

PAPER COHESION & FLOW

Problem

In paper-writing, one of the biggest difficulties is keeping your ideas clear and organized from beginning to end. It is easy to lose track of your purpose, especially in a longer paper. This can result in paragraphs that do not support your thesis, that are not well ordered, or whose point is unclear. Your purpose or main idea may even have shifted by the end of your draft.

Solutions

MAKE AN OUTLINE *after* writing a draft (what is sometimes called a *reverse outline*) to identify gaps in overall logic or development, as well as problems with the sequence and flow of ideas from paragraph to paragraph.

- Start by summarizing each paragraph of your paper in a short phrase. If you can't, make a note to clarify the purpose of that paragraph later. If a paragraph has more than one main idea, consider separating it into multiple paragraphs.
- Compare your thesis and conclusion: Do they emphasize the same controlling idea? It's not uncommon to discover your "real" thesis only at the end of your first draft.
- Check your brief paragraph summaries against your clarified thesis. Is each paragraph clearly connected to the thesis? Are any important points missing? Do any points need further development? Does the order of paragraphs make sense?
- Make sure that the main idea of each paragraph is clearly stated in a topic sentence or early in the paragraph. Sometimes you may have a clear articulation of your main idea in the middle or at the end of the paragraph, which you can move to the beginning of the paragraph for more clarity.

Once your main ideas are in place, MAKE THE PROGRESSION OF IDEAS CLEAR to your readers by using a variety of strategies.

- **PARALLELISM: Use similar sentence patterns to introduce structurally equivalent points.**

One reason for the establishment of the Electoral College was...

Another reason for the establishment of the Electoral College was...

Jack is a character who thinks only of himself.

Alice is another character who always thinks of her own needs first.

- **REPETITION OF KEY WORDS:** Use an important word or two from the end of the previous paragraph in your topic sentence.

Final sentence of one paragraph: Thus Alice represents all people whose curiosity leads them into situations that they are **unprepared** to deal with.

Topic sentence of next paragraph: Being **unprepared** also creates difficulties for Rowena, the protagonist of the novel....

- **GIVEN–NEW:** Briefly refer to the topic of the previous paragraph before introducing the topic of the current paragraph.

First body paragraph: (This first paragraph describes asthma, including racial disparities in rates of disease and severity of symptoms).

Topic sentence of next paragraph: While disparities in the rates and severity of asthma are documented [previous topic], the causes of these disparities are less clear [new topic]. Some experts point to disparities in access to adequate healthcare.

Topic sentence of next paragraph: In addition to disparities in access to healthcare [previous topic], the unequal exposure to environmental hazards due to racial segregation in housing [new topic] can contribute to disparities in asthma rates and severity of symptoms.

- **PREDICTION:** Use the last sentence of a paragraph to predict the topic of the paragraph that follows. Be careful, because doing this does not eliminate the need for a topic sentence in that next paragraph.

End of one paragraph: The #OscarsSoWhite media campaign highlighted the clear racial imbalances in the awards ceremony, but what are the **causes** of this outcome?

Topic sentence of next paragraph: Many theories about the **causes** of #OscarsSoWhite focus on disparities at all levels in the film industry. [Paragraph continues with a discussion of various theories.] All these theories, however, lack a key element: **the role of cutbacks in film and theatre arts programming in high poverty, majority POC public schools.**

Topic sentence of the next paragraph: **The decrease in film and theatre arts programming in public schools**, especially in high poverty and majority POC districts, results in fewer opportunities for children of color to develop interest and experience that could later lead to contributions in the film industry.

TRANSITION CLEARLY BETWEEN SECTIONS OF A LONGER PAPER.

In a longer paper, it may be appropriate to write a **transition paragraph** between major sections of your paper to help keep the reader on track. Such paragraphs usually summarize the material already covered and preview where the discussion will go next.

In some disciplines, it may also be appropriate to use section headings. Review the literature in your field to learn typical conventions for organization.

For more information:

Behrens, L., Rosen, L. & Beedles, B. (2005). *A sequence for academic writing*. (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Pearson Longman.