 3 ______ (cause-effect) his ball cap was pulled low over his eyes and he wore a jacket 4 ______ (contrast) the morning was warm. He loitered for a while 5 ______ (space) the door; 6 ______ (time) he walked up to her register. She must have suspected him 7 ______ (cause-effect) she suddenly remembered Mr. Monroe, the store manager, saying: “If you are ever robbed, remember that your life is worth more than whatever is in that cash drawer. Stay cool and hand over the money.” 8 ______ (time) the robber leaned 9 ______ (space) her and mumbled, “I have a gun. Put the money in a bag.” Remembering Mr. Monroe’s words, Shawna quickly withdrew the money from the register. 10 ______ (time) she reached for a bag, she was surprised at the words that automatically fell from her lips: “Paper or plastic?” Much 11 ______ (time) Mr. Monroe teased that not only had she remembered his instructions, she had 12 ______ (addition) remembered to offer her unwelcome “customer” a choice.

1. ______ 5. ______ 8. ______
2. ______ 6. ______ 10. ______
3. ______ 7. ______ 11. ______
4. ______ 8. ______ 12. ______
Using Transitions Effectively

Used skillfully, transitional expressions bring coherence to your writing, but moderation is the key. Using these words unnecessarily or artificially is worse than not using them at all.

Tips for Using Transitional Expressions and Examples

- Less is more. Skillfully weaving a few transitional expressions into a paragraph is better than forcing in as many as possible.
- For variety, place transitions somewhere other than the beginning of a sentence. Instead of “However, Arturo refused to place the pink plastic flamingo on his lawn,” try “Arturo, however, refused to place the pink plastic flamingo on his lawn.”
- Examples are sometimes more effective when they are not preceded by _for example_ or _for instance_. If you feel uncomfortable putting an example in without announcement, try using _for example_ in your rough draft and editing it out later.

Exercise 7 Analyzing Use of Transitions

Look at the two paragraphs that follow. Underline the transitional expressions in each. In which paragraph are transitional expressions used more skillfully? Can you pinpoint some of the reasons?

Paragraph 1

The third week of a student’s first year in college is often a dangerous one. Like the “seven-year itch” that supposedly makes people give up on romantic relationships, the “three-week shock syndrome” sometimes signals the end of a student’s academic career. After the excitement of the first week or two of classes begins to wear off, reality starts to set in. There is more than just the excitement of meeting new people and buying textbooks in a well-stocked bookstore. Those books, with their crisp pages and new smell, must be opened and read, marked and highlighted. The smiling professors who leaned on their lecterns and cracked jokes on the first day of class have turned into serious-faced people who talk faster than their students can write and...
whose lectures are sometimes boring. Worst of all is the work. Reading assignments, writing assignments, library assignments, and computer lab assignments pile up, waiting to be completed. Who has time to remember it all, much less do it all? Students who make it past the third week of classes usually find that they can adjust, that they can keep up. But some, faced with the shock that college means work, never stay long enough to find out whether they can succeed or not.

Paragraph 2

First of all, the third week of a student’s first year in college is often a dangerous one. For example, the “seven-year itch” supposedly makes people give up on romantic relationships, and the “three-week shock syndrome” often signals the end of a student’s academic career. In addition, the excitement of the first week or two of classes begins to wear off, and reality starts to set in. More important, there is more than just the excitement of meeting new people and buying textbooks in a well-stocked bookstore. In contrast, those books, with their crisp pages and new smell, must be opened and read, marked and highlighted. Furthermore, the smiling professors who leaned on their lec-
terns and cracked jokes on the first day of class have turned into serious-faced people who talk faster than their students can write and whose lectures are sometimes boring. Worst of all is the work. To enumerate, there are reading assignments, writing assignments, library assignments, and computer lab assignments. Further, who has time to remember it all, much less do it all? Nevertheless, students who make it past the third week of classes usually find that they can adjust, that they can keep up. In conclusion, some, faced with the shock that college means work, never stay long enough to find out whether they can suc-
ceed or not.

The paragraph in which transitions are used more successfully is paragraph __.

Some reasons: _______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________ 
______________________________________________________________
EXERCISE 8  ANALYZING USE OF TRANSITIONS

Look at the two paragraphs that follow. Underline the transitional expressions in each. In which paragraph are transitional expressions used more skillfully? Can you pinpoint some of the reasons?

Paragraph 1

One characteristic of successful students is that they know how to study. They know, for instance, that the time to begin studying is not the night before the test but much earlier. The first time they read a section of the textbook, successful students begin their study. They highlight or underline important sections and jot down key terms. When taking notes in class, they use a similar technique, jotting down the most important ideas and later transcribing their notes into a format that will be easy to study. Unsuccessful students, on the other hand, often postpone highlighting the text and organizing their notes until the night before the test, when time is short. Successful study, then, partly depends on beginning well before the date of the test.

Paragraph 2

First, successful students know how to study. First of all, they know that the time to begin studying is not the night before the test but much earlier. For example, successful students usually begin their study the first time they read a section of the textbook. In addition, they highlight or underline important sections and jot down key terms. Next, when taking notes in class, they jot down the most important ideas. Furthermore, they transcribe their notes into a format that will be easy to study from later. However, unsuccessful students postpone highlighting the text and organizing their notes until the night before the test. Therefore, successful study partly depends on beginning well before the date of the test.

The paragraph in which transitions are used more successfully is paragraph __.
Some reasons: __________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
Repetition

Repetition of Key Words and Phrases

Often, repetition is seen as a negative quality in writing. However, repetition of key words and phrases is a method of tying your ideas together and achieving coherence. While no one would advise endless hammering of unimportant words or ideas, repetition of key words and ideas helps to bring your point home strongly.

Exercise 9 Examining Repetition of Important Terms

The following paragraph is about business telephone manners. Underline the repetitions of the key words business, telephone (or phone), and manners.

At a time when voice mail, answering machines, and computerized telephone answering systems have all but replaced the business telephone call, good telephone manners remain essential. Because the caller on the other end of the phone cannot read lips or minds, it is important for anyone who answers a business telephone to speak clearly, giving his name and the name of the department or company. If it is necessary to ask the caller to hold, it is never good manners to say “Hold, please” and leave the person wondering when, if ever, the phone will be picked up again. Good telephone manners require an explanation, such as “Ms. Smith, our manager, will be happy to help you with that. Would you mind holding for a minute while I get her?” Above all, business telephone manners require giving the caller the idea that her business is appreciated and that the phone call has been a pleasure, not a chore. For example, if the caller says, “Thank you,” then the proper reply is not “Yeah, right, no problem.” A reply such as “Thank you, Ms. Crabtree. We appreciate your business,” demonstrates good telephone manners and excellent business sense. In an impersonal age, adding a personal touch to business telephone calls is not just good manners. It’s good business.

Repetition Through Pronouns

Pronouns aid coherence by allowing you to refer to someone or something without tedious repetition. Following is a partial list of pronouns often used to substitute for nouns. (For more information about using pronouns, see Chapters 18 and 19.)
Common Pronouns

Subject pronouns: I, we, you, he, she, it, they, who
Object pronouns: me, us, you, him, her, it, them, whom
Possessive pronouns: my, mine, our, ours, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, their, theirs, whose
Indefinite pronouns: one, anyone, everyone, nobody, some, somebody

In the following sentences, it’s easy to see how much more smoothly the words seem to flow when pronouns link sentences and ideas together.

Example Paragraph Without Pronouns

✘ The dog woke up, stretched out the dog’s legs, and yawned hugely. Then, as if realizing that the dog was supposed to be guarding the dog’s yard, the dog shambled over to the gate and gave a halfhearted bark.

Example Paragraph with Pronouns That Aid Coherence

✔ The dog woke up, stretched out his legs, and yawned hugely. Then, as if realizing that he was supposed to be guarding his yard, he shambled over to the gate and gave a halfhearted bark.

PROGRESSIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Progressive Writing Assignment: Unity and Coherence

If your instructor has assigned the Progressive Writing Assignment, you have already completed your prewriting, a topic sentence, and supporting details. In this chapter, you will make sure your paragraph has unity and coherence.

Topics and Tips

The Topics

Topic 1: Discuss the results of taking a specific piece of advice from a friend or family member.
Topic 2: Discuss your decision to attend college.
Topics:

Topic 3: Discuss your greatest fear.
Topic 4: Discuss the types of stress experienced by college students.

Tips for Unity and Coherence

Staying on Track: Tips for Unity

- Check each paragraph to make sure that every sentence supports the topic sentence.
- Include a summary sentence at the end of the paragraph to reinforce the topic sentence.

✔ Whatever else they may learn on campus, most college students also learn to live with stress.
✔ Becoming a nurse will be the fulfillment of a lifelong dream and the beginning of a long and rewarding career.

Transitions: Tips for Coherence

- Read your paragraph aloud to make sure it flows logically.
- Check to make sure that transitions between supporting ideas are smooth and that transitional expressions are used where needed.

✔ Academic stress also affects most college students.
✔ However, I have found ways of coping with my fear of public speaking.

For support in meeting this chapter’s goal, log in to www.mywritinglab.com and select Developing and Organizing a Paragraph and The Topic Sentence.